

Left Fukuyamaism: Politics in Tragic Times

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In 1991, a documentary crew witnessed the dissolution of the Communist Party of Great Britain [1].

The End of the Party shows us three demographics. The young(er) Eurocommunists of the Party leadership have the chic graphics and the hard truths; confidently they berate an ageing audience to accept that 'the era of Communist Parties is over' as they push for a name change. When they win, the few students in the room cheer and rise to their feet in applause. They want to be part of the future, not just the past. Rose Kerrigan stays sitting. Born in 1903 to Jewish immigrants from the Russian empire, Rose tells us how she lost her first job in 1917 for defending a conscientious objector during the First World War. She shows us the tea sets and the Gorky novels she brought back from stays in the new Russia in the 1930s. Those trips were her recovery of the land her parents left and the winning of a land they never had. Becoming a Communist was her social mobility, her entry into broader and richer life-worlds. But it came with community, and with love and loyalty for her roots, and so without the particular sort of trampling on others that the term social mobility more often suggests. Her husband fought in Spain, then raised money everywhere and against the odds to push back fascism there. She knows that people want her to apologise now for being a Communist, but they always have - since the days of the trenches. She believes that every human being everywhere should be treated equally, she tells us, without all the hierarchies of race and nation and gender and class to which most outside her militant minority doff their caps. Her new Party leaders find her an embarrassment. They talk of the need for reinvention, they know the Communists have become a relic. After their win at the conference, the new project faded quickly until, seeking ever broader and shallower alliances, they delivered Moscow's gold to an insipid campaign for electoral reform.

There is sorrow and beauty in watching Rose. She lives still in the hopes of Red Clydeside, Glasgow's destroyed working class radicalism. She remembers visiting the first supermarket in the Soviet Union. She doesn't tell us that everything was perfect there, or even easy. But she came from tenements, looked up at Soviet skyscrapers, and thought of all the cynics for whom a world without suffering was impossible. She hoped that one day soon the Russians would prove them wrong. The shipyards of Glasgow, with kinder cultures of solidarity than the bosses preach, might be with them then. It would be possible for others - for her friends and family - to believe at last. She remembers not a naïvely glorified past, but a real one: real pain but also a trajectory, a future she is told now to consign to the past. She stays in this memory because it is possible there, and so hard outside it, to root the dedication to a better world in something concrete.

Rose gets off the train and shuffles into the conference hall to register her protest against the end of Communism with a capital-C. She walks past a small band of young things in black leather jackets. 'No matter how you change your name', they shout into the hall, 'you still play the bosses' game!' These are the savvy twins to the Eurocommunist reformers, the young Stalinists who know which way the wind is blowing. They've left the Party, and they call it a corpse. Their newspaper is the *Leninist*, and against the stream they champion (albeit critically) the Russian tanks that once rolled into Budapest and Prague. Theirs is no mass party. They are the enlightened few. To them, as to the

Eurocommunists, Rose who will not give up her old Party is an old fool.

Rose died in 1995. The *Leninist* is now the *Weekly Worker*, and its writers are ageing too. They have moved on from their Stalinism. But there is a new if modest proliferation of radicals now who would have baffled 1990s commentators; young people in Europe and North America who want to sound like the old Communists. On podcasts and on social media, in political parties and in unions, they salute authoritarian state power past and present. They speak, they say, in the name of socialism. They amass thousands of followers online. They are not the dwindling band of pensioners who remember subsidised cruises on the Volga. They don an aesthetic of kitsch cheek or unsentimental realism or, somehow, both. The small Communist Party of Britain (founded by some of the old CPGB's anti-Eurocommunists) feels the need to issue slightly embarrassed social media guidelines for its younger members, opposing glorification of Stalin. In the resurgent and newly youthful Democratic Socialists of America, veering since 2016 from the margins of the political margins to their foreground, critics of 'campist' admiration for ostensibly anti-US bureaucrats overseas find themselves isolated and then booted off the International Committee. In New York, a much-billed conference on 'China and the Left' spills over with enthusiasm for the Chinese state. In Britain, the Corbynites at Novara Media cover protests in Havana by insisting 'that violent disorder will be punished through the legal system.'

Are these the heirs of Rose Kerrigan? Some of the new campists seem to reflect the hecklers outside the conference hall in 1991 more than anyone inside it: loud and confident, committed to Five Year Plans in part for the shock value, and detached from most mass politics. Though Rose spoke with melancholy of the disappointments of the Soviet Union, some in this band have the deepest suspicion for anything but adulation for a project that was not theirs. They never knew its heyday. But they want Rose's world. They certainly do not regard her with haughty contempt. One of their sympathetic features is their protest against a left in search of a future that would denigrate its past as nothing but awkward.

'Campism' originally meant support for a mighty 'socialist camp' stretching without interruption from Berlin to Beijing. Campists supported workers on strike against pay cuts and humiliations in Detroit but not in Poland, where everything was flipped; dissident workers there could only further the interests of global capital and the CIA, in the campist view, and their bosses better represented the international working class. Now that camp is gone, but campism is back. It can name the defence or the admiration (not the same thing) of states past, present or both. It can be the garb for the hardest sectarianism or the softest opportunism. It can think its camp headquarters were once in Moscow or Algiers or that they remain in Beijing or in Caracas. The unifying connection is a hard-nosed scorn for hypocritical imperialists and leftwing idealists alike who rush to denounce gulags. Campism today names a common turn within several different parts of the left, rather than a single current. Why is this happening now? What mood does it express? The critique of ideology, asking what the emergence of particular forms of thought might reveal about their epoch, is in need of renewal. Treating thought and feeling together might be one way of renewing it.

In Vivian Gornick's classic *Romance of American Communism* (and in the moving 1983 documentary, 'Seeing Red', on American Communists recruited in the 1930s) the following point is already half-visible. The affective dimensions of contemporary campism are rooted in love: the forbidden romance, the wistful longing for the departed, and the privately desolate love that *settles for less*.

Our aim, like Marx's, should be a form of critique capable of grasping the conditions in which a given idea feels plausible. That is rare enough on the left today, where denunciation can be more pleasurable. And though Marxist orthodoxy hews to the rational reconstruction of objective interests as Marx's great power - now deployed to tell people they are proletarian even, or especially, when they think otherwise - in fact Marx's work is imbued with sensitivity to the feeling of the world, to its

emotional experience, as central in the genesis of political activity. As a young man in Paris, he named not one kind of alienation but two: the objective process by which our labour and its products come to dominate us, and also its subjective corollary where the worker 'does not feel at home' in work. By the writing of *Capital* twenty years later, the modern factory had become a key site in the construction of the revolutionary subject – though more wage-labourers then toiled on farms and in domestic service than in England's industrial workshops – in part because the concentration of workers there introduced a novel experience, where 'the labourer co-operates systematically with others', and so feels the world of production for the first time as a site pregnant with the possibility of social management. There is a challenge here to us, to think of affects not only as the property of our irrational opponents but as the phenomena we need too for politics.

First, though, we would do well to understand jealously how structures of feeling now predominant sustain politics other than those we would choose. The question here is both fundamental and general, though this current offers only one window onto it. The question is: what kinds of politics of antagonism and hope flourish, after the End of History?

The Wistful Past

There is today a romance of the illicit amid the failure of the accepted. This much is obvious. People sometimes have damaging affairs when all is not well in their stable and boring relationships. They crave the liberating rush of setting aside their better judgement, which feels merely oppressive once it stops feeling like a route to their flourishing. The 'alt-right', so-called, provides a similar kind of outlet after decades of stagnation and disappointment from the established order. If that order with its gods – 'liberalism', 'democracy' – is predicated on a rejection of Nazism and Stalinism, then the most shocking thing anyone can do is to embrace either label enthusiastically. And why not, if faced with rising rents and insecure employment and the uselessness of those gods? It is of course important that enough time has elapsed after their defeat for these demons to feel like myths spun by the ruling class, losing their reality; part of the irony ought to be that Stalinism was really very *grey*, so it takes fading memories for it to be constructed as *risqué*. This is a story of forbidden love.

If the major brand of youth radicalism in the global North today involves the suffocating moralism of Mark Fisher's 'vampire castle', here is a language for resenting power without the masochism and the atomistic paranoias of contemporary identity pessimism: how refreshing to switch a fragile and frightened 'safe space' for all the might and pride of a marching band in Red Square. There is an important affective dimension to all of this, just as Trump without the lurid vulgarity – a Trump entirely serious – would not have had quite the same popular pull. Shock value is almost all we have in pessimistic times, where social transformation to overthrow the world's rulers might be impossible but horrifying them and making them uncomfortable offers some escape.

That brings us to the ubiquity of nostalgia as a form of politics today. The right has lost its 1980s vanguard optimism: no longer 'Morning in America' but 'American Carnage', instead. Its battle-cry now is not the making of a new world of flexible markets but the rescue of a past order trashed by multiculturalism and feminism and much else besides. Social democracy also speaks in an overwhelmingly nostalgic key, longing for the post-war golden age destroyed by neoliberal conspiracy in the 1980s. Right and left, then, are united in this basic language. Climate change and automation feature as harbingers of coming doom across the political spectrum. Even centrist technocratic crisis-fighters see little in the way of an exhilarating future. For political hope, for sunny days and lost innocence, the norm now is to look to the past. Make America Great *Again*. Take *Back Control*. One must choose a past to venerate, and so people rushing to the left are called on to find a past of their own: the longer-lasting the better, so that its endurance can act as a smack in the face to all of hegemony's doubts about whether anything different is possible at all.

For some, who lack much political activity outside Twitter or who join tiny grouplets, the comforts of the past are an alibi for the barrenness of the present; in this *The New Stalinists*, who at least want to have fun in *the joy of the provocative*, are just more self-aware than the rest of the left which often plays the same sentimental game but takes itself more seriously. We cosplay and say, 'Another World Was Possible'. Often though, the shock value attained by Cold War nostalgia satisfies urges for radicalism in a pessimistic moment, while the real nostalgia remains for social democracy. Internet Stalinisms and campisms in the global North are diverse, but in recent years some have come from the most enthusiastic supporters of more mainstream electoral lefts.

It makes sense to combine these two forms of longing. To speak sentimentally of the USSR is not only to summon memories of a world where the word 'socialism' seemed to mean something mighty and frightening to power. It is also to remember a time when the very language of 'class' and its politics had firmer, apparently easier, industrial foundations. As the Germans understand, what they call 'Ostalgie' is not nostalgia for the Stasi but for decent pensions. Both get wrapped up in a Hobbesian left, an image of strong states and industrial battalions and the stability of secure wages and a social safety net. The Cold War reminds us of that world, even (perhaps especially) those of us from lands far from the direct experience of the brutality of any 'socialist' secret police.

This sympathetic romance of the past provides the glue uniting apparently disparate phenomena. It is the noble wish to step out of this present, not to be caught up in it and a participant in it any longer. The alienation is sometimes spatial as much as temporal; the veneration attaches itself to projects still alive now but faraway, as in the rolling sagas of Latin America's 'Pink Tide'. In both cases, distant phenomena are invoked in the face of local absences, and to defy the forms of belonging, the identities and coalitions, and so the assumed enemies, which together define regnant values drenched in blood. But the nature of the escape can look quite different in different places.

In Britain, whose Communist Party was never a national electoral force but held serious industrial significance, 'tankieism' means memories of brilliant and effective organisers like Bert Ramelson and Derek Robinson: 'Red Robbo', who terrified the press. They were sufficiently marginal to feel countercultural now, but sufficiently powerful to be the punchline of nobody's joke, which after 1989 sometimes felt like the necessary condition of radicals in the imperial core. Their disdain for factory and student Trotskyists fits nicely now into a protest against the pathetic and the tiny, paper-selling and small protests that lose, as the image of the left. They evoke the world of Negri's 'mass worker'. Corbynism, where the left once again promised to matter, easily invited the veneration of this earlier tradition for some.

In the United States, a different dynamic reigns. There, the anti-Communism that propels Fox News doggerel about the 'Franklin School' to the top of the bestseller lists arises simultaneously with a racist moral panic about Critical Race Theory. With some obvious partial exceptions - like the Black Panther Party - campism appeals there as a surpassing, more than a recovery, of a national tradition. It is tied above all to the language of anti-imperialism. It marks the moment of taking seriously *most of the world*, in a nation whose ignorance about others is matched only by the ferocity with which it bombs them.

If in the United States a largely white left is quick to dismiss the same Stalin whose name meant inspiration to black militants in Alabama in the 1930s and Vietnamese liberation fighters in the 1960s, and if in Britain a largely middle-class left is inclined to sneer at the same Stalin who inspired miners in Chopwell to rename their streets after Marx and Lenin, then it only seems reasonable to ask: 'what have you got instead?' And when the answers are wanting, when some on the left bury their heads to the defeat of world revolution and call still for freedom everywhere tomorrow, while others react to that loss by accommodating themselves to imperialist power as servile ministers or crowing chroniclers, people look elsewhere. From Nicaraguan Sandinistas to Longbridge car

manufacturers, very different communities summon a future past, a defeated set of hopes once cherished by decent people struggling to end their degradation.

For campism, a virtuous alienation from our time and place means experiencing an affinity instead with a better land of struggle. But it must also mark failure: an age of holding Lenin tight since we do not have new Lenins reinventing emancipation in new colours fitted to new conditions, just as he did in the formation of proletarian internationalism and the electrifying call for soviet power a century ago. Amid the absence or weakness of such emancipatory subjects now, the ability to imagine alternative worlds is simply not sustained by real movements presenting the serious possibility of revolutionary transformation in the global North. But those who call socialism impossible, who dismiss the abolition of capitalism as an utterly absent project in today's politics, cannot deny that armies of millions pledged themselves in name to that goal not so long ago, and those armies lasted for decades! The turn away from the here and now evidences a real abyss, of which campism is but the symptom. The sad reformulation of radical politics, as we will now see, comes in the campists' relationship to the world they choose to inhabit instead.

The impotent present

In truth, all this can be very presentist: the new campism is new for its sometime abandonment of the trajectory towards global victory and universal dignity that gave to 1930s Communists and 1960s anti-colonial revolutionaries some justification for accepting present difficulties. The new campism venerates a past *without its future past*. Consider, for example, how the campism that defends ostensible Leninists around the world joins with or competes with another tendency. An apparently more forlorn campist realism would defend Assad or Putin or whoever else proclaims opposition to Washington with a big bureaucracy behind them, regardless of their Communist or even left credentials. There is a left Fukuyamaism [\[2\]](#) there, where the only thing possible in this present of capitalist realism is to herald the violent authoritarians who frighten, at least, the very most violent power in the world.

We might call this *imperialist realism*. Within it, campism is appended to a thinner and more defensive project than before - then championing the end of capitalism, now avoiding asphyxiation by hegemonic powers - and on this view the best we can do is to choose between rival imperialisms. There is a determined miserabilism here that will not give up on tragedy; when revolutions really do break out, as in Syria, the insistence that all politics is geopolitics and so no emancipatory struggle is conceivable now becomes circular and self-validating. The politics of a nobler freedom is an impossibly fringe project today, we are told, so we must choose between imperial camps. And then when this politics does emerge, it is ruled out as a fraud, since the camps must be all there is. Look at Syria today, and the resources for such a conclusion are clear.

The great Caribbean anthropologist David Scott has seen a shift of genre between the 1938 and 1963 editions of CLR James' *Black Jacobins*, from the romance of revolution to its tragedy. In James' account of the modern world's first successful slave revolt, the Haitian revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century, its leaders send liberated slaves back to work on plantations after the old slavers are exiled. Haitians remain, on the day after the revolution, conscripted to a global capitalist division of labour, without the power to remake the whole world and so to find alternative means of feeding themselves. After their nominal victory they are besieged, despised and punished by all the powers of the world - slave-holders or colonial beneficiaries of brutalisation, all of them. It is fitting to our purposes here that James, a Trinidadian Trotskyist whose hostility to social domination radicalised him against empire and against Stalin too, commented on the isolation and degeneration of the Russian revolution through an analogy with Haiti.

Scott's *Omens of Adversity* has recently extended the same tragic narrative arc to cover the United

States' devastation of revolutionary Grenada in the 1980s. Making a new world in the twentieth century was, not only in Russia but across Africa and Asia and the Americas, a project undertaken against the deliberate suffocations of concentrated power, which succeeded in strangling the possibility of a happy freedom for the oppressed. In Grenada today, Scott notes, there is one public memorial to the dreams of the New Jewel movement and their violent crushing by Reagan's forces. It is a memorial built by the US, honouring the US dead. He writes of its imposing arches, and its engraved claim that Grenadians are 'grateful' to their invaders:

It seems to me hard not to recognize in it the embodiment of a cynical act of imperial power, the sneering reward empire offers to mark the defeat of a people's defiance. If on the one side the monument confronts us with the projection of overwhelming domination, on the other side, it registers the limp prostration of a defeated people's spirit.

In today's imperialist realism, this tragedy is keenly felt. The 'postcolonial' names the epoch after the death of many hopes in the anti-colonial age. In fact, the shift was global, the defeat of the long 1968. Scott's reflections might just as easily be trained on the swapping of Communist for National Front votes in 2000s France, or the immiserated wreckage of 1990s Russia, as 1980s Grenada. Campism owes its revival now not just to the political and cultural ubiquity of nostalgia, but also to a very contemporary condition: the desolation of past hopes. Campism offers a means of facing the present, not only running away from it. It appeals as a form of reassuring denial - all is not lost, China remains a vanguard of anti-imperialism, and so on - but also a different and subtler and altogether more compelling kind of forgetting. It stares into overwhelming defeat, wrought by the power of the vile masters of the universe, and to avoid rehashing all the pain it skips to the end of the story told by James and Scott. There is nothing in the world but the enemy's fortresses or ours, it says, though revolutionaries everywhere once dreamed bolder dreams: of freedom. We must pick a fortress, say campists, or we will have to sacrifice our loyalty to Haitian slaves and Russian workers whose struggles have ended here. The gulf between revolutionary hopes and grisly outcomes is thus repressed by this move. In forgetting that gap, campism avoids facing the fact of failure and so abdicates the task of working out how to do things better. It proved an apparently impossible task in the twentieth century, and Fukuyamaism says it always is so. In practice, campists agree. The final years of Lenin's life, his 'last struggle' in Moshe Lewin's construal, involved his grappling with the tragic implications of the following predicament: could it be that the disciplined, militarised defence of the workers' state necessitated abandoning the very conditions of real, democratic workers' rule that gave it its legitimacy and its potentially socialist character? Saving the workers' state in 1918-21 might have meant destroying it. In a set of desperate proposals against calcifying bureaucratisation and national chauvinism in the Bolshevik state apparatus, Lenin sought frantically to recover the sovereignty of the millions without whom socialism would be an empty husk.

The campists forget this, or simply choose - like everyone else at the End of History - to give up for now on such awkward idealism. In China, exploited workers and billionaires both sit under the red flag, so *something* has survived. The woe of the campist position amounts to this: staying true to a battered original hope means acceding to any leader born in its firmament, even as the revolution rots under them. Those who strive to remain true in some sense to older and bolder aspirations can appear to postcolonial campism as naïve or even as racists, unaware or blasé about the full trauma of imperial counter-revolution. But the critique of this politics that interests us here is all about reckoning more fully with the scale of the 'liberal democratic' horror, seeing the devastation of emancipatory horizons as its bitter fruit. Campists reduce the complex conditions of defeat to strangulation from outside, which functions like Trotskyist stories of betrayal to keep the project clean and avoid messier questions. But this is not a moralistic criticism of campism, or a call for an easy return to the grander projects whose rubble campists clasp. New campisms are of interest

precisely as symptoms of real capitalist and imperialist wreckage, as streams at the margins that tell us things about our cultural and intellectual condition more generally.

One last feeling bears noting in this connection, which again reflects and rebels against the affective economy of our times. Aligning yourself with dictators overseas marries desires for radicalism and a particular kind of *reasonableness*. It means horrifying the defenders of a capitalist order you loathe while still internalising all their dismissiveness about silly and naïve dreamers. It also means giving up far too much. It means making the socialist offer to the world a lot of prisons and spies and the caste power of a state elite. 'I'm no stargazing kid', says the Stalinist to the sneering liberal: 'While you write poetry about democracy, I have the guts to defend millions of deaths as necessary. How's that for hard-headed realism?' That is to perform the kind of world-weary maturity praised since 1989 as the only un-embarrassing orientation to politics, outdoing the Right for cynicism and so gleefully claiming that terrain they thought was theirs while still finding an outlet for those undead desires, scorned as infantile, to break all the rules.

We are all tankies

The last part of the story is really the most fundamental. The pull in twentieth-century socialism was towards defining its object as 'the economy' and its instrument as the national state. That entailed understanding capitalism as a system of private ownership and market exchange counterposed to state ownership and distribution, rather than seeing capital as a structure of domination to be opposed in the name of freedom and popular power. Contemporary Stalinism is an instance and a symptom of that, just as social democracy is: twin forms (as Hal Draper had it) of 'socialism from above.' Some postcolonial state-building might be clustered under this label too, though often more ambivalently and complicatedly; in the genealogy of contemporary imperialist realism this plays a crucial role, but Western attempts to bundle enthusiasm for the FLN in Algeria with illusions in Brezhnev as identical forms of 'substitutionism' - making state apparatuses the agents of our politics and distant developments the only cause of hope - often worked to reveal the crudeness (or much worse) of the critics. Some state projects really did harbour more hope than others.

The challenge is to move beyond finger-wagging condemnation to take seriously the bind that produced a hundred years ago - East and West, North and South - this common trajectory towards the embrace of national states as socialist instruments and national economies as their objects for delivering not freedom but some modicum of economic equality: planning and full employment beyond the miserable vicissitudes of crises-ridden domination by the impersonal power of the marketplace. The language of this politics was creativity and stability at once, that distinctly modern faith in the mutability of the world to human design wielded here to advocate the grey planning of everything. Foucault was surely wrong to claim there has never been a 'socialist governmentality'. It is hard now to think ourselves out of this intellectual condition. At its dawn, socialist governmentality was a reply to the coming of universal suffrage in some places, the decline of transnational insurrectionary energies, the ascent of a bureaucratic state arsenal for the management of employment and distribution within the shell of capitalist states, and the burning challenges of poverty to which that new techne seemed to present ready answers. The socialist challenge and possibility, then, was to free the machinery of state management over the economy from its fragmentary, half-hearted deployment by capitalists worried about the invasion of their hallowed hidden abode.

The curious dialectic here involved the deployment and the adaptation of aspirations around power so important to Marx; in seeking to take control over an alienated social metabolism, represented increasingly as a 'blind' subject lurching from boom to bust, the agent of that control moved from millions to a few administrators. The desire for autonomous power over ourselves to replace hierarchical power over us thus metamorphosed into its opposite, by dint of changing historical

possibilities more than any conspiracy. Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* is dangerously titled; his disciples cast Stalin or a set of bureaucrats as personal betrayers of the revolution, scapegoated in order to leave the socialist project untarnished, but Trotsky himself treated war and scarcity as pressures transforming and crippling the possibilities of the nascent USSR. Many on the left resisted the pull towards a top-down statified socialism, from council communists, syndicalists, autonomists and Luxemburgists to the most radical of the Non-Aligned internationalists – but they tended to be much worse at explaining its appeal, and so explaining their usual marginality. In fact, though they called for workers' councils not distant officials in suits, much of socialism's most radical fringe (Trotsky certainly included) was conquered too by the language of 'the economy' as a coherent site for capitalism and the modernist insistence on constant agency as the proper alternative to capital's invisible hand. That economism gradually let dreams of freedom narrow and then slide, while the veneration of agency allowed autonomous power to become hierarchical power. The dissidents tended to imagine sharp ruptures between their democratic ambitions and anti-democratic 'counterrevolutions' in the name of revolution; the blurred lines are the repressed in this thinking.

Today, the newly expansive language of 'abolition' – against police, prisons, borders, the family, work and even the value-form – evokes the salutary rediscovery of a leftism defined by insubordination against oppressive iterations of power and status [3]. At best, this is even the recovery of ambitions to chart a 'free individuality' after capital, concentrating on domination and hierarchy as its enemies and so strikingly more emancipatory than Hobbesian praise for dictators. How, then, can it coexist with a new campism in the same moment? Both index an absence of agents and strategies sufficient to the task of freedom: 'abolition' begins by naming its enemies, where once the language of 'transition' foregrounded its subjects and its roadmap. Against the same backdrop, an irony greets the resurgence of campism's 'barracks socialism.' Its protagonists are sometimes coolly aware of the irony, which is what makes them meaningfully novel, and explains their embrace of the kitsch aesthetic. The revival comes after the *desolation* of the twentieth century constellation that established the original campism as plausible. Its camp (be it the Warsaw Pact in the East, or the Non-Aligned Movement as a meaningfully radical actor in the South) is gone, and so is the Fordism that once made it a mass politics in the North and West.

Campism was founded in a claim about the deflection of class struggles into geopolitical struggles. Long before the tanks rolled into Hungary in 1956, 1939 was its watershed. That year, Communists grit their teeth and defended Stalin's desperate pact with the Nazi state that would put them in concentration camps, since the endurance of socialism – of a world even vaguely liveable, amid the Depression and fascism – hinged, it seemed to them, on the defence of the Soviet Union. After the defeat of world Communism, in a 1994 interview, Eric Hobsbawm had the dubious privilege of attempting to explain this to Michael Ignatieff, whose haughty liberalism soon saw him calling for bombs over Baghdad. How, asked this bastion of peaceful moderation, could intelligent people have committed themselves to such violent idealism? It was, Hobsbawm corrected him, always a sombre kind of politics; survival was its language more than utopia. But it was possible too for twentieth-century Communists to believe that new and better worlds really were in the offing in the East. Trotsky insisted on the defence of Stalin's Soviet Union in any war with imperialist powers – magical thinking was not the only alternative to campism – but official Communists refused his pained choice with a clearer-cut one: in Stalingrad there was socialism, or at least there might be soon, and it was worth defending as such. Today, that illusion is easily enough dispelled, and not only by the implosion of the Soviet project. Domination by wage-labour, which provided the core of Marx's critique of capital, remained in force across the Warsaw Pact even at its height. The alienation of our powers to a distant state apparatus, planning an industrial society in the Fordist mould, is not the proper horizon of emancipatory politics. It was far from the goal of the most romantic Communists and anti-imperialists whose faces adorn the campist repertoire.

All of this is close to irrelevant, though, once campism is transformed by a turn from optimism to pessimism. Today, it is less often a naïve claim about distant realities than a cynical one about ours. Oppressive states are to be defended not only from British and American bombs but from domestic revolutions too, not because they are great but because nothing great is possible. This politics emerges from the same conditions that birth the vampire castle, whose quest for safe spaces in an unsafe world only marks a different response to despair. Campism's left critics, from blood-stained social democrats to purer revolutionaries, usually fail to own up to the impasse it addresses, which is the coexistence of savage imperial hegemony and a desperate need for some counterweight to it. The critique of this campism should involve a lot of sympathy, or it becomes suspect. At times, campism can demand the brutal denigration of radicals and revolutionaries in inconvenient places, from Prague to Aleppo. But at other moments, it becomes clear that campists want to love in a world that makes it hard to love; they want to cherish flawed projects and to herald the bravery of their protagonists, from Soviet futurisms amid a crumbling old world to the hopeful boldness of Cultural Revolution, and from Kwame Nkrumah and Thomas Sankara to the *campesinos* of Latin American revolution. In fact, campism is caught in a co-dependence of love and denigration, where the violence of our world seems to render love possible only through some nasty exclusions. What if it is true that North Korean technology delivered arms to Palestinian fighters – that without the Kim dictatorship they would be weaker in Gaza? What to do with this fact, once we accept (some campists still don't, and so repress the problem, but others do) that Kim starves and tortures as the palace-dwelling warden of an open-air prison? Contemporary campism inhabits the tension which, in very different ways, we must learn to inhabit too: between well-grounded gloom and much-needed faith.

The campists are right, not about the states they defend or the revolutions they condemn or defile, but about this. They bear witness to the awkwardness that accompanies talk of hope and freedom and equality today. In a sense, they embrace the recognition that these are strange and foreign terms now, and so in wielding them they choose to sound like cynics and not like the feebler ingenué. Here we might return with sympathy even to the worst of the online provocateurs, with their drawling over Beria, designed to shock. They announce their yearning for another world, and in the same breath they almost wink, 'I'm joking!' In the end, this is a lot of bravado to evade a choice we all shirk in our different ways. Perhaps they think the barrel bombs and re-education camps of a global 'war on terror' mark an almost incomprehensible tragedy, in which criminal states like Syria and China must be defended with eyes wide open, because nothing better than butchery is possible. In this case, they are conservatives mourning the End of History, since Fukuyamaism is liberal or conservative. But there cannot really be a Fukuyamaism that is actively *left-wing*. This might be the melancholia which jibes and jokes about Stalin's machismo are supposed to cover. Or perhaps the truth is something else. Perhaps, like the rest of us, they want ways to give doubt a rest.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] With deep thanks to David Camfield, without whom this article would have been impossible, and Charlotte Heltai, without whom it would have been worse. I am grateful, constantly, to Jonas Marvin for encouraging me. The mistakes are all my own.

[2] I take this term from Slavoj Žižek, who uses it to name the Third Way. Since Blair's 'war on terror', Clinton's 'war on crime' and Schroder's Hartz IV war on the poor more than confirmed their sometime self-designation as forces beyond the left, I think Žižek's appellation is inappropriate: these were simply Fukuyamaists. The tendency named in this article is a better candidate for the descriptor. There is a continuity between the two worth stressing, though. When Gordon Brown entered the British Treasury with an immediate plan to hand great power to the unelected Governor of the Bank of England, he did so on the explicit basis that a Labour government could only invest in saving the welfare state if it had the confidence of 'the markets', avoiding a run on sterling. This was, briefly, a sort of Left Fukuyamaism: a claim about the narrow possibilities for effective political action at the End of History, and an attempt to chart that narrow course against leftwing idealists who still dreamed of a world without bankers. Campism says the same of idealists who dream of a world without censorship and prison camps.

[3] It is worth remembering, though, as testament to the complexities of the twentieth century - where dreams of freedom became bound up with its opposite, because the road to socialism was so strewn with obstacles that illusions or clear-eyed bargains seemed to many necessary to avoid despair or fatalism - that Angela Davis could call for the abolition of prisons in the US and then praise the prison system in East Germany. And yet: as the Soviet Union dissolved, Davis was an anti-Stalinist dissident inside the Communist Party.