**Fighting the Left**

When Francisco Franco and other officers rose against the Spanish Republic in July 1936, it was above all the working class that fought the attempted coup d'état to a standstill. What then became the Spanish Civil War, this initial phase of citizens fighting to secure their popular democracy against the military deeply alarmed European governments, above all Great Britain under Neville Chamberlain. Aside from the United Kingdom, Europe's governments by 1936 were almost exclusively right wing—fascist or national conservative—from Éamon de Valera's Ireland to Miklós Horthy's Hungary, and most were dictatorships. These governments were either the victors in the bloody civil strife that wracked Europe after World War I, as with Italy's National Fascist Party, or else claimed to be reversing a post-World War I “crime” against their nation, as with the National Socialists in Germany. To all these governments, Spain's potential to “turn red” as a result of a republican victory ensured they put a great deal of effort into its destruction—with tanks or planes from Germany and Italy and with international political and economic manipulation from the British Empire. Although the Soviet Union backed the republic, even Joseph Stalin pursued an “anti-revolutionary” line in the misguided hope he could win a mutual security pact with the British. In these circumstances, the Spanish Republic attempted increasingly desperate offensives. Benefiting from the UK's international umbrella of political protection, the rebel generals were able to use their internationally supplied material superiority and to systematically reduce the republican territories. Meanwhile, the flashy demonstrations of German arms (less so the Italians) reinforced British conservatives in their policies of appeasement or agreement with Adolf Hitler, to the detriment of global peace in the long run.

Philip B. Minehan argues that the cause of the Spanish Civil War—and much else in global politics before and after—resulted from a malignant “anti-socialism” endemic to modernity. In his *Anti-Leftist Politics in Modern World History: Avoiding “Socialism” at All Costs*, he shows how governments fell into “blindness, hysteria, and irrationality,” lashing out more or less indiscriminately at dissenting peoples around the world across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, helping in many cases to bring into existence the very “socialists” they aimed to destroy (p. 233). He notes that the “likeliest targets for anti-leftist politics
have included a wide variety of actual socialists, anarchists, communists, Bolsheviks, Maoists, and Third World nationalists, among others. However, one has to be cautious in treating any of the targets as the ‘actual’ ones.... Some of the targets, one way or another, were self-identified as leftist. But then there are cases where it appears that there is no justifiable ground whatsoever” for such attacks (p. 3). Citing the absurd claim by Franco and his co-conspirators that they were fighting a *reconquista* of Spain from “Bolsheviks,” the National Socialist phantasm of “Jewish-Bolshevism,” and the US right’s hysterical claims of Barack Obama’s “socialism,” Minehan notes that these “attacks have functioned to sustain and advance societal systems of injustice.... Combined with the other major forces of modern history—state power, race, class, nationalism—aggressive politics against the left over the past two hundred years have an intense pattern of tension, conflict, and warfare within and between societies and states” (p. 4). Furthermore, the long-term consequences of this anti-socialism did not pass in the 1940s, when “ideological conflict” supposedly quieted in Western domestic politics (see chapter 4, “Soft on Social Democracy, Hard on ‘Communism’”), or 1990s, when the Cold War ended. For the Spanish people, this meant remaining under Franco’s thumb until the 1970s, then being saddled once more with the execrable Bourbons. Elsewhere, much the same has proven true, with the last chapter of the book, titled “The Overkill,” detailing how this anti-socialism metastasized into an arrogant neoliberalism, attempting to impose a global order limiting any dissent. As he notes after citing the conservative Project for a New American Century’s 2000 policy statement, by the new millennium anti-socialism was a “plan of action in search of a pretext,” having now “defeated” the enemy in the twentieth century’s ideological struggles (p. 216).

**Anti-Leftist Politics** is divided into three sections: "Failed Solutions," focused on the period before 1945, "The US-Led Global Anti-Communist Solution," and the "The Neoliberal Solution." This framing of "solutions" to the "problem" of socialism is part of Minehan’s declared intent to extend the logic of *The Age of Empires: 1875-1914* (1987), Eric Hobsbawm’s account of the late nineteenth-century bourgeois society. Hobsbawm, according to Minehan, described a society “loaded with contradictions that were ultimately and spectacularly self-destructive” (p. 238). To this end, the introduction begins with the "liberal solutions" up to 1871, the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune—the touchstone for Hobsbawm’s chapter “The Politics of Democracy”—forming the start of the narrative proper. Minehan’s own chapter 1, “The Imperial Solution, 1871-1917,” usefully extends Hobsbawm with the case study of India and the South Asian diaspora. This is also where Minehan makes his argument most clearly, when discussing the dissonance in identifying Indian anti-colonial nationalism, driven by large landowners and urban elites, with the political left: “Only a few of the more militant among the anti-colonial nationalists explicitly espoused leftist or socialist politics of the sort that were operative in Europe and the Americas. British opposition against all these social forces, therefore, was anti-nationalist. However, this is the point: to be an anti-colonialist nationalist was to be on the political left” (p. 31). These arguments—that “the left” was to a certain extent constituted by the brute force that the state and capital exerted against those it perceived to be threats and that what became “left” was constituted by its opposition to the pre-1914 status quo—are critical points and vital contributions this book makes. In brief, in addition to the specifically industrial or economic forces giving substance to Karl Marx’s “specter,” it was simultaneously being made real by the physical force—violence and coercion but also forced movement of populations, etc.—exerted to ensure the continued advance of the economic order. Chapters 2 and 3 extend these arguments to the interwar and World War II eras, with the familiar examples of Spain and Greece now complemented by examples from Korea and Indochina.
In parts 2 and 3, Minehan makes clear the degree to which anti-leftism masked efforts to reinforce colonial regimes of order or postcolonial dependency in the decades after World War II. A long section on sub-Saharan Africa offers an illuminating example, as the chapter opens with conflicting US and UK intelligence reports, the latter insisting on the existence of communist subversion in 1950s Nigeria where the former saw none. What made the unrest “communist,” however, was less the autonomous action of the local population than a fear that the USSR “misrepresented their colonial policies to the local population” (p. 127). Even more significant, the British colonial administrations in sub-Saharan Africa found creating a straightforward definition of “communism” impossible, because supposedly “communist” activity seemed to easily encompass both traditional communal ways of life and “the precepts of the New Testament,” as one British official put it (p. 129). This led to a contradictory situation, where British officials worried that colonial resistance, such as that of the Mau Mau in Kenya, was communist in character but denied this in public. Instead, in the case of the Mau Mau, colonial officials relied on heavily racialized “ethnopsychological” depictions of the Kenyans as savages not only who were not communist but also whose practices of resistance likewise cut them off from traditional Kenyan social forms. Unsurprisingly, it was post-World War II British colonial policy aimed at increasing the exploitation of its colonies, especially those in Africa, that disrupted traditional social forms and sparked the Mau Mau uprising, which really did have little to do with communism but instead arose from “particularistic cultural explanations.” As Minehan notes: “The result is a complex irony, namely, that British colonial authorities assumed the existence of something that was not there, only to deny that assumption officially” (p. 131). This process repeated itself globally during the Cold War.

The single chapter in part 3, “The Overkill,” covers the neoliberal post-1970s, beginning with the destruction of Salvador Allende’s Chile and ending with SYRIZA’s victory in the July 2015 referendum on Greece’s place in the Eurozone, which was then immediately overturned by “big money in the hands of the very few” (p. 221). The intervening era of “globalized capitalist production,” as one subheading has it, continued the disruptive trajectory laid out in the preceding chapters (p. 207). Anticommunism—or at least fears of communism—contributed to destabilizing not only Latin America but also the Middle East, initially during the 1960s-90s, where the traditional language of anticommunism took the lead but the blowback was increasingly Islamist in character. This development came to full fruition in the twenty-first century, when US confidence (faith might be a better word) in its “free market principles” led to the needless full-scale invasions of first Afghanistan and then, even more needlessly, Iraq. According to Minehan, the United States and its coalition partners set out in the early 2000s to fulfill what had come to be seen as a capitalist destiny to eliminate all barriers to expansion and exploitation, based on little more than Francis Fukuyama’s prognostications.

Anti-Leftist Politics is not without some problems, above all relating to its breadth. The global perspective and the attempt to incorporate parts of the world ignored by Hobsbawm’s European focus is an important part of the book’s argument, but it needed to be more focused. The book jumps around quite a lot geographically and chronologically, within its broadly defined chapters. Chapter 1 on the nineteenth-century “imperial solution” is probably the book’s weakest, relying at times on fairly broad and sketchy descriptions of political developments in this crucial period. That this was Hobsbawm’s subject in The Age of Empires explains the thinness of the story here, perhaps, as does chapter 1 featuring Minehan’s subsection on South Asian anti-colonialism before World War I. However, a fuller exploration of how anti-leftism evolved elsewhere in the nineteenth century would have provided a fuller grasp of what fol-
lowed. As things stand, the book's focus above all on the twentieth century is valuable, but it comes off a rushed start and certainly leaves space for further exploration of this topic's roots.

In his "Epilogue: The Pathology, the Pandemic, and the Prospects," Minehan notes that "‘Antifa’ barely exists. It is nothing compared to the demonical image of it peddled by Trump and his supporters. It's 99 percent a bogeyman, yet its alleged existence and actions fueled, or at least justified," Donald Trump’s second campaign for the presidency (p. 236). This point rings true, and it again illustrates the most vital contribution Anti-Leftist Politics makes to current scholarship on the global left, namely, that its history is constructed partly from the cast-off, shattered, and isolated opponents of powerful and wealthy individuals, cloaked now in the twenty-first century in institutional power on a global scale. That movements, parties, and ideologies form around this opposition is, as Minehan repeatedly insists, part of the continual dialectic process he traces through the book. This process, where state-and-capital induced socioeconomic change, which sparks off resistance that is then fearfully described as some sort of socialism or another threatening ideology and violently attacked as such, then produces the constituents of further resistance. Minehan places a critical spotlight in Anti-Leftist Politics on the "treacherous dynamic" of capitalism drawing out its opposition, defining it, then crushing it, and this dynamic warrants further investigation (p. 244).

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