

Terrorism's Fellow Travelers

by Brink Lindsey

Collectivists and communitarians frequently deride modern, liberal societies for their “atomism,” or lack of “social cohesion.” In the wake of September 11, the baselessness of those criticisms should now be obvious. Although solidarity in freedom may not be uppermost in the mind amidst the diverting luxuries of peacetime, its presence became palpable as soon as liberty came under attack. The heroism of Flight 93’s doomed passengers, and of firefighters and police officers who rushed into burning buildings; the enormous outpouring of aid and assistance for the victims; the immediate insistence, from the president on down, that there be no reprisals or bigotry directed against Muslim Americans; the electrifying resurgence of patriotism here at home; the tears and prayers of freedom-loving people around the world all confirm that the promise of *e pluribus unum* remains alive and well.

On the far political fringes, though, are voices that call out from beyond the pale of liberal fellow feeling. Adding obscene insult to grievous injury, those voices responded to the horror of September 11 by blaming the victims—by contending, explicitly or implicitly, that America had it coming. And so, while the terrorist attacks served to draw most of us closer together, they simultaneously exposed the unbridgeable differences between us and a disaffected minority of extremists.

Most of the America haters flushed out by September 11 are huddled on the left wing of the conventional political spectrum. Yes, from the far right Jerry Falwell did

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Ivan Eland, director of defense policy studies, answers questions about national defense after a Book Forum for his new book, *Putting “Defense” Back into U.S. Defense Policy: Rethinking U.S. Security in the Post-Cold War World*.

rush to ascribe the mass murder of innocents to divine wrath against his political opponents, while Pat Robertson nodded in warm assent. But that episode was exceptional; moreover, Falwell and Robertson were blasted even by their supporters and forced almost immediately to recant. The left, on the other hand, produced a steady drumbeat of America-bashing tirades—and retractions have been few and far between. “America, America, what did you do—either intentionally or unintentionally—in the world order, in Central America, in Africa where bombs are still blasting?” thundered former San Francisco supervisor Amos Brown at, of all places, a memorial service for victims of the terrorist attacks. “America, what did you do in the global warming conference when you did not embrace the smaller nations? America, what did you do two weeks ago when I stood at the world conference on racism, when you wouldn’t show up? Ohhhh—America, what did you do?”

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“Such a reaction bespeaks a wild, blind hatred of the United States and the values it incarnates.”

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Author Susan Sontag reacted, not with Brown's stage anguish, but instead with outright contempt. “The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing,” she wrote in the *New Yorker*. “The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a ‘cowardly’ attack on ‘civilization’ or ‘liberty’ or ‘humanity’ or ‘the free world’ but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions?”

“This was not an ‘attack on freedom,’” chimed in Gar Smith, president of the environmentalist Earth Island Institute. “It was a politically targeted attack on the core structures of the U.S. military and the U.S.-dominated global financial structure.”

The anti-globalization group Anti-Capitalist Convergence, which led “peace” protests in Washington at the end of September, indulged in the familiar gambit of moral equivalence mongering. “The US government has failed to recognize the interconnectedness of all forms of violence,” read a statement on the group's Web site. “Bombing, encouragement of dictatorships, sweatshops for benefit of US corporations, third world debt, world hunger or lack of shelter and healthcare are all forms of violence. The fear and desperation that grows from poverty and oppression is crucial to any understanding of violence throughout the world. . . . Terror is still terror whether it is from death from starvation, fear of enslavement by corporations or fear of bombs or airplanes falling.”

Joel Rogers, writing for *The Nation*, climbed aboard the same bandwagon. “Our own government, through much of the past fifty years, has been the world's leading ‘rogue state,’” he intoned. “Merely listing the plainly illegal or unauthorized uses of force the US was responsible for during the long period of cold war, and continued during the past decade of ‘purposeless

peace’—assassinations, engineered coups, terrorizing police forces, military invasions, ‘force without war,’ direct bombings, etc.—would literally take volumes. And behind that list reside the bodies of literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocents, most of them children, whose lives we have taken without any pretense to justice.”

Leftists abroad have been, if anything, even more truculent in their post-September 11 denunciations of America. “Today in the world the United States is the most dangerous and the most powerful global force unleashing horrific levels of violence,” said Sunera Thobani, a Canadian women's studies professor. “It's really interesting to hear this talk about saving Afghani women,” she continued. “Those of us who have been colonized know what this saving means.”

Italian playwright Dario Fo, winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize in Literature, may have taken top dishonors for his near-glee at the recent destruction. “The great speculators wallow in an economy that every year kills tens of millions of people with poverty—so what is 20,000 dead in New York?” he wrote. “Regardless of who carried out the massacre, this violence is the legitimate daughter of the culture of violence, hunger and inhumane exploitation.” (As an aside, Fo later said he would sue the Italian newspaper that printed his remarks, not because he didn't write them, but because they were taken out of context. Which raises the question: Is there an imaginable context in which such a statement would be anything other than obscene?)

Similar quotations could be multiplied, quite literally, ad nauseam. Taken together, they reveal with depressing clarity the pathological state into which the anti-capitalist left has sunk. Faced with acts of appalling and unmitigated evil, the commentators sampled above directed their outrage, not at the perpetrators, but at the society of the victims. Such a reaction bespeaks a wild, blind hatred of the United States and the values it incarnates—a hatred not dissimilar to that which consumes the terrorists who seek to destroy us.

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Cato Calendar

China's Pension System: Crisis and Challenge

*Cosponsored with China Center for Economic Research
Beijing • The Great Wall Sheraton Hotel • November 8, 2001*

Speakers include Sun Jian Yong, Justin Yifu Lin, John Greenwood, José Piñera, Mao Yushi, and Liu Mingkang.

The Future of Intellectual Property in the Information Age

*Fifth Annual Technology and Society Conference
Cosponsored with Forbes ASAP
Washington • Cato Institute
November 14, 2001*

Speakers include Sen. Patrick Leahy, John Perry Barlow, Frank Hausmann, Mitch Glazier, Mike Godwin, Paul Misener, and Tom W. Bell.

Policy Perspectives 2001

*New York • Waldorf=Astoria
November 16, 2001*

Fourteenth Annual Benefactor Summit

*Phoenix • Royal Palms Hotel
February 20–24, 2002*

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Gala

*Washington • Hilton
May 9, 2002*

Cato University

*Cambridge, Md. • Hyatt Regency
Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort
July 27–August 2, 2002*

20th Annual Monetary Conference

*New York • Waldorf=Astoria
October 17, 2002*

Cato University

*San Diego • Rancho Bernardo Inn
November 7–10, 2002*

Updated information on Cato events, including Policy Forums and Book Forums not shown here, can be found at www.cato.org/events/calendar.html.

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The radical left in the West and the Islamist extremists of the Muslim world share more than a common enemy. They share a common history. Both are remnants of a once bright and shining lie—the delusion that in politics lies redemption from the uncertainties and flux of modern life. From that delusion sprang the great centralizing ideologies of the 20th century and the horrors they produced. And to that delusion cling the desperate true believers—Western and Islamist—who continue the quest for political salvation into the 21st century.

The New Liberal World

The advent of modern, liberal society, with its dizzying technological and cultural dynamism, represented a profound discontinuity in human history—a radical break from the traditional, static, agriculture-based social order that had prevailed for ten millennia. The amazing opportunities created by the new order came at the price of a stern new discipline—namely, the fortitude to live with never-resolved doubts, never-ending change, and never-abated anonymity. For the fundamental feature of modern society is open-endedness: open-endedness in the pursuit of knowledge (provisional and refutable hypotheses in place

of revelation and authority), open-endedness in economic life (innovation and free-floating market transactions in place of tradition and the “just price”), open-endedness in politics (power emerging from the people in place of the divine right of kings and hereditary aristocracies), and open-endedness in life paths (following your dreams instead of knowing your place).

Liberal society did not eliminate social cohesion, as its opponents have charged. Instead a new type of community was created: not the all-embracing unity (and oppression) of traditional, village *Gemeinschaft*, but the gossamer bonds of the modern, pluralistic *Gesellschaft*. Social solidarity now consisted of a shared commitment to the rigors and bounty of openness.

Modernization has thus required a wrenching psychological adjustment. It should not be surprising that many people—first in the West where the new order originated, and then elsewhere as the revolution spread—have found themselves unable to adjust. These lost souls have been unable to make a home for themselves under the new dispensation. For them modernity is a world without answers, without meaning, without anchors. The deepest thinkers of the 19th century identified this anomie as the spiritual crisis of the age: Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, while Max Weber wrote of society’s “disen-

chantment.” And it was Karl Marx who traced most clearly the connection between this spiritual crisis and the economic upheavals of his day. As he and Friedrich Engels wrote in this breathtaking passage from *The Communist Manifesto*:

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. . . .

The Industrial Counterrevolution

Out of the anguish of modernity’s lost souls arose the great collectivist rebellion against liberal openness—a historical phenomenon that can usefully be described as the Industrial Counterrevolution. It was, after all, during the latter half of the 19th century—when the systematic integration of science and technology brought the Industrial Revolution to full flower—that the collectivist ideal began to assert itself as a world-historical force. The timing of collectivism’s rise was no accident: amidst the turmoil of industrialization, ideologies of centralized control found ready adherents by promising to reestablish, at the national or global level, the simplicity and certainty of preindustrial life.

But collectivism offered more than mere nostalgia. It sold itself, not as a rejection of modernity, but rather as modernity’s rightful heir. For while collectivism’s emotional appeal lay in the reactionary social values it celebrated, its intellectual appeal rested on its claim to the mantle of progress. In the view of collectivism’s champions, the new industrial economy thrived on centralization. They saw the giant new business enterprises that produced abundance through mass production and concluded that consolidation and top-down control were the agents of economic development. The problem, in their view, was that the process had not yet been carried far enough.



At the end of the Cato University summer session in San Diego, conference director Laura Major awards mortarboards to people who had attended four or more Cato University sessions. Dressed in his Oxford University robes, Cato University director Tom G. Palmer reads the list.

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This then was the goal of collectivism: to fulfill the promise of the new age by extending the logic of the factory to govern society as a whole.

In his 1888 bestseller *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, Edward Bellamy explained how the industrial giants of his day were the precursors of the coming utopia:

The movement toward the conduct of business by larger and larger aggregations of capital, the tendency toward monopolies, which had been so desperately and vainly resisted, was recognized at last, in its true significance, as a process which only needed to complete its logical evolution to open a golden future to humanity.

Early in the last century the evolution was completed by the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation. . . . The nation, that is to say, organized as the one great business corporation in which all other corporations were absorbed; it became the only capitalist in the place of all other capitalists, the sole employer, the final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economics of which all citizens shared. The epoch of trusts had ended in The Great Trust.

The program of the Industrial Counterrevolution was thus one of “back to the future”—the realization of the full benefits of science and technology through the return to archaic social values. In short, collectivism offered the irresistible temptation of having one’s cake and eating it, too.

The Hatred of Freedom

In the West, the high tide of radical collectivism was the “low, dishonest decade” of the 1930s. After the victory over fascism in World War II and the subsequent confrontation with communism in the Cold War, the fortunes of liberal democracy staged a decisive revival in the advanced, industrialized countries. A minority of radical faithful remained, however—especially among intellectuals. These political pilgrims shifted their allegiances around the world

in search of a centrally planned utopia they could claim as a spiritual homeland—China, Cuba, North Vietnam, Nicaragua—until at last there was nowhere else to go.

Today, the last true believers have nothing left but negation and obstruction: hatred of the plenitude and dynamism of liberal, capitalist society; hatred of America, where those liberal values burn brightest; and hatred of globalization, the process whereby those values are spreading around the world. Hence the sad, sick spectacle of their post-September 11 *Schadenfreude*—enraged, incoherent, reduced to impotent fist waving at a world that has passed them by.

In the underdeveloped world, radical collectivism flourished after World War II. It was all too easy in the backward and politically immature new countries of the postcolonial era for ideological zealots, or just plain ruthless opportunists, to sweep into power with grand promises of centrally planned modernization. In the Islamic world in particular, postwar independence brought wave after wave of centralizing fervor—from the “Arab socialism” of Nasser, Assad, Qadhafi, and Saddam Hussein to the “White Revolution” of Reza Shah Pahlavi. Over time, though, heady visions of accelerated development and social justice gave way inevitably to grim realities of stagnation and oppression.

The past couple of decades have witnessed a renaissance of market competition and political freedom throughout much of the non-Western world. In the Middle East and Muslim South Asia, however, the dismal legacy of collectivism remains largely unreconstructed. State ownership of industry and government controls on economic activity are still pervasive; dictatorship remains the rule. And radicals discontent with modernity, disillusioned with the secular religions of socialism, have gone back to the real thing—namely, a literalist, virulently intolerant, and utterly politicized variant of Islam.

The terrorists of radical Islamism are thus the latest monsters hatched by the Industrial Counterrevolution. Out of the spiritual turmoil of modernity, and out of the shattered dreams and brutalization of centralizing ideology, has come a new breed of totalitarianism. In this variant, the beguil-

ing message of “back to the future” has been dropped; all associations with scientific and technical progress have been severed. Totalitarianism has now been stripped clean: all that remains is snarling, rabid hatred of freedom.

Today, in the attacks of September 11 and the disgraceful leftist reaction that followed, we see the convergence of radical rearguards—one external, the other internal. The external enemies of freedom have wrought tragedy on an immense scale; the internal enemies, meanwhile, have managed only farce. Both are contingents in the failed, mad rebellion against modernity—a rebellion that no longer even attempts to offer any viable alternative to the liberal order it opposes.

The external threat now properly dominates our attention as Americans—who first crushed fascism, then contained and outlasted communism—prepare once more to confront the totalitarian menace. But let all of us now reacquainted with freedom’s gentle unity remember those among us who reject and despise it. However ideological divisions are reshaped in the aftermath of September 11, let the first and deepest division be between us and them. ■

STUDIES *Continued from page 9*

phy because both the anti-porn and the Internet privacy movements are based on restricting free speech. Bell explains that the arguments those groups used to oppose decency laws should also apply to proposed privacy legislation that seeks to control commercial speech. The civil liberties groups successfully opposed legislation restricting Internet speech classified as indecent or harmful to minors, Bell writes, “by arguing that the availability of self-help alternatives disqualified such laws as the ‘least restrictive means’ of regulating constitutionally protected speech.” The solution, Bell says, is not government regulation but “digital self-help”: technologies that offer Internet users the option of filtering porn and preventing commercial entities from collecting or divulging personal information. ■