The State of Fear

by Eszter Pál

Fear is one of the main concepts in the thought of Guglielmo Ferrero's Hungarian disciple, István Bibó. For both Ferrero and Bibó, this concept refers to an anthropological attribute which has its roots in the consciousness of mortality. Bibó claims that the greed for power originates in fear, and having power is a way of overcoming fear. Nevertheless, says Bibó, the exercise of power rooted in fear is dangerous, and the effort to transcend the fear of mortality by exercising power necessarily ends in failure. His famous remark, 'to be a democrat is not to be afraid', highlights the crucial connection between fear and politics.

For Bibó, the principal explanation of the failure of East-Central European states to build a balanced democratic public and political life is also fear. But in his account of this failure he enriches the original anthropological meaning of the concept with a social-psychological dimension. He describes a type of fear specific to this region and attempts to uncover its roots. Essentially political, this fear can result, and indeed on several occasions has resulted, in fatal political decisions; it is a fear which has prevented the formation of a healthy democratic political life.

Bibó argues that this form of political fear is specific to East-Central European countries because of a crucial difference between the historical processes that unfolded in this region and those in Western Europe. This difference lies in the relationship between state and nation. In Western Europe, he asserts, at the end of the eighteenth century, when the modern democratic national movements took shape, there was an evident congruence between the already-existing state boundaries and the emergent 'national consciousness'.

By contrast, in East-Central Europe there were no proper state structures to accommodate national sentiments. The region was cursed by the most pernicious state organization, the Habsburg Empire. The territories of the 'imagined communities' of the Eastern national movements lacked any existing state apparatus, economic organization, or political culture. It thus became imperative for such communities to prove themselves to be viable and also to be distinguishable from other communities. These aspirations explain why East-Central-European nationalism became not only so strong but also essentially different from that of Western nations: why it could take forms such as linguistic nationalism, for example, and why in this region the term 'the people' carried a *völkisch* rather than a civic connotation.

Moreover, the nations in question attached their historic consciousness and emotions to a different and usually bigger territory than that occupied by the linguistic group. This situation, says Bibó, inevitably created a state of fear, because all these small nations felt threatened by one another. The result was different types of antidemocratic nationalism.

In the particular case of Hungary, Bibó claims the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, created in the 'Compromise' of 1867, can be understood only in terms of Hungary's giving up its aspirations for independence in the interest of keeping all its so-called 'historic territories' (for example, Transylvania). These territories were, in fact, multinational, and Bibó argues that Hungary drew a fatal lesson from the outcome of the revolution and war of independence in 1848-49 against the Habsburgs: namely, that the minorities in Hungary would use democratic freedoms to secede from Hungary and that the consequence of democratization would be the loss of territories.

The loss of huge territories (Transylvania and half of the Banat to Romania, the Burgenland to Austria, and so on), under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon after World War I - including ones entirely populated by Hungarians - made this problem even more acute. In Hungarian political life, according to Bibó, the highly important distinction between the 'Hungarian' territories and the others was not made. The national project, the desired nation-state, remained that of the 'historic Hungary': this involved the recovery of Hungarian and non-Hungarian minority territories alike.

Bibó doesn't overlook the linguistic and territorial ingredients in Western European debates, but he emphasizes that these have been quite different from those in East-Central Europe: the latter - participants in them have felt - determine the very existence of the nation. So Bibó points to a vicious circle: the East-Central European nations have been in a state of fear because they haven't become mature democracies, and they haven't become mature democracies because they have been in a state of fear. This vicious circle, he asserts, can only been broken by undertaking the difficult task of reconciling past and present, and, as a consequence, adjusting political projects to meet reality.

Bibó died in 1979. His 'antisocialism' and his important role in the 1956 revolution meant that, in the communist era, his writings were not published. Only since the late 1980s, when his writings first appeared officially, has he become widely known. Over the last decade he has become one of the most cited political theorists in Hungary. This is not just because he was concerned with problems which preoccupy us today, but also because of his analytical method, a method which allowed him to explore the connection between certain social-psychological phenomena and public life. This distinctive approach makes him worthy of wider attention.

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Risk and Community

by Jane Franklin and Chris Sparks

Since the publication of Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, Anglo-American political theory has been preoccupied mainly with the debate between individualist liberals and communitarians. The ongoing debate has shown that neither perspective, nor a synthesis of the two, can deal with the basic problems it encounters or fully articulate the insights it produces. Nevertheless, its overbearing presence tends to block attempts to develop more far-reaching analysis.

Critical theory provides an important outside viewpoint from which to gain relative objectivity about the paradigmatic contest between liberalism and communitarianism.

Ulrich Beck's work on the politics of 'risk society' is particularly relevant here. Beck argues that, as it becomes increasingly self-referential and self-critical, the culture of modern society expresses its' inhabitants awareness of the fragility of the institutions they have created, and of the contingency and absurdity of their social mode of existence. This awareness gives rise to two political imperatives. First, the imperative to invent a new politics which engages reflexively with its own riskiness and contingency; this 'reflexive politics', Beck argues, tries, in a still-unwritten language, to chart an unknown political territory through a sceptical encounter with uncertainty. Secondly, a counter-force - what Beck calls 'counter-modernization' - which, through resistance to and denial of modernity, tries to reinvent a safe and secure world which existed before the hegemony of scientific rationalism (expressed as liberalism and later variants of socialism). This counter-modern politics of community creates certainty and tends to narrow

political perspectives; and its language, on one level tapping into a common sense, is seductive and comforting.

Alasdair MacIntyre, one of the proponents of 'counter-modern', or communitarian, politics, argues that the detrimental effects of liberalism - the isolated individual, and the politics of right which separate people from each other - have created a world in which individuals are so selfish that they feel no responsibility or obligation to each other or to their communities.

The strength of this argument lies both in its identification of a discontent with a society formed by liberal hegemony, and in its desire to eradicate the influence that gave this society shape. Working in the discontented wake of a period of fierce neo-liberalism, social democratic policy-makers find the communitarian sensibility attractive and are trying to synthesize liberalism with communitarianism. Such a synthesis - an attempt to construct a new common sense and thus to overcome uncertainty - proposes a balance between the rights of liberal politics and the responsibilities of communitarian politics. In fact, however, this position is untenable: as Beck argues, the promise that creative freedom and stability can be combined is unfulfillable. The attempt to merge these two values by emphasizing consensus encourages agreement at the expense of free thought and expression; it also reveals that these policy-makers are in fact obsessed with the continual creation of new certainties, certainties which will put an end to doubt by closing off alternative possibilities. The result of this is a legitimization of authoritarian policies. A politics rooted - even if only partly - in myth and memory, while attempting to keep things on an even keel and to stem the insecurity caused by social and political change, merely masks the instability of conventional politics.

Even with a social democratic veneer, Beck insists, this is the politics of counter-modernity. And the project is futile, he contends. We are not living in a world of discrete, self-enclosed identities, as we may think, but in a late modern world, the core constituents of which are shadowy representations of each other. As a result, the traditional discourse of political theory built on a triad of dichotomies - known/unknown, certain/uncertain, order/chaos - and, in the realm of political experience, on opposites such as war/peace, and security/insecurity, does not help us understand the world. Indeed, we perhaps *are* coming to see the world not in dichotomous terms, as either/or, but in terms of 'and': one thing *and* another. Starting with this insight, Beck tentatively describes what he calls the 'co-ordinates of politics and conflict in reflexive modernity'.

He sets out contrasts between 'safe' and 'unsafe', 'inside' and 'outside', and 'political' and 'unpolitical'. These reflect three key questions: what is one's attitude, first, towards uncertainty; secondly, towards strangers; and, thirdly, towards the possibility of shaping society? On the horizon of reflexive modernity , we still see these contrasts in terms of either-or. As the process of modernization develops, however, we may begin to see that each position contains the possibility of the other. Reflexivity, generating doubt and scepticism as the modes of intellectual inquiry, undermines the distinctiveness of opposites. A recognition will emerge that the barriers constructed between 'safe' and 'unsafe', 'inside' and 'outside', and 'political' and 'unpolitical' have been built to keep out what Beck calls 'the reality of And, the reality of one world'.

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