

READINGS

[Essay]

WHERE THERE IS NO COMMON POWER

The following essay by John Gray appeared in the September 24 issue of the New Statesman. Gray's most recent book is Two Faces of Liberalism.

The dozen years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the assault on the Twin Towers will be remembered as an era of delusion. The West greeted the collapse of Communism—though it was itself a Western utopian ideology—as the triumph of Western values. The end of the most catastrophic utopian experiment in history was welcomed as an historic opportunity to launch yet another vast utopian project—a global free market. The world was to be made over in an image of Western modernity, an image deformed by a market ideology that was as far removed from any human reality as Marxism had been. Now, after the attacks on New York and Washington, the conventional view of globalization as an irresistible historical trend has been shattered. We are back on the classical terrain of history, where war is waged not over ideologies but over religion, ethnicity, territory, and the control of natural resources.

We are in for a long period—not months but years, perhaps decades—of acutely dangerous conflict. It will be a type of conflict with which many regions of the world are all too fa-

miliar but which overturns many of our preconceptions about war and peace. Its protagonists are not the agents of states but organizations whose relationships with governments are oblique, ambiguous, and sometimes indecipherable. The men who struck the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, using box cutters and passenger jets as weapons, were soldiers in a new kind of war.

A monopoly of organized violence is one of the defining powers of the modern state, achieved slowly and with difficulty. Now war, like so much else in the age of globalization, has slipped out from the control of governments, and it has done so, moreover, with astonishing speed over the past decade. The world is littered with collapsed states. In much of Africa, in Afghanistan, in the Balkans, and in a good deal of Russia, there is nothing that resembles a modern state. In these zones of anarchy, wars are fought by irregular armies commanded by political and religious organizations, often clan-based and prone to savage internecine conflicts. No power is strong enough to enforce peace.

The results expose the weaknesses and contradictions of the global free market constructed after the Cold War. Rich societies cannot be insulated from the collapsed states and new forms of war. Asylum seekers and economic refugees press on the borders of every advanced country. But while trade and capital move freely across the globe, the movement of labor is strictly limited—a very different state of affairs from the late nineteenth century, a period of comparable globalization in which barriers

to immigration hardly existed. This is a contradiction rarely noted by tub-thumpers for the global market, but it will become more acute as travel is monitored and controlled ever more stringently by governments.

With the assaults on New York and Washington, the anarchy that has been one of the by-products of globalization in much of the world can no longer be ignored. The ragged, irregular armies of the world's most collapsed zones have proved that they can reach to the heart of its richest and most powerful state.

[Warning]

YOU BETTER WATCH OUT

The following notice was sent in November 2000 by the group L'Anti Noël Avant L'Temps to merchants in Montreal whose stores were decorated for Christmas. Fourteen businesses that did not comply with the group's request were vandalized. Translated from the French by Jennifer Szalai.

Halloween has ended. Before Halloween it was autumn, and after Halloween autumn continues. Do you agree?

The leaves lie scattered on the soil, the atmosphere is calm and romantic; it is the dead season and many are rejoicing. Right? It is part of a whole season, a beautiful season, and one that does not officially end until the twenty-first of December. Are you listening?

Winter is far off, and Christmas does not exist outside of winter. Christmas=winter. Autumn=tranquillity, peace of mind. You see what we want to say, no?

We are L'A.N.A.L.T. (L'Anti Noël Avant L'Temps)

We are a group of people who are saddened and frustrated by your ill breeding. We refuse to let you destroy autumn for a reason as pernicious and disgusting as making a little bit of money. Everybody knows that Christmas is coming. You're going to make the same kind of cash! So, if you please, everything has its time.

We demand that you take down all of your Christmas decorations without delay, and not put them back up until the first of December. If not, we are going to strike again.

N.B. Do not take this lightly. We are SERIOUS.

Their brutal coup is an example of what military analysts call "asymmetric threat"—in other words, the power of the weak against the strong. What it has shown is that the strong are weaker than anyone imagined.

The powerlessness of the strong is not new. It has long been revealed in the futile "war" on drugs. The trade in illegal drugs is, along with oil and armaments, one of the three largest components of world trade. Like other branches of organized crime, it has thrived in the free-for-all created by financial deregulation. The world's richest states have squandered billions on a vain crusade against a highly globalized and fabulously well-funded industry. Rooting out terrorism will be even more difficult. After all, most of the worst effects of the drug trade can be eradicated simply by legalizing drugs. There is no parallel remedy for terrorism.

The atrocities in Washington and New York did more than reveal the laxity of America's airport security and the limitations of its intelligence agencies. It inflicted a grievous blow to the beliefs that underpin the global market. In the past, it was taken for granted that the world will always be a dangerous place. Investors knew that war and revolution could wipe out their profits at any time. Over the past decade, under the influence of ludicrous theories about new paradigms and the end of history, they came to believe that the worldwide advance of commercial liberalism was irresistible. Financial markets came to price assets accordingly. The attack on the World Trade Center may accomplish what none of the crises of the past few years—the Asian crisis, the Russian default of 1998, and the collapse of Long-Term Capital Management, an over-leveraged hedge fund—was able to do. It may shatter the markets' own faith in globalization.

Some people say that this was the purpose of the attack, and that we would be craven to give in to it. Instead, we are told, we must reassert the verities of the global free market and seek to rebuild it. And, with luck, it may not be too late to stave off worldwide recession. But the name of the game has changed forever. The entire view of the world that supported the markets' faith in globalization has melted down. Whatever anyone tells you, it cannot be reconstituted. The wiser course is to ask what was wrong with it.

It is worth reminding ourselves how grandiose were the dreams of the globalizers. The entire world was to be remade as a universal free market. No matter how different their



Edge City, by New York artist Olive Ayhens, whose work can be seen at Pierogi gallery in Brooklyn.

histories and values, however deep their differences or bitter their conflicts, all cultures everywhere were to be corralled into a universal civilization.

What is striking is how closely the market liberal philosophy that underpins globalization resembles Marxism. Both are essentially secular religions, in which the eschatological hopes and fantasies of Christianity are given an Enlightenment twist. In both, history is understood as the progress of the species, powered by growing knowledge and wealth, and culminating in a universal civilization. Human beings are viewed primarily in economic terms, as producers or consumers, with—at bottom—the same values and needs. Religion of the old-fashioned sort is seen as peripheral, destined soon to disappear or to shrink into the private sphere, where it can no longer convulse politics or inflame war.

History's crimes and tragedies are not thought to have their roots in human nature: they are errors, mistakes that can be corrected by more education, better political institutions, higher living standards. Marxists and market liberals may differ on what is the best economic

system, but, for both, vested interests and human irrationality alone stand between humankind and a radiant future. In holding to this primitive Enlightenment creed, they are at one.

And both have their dogmatic, missionary side. For market liberals, there is only one way to become modern. All societies must adopt free markets. If their religious beliefs or their patterns of family life make this difficult for them, too bad—that is their problem. If the individualist values that free markets require and propagate go with high levels of inequality and crime, and if some sections of society go to the wall, tough—that is the price of progress. If entire countries are ruined, as happened in Russia during the time of neoliberal shock therapy, well—as an earlier generation of radicals nonchalantly put it—you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

During the 1990s, this crudely rationalistic philosophy was hugely influential. It had a stronghold in the International Monetary Fund, as it blundered and bungled its way across the world exercising its power to impose identical policies on countries with vastly different histories, problems, and circumstances. There was only one route to modernity, and

the seers who ruled the I.M.F. were resolved that it be followed everywhere.

In fact, there are many ways of being modern, and many of failing to be so. It is simply not true that liberal capitalism is the only way of organizing a modern economy. Bismarck's Prussia embodied a different model, as did czarist Russia, and each of them might well have been with us still in some form had the First World War ended differently. The Japanese and German forms of capitalism have never conformed to the free-market model and—despite orthodox opinion everywhere telling us the contrary—it is a safe bet that they never will. We cannot know in advance what modernity means for any given society, or what it takes to achieve it. All we know for sure is that different countries have modernized successfully in a variety of ways.

The atrocities of September 11 have planted a question mark over the very idea of modernity. Is it really the case that all societies are bound, sooner or later, to converge on the same values and views of the world? Not only in America but also, to some degree, in most Western countries, the belief that modernization is an historical imperative that

no society can ignore for long made it harder to perceive the growing risk of an anti-Western backlash. Led by the United States, the world's richest states have acted on the assumption that people everywhere want to live as they do. As a result, they failed to recognize the deadly mixture of emotions—cultural resentment, the sense of injustice, and a genuine rejection of Western modernity—that lies behind the attacks on New York and Washington.

In my view, it is reasonable to regard the struggle against the groups that mounted those attacks as a defense of civilized values. As their destruction of ancient Buddhist relics demonstrated, the Taliban are hostile to the very ideas of toleration and pluralism. But these ideas are not the property of any one civilization, and they are not even peculiarly modern. In Western countries the practice of toleration owes much to the Reformation and, indeed, to the Enlightenment, which has always contained a skeptical tradition alongside its more dogmatic schools. Beyond Europe toleration flourished long before the modern era in the Muslim kingdoms of Moorish Spain and Buddhist India, to name only two examples. It would be a fatal error to interpret the conflict that is now under way in terms of poisonous theories about clashing civilizations.

Effective action against terrorism must have the support of a broad coalition of states. Crucially, these must include Muslim countries (which is one reason why American military action must entail new attempts to seek peace in Israel). Not only Russia and China—each of which has serious problems with Islamic fundamentalism—but even Iran could conceivably join in a U.S.-led coalition.

Constructing such a far-reaching alliance will be an exercise in realpolitik in which ideas of global governance of the kind that have lately been fashionable on the left become largely irrelevant. The United States will find itself supping with former enemies and courting states that are in no sense committed to liberal values. In waging war against the Taliban, it will do battle against a force it backed only a few years ago to resist the Soviet invasion. Such ironies can no more be conjured away by international courts than by global markets. They are built into an intractably disordered world. Bodies such as the United Nations can play a useful role in the labyrinthine diplomacy that inevitably surrounds military action. But anyone who thinks that this crisis is an opportunity to rebuild world order on a liberal universalist model has not understood it. The ideal of a universal civilization is a recipe for unending con-

[Apology]

McSTAKES WERE MADE

The following statement was read last May by Tristan Kading, a student at Stonington High School in Stonington, Connecticut, to the entire school. Earlier that day Kading had participated in a mock job interview with a visiting McDonald's representative; when asked to describe himself, he replied, "I hate large corporations like McDonald's," and then accused the company of falsely advertising its french fries as vegetarian.

I am sorry I caused a disturbance and influenced your ability to absorb the valuable lesson the McDonald's representative was attempting to teach. My political aspirations should stay out of the school building, and at protests, where they belong. I was thinking just now: What if I was in the teacher's shoes and had to deal with me? The experience wouldn't have been pleasant.

I apologize now to my classmates, to the McDonald's representative, and to the school.

flict, and it is time it was given up. What is urgently needed is an attempt to work out terms of civilized coexistence among cultures and regimes that will always remain different.

Over the coming years, the transnational institutions that have built the global free market will have to accept a more modest role, or else they will find themselves among the casualties of this great upheaval. The notion that trade and wealth creation require global laissez-faire has no basis in history. The Cold War—a time of strict controls on capital and extensive intervention in the economy by national governments—was, in Western countries, a time of unprecedented prosperity. Contrary to the cranky orthodoxies of market liberals, capitalism does not need a worldwide free market to thrive. It needs a reasonably secure environment, safe from the threat of major war, and reliable rules about the conduct of business. These things cannot be provided by the brittle structures of the global free market.

On the contrary, the attempt to force life everywhere into a single mold is bound to fuel conflict and insecurity. As far as possible, rules on trade and the movement of capital should be left to multilateral agreements between sovereign states. If countries opt to stay out of global markets, they should be left in peace. They should be free to find their own version of modernity, or not to modernize at all. So long as they pose no threat to others, even intolerable regimes should be tolerated. A looser, more fragmented, partly de-globalized world would be a less tidy world. It would also be a safer world.

It will be objected that de-globalization defies the dominant trend of the age. But although it is true that technology will continue to shrink time and distance, and in that sense link the world more closely, it is only a bankrupt philosophy of history that leads people to think that technology will produce convergence on values, let alone a worldwide civilization.

New weapons of mass destruction can—and quite possibly will—be used to prosecute old-style wars of religion. The Enlightenment thinking that found expression in the era of globalization will not be much use in its dangerous aftermath. Even Hobbes cannot tell us how to deal with fundamentalist warriors who choose certain death in order to humble their enemies. The lesson of September 11 is that the go-go years of globalization were an interregnum, a time of transition between two epochs of conflict. The task in front of us is to forge terms of peace among peoples separated by unalterably divergent histories, beliefs, and values. In the perilous years to come, this more-than-Hobbesian labor will be quite enough to keep us occupied.

[Accounts]

AND NOW A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

The following testimony was taken from interviews with plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in June against Exxon-Mobil for complicity in human-rights abuses committed by Indonesian military forces, the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI), whom Exxon-Mobil hired to protect its natural-gas operations in the Aceh province, where a separatist rebellion has been ongoing for twenty-five years. The suit, brought by the International Labor Rights Fund, contends that Exxon-Mobil provided barracks where victims were tortured and heavy equipment that was used to dig mass graves. TNI Unit 113 was specifically assigned to the Exxon-Mobil facility near the town of Lhokseumawe. Exxon-Mobil released a statement categorically rejecting the allegations. In the last decade, 6,000 people, mostly civilians, have died in the fighting. One thousand have been killed in the last year.

JANE DOE, AGE 23: On December 2, 2000, my husband left for his rice fields to work. After he left, I heard cross fire. This was not unusual. There were lots of troops in the area because of the Exxon plant. The shots were very close. I went to the fields, and my husband was already dead. Three witnesses who were in the fields with my husband said that the soldiers from Unit 113, the Exxon soldiers, arrived in military vehicles and shot at the group of farmers who were working the fields. My husband was the one who was hit.

JOHN DOE, AGE 25: I was riding my bicycle to the market in Simpangnibong to sell some vegetables. I saw soldiers ahead on the road. They were from TNI Unit 113. I was afraid, but I had never been questioned before, and I was doing what I always do. One of the soldiers shot at me as I approached on my bike. I was hit in the hand. I fell in a ditch, and the soldiers approached. One of them threw a hand grenade or something explosive in the ditch. It went off. I don't know who found me. Now I cannot work.

JOHN DOE, AGE 29: I was traveling to the refugee camp near Point A of the Exxon-Mobil property. This camp was for people who have had their homes destroyed by the occupying troops. I was on a motorbike. I saw three trucks of soldiers. One was Unit 113; I didn't see the others to identify. One of the soldiers shot at me and hit my leg in three places. The soldiers took me to a local police office. They tortured me for four hours and would not let me see a doctor.