

Languages English

Left? Right? Extreme Centre? What's Next?

Denisa Tomkova



Cristina Lucas, *La Liberté Raisonnée* (2009) Credit: The Akademie der Kuenste der Welt, Koln, Germany. Photographer: Roel Weenink

"Life is political, not because the world cares about how you feel, but because the world reacts to what you do." Timothy Snyder¹

The *Extreme Centre* symposium addressed how by replacing the political categories of "left" and "right", the "extreme centre" has emerged as a neoliberal consensus. However, "Fascism" and "Communism" also appeared to be problematic terms as they divided the speakers: Ágnes Heller and Srećko Horvat had several very fired discussions about the regimes. Heller reacted to Horvat: "I think you read too many books on Marx." And added that: "If capitalism does not exist too many people will die tomorrow from hunger – what we need is to increase equality. But to abolish capitalism does not make sense to me." Horvat responded: "Africa is not starving because they don't have enough capitalism, but because they have too much capitalism." To which Heller pointed out that the real problem is the redistribution of capital and stressed that current international capital is based on hierarchy, and that there is no remedy.

She warned against big promises and remedies like "To abolish capitalism", calling it the pure slogan. Their heated debate demonstrates the complexity of these issues to which there is no simple answer. Is Totalitarian Communism better than Fascism? Is the Extreme Centre a solution? And why has it occurred now in this political climate? Is neoliberal global capitalism to be blamed for all the problems? And what can we learn from this history so we do not repeat the same mistakes?

Timothy Snyder refers to the political categories "left" and "right" as the bipolarity of politics. He believes that approximately since the French Revolution, these terms have been used to describe politics. Snyder says that: "We are inclined to consider the Soviet Union as the leftist and The Third Reich as the right, and because we associate ourselves with the either left or right; we understand them solely based on their beliefs."² Nevertheless, as Snyder demonstrates, these countries have more in common than the divisive bipolarity of political left and right suggests. Hence, it is relevant to think about these categories and examine their use and meaning in today's political turmoil. Snyder claims that: "Both fascism and communism were responses to globalization: to the real and perceived inequalities it created, and the apparent helplessness of the democracies in addressing them."³ He presents twenty lessons from the twentieth century adapted to the circumstances of today which we can learn from.⁴ Snyder warns us that the world is political because it reacts to what we do, and therefore, all small choices we make "are themselves a kind of vote, making it more or less likely that free and fair elections will be held in the future."⁵ He reminds us of the importance of the right to vote, because every election can be the last.⁶ Hence, always remember to vote and to believe in truth. "Fascists despised the small truths of daily existence, loved slogans that resonated like a new religion... And now, as then, many people confused faith in a hugely flawed leader with the truth about the world we all share. Post-truth is pre-fascism."⁷

1 — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London, p.33

2 — Timothy Snyder, *Politika Života a Smrti, Nadace Dagmar a Václava Havlových*, VIZE 97, Prague, 2015, p.71

3 — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London, p.12

4 — 1. Do not obey in advance. 2. Defend institutions. 3. Beware of the one-party state. 4. Take responsibility for the face of the world. 5. Remember professional ethics. 6. Be wary of paramilitaries. 7. Be reflective if you must be armed. 8. Stand out. 9. Be kind to our language. 10. Believe in truth. 11. Investigate. 12. Make eye contact and small talks. 13. Practice corporeal politics. 14. Establish a private life. 15. Contribute to good causes. 16. Learn from peers in other countries. 17. Listen for dangerous words. 18. Be calm when unthinkable arrives. 19. Be a patriot. 20. Be as courageous as you can. Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London

5 — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London, p.33

6 — "Some of the Germans who voted for the Nazi Party in 1932 no doubt understood that this might be the last meaningfully free election for some time. Some of the Czechs and Slovaks who vote for the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1946 probably realized they were voting for the end of democracy, but most assumed they were would have another chance." Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London, p.28

7 — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century. 2017*, The Bodley Head, London, p.71

Posted 24 July 2017

Sorry, the browser you are using is not currently supported. Disqus actively supports the following browsers:

- [Firefox](#)
- [Chrome](#)
- [Internet Explorer 11+](#)
- [Safari](#)

□

L'Internationale is a confederation of six major European modern and contemporary art institutions and partners. L'Internationale proposes a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralised internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected. One of the main sites where research and debate related to the current project of L'Internationale, the five-year programme (2013-2017) titled The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989, takes place is on the newly developed platform: L'Internationale Online.

SUBSCRIBE



EU Culture

With the support of the
Culture Programme of
the European Union