

Opinion Germany's past just might hold the keys to America's future

Checking corporate power doesn't have to make for a weak economy.

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Regarding Joseph Stiglitz's May 16 Thursday Opinion column, "[Time's up for neoliberals](#)":

Mr. Stiglitz called for a progressive capitalism to counter the neoliberal doctrines fueling an antidemocratic backlash around the world. The economic success of postwar Germany suggests that Americans need not start from scratch.

In the previous century, a group of anti-fascist German scholars devised a philosophy they named "ordoliberalism." It was rooted in two key ideas: Competition is more important than efficiency and a well-functioning market economy must serve the ends of social justice and individual freedom.

They began to develop their views in the 1930s, as fascism was gaining ground in Europe, Soviet communism ruled Russia, and Western capitalism was dominated by giant cartels and trusts. These conditions meant they never lost sight of the dangers of concentrated economic power, which could be exercised both by government, as in a totalitarian regime, or by big corporate interests. And while some ordoliberals were arrested or driven into exile during the Nazi dictatorship, others continued working underground, and their ideas influenced postwar German reconstruction.

As [the 1949 Basic Law](#) for the Federal Republic of Germany states, "Property entails obligations. Its use shall also serve the public good." That idea was expressed through Germany's employment-based social insurance system; a stable currency; inflation held in check through collective bargaining; and a steep 50 percent tax on private and public property to "equalize burdens" between those who had accumulated wealth and those who had lost property during the war. Germany believed that all of society — labor, employers, taxpayers — must share in the costs and benefits of public investment in education and training, expanding the apprenticeship model that has kept youth unemployment low and industry competitive.

And in 1957, Germany adopted a competition law prohibiting cartels and any concentrations of market power that restrict freedom of enterprise or limit competition. The thinking behind Germany's competition law underlies European-wide competition law enacted in the treaties of Paris, Rome and Maastricht that established the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, and finally the European Union. Europe's competition regime has been vital to the continent's peace and prosperity.

And while ordoliberalism is a German creation, it is also part of a larger intellectual tradition with roots, and present-day expressions, in the United States. The philosophy was heavily influenced by turn-of-the-century American progressives, particularly Justice Louis Brandeis, an antimonopolist who has returned to fashion as a key influence on modern-day critics of laissez-faire economics such as Tim Wu and Lina Khan.

Power concentrations will always arise and attempt to suppress threats to their economic advantages and influence over government. As the ordoliberals recognized, freedom and social justice are linked. When monopolists abuse the market economy, both freedom and social justice are weakened. When government vigorously protects competition, then the economy can truly serve society.

Thomas F. Remington, *Cambridge, Mass.*

The writer is a visiting professor at Harvard University and the author of “The Returns to Power: A Political Theory of Economic Inequality.”

Thank you for publishing Joseph Stiglitz’s opinion column.

“The proper role of government is to protect the weak from the strong” is my response to both neoliberals and neoconservatives who question whether the federal government is doing too much or too little. We have a criminal justice system to protect us from bad actors at home. We have an Army to protect us from bad actors abroad.

And we have federal and state laws to protect us from large corporations. Left unchecked (and unregulated) in the best neoliberal tradition, they would run roughshod over their customers. They would act only in the interest of their own profits, to the detriment of our needs and planet. They have proved this time and again. The courts are not the answer. Imagine the lawyers Google or Facebook could marshal against me if I sued one of them over a legitimate grievance.

Neoliberals and neoconservatives alike agree that the state has the first two roles but vehemently disagree with the third, even though corporate power presents a clear and present danger equal to the threat of crime or foreign conflict.

Ron Cordes, *King of Prussia, Pa.*

Zionism’s future

Regarding Yuval Noah Harari’s May 15 Wednesday Opinion essay, “[Will Zionism survive the war?](#)”

I read Mr. Harari’s excellent essay with great interest and agree with many of his observations. He makes clear, rightly enough, that he opposes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the type of Zionism he represents. Defeating Mr. Netanyahu would be a clear step in the right direction, in my opinion. But what does Mr. Harari want for Israel after the Netanyahu government? A Labor government? If so, what difference might that make?

As Mr. Harari must surely know, while David Ben-Gurion, who was Israel's first prime minister and leader of the Mapai party, advocated for and accepted the division of Palestine, he did not agree to be bound by the borders sanctioned by the United Nations. Nor did he accept the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs in the new Jewish state. His Labor successors also rejected borders proposed by the United Nations and refused to allow Muslim and Christian refugees to return to their homes. Levi Eshkol, a Labor prime minister, launched the Six-Day War in 1967, later described by Prime Minister Menachem Begin as a war of choice, if also a defensive one. Labor Prime Ministers Golda Meir, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak authorized the confiscation of Palestinian land and the movement of hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews into East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

I agree that Israel and Jews all over the world have a lot at stake in the way Israel deals with its Arab citizens and neighbors. And so does the United States, which has aligned itself closely with Israel.

For Zionism to survive, it's time for a clearer break with the past. Instead of vetoing U.N. resolutions opposed by Israel and providing weapons that are not truly necessary for Israel's self-defense, our country should openly side with Mr. Harari and the Israelis like him.

Kenneth Longmyer, *Falls Church*

The writer, a retired Foreign Service officer, served in Jerusalem and in the State Department's Office of Palestinian Affairs.

Yuval Noah Harari's column was very wise.

My family has a long history of support for Israel. My uncle served as commander of Israel's 7th Armored Brigade in its war of independence. After conquering Nazareth, he also refused to expel the Arabs from the city. Although a warrior, he was a man of peace who believed Israel should stand for tolerance, fairness and justice. His mentor, David Ben-Gurion, shared that vision and accepted the U.N. mandate for a Palestinian state, as did his deputy, Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated for that view by an Israeli extremist. Their founding vision for a fair and just Israel is the only moral one and the only one that can succeed.

Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of that vision, his support for settlements, rejection of a two-state solution and general tough-guy, no-holds-barred aggressiveness have isolated Israel and turned it from a symbol of fairness and justice to one of intolerance and oppression. That is making Israel a pariah and hurting Jews everywhere. Netanyahu is right that Israel cannot be on the leash of other nations. But it must always be on the leash of righteousness.

Thomas Wilner, *Washington*

As one would expect, Yuval Noah Harari offered a thoughtful proposal for a Zionism that not only accommodates but ultimately relies upon the creation of a Palestinian state. However, with respect, Mr. Harari fails to offer any ideas for how such a proposal can become a reality.

Mr. Harari fairly admits that only one-third of the Israeli population now favors a two-state solution, and he could have added that more than 500,000 Israelis inhabit settlements that now spread throughout the West Bank and are growing every day. Yet he doesn't answer the inevitable question: Given these facts, what is to be done?

This is where the United States comes in. If one agrees with Mr. Harari's conclusion that an Israeli "river to the sea" stance is no more acceptable than the Palestinian version, then Israel must withdraw from the West Bank. For five decades, the United States has permitted, if not encouraged, a settlement process that violates international law, common sense and simple moral precepts. And now we, and Israel, are trapped by an Israeli population that is close to seeing a Jewish West Bank as a *fait accompli* and a government that already does. This puts in jeopardy the two-state solution, the only realistic path toward a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace. If Israeli politicians are unwilling to extricate themselves from the trap they have created, then a U.S.-led sanction regime tied to settlement withdrawal, or a cessation of military and economic support, could provide the impetus for change.

The United States can no longer be a bystander to this catastrophe. We must finally see that, by providing no-strings military and economic lifelines to Israel despite its settlement policy, we endanger the very Zionist principles Mr. Harari promotes in his essay.

Alan Ferber, *Alexandria*