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A Specter is Haunting America

Sandy Krolick

2010

“A specter is haunting Europe”, Karl Marx once wrote. He wrote these words on the eve of revolutionary outbreaks that began in Italy and France in 1848 and soon engulfed much of the Continent. Unbeknownst to most Americans, Europe is again engulfed in revolt, which threatens to spread. The financial crisis that started in the USA and swept the globe, along with the sovereign debt crisis that was inflicted upon the European Union as a result, has ignited the passions of strangled and enslaved masses everywhere. People have recognized their enslavement and have put a finger on their slave-masters. The largely capitalist regimes are no less affected than are the socialist, communist, or theocratic ones, for they all have the same owner.

On the heels of 2009 civil unrest that had swept through Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Portugal, Russia and the Czech Republic in response to diverse austerity measures implemented by the ruling elites, a full-force revolt has broken out in France. Much like the political protests following the Iranian elections in 2009, months of protests and street demonstrations across France have taken a more violent turn, and signs of an armed

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insurrection continue to mount. Across the Atlantic, even the Canadians have taken their eyes off the puck long enough to become enraged, staging protests at the G-20 meeting in Toronto that would make a Frenchman proud, protests that have prompted one of the tamest looking of political beasts to bare its tyrannical fangs.

The American middle/working class is still preoccupied with gazing at the shadows cast upon the walls of its cave/prison, preferring to go on believing what they are told by their owners and handlers: that all will be right with their little world, provided they keep their head down and work hard (at trying to find a job). Political hucksters like Obama reassuringly tell us that “Yes We Can” survive this crisis and go on begging for a piece of the American Dream. The man behind the curtain is imploring them to go on ignoring what is before their eyes. He tells us that their world is intact and will continue to prosper. And they dutifully listen, and willfully refuse to see. But the disillusioned among us can no longer ignore the mountain of evidence to the contrary that is before us. This show is coming to an end, and it promises to be an inglorious one. The wave of extinction, peak oil, peak water, economic and financial crises worldwide, political unrest abroad that is about to spread to the homeland — are these not signs of imminent collapse?

But even our European brothers do not understand the magnitude of this seismic event. It is neither a fiscal nor an economic problem. It is not a matter of having the wrong political leadership, nor is it the result of confused or misguided personal priorities. It is a crack in the dome of the theater of the Spectacle that began with the advent of human history, of civilization itself. It is the endgame of the human evolutionary dead end that has pathologically sought artifices of manipulation and control at all costs.

As Thomas Hobbes proleptically though unwittingly stated centuries ago, this will be a “Warre of all against all”. But this will not be the war that he mistakenly assumed would have

occurred among our pre-civilized ancestors had it not been for our constituting the social contract. Rather, it is a war resulting from that very contract, grounded in cold and calculating thinking, and from the momentum it imparted to civilization for these last six thousand years of recorded history.

The specter Marx was referring to was Communism: his contention was that it would and should be the final stage in the dialectical movement of history to a civil but classless society. He was mistaken: the communist experiment failed. The real ghostly apparition that is haunting us now is a natural reflection of the fundamental lethality of industrial civilization itself and the systems of hierarchy and domination it has devised and perfected, all based upon the power of the syllogism. This is the logic of objective science, the principle of our legal systems, the rationality behind our social contracts, the anonymity of our civil politics, and the narrative framework of history itself. It is this logic that binds us to the hierarchies that have worked to empty the world of all its resources and life, of all its significance, replacing them with impersonal systems that vainly attempt to control and manage all affairs, human or natural.

It is the inevitable culmination of six thousand years of unnatural, human history that began with the first urban empires emerging in and around Mesopotamia's once fertile Fertile Crescent. People can still perceive this basic lethality, though many of them have become empty parts of emptying hierarchical institutions — an emptiness expressed most baldly in the following formulation: If A is a B, and B is a C, then A must be a C. Whether to control nature or our fellow humans, in this view we are all interchangeable commodities within a single logic of control, a composite of test scores, job functions, marketable fashions and other objective criteria. Herein lies the reason for our emptiness and our sense of alienation from one another, from nature and from our own natures. In seeking to compensate for this emptiness, we have sought to acquire other commodities to make us feel whole again — televisions,

cars, laptops and other gadgets. But flashy cars and widescreen televisions will not save us.

America is the most rationally conceived of all modern, civilized societies. We have more science and technology, more lawyers and laws, more prisons and prisoners, more military bases — in short, more and larger systems of domination than any other country on the planet. We also have more lawyers, more money managers and swindlers, more rat race, more mental illness and more lone gunmen acting out against whatever they perceive as an injustice in their world. And yet we keep marching straight ahead to the precipice. We are a nation of rule-followers, not a community of free persons — and we are committed to the syllogism as no other. There is no dignity in our enslavement; we have become the emptiest of souls.

What is haunting the globe today is the specter of primitive anarchy, a feral tendency buried deep within the marrow and musculature of every animal. The human species is no exception, and it too possesses a powerful instinct to escape death. We have an irrepressible will to survive the artfully, coldly created hierarchical systems of domination that are now failing. It is anarchic in the truest sense of the word: it seeks to be leaderless not merely in a political sense, but to be free from the tyrannical hegemony imposed by the civilizing logic of syllogistic reasoning itself. It seeks to make each person, each interaction, each moment unique, unclassifiable, open to will and chance. It seeks freedom in the polysemy of the senses, of the physical body — not the body politic. This specter is not imaginary: it is real, and it is upon us. It is now everywhere and has a will of its own. It can no longer be brought under control, through force or through reason, and there will be no escaping it. It is not interested in you; it is coming after who you think you are.

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After a ten-year career in academia, including appointments at the University of Virginia, the University of Denver-Daniels College of Business, and the Colorado School of Mines, he spent the next twenty years in the partnership and executive ranks of several of America's largest domestic and international firms, including Ernst & Young LLP, General Electric, and Computer Sciences Corporation.

Sandy has spent many years traveling around the world, including parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, and of course North America. Retiring from business at the age of fifty, he recently returned to the USA with his wife Anna, after living and teaching for several years in the central Siberian Steppe, at the foot of the Altai mountains in Barnaul, Russia.

His published works include *The Recovery of Ecstasy: Notebooks from Siberia* (2008), *Resolve: A Phenomenological Understanding of Time and Myth* (Mercer University Press, 1987), *Ethical Decisionmaking Styles* (Addison Wesley, 1986), and *Gandhi in the Postmodern Age: Issues in War and Peace* (CSM Press, 1984).