

GOODBYE COMRADES, WE MISS YOU NOT

Goodbye to all that?: The Story of Europe Since 1945 by Dan Stone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

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The 25th anniversary of the end of the Cold War and the recent financial crisis have led to a tendency to view the alleged stability of post-war Europe before the Berlin Wall fell with a nostalgic air. It has also led to a flurry of books taking advantage of newly released archives and the ability to better analyse the fascinating period of the end of the Cold War with more detachment and a better grasp of the long term trends it represented.

Dan Stone's *Goodbye to all that?*, the title is an homage to Robert Graves memoir of the Great War, is one of the most interesting interpretations of Cold War Europe to come out as part of the flurry of anniversary publications. It is a fascinating and also frustrating work. Stone takes a chronological approach and his range is breath-taking. He is equally at home in Franco's Spain and Ceausescu's Romania, but he fails to grasp that each were uniquely horrible and neither should not be mourned for passing into history.

Stone is a historian of ideas and he takes as his main thesis that the post 1945 consensus was grounded in a common ideological outlook, one based on anti-fascism. In the West this took the form of Social Democracy and the creation of the welfare state, while in the East it was socialism in one country. While the argument is plausible, Stone never really wrestles with the causes for the

decline of the post-war consensus, he ascribes it to neo-liberalism which he claims facilitated a resurgence of far-right politicians, but there is little explanation as to why neo-liberalism was able to sweep the European continent so rapidly and so soundly. Furthermore, far right groups had been around long before neo-liberalism appeared, most notably in France where the far right brought down the 4th Republic aided and abetted by a military shaded with more than a tinge of fascist ideology and nearly brought down the 5th Republic.

This oversight is unique only in that Stone is overlooking the sins of the right. The most frustrating part of the work is how soft Stone is towards the left. This inability to fully grasp and understand the horrors of communism explains in part his inability to understand why everyday legacies of regimes such as the DDR are quickly being expunged from the collective and even architectural memory. Communism is not in Stone's account a particularly nasty form of tyranny made attractive only by the fact that Nazism was even more nasty. We are told that there were "more extreme intolerant aspects of Stalinism" one wonders what were Stalinism's less extreme intolerant aspects, perhaps deportation as opposed to execution?

Nor can Stone accept that Soviet Communism was ultimately unreformable, which does explain why it failed to meet the challenge of neo-liberalism. Reform was attempted under Gorbachev of course but when reform failed the system collapsed. Stone however can have no enemies or villains to the Left, thus one encounters rather quaint descriptions such as 'renegade communist' to describe Milovan Djilas. Such descriptions reveal far more about the author than the post-war consensus he mourns for passing.

Goodbye to all that? will become a standard revisionist text on the cold war period in Europe. It is a valuable book in that it sheds light on common elements and themes across the Berlin Wall, but its greatest value lies in demonstrating to students how the “useful idiots” of the Cold War could overlook the horrors of the Left. The end of the post war consensus brought change and uncertainty, but that does not mean it should be mourned or that it should be revived as a challenge to the current neo-liberal trend that is still dominating European politics. No one can seriously think that a Stalinist regime in today’s world would be where one would like to live or the regime one would want for a neighbour.