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End of an Era

A Conversation with Sir Ralf Dahrendorf

To many observers, the extremely fast—and sometimes chaotic—developments of the last few months have given the impression of being too momentous to be fully perceived and understood in their historic novelty. This is the well-known destiny of the majority of those who happen to witness periods of dramatic acceleration of history, and are bound to discover that only the passing of time will give them enough of a vantage point for a full comprehension of what has unfolded before their eyes. In search of an analysis in real time, capable of going beyond the mass of information with which the world public is flooded, as well as of a global view for which there is today a largely felt need, Giuseppe Sacco, the Editor of *The European Journal of International Affairs*, met in Oxford on December 30, 1989, with Sir Ralf Dahrendorf. At the end of a year marked by extraordinary events on the world scene, he thus had a unique opportunity to gather for our readers an extremely interesting interpretation of the long-term trends that lie behind the events that fill the front pages of the world's media.

E I The year that is coming to its close might pass in history as the end of an era, and we would very much like to have your assessment of the extraordinary events that have marked the past few months. As you probably know, there are widespread rumours of a new book that you are supposed to be writing, a book about 1989.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I have of course heard these rumours myself. They have been reported mostly by the Italian press. But at the risk of disappointing the faithful readers I have in that country, I have to tell you that, at this stage

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I am confining myself to articles. I have recently written a piece which has been widely read about the death of socialism, and I have written a piece about "transitions". This you may be interested in, although it is obviously obsolete in its examples, though not in the argument. I am now writing a piece for a meeting in Poland, organised by the New York-based East-West Security Group, about the conditions of democratisation. I am indeed planning to write something about Germany—an article—and it will in a way add up, but I will publish it as a book. Things are happening so quickly that it is difficult to write a book. And I would guess that even producing a quarterly as the *European Journal* has to be extremely difficult.

There is an absolutely beautiful article in the last issue of the *New York Review of Books* by my colleague Tim Garton Ash with the title "Magic Prague". That article was finished on the 21st of December, and stated that it was quite uncertain whether Havel would be acceptable as President of Czechoslovakia. Well, you see! On the 29th of the same month, he was elected! Frankly, the pace of political developments seems to me absolutely extraordinary. And I actually suspect that 1990 is going to be the year in which things slow down. Who knows? That may even encourage me to put my reflections on the revolution of 1989 in a book.

E You are obviously referring to what is happening in the East, where
I every day brings novelties that would have been simply unthinkable a few weeks earlier. Still, about the Communist world there are questions that are not related to day by day developments. One such question should of course be whether Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Hannah Arendt before her, were in the end wrong in saying that totalitarian regimes cannot collapse. What has happened? Do the events of 1989 prove that their conclusions were wrong?

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I am sure that they were not wrong, although my own analysis of this situation is a bit more complex than what we read in the papers today. The Soviet bloc regimes have not exactly collapsed; they have become routinised, and this not today but in the 1960's. That is to say, it is a mistake to label as "totalitarian" the regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which are presently undergoing change. They were not really "totalitarian". The real problem of the Soviet Union and of the Communist movement is that they had to cope with two successive aberrations. The first was totalitarianism—Stalin, Ulbricht and others. The second was what is now called in some countries "administrative centralism"—Brezhnevism, or

bureaucratic rule. Bureaucratic rule was not totalitarian; Brezhnev was not totalitarian. It was a *nomenklatura* regime, the rule of a rather large social group. And this actually is the main problem. If it were just Stalinism, all the Poles would have to do is what the Romanians did: kill the dictator and his family and then take over. But this is not the case. The Poles do not have this easy way out. As the Solidarity leadership has suddenly discovered, to its disappointment, there are one and a half million Poles that were part of the *nomenklatura*. That is not totalitarianism, that is bureaucratic administrative centralism. Administrative centralism is, I believe, the term used in East Germany.

So my analysis of what really happened is that in the 1960's or perhaps at the beginning of the Krushchev period, you get a sort of routinisation, and routinisation as Hannah Arendt quite rightly said, is the end of totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt saw very clearly that totalitarianism is a sort of permanent revolution, a permanent state of emergency, as she put it; and as soon as it stabilises, it ceases to be totalitarian. For too long we have used Reaganite language, which is totally misleading—the sort of empire of evil language. In fact what we had in Eastern Europe was the heavy hand of a huge bureaucracy which helped itself and prevented the people from either participating or developing economically, and that is what is collapsing now. So we are not actually witnessing the collapse of totalitarianism, but the collapse of post-totalitarian bureaucratic—*nomenklatura*—rule of Brezhnev, rather than Stalin.

E Are you referring to the Soviet Union, or to the ex-satellite countries
I as well?

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I am referring to the Soviet Union, but also to Eastern Europe, because in every single East European country, with the exception of Romania, you have had a similar transition to *nomenklatura* rule in which there was still a person at the top, but the person at the top was not—even Honecker was not—a totalitarian ruler. In Czechoslovakia there was not one totalitarian ruler. Kadar—that is the point—was not a totalitarian ruler: he was presiding over a *nomenklatura*.

E I am posing this question about the differences between the USSR and
I the satellite countries because there are cases, such as the Honecker case, where it seems quite clear that by withdrawing Soviet support,

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Gorbachev practically fired him. This is even more evident in the Czech case, where this kind of situation was obliged by the Russians to compromise with an opposition they could have easily kept down. And this is substantially different to the Soviet Union, where there is no external force in a position of firing the nomenklatura.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - True! I think there are many differences between the Soviet Union and East Central Europe, and I think these differences are now quite evident. There are the obvious differences: that the Soviet Union is a superpower, whilst East Central Europe, like Western Europe, consists of small and medium-sized nations. There is also the difference that the Soviet Union, (and here I shock people when I say this) is fundamentally a developing country, whereas most of the countries in East Central Europe are fairly developed and belong to a different tradition. But the crucial difference—politically—which emerges now, is that Gorbachev has got himself into a tangle. He is promoting in East Central Europe what he apparently cannot accept at home. He is thus congratulating the Czechs on pluralism but preventing his own Central Committee from debating Article Six of the Soviet Constitution about the position of the Communist Party. That is an extraordinary paradox which will be highly relevant during the next few months. Just to complete this point: I like the idea of a common house, but my common house does not include the Soviet Union. My common house ends at the Polish-Soviet border.

E *How do you explain, then, the enthusiasm in the West, not only of the mass media, but of scholarly observers as well, for the role supposedly played by the crowd? If the leaders of Central Europe, with the notable exception of Poland, were de facto fired for not being in tune with the present Soviet line, one could say that the masses appeared on the streets because the gates had been opened, not that they opened the gates themselves.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, it is a bit more complicated and here you really have to look at every country individually. In Poland, in 1980-81, you had an early organisation of workers—really, more than masses—which caught on and got an enormous popular support that never disappeared again. In Hungary, it is a very complicated story, because there is no sign of massive popular involvement, although Hungary seems to have a political class of people involved. It is not simply the masses. In East Germany it was really the crowd coming out after the church service in Leipzig, and I have no doubt that

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without the repeated Leipzig Monday demonstrations, nothing would have happened at this particular moment.

In Prague, on the contrary, it was probably the students and the artists, daring to come down to Wenceslaus Square: having this one encounter with the police, and then coming back. While I said there was a political class in Hungary, one certainly cannot speak of one in the case of Czechoslovakia.

The reason why I find Timothy Garton Ash's piece on Prague so splendid, is because he shows how the leaders of the opposition were total amateurs. He tells how some people, such as Peter Pitman came by accident into the theatre where the meetings were held, the Magic Lantern Theatre, and were drawn to take part in the discussion. And then everyone said: "Hey! You must write our manifesto. We need it in two hours' time; just sit down in a corner and write it." And this is the origin of the political platform that the so-called "opposition forces" take to the next negotiations with the leaders. This is not a political class. These people are really emerging from nowhere. Well, in Poland, they came from the Unions. In Czechoslovakia, they were mostly artists—these Magic Lantern people. In Hungary, I suppose there are a few more business-minded people...

In any case, the same classical dynamic is repeated everywhere. Everywhere you see the classical revolutionary phenomenon of the ruling class being weakened by events outside its control, beginning to give way, and therefore encouraging—almost inviting—further pressures and further demands.

E *But the Communist leaders should have known that the decision to offer*
I *reforms would have been interpreted by the masses not as proof of liberalism, but as a sign of weakness! How can such a mistake be explained, if not through Soviet pressure for reform?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - No, it was the weakness of the traditional bureaucratic ruling class, of really existing socialism. I think that the crowds did play a part in quite a few countries.

E *So what you mean is that Honecker probably could have held, that*
I *Gorbachev would have thought of keeping the regime. You mean that the masses actually played a role in pushing the Russians to stop supporting, indeed to fire the East German leadership?*

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Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well the Russians did not fire the East German leadership. Gorbachev said: "If you are behind the times, you will be swept away", and he thereby encouraged, in the first instance, the potential opposition within the party. After he had been to Berlin, he left people with the feeling that things had to change, that they could not go on as they were. Something similar happened in all the satellite countries: first there are the Krenzes and the Adamic's and the Rakowskis, and a few weeks later they are gone and others take over. Gorbachev really encouraged this initial step towards the Krenz-Adamic-Rakowski rule, and thereby set things going, but the next step was really taken by the people. Incidentally, the most important feature of all this is what Gennadi Gerasimov in his inimitable way called the "Sinatra doctrine", which is the clear indication of two things: first, that Soviet troops would stay in the barracks, and second, that nothing would be done in other ways to prevent these countries from going down the pluralistic route. This is an extraordinary shift but more an encouragement than an active involvement by the Soviet Union: an encouragement, actually, by non-involvement.

E *But the Russians certainly knew that this was more than enough to bring*
I *down a political class like ...*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - As we now see, yes. But I think you ascribe to the Soviet Union a more active role than I do. I think what happened was that it was simply the statement that the Soviet Union would be passive which encouraged indigenous developments.

E *It is the difference between the "gentle" collapse of Communist power in*
I *most Eastern bloc countries and the terrible Romanian tragedy that makes me doubt of the spontaneity of the mass action, for instance, in Prague. In all the other Eastern bloc countries, these bureaucratic groups were in power more or less for the sole reason that the Russians wanted them there. The simple announcement that the Russians were not going to support them for ever was bound to bring them down. Romania, instead, was semi-autonomous.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, there were no Soviet troops stationed in Romania.

E *And the army was probably less strictly controlled by officers loyal*
I *only to Moscow. And the secret service, the Securitate, was more*



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or less independent from the the Soviet secret service. In other words, the situation was very different from that of the Bulgarian or the Hungarian secret services, that have always had structural links with the KGB. And since the Hungarian secret service is quite likely to have played a role in staging the Timisoara rebellion in order to destabilise the Ceausescu dictatorship, the Soviet secret service is likely to have been involved somehow as well. It is beyond doubt that Ceausescu had become a nuisance to the Kremlin.

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It is a fact that in the two Communist countries where the Russians did not control things directly—China and Romania—the regimes tried to resist: in China successfully and in Romania unsuccessfully. But when you have these revolutions without people being killed in the streets, without a shot actually being fired and with those in power kindly giving in, it becomes legitimate to suspect that the thing was engineered from the top, that the masses had come into the picture when the game was already over. The masses were clearly involved in Romania, and you see the result.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I see your point, but I do not agree. I think the Romanian case was very special. Ceausescu used the language of socialism but his regime was in fact a traditional family dictatorship, like the Duvalier regime in Haiti. It had nothing to do with socialism, but was purely and simply a kind of fascism, if you want to call it that. In any case, it was a cruel family dictatorship with a fairly large hired security police to hold the people down. I think it is a very different story, and I am afraid—I say this without any satisfaction—I said weeks ago that if things happened in Romania, they would be awfully violent. It is a totally different story; it is not a story of democratisation, but a story of violence breeding violence.

While one has become hesitant to make predictions, I would say we have not seen the end of that violence yet. So far we have seen the battle of the army against the *Securitate*; next we will see the battle of the “people” against the army, and then—I do not know. I think the Romanian case is a different affair, as the Ceausescu dictatorship was a very different kind of regime. And I would also venture to add that we have not yet seen the end of the Chinese developments.

You see, in East European countries other than Romania, there was a *nomenklatura* regime which, as you say, was maintained by Soviet support and indeed by Soviet force. We have all seen the tanks in Budapest and Prague, and of course the Soviets were omnipresent in Poland. But I think it is wrong to infer from the recent developments in these countries that they were Soviet-organised. I still believe it was the withdrawal of Soviet interference which enabled them to follow their own way, and their own way in all these countries is the search for a sort of combination of domestic pluralism, economic success and a redefinition of their different geopolitical and international interests. So I think these are true indigenous developments, as is the Romanian case, but under very different conditions. For me, Romania is a separate story.

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E *Then one cannot use the Romanian example to prove or disprove*
I *a contrario this or that interpretation of the events that have taken place in ...*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - In Bulgaria, Hungary and so on.

E *Now, if this is the situation, what then is the Westpolitik of the Soviet*
I *Union? What are the aims that are being pursued through this decision not to support the regimes of Central Europe any longer?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I wonder how much of this was the unfolding of a deliberate policy, and how much of it has just happened. I remember being in India and talking to the Maharajah of Jaipur on the day of the opening of the Wall, and he asked me what Krenz was doing. Was he not opening the cage where the tiger was and holding on to the tail? Was he kidding himself into believing he could control the tiger, when in fact he was being dragged along?

I suspect that this has happened not only to Egon Krenz, but to some extent this has even happened to Gorbachev. I would not be surprised if there had been at the beginning a sort of realisation that it would be very difficult to motivate the Soviet Army to move into any of these countries—very difficult. And after Afghanistan, even more difficult than before. Thus Gorbachev has probably made the best of a difficult situation by calling it a new doctrine. I also suspect, incidentally, that he probably thought the Communist parties of Eastern Europe were much stronger than they have now turned out to be. I think he probably thought that other political groups would crop up, but that the Communists would by and large remain the strongest.

E *So this is the answer. They expected some reforms to take place that*
I *would keep the countries more or less socialist, and therefore in the socialist alliance?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, I should have thought so.

E *So there was a kind of grand design in which he thought that things*
I *would fall more or less naturally into place?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, there was a belief in reform communism, as it were.

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E *So he himself was a slave of ideology and prisoner of his own*
I *propaganda?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - He still is, I think. This seems to me most evident in his attitude to developments within the Soviet Union. He is undoubtedly a slave of an ideology, to some considerable extent, yes. But he is also a man—and this is quite interesting—who is not blinded by it. He can see realities when they become manifest, and does not try to deny the reality of what is happening. Whatever his initial concept was, he accepts that what is happening is different from what he expected, and so he adjusts his attitude. So it is very difficult to say where he stands at the moment as far as the future of Eastern Europe is concerned.

E *Would you go so far as to say that he is the kind of man who tends to*
I *fight fire with fire? Or is he a skier trying to run faster than the snowball, thus setting more avalanches in motion? Certainly, when things develop in a way and at a pace he has not foreseen, he starts pushing even faster in the same direction?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, that is what Henry Kissinger said to me the other day. He thinks Gorbachev is the greatest log-runner—as he called him—that history has ever seen. A man who is running on a rolling log of wood and has to run faster and faster in order to stay upright. Personally, I tend to see Gorbachev as a great initiator, rather than as a great statesman or a great carrier-through. He starts things, and starts things because he believes they are right. As we said a few moments ago, he starts things with some kind of notion of where they are likely to lead, but if they do not lead there, he does not go back on his initial decision. He still believes his initial decision was right. I would accept he is not in control of Eastern Europe and he may soon cease to be in control of a number of areas on the margin of the Soviet Union. And this may be his undoing.

E *Aleksander Smolar said that Gorbachev's behaviour reminded him of an*
I *ironic point drawn from the Talmud: what is good about not knowing where you are going is that any road will lead you there. Some observers perceive Gorbachev as a de-stabiliser, but this seems rather strange for a leader who came to power with the help of a person like Gromyko, who was certainly not a de-stabiliser. Do you see his action as being linked to any strategy adhered to at the top of the Soviet bureaucracy?*

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Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - No, I do not think so. I think Gorbachev is a very lonely man. We know how he was elected, but then he took over and started things; and everybody realised suddenly there was no real road back. Mrs. Thatcher was called "Tina" for a while, which is the abbreviation for "there is no alternative" (T-i-n-a). Gorbachev is in a kind of "Tina" situation, and that is why he is strong; no one around him can think of an alternative—Ligachev cannot, Ryzhkov cannot—because they all know that they cannot go back to the "good old Brezhnev days". You cannot because once you have started opening the floodgates, it would require too much violence and so I think he is strong by default, not strong because of support. This is what I mean when I say that he is lonely.

Listen to the attacks on him by the people who should be his friends. Sakharov's attacks were vicious—absolutely vicious. He called Gorbachev "a mean little Communist Party functionary incapable of any big thoughts", and so on. I heard Shmelev the other day, Bovomolev, Korotich. All these people who would not exist without him are saying he has not got the courage to do the simplest things. So he is attacked by the reformers; he is undoubtedly attacked by the so-called conservatives. I have not met a single person who can really be called a Gorbachev supporter, so I do not think he is speaking on behalf of the apparatus, and he is not speaking on behalf of the people; he is one of the loneliest people I have ever seen in power.

E *To this extent he is a slave of ideology and of an obsolete view of the*
I *world. Would you also apply this to international relations? For instance, about three months ago, or more, he gave the impression of confusing the FRG of today with post-Versailles Germany when he offered the German government the creation of a free-trade zone for German capital in the Königsberg triangle, drawing practically no response from the FRG.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, he did not really offer it ...

E *He hinted that the thing could be done.*
I

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, I do not think his international policy is very sophisticated. And this will probably be quite evident one day, when it will be analysed in detail. Already before what was called the "great Party jamboree" of June 1989, he started from time to time talking about the common European house. But then he suddenly stopped. A nice story is that of his visit to Great

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Britain, where Mrs. Thatcher had prepared a speech in response to his expected speech on the common European house. Well, he did not even mention it, because he had suddenly understood that a common European house was not in the Soviet interest because somewhere it had an anti-American sting. So he changed his tack and started talking about universal problems. Since then, every single speech he has made has been about the existence of universal problems which transcend ideologies and social systems, problems that require common action by everyone, and notably by the superpowers. Thus, for a period, he made a load of "Green" or anti-nuclear speeches. But then he realised that he had not got (and cannot get) very far, and recently he has not said very much about that either. So I have doubts about the subtlety of his international policy.

E *Then what you think is that in the West there is a tendency to overvalue*
I *him?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, he cannot possibly be overvalued as an initiator, and I think his lasting effect on history will be the effect on Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, I wonder how much has been changed by his action and how much will be changed.

E *What about Germany? The hypothesis that he was opening the way to*
I *a kind of Soviet-German condominium on Eastern Europe was received in a mixed way in Germany. Do you think he has an obsolete view of Germany?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, I do not know whether it is obsolete or not. What I really think is that people in Moscow are deeply divided over Germany, and I would not be surprised if Gorbachev were divided in himself. Partly, I believe, he shares the understandable Russian fear of a strong Germany as one of the main motives of his European policy. Partly, on the other hand, he recognises that the world has changed, and that maybe one should think of more imaginative answers, and that in any case, the Helsinki answer no longer works. The notion that you have two stable blocs which have stable relations with each other is dead, and while many people dream of it, you cannot resuscitate it.

E *Yes, but now Soviet diplomacy speaks of a non-aggression pact between*
I *the two alliances. And this is a way of keeping Germany divided.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, they are also talking of a Helsinki II, and all that. But I think events will soon run away from this, so that the Soviets will have to look, and indeed are already looking, quite carefully at the real developments in Germany. These real developments are fascinating, and are perhaps the key to what will happen to Europe in international terms—in terms of international relations—in the next few years, perhaps in the next few months. The real developments, of course, are peculiar because they lead closer and closer to unification, but a unification without nationalism. Neither the East Germans nor the West Germans want unification for nationalistic reasons. They want it for economic reasons, or rather for social and economic reasons.

It is the most peculiar development I have ever seen. The West Germans do not particularly want reunification, but they do want the East Germans to stay at home, and if the only way to keep the East Germans at home is to have reunification, then so be it. The East Germans, in their turn, do not particularly want reunification, but they want their money to be worth something, and they do not want to live forever, or even for twenty years, what they regard as a second rate existence compared to the West Germans. What I think we will see is an increasing economics-driven *de facto* unification. This, within the next six months, will pose quite interesting *de facto* questions. Very peculiar *de facto* questions, that will lead to all the great designs being suddenly forgotten.

E Do you mean that in the next six months, if economic reunification
I without political reunification appears impossible, people will vote for political reunification?

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - No, I think economic reunification will take place. To make it possible, all that is needed is the acceptance by East Germany of the Bundesbank as the dominant institution of its economic policy, which I think will happen.

E If this is true, two questions inevitably arise at this point: one on the
I predicament of East Germany, and one on the future of the EEC.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Quite so.

E Regarding Germany's political development, for a long period East
I German intellectuals in the opposition had almost convinced us that something that could be considered as a kind of Eastern German identity had

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developed East of the Elbe and of the Wall. Now, two weekends of shopping and walking around the Kurfürstendamm have sufficed to bring about the sudden collapse of this delusion. But, this notwithstanding, something happened across the Wall that showed that the East German population had, up to a point, believed in the propaganda of their government, that they had taken their rulers seriously. The shock and popular furor at the discovery that the Communists were corrupt did not appear in any other Eastern European country; this was a purely East German reaction.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - That is true.

E Of course, all the peoples of the satellite countries knew that their rulers were imposed from the outside, and had taken it for granted that, while it lasted, they would try to put something aside for the future. Only the East Germans did not think like that, only the East Germans assumed that even a government sitting on the bayonets of a foreign army was bound to the population by a sort of social contract. But this implied, in change, a degree of loyalty of the population to the rulers. Do you see my point?

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I see your point, and I find it very peculiar. But first of all, I think I can say I have never believed in this East German identity. You remember that shortly before things happened, there was a very important piece by the then ideologist of the SED, Reinhold, in which he said that unless East Germany was socialist, it had no *raison d'être*. That was then considered a very interesting statement, and was much discussed. But to me it was a very surprising statement indeed, because I had always thought that if there was any

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raison d'être for East Germany, it was geopolitical rather than ideological. So, since already at that time it was quite clear that socialism had no future, what in my view Reinhold was really doing, was to advocate reunification without knowing it. That is my first point on East Germany.

Point two: it is true that, in comparison with the other ex-satellite countries, there is in East Germany a much larger group of middle-of-the-road or halfway-house people. Indeed, the East German *Neues Forum* is much more social-democratic, or democratic-socialist, or reformist-socialist than the forces that have appeared in Hungary or elsewhere. But I suspect that, come the elections, most of these middle-of-the-roaders will be swept away. Actually, I am convinced that one of the great concerns of 1990 will be an enormous swing of the pendulum towards the right, in all the East European countries. In 1990 we are going to have elections in all these countries, and it is easy to forecast that there will be a substantial success of what we call the right. When this happens, the enthusiasm of Western intellectuals will obviously cease. But I do not regard this as an aberration; actually I regard this as perfectly normal and understandable. A real question will at that stage be posed: will the democratic institutions in these different countries be strong enough to prevent this push to the right from going overboard and swinging outside the democratic consensus? I think it is perfectly bearable for Hungary to have a right wing government for a few years as long as that government does not establish a military dictatorship, or something like it.

E *I understand your point, as far as an extremely right wing economic*
I *policy is concerned. But I do not understand what would be the need for*
establishing a dictatorship, if popular consensus is there.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - This movement towards the extreme right will certainly be, in part, in the field of economic policy, but I think there will also be elements of nationalism, anti-semitism, and intolerance.

E *This you might well have without a dictatorship.*
I

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Of course you might. A move to the extreme right can take many different forms. All I am saying is I hope the pendulum will not swing outside the democratic consensus, as might well happen in Romania. I do not really think it will necessarily happen in all the other Central European countries, but in some of them this is a real possibility. I do not believe, for

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instance, that the present East German situation is a very settled one, and I imagine that by the spring we might be confronted with a very different and serious one.

E *Let us now come to the question of the EEC. This is a very relevant one*
I *because the reunification of Germany casts serious doubts on the possibility of setting in motion the process of political unification of the EEC.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Not necessarily. You see, when I speak of a united Germany I am not thinking of a great German Reich, but of a greater Federal Republic. Now, the EEC already has a problem with the Federal Republic; a problem that is too frequently overseen. Even before any possible enlargement to Eastern Germany is taken into account, the Federal Republic has become too strong, massively too strong. It has got an enormous balance of payments surplus; its currency calls the tune. Everyone now knows that monetary union does not really mean a process of the merging of the member countries in a supranational entity, but a simple *Anschluss* of the rest of Western Europe to the area of the German mark. Actually, economic unification would for the moment, for a few years, dampen this process. It would lead to a decline in the *per capita* GNP of a unified Germany—for a while. After that, however, it would probably come up again, and take off to new heights. All this having been said, however, it is quite true that the strength of Germany in the EEC already poses problems.

E *What you mean is that the preoccupations for the consequences of a*
I *unified Germany on the movement towards a more integrated Europe are excessive?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Yes, they seem to me totally exaggerated. The complications created by the unification of Germany, by an enlargement of the Federal Republic to include what is today the GDR, would only be a relatively small addition to an already existing problem.

E *You do not think that the recent failure of the Schengen Agreement is a*
I *signal of more similar failures in the future? In the end the Schengen case could be considered very symbolic. Here we had five EEC countries—the hard core of the original Common Market, trying to implement free circulation amongst them through the creation of a common external border, and the attempt failing because in the end the Bonn Government found it*

inacceptable that the common external border should coincide with the German-German divide.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I do not share this interpretation. And I am indeed convinced that the main reason why the signing of the Schengen Agreement had to be postponed is that there are, among the five countries involved, two different and incompatible views of the relationship between the citizen and the police. The French prefer police control within the country. Others, including myself, prefer control at the border. The French tradition is that the police have the right to turn people out of their beds at any time, while—not to mention the reluctance of the British before the very idea of being obliged to carry an ID—in some other countries there is a preference for strict border control associated with freedom once one is inside. I personally share this second approach, and believe it is not only preferable in terms of personal liberty, but also less costly.

E *This is a very interesting point and an original interpretation of the crisis of the Schengen process. But let me now move to the third question, about West Germany and the impact of changes in the international situation on its domestic politics. Until recently, in the Federal Republic the SPD had the role of initiating policies that in the end also the others were obliged to follow. Now there seems to be serious problems. Moreover, the SPD was, in a way, a nationalistic party.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - That is more complicated. The SPD was nationalistic in an early period of its postwar history. It was anti-American, and it has somewhat remained so. But in recent years it has quite clearly been the party of the two German states. In international affairs the SPD had become a kind of "Brezhnev" party, which insisted on a two state system in Germany within a stable two-pact system in Europe and the world. The Socialists were the party of Helsinki, the party of keeping things as they were. They have established close relations with the SED, I refer to this joint committee with the SED. And as late as six months ago, they were still making high-sounding statements on how no change was thinkable in the DDR without the SED. Everything would have to go through the SED. The SED would have to be the agent, and so forth.

Quite recently they have clearly moved away from this rather untenable position, which defined them totally out of the events of 1989. So they are

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When the sleigh goes too fast

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf

rather pathetic. I just read a piece about Germany in the *New York Review of Books*, in which Gordon Craig describes how a leading German Social Democrat at a conference in Harvard in October 1989, I repeat, in October 1989, when asked what would happen if East Germany opened the Wall, said that if it did, we in the West would have to rebuild it. And that was very much an indication of where the West German left stood until recently.

E *On the other side, we have Kohl who is now emerging as the symbol of*
I *moderate nationalism.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Since I am giving you an absolutely candid interview, I will not conceal my feeling that Chancellor Kohl does not know exactly what he is doing. He is fumbling; as always, he is doing one thing today and then another tomorrow. And then he suddenly forgets to inform his good friend Mitterrand of what he is going to do, because he is doing that for purely domestic reasons, and so on. It is not a very clever policy. But it is in effect quite a good one, because he is letting things happen and at the same time shows to the other Europeans and the United States that he is not interested in a powerful German nation which upsets the apple cart. I believe it is, in effect, although not in design, quite a clever policy.

E *How would you explain this constant preoccupation with avoiding*
I *speaking of the German-Polish border?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Somebody in his party has said that they are going to lose the next election if he says that. So he uses this idiotic language, not realising that it is one of the best ways to prevent German reunification. All you have to do, if you wish to prevent German reunification, is to be ambiguous about the German-Polish border. Or perhaps he does realise it. But this would mean crediting him of being more machiavellian than he is. No. I think it is simple electoral politics. And it is quite interesting that von Weizsäcker should have gone as far as he has done in this respect now, and made quite unambiguous statements as president.

E *Now I have a couple of questions about the possibility of comparing*
I *1989 with the great revolutionary years of the past—1789 or 1848.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - I am thinking a great deal over this problem and with a great deal of concern. All the revolutions of history have turned sour. It is true,

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there is the exception of the American so-called revolution. But I have never regarded it as a revolution; it was a war of liberation from a colonial rule with features not really comparable with those of a revolution. Revolutions always go through this period of euphoria, in which one can believe that the people are now actually ruling, in which the king becomes a citizen like the others and swears allegiance to the new constitution. Also the Revolution in France was very peaceful for the first few months. It was only in 1791 that things really turned sour and dreadful. To define the events of these last months in Central-Eastern Europe, Timothy Garton Ash has coined the term "refolution" which is a combination of "reform" and "revolution". He now talks about "revolutions-transformations". By that he means that most of what happens is set in motion from the top, and indeed there is a considerable amount of continuity in the succession of events, even though things change quite rapidly, but the Krenzes and Adamic's are burned quite rapidly. I do not quite know, I have not made up my mind what this phenomenon is, but I still fear that things might turn sour, which means that it could become impossible for governments to get things under control and therefore you would get strong pressure towards either radicalisation of the revolution, or a re-establishment of order by force.

E *Do you still consider this comparison feasible, in the sense that this is a*
I *revolution?*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, I would not say that this is totally non-feasible. I have not yet been able to clarify my ideas completely. But certainly, it has many traits of historical revolutions.

E *And what about comparisons with 1815, when the French people elected*
I *the Chambre Introuvable and the French Revolution, having gone through all its phases, had in the end become the Reaction. It is rather shocking to see the people of Budapest applauding Otto von Habsburg.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Well, as I said earlier, there is every sign that the first elections will shift most of these countries way beyond the "reasonable centre" which has initially taken over. It would, of course, be rather paternalistic of us to say: "Don't go too far, stop in the middle, don't ask for too much at once, take your time". Who are we to say that?

I have recently re-read Von Hayeck's *Road to Serfdom*. In this very gloomy book written in 1943-44, Von Hayek wrote that the Allies could well defeat the

Nazis, but if socialist governments came to power in the allied countries, then nothing would have been gained. He predicted a long period of state control, a predominance of powerful socialist parties. Well, what we are witnessing now is the undoing of the 45 year trend he had foreseen. In fact, throughout the 1980's this undoing has taken place in the West, in which the trend was much milder. Now, it could be the turn of the USSR and of the countries in which Stalin imposed the Soviet system. So I see why you pose these questions about the possibility of a comparison with 1789, or 1815. I have been thinking about it, but I have not been able to make up my mind yet. Although there are signs that point in that direction, I am still hesitant to venture fully into these historical parallels. I am sorry not to be clearer. Incidentally, if I were clearer I would write my book—the book the Italian press has been announcing.

E *My last question will be about Gorbachev's visit to the Vatican. I have to*
I *confess I am rather irritated by the fact that this first ever meeting between a Secretary General of the CPSU is labelled "historical". To me, Gorbachev on that occasion appeared rather like those people who are all their life Communist or anti-clericals but call a priest when they are on the point of dying. However, in yesterday's Le Figaro the Frenchman D'Ormesson goes as far as to write: "L'Année 1797 s'était placée sous le signe de la rupture. La révolution dans la révolution s'est placée, en 1989, sous le signe de la rencontre." ... "Le symbole de cette rencontre reste l'entrevue à Rome du chef incontesté du communisme mondial et du chef de l'Eglise Catholique, du successeur de Stalin et du successeur de Saint Pierre...qui travaillent l'un et l'autre pour l'éternité".*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - That is still the language of yesterday, that is the language of systems. I would go half-way with him. At a conference which I chaired in Hamburg the other day, André Fontaine, the editor of *Le Monde*, talked about what he called the reunification of language, and I think this is a very important fact. It is wonderful to be at a conference at which a Russian—a prominent Russian, a member of Parliament—says: "Don't talk about democracy and human rights as if they were Western, they are genuine human values to which we all subscribe". This I regard as much more significant than the meeting between Gorbachev and the Pope. They are accepting now that these are values which are as applicable to them as they are to us, and we can therefore talk the same language. Political culture is going very far. I would not go beyond language. It is like Gerasimov inventing the Sinatra Doctrine; this is something which we immediately understand; now for a Russian presidential

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spokesman to make this statement shows that he has become part of a universe of discourse which is unified and we are certainly beginning to have in Europe a universe of discourse in which we can speak freely in the same language without all the dreadful hang-ups which we have had over the years. That is more important than a specific encounter.

E *What about the role of the Pope? The Pope and the Church have grown*
I *and have come to the centre of the stage in a way that has not been seen for a long time. At least that is the impression one gets.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - On the contrary, I think the Church has done its job, especially in Poland, and is now moving away from the centre of the stage because the next phase is not one of moral opposition but one of almost an economic policy; the job has been done. I think, on the contrary, that the Pope and the Church are moving away from the centre of the stage.

E *I agree with this, of course. This has happened for instance in East*
I *Germany, where as soon as the Wall was opened, the churches were empty and the people were in the streets. But you hear now and then voices that say that the failure of communism is the failure of one attempt at modernity and that this failure marks the beginning of a post-modern age.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - No, we will still live in the modern age. I do not think modernity has failed in the West. Communism is for sure the failure of an alternative modernity, so that we now know that there is only one, which is the modernity of the Enlightenment, market systems and of the open society; so there is no need for post-modernity which was a luxury of the overfed intellectuals of the 1980's. What we are really talking about is modernity: classical values of free countries, the constitution of liberty.

E *But in your book *Reisen nach innen und außen* you have yourself written*
I *about the great number of marginals that have been created in the modernisation process, both in the developed and underdeveloped countries.*

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - Absolutely, but these are problems which can be solved within the framework of modern society. I believe that my book ends with the statement which is perfectly applicable: when all is said and done, modern civil societies are not such a bad place to be as long as we do not loose our zest for improvement.

E So you do not share what Max Weber wrote in the last pages of *The Protestant Ethic* saying that at the end of modernity there will be either the appearing of new prophets or a revival of old prophets.

Sir Ralf Dahrendorf - My approach is completely different; I do not think the age of modernity has come to its close, and I do not think modernity is the end of history either, because I do not think history can be reduced to just these wretched systems, socialism or capitalism. This would be a rather short-term and simplified notion of history.