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## After Liberalism

(Transcript of a lecture given as part of the School for Politics and Critique 2022)

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On the one hand, we have this reality of what is supposed to be the liberal order or the globalized order of the Western tradition of liberal democracy, and what is known to be the modern state. Here I am referring to the civilizational invention, let's say, and an era that began with modernity and the modern state and with it came into being the understanding of the state in terms of what was back then called republicanism and what we nowadays call liberal democracy. So, I could observe this problem with the rise and the spread through globalization of the neo-liberal order, I could see that this so-called liberal order, through the means of its liberalism, basically eats itself

from within. There is a certain implosion or self-destructive movement that shrinks its horizons, its form and its tendencies to what is in fact a kind of authoritarianism. Before we talk about the illiberalism of the likes of Salvini or Orbán, for example, let's remind ourselves of the UK around 2010: The student protests, the reaction there... the austerity, the phenomenon of austerity... so many things that were so recent in the past but have been replaced by other political preoccupations. We kind of tend to forget that these events were in place. The state was pretty strong there in maintaining a certain order in the society that was supposed to abide to a model, whose only function was basically to maintain the economy and the possession of wealth, and distribution of wealth as it was, through in fact, authoritarianism, while using the typical strategy of liberalism, not a strategy typical of the model of liberalism we are talking about – Western liberalism, whereby you are supposed to interiorize and adhere to these principals and believe that in fact you kind of like and agree with these policies and you endorse them... It was very easy back then to see that this is an authoritarian move. Then, we have this kind of lapse of memory for half a decade, and people like Viktor Orbán and others emerge and start talking about illiberal democracy. Because we are talking about Viktor Orbán, it is supposed to be nonsense, right? He is not capable of defining the regime that he is propagating. Well, I went through some kind of a serious analysis. I took him seriously, I took him by his word, and I decided to analyze back in the time when we had a similar regime here, and those regimes are called hybrid regimes. I did a comparative analysis and analyzed his ideology, which is perhaps not laid out in some huge books or

elaborate manifestos, but there are speeches that kind of sketch out what he means by that. And when he surprised Angela Merkel at this press conference in 2015, stating that there is such a thing as illiberal democracy..., I decided that I should take him seriously and really look closely at what he is talking about. Well, what the man was talking about is something that he is actually doing, or something that Erdogan has been doing for a quite a while. In fact, the form of democracy, which is in fact the structure of and the dialectics of, let's say, parliamentarism, is an empty form. In structuralist terms, you can look at it as really an empty form or certain signifier, a structure which is not filled out with semantics, with content of a certain meaning, a particular meaning, and you can fill it up with this or that type of meaning, and it could indeed be democratic or anti-democratic, liberal or anti-liberal.... If you retain the empty form, but the value system behind the so-called democracy, which is supposed to be a more immediate representation of the Citizen or citizenship, if that is kind of evacuated from this form, then you really retain what is technically democracy, this is what I am talking about. But that is the least of our concern here.

The concern here is that what Orbán said he would expunge from this form of parliamentary democracy, was liberalism and liberal ideas, but because we were the left, we were supposed to say nothing about it, because we hate liberalism as well, right? So, what are we to do? So, we started convincing Orbánites, the adherents of Orbán and all forms of illiberalism on this planet, or at least on this continent, and especially in this region of Southeast Europe, where Orbán's influence is really rising, from Slo-

venia down to here, we started convincing the opposition that they are not what they claim to be. They are something else, of course, because it is not about illiberalism it is about this, it is about that... even though they are telling you clearly – we want to get rid of liberalism, liberal values, that's it! So, I thought to myself while I was preparing for a talk in Brooklyn in the United States, where the then to be Democratic Socialists of America invited me to talk, I started to prepare a lecture about this, and it was really difficult to explain what this thing is, illiberalism. It was really difficult to convince them that there is such a doctrine that should be taken seriously and then we were really in trouble finding a language to criticize this phenomenon, because we were not liberals. So, I decided to look at the liberal tradition in the most classical sense of the word. I decided to look up places in Marx's original texts, where he discusses liberalism, and see what his issue with it is, or maybe, and I came to this realization, that Marx had an issue with liberalism for it not being radical enough, for it not being liberal enough... for not being the agency of freedom for humanity in its full sense.

One of the most telling texts from Marx on this issue is, surprisingly, one might not think that we would find most of the material there, but it is the paper on the Jewish family... and the division and the split, basically, between the state and the society, where he insists that there should be some immanent link between the state and the society, and here is his famous formula that, at a certain point of time, the state should disappear as a form of organization, and we should end up with a society, a society with a social contract and all that functions better than the system

of the modern state. So, that is why he criticizes Hegel's theory of the state there, as being bourgeois, because it sustains the split between society and the state. The two ought to have a more organic link. This organic link would enable greater emancipation for humanity as well, according to him there. So, this is kind of early Marx but we find passages that come from the later stage, and all of this archeology of statements, along the lines of this argument that I am presenting about Marx, have been assembled by the French, relatively young, I guess, researcher, Paulin Clochec ... who I was not aware of until I started working on this paper and a couple of other papers on a similar topic. So, let's see how this discourse has been set up since the fall of the Berlin Wall, since the fall of our former socialist states and countries, states and societies: what emerged afterwards, and what type of Western Marxism became the model for us, and, at the center of it, of course, the so-called post-Marxism, and what it is all about?

So, as soon the ideal of globalization rose to prominence and the Neo-liberal global order deterritorialized, as the Deluezians would put it, the entire territory of the globe, so spread on the globe, supposedly being trans-territorial, above the physical, above the geographical—ethereal supposedly... and the Berlin Wall fell, so this all coincides and the end of the history was declared, if you remember, we use to point to when... history reached its fulfillment and we were not supposed to expect anything in the future, which would be a possibly different form of political organization/political system. All of this happened at this time, our societies and states, well our state, Yugoslavia fell apart, and the system that was called socialism or communism

disappeared. So, we started becoming Westernized, "civilized," according to the Western model and we started to, for a decade or maybe more, to avoid Marxism all together as a topic. It was like an improper issue, an embarrassing topic, like a cultural intimacy, a shame. So it was a matter of cultural intimacy that we would avoid it, and wouldn't talk of the matter until it became safe enough. Many of us, of our former republics, or many of the countries that formed that federation, and the neighbors around it, joined the European Union, and some of us are stuck, like us, along the way, but sufficiently stuck in the integration process to consider ourselves to be practically there, so it became safe again to talk about the matter, to utter the word Marxism but from a Western perspective. We kind of did this with some sort of unexamined spontaneity and I thought it appropriate for this occasion to see what stands behind the term "post-Marxism," who coined it, and with what goal and how does this coinage of the term coincide with the neo-liberal global rise and also whether it does indeed overlap with the whole logic of what is happening globally in terms of economy, meaning neo-liberalism, of course, in its global form, of the phenomenon of globalization? Whether these two things coincided, not just coincided but converged, post-structuralism and globalization. And, mind you, this is a period when communism was over, or the attempt of communism in our former states.

So, at that point we, the failed communist societies, admitted our moral defeat and conceded to the "call out" of the post-Marxists, such as Alasdair Macintyre. This is a quote from him: "Marxism had failed morally." Apparently, more so than the West, so we have failed apparently mor-

ally more so than the West. This is my comment to Macintyre. So, Macintyre's critical projects seem to rely on all but Marxism, from what I have studied, and it was boring but I studied him closely. So, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and very little if any of Marx or Marxism, whereas his main charge against Marxism and the charge of its failure, for its failure against it, was stated to be the fact that it remained too, or maybe it became, according to him, to paraphrase, too liberal. His statement is "it remained too liberal," so, mind you, Macintyre, with all of this Aristotle and Nietzsche in the mix there, but with very little Marxism,...he accuses the East of remaining too liberal and thereby failing as a social policy experiment. Therefore, when it comes to the admission of Marxism's failure, there is an overlooked misunderstanding between us in the East, and the post-Marxists of the West. Whereas we in the East have believed for so long that we had failed because of the bureaucratized and alienated state. So, we have believed that to be the reason. Suppression of the freedom of expression, amongst other things, we thought this was the error. If this was remedied, maybe socialism would have survived. Interestingly, the West thinks we were too liberal. So, where as we in the East have believed for so long that we have failed because of the bureaucratized and alienated state, and its suppression of freedom of expression – totalitarianism, to put it simply – Macintyre and his acolytes accused our former political system of the opposite, of being too liberal. Let us note that Macintyre's entire premise is not derived from the assumption that the mode of production had not moved away substantially from the liberal model. This is not his rapprochement to our model that failed, that is – we function through wage labor and commodity produc-

tion. No, this was not what he reprimanded about. His reprimand is that the underlying reason for failure is the *ethos*, morality, of the former communist states. Its morality which has remained too liberal, supposedly.

I think that the whole problem why we cannot conceive any form of revolution or radical change, or whatever right now, is the fact that the discourse we can operate with has its hands so tied by this moralist discourse that it cannot think politically. We cannot think politically. So, this is the archeology of how we ended up at this point. What I am just talking about here, which is happening in the 1980s/1990s, this critique, post-Marxism. So, apparently, we remained too liberal. Apparently, according to Macintyre, insufficient totalitarianism has led communism to its moral failure rather than a historic failure related to the mode of production. Sadly, the Anglo-American interpretation of Marxism's failure, declared almost simultaneously with Fukuyama's declaration of the end of history, has become the paradigm of the global radical left critique of liberalism, based on very little Marx and a lots of Aristotle, as well as very little political-economy and lots of ethics and morality. Then again, Marx and Engels have emphasized repeatedly that communism is not about any form of morality, but rather about social organization, cultural transformation, and, perhaps, moral revalorization that would ensue from an economy, that would not be based on wage labor, as Takahisa Oishi demonstrates in his meticulous exegesis of Marx's original texts — reconstructing a unity out of a rather fragmented argument there. The following statement could not be more unequivocal. This comes from Marx. Then we will arrive at Oishi. So, the fol-

lowing statement that I am about to cite, and that I just labeled as unequivocal, comes from Marx directly in “Capital and Labor.” The “communists do not preach *morality* at all, as Stirner does so extensively. They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists, etc: on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selflessness, is in definite circumstances, a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals,” and without this you do not have revolutionary collective subjectivities. Hence, “the communists by no means want, as Saint Max [they call Stirner Saint Max] believes,... to do away with the “private individual” for the sake of the “general,” selfless man.”<sup>1</sup> Let me re-read it because maybe it is not clear. So they conclude in opposition to Marx Stirner. Hence, the communists by no means want, as Saint Max believes, to do away with the private individual. The communists do not want to do away with the private individual, for the sake of the general. You know how much Marx hates generalizations, *ersatz* abstractions as a question of method.... So, the communists do not want to do away with the private individual for the sake of the “general,” selfless man.”

Oishi’s reading of Marx on the matter of morality as being one of the materializations in the form of social relations of the different modes of production leads to the conclusion that the socialist economic foundation comprised of associations of individual workers, provides the basis for a possible new ethics. This thesis is further explored by Igor Shoikhedbrod in his 2019 publication,<sup>2</sup> which proffers an

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/cho3f.htm>

<sup>2</sup> See: Igor Shoikhedbrod, *Revisiting Marx’s Critique of Liberalism: Rethinking Justice, Legality and Rights* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

important addition and a further corroboration of Oishi’s main thesis. It is important to note that Oishi undertakes a painstaking task of distinguishing Marx’s annunciations and arguments from those present in Engels’s interpretation, and offers the full and formulaic summarization. He even has a formula. He says “the French version begins with the capitalist mode of production and of appropriation that corresponds to it, and omits the free workers.” This is from the French version of *Capital*. “The present German and English versions were written or modified by Engels. As far as we can distinguish a mode of appropriation from its basis and understand it in its context, we cannot agree with Dühring more. Individual private property, as founded on the labor of its proprietor, is negated by capitalist private property.” We are talking about properties, but they are of a different form, and this is enabled through law and legality. So, “individual private property as founded on the labor of the proprietor is negated by the capitalist private property, which rests on the exploitation of alien but formally free labor. And, then by individual property on the basis of cooperation and a free workers’ possession of the income of the land and the means of production produced by labor itself.” These are quotes from Marx that are put together in a paraphrase of Oishi’s, offered in this quote I am reading. So, thereby we arrive at something that he calls social property. So, he proposes the following – let us formulate this and compare it with that of Engels. He kind of puts Marx against Engels. Marx – individual property equals social property, negates common property... It is the opposite of equal. Engels – Individual property is not equal, negates in a way social property but it is equal to common property.... So, a very different equation here,

Marx and Engels, thanks to 3 different...one original and German and 2 different translations.

So, Oishi's philological and philosophical reconstruction of Marx's argument seems to me, as someone who was born and reached adulthood in Yugoslavia, more in tune with what I remember my former country set as its horizon and where our collective post-communist self feels, at least in a predominant fashion, to have failed. In other words, more liberty would have been considered as bringing us closer to the communist ideal through the form of self-management, characteristic of the latest stage of Yugoslavia's economic development. Such spontaneous interpretation or reminiscence on my part would be in line with Paulin Clochec's brilliant analysis of Marxist's liberalism, which manages to downstream what Marx sought to accomplish through his critique of bourgeois liberalism whilst full radicalization of the most basic tenet of the liberal ideal, that of liberty embodied by individuals and collectives in an inextricable manner. So, the one and the other, the individual and the collective are two sides of the same coin that is called liberty. The one does not cancel the other. So, the very possibility of criticizing liberalism and liberal values, while having a different and even an opposing reference in mind. So, we use the term but we think of different things, when the left and when Orbán criticizes liberalism... So, ... having an opposing reference in mind speaks of the fact that the notion is multifaceted and embedded in different political traditions and doctrines. For example, Victor Orbán's attack on academic liberties, because they are unpatriotic, sponsored by George Soros and seeking to undermine the European civilization, is incomparable

with the Western progressive left's critiques of liberalism that seek to radicalize individual, gendered and multicultural self-expression. So, we are using the same term but thinking different and even opposing things, which is a testament to the fact that the term itself and its intellectual traditions are multifaceted and complex.

Returning to Marxism, let us note that what Marx and his disciples have been tackling all along is the possibility to imagine freedom, liberties and arguably rights as well as *Das Recht*, as in rule of law, in communism as well as engage in critique of bourgeois liberalism. It seems like Marxist scholarship has been able to conceive of some generic notions of freedom, liberty and of a sublated (*Aufhebung*) version of liberalism, emerging from the contradictions of capitalism and bourgeois society in a dialectical and historically determined manner. If such a generalization is inapplicable to the entire legacy, or to all of the legacies of Marxism, it certainly is, I would argue, applicable to Marx's own writings. I'm basing this argument on the convincing exegeses of authors such as Oishi, and Clochec, to name only a few. But also on Marx's oeuvre itself and, in particular, some of the writings that I have mentioned, some coming from his earliest stage, others of the later stage. For an example, *On the Jewish Question*, *The Holy Family*, *Grundrisse*, but not only those... so, we are thus brought to the matter at hand and its context at the turn of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in an era of rising illiberalisms, authoritarianisms, or populist authoritarianisms as they are called, but I don't think that they grasp the definition. So, in an era of rising illiberalism of different sorts and possible further suspension of rights, due to phenom-

ena such as the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic, or maybe other pandemics in the future, or some other global states of emergency. Are we not then faced with the challenge to defend some very generic freedoms such as the freedom to move? How are we to do so, beyond the already irreparable language of liberalism? How are we to do so without or beyond the reach of liberalism because it is irreparable? Can we speak a new language of freedom and of specific yet rather general liberties? And, is it possible to do so by way of discarding the entire history of liberalism and its fundamental concepts? This is a question. To be clear, I am not advocating for the unreasonable defiance of, for example, the pandemic's containment or control, or anything of its sort, or anything that can be likened to this situation. I am not saying that we should put our right to freely displace our bodies and enjoy social and physical interaction at the expense of the collective health.

My warning is that the now, hopefully, past pandemic, or similar situations on a global scale, can be abused in order to limit some of said basic and apparently generic forms of freedom. In fact, warnings of abuse of the pandemic for the democratic backsliding and the imposing of an authoritarian rule have arrived as early as in the spring of 2020 by a Swedish institute that followed this phenomenon, whether the state of exception was being abused in Europe. Therefore, we could say there is a twofold pressing reason to invent a language of a freedom that would transcend the confines of liberal traditions, both affirmations and its critiques as aspects of the same historic given. Furthermore, Marx's radicalization of the liberal core found in the discussions of the young Hegelians, as

demonstrated by Paulin Clochec, and as taken beyond the bourgeois status quo and its material economic foundation, provides the means for it. We could build on exegeses such as that of Clochec or other similar authors, and there are not many of that kind, but still they exist. In order for such a radicalization of the concept to take place, one ought to create the conditions for the first prerequisite to take place—the transformation of the mode of production, whereby the means of production would be seized by associations of individual-producers. For example, this is only an example... the point is that it must start from a kind of a transformation of the modes of production. If at the present points in time, such a possibility seems utopian, let us recall that Marx himself argued that the associations of free producers could appear within the capitalist model. Namely, in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx states that individual private property is the foundation of small scale industry and the small scale industry is a necessary condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the worker himself. The expansion of the small scale industry of associations of free workers would deepen the capitalist contradiction and so the contradiction is in place. It may not be the transformative paradigm but they could deepen the contradiction within the capitalist state as it is, and finally lead to its resolution and to a transformation of the political economic paradigm.

Such very material freedom is premised on the mere physical freedom of movement and establishing social relations. It is a historical struggle, but I do not see a reason to view historical transformations and progressions as necessarily linear. Therefore, reclaiming the language of liberty

in the face of rising authoritarianisms and the transformation of the mode of production could take place by following the laws of both synchrony and diachrony, as the structuralists would put it, as Claude Levi Strauss would put it. If the present paradigm is in crisis and the germs of the new possibilities emerge from this very entropy, islands of potentialities exist at both the economic plane as well of that of social relations. Both of them seen as unequivocally material.