

ANTI-WASHINGTON BUT PRO-AMERICAN!

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Is this a meaningful combination? I think yes, but it is not unproblematic. Maybe a point of departure would be to explore the opposite combination which in my experience is very frequent in right-wing circles in Western Europe, and also in Eastern Europe for that matter: to be pro-Washington but anti-American.

Of course, if one's political vision is limited to Europe; and to what is often called the first generation of human rights, civil and political rights (from 1789, enshrined in the Human Rights Declaration of 1948); and at the same time the Soviet Union and its relation to Eastern Europe is used as a basis of comparison then there is a certain logic to being pro-Washington. The Western European regimes certainly rank higher on civil and political rights than the Eastern European regimes including the Soviet Union and the two parts of Europe are in the spheres of influence of the two super-powers whether that is causally related to the state of affairs in human rights or not.

However, in our century and certainly after the Second World War it is absolutely impermissible to have such a narrow perspective on world politics. A political calculus involving only Europeans is not only provincial and Euro-centric; it is profoundly anti-human. To take into account only civil and political human rights and not the social, economic and cultural human rights enshrined in the human rights documents of 1965-66, the second generation of human rights is an equally impermissible bias, as impermissible as it is to pay attention only to social and economic rights (employment,

social security, satisfaction of basic material needs of well-being in general) a frequent sin of the left. And this could also be extended to the third generation of human rights still in the making, the rights of people, not only individuals to a clean environment, to development, to peace. Third, to use the Soviet Union, still with a bad record in the first generation of human rights although not so bad in the second generation (but then bad again where the third generation is concerned) as a point of reference may sound useful in political polemics, but not in real politics. Our politics should be in terms of our goals and should arise out of our own political dynamics, in free dialogue, and we should judge ourselves relative to our own standards, not the standards set by another society.

Given the indivisibility of the world today and the indivisibility of the human problématique in general we have to think globally, not as provincial West Europeans, and we have to think wholistically, not only focussing on the fields where we in Western Europe, for particular historical reasons, are not doing too badly. In this perspective the United States comes out rather badly. I shall not make any list of all the direct and structural violence engaged in by the US leadership, from extermination of indigenous peoples, via slavery, wars and interventions, support of highly repressive regimes, to establishment and maintenance of economic structures leading to untold suffering for millions (although also for considerable benefits for others). The reader will find much of this very well documented in the excellent books by Noam Chomsky, particularly his recent book, Turning the Tide. Some of this struck Southern Europe from

Greece to Spain, but by and large Western Europe has not been touched by US direct aggression. Had Eastern Europe not been forcefully kept inside the Soviet sphere of influence what happened in Greece 1944-45, not to mention 1967 and onwards might serve as an indication of how the United States would have behaved.

Let me refer to US policy abroad, both in the public and private domains, as "Washington", knowing that this may sound as an insult to the many good people there. To anti-Washington is easy-- the position follows from what has been said. To be pro-Washington is only possible with very limited horizons in political geography and political agenda. There are also some other formulas. Right-wing people are often simply ignorant of what the United States did in the Philippines, of the pretexts and outright lies that have been used through the centuries to justify intervention and invasion (the Tonkin Bay Resolution being a good example--German editors, please have a look at your newspapers when that happened and check to what extent you voiced some critical concerns!). Another mechanism is denial of facts. A third mechanism is more subtle: "well, well this may all be true but that is the United States in South America and in Southeast Asia; we are living in Western Europe and are concerned with the security we can derive from the US here." A profoundly egotistical, anti-human and I think also basically racist perspective, but not infrequent. And then there is the fourth formula, emphasizing US foreign policy

acts considered positive such as participation in the First and Second World Wars to balance the atrocities committed elsewhere. Essentially all of this can be included in one formula: a contraction of political perspective. As a result chronic Washington-philiacs become very much like stalinist communists clinging to what to them was a positive aspect of stalinism, the historical mission of bringing countries into socialism and defending that position in spite of all the atrocities committed by that regime, at home and abroad. However, most stalinists converted, communist parties changed their position, there are very few Moscow-philiacs left, "Moscow" not standing for the many positive aspects of the Gorbachev era, but for Stalin's times. The Washington-philiacs are still among us, trying to defend hopeless positions with a justifiable concern for Afghanistan not extended to Central America.

But how is it possible to be pro-American while at the same time anti-Washington? Many Americans claim that this is impossible. The test of a pro-American attitude is your ability not only to understand, to condone, to accept, but even to support Washington's foreign policy. This assumption, that anti-Washington means anti-American is just as much nonsense as two similar ideas, propagated by Berlin (DDR) that to be against the countries of the really existing socialism means that you are anti-Marxist, even anti-Socialist, and the idea propagated by Israel that to be against Israel, even anti-Zionist, means that one is anti-Semitic. Tactically this may sound like good polemics: very few people want to be labelled as anti-Semitic, most do not like to be seen as anti-American and

many do not want to identify themselves as anti-Socialist. Washington, Berlin (DDR) and Jerusalem offer a way out: just embrace our politics and no such labels or libels will ever trouble you; to not embrace that politics and the implication is very clear!

This is both intellectually sloppy, morally dishonest and politically unwise in the longer run. But leaving all that aside let me try to answer the question: what is so good about America that I want to characterize myself as not only not anti-American but pro-American? I think for three reasons, most of them touched in the debate already.

First, this country has an incredibly creative and dynamic population, for good and for bad. It is not burdened by centuries, millennia of European cynicism and conventional wisdom of "that-will-never-work" variety. To listen to news from Washington always implies an element of masochism, of voluntary suffering merely by switching on the TV or tuning in. The compensation lies in conversations and debates with all these fountains of enthusiasm found in this country, and there must be millions of them, from coast to coast. They are found in the arts and the sciences, in lifestyle and politics, in all fields. Whenever there is a problem the assumption is that there must be a solution, and only in Washington is the assumption that the solution could be a technical one or based on some heavy "social engineering" of the CIA/NSC variety. The American people in general do not share such naive assumptions.

And that is the second point: grassroots democracy. Participation, volunteerism, meetings and marches, protests, action. They seem never to get tired these people, never cynical. Even Chomsky ends his book by advising Americans to write their congressman. There is a faith in the system much beyond what an empirically oriented social scientist would think is warranted; but then that very faith is what keeps the system alive. At the local level US democracy is strong, very strong.

But, and that is the third point: how does this relate to foreign policy? The nuclear freeze campaign of 1981, the huge peace demonstration of 1982, none of this made the slightest impression. I think there are good reasons that I will not enter into here to assume that nor will it do in the foreseeable future. The establishment control of US foreign policy is that much stronger than such democratic institutions as elections, US Congress, even US Congress committees. Irangate offers one example But to me that is merely the eruption of a volcano, the lava has been there all the time only kept out of the public view. No, he who waits for peaceful, positive signs in Washington public foreign policy will still have to wait for some time. But every single day there are tremendous acts of courage and generosity in the private foreign policy engaged in by US citizens in countless individual initiatives and non-governmental organizations around the world. In fact, many of these organizations would collapse had it not been for US participation, and here I mean American, not Washington. Just go to any of the big UN conferences, be that for the environment, for women, the law of

the sea, whatever and see who are most energetically working for global and wholistic political perspectives; Americans.

I love that America. There is absolutely nothing original in that perspective--I would assume most people to be touched, deeply, by this America. And I do not even call it the other America. To me this is the first, the real America, to a large extent abused by power elites in Washington. This America is populist; volatile, often faddish and superficial, sometimes naive, but fundamentally well-intentioned and generous. They are among the most world-minded people this world has created so far. To them America is a generous utopia inspired by a benign Judeo-Christian god, not by that malicious, tribal and punitive god that seems to be the source of inspiration of Reaganism.

But precisely my reasons for being pro-American could be the right-wingers' reasons for being anti-American. As much as they love Washington for its promise of defending the status quo with all the strength, even force when necessary, they must be skeptical of the American people. Not so much of the civil rights movement that did not affect right-wing interests in Western Europe, as of the anti-Vietnam movement, not to mention the peace movement. Right now that movement is in a latency phase but rest assured: it will come back again in full strength.

How, then, would I explain that this very same American population twice elected Reagan? If I see Reaganism abroad as quintessential Washington with populist rhetoric and the population then supports Reagan how can I retain a basically pro-American attitude? Why don't I become anti-American--in the same sense as I was anti-German in the 10, even 20 years after a Second World War that brought German Occupation to my country (but with considerable less harrassment than has been suffered by Central and South American populations under direct or indirect American intervention), my father in a concentration camp and so on--meaning having as little as possible to do with the country? I have three answers to that question which admittedly is a problematic one.

First, given that the United States has the lowest election participation of any country I know of practicing reasonably free elections (4 November 1986 as low as 38.5%) and only slightly more than half of those who voted, voted for Reagan, he had 27% of the electorate behind him in 1980, 31% in 1984. So, did the American population really vote for Reagan?--or are they manipulated by a basically flawed political system so much alienating the population that half of them do not even vote. How would the other half have voted?

Second, even if we disregard this argument a vote for Reagan was not necessarily a vote for his foreign policy. Again and again it has been shown that the US population is much less interventionist than Washington and deeply skeptical of what Washington does in

Central America. This skepticism will certainly grow as more and more will be revealed in connection with Irangate, and we are probably still only at the beginning. Whether skepticism in the population has any real impact on Washington later on is, however, another matter--I do not belong to those who, in my mind naively, assume a positive relationship here.

Third, even if we should disregard the second argument since there is no doubt that there are acts of aggressiveness that the majority of the US would support I would say there is more to America than this. The good America I love is not found in any particular race, gender or class in the US today. Nor, certainly, in any particular political party if these gatherings manipulated by behind-the-scene committees with no lasting mass support, no real principles can be referred to as parties. Nor will I say that certain periods in US foreign policy are more or less aggressive than others--I find aggressiveness to be a more constant theme with Eisenhower as much as with Kennedy, with Carter as much as with Reagan.

I do find a certain regional variation. If we disregard Florida, Alaska and Hawaii and look at rectangular United States the northern half is certainly more world-minded than the southern half. As one moves westwards morality in world affairs tends to increase at the same time as concrete knowledge decreases. In the east values do not stand in the way of accumulating tremendous

amounts of knowledge, in the west knowledge not in the way of morality. This gives us the mid-west as a focus of sanity in the United States today, and I will expect forces of revival after the self-destruction caused by the Reagan years to come from that part of the country.

But above all I find the good American inside every single individual American except when he is playing the role as God's messenger on earth. And that, unfortunately, is the role Washington loves to play.