

LIBERTÀ POLITICA E DIRITTI UMANI
A VENT'ANNI DALLA CADUTA
DEL MURO DI BERLINO

SERGIO BELARDINELLI · JEFF LANGAN
NIKOLAUS LOBKOWICZ

IL SESSANTOTTO E L'OTTANTANOVE: GLI ESITI DI DUE RIVOLUZIONI

Sergio Belardinelli¹

APPARTENGO a una generazione che ha vissuto due grandi rivoluzioni culturali: quella del Sessantotto e quella dell'Ottantanove. La prima, benché avessi appena quindici-sedici anni e molti miei coetanei ne fossero entusiasti, mi ha sfiorato appena e l'ho sempre guardata con avverso scetticismo; la seconda, l'ho vissuta invece con partecipazione e speranza. Giovanni Paolo II, Solidarnosc, il crollo del muro di Berlino, la fine del comunismo stavano a significare non soltanto una svolta storica di dimensioni gigantesche, ma per me costituivano anche la consolante riprova, insignificante quanto si vuole, di essere stato dalla parte giusta, anche quando, dai tempi del Sessantotto, tutti mi dicevano di stare dalla parte sbagliata. Oggi, a vent'anni da quell'evento, registro in me un curioso rimescolamento di carte. Il Sessantotto era forse meno peggio di quanto pensassi e l'Ottantanove non ha prodotto le rose e i fiori che mi aspettavo. Qualcuno dirà: è la vecchiaia, bellezza! Ma forse c'è anche qualcos'altro.

C'è ad esempio una maggiore disponibilità a riconoscere ciò che di positivo muoveva gli eventi del Sessantotto. Le pecore portate al pascolo dagli studenti per i viali dell'Università di Roma, il desiderio di libertà e di partecipazione, i grandi dibattiti per una scuola più aperta e per una società meno ingiusta non avevano nulla, almeno all'inizio, del ciarpame ideologico che di lì a poco avrebbe colonizzato il cosiddetto "movimento studentesco". Se penso al tono di certe discussioni d'allora, mi viene da dire che erano futurismo puro, esaltazione, magari infantile, di un grande anelito di novità, non certo cattiva ideologia comunista. Ma tale, anzi meglio, una miscela esplosiva di settarismo comunista e di radicalismo borghese, sarebbero ben presto diventate, con tut-

¹ Università di Bologna, Facoltà di Scienze Politiche "Roberto Ruffilli", Via G. della Torre 5, 47121 Forlì. E-mail: sergio.belardinelli@unibo.it

te le conseguenze devastanti che conosciamo, prima fra tutte la progressiva colonizzazione del variegato mondo della cultura da parte di maestrini fanatici, narcisisti e opportunisti (con qualche eccezione, ovviamente).

Lavorare per l'egemonia della classe operaia divenne una sorta di imperativo categorico, che consentiva paradossalmente a ciascuno di soddisfare il proprio piccolo interesse particolare, vuoi in termini di denaro, vuoi in termini di successo e di potere. E la storia andò avanti per molti anni, finché arrivarono personaggi come Giovanni Paolo II, Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl e tanti altri, noti e meno noti, a Est e a Ovest, che, all'improvviso, con sorpresa di tutti, fecero scoppiare l'Ottantanove.

Molti allora pensarono che con il muro di Berlino potesse finalmente cadere anche l'egemonia di certa cultura che, pur senza credere al materialismo storico di Marx e di Engels né al libretto rosso di Mao, non aveva comunque mai smesso di militare sotto le insegne dei diversi partiti comunisti occidentali, più o meno collegati a quelli dei Paesi dell'Est, Unione Sovietica in testa. Avvenne invece qualcosa di assolutamente incredibile. Una generazione di intellettuali, nata sulla scia della rivoluzione del Sessantotto e formatasi all'insegna dell'ideologia comunista nelle sue diverse varianti (scientifica, umanista, rivoluzionaria, terroristica, ecc.), cambiò letteralmente pelle, senza alcun trauma e nello spazio di un mattino. L'equipaggiamento ideologico marxista venne accantonato, per indossarne subito un altro, fatto di pragmatismo, rispetto per le istituzioni liberaldemocratiche e tutto proteso verso i diritti e le libertà individuali. Molti di coloro che avevano predicato la rivoluzione proletaria e persino la lotta armata presero a difendere con altrettanto zelo la costituzione repubblicana e la sacralità della legge. Marx, Marcuse e Mao (le famose tre emme) scomparvero all'improvviso dai programmi dei corsi universitari, così come la Scuola di Francoforte o il marxismo dal volto umano. In Italia, ad esempio, il vecchio PCI, da sempre affratellato al partito comunista sovietico, si adeguò agli eventi, limitandosi a cambiare semplicemente il nome, mentre a cadere paradossalmente sotto le macerie del muro di Berlino furono i partiti anticomunisti (si pensi alla fine ingloriosa del PSI di Bettino Craxi e della Democrazia Cristiana). Se a questo aggiungiamo che anche dopo l'Ottantanove il potere intellettuale, quello delle redazioni dei giornali, delle emittenti televisive, delle case editrici e delle cattedre universitarie, è rimasto più o meno nelle stesse mani e che persino gli uomini politici che militano in partiti di centro-destra sembrano oggi preoccupati soprattutto di assicurarsi i favori e la benevolenza dei cosiddetti intellettuali di sinistra, credo che ci siano buoni motivi per guardare con un po' di sano scetticismo anche alle vicende degli ultimi anni.

Contrariamente a quanto molti avevano sperato, la rivoluzione dell'Ottantanove non ha chiuso con quella del Sessantotto; in alcuni Paesi occidentali ne ha continuato piuttosto i tratti peggiori, sostituendo Marx e il marxismo

con l'esaltazione dell'individualismo e del relativismo. Eppure qualcosa sta cambiando profondamente. La globalizzazione, le nuove sfide della bioetica, la crisi economica e i nuovi conflitti che si vanno delineando all'orizzonte non possono essere fronteggiati con le chiacchiere ideologiche del passato, meno che mai spacciando per diritti quelli che sono soltanto desideri. Molti incominciano a ribellarsi all'egemonia del pensiero debole (e furbo e svelto) di questi ultimi due decenni. Grazie soprattutto all'azione incessante del magistero della chiesa cattolica, la questione antropologica sta riprendendo vigore e serietà. Forse davvero ci stiamo buttando alle spalle il secolo passato e le sue rivoluzioni e sta nascendo qualcosa di nuovo. Almeno lo spero.

PLATO'S LESSON: THE CHANCES AFTER A REVOLUTION

Jeff Langan²

As a young man Plato sat on a wall contemplating the possibility of becoming a master of political affairs, and then a revolution took place. By tradition Plato's writing career began sometime in the 380s and was a little less than twenty years after the fall of the Athenian wall in 404 BC, an event that led to the end of Athenian Democracy. In the *Gorgias*, Plato critiqued the foolish nature of Athenian leadership from Themistocles to Pericles, which built a cultural, economic, and political life by feeding on the vices and the insane passions of Athenian citizens. By doing so, her leaders failed to save Athens from harming the state and its citizens by over-extending the Empire, and ultimately bringing the ire of Sparta from without along with the explosion of Athens' self-destructive passions from within. As an alternative, Plato proposed a divine hunt for the soul, good life, and Divine Being. This effort would reveal something like the "common good", as well as suggest how to bring men and cities into harmony within that good.

However, Isocrates and the Sophists saw Plato as a farcical figure who proposed false charms, like souls and the Divine Being, as objects of men's quests. Men's passions could not be transformed, rather, they could only be re-directed to goals created by political geniuses and experts. The Fall of the Athenian Wall revealed the danger of failing to propose goals big enough to unite the Greeks who needed a war to bond their civilization together against a common enemy in life or death struggles for survival. At the end of his life, Isocrates looked to Persia as this enemy and to Macedonia for the leadership capable of uniting the Greeks.

Isocrates was not a skeptic, though he argued Athens should keep up democratic appearances even if only a wealthy few controlled public life. The

² Holy Cross College at Notre Dame, 109 Vincent Hall, 54515 State Road 933 N, Notre Dame, IN 46556-0308; e-mail: jlangan1@gmail.com

Greeks had much to offer the world: beautiful language, art, and political institutions. It had open economic markets that enabled an expansion in wealth unknown in other cities. Even worse than Plato for Isocrates, however, was the rule of skeptical cosmopolitan democrats. These skeptical Sophists were dangerous because their skepticism could seep into the masses, creating disorder and the collapse of ambitious political projects. To oppose both Plato and the skeptics, Isocrates proposed extended thinking on how to create a government with democratic forms but oligarchic outcomes. He also sought to focus the thoughts of the cities' elites on discovering the true intentions of the founders as a way of recovering their founding spirit's strength.

These three divisions, between the Platonists, the Empire-searching sophists, and the skeptical sophists, persist in political philosophy twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the two forms of sophistry tending to predominate.

A small but effective development in traditional Isocratic political philosophy, was the emergence of neoconservative political philosophers. This neoconservative group appears towards the end of the Cold War and followed the path laid out by Isocrates, though claiming Plato was their inspiration and starting-point. Whereas, the fall of the Athenian Wall dashed the hopes of ancient democracy, the fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in democracy triumphant. Nonetheless, for Western democracy to survive it had to find another battle to the death against a new enemy, the Islamo-fascists. And so, the importance of religion and a defense of Enlightenment constitutions emerged. When studying American democracy, like Isocrates, the neoconservatives emphasized rediscovering the thought of the founding fathers as the key to reforming the system. They also tended to support inter-civilizational conflicts, whether with Islam or China, as a way to keep the West advancing open markets, political rights, and social freedoms. If morality was a concern of the neoconservative movement, it consisted of the morality of preserving Western free choice, markets, and culture.

Post-modern political philosophers tend to follow the path of the more radical or skeptical sophists. They question the reality of essence, and so for them politics consists of identity politics. They are as critical of democracy and empire as they are of religious bodies or philosophers that propose ideals of the soul, God, truth, falsity, good, and evil. The purpose of political philosophy is not so much a hunt for the true and the good as it is theoretical. In this light, significance is placed on developing the ways of thinking about democracy that lead to acceptance of homosexual unions, the rights of transvestites, or the general freedom of minority groups excluded by traditional cultures, or by Socratic and Aristotelian essentialism.

The radical sophists long for founders of their own, those who prepared the West and the World for radical democracy, as represented by the revo-

lutionary moments of the past two hundred years. Updating Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault will enable the re-creating of society. However, they are aware that the image of the Berlin Wall falling has discredited, for a time, some of the methodologies of their heroes. Radical sophists are also aware that as memory of Berlin fades, so too will the critiques of revolutionary political principles. And so, the economic collapse of 2008 became an opportunity to remove post-modernist masks, replacing them with older revolutionary masks, entailing that materialist political economy is re-asserting itself into political philosophy.

Platonic political philosophers will find themselves at odds, or at best in an uneasy alliance, with either the neoconservatives on the one hand, or the post-modernists on the other. In journals, publishing houses, and universities, arguments for the natural moral law, classical education, and the importance of the family, find themselves in a distinct, but perhaps creative, minority. And so, such philosophers linger on as part of the discipline, for some as a historical curiosity and for others as providing principles and insight into reality that is sorely needed in political philosophy and political practice.

MARXISM DIED BEFORE 1989 BUT MANY THINKERS
OF THE FREE WORLD IGNORE IT

Nikolaus Lobkowitz³

In spite of its great symbolic significance, the Fall of the Berlin Wall was neither the beginning nor the culmination of Communism's downfall. It was preceded by the victory of the *solidarność* movement in Poland that resulted in the first election of a non-Communist and Catholic prime minister in a formerly Communist country, but there still was some time until the Soviet Union fell apart. Yet it was the first and decisive step towards the disappearance of the most palpable expression of the division between the "Free" and the "Second" World, or the division of Germany into a West-oriented Federal and the so-called (in reality Communist) "Democratic" Republic. The former had never given up its claim that the region and population of the latter is one of its parts, as it had stated it in its constitution of 1949. Only the state, by the grace of the Soviet Union East of the Wall, had pretended to be a definitive and everlasting solution.

For someone like me specialized in the history of ideas, the most interesting aspect of Germany's re-unification was the overnight disappearance of Marxist-Leninist ideology. It is not easy to say whether in the 80's of the last century there still existed Germans who honestly believed it to be true. Yet, from 1949

³ Zentralinstitut für Mittel- und Osteuropastudien (ZIMOS), Università di Eichstätt, Ostenstraße 27, 85072 Eichstätt, Germania; e-mail: gga052@ku-eichstaett.de

to 1990 each East German university student of whatever subject had to sign up for classes (and to pass examinations) in that subject, the details and occasional changes of which were decided in Moscow. Inevitably, this teaching method left traces in the mind even of students who did not sympathize with Communism. The method consisted of three parts: dialectical and historical materialism (the ontological foundation), "political economy" (predicting the downfall of capitalism), and "scientific socialism" (describing the Communist regimes and parties as the only possible and salutary solution). In the West, (especially France, Italy, and Germany) there existed isolated but influential scholars who felt that Marx was right when he predicted the inevitable downfall of capitalism followed by a victory of the "working class", the heralds of which were leftist intellectuals. However, virtually none of these intellectuals subscribed to the primitive materialist ontology developed by Friedrich Engels and codified by Stalin in the 30's. In fact, most Western Marxists felt that this kind of ill-considered materialism was incompatible with Marx's ingenious thought that is not understood without considering its Hegelian background. In Communist countries, in contrast, this ontology was the "foundation of it all" since it was supposed to serve as protection from any kind of "religious escapism".

After October 1990 Germany was "re-united" and virtually all former East German university professors of philosophy, as well as their assistants, were given notice. The few exceptions concerned scholars specialized in formal logic or in the history of philosophy whose works were respected in the West. On the whole, the committees who had the authority to decide who may stay and who would leave did not care about the convictions of the scholars in question. Even if the scholar was a Marxist and had published respectable books or papers, nobody objected to his staying except when the scholar had brought unjust charges against a colleague or a student. The fact that, nevertheless, most East German teachers of philosophy had to leave indicates the extremely poor quality of East German Marxism, even when compared with Marxism-Leninism in Russia. The reason for this difference was that most Marxists who tried to be creative and original sooner or later had emigrated or escaped to West Germany. In Russia, or for that matter in Poland, dissidents usually had to give up their scholarly career. Only a few of them (e.g. Leszek Kołakowski and Aleksander Zinoviev) dared to stay abroad while, for example, attending a conference in a western country. In this respect, the situation of East German scholars was much more comfortable because there existed another country in which they could continue to use their native language. To a large extent, the poor level of East German philosophy was due to constant bloodletting.

An interesting consequence of the re-unification of Germany was that virtually *any* kind of Marxism disappeared from German universities and, indeed,

among German intellectuals. During the last decades of the 20th century the old heralds of non-Leninist Marxism had died, and the Leninist (or rather Stalinist Marxism) characteristic of Communist countries was totally discredited. Nonetheless, in France, Italy, and even England, and the United States, varieties of Marxism continue to exist while in their own native country Marx and Engels have become historical figures that a student of subjects such as philosophy, political science, or sociology have to know, but nobody quotes. For someone like me, who since his student days was always interested both in Soviet and Western Marxism, (after all, as a Christian one should be familiar with aggressive kinds of atheism) Marxism had become a sort of “Egyptology”, or a subject without any influence upon contemporary thought.

One should not overlook, however, that many ideas put forward by Marxism-Leninism (e.g. its militant atheism, its materialism, determinism, and the claim that mankind has the right and chance to become whatever it decides, etc.) was and still continues to be an ideology that many “thinkers of the Free World” adhere to. In a way, Marxism-Leninism never was anything else but a particularly awkward articulation of a number of ideas that unfortunately have become a heritage of supposedly enlightened “European culture”.