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## THE POLYGLOT'S SHELF

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### *Broken Mirror*

Jacques  
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SMOUTS  
*La France face  
au Sud,*  
Karthala,  
Paris, 1989

Of all the Western countries, France is the one that prides itself on having best understood the needs of the LDC's. But, according to the authors of **France towards the South**, the idea that French authorities and public opinion have of the role of their country in the Third World "is pure narcissism". The central argument of this study of the complex set of relations that Paris has kept its most of former colonial dependencies (plus some of other European countries) is that "the mirror, in which France loved to look at its own virtue, is now broken".



In the first section of this lengthy and fact-ridden scholarly book, the Authors draw a critical analysis of France's bilateral aid. This, as they make abundantly clear, has been more aimed at maintaining French political, cultural and linguistic influence, than at setting in motion an economic development process in the concerned LDCs. It was more a foreign policy instrument than an international cooperation

one. If the paradoxical side of this behaviour is that very frequently it turned out to be not even in the interest of France, the main point is that it never really profited the recipient countries. Actually, the Authors believe that French bilateral aid all through the early 80s is partly responsible for the "misdevelopment" of these countries, because of its insufficiency in the field of education, the constant preoccupation of keeping a group of client countries to France, and the survival of a French Franc monetary zone.

The second part of the book is devoted to the efforts of France's diplomatic and scholarly communities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problems of the South, especially with reference to non-alignment and to the need for a new and different international economic order. But this attention was merely theoretical, and was never converted into a different policy approach, not even in the political field, where France, thirty years after de-colonisation was completed, still stubbornly tends

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to keep the *status quo* that was established at that time. Although the Leftist coalition that went to power in the early Eighties had proclaimed having the intention of "decolonizing development cooperation", in practice, the Socialist Government was also obliged, under the pressure of powerful bureaucratic and domestic economic interests, to stick to the old policy .

The dramatic situation of the Third World in the Eighties, and the explosion of the debt crisis have shown all the limits and the ambiguities of such an attitude. The debt crisis, together with the spread of protectionism and the decline in development aid from the advanced countries, is the main object of the analysis of the last part of this study.



The position of France in the ex-colonial world is undoubtedly very peculiar. Through a sophisticated network of cultural, economic and military cooperation agreements, and most notably through the creation of a common West-African currency structurally linked to the French Franc (and therefore the European monetary system), Paris has indeed succeeded in keeping its hands on part of the sovereignty of its former colonial dependencies to an extent that Britain, in spite of the Commonwealth, would have not even

dreamed of. And, of course, to an extent, that is unthinkable for the smaller ex-colonial powers, or for the countries such as Germany or Italy that had lost their colonies in a previous period.

As a direct consequence of the peculiarity of their object of study, the research of the two French Authors ends up having all the complexities and uniqueness of French policy towards the South. But despite this, the methodology that the Authors have developed for this occasion is so systematic, detailed and all-encompassing that the usefulness of this book goes far beyond the objective interest of the French case. In other words, the book provides highly instructive reading for the understanding of the North-South relationship in general, viz. for the understanding of the development cooperation of the other advanced market-economy countries, and of the EEC as a separate actor. The bibliography is also extremely rich.

*La France face au Sud* is therefore not only a must for all those interested in France's foreign relations, and for scholars of the development aid policy of those countries that try to follow the French model, but also an extremely useful working tool for all those interested in Third World affairs. And it seems highly advisable that the same Authors, or other authors with the same methodology, extend

their analysis beyond the limits of the French case.



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Federica Lolli-Ghetti

## A Question of Identity

**Christian KROCKOW;**  
*Die Deutschen in ihrem Jahrhundert, 1890—1990,*  
Rowohlt Verlag,  
Reinbek, 1990

The continent is quaking, yet this platitude has become reality: the German question is open and dramatically contemporary. The road the Germans will choose is a question which is shaking the world, and the foundations of the architecture of Europe have also moved to centre stage of world attention. Whether optimistic or uneasy, confident or anxious, the actors of world politics are all magically attracted by the question as to what Germany is to become. Meanwhile the longing of the Germans for freedom is finding its way under growing unity, and—once again—the focus of European history has become Germany.

Another commonplace of political conversation is also turning into observable reality: that the Germans themselves—sooner or later—will decide as to their organisational structure and their

future. They will have to respect their European responsibilities, of course. And thus the dialectical unity of Germany and Europe together limit margins for action on all sides.

The Germans will not be able to answer the question as to their future either unconditionally or arbitrarily, for the present has become a historical issue, and contemporary German thinking on the subject is oriented by the experiences and legacies of the past. The question as to who the Germans are leads to the further question as to where we come from, and it is this particular mixture of historical awareness, comprehension of the present, and expectations for the future, which influences both their self-consciousness and their feeling for the present time.



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In his book, on **The Germans in Their Century, 1890-1990**, Count von Krockow devotes his attention to the key issues of political culture in Germany. He skilfully begins with a reference, pregnant with meaning for the present moment, to the date November 9, 1989:

"November 9, 1989, marks a turning point in German history: it is an end and a beginning at the same time. Perhaps one day it will become a day of German national celebration. Thus it would always be there to remind us of a new national self-consciousness, and of the only fortunate revolution we have had: the people peacefully and unwaveringly fought their way to freedom, and what they demolished were not only the walls protecting despotism, but the symbols the despotic power holders clung to, and presented as being for the welfare of the people, even though they did nothing but damage."

It is with this backdrop, then, that readers will hold their breath at this book about the history of Germany's quest for itself. A narrator of some rank has taken up his pen here, and with linguistic virtuosity has translated the systematic nature of sociological and historical analysis into the vibrating life of tangible reality. Occasionally, the reader might check whether he is not perhaps just a little over-stirred by the

rhetoric the writer has indulged in, as in the example:

"Here the Germans would have willingly settled out of the mainstream of history, a nation symbolised by the nightcap, the gnome or the Baroque angel; the notion of German *Gemütlichkeit*, on final analysis, is one of their untranslatable concepts, just as *Kindergarten*, *Bildung*, *Weltanschauung*, *Blitzkrieg* and *Endlösung*. Yet it is not only the German instinct for efficiency which has made tranquillity so difficult to achieve, it is their fear. They have never trusted existing conditions, nor felt at ease with daily imperfection and injustice; tomorrow, they have always thought, everything might end, whether by war, natural disaster, economic crash or whatever. The German personality has thus always been a jarring combination of longing for an idyll and expectations of doom, their fears having generated turbulence and movement, though it has never been clear to what end. Whether November 9, 1989, has put an end to all this, and actually generated a new self-consciousness, is a question which only the future will answer."

This is all true—yet the great scope of this text make the many smaller realities seem remarkably distant.



Krockow narrates the history of the Germans as a succession of intellectual worlds and political ideas. He leaves nothing out: glitter and misery; self-doubt and arrogance; mania and sensible diligence. It will surprise no one, then, that he begins with Wilhelm II. And where other writers would have got bogged down in a swamp of statistics when describing the transition from an agricultural state to an industrialised society, Krockow quotes the divided feelings formerly captured in a song by Ferdinand Freiligrath and sung by emigrants: *Wie wird das Bild der alten Tage durch eure Träume glänzend wehn! Gleich einer stillen, frommen Sage wird es euch vor der Seele stehn.* (How the memory of the old days glitters through your dreams! Like a quiet, holy tale it stands there, open to your soul)

Progress under Kaiser Wilhelm was striking—yet a society without self-consciousness was the result, and hence the spiritual conditions for romantic outbursts. And here, in a fashion, Krockow finds a *leitmotiv* for his preoccupation with German thinking: the tendency towards spiritual rupture with reality, and a predisposition towards ideal revolution against reality. Idylls, longing for an intact identity, hopes for an uncomplicated social community, and dreams of harmony: these are the feelings Krockow posits behind the Ger-

man state of mind, and which will warm the hearts of some readers while alienating others.

The conflict between community and society is then dealt with. From the struggle for the “real” and “actual”, and from the dream of the “true”, it is only a short step to catastrophe. The German national state is remarkably unsure as to exactly what its style, its strategies, its presentation and its role should be, and Krockow is aware of the explanation:

“Germany lacked a national *milieu*. Religion did not unite, as in Poland or in Ireland, but separated, and there were no pervasive symbols of citizen self-consciousness like those which characterised the other Western nations. There even lacked an undisputed capital with its centralising effects; Berlin came late—too late—while the National Assembly of 1848 met in the ancient coronation city of Frankfurt, and the choice of Vienna was only renounced with the famous 1866 decision. Taken as a whole, the variety of *milieux* could have been a rich legacy to Germany, yet the fact that that this rich variety was neither substituted nor dominated by any truly national *milieu* proved to be a social problem in the era of industrialisation, and a political problem during the development of the national state.”

In a large, second section Krockow then depicts the German

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drama of 1914 to 1945: the motives and justifications, the war myths, the stab-in-the-back legend, Berlin, the quest for spiritual welfare, and the final solution. The German dream and the German trauma are brought to life, yet here and there the reader will wonder whether everything is so coherently explicable—even catastrophe and perversion.

Krockow's account gathers speed with the postwar period. But it loses however its depth, and its intellectuality gets desultory and hesitant. The reader can detect the pressure of the timing—the recent events in Eastern Germany—under which the book was written. And the focus is significantly narrowed down on to developments in the Western part of Germany. The narration also assumes not infrequent passages with a sharper undertone. With some precision, Krockow elaborates this decisive change in focus on history from a political point of view:

“The return of the citizen logically corresponded to the way home to Europe. The juxtaposition of ‘German *Geist*’ and West Europe was no longer to be the determining factor, and gave way to a sense of inner and outer belonging to the West.”

From this, Krockow jumps to the generation conflict and the student revolts, and his postwar period thus counts as a narrative

torso, even at his best. It is impossible to ignore how this chapter is coloured by the profound preoccupation of the author with regard to the capacity of the Germans to political *ratio*. Will they be in a position to integrate their complex identity constructively into Europe in reasonable proportion? Krockow's doubts are linked to his hopes that this fear might be allayed by future use of politics and history. Yet there can be no doubt about the fact that the damage suffered by German identity rankles on: historical debts, the catastrophe of National Socialism, the long-denied unity of the nation.

The political and intellectual discontent of our epoch, rather like a spiritual seismograph, shows that the question of German identity is not an external factor, isolated in the comfortable niches of the status quo, or thrown up through lack of patience and prospects. It is clear that the Germans are also possessed by the longing to have an unsoiled identity. Krockow concludes his book with a glance at the future of German ambivalence:

“In the end, since their failure, the Germans have found their way back to Europe. But their revolution has involved a terrible sacrifice of victims, and for the latter there is no return home. There remains only memory, and with this a warning: no one, not even our own human nature,

guarantees us a path into life; we must proceed by ourselves, perhaps towards an aim, and it is not clear how important it is whether we reach this aim, or whether we meet up with an abyss on the way."

In this short conclusion, then, Krockow summarises his key ideas about German history: failure, Europe, revolution, sacrifice, abyss. Whatever consequences we draw from these cultural experiences, it is on these

that the German path into the future will be based—for good or for bad as the case may be.

**Christian Krockow, Professor of Political Science since 1961. Since 1969 he is mostly a political writer and essayist. His most important books are: *Nationalism as a German Problem, Munich, 1974* and *The Journey to Pomerania, Stuttgart, 1985***

Werner Weidenfeld

### *In the Melée*

**Marcel MERLE, Christine de MONTCLOS**  
*L'Eglise dans les relations internationales,*  
Le Centurion,  
Paris, 1989

"The Pope? How many divisions?" Who today would dare to repeat this ironical remark ascribed to Stalin in 1945. No one questions the role played by the Catholic Church in international relations. However, many people wonder about the methods used by the Church in order to fulfil its role. In what areas of international relations does it play a role and with what results? Two catholic academics, Marcel Merle and Christine de Montclos have thrown some light on these questions in a major work they have recently published on **The Church and International Relations**, an important book in clarifying the principles and working of the Church.

Without identifying the Catholic Church with its Roman centre, the Authors initially outline the quite special nature of the Vatican City, which associates traits typical of a state to those of multinational organization.

For eleven centuries (from 756 to 1870) the Pope was a veritable Head of State. Since the Lateran Agreements (1929) he has been the sovereign of a small country comprising 44 hectares, the "Holy See", enjoying the majority of legal prerogatives of any modern state. Thus the Church, to support its international role, has at its disposal a diplomatic network larger than that of many other countries. The

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"nuntii" are at the same time the representatives of the Pope to local Churches and the ambassadors of the Holy See to the respective Heads of State. In 35 countries they remain, by law, the senior members of the diplomatic corps.

But it is above all due to its now universal establishment that the Church plays so important a role on the international scene. Previously essentially European, the flock of the Catholic Church has become considerably internationalised within one century, so that today Europeans constitute only 34 per cent of its 800 million faithful. Its future is to be found in Africa and in the Americas, where by the year 2000 eight and fifty per cent of Catholics, respectively, will be living. Present throughout the world, the Church is, after the UN, the most "multinational" institution in existence on our planet.



In the contemporary world the teachings and action of the Catholic Church on an international level essentially regard three areas: peace, development and human rights.

The struggle for peace is something the Church considers among its main responsibilities. In this respect, during the the last World War, the attitude of Pious XII

was the object of numerous controversies. The two Authors speak dispassionately of this episode, considering the case that has been raised against this particular Pope to be based on unsubstantiated assumptions. Nevertheless they recognize the possibility that by remaining "above the *mêlée*" he gave the regrettable impression of "holding the scales even between aggressor and victim". According to Merle and de Montclos, the traditional Catholic doctrine of the "just war" was thus seriously undermined. Having abstained from declaring Hitler's aggression "unjust", to what later war could the moral authority of Rome apply its classical criteria?

The arrival of weapons of mass destruction only reinforced in successive Popes the conviction that no war in the future could be declared just. The cry of Pious XII in 1944 to wage "war on war", is echoed by Paul VI's UN appeal of 1965 for "war never again", while John XXIII in *Pacem in terris* (1963) avoided all mention of the expression "just war", affirming that war could no longer be, "in our atomic era, the proper means of seeking justice from the violation of rights". The Council and pontifical texts nevertheless admit that recourse to violence is justified in two instances: "legitimate defence" against an obvious attack and "resistance to all forms of tyranny" that



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seriously undermine human dignity. However, in each case, some acts (torture, genocide, mass attacks on civilians) remain immoral.

Notably familiar with is the solemn condemnation pronounced by Vatican II of any act of war involving "the destruction of whole towns and vast regions along with their inhabitants". The nuclear deterrent, to the extent that its credibility depends on the threat of committing such acts, poses fearful moral problems to the Catholic conscience. This is why the Council, the Popes and the Episcopal Conferences (re-examining the problem in 1983 in controversial documents) accept it only provisionally as a "lesser evil", and on two conditions: that it be used as a stage in the process of disarmament, and that other methods are actively sought to guarantee peace.



John Paul II's recent Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, published to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum progressio*, stresses the importance the Church attaches to the problem of social justice and economic development of the less advanced countries. To briefly touch upon this argument, it suffices to restate the two uniquely theological foundations of this vigorous ecclesiastical engagement: "God destined the earth and all it contains to the use of all men and all

peoples, in order to ensure that the goods of the earth flow into the hands of each and every man, according to the rules of law, which are inseparable from charity." (*Gaudium et spes*, 69).

Having placed this principle of the "universal distribution of goods" at the heart of its social doctrine since Leon XIII, it is evident that the Church does not find its inspiration in some form of modern egalitarian ideology, but indeed in God's very design for humanity. As today "the social question has become global" (Paul VI), it is also on the international level that Christians must work towards justice: for the disciples of Christ, solidarity with the poorest of the poor is not a matter of free choice: it is a moral obligation.

The Church is thus pressed to commit itself in certain specific areas of North-South relations. And an example lies in the document *Justitia et Pax*, on international debt.



The emphasis that the highest ranks of the Catholic hierarchy give to the problem of human rights show that gone are the days when theologians contrasted "the rights of God" to "the alleged rights of man". And yet, considering the importance Christians accord to the fight for human rights today, a suspicion remains: have they not suc-

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coumbed to a mere trend? Is their commitment solid and durable?

After emphasising that the foundations of this commitment were laid by Pious XII and especially by John XXIII and the Council, the two authors stress the essential contribution of the present Pope, notably through his Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1979). In their eyes, it is "the charter of the pontificate and perhaps a document whose importance in the history of the Church is possibly as great as *Rerum novarum* was in its time". In it, they discern three objectives.

First of all, while in the post-Council period a great number of Catholics engaged here and there in social and political actions—often in the name of secular ideologies—John Paul II maintains that any Christian action in the world must be based uniquely in the mystery of the incarnation through which "the Son of God united himself in some way with every human being". The Encyclical therefore constitutes rather a call to order with a dual meaning: a call for both a return to orthodoxy, and for the reorganisation of forces that had become too dispersed.

Secondly, whereas human rights have for a long time constituted a barrier between the Church and the world, John Paul II would like to transform them in a bridge of communication. Following the

broadminded approach of John XXIII and Paul VI on this point, he vigorously approves and supports the efforts of the United Nations in defining, establishing and implementing respect of human rights.

Thirdly, the theme of human rights would finally allow the Church to organize and unify its own social doctrine which is dispersed into too many different areas: problems of the workers, of development, of peace, of liberation and the like. For John Paul II, any argument in favour of peace or justice falls back on one single principle: respect of human rights. Whereas for Paul VI peace depended above all on development ("development, the new name for peace"), for the current Pope it depends rather on human rights: "the warring spirit rises and matures where inalienable rights of man are violated".

Both authors indicate the risks of such a position: will the specificity of the Catholic stance on human rights be noticed if it resembles too closely that of the UN? Are Christians sufficiently aware of the fact that the expression "human rights" holds a very different meaning for all those who refer to it?

What ever the case may be, the Church shows through its work that its commitment to human rights is a serious one. On the diplomatic level, the Holy See

has played an active part in many a conference on humanitarian law and participated—as a European State—in the Helsinki process. On his journeys the Pope never ceases his plea for a better welcoming of refugees and immigrants, as for true respect of each and every culture. It was also in the name of human rights that the Bishops in the Philippines and Haiti justified their decisive commitment to the fall of two dictatorships.



To conclude, Marcel Merle and Christine de Montclos note that it is difficult to evaluate the real influence of the Church in international relations. Apart from the specific, very particular cases of diplomatic action on the part of the Holy See (as the Beagle Canal mediation between Chile and Argentina), this influence is above all exercised through a slow transformation of mentalities, hardly measurable in scientific terms. They nevertheless have brought about two notable developments.

Among non-Catholics, the appeal of the Church has grown. The media strategy of John Paul II in this area has proved quite fruitful. One can however wonder whether “the uncontested advantages of his popularity prevail over the risk of the public’s dilut-

ing or oversimplifying of the message”.

For the Catholics, the teachings of the Church have contributed to motivating their generosity towards certain international causes—especially in the Third World—while pushing them to a major of prudence against extremism.

It is inevitable, in this brief review of such a major work to overlook many essential aspects, notably the active support given by the Church to the idea of a supranational authority of arbitration and cooperation. Yet this is only another reason to strongly recommend the reading of this work to all those who wish to gain a greater understanding of our world and of the Church’s actions towards transforming it.

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**Christine Alix de Montclos is Engineer of Researches at CNRS, *Centre d'études et de recherches internationales of the Fondation National de Sciences Politiques*.**

Christian Mellon

## *Tests of power*

Since the outstanding comparative studies on the political systems of the superpowers (Brzezinski/Huntington, for instance), the comparison between the USA and Soviet Union has been one of the great themes of international political analysis. The interplay of their world policies, with the antagonism between their systems, is a fascinating subject. As a result of the recent revolutionary outbursts within Europe, the roles of the superpowers are about to undergo far-reaching changes, and this increases the stimulus to observe the development patterns and rivalling structures in superpower relations over the 1980s. Which are the constants of the new phase of cooperation between the USA and the Soviet Union? Which structural alternatives do the superpowers have before them, given the premises of this change? The answers to these questions will tell whether the conclusions of the renowned Frankfurt specialist on American affairs and peace researcher Ernst-Otto Czempiel possess historical justification, or whether they simply define the determinants of new, future power conflicts with regard to the world order.

Czempiel's latest book has proved unusual, as its author lo-

cates it in the unclear no-man's land between a contemporary political and historical reference text, and an analytical manual of political science and sociology. Czempiel attempts to go beyond the range of his own field, insofar as he combines his theoretical projections for the analysis of international relations—his map grid—with an outline of American world policy from Carter to Bush. And he candidly concedes the motive behind this strategy: "This book was written in order to be read" This unassuming assertion will give food for thought to the reader who has carefully read the preface, with its thanks to the great German research institutes whose grants made the book possible.

Other than as suggested by the subtitle, Czempiel concentrates his analysis on the aims, actors and structures of American world policy, while Soviet actions appear as "only static counter measures". The brief main title **Test of Power**, however, concretely describes the basic subject of the book, and Czempiel's starting point is the fundamental power competition between the superpowers which determines the actions of both sides, also with respect to third parties. Central to the author's analysis is then to trace out this basic pattern

**Ernst-Otto  
CZEMPIEL;**  
*Machtprobe.  
Die USA und  
die Sowjetunion  
in den achtziger  
Jahren,*  
**C.H. Beck,  
Munich, 1989.**

of bi-polar East-West conflict on the American side, in all the latter's strategic, structural and personal features. Czempiel's main conclusion is that the Carter administration allowed the Soviet Union to achieve military parity (an achievement which took place during the 1970s), but attempted to prevent its political parity. During the Reagan era, on the other hand, the USA changed and tried to counter the political parity of the Soviet Union by altering the military balance.



The organisation of the six main chapters thus reflects this scheme, only the first dealing with the years 1976 to 1980, the period when Carter held office. Carter's Soviet policy, his human rights strategy and his world policy, along with the challenge posed to the United States by Brezhnev's armaments and territorial expansion policies, are thus seen as the historical starting point behind the Reagan 'regime', examined in the subsequent chapters.

The second main chapter illustrates the foundations of domestic policy, social policy and ideological premises behind the Reagan administration. Czempiel pithily describes the latter's policy of confrontation and the armament strategy during the first period of office, also from the point of view of their

domestic consequences. For his first two years, Reagan appears as a revolutionary, shaping out a new role for federal power within the American system. In foreign policy, the federal government had to represent effectively American interests and the superiority of the USA; it was not a question "... of changing the Soviet Union, but of weakening it". In domestic policy, federal power and competence had to be cut back, and defence costs had to be met through restrictions in other fields. With this strategy, then, Reagan attempted to establish a "social-political state-empire".

Further on in the book Czempiel describes—and this is certainly a credit to the well structured treatment of his material—the change which has taken place in environmental requirements. He gives a concrete sense to subjects such as the decline in social consensus behind the Reagan leadership, the sensitive reactions of the American legislative organs, the economic interests of both the export industry and the agricultural lobby, and on to the changes in Soviet policy with respect to American challenges, from Andropov to Gorbachev (in the brief third chapter). Both the subsequent chapters then deal with Reagan's second period of office, the tendency towards arms control and disarmament with simultaneous development of armament, as also the global

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strategy behind the limitation of Soviet influence in the Third World through the projection of American power.

At the end of the volume, Czempiel summarises the costs and successes of the Reagan administration, without concealing his admiration for the importance (perhaps even radical nature) and fortune of American world policy in this phase. At the same time, however, he does critically examine the consequences of these years in the field of domestic policy. The American system of government is heavily influenced by participation, and this has a balancing effect, yet despite this fact the future presidents will be tied down to a certain extent. Less effective has been the military orientation of American foreign policy in the Third World. Czempiel clearly demonstrates that successes in this field have proved less significant, and have cost more, in comparison to the Carter strategy. He thus refers the reader to the relatively favourable circumstances in which the USA—as in the bombing of Libya—made use of military force.



In this book, Czempiel has found a method of narration which makes politics tangible, and even in part gripping, without leaving the reader unclear as to the scien-

tific and theoretical pretensions of the author. This all has its price nonetheless and the 350 pages or so of text nonetheless offer little extra room for the necessary accompanying information on the American system of government, or on the reactions of the countries who are the objects of American world policy; there is little on the changes in the Soviet Union, and even less on the American allies in Western Europe. The non-specialist will therefore not fully comprehend the changes which Czempiel sees as the turning point in American policy—1983 and 1984. The otherwise carefully organised argumentation is occasionally flat, as when Carter's security adviser Brzezinski is described as the "bad guy", or when the nomination of UN representative Kirkpatrick is traced back to the publication of one single article.

Finally, the language used in the book will require the intended wide circle of readers to consult both a dictionary of political science, and an edition of Czempiel's previous volume on international policy and conflict, as a consequence of his individual technical jargon. Czempiel is not to blame for this, however. He has succeeded in offering a noteworthy analysis—from both a specialist and didactic point of view—of the American answers to the power conflict with the Soviet Union.

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the few specialists in the Theory of Foreign Policy and International Relations. Among his books, the most important is *Internationale Politik: ein Konfliktmodell*, 1981

Josef Janning

### *A Man, a Country*

Pierre  
MELANDRI,  
*Reagan: Une  
biographie  
totale*,  
Editions  
Robert Laffont,  
Paris, 1988

How was it possible for a film actor to become president of the most important democracy in the world? This was what European observers asked themselves at the beginning of the last decade, with a mixture of incredulity and derision at the outcome of an electoral campaign that brought Ronald Reagan to the highest office in the most important Western democracy. After all, the United States' crucial role in world equilibria makes its system of political selection particularly vulnerable to the criticisms and worries of international public opinion, in particular those of countries in politico-military alliance with America. Yet, at the end of the decade, these same observers had little doubt that the film actor's presidency had been one of the most important in modern American history. Was this outcome an entirely unpredictable one?

Mélandri's *Reagan, a total biography* gives an answer from the

"inside". By means of a painstaking, well-crafted reconstruction of Reagan's political career, he shows how the success of the Reagan presidency was the wholly predictable result of a clever combination of instinct and ideology. With a journalistic slant to his analysis, Mélandri traces the making of a president in an America structurally modified in the last three decades by colossal technological processes, which have changed its political and cultural landscape. Reagan's career is a synthesis of American history from the 1930s to the present day, with its often haphazard contradictions and shifts of direction. Mélandri is not primarily concerned with the dynamics of the American political system, nor with the process by which it selects its leaders. His interest lies in the story of one such leader and the way in which it is representative of the country as a whole.



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It is important to keep this relationship in mind, because it helps to explain Reagan's formidable skill in staying tuned to the mood of the country, or at least of its majority, and in reflecting its ambiguities and its hopes. Thus, a biography of Reagan becomes the biography of the neo-conservative culture that has progressively taken over in America, replacing traditional New Deal liberalism and even more traditional elitist conservatism. Reagan's great merit as a politician was that he managed to give a mass basis to conservatism while combining it with the populism that was still very much alive in the country. This he was able to do because of his own particular political history. Of relatively humble origins, with an education gleaned from not particularly prestigious institutions, and with an early career in decidedly non-elite occupations (radio news-reader, film actor, trade unionist, public relations man), Reagan progressively developed, as well as his media skills, his sensitivity to the mood of the man in the street—especially his need to believe in the immutability of the American Dream.

Reagan's identification with the interests and ideology of big business, beckoned by his many years of work with General Electric as an entertainer, became explicit from the 1940s onwards. It merged with his embracing of

populist ideas like anti-taxation and his attacks on big government. Thus his overt and active anti-communism, which at times approached McCarthyism, was watered down by the communicative approach of an old-style Rooseveltian democrat. From this mix of conservative and populist doctrine stems Reagan's peculiar political career. A career which began "officially" with his appointment as Governor of California, America's most populous state, in 1966, continued with his re-election in 1970, moved towards its climax with the conquest of the White House in 1980 and reached its apogee with his landslide re-election of 1984. I use the term "officially" because, as Mélandri shows very well, Reagan's political career in fact began much earlier: with his trade union activities in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s and then his public relations work for General Electric during the 1950s. This experience enabled Reagan to refine his skills as a communicator and, with the help of his wife to build a close-knit network of personal contacts with wealthy businessmen and vociferous conservatively oriented associations.

As Mélandri points out, it was only in the 1960s (with the 1964 election to be precise) that the conditions were created for the rise of a new conservative ideol-



ogy, of which Reagan was a leading spokesman. The shift of the country's political centre of gravity to the southern and western states set off explosive white reaction against the integration policies of Kennedy and Johnson Democratic administrations. This reaction was made even more violent by the increased tax burden deriving from expenditure on new welfare policies ("War against Poverty") and by the armaments build-up consequent on America's increasing involvement in Vietnam. Unlike the traditional "moderate and enlightened" conservatism of the north-eastern states, represented by Nelson Rockefeller and others, the new conservatism which swept Reagan to the governorship of California and then to the White House was fed by that southern anti-establishment extremism long expressed by politicians like Barry Goldwater. However, unlike Goldwater, Reagan did not reduce his extremism to a mere "threat strategy" but transformed it into an acceptable current of opinion able to mobilise not only the frustrations of classes on the defensive, but also the ambitions and prejudices of other, very upwardly mobile classes and communities.

From this point of view, Reagan's two administrations between 1980 and 1988 were the outward expression of a changed power structure within American society

and politics, and his policies were designed to give an institutional basis to that change. Hence Reagan's successes and failures must be interpreted as the result, in many respects fortuitous, of a bitter conflict between a new strong neo-conservative coalition, on the rise but still lacking institutional resources, and a declining old New Deal democratic coalition, still firmly in control of important institutional resources. The clash between President and Congress, which from 1982 onwards and especially after the mid-term elections of 1986 marked Reagan's entire period in office, must be seen in terms of conflict between these two coalitions and, ultimately, of the particular political transition that the United States was and is still undergoing.



For these various reasons Reagan's career provides us with a significant mirror of the cultural and political changes in America. Mélandri has performed a useful task in examining these changes through the life of the man most closely identified with them. At the same time he has dispelled a number of prejudices concerning Reagan that have been current for too long on this side of the Atlantic. Few European commentators of the early 1980s interpreted Reagan's neo-conservatism as anything but backward. Mélan-

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dri's book, and this is to his credit, seems somehow emblematic of the shift in opinion that occurred at the end of the decade. Then, despite the budget deficit, the Iran-Contra affair and other factors, no one would have thought that America could return to the soothing pastures of American New Dealism. The Reagan decade had irrevocably changed the order of priorities on the public agenda, the terms of political discourse, the conditions of political legitimacy. If today the question is asked, "where is America going?", to provide an

answer we must necessarily start with Ronald Reagan.

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