

The Left Agenda After September 11

An American View

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Must the intellectual, or the leftist – who need not be identical – always adopt a critical position, declaring that the glass is half-empty? Must the intellectual, or the leftist, always oppose the government, or the imperial hegemon? Must the intellectual, or the leftist, always take the side of the minority, the underdog, the victim – and in so doing, ignore any responsibility that might fall to that minority, underdog or victim? Is the intellectual, or the leftist, faced with choices that are morally clear-cut to the point that political choice and personal responsibility are superfluous? Must the intellectual, or the leftist, always have a good conscience and opt always if not for the side of the angels at least for that of Historical Progress?

This series of (rhetorical) questions comes to mind in the face of the new political landscape left by the terrorist attacks of September 11. But they are in fact old (and not just rhetorical) questions, that go back to the origins of left-wing political movements – recall, for example, the polemics between Marx and Weitling, Marx and Proudhon, or Marx and Bakunin; think of the debates between reformists, revisionists and orthodox Marxists; remember the sad end of the promising »new left« that shook the political culture of the established order in the first, then the second and into the third worlds. But those old debates took place in a landscape defined by the dominance of the capitalist economy, and the need to overcome the exploitation and alienation that it reproduced. As I have suggested elsewhere, it is misleading to make political choices dependent on such economic conditions (whose existence, and impact cannot be denied); it is more useful to recognize that modern politics has to take into account the emergence of *democratic* social relations that represent a challenge to *all* forms of social domination – as long as those democratic conditions are maintained.¹ If this is the case, then perhaps the in-

1. This thesis is developed most fully in *The Specter of Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). C.f., also my recent *Marx, A l'origine de la pensée critique* (Paris: Michalon, 2001).

tellectual, and the leftist, should be arguing that the glass is half-full – and then show how one can fill it still further.

One further introductory remark leads me back to September 11. The critic Harold Rosenberg once spoke of the engaged political militant as »an intellectual who doesn't think.« He meant that the militant uses his mind, so to speak, only to try to adjust his vision of the factual world in order to fit it into the already existing »line« of the party. Such a militant is incapable of facing up to the *new* – indeed, he is comfortable with the old, whose repetition is like a nursery rhyme rocking to sleep the good conscience of the innocent who need never grow up. The terror of September 11 was a wake-up call for the intellectual and for the left. The first

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step in facing up to the challenge is to look back at some of the old arguments that have again been recycled in order, then, to see what new issues have emerged. Against this background, the immediate political question facing the left is whether we will confront something like a new Cold War that freezes the possibility of political innovation, or whether the realization that the free market cannot prevent acts of terror will lead to a renewed Social Democratic politics. But that politics cannot simply react to social needs as did the old welfare state; it must recognize that what the terrorists attacked was democracy, and that democracy must not only defend itself but must also take the offensive.

Old Arguments: Turning to the »Root Causes«

The old arguments are not false; the problem is that they can be used to criticize *any* action (or inaction) by the U.S. Moreover, they don't consider arguments that might be made *for* the choice of a given action. As a result, they are weak because one-sided, based on an either/or, forgetting that politics is based on judgements made in situations that are not defined by rational choice or zero-sum games. The centrality of judgement in politics does not, however, mean that politics takes place in a landscape governed by moral relativism. There clearly are values and moral stand-

ards. That is why, for example, members of the Frankfurt School remained anti-capitalist even while they worked for the OSS, forerunner of the CIA: Nazism represented a greater evil and presented an immediate challenge. More generally, the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend, as one could have learned already before that War, when progressive intellectuals were told not to criticize the Moscow Trials because America still lynches Negroes! This old argument remains valid still today.

A. The most general of the old arguments is the »root causes« approach. It says that yes, terror is bad, but we have to understand that it is a reaction to something even more serious, deeper, and crying out for attention. Terror must be the expression of that something deeper; it is the root cause. Such a root cause does not excuse the terror, but it makes it comprehensible; and the left and its politics are justified by their ability to pierce beneath the surface to uncover these hidden roots of evil, which must then be uprooted for the good to triumph. This argument can be formulated generally, and then translated into the particular language of international and domestic politics – each level points toward the others, promising a key to understanding world history.

The most basic form of the root cause argument serves to justify an anti-capitalist politics. Capitalist exploitation is destructive of both traditional life-forms and the physical environment. In its advanced form, capitalism leads to freer trade, which has the effect of increasing the gap between rich and poor while what passes for capitalist culture destroys indigenous cultures. This, and more, is all true; but it is not clear how such a universal claim explains *this* particular terrorist response. One could react differently to each of these »results« of capitalism – a capitalism which brings with it *also* new social and political possibilities which could, indeed, result in rising expectations that give new hopes and projects rather than fuel an anti-political, nihilistic terrorism.

A variant of the anti-capitalist root cause argument blames capitalism for various forms of imperial exploitation, in particular the control over natural resources needed since the demise of colonial domination. This explains for example U.S. support for corrupt Arab oil sheiks, toleration of the Putin regime's terror in Chechnya or the intervention in Afghanistan as »really« motivated by oil and the project of building a pipeline. Not only does capitalist imperialism seek control of natural resources; it also monopolizes non-natural ones, such as the patents permitting it to

sell anti-AIDS drugs at exploitative prices. Again, these general accounts are all true; but they don't explain *this* particular terrorist reaction to them. Why not have recourse to the tactics of guerilla war, or the symbolically powerful sky-jackings, as in days gone by?

Capitalism can also be denounced for its imposition of political control that denies democratic self-government and workers' rights while supporting corrupt oligarchies. While this criticism is also true, and easy to illustrate in the mid-East, the fact that September 11 was also the date of the 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile (as well as the defeat of the Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1683) suggests the need to take into account the broader historical context in which events take place. The US-backed coup against Allende took place in the context of the Cold War, when the »enemy« was a geo-political actor who was not simply a passive victim.²

In short, the »root cause« argument denounces an unnatural inequality marked by the growing gap between rich and poor countries and regions (as well as inequality within the poorer regions). Exploitation in international relations joins exploitation of domestic workers in a diabolical circle in which all the parts conspire to reproduce on an expanded scale the inequalities that were present at the (capitalist) outset. In an updated version of the argument, proposed for example by Axel Honneth, this produces an asymmetry in which one participant denies to the other the »recognition« that is the natural right of humans and societies; radical politics (including terrorism?) becomes a struggle for recognition. This does not, however, explain the origin of capitalism, the original sin that starts the cycle.

B. One difficulty with the »root causes« argument is that it attributes guilt to huge and seemingly impersonal forces over which individuals can have little influence. To remedy this, a modified version suggests: »the terrorists may be bad but we're worse.« We're the original sinners, first terrorists, who keep thugs in power while exploiting and humiliating the downtrodden. Worse, we do so in order to maintain an egoistic, drug-infested, sexually licentious society that needs to be made healthy and whole. The irony, of course, is that this latter is just what the American

2. I will return to the Cold War and politics in a post-Cold War world, as well as to the changing fate of Islam in the modern world.

religious right claims and it is what Bin Laden also believes.³ What makes this into a *leftist* argument is the assumption that the real sin is that capitalism kills more people than died in the WTC and Pentagon – *and* the assumption that we can, and therefore should (!), remedy our own wrongs. Nonetheless, the weaknesses of the »root cause« argument remain, since it is assumed that once *we* heal ourselves, *they* will have no more grievances and we'll *all* live happily ever-after in a world that will have no need for politics and judgement.

A variant on this argument is the so-called »blowback« theory often attributed to Chalmers Johnson which condemns the U.S. for making deals with bad guys (or creating them, as with Bin Laden) who then turn against us when that suits their nefarious purposes. Thus, the attacks are deserved, the pay-back for immoral (or amoral) support of such evil-doers who are now asserting their independence.⁴

C. A peculiar inversion of the »root cause« theme points to a particular policy option that is said to cause general hatred: unconditioned support supposedly offered to Israel. None of the explanations for this policy seem convincing: sometimes domestic lobbies (AIPAC) are blamed, sometimes refusal of »recognition« to Islam and its civilization are the cause, while still others imagine a strategy aiming to divide-and-conquer Arab nationalism. None of these explanations is convincing, particularly since the Bush people (father and son) tend to be pro-Arab (pro-oil), while their allies on the religious right are pro-Israel, and the present Bush administration – despite its passivity (or worse) on the mid-East – has recognized Palestinian rights to statehood.

D. This leaves a final set of old arguments that goes back to the fear by the democratic left that, because of the unique constitutional status of the

3. This was the position taken on September 12 by the reverends Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson; as for Bin Laden, c.f., the discussion below, as well as Paul Berman's »Terror and Liberalism,« in *The American Prospect*, October 22, 2001, pp. 18–23. Do leftists believe it? The history of »left puritanism« is long ...

4. There has been some debate about whether to lift the Congressional ban on the CIA working with corrupt foreigners – as was done e.g., with the Contras in Nicaragua, or before that, with Noriega in Panama. Some even want to lift the ban on secret assassinations! As I suggest later, if the Bush administration uses the terrorist attacks to create a new »cold war« ambience, this shift can be expected, and should be the object of serious criticism.

President as commander-in-chief, executive power will grow in times of war; and that this growth will come at the expense of individual rights.⁵ This is why there was leftist opposition to U.S. entry into both World Wars. Will the post-September 11 experience be comparable? This question takes us to the next phase of the argument.

New Questions: How to Conduct the »War on Terrorism«

A. In the immediate aftermath, and still six months later, the issue of individual rights, particularly for people of Middle-Eastern origin who are held in prison without formal charges is unresolved. On the other hand, Bush and Ashcroft have had to retreat on the use of military courts, for which final procedures have not yet been established.⁶ There were excesses, particularly by Attorney General Ashcroft, whose earlier regular TV appearances have been sharply curtailed. Such excesses were to be expected from this administration, whose penchant for secrecy and mania for control (in domestic as well as foreign policy) should not be underestimated. More striking is the fact that the civil-rights activists, whose protests explain the more cautious approach of the administration, are on their side becoming more nuanced. Racial profiling is seen by some as acceptable,⁷ there is discussion of creating national identity documents as well as permitting tighter coordination of FBI/CIA/Immigration/Local Police. An important new political debate can be expected – a *political* debate, because the issues have not been posed in terms of the now worn-out moral-legal contrast between liberalism and communitarianism. It

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5. Executive power threatens also the right of Congress, as Senator Robert C. Byrd notes in an op-ed published as »Why Congress Has to Ask Questions«, in *New York Times*, March 12, 2002. C.f., the way in which the Republicans use this ambiguity to attack the Democrats as threatening American unity, below.
 6. Now-retired *New York Times* columnist, Anthony Lewis, weighs in on both issues in »Taking Our Liberties«, in March 9, 2002. A good summary of the legal issues in question, and a critique of such liberals as Lawrence Tribe, is found in George P. Fletcher, »War and the Constitution«, in *The American Prospect*, January 1–14, 2002, who points out that either the captured are war prisoners entitled to Geneva rights and not subject to trial; or they are accused of civil crimes, in which case they have a right to jury trial.
 7. It has been pointed out by civil libertarians that the only people indicted since September 11 – Moussaoui and Richard Reid – were born respectively in France and England!

was the domination of that moral-legal paradigm that explained many of the ills denounced by E.J. Dionne's »Why Americans Hate Politics«.⁸

An ill-elected President has found a quasi-religious calling. The »war« on terrorism justifies his every action – and particularly those favoring his domestic allies, such as tax cuts, »fast tract« authority to negotiate free trade agreements, budget deficits, military spending ...

B. Are the place and role of dissent unchanged in times of emergency? There certainly have been grounds for criticism since September 11. Everyone will have their own list, ranging for example, from the government's evident ignorance with regard to the anthrax attacks to the many arrests of Middle-Eastern men in order to give the public confidence that the government was alert to the anger, and on to unsavory alliances with Russians, Saudis, Uzbeks, Pakistanis, as well as the way India and Israel use the »war on terrorism« for their own political purposes. Should these simply be swallowed, like bad tasting medicine needed to cure the new illness? Some journalists have admitted to self-censorship; others criticize government secrecy and attempts to control the press.⁹ The early doubts about the appropriateness of the U.S. response were eliminated by the measured build-up that preceded the military engagement (and the well-executed Speech to Congress on September 24) – and even more by the apparently rapid and painless success against the Taliban that put an end to talk of a Vietnam-like »quagmire.« On the other hand, the apparently unlimited extension of engagement to such countries as Yemen, the Philippines, Georgia – not to speak of the constant refrain calling for war with Iraq (or Saddam) – could lead to renewed doubts.

8. On Dionne's book, and similar criticisms, c.f., my essay on »Le débat politique aux USA«, translated as »Theorie und Praxis der jüngsten amerikanischen Politik«, in *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, Heft 78, Jg. 21, pp. 118–124. C.f., also Andrew Arato's suggestion that the American constitution needs to find a place for something like the »state of exception« (»Minima Politica after September 11th«, in *Constellations*, Vol. 9, Nr. 1, pp. 46–52).

9. Vigilance among the press and public were responsible for the rapid disappearance of a Pentagon project to create something like an Office of Dis-Information in order to insure »correct« appreciation by the foreign press. The project was revealed at the beginning of March 2002; by March 5 it was officially dead.

It may well be the hubris that comes with high poll-ratings and military success that calls forth dissent. An ill-elected President (the »resident of the White House«) has found a quasi-religious calling. The »war« on terrorism justifies his every action – and particularly those favoring his domestic allies, such as tax cuts, »fast tract« authority to negotiate free trade agreements, budget deficits, military spending ... This will eventually prove too much for even politicians to swallow. But the Republican »patriots« will attack any critic, as was clear in a recent New York Times (March 4, 2002) article, »Daschle Wants President to Tell Congress More About His Plans for War«, which pointed to criticisms that »any sign that we are losing that unity ... will be used against us overseas«. It is well-known that the courage of politicians depends on the mood of their constituents.

C. In this context, the new face of globalization is no longer as simple as it was in Seattle or Genoa; finance capital and ecological destruction are joined in a more complex human tissue. (1) People are global. The New York Times' »Portraits of Grief«, published daily for three months

It would be useful to return to an old concept that fell out of favor after it had served as a global explanation of evil. Totalitarianism is not identical with the defeated regimes of Communism or Nazism; it represents a general reaction to the confrontation with modernity and democracy.

after the attacks, shows the human face of globalization as it cuts across classes and nations in what Eli Zaretsky calls a de-reification or humanization of broad-brush categories.¹⁰ (2) But terror is global too, and not just in its transnational reach and composition. For example, economic globalization means open borders, just-in-time-delivery and thus easy passage through customs of potential ABC arms.¹¹ On the other hand, the openness of democratic societies and their protection of individual rights provides a cover for terrorists (who would be more easily repressed in a

10. C.f., Eli Zaretsky, »Trauma and Dereification: September 11 and the Problem of Ontological Security, « in *Constellations*, Vol. 9, Nr. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 98–105.

11. C.f., Stephen E. Flynn, »America the Vulnerable, « in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, Nr. 1, January/February 2002, pp. 60–74.

dictatorship). In this sense, terrorism is an internal problem to democratic societies, which are themselves de facto global.¹²

D. Is war itself now global? Indeed, what is the new face of war? Can you have war without an identified, and declared, enemy? What are the goals of post-September 11 warfare? The challenge is to give political form to a terrorism that does not declare goals while hiding the visage of its agents.¹³

1. A first model is provided by the experience of de-colonization, in which violent liberation movements were not declared outside-the-law but attempts were made to find points where negotiation could occur. But the al Qaeda group does not have the same kind of agenda as did, say, the FLN in Algeria, which could eventually negotiate de-colonization accords with the French at Evian.
2. The lack of an interlocutor points to the »failed states« argument. Herfried Münkler¹⁴ argues that modern warfare has been increasingly privatized. Privatized war becomes a self-reproducing industry since the warlords have no interest in stopping it. Hence, it is necessary to strengthen states in order to limit this self-reproducing cycle of war. While this may be true in Sierra Leone, Liberia or Congo, and despite the rapid disappearance of the Taliban »state«, does the picture fit al Qaeda?
3. Searching for an adequate level of political exchange, some propose an international treatment. Michael Howard cautions against calling the terror an act of war, proposing instead a police operation by the UN to confront a crime against the international community.¹⁵ But reducing the attacks to a simple crime (even if against »humanity«) means one can only react after the fact – you remain defenseless before-hand.

12. C.f., Olivier Mongin, »Sous le choc. Fin de cycle? Changement d'ère?«, in *Esprit*, octobre 2001, pp. 22–40.

13. C.f., my first reaction to September 11, »Krieg oder Politik«, in *Kommune*, Oktober 2001, pp. 6–9.

14. Note that »failed states« are not identical to »rogue states«, « which poses a problem for those who want to turn the post-September »war« against Iraq. For the present argument, c.f., Münkler's »The Brutal Logic of Terror: the Privatization of War in Modernity«, in *Constellations*, Vol. 9, Nr. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 66–73. A book-length study by Münkler is forthcoming in German.

15. C.f., Michael Howard, »What's in a Name?« in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, Nr 1, January/February 2002, pp. 8–13.

However satisfying for the intellectual, no statesman could accept that risk.

4. However difficult for American optimism, it may well be that the terrorists have to be understood as sheer evil. This would be the inversion of the »root causes« argument and it faces similar difficulties: if true, it doesn't explain the particular case in question, or give a way of protecting against future threats. Its only advantage is its gigantic claim to offer a total explanation: by the absurd.
5. These difficulties suggest that it would be useful to return to an old concept that fell out of favor after it, too, had served as a global explanation of evil. *Totalitarianism* is not identical with the defeated regimes of Communism or Nazism; it represents a general reaction to the confrontation with modernity and democracy which did not end with their demise.¹⁶ Whether one interprets the Islamic roots of the terrorists from a secular¹⁷ or from a religious perspective,¹⁸ that self-same clash lies at the roots of their action. That does *not* make the »war« with the new totalitarian threat a new Cold War (as I will argue in a moment), but it does help explain certain aspects of the behavior of the new enemy – for example, the need for a leader built up by myth (and who, for that reason, is both powerful and brittle); the fact that such a leader needs continued victories, a sort of permanent revolution against a polymorphous enemy; and as a result, that his movement will

16. C.f. Dick Howard, *The Specter of Democracy*, op. cit. especially chapter 8, »From the Critique of Totalitarianism to the Politics of Democracy«.

17. Olivier Mongin presents the secular version in »Sous le choc«, op. cit. A first phase of state-sponsored terrorism that was not necessarily religious (Syria, Libya) was followed by a religious terrorism turned against the existing corrupt states (and was defeated in Egypt, integrated in Algeria); the third stage was neither state nor anti-state but international terrorism, building on alienated youth in Europe who are products of modern society but seek neither state power nor revolution but use Islam not for its own sake but as a tool in their nihilistic quest to harm the West – of which, as modern, they are nonetheless a part.

18. C.f., Michael Doran, »Understanding the Enemy«, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, Nr. 1, January/February 2002, pp. 22–42. The terrorists are appealing to the »umma« against local rulers who don't use shari'a and are thus like the Hypocrites of Medina who supported Mohammed during his exile from Mecca only in order to preserve their own positions. Such national rulers are seen also as polytheists who add a second law to god's law. This »Salafiyya« movement can join with a secular force, as when Bin Laden describes eighty years of humiliation dating from the defeat of the Ottoman empire by a »zionist/crusader alliance«.

find constantly new enemies (liberal democracy, human rights, secularism ...) – and will be unable to define goals that could open possibilities for political negotiation.

The Challenge for Democracy

A. We can start with the naïve question asked by many Americans: »why would they do that to us?« The question has several implications. The first is its sheer naiveté: Americans don't realize that they affect the lives of others in an increasingly interconnected global world. Loss of innocence can be a good thing – that was why the itinerant peddlers of the *Aufklärung* classified pornographic literature as »philosophy« – particularly since the Cold War »victory« (i.e., the collapse of communism) has overcome the so-called Vietnam syndrome. September 11 said brutally to America: »welcome to the world«; America will have to learn to reply with its own: »welcome to the world«.¹⁹ Second, the naiveté is expressed also in the idea that they were not attacking us so much as they were attacking our democratic values. What is naïve here is not the values but the notion that because they claim to be universal, everyone could, should and would adopt them. The lesson to be drawn from the attack is that these values have to be fought for, defended, and can also be lost. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

Democracy is a mode of life deprived of pre-existing certainties and forced constantly to re-affirm the values that it chooses – and, for just that reason, it can make choices that others may disapprove of. That is why it is a pluralistic form of society, built on tolerance and open to critical debate. Perhaps most important, that is why it is a dynamic society, one that is constantly changing – and change means constantly putting into question, testing, the very values on which it is based.

As a nation based on values, America is also based on the free choice of its citizens to adhere to those values (hence its relative tolerance of immigrants). But the implication of this free choice is also that those who

19. C.f., my above-mentioned article, »Krieg oder Politik,« op. cit.

do not accept American values are sinners who need to be converted, or punished. This of course is reflected in American attitudes toward foreigners, but it is also applied to dissenters, particularly on the left, who are labeled as »Un-American«. A leftist reply to such attacks has to make clear that its criticism is blaming America for not living up to its own values. And one of those values, implied by the very freedom to choose but too often forgotten, is the principle of tolerance and respect for otherness.²⁰

B. This stress on values points to the fact that the democracy that is challenged is not simply a system of electoral politics or even the protection of liberal individual rights – although it is both of these as well. Democracy is a mode of life deprived of pre-existing certainties and forced constantly to re-affirm the values that it chooses – and, for just that reason, it can make choices that others may disapprove of. That is why it is a pluralistic form of society, built on tolerance and open to critical debate. Perhaps most important, that is why it is a dynamic society, one that is constantly changing – and change means constantly putting into question, testing, the very values on which it is based. As Paul Berman observed in a lucid discussion of »Terror and Liberalism«, ²¹ what Bush called »the first war of the twenty-first century« resembles in many ways the great wars of the twentieth – which were fought against liberal democracies by militant movements and states seeking a return of unity, purity and certainty that are constantly undermined by the dynamism and progress of democratic societies. These modern fundamentalisms were so powerful, moreover, because there were always citizens of the democratic societies (on the left *and* the right) afflicted by doubt in the validity and viability of the self-critical democratic values who hesitated to defend that democracy.

C. What then is the place of the critical intellectual within a democratic society? This is the problem of the half-empty glass from which I began this discussion. The point can be illustrated by the clash between the American rhetoric of multilateralism and its unilateralist practice. A critic could denounce the rhetoric as simply a ruse seeking to preserve Ameri-

20. C.f., Dick Howard, »Der echte Antiamerikanismus entsteht in Amerika selbst«, in *Kommune*, Januar 2002, pp. 10–11.

21. *The American Prospect*, October 22, 2001, pp. 18–23.

can hegemony (which is not false).²² Or the critic might argue that this is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, and has to be seen as a first step toward strengthening what David Held calls a global civil society, or, as Robin Blackburn proposes, taking the first steps not only toward reforming the UN but also toward dealing with what Jonathan Shell has called »The Unfinished 20th Century« – namely the problem of ABC weapons.²³ That these choices are not simply theoretical is seen when we return, finally, to the concrete political choices facing a contemporary American left that, for the moment, has had little to say about (and in) the post-September 11 constellation.

The Need for the Constant Activation of Democracy

A. The promise of a »long war on terrorism«, to be fought on many fronts, with any weapons including those of the intellect (or »ideology«), recalls what were for many in the Bush administration the good old days of the Cold War when there was a clearly defined enemy (who was not always clearly identified, since one always had to fear subversives, but whose implied presence justified whatever actions were taken). This mental universe assured popular political support for governments that could also denounce critics as a threat to the imperative of unity-in-war.

But before denouncing this manipulation of public opinion, it should be noted that the old Cold War view was one with which the critical intellectual is familiar, even comfortable: it is a world where demystification, critique of ideology, and a shrewd eye following material profit are useful in deciphering the moves of the enemy. This congruence of left and right comes from the fact that neither takes seriously the autonomy (and uncertainties) of democratic politics, which both reduce to its economic foundations. The result is a shared *antipolitics* which, in the case of the half-empty glass of left politics leads to the conclusion that the political

22. C.f., for example, Benjamin Barber's criticism of a pseudo-multilateralism which is willing to make »coalitions« (at its convenience) but rejects (political) »alliances« that would bind it, in *The Berlin Journal*, Nr. 3, Fall, 2001.

23. C.f. the articles by Robin Blackburn, »The Imperial Presidency, the War on Terrorism, and the Revolutions of Modernity, « and David Held, »Violence, Law, and Justice in a Global Age«, both in *Constellations*, Vol. 9, Nr. 1, pp. 3–34, and 74–88.

system itself is corrupt, and is organized to frustrate possible change. This can give rise to a resentful, anti-democratic populism which may even justify terrorism by applying what Robin Blackburn – playing on the old Socialist critique of anti-Semitism as the socialism of fools – calls the anti-imperialism of fools.²⁴ Blackburn's point is well-taken: support for terrorism, of whatever kind, has never helped the left.

The values of community can come into conflict with the value of freedom to choose. This conflict is not a philosophical contest between liberal rights and community values; it is rather the expression of the dynamic that is typical of modern democratic society – a dynamic that cannot be reduced to a moral either/or.

B. The September attacks can be seen as marking the end of a different kind of economic antipolitics: the right-wing version popularized by Reagan and Thatcher, for which the role of the state must be reduced to a minimum while the development of a (supposedly self-regulating) capitalist market society is encouraged. Phenomena as different as the folly of leaving airport security in the hands of private airlines; the selfless courage of firemen and police which contributed to overcoming the stereotype of the self-indulgent state employee, and the recognition that, like it or not, America is now part of a globally interdependent world support the hope for a Social Democratic renewal. Indeed, recent polls show that for the first time since the 1970s, a majority of Americans now trust Washington! This makes possible a social politics of the half-full glass.²⁵ But the democratic component, which cannot be identified with the political party wearing that name, remains to be defined.

C. Electoral politics cannot be spurned – but electoral politics is not the center of democratic politics. Recent focus group studies by Stanley B. Greenberg show signs of a possible Democratic party win on the basis of four strategic points.²⁶

24. C.f., Robin Blackburn, »The Imperial Presidency ...«, op. cit.

25. It also goes beyond the moral-legal paradigms of communitarianism vs. liberalism that, as suggested earlier, have limited political discussion to debates about rights.

26. Greenberg's results are summarized in *The American Prospect*, December 17, 2001.

- A new pride in national unity has overcome the Vietnam hangover, meaning that the national security issue won't hurt Democrats, who are no longer seen as unpatriotic.
- A new sense of community follows from this, suggesting both an obligation to help others and that individual desires are less important than communal well-being. Thus, Democrats will mock Bush's definition of patriotism as consumerism – which is why Bush stressed in his State of the Union Address and now supports Clinton's domestic Peace Corps (reabeled typically U.S.A. Freedom Corps, which he denounced during the campaign).²⁷
- A new seriousness of private and public purpose after the shock of September 11 means that tax cuts may not be so important (which is why Bush yielded on new tax cuts in the March »Economic Recovery Bill«).
- Finally, the fundamentalism of the terrorists shows the import of the freedom to choose, and works against the republican right and its appeal to the values of a religious fundamentalism that appears intolerant and dogmatic.

D. While this might bring the Democratic party to power, and would in turn bring with it a much needed social reforms (health care, workers' rights) and environmental policy, what is (small-d) democratic about it? Stanley Greenberg's four points illustrate changed American attitudes toward the *values* that are fundamental to a democratic society. But the values of community can come into conflict with the value of freedom to choose. This conflict is not a philosophical contest between liberal rights and community values; it is rather the expression of the dynamic that is typical of modern democratic society – a dynamic that cannot be reduced to a moral either/or. This in turn suggests that the need to maintain civil liberties even while protecting society cannot be reduced to a moral/legal version of the either/or. This is where a democratic left can find its place as the critic who neither insists like Pollyanna that the glass is getting fuller nor revels in ascetic denunciation of a half-empty glass.

During the old Cold War the left could only re-act (since it could hardly defend really-existing socialism); and because it was on the defen-

27. C.f., »Bush Rallies Volunteers for His New Corps«, in *New York Times*, March 13, 2002, which shows how this initiative, announced in the State of the Union address, is now blended into the omnipresent theme of the struggle against terrorism.

sive, it denounced the half-full glass. The new Cold War against Terrorism has a different structure: not only can the left denounce terrorism (and its root causes); it can also argue that the roots of terrorism (at home as well as abroad) lie in its anti-democratic values, and that it is the threat to *democracy* that must be fought – including the threat that comes from those root causes that appeared too simple to explain the terrorist attacks. What the terrorist attacks should have taught the left (as the critique of totalitarianism should have taught it) is that the threat to the established (dis-)order is a democracy whose self-contradictory political dynamic must constantly be refilled if its critical nature is not to become a fatal weakness. The same lesson implies that the left should not consider its successes – for example, a renewal of confidence in a state controlled by the Democratic party – to be an end in itself but rather a means to make more active and self-critical that democratic society. Even the glass that is being filled still remains partially empty; the critic cannot disarm, nor turn into the court jester!