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The Specter of Communism

Denmark, 1848

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Abstract

The modern concept *communism* emerged in the French public sphere in 1840 and rapidly gained currency in other European countries as well. Though primarily used as a term of derision, its radicalization of already-established senses of accelerating change and worldly futurity secured its incorporation in complex unities of utopian hopes and dystopian fears all over the political spectrum of the time. The Danish public sphere of the 1840s reveals three basic modes of using *communism*, each linked in its peculiar way to new uses of the concept *democracy*: conservative equations of democratic political equality (particularly, universal male suffrage) and communist attacks on private property in favor of a community of goods; leftist democratic denials of such equations and the emergence of anticommunist democratic positions; and, between the two extremes, liberal distinctions between their own moderate conception of democracy and the false, “communist” democracy of the left.

Keywords

1848, communism, conceptual transfer, democracy, Denmark, revolution

Among all the new phenomena in recent times, none have appeared as radical and comprehensively subversive as socialism and communism. In France, the center and starting-point of all political movement, socialism and communism has proven to be

the main question, the sole determinant of all European, or at least Western European, history.

—Carl Ebeling, “Fortale”

This was how the conservative theologian Carl Ebeling characterized recent history in 1851. The quoted passage appears in a preface to the Danish translation of the fiercely anticommunist tome *Histoire du Communisme* by the French economist Alfred Sudre. Ebeling conceived communism as the most menacing of all the subversive new phenomena of modern society and, in particular, the recent revolutions of 1848–1849. And not despite its French origin, but precisely because of it, communism was also a general problem in modern European civilization, including the areas outside of the dominant states or the main revolutionary events of 1848–1849. One of these areas was the Danish composite state. Even though this state was involved in a bloody war with Prussia and other forces concerning its largely German-speaking possessions Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg, otherwise it

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Epigraph: Carl Ebeling, “Fortale,” in *Communismens Historie, eller historisk Bedømmelse af de socialistiske Lyksaligheds-Lærdomme*, Alfred Sudre, ed. (Copenhagen: 1851), preface without page numbers.

experienced a comparatively quiet transition from absolutist to constitutional monarchy during this short time period.¹

This article studies the emergence and changing uses of the new concept *communism* during the 1840s, with particular emphasis on its role in the Danish debates of 1848–1849 on the imminent new state constitution, that is, the transition from absolutist to constitutional monarchy in the context of the European wave of revolutions. After introductory remarks on the interpretative framework, I will provide brief sketches of the early history of the concept and the historical context of Danish history during the 1848–1849 revolutions, followed by closer looks at three characteristic ways of conceptualizing *communism* in relation to important Danish political decisions, especially in the minutes of the Constitutional Assembly of 1848–1849 and in contemporary newspaper debates.

Apart from supplementing prior studies of *communism* as a key concept in modern political vocabulary, this approach may provide us with a case study in conceptual transfer from the dominant politicocultural centers of the time to a European periphery or semiperiphery as well as studies of the uses and redefinitions of such concepts in struggles for politicocultural hegemony between social classes and political “parties”. At the same time, the particular concept of *communism* allows us to study a case of what Jacques Derrida termed “spectrality” (or, perhaps better, “spectral otherness”) involved in certain types of discourse and social imaginaries concerning the significant others of nineteenth-century conceptions of civilization—in temporal as well as spatial terms.

1. On Denmark in the 1848 revolutions, see Steen Bo Frandsen, “1848 in Denmark,” in *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, Dieter Dowe et al., eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 289–312. There are, of course, more elaborate presentations in Danish, including Claus Bjørn, *1848: Borgerkrig og revolution* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998).

Times and Spaces of a Spectral Concept

Carl Ebeling was far from alone in his judgment about the significance of communism to modern civilization or the revolutionary wave of 1848–1849. In a more comprehensive but similarly conservative retrospect of the year 1848, Thomas Overskou emphasized how communism had “raised its head and appealed to the large and constantly increasing number of the needy, shamelessly and falsely demonstrating that everyone should have an equal right to the enjoyment of the goods of life, and that the poor man should thus be entitled to rob the rich man, until both of them possess the same amount.”² For their part, voices on the political left and center of contemporary Danish debates echoed such vehement rejection and fear of communism, while using it to serve their own political ends, as I will demonstrate below.

This widespread “red scare” in Danish political debates of this era was contrasted by the conspicuous near-absence of self-declared, let alone organized, communists within the boundaries of the Danish state.³ The neighboring concept of socialism, which gained general

2. Thomas Overskou, *Tilbageblik paa Aaret 1848* (Copenhagen: Eduard Meyer, 1849), 5–6.

The association of communism with theft or robbery might seem inspired by Proudhon’s famous slogan, “Property is theft,” but rather than deriving from a single intellectual source, it was a commonplace of 1840s anticommunism, related to the general communist critique of private property.

3. I have been able to find only three exceptions, that is, examples of positive valorizations of communism, all of them extremely marginal: F. C. Sibbern, *Nogle Betragtninger over Stat og Kirke* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1849); F. C. Sibbern, *Meddelelser af Indholdet af et Skrivt fra Aaret 2135*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel and author, 1858–1872); David Frederik Spichmann, *Grundtræk til en fuldkommen lykkelig Stats Organisation*

currency around the same time, was sometimes regarded as the more moderate sibling of communism, that is, as a complex of approaches to worker-friendly social reform through the “organization of labor” in cooperatives or similar forms, but without the communist insistence on strict equality or the community of goods.⁴ Thus, toward the late 1840s socialism became a legitimate political position within small radical leftist circles in Copenhagen, with the young medical student Frederik Dreier as the most prominent and persistent socialist of the era.⁵ At the same time, commentators to the right tended to increasingly disregard socialism as an independent current, opting instead to associate all extreme leftist positions with communism as the ultimate sign of political evil—either by

i et nyt forhen ubeboet Land (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1987 [1843]); and a couple of brief, anonymous articles in *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 25 March and 11 December 1846.

4. See Wolfgang Schieder, “Sozialismus,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Otto Brunner et al., eds. (Stuttgart: Klett & Cotta, 1974–1997), 5:923–996; Lorenz von Stein, *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs: ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1842).

5. See Svend Erik Stybe, *Frederik Dreier: Hans liv, hans samtid og hans sociale tænkning* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959); Hanne Nørregaard Posselt et al., eds., *Frederik Dreier og samfundets reform* (Copenhagen: Tiderne skifter, 2003). Other, briefer examples of self-declared socialist positions include *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 17 June 1845; “Clara Raphael: Et ‘rødt’ Brev,” *Literært Maanedsskrift*, 1851, 294–301. See also Bertel Nygaard, *Det røde spøgelse: Kommunismen og 1840’ernes danske politiske kultur* (Copenhagen: SFAH, 2014), 113–140, 196–192.

only mentioning socialism as part of the evil twins “socialism and communism” or by simply mentioning communism, and thus ignoring socialism.⁶

Thus, communism was, indeed, a specter haunting Europe and all of its political parties, as Marx and Engels stated in the famous openings words of their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written just weeks before the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions.⁷ As Jacques Derrida noted a century and a half later, in the midst of the (most recent) global burial of communism as a relevant sociopolitical phenomenon, such political specters invariably announce a radically different future (*avenir*) that, in its very radicalness, positions itself as the other of the present social order—and thus as the very condition of the historicity of the present.⁸ Communism was, and remained, much more than a specific social movement, a potential for social development, or a longing for a distant utopia. It was also a crucial indicator of what Ernst Bloch, the German philosopher of utopia and the principle of hope, would categorize as the “not yet” of the modern (bourgeois, capitalist) social order, that is, its contradictory, unfinished, historical, transitory nature.⁹ The specter of communism became one recurring revelation among others that, in Slavoj Žižek’s words, the symbolic structuring

6. See, for example, *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen* (Copenhagen: Bianco Luno, 1849), columns 1994–1995, 2049, and 2187; Nygaard, *Det røde spøgelse*, 147–148.

7. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifest der kommunistischen Partei (1848),” *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1959), 4:461. (In English at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>).

8. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L’État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 70–71.

9. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959).

of the social order “ultimately always fails, that it never succeeds in fully ‘covering’ the real, that it always involves some unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt.”¹⁰

This was not only a question of the long-term separation of “horizon of expectation” from “space of experience” in the key political concepts of the modern era, as mapped by Reinhart Koselleck and the German tradition of conceptual history, nor just of a general “normalization of change” within cultural modernity, as Immanuel Wallerstein has expressed it in his studies of the modern world system.¹¹ To contemporaries, such gradual processes of modernity only constituted the experiential background to the radically intensified perceptions of historical crisis and change during the 1840s in general and the 1848–1849 revolutions in particular.

Communism, as a new concept indicating the full potential of the temporal crack in the established social order, was integral to this perception of revolution. Witness the Danish polymath Christian Molbech writing in the midst of the 1848 revolutions: “The usual measures of time seem too restricted for its content.”¹² A “monstrous acceleration in all things” had occurred, he added some months later, in the immediate aftermath of revolution: The long-running process of “leveling” had revealed its true face. Large parts of Europe had been led to “the extreme edge of the abyss of revolution; where the crater of communism has

10. Slavoj Žižek, “The Spectre of Ideology,” in *Mapping Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London: Verso, 1994), 21.

11. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–276; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Vol. III: The Second Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730–1840s* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989).

12. Christian Molbech, “Fortale,” *Nyt Historisk Tidsskrift* 1, no. 2 (1848): iii.

opened up, spraying one red-hot stream of lava against that political order and civil organism which is the condition for life of culture and civilization.”¹³ This radical futurity of communism was linked in complex ways to other political ends and temporalities, for example, conservative nostalgia or the comparatively moderate reform aims of liberals, as I will demonstrate below.

What seemed to be a collapse of the temporal borders between distant utopian futures and immediate political potentials was accompanied by the rapid diminishing of politicocultural distance and thus of what Henri Lefebvre called “perceived” and “lived” space.¹⁴ Parisian politics and culture had been a central concern to non-French people and states for a long time, of course.¹⁵ But the February Revolution of 1848 and the establishment of the Second Republic in France made French politics a much more urgent question in the rest of Europe too, as the above quotes from Ebeling, Overskou, and Molbech indicate. Paris, as the urban symbol of “French” revolutionary practice, republicanism, modern democracy, and communism, now seemed a lot closer to Berlin, Frankfurt, Vienna, and Copenhagen. The fast-paced shifts in the political dynamics of the French republic were also echoed in other

13. Christian Molbech, “Bidrag til en historisk-politisk Betragtning af de agrariske Grundforhold i Staterne, m. m. i den gamle Verden og i Middelalderen,” *Nyt Historisk Tidsskrift* 2, no. 3 (1850): 68–69.

14. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

15. See, for example, Lloyd S. Kramer, *Threshold of a New World: Intellectuals and the Exile Experience in Paris, 1830–1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 15–57; Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the 19th-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

parts of Europe: the revolutionary offensives of republican and constitutionalist forces during the spring of 1848; labor radicalization and new social conflicts from the early summer (notably, the June Days of Paris); defeats of revolutionary forces in the fall; and, in some places, short-lived attempts at reinvigorating the revolutionary spirit during the spring of 1849.¹⁶

Also, the protests of the lower, working classes, especially during the Parisian June Days, shattered the hitherto predominant idealist discourses of civilization, culture, and politics, breeding a new sense of material and economic relations as well as a temporary but drastic democratization of the bourgeois public spheres of Europe. This was “time-space compression” in a revolutionary leap, the forging of entangled European revolutionary developments with open, fluid borders between states, political cultures, and languages.¹⁷

Such patterns of entanglement may appear in more clarity when regarded from the semiperipheral position of the Danish state and its capital city of Copenhagen: outside the dominant states or sites of revolutionary action in 1848–1849, yet characterized by different (constitutionalist, nationalist, democratic, or late imperial) sentiments of rightfully belonging to the realm of “civilized” Europe (and thus being unfairly excluded from it). In other words, the Danish case offers an opportunity to study a hybrid version of what the Finnish historian

16. See Dowe, *Europe in 1848*; Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848–1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Claus Møller Jørgensen, “Transurban Interconnectivities: An Essay on the Interpretation of the Revolutions of 1848,” *European Review of History* 19, no. 2 (2012): 201–227.

17. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 240–307; Margrit Pernau, “Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, no. 1 (2012): 1–11.

Henrik Stenius has dubbed a “translation culture”: a culture characterized by “asymmetrical relations” with other languages and cultures.¹⁸ Accordingly, our study of the history of *communism* as a concept in Danish during the 1840s must begin not in Copenhagen or the fields of Jutland, but in Paris.

Communism: French, Universal, Danish

Although the main ideal content as well as the word *communism* had longer prehistories, the 1840s saw the remarkably swift emergence and dissemination of the modern concept of *communism*—that is, in the sense of a sociopolitical movement, based on the modern proletariat, striving toward the abolishment of social inequality in general and bourgeois private property in particular.¹⁹ The communist movement, idea, and concept originated among those parts of the illegal republican societies of the July Monarchy in France identifying with the political legacy of “Gracchus” Babeuf and the Conspiracy of Equals, who had met the deradicalization of the French Revolution under the Directory of the mid-

18. Henrik Stenius, “The Finnish Citizen: How a Translation Emasculated the Concept,” *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 8 (2004): 172–188, especially 176–180.

19. Jacques Grandjonc, *Communisme/Kommunismus/Communism: Origine et développement international de la terminologie communautaire prémarxiste des utopistes aux néo-babouvistes*, 2 vols. (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1989); Wolfgang Schieder, “Kommunismus,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Otto Brunner et al., eds. (Stuttgart: Klett & Cotta, 1974–1997), 3:455–529.

1790s with demands for a “second revolution” abolishing private property in land.²⁰ The neo-Babouvist communists emerged onto the French and European public scene some forty-five years later, in a significantly more industrialized society and based upon the urban proletariat rather than rural demands.²¹

The earliest public uses of the word *communism* in this modern sense occurred at the first avowedly communist banquet in the Belleville area of Paris on 1 July 1840. Reports on this meeting and the views of its conveners spread from the French press to other parts of Europe. Ten days later, two of the main conservative newspapers of Copenhagen, *Dagen* and *Berlingske Tidende*, briefly informed their readers about this “banquet presided over by the so-called communists (preachers advocating community).”²² And on 15 July, *Dagen* included long excerpts from Léon Faucher’s widely republished presentation of this new, strange phenomenon, originally printed in the French liberal journal *Le courrier français* immediately after the banquet: While other radicals proposed merely political reforms, especially universal (that is, male) suffrage, the communist aimed at revolutionary social

20. Philippe Buonarroti, *Conspiration pour l’égalité dite de Babeuf* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1957 [1828]), 95. See also Alain Maillard, Claude Mazauric, and Eric Walter, eds., *Présence de Babeuf: Lumières, Révolution, communism* (Paris: Publications de Sorbonne, 1994); Ian Birchall, *The Spectre of Babeuf* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

21. Alain Maillard, *La communauté des égaux: La communisme néo-babouviste dans la France des années 1840* (Paris: Kimé, 1999); Georges Sencier, *Le babouvisme après Babeuf* (Paris: Marcel Rivière & Cie, 1912).

22. Quote from *Dagen*, 11 June 1840. See similarly in *Berlingske Tidende* on the same date.

change. Inspired by Babeuf, they strove to replace “social order” with “the ridiculous, immoral and impossible Utopia of the community of goods.”²³

Initial curiosity gave way to acute horror during the fall of 1840, when a few individuals from communist circles carried out several assassination attempts against high-ranking political figures, including King Louis-Philippe, during the fall of 1840. Though it seems that these individuals acted on their own initiative, out of despair and without active encouragement from the communist groups, the traditional militancy and radical rhetoric of the illegal left-wing societies during the July Monarchy did little to preclude such actions.²⁴ In any case, many French and European newspapers were more than willing to associate these acts of individual terrorism with the communist ideal and the movement as a whole. The trial and execution of the deeply pauperized would-be regicide Marius Darmès thus contributed crucially to the swift, sensationalist launching of *communism* as a key concept in modern political vocabulary.

The Darmès case was followed closely by the conservative Danish press, in particular *Dagen*, exploiting every opportunity for associating Darmès’s criminal act and his alleged moral depravity with communism and, by extension, other left-wing currents, such as republicanism.²⁵ In these reports and comments, the concept of *communism* “circulated without its context,” that is, to a certain extent dissociated from the particularly French or

23. *Dagen*, 15 July 1840.

24. See Jill Harsin, *Barricades: The War of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris, 1830–1848* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 189–198.

25. See, for example, *Dagen*, 23, 24, and 28 October 1840; 4 November 1840; 5 and 15 April 1841; 22, 25, and 28 May 1841; 1 and 2 June 1841; 3 August 1841.

Parisian features deriving from its original “field of production,” in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms.²⁶ In its new context of reception, it was rapidly familiarized, incorporated into everyday political discourse, and universalized, or in other words, transformed from a peculiarly French political phenomenon into a significant other of modern civilization as such. Communism was associated with “anarchy, social disintegration, murder, pillage, plunder” and characterized as a “chaos of every lustful drive and every moral anomaly,” the “moral vulgarity, the veritable dunghill of the big cities,” a phenomenon rooted in “the present age in which the inordinate advance of culture is breeding luxuriousness and moral decay.”²⁷ These wide-ranging semantic associations, revealing the gradual formation of an entire discourse on communism, not only indicate a process of what the Finnish historians Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang have termed “active selection and appropriation at the receiving end” of a hierarchically structured European space, rather than either passive “reception” or mere “flows” of ideas within a seamlessly transnational cultural space.²⁸ They also seem to confirm the general observation, recently presented by literary scholar Christopher L. Hill, that concepts undergo a process of semantic universalization when transferred to the cultural

26. Quote from Pierre Bourdieu, “Les conditions sociales de la circulation international des idées,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 145 (2002): 4.

27. Quotes from *Dagen*, 28 May and 2 June 1841.

28. Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang, “Facing Asymmetry: Nordic Intellectuals and Center-Periphery Dynamics in a European Cultural Space,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 1 (2016), 75–98.

periphery—in this case, an increasing emphasis on communism as a key counterconcept to civilization.²⁹

In the wake of this universalization, the different wings of the political press began to use the concept for their own political purposes—in other words, reparticularizing the concept following its semantic universalization. During the autumn of 1841, *Dagen* accused its political opponents on the left of having secret communist sympathies. The left-leaning, democratic newspaper *Kjøbenhavnsposten* was described as being in liaison with the English Chartists along with the “scum factions in France” and, in general, preaching “communisterie [Communisteri], agrarian laws and similar political utopias.”³⁰ And even though its more influential counterpart, *Fædrelandet*, associated with the emerging liberal “party” (often termed the National Liberals in retrospect) dominated by academics, defended the more moderate prospect of a constitutional monarchy, it too could be suspected of secretly entertaining similar sympathies.³¹

The democratic and liberal oppositions replied in kind, seeking to associate conservative defenses of royal or aristocratic privilege with communism. *Kjøbenhavnsposten* immediately retorted that the real danger of communism was to be found not among those

29. Christopher L. Hill, “Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century,” in *Global Intellectual History*, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 134–158. On “counterconcept”: Reinhart Koselleck, “On the Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts,” in Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 155–191; Kay Junge and Kirill Postoutenko, eds., *Asymmetrical Concepts after Reinhart Koselleck: Historical Semantics and Beyond* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011).

30. *Dagen*, 5 October 1841.

31. See *Dagen*, 23 November 1841.

who really cared for the “proletarians”, but among those in power who rejected the justified claims of the poor, thus leaving them desperate and susceptible to communism.³² And was there not an element of communism in the conservative appeal to the absolutist state as the true community?³³ *Fædrelandet* echoed some of these anticommunist tirades against the conservatives, but at times also repeated conservative condemnations of the democratic left wing as being communist.³⁴

Thus, while commentators to the left and the right alike would agree on the general characterization of communism as the striving toward the community of goods and as a predominantly modern phenomenon, that is, as the other of modern civilization, the subsequent uses of the concept established important differences, most obviously in the associations of the concept. In Ernesto Laclau’s terms, *communism* functioned as a floating signifier, providing the battleground for competing, widely different inscriptions of meaning and associated concepts of equivalence in a struggle for discursive hegemony, but it was not a completely empty signifier, devoid of all fixity of semantic content.³⁵ Conservatives tended to

32. *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 11 and 26 October 1841. A similar argument appeared in *Fædrelandet*, 29 March 1845.

33. *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 10 September 1843; see also *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, 8 March 1843, and *Fædrelandet*, 29 March 1845.

34. See, for example, *Fædrelandet*, 21 November 1843.

35. See Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London: Verso, 2014), 20–

21. Laclau’s discourse theory and Koselleck’s conceptual history share certain basic Schmittian assumptions about enemy relations and conflictual struggle. But the former’s neo-Gramscian approach to discourse as an arena of struggle for discursive hegemony not only contains important specific analytical distinctions (for example, between floating and empty

equate communism with any sort of opposition to the old regime or “natural” inequalities of power or wealth. The different wings of the political opposition might simply return the accusations of communism or invoke such accusations in their reciprocal struggles, but were often more prone to develop more specific conceptions of communism, dissociating legitimate noncommunist oppositional policies from illegitimate communist ones. Notably, in 1842–1843 the liberal *Fædrelandet* published several long articles based on the recent treatise by the German scholar Lorenz von Stein on French socialism and communism. Stein’s book, which gained significant success in all of northern Europe, turned the discussion of communism into something more than mere slogans of political polemics: a general social theory of modern civilization was revised by taking account of the specifically modern oppositions between *bourgeoisie* and *peuple/prolétariat*, and the new political currents of the latter, that is, *socialism* and *communism*.³⁶

Communism in 1848

signifiers, or between intradiscursive contradictions and interdiscursive antagonisms). It also proceeds from a more systemic social and discursive approach to the construction of what Koselleckian conceptual historians have approached as counterconcepts or asymmetrical concepts. These features in Laclau’s approach are not necessarily an alternative to Koselleckian contextualism but should, perhaps, be regarded as an important theoretical and methodological resource for conceptual historians too.

36. Stein, *Der Socialismus und Communismus*; *Fædrelandet*, 30 December 1842, 28 February 1843, and 17 and 18 May 1843. See also *Fædrelandet*, 15 August 1842, 21 November 1843, and 10 and 29 March 1845.

After the initial debates on communism in 1840–1842, anticommunist rhetoric receded somewhat into the background, along with the demands for deep political reforms. But it was still invoked whenever polemical necessity seemed to call for it. Thus, for example, when a new movement for “peasant emancipation” arose during the mid-1840s, supported by a part of the urban liberal movement, conservative landowners were quick to respond with accusations of communism.³⁷ But with the outbreak of revolution in 1848, the communist specter returned with a new sense of urgency.

The Danish debates on communism were woven into the debates on the future of the state and of civilization in general, but were especially visible in the debates on the principles of suffrage in the new constitution, marking the end of almost two hundred years of absolutist rule in Denmark and the commencement of constitutional monarchy. The debate on constitutional reform had been initiated by the elderly King Christian VIII just before his death in January 1848, but the terms of the debate were radically redefined shortly after the accession to power of King Frederik VII, when news of the February and March revolutions reached Denmark. While a civil war broke out in the south of the Danish empire over the national fate of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, torn between Denmark and the German League, the liberals initially succeeded in putting themselves at the head of a popular

37. See, for example, *Roskilde Stænder-Tidende* (1844), columns 2969, 3016, and 3034; *Almuevennen*, 28 May 1845. On the Danish peasant movement, see Niels Clemmensen, “Politische Mobilisierung und Klassenstruktur der dänischen Agrargesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Idylle oder Aufbruch? Das Dorf im bürgerlichen 19. Jahrhunderts: Ein europäischer Vergleich*, Wolfgang Jacobeit, Josef Mooser, and Bo Stråth, eds. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1990), 231–243.

movement in Copenhagen mobilized on nationalist as well as on constitutionalist and democratic demands.

In this context of revolution, war, and constitutional reform, the sphere of politics was expanding rapidly, in Denmark as in many other European countries. New social classes gradually developing in the transition to a modern, capitalist society now became politically visible, raising their own demands, borrowing new political concepts from other parts of Europe or radically redefining the conceptual elements at hand. And new political currents emerged from these social and discursive processes. Apart from the conservative circles around the old absolutist government and the traditional opposition, led by the liberal academics, there emerged a small but distinct group of radically antidemocratic landed aristocrats as well as new, explicitly democratic movements among peasants, artisans, and left-wing intellectuals. Each of these political groupings reflected European political developments of 1848 as well as specifically Danish problems. We may see this in the way the different political Danish “parties” of 1848—they may be roughly summarized as conservative right, democratic left, and liberal center—approached the problem of communism. While all parties took anticommunist stances, they did so in significantly different ways, marked by specific relations between democratic and communist principles of equality.

Right: Democracy as Communism

The most insistent anticommunist rhetoric was to be found among conservative critics of democracy and universal suffrage. Among the most eloquent spokesmen for this sort of position was the economist C. N. David, previously a leading figure of the liberal opposition, but now invoking basic liberal values in defense of royal predominance. His position was

comparable to that of the French Doctrinaires.³⁸ During the debates on the suffrage laws of the new constitution, he warned vehemently of the dangers of communism inherent in the democratic principles of equality. The “communist doctrines and the doctrine of universal suffrage derive from the very same well-spring,” he declared to the Constitutional Assembly in March 1849.³⁹ Acknowledgment of the political equality between the uncultured and the unpropertied on the one hand and the cultured and the propertied on the other would soon lead to the lower classes attacking culture and property in the name of equality: “The demand that everybody should be politically equal in the state and the demand that everybody should enjoy not only equal access to enjoyment and profession, but also material equality of enjoyment and profession, are two sides to the very same misconception, both of which serve the same end.”⁴⁰ Being the direct opposite of civilization, culture, progress, liberty, and the natural inequality of abilities and talent among human beings, communism could only become reality by transforming the state into “one big house of correction [Tvangsarbeidsanstalt].”⁴¹ Thus, communism should be destroyed, even in its more moderate, “democratic” beginnings. In the debate on the forthcoming Danish constitution, he invoked this specter of communism in order to defend property qualifications as a condition for suffrage—instead of the age limit of thirty years supported by the left and center

38. See Aurelian Craiutu, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003); Jörn Leonhard, *Liberalismus: Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2001).

39. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2112.

40. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2193.

41. C. N. David, *Nogle Betragtninger om Arbeide og Capital* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1848), 24.

politicians. He argued, characteristically, that the personal independence required for political participation did not appear at a certain age, but was rather the result of “a certain independent position of civil occupation.”⁴² In other words, the material, socioeconomic position of the individual was crucial in itself. Yet, this position was also a subordinate means for achieving certain moral characteristics:

True, property cannot serve as a direct measure of moral character, any more than age could. Nonetheless, property in general stems from certain factors, among which moral character is an essential part. No-one with even a minimal knowledge of production and the achievement and maintenance of property could ever deny this. And thus, it is difficult for me to understand how he would deny the fact that a person possessing a certain amount of property or is paying a certain level of taxes, must generally be regarded as possessing a certain moral character.⁴³

David’s equation of political and social leveling, of democratic and communist leveling, did not necessarily imply a rejection of the need for reform and, thus, for a political future different from the contemporary situation. But the process leading forward was to be a continuation of the progress already immanent in the established tradition of “enlightened” monarchy. Thus, he characterized the revolutionary destructiveness and the radical temporal otherness of this democracy-communism equation for the rhetorical purposes of his own, much less radical, program for the further political empowerment of the people of cultural and moral stature, with material wealth being one of the main signs of such stature.

Other conservative members of the Constitutional Assembly were much less versed in liberal political theory and argued straightforwardly that the “communism” inherent in the

42. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2112.

43. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, columns 2112–2113.

enfranchisement of the unpropertied could only be prevented if—as the mayor of the town of Horsens, Ditlev Ræder, put it—the “most qualified” were allowed to rule. The “most qualified” in his view were the large property owners, since “property ties the owner more firmly to the state and the legal order than any other connection.”⁴⁴ While property qualification had also been a mainstay of the pre-1848 liberal center, few spokesmen of the liberal movement had interpreted such qualifications so restrictively—if only because any narrow property qualifications would exclude most members of the “educated” liberal group and their potential supporters from the franchise. Besides, the core of the Danish liberals moved toward democratic, leftist positions in the new context of 1848.

Ræder’s more “materialist” rhetoric was closer to the discourse of the small group of right-wing landed aristocrats who demanded privileged political representation of the biggest landowners, claiming that the interests of the state as a whole were particularly tied to landed property.⁴⁵ The rhetoric of the latter group revealed a curious combination of outward royalism, strong elements of nostalgia for preabsolutist noble power, and an implicit struggle for the particular interests of this group of land-owning capitalists whose recently acquired

44. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2004.

45. See *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, columns 2104–2105, 2206–2210, 2215–2216; H. Christensen [Hans Rasmussen Carlsen], *Bidrag til Oplysning om Begrebet af et Førstekammer* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1848); J. B. Scavenius, *Endnu et Par Ord om den paataente danske Rigsforfatning* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1848). The politics of these groups of landowners is analyzed in more detail in Niels Clemmensen, “Godsejernes organiserede politiske virksomhed under stænderforfatning og junigrundlov,” *Historie: Jyske Samlinger* 11, no. 1 (1974): 29–61; Jens Lei Wendel-Hansen, “De Jordbundne: Danmarks godsejre og det konstitutionelle monarki 1835–1919” (unpublished PhD diss., Aarhus University, 2012).

noble titles could not conceal the facts of their bourgeois, often urban heritage and education. This was anticommunist nostalgia in the service of a particular future form of bourgeois capitalist society, based on extremely hierarchical political structures.

Still other members of the Constitutional Assembly argued very differently against the communism inherent in the plans for universal male suffrage. The farmer Christian Eriksen warned against this communism as an immediate threat, lurking in the protests of the French workers during 1848 as well as in recent rumored wage strikes by Danish workers. He also warned against the predominance of large property owners, that is, the counterweight or alternative to communist democracy propagated by most conservative commentators. A two-chamber parliament with a strong upper house and privileged positions to the propertied would result in “a house of class interest [*Standsting*] or a house of moneyed interests [*Pengekammer*],” which would only exacerbate the conflicts.⁴⁶ Thus, the communist danger resided not only among the workers, but also in the class interests of the propertied. Continuing a long-standing tradition of peasant and farmer loyalty to absolutist monarchy, he argued instead for a strong royal power, capable of acting as a benevolent patriarch, securing the proper harmony and balance between the different elements and estates of society.⁴⁷ If the anticommunism of David, Ræder, and the landowners could be characterized as different shapes of a rule of the bourgeoisie to come, partly tinged with a discourse of feudal aristocracy in the case of the landowners, Eriksen’s alternative of antibourgeois and antifeudal monarchy was nostalgia proper—even if it was nostalgia for a mythical, symbolic

46. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, columns 2069–2070.

47. For similar arguments among other Danish peasants in 1848, see Claus Bjørn, *Frygten fra 1848* (Copenhagen: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 1985).

past, whose repetition in historical reality would, in fact, have been the creation of something essentially novel.

These internal differences of political outlook among the Danish conservatives of 1848 weakened their efficiency as a political “party” in 1848. But they did manage to unite in their common opposition to the communism allegedly inherent in democracy and universal suffrage—as well as in a specific politics of space, strongly emphasizing Danish traditions (of the existing conglomerate state, rather than that of the nation-state desired by the liberals of the center) against the Frenchness of revolution, democracy, and communism. Their strong emphasis on the equation between communist and democratic leveling seems to have been addressed not only to the broader political public, but also to the adherents of the political center and the more moderate forces among the democratic left.

Left: Democracy against Communism

While conservatives equated democracy with communism as parts of the same basic process of leveling and the same unsound principle of equality, or at least regarded democracy as a stepping-stone toward full communism, the political left fully identified with democracy while rejecting communism. This did not only imply sharp distinctions between democratic and communist notions of equality, but also the argument that democratic equality would be the most efficient means of preventing communism—in other words, that moderate equality would be an efficient means of preventing radical, illegitimate equality.

In the Constitutional Assembly, newspaper editor Bernhard Rée countered the conservative tales of French horrors by pointing out that French “universal suffrage has weakened communism significantly”—as witnessed by the recent victory of Louis Napoléon

at the presidential elections.⁴⁸ And Carl Wilhelm Thalbitzer, a landowner of democratic leanings, argued that enfranchisement of the lower classes would safeguard private property against any communist temptations. Every one wished to possess things, he claimed; and the poor man, having only a few belongings, treasured them even more. “Those who sow only a few bushels [*Skjepper*] of grain will see a communist in every sparrow trying to rob them of their possessions.” Thus, the poor peasants were just as unwilling as the upper classes “to share their legitimately and often painfully earned property with the inarticulate as well as the articulate communists.”⁴⁹

As noted above, democratic viewpoints had been pioneered by *Kjøbenhavnsposten* from the beginning of the decade. But an explicitly democratic left-wing movement had only appeared during the spring and summer of 1848, in tandem with the outbreak and radicalization of the European revolutions. The most radical parts of this new left-wing movement were assembled rather loosely in the Suffrage Reform Movement, a movement of artisans and a few left-wing intellectuals with roots in the Educational Association for Artisans (*Haandværkerdannelsesforeningen*) from 1847. The Suffrage Reform Movement was widely known as the *Hippodrom* movement, named after the building in which its big public meetings took place. Exclusively urban and restricted to Copenhagen, its presence in the capital of Denmark and its radical rhetoric, somewhat resembling that of contemporary German- and French-speaking radicals, secured it a central place in the broader political debates prior to the Constitutional Assembly elections of October 1848, in which it fared poorly and subsequently more or less fell apart. But while this fate was still unsettled, many conservatives and liberals believed that this movement was—finally—the long-awaited

48. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2048; cf. column 2099.

49. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 1823.

embodiment of the communist specter. To C. N. David, Ditlev Ræder, and other right-wing figures, the *Hippodrom* demands for suffrage reform and social reform as well as its social base among politicized artisans was sufficient proof of the communist nature of this movement, regardless of what the spokesmen of the movement claimed. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1848, and spurred on by the news of the Parisian workers' uprising during the June Days, conservative writers repeatedly warned against this specific communist menace in Danish political life.⁵⁰ The liberals around *Fædrelandet*, who were at the same time beginning to present themselves as true democrats and supporters of universal male suffrage (though insisting on a two-chamber solution rather than the more radically democratic one-chamber parliament proposed by the democratic left), were somewhat less energetic in their anticommunist polemics, and throughout most of the spring they strove to preempt, rather than directly confront, the radicalization of the movement. Yet their most prominent spokesmen, Orla Lehmann and D. G. Monrad, did curse these "communist fanatics," and during the summer of 1848, the comments of the liberal daily *Fædrelandet* on the *Hippodrom* movement came to basically echo those of David and Ræder.⁵¹

50. David, *Nogle Betragtninger*; Ditlev Ræder in *Nyt Aftenblad*, 9 September 1848; *Den danske Folkeven*, no. 12 (19 August 1848).

51. Letter from Orla Lehmann to Marie Lehmann, 17 March 1848, in *Danske politiske Breve fra 1830'erne og 1840'erne*, vol. 4, Povl Bagge, Povl Engelstoft, and Johs. Lomholt-Thomsen, eds. (Copenhagen: Det kongelige danske Selskab for Fædrelandets Historie, 1945–1958), 129; Aage Friis & Just Rahbek, eds., *A.F. Kriegers, D.G. Monrads og P. Vedels indbyrdes Brevveksling 1846–1888* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1940 [offprint from *Danske Magazin*]), 66.

However, the spokesmen of the *Hippodrom* movement rejected communism in clear terms. The small group of so-called Parisian artisans, that is, Danish artisans who had lived and worked for some years in Paris and thus acquainted themselves with political theories (especially those around the noncommunist worker's journal *l'Atelier*, inspired by Philippe Buchez's thought) before resettling in Copenhagen, and who were now among the leading forces within the *Hippodrom* movement, adhered to French models for workers' cooperatives that were to compete with the big companies. This model was intended to safeguard "the sacredness of property and family" and to provide the (male) artisans with sufficient social and economic independence to not only support their households but also attain the status of fully fledged citizens.⁵² They repeatedly rejected communism as a false solution to real social problems, while ridiculing the fearfulness and ignorance of right-wing anticommunists such as Ditlev Ræder.⁵³ Similarly, the elected chairman of the Suffrage Reform Association (and thus the unofficial spokesman of the *Hippodrom* movement as a whole), the industrialist P. F. Lunde, presented his program for the "organization of labor" as a means of preempting the allegedly "communist" aspirations of the desperate French workers.⁵⁴ To the author and prolific editor Meir Goldschmidt, who became an important figure among the Copenhagen democrats in early 1848 before moving on to other fields of interest and new political

52. Quote from *Nyeste Postefterretninger*, no. 116 (1 August 1848). See Bertel Nygaard, "Arbejderpolitik i 1848," *Kulturstudier*, no. 1 (2012): 55–77; Armand Cuvillier, *Un journal d'ouvriers: L'Atelier 1840–1850* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1954).

53. *Nyeste Postefterretninger*, nos. 158 (10 September 1848), 177 (27 September 1848), 123 (9 August 1848), and 162 (14 September 1848).

54. P. F. Lunde, *Forslag til Forbedring i de arbejdende Classers Kaar* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1848).

positions, communism equaled “despotism” and the destruction of “the state, art, science and the innumerable higher interests of society,” that is, a destruction of civilization and reason.⁵⁵ Even Frederik Dreier, the Danish socialist mentioned above who developed remarkably radical and innovative critiques of the dominant idealist and elitist culture in mid-nineteenth-century Denmark, echoed Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s rejection of communism as an authoritarian, statist principle of community.⁵⁶

Anticommunism was equally obvious in the other, stronger part of the democratic left-wing movement, the Friends of the Peasants. This movement was based in the Society of the Friends of the Peasant, established in 1846 by liberals attempting to mobilize the peasants as supporters of liberal bourgeois hegemony—a risky project, since this hegemony on the part of the small group of liberal bourgeois over the large group of peasants was not a predetermined result. During the 1848 revolutions, this mobilization did indeed provide the groundwork for a strong left-wing movement uniting under the slogan of democracy against not only the conservatives but also the moneyed and educated bourgeoisie.

This movement was also accused of aiming at a communist type of democracy, as we saw above. Yet, such accusations were somewhat less frequent and easier to ignore than in the case of the *Hippodrom* movement, perhaps because the Friends of the Peasants were, after all, less radical than the *Hippodrom* movement, despite their newly acquired democratic rhetoric of 1848 and their severe polemical attacks against the conservatives as well as the

55. Meïr Goldschmidt, “Det øvrige Tydskland,” *Nord og Syd* 1, no. 2 (1848): 165. See also Meïr Goldschmidt, “Det sociale Spørgsmaal,” *Nord og Syd* 1, no. 3 (1848): 9 and 14.

56. See Frederik Dreier, “Frankrigs sociale Historie (1852),” in *Samlede skrifter*, vol. 2, Frederik Dreier, ed. (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2003), 115; Frederik Dreier, “Fremtidens Folkeopdragelse: Foreløbige Antydninger: Af en Socialist,” *Samlede skrifter* 1, no. 76.

liberal bourgeoisie. As early as 1845, the still mainly liberal, not yet democratic peasant-friendly newspaper *Almuevennen* had responded to accusations of communism by publishing a harsh condemnation of communism as a principle and, more specifically, the communist ideas of the German artisan Wilhelm Weitling.⁵⁷ In 1848, adherents of the democratic outlook of the Friends of the Peasant insisted on the basically anticommunist nature of universal suffrage during the debates of the Constitutional Assembly, as quoted above, and did so without the sort of qualifying remark that communism was a (failed) response to important problems.

Thus, the democratic left wing clearly rejected the conservative equation of communist and democratic leveling, stressing the contrasts between these two types of leveling as, respectively, illegitimate and legitimate (even necessary). This also entailed a distinction between too radical and more moderate visions of the future, that is, what we may call a *prophylactic* invocation of a democratic future against the communist one. Also, while conservative Danes were eager to emphasize the need to defend politicospatial differences, that is, by defending “Danish” moderation against the revolutionary, democratic, and “communist” dangers of “Frenchness”, many democrats regarded the politics of the moderate left wing in the Second French Republic as a source of inspiration, thus striving to overcome the barriers between Danish realities and “French” politics—but only to the extent that such “French” politics actually served the end of preventing revolution and illegitimate political radicalization tending toward communism. Thus, the democratic left wing in Denmark also

57. *Almuevennen*, 28 May 1845. See, for Weitling’s context, Waltraud Seidel-Höppner, *Wilhelm Weitling* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

tended to appeal to crucial elements of political moderation, as some historians have noted.⁵⁸

In this context, left-wing anticommunism was perhaps the clearest expression at the time of what may be regarded as a general function of anticommunism: the disciplining of the social order and its subjects, that is, the internalization of power functions and ideological discourses, making individuals “relays” in the circulation of such discursively exercised power functions, as Michel Foucault put it.⁵⁹ The communist specter was not only invoked to scare one’s political enemies into submission, but also to establish boundaries for what could be legitimately thought, projected, or done.

58. See Niels Clemmensen, “Fra Junigrundlov til revideret Junigrundlov 1849–1866,” in *Systemskiftet 1848–49*, 181–203; Anne Engelst Nørgaard, “‘Hvoraf kommer det, at vi alle ere saa demokratiske som vi ere?’—Demokratisk-monarkiske bondevenner i den danske grundlovs-kamp,” *Slagmark*, no. 69 (2014): 71–88.

59. Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76* (New York: Picador, 2003), 29; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Foucault’s conception of disciplining has been briefly related to anticommunism as such in Werner Schmidt, “Antikommunismen under det korta 1900-talet—en stereotyp i förvandling,” in *Kommunismen hot och löfte: Arbetarrörelsen i skuggan av Sovjetunionen 1917–1991*, Håkan Blomqvist and Lars Ekdahl, eds. (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2002), 171–200. Other (non-Foucauldian) approaches to anticommunism as ideologically upholding the dominant (capitalist) social order are to be found in Wolfgang Wippermann, *Heilige Hetzjagd: Eine Ideologieggeschichte des Antikommunismus* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2012); and Joel Kovel, *Red Hunting in the Promised Land: Anticommunism and the Making of America* (London: Cassell, 1997).

Center: Liberal or Communist Democracy?

Turning toward the liberals, politically in between the democratic left and the antidemocratic right, we may discover a third configuration of communism in relation to democracy.

Having shared the general skepticism of democracy during most of the 1840s, the Danish liberals around *Fædrelandet* succeeded in reinventing themselves as democrats and supporters of universal male suffrage during the upsurge of 1848, while maintaining their traditional insistence on the necessity of a political hegemony of the cultured liberal bourgeoisie. In this rather bold wager on new, democratized political structures, they were also changing the semantic content and rhetorical functions of democracy itself, subjecting democracy to what Quentin Skinner has termed “rhetorical redescription.”⁶⁰ In their discourse, we may recognize elements of both the right and the left versions of anticommunism noted above.

During the debates of the Constitutional Assembly on the enfranchisement of the men of lower classes, they basically sided with the left. Carl Ploug, editor of *Fædrelandet* and a prominent member of the Constitutional Assembly, countered C. N. David’s anticommunist criticism of universal male suffrage, emphasizing that “the well-known communist and socialist theories” had emerged not in the context of universal suffrage, but in the France of the July Monarchy, “under a franchise law limiting suffrage by a census of 200 Francs or 70 *Rigsbankdaler* in annual taxes.”⁶¹

However, this apparent democratic leftism concealed a different version of democracy and acknowledgment of universal male suffrage. While the left wing of the Constitutional

60. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152 and 168.

61. *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, column 2025.

Assembly wanted a single parliamentary chamber in order to lend full weight to the popular vote and, at the same time, polemicized harshly against the royal appointment of a certain number of (mostly “honorable” and thus dominantly conservative) delegates to the Constitutional Assembly, the liberals sided with the right in calling for a two-chamber solution and, while superficially critical of the principle of royal appointment to the Constitutional Assembly, chose to tolerate it for the time being (not least since the royal appointments also had the desirable side effect of limiting the weight of the left wing in the Constitutional Assembly). In other words, while the liberals now wore the emblem of democracy, their notion of democracy was clearly opposed to the so-called pure democracy associated with the left wing. The democracy of the liberals was a new, politically bolder version of the hegemony of the propertied and (especially) the educated bourgeoisie, now aiming at the support of the newly enfranchised working classes.

Thus, while Ploug could ridicule David’s fear of “communist” universal suffrage, his newspaper insisted that some versions of democracy—notably, the left-wing conceptions of democracy and left-wing polemics against the hegemony of the propertied and the educated—were communist indeed. *Almuevennen*’s (the peasant-friendly newspaper) conception of democracy differed from that of *Fædrelandet* as well as “most people.” Ploug’s paper claimed in a polemical broadside against the *Almuevennen*:

[E]qual political rights of all citizens and classes of citizens does not in any way exclude the power of property [*Formuens Indflydelse*] or the predominance of intellectual skills. On the contrary, true democracy is coterminous with true intellectual aristocracy. Since it admits all skills equally, it admits the greatest skills the most. If the sort of democracy that *Almuevennen* is striving for, were to annihilate the power of property, it would have to annihilate property itself, for its power cannot be annihilated in any other way; and if it were to do away with the aristocracy of

intellect, it would have to introduce the aristocracy of the raw masses or the regime of physical force. But none of this would be democracy in the ordinary sense: the former is termed communism, and the latter is ochlocracy—or, in Danish: ordinary robbery and the rule of the rabble [*Pøbelherredømme*].⁶²

In other words, “pure” democracy equaled communism—to the liberal center as well as the conservative right. And democracy in this liberal “ordinary sense” was another word for well-established liberal theories of the (formally juridically) equal rights of (materially) unequal claims to power. To the liberals, the new democratic rhetoric did imply a commitment to the principle of universal male suffrage (albeit with certain crucial qualifications), but it was combined with an increased emphasis on the legitimate hegemony of the educated bourgeoisie and their political representation via the liberal leaders themselves.

This position of bold compromise was also reflected in the spatiotemporal coordinates of liberal discourse. Traditionally, the liberals were emphatically oriented toward a future essentially different from the present: a constitutional monarchy instead of absolutism; a nation-state instead of the conglomerate state; liberty as a core value grounded in history, but not yet fulfilled. But this was a much less ambitiously utopian program than that of the democrats. And while at least some representatives from the democratic left wing could look toward republican France for political inspiration, the liberals were much more ambiguous and vacillating: enthusiastic about the fall of the July Monarchy, sympathetic toward the new republican government, yet unabashedly hostile toward what it regarded as the disagreeable elements of French politics, especially its traditions of labor protests.⁶³

62. *Fædrelandet*, 28 September 1848.

63. See, for example, the condemnation of the Parisian June Days in *Fædrelandet*, 6 July 1848.

As it turned out, it was the liberal notion of democracy that came to predominate. With the defeats of revolutionary movements during the fall of 1848 and, after a new resurgence in many places, the spring of 1849, the democratic left was increasingly inclined to accept a defensive position. Thus, the left ended up accepting the model of a two-chamber parliament proposed by the liberals as a concession to the widespread democratic expectations of 1848. This enabled the left and the center to marginalize the antidemocratic positions of the right in the Constitutional Assembly, but at the cost of a deradicalization of the parliamentary left. The utopian aims of the left-wing democrats had been partially blocked by the dystopian specter of communism, just as the democrats themselves had succeeded in blocking right-wing utopian desires by similar means.

Conclusion

The debates as well as the constitutional results of the new Danish constitution were thus influenced by what may be termed the “spectral presence” of communism; it was, as Derrida later put it, “present without being present.”⁶⁴ In other words, while being practically absent as a social or political movement (or even as a political program) in Denmark during the 1840s, communism had a strong presence in the discourse of the social order, including the conservative adherents of absolute monarchy as well as the liberal and democratic currents of the opposition attaining hegemonic positions during the European revolutionary wave of 1848–1849. In its own dramatic way, it contributed to the sense of temporalization of modern conceptions of the social order—as well as to reconfigurations of the politics of space within the overall construction of European civilization: forging discursive constructions of European unity as well as new emphases on the necessity of maintaining distance and

64. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 165.

difference, especially between traditionalist or gradualist “Danishness” and revolutionary “Frenchness”.

The intimate relations between the concept of *communism* and processes of social revolution during 1848–1849 may be revealed by the contrast between the frequent, urgent warnings of communism during the 1840s and the fewer, much calmer references to communism that I have been able to locate in Danish debates of the ensuing decade. To name one important example, the Cologne trials against German communists in 1852, designed to root out the remains of communism as a movement and as a social desire in Germany, were publicized energetically by the German press. But the Danish press seemed uninterested, hardly even mentioning it.⁶⁵ In one of the rare explicit critiques of communism during the mid-1850s, the liberal lawyer Otto Müller commented on the French writer Alfred Sudre’s book on the subject published in the immediate aftermath of the 1848 revolutions: However justified his polemics against “the unjust, ridiculous, unnatural, impossible content, of the Socialist and Communist doctrines; their annihilation of all happiness and liberty, of all civil and moral order,” such polemical asides were of little “use and interest to Danish readers.”⁶⁶

65. Searching through several Danish newspapers of different political persuasions (*Fædrelandet*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, and *Dagen*), I have only managed to find one single brief notice about the Cologne trials, in *Fædrelandet* on 9 October 1852. A good, recent account of the trials and their reflections in the German press is Jürgen Herres, “Der Kölner Kommunistenprozess von 1852,” *Geschichte in Köln: Zeitschrift für Stadt und Regionalgeschichte* 50 (2003): 133–155.

66. Otto Müller, “Communismens Historie, af Alfred Sudre,” *Dansk Maanedsskrift* 4 (1856): 254.

In other words, communism could now be described, even by a very politically engaged writer like Müller, as something remote in time and space—as a phenomenon peculiar to French political life and to the turmoil of a brief revolutionary period in the past. And yet, Müller seemed hardly able to constrain his own anticommunist polemics, spending almost forty pages of an intellectual journal on a (not-so-disengaged) summary of the nature and history of this communism, which was allegedly so far away. If Sudre's book from 1850 had been an attempt at burying communism in the midst of revolutionary conflicts, Müller's project was that of excavating its remains in order to bury it again—or, borrowing Derrida's expression: to conjure the specter in order to conjure it away.⁶⁷ Like a surgeon, Müller stitched the wounds of the social body in a suture. But the scars of the wound were retained in the suture as “sedimentary deposits.”⁶⁸

With the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917, the concept and language of *communism* reappeared in modern political vocabularies.⁶⁹ By then, uses of the word carried only increasingly vague reminiscences of its first appearances during the 1840s. Yet, its main semantic content—the longing for a future society beyond that of the power of private property—remained intact, along with its characteristic patterns of social hopes and fears that, inevitably, turned even the twentieth-century states under Communist Party rule into mythical entities, promises, or threats of radically different social forms

67. “On le convoque pour le révoquer, on ne jure que par lui mais pour le conjurer.” Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 164.

68. Michèle Barrett, “Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe,” *Mapping Ideology*, 249. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2000 [1985]), 88.

69. Schieder, “Kommunismus,” 506–516.

beyond any societies in actual existence. The communist specter, with its peculiar conjunctions of historical temporalities, seemed now to return with a vengeance. And perhaps, even a quarter of a century after the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the persistently harsh debates over the fate and character of twentieth-century communism reveals how this specter continues to haunt our own present.