Psihologia Socială, nr. 51(I)/2023, pp. 139-144

The Value of the New Deal and the Neoliberal Order

Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order : America and the World in the Free Market Era*, Oxford University Press, 2022

The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order : America and the World in the Free Market Era (Oxford University Press, 2022) by Gary Gerstle is a master-work that advances the understanding of the history of the liberalism (and neoliberalism), the New Deal, and Communism not only for experts, but for researchers from other inquiring fields and for common readers. The works of Gary Gerstle include landmark contributions to America and world history covering a wide area from very specific questions such as the politics of labor in a textile city" (1989) to the analysis of the multilevels dynamics of race and nation (2001) among other major cotributions.

Reading the excellent work on *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order* and thinking about its ideas and narrative the reader has the chance to realize the vital importance of this approach for experts and politicians that enjoy the freedom of democratic societies, but also for people who lived under the terror of the communist order. From the perspective of my own experience (45 years in my country of origin – Romania, and 33 years in my adoptive country – the USA) a series of crucial historical events, due to this analysis and synthesizing work, become understandable and meaningful at a much deeper level than ever before. In some cases what appeared to be known and classified by previous studies reveals new dimensions and connections between past – present – and, probable, future.

Indeed, as Gerstle argues, in line with many other studies (for instance Chirot, 2020 ; Galtung, 2015 ; Malia, 1999) communism has its origin in the French Revolution while liberalism has its origin in the American Revolution. Communism, beyond its roots in the French Revolution, and other sources (utopian visions, philosophical and economic conceptions) is theoretically and ideologically grounded in Marxism. As Gerstle argues „both camps – Communism and Liberalism – saw themselves as freeing humanity from old, encrusted social orders marked by privilege, inequality, and widespread misery" (p. 30). Liberalism and communism „were radically different". Gerstle's view on the world-wide attitudes and representations of W. Wilson and V. I. Lenin is highly useful. At the same time, besides the „global adulation" of Wilson and Lenin, it might have been useful to remind to the younger generations that while Lenin has been from the very beginning a partisan and practitioner of violent means to be used against political enemies, Wilson

had a radical different approach to violent means. His approach of the Armenian Genocide is just one of the major questions in relation to which Wilson's care for the humanity is obvious, while for Lenin, the justice (communist justice) has been identified many times with a bullet in the head of the class enemies.

Gerstle's comprehensive approach advances our understanding of the complex dynamics of major social innovations and movements – as it is the New Deal, which „transitioned from political movement to political order" as he posits in a convincingly mode. Due to this original synthesis it is underscored that *the New Deal achieved a historic structural change in a critical moment without violent confrontations*. This marks a historic threshold for solving deep social conflicts. It makes explicit both the theoretical and practical value of the New Deal for solving in a peaceful mode structural societal pains. I should disclose that I learned about Gerstle's landmark approach with the help of Professor Howard Gardner's (the creator of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences) generous suggestion to study this book. I am grateful for this suggestion that includes a stimulating critical advice regarding my own short article on the tragic consequences of social revolutions. For sure, the New Deal entered on the historical stage in a constructive and peaceful way and proved its huge adaptive potential. Gerstle's study proves that the principles of the New Deal were shared, in different degrees at different moments, by the two major American political parties : the Democratic and Republican parties. As a matter of fact some of its core elements are very relevant for the nowadays debates. Gerstle's approach uses in a highly instructive and informative way a dialectial vision that reveals both the causes of conflicts and the unifying potential of a new political perspective across partisan membership (Democratic/Republican). The value of dialectical synthesis obvious in this work is explored in other works developed by Gerstle. The dialectical vision is displayed, for instance, in the study of the character of American nationality. Gerstle (2015, p. 31) states : „Any examination of American nationality must contend with its contradictory character. On the one hand, this nationality harbors a civic creed promising all Americans equal rights regardless of race, religion, sex, or national origin. On the other hand, American nationality has also contained religious and racial ideologies that have defined the United States in exclusionary ways". The contradictory character of nationality is, unfortunately, neglected by many official histories of various nations. Gerstle's insight is needed in order to better grasp with the contradictory character of nationality across cultures and in some cases with the fragmented state of nationality that can be the result of internal, external and combined forces. The overcoming of such tensions is very probably in the benefit of each nation and all its members. This process implies, as Gerstle argues the will and ability to choose : „Choice – choosing one's national identity rather than having it imposed by a ruler or by heredity [or by an external power, we may add]—was crucial to this civic nationalism" (p. 34).

If the New Deal entered modern history in a peaceful way, the Soviet communism did exit the global stage in a nonviolent way. The question is : are Soviet Communism practices, principles, and political decisions without long-term violent consequences ? It seems that such consequences are not only a potential danger. Commonly, the historic exit of the Soviet Communism is represented as the escape from the Cold War era without violent confrontations. Metaphorically speaking I wonder if such a political nonviolent mega-seism might not imply terrible aftershocks.

Indeed, as Gerstle shows that there is a huge difference between Deng's (who was „brutally practical in his determination to preserve the power of the Chinese Communist

Party") and Gorbachev – labeled as „the last of the socialist utopians", who decided "that if socialism could not be saved by a democratic manner, then it did not deserve to be saved at all" (p. 143).

Gerstle's construct of *political order* – including the complex dynamics of its reality from origin to periods of destabilization – increases the explanatory and exploratory resources for situations in which the New Deal and its transformations must cope with existential challenges never met before (pp. 42-43, 285).

While exploring the structural global changes and the strong trend of former communist countries to embrace capitalism produced in and after 1989, Gerstle mentions explicitly the following countries: Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. It is highly surprising that among these countries are not included (in 2022!) others such as Albania, Bulgaria, Romania even if the changes carried out in these countries are assessed as slower. However, these countries went through essential political and economic changes as they too embraced the market economy and the democratic principles. In addition, it would make sense to add, not long after 1989, other countries such as Croatia, Slovenia... that now have a well-established status within the categories of the countries that embraced market and democratic principles. The fact that a few countries involved in this transformation are missing from Gerstle's analysis invites a question. It would be meaningful to know: what are the main reasons for which such countries are not included on the first (and single) list? My question implies also the observation that quite frequently the changes made in Romania in the last 33 years as well as some of its historical rights are not for the first time neglected by major authors. This recent omission of post-1989 transformations in Romania is, unfortunately, in line with omissions regarding the historical rights of Romania as the right of the Romanians to speak Romanian language (wrongly replaced with the linguistic artifice that uses the term „Moldovan language", and in many cases before 1989 and even long time after these crucial changes the right to use Romanian language in schools and other places has ben and is denied, Mamali, 1994). Besides such issues are the omissions regarding the dictatorial changes of the borders of historical Romanian land within the territories (and republics) of the former Soviet Union – accurately called by Reagan the „Evil Empire". One of the main reasons of this omission is the mistreatment and misrepresentation of the historical reality by significant Romanian politicians before 1945 – during what is called Vienna dictate (Manoilescu, 1991, Marinescu, 2000), during communism (1945-1989) and after 1989. In addition even after 1989, when, supposedly freedom of speech achieved a significant progress, some Romanian historians misrepresented the historical reality of the Romanian population and land beyond the present political borders. This is why the works of those with excellent expertise and the moral courage to stand against the injust treatment of the Romanian historical rights, as it happened in the recent history, for instance the works of Al. Zub (1983, 1986, 1994, 1997, 2000), and the writings of P. Goma (see Bălănescu, 2022), both authors suffering terrible persecutions under the communist regime, need to be reminded and supported by further works.

Gerstle states: „To argue for communism's importance is not meant to rehabilitate it as a political movement. Communism was an indefensible system of tyranny. Rather, it is meant to help us to understand the role that communism played in the century when it was a feared force" and to explore „the effects of its sudden and complete disappearance from international and national affairs" (p. 12). As a person, and social psychologist, who experienced the communist tyranny, I am conceptually and experientially in total

agreement with the historical diagnostic that communism is „an indefensible system of tyranny". Nonetheless, I doubt that its „complete disappearance" is a reality even in some countries not mentioning China, Cuba, and N. Korea... where communism is an official system. Even if communism might exist under various forms, some extremely hard to predict and decode – as it is the case of the powerful influence of Confucianism on the Marxist political scenario (one party political system, proletarian dictatorship, overcentralization, state ownership...) that is obvious in China – still, to talk about its „complete disappearance from international and national affairs" does not fit to the observable reality. There are essential differences between the Chinese communism and the pre-1989 Soviet, Polish, Hungarian or Romanian communism as there are essential differences between the British capitalism and democracy and the Turkish capitalism and democracy, between German capitalism and democracy and Greek capitalism and democracy, or between the American capitalism and democracy and Danish capitalism and democracy. Despite the fact that Chinese communism, which includes self-reliance, self-cultivation (the educational achievement being more important than material possessions according to Li, 2012, Li 2017, and Weber, 1951) and is marked by very high economic, scientific, technological, artistic, and financial performances, this is still a *self-declared communism*. There are major authors who assess that ideologically and politically communism did not reach its „complete disappearance". For instance, Avinery argued in 1992 that after the revolutions of 1989/1990, which marked the fall of political communist regimes in Eastern Europe, „capitalism has not won, socialism is not dead". If we discuss the disappearance of an entire political system such as communism, to distinguish between the death of the formal and official political structures, and institutions on one side and the decline of the social influence of its ideology, the inertia of its networks, mentalities and habits on the other side is a necessary operation. In general, the physical (structural) death is not identical with other forms of survival (ideological, moral, cultural) for the good or for the worth. On the same wavelength with Thoreau's idea of „everlasting death" suffered when one gives up to high moral principles for material benefits, immortality, from a cultural viewpoint – this is to say surviving within a culture – can be both positive and negative. Political monsters, guilty of crimes against humanity, have been identified in many studies and rightly called the „villains" of world history (Hanke, Liu et al., 2015; Liu & Hilton, 2005). From the present perspective these historic villains are marked by *negative immortality* in sharp contrast with moral exemplars (Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, M. Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Jan Palach and many others) that have a *positive (cultural) immortality*. Negative immortality is understood as a permanent cultural memory of individual and collective actors that perpetuated horrific crimes. The horrific evilness of these villains survives within the collective memories longtime after their political downfall and physical death.

Communist ideology, practices, mentalities and even networks survive both in well-established democracies (Western World) and especially in former communist countries. I say it based on the firsthand observations of the inertia of communist mentalities, ideology, networks and habits even in some former communist countries, for sure in Romania. I experienced this inertia directly since 2008, the year of my first visit, as an American citizen, after some 18 years, to Romania, my country of origin.

As one interested in the question of civil rights and civil disobedience I enjoyed greatly the enriching and meaningful connection achieved in Gerstle's narrative between the ideas of Theodore Roosevelt and the abolitionist John Brown (p. 82). This connection comes after

the author presents the crucial contribution of M. L. King Jr. to civil rights movement, to the non-violent protest. As a reader of this excellent approach, I asked myself the question : is there any well-grounded connection between Gerstle's fertile concept of „political order" and the idea of „moral order" implied in the basic principles of civil disobedience as conceived by Thoreau ? My guess is that the birth of a valid political order is conditioned by the degree in which it integrates the principles of a „moral order" as it is the case in Thoreauvian conception. If we consider that Thoreau (1848/1970, 1973), long time before Theodore Roosevelt, made explicit his principled support for the abolitionist John Brown (who also used violent means to attain justice) it is hard to guess why Thoreau's groundbreaking contribution to the civil rights and civil society is omitted.

The original and powerful synthesis provided by the excellent book *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order : America and the World in the Free Market Era* is extremely useful for experts, politicians, students and common readers. It reveals the complex history of liberalism and neoliberalism and its theoretical and practical ramifications.

Cătălin Mamali[1]

Avineri, S., „After the fall of communism : Capitalism has not won, socialism is not dead", *Dissent*, 1992, Winter.

Bălănescu, F. (2022). *Paul Goma. Conştiinţă istorică şi conştiinţă literară*, prefaţă de Mioara Anton. Bucureşti : Editura Corint.

Chirot, D. (2020). *You say you want a revolution ? Radical idealism and its tragic consequences*, Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Galtung, J. (2015). *Johan fără ţară. Străbătând lumea pe drumul păcii*, Postfaţă : Imaginarea şi trăirea conceptului încărcat valoric de C. Mamali, Tiiparg, Piteşti.

Gerstle, G. (1989). *Working-Class Americanism : The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960.* New York : Cambridge University Press.

Gerstle, G. (1999). Theodore Roosevelt and the American nationalism. *Journal of History*, December, pp. 1281-1307.

Gerstle, G. (2001). *American Crucible : Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century.* Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press.

Gerstle, G. (2015). The contradictory character of American nationality : A political perspective. In N. Foner & P. Simon (Eds.) *Fear, anxiety, and national identity.* New York : The Russell Sage Foundation.

Gerstle. G. (2016). *Liberty and coercion : The paradox of American government from the founding to the present.* Princeton : Priceton University Press.

Gerstle, G. (2022). *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order. America and the World in the Free Market Era*, Oxford University Press.

Hanke, K., Liu, J.H., Sibley, C.G., Paez, D., Gaines, Jr. S.O., Moloney, G., Leong, C.-H., Wagner, W., Licata, L., Klein, O., Garber, I., Böhm, G., Hilton, D.J., Valchev, V., Khan, S.S., Cabecinhas, R. (2015). „'Heroes' and 'villains' of world history. Across Cultures." *Plos One*, pp. 1–21. DOI : 10.137/journal.pone.0115641.

Li, J. (2012), *Cultural foundations of learning : East and West*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Li, J. (2017). *Confucian self-cultivation : A developmental perspective*, Zurich : University of Zurich.

Liu, J.H. & Hilton D.J. (2005), „How the Past Weighs on the Present : Social Representations on History and Their Impact on Identity Politics", *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 44, pp. 537–556. PMID : 16368018.

1. Independent Scholar, POROI, Univ. of Iowa, catalin.mamali@loras.edu

Malia, M. (1999). *Russia under Western eyes : From the bronze horseman to the Lenin mausoleum*, Cambridge : The Belknap of Harvard University Press.

Mamali, C. (1994). Levels of social identity, *Contemporary Psychology*, vol. 39, 3, 290-291

Mamali, C. (2019/2022). Revolutions as disasters of misconceived political projects of social mutations. *Filozofia Publiczna i Edukacja Demokratyczna Tom 8,* 1, pp. 47–88 *DOI, www.filozofiapubliczna.amu.edu.pl*.

Manoilescu, M. (1991), *Dictatul de la Viena. Memorii iulie-august 1940*. Bucureşti, Editura Enciclopedică.

Marinescu, A.S. (2000), *Înainte şi după Dictatul de la Viena*, Ed. Vremea.

Thoreau, H.D. (1997). *Journal. Vol. 5 : 1852–1853. Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997.

Thoreau, H.D. (1970), *The annotated Walden. Walden ; or Life in the forest by Henry D. Thoreau together with „Civil Disobedience"*, edited by Ph. Van Doren Stern, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York.

Thoreau, H.D. (1973). *The reform papers*, edited by W. Glick, Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Thoreau, H.D. (1967). *The Variorum Civil Disobedience. Annotated and with an Introduction by Walter Harding*, New York : Tayn Publishers.

Weber M. (1951). *The religion of China*, New York : The Free Press.

Zub, Al. (1983*) Biruit-au gândul. Note despre istorismul românesc.* Iaşi : Editura Junimea.

Zub, Al. (1986/2004). *Cunoaştere de sine şi integrare.* Iaşi : Editura Junimea.

Zub, Al. (1994). *Eminescu. Glose istorico-culturale*. Chişinău : Editura Enciclopedică Gheorghe Asachi.

Zub. Al. (1997). *Chemarea istoriei. Un an de răspântie în România postcomunistă*. Iaşi : Editura Junimea.

Zub, Al. (2000*). Orizont închis. Istoriografia română sub dictatură*. Iaşi : Institutul European.