

## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

Sons of Liberty bowl (1768) to the masthead of the *Boston Gazette*.

Korshak attributes the symbol's eventual demise in America to "sensitivity" to the slavery issue, which threatened the union as early as the 1787 Constitutional Convention. The federal mint, established in 1792, for example, "may have preferred for its first coinage a generalized and inspirational goddess . . . over any depictions of the cap, [with its specific reference] to the freeing of slaves, even ancient Roman slaves."

French artists, however, who had used the liberty cap symbol to refer to the American Revolution, adopted it to serve the anti-Royalist cause during the French Revolution in 1789. The floppy-tipped Phrygian cap, which alluded to the kind worn by French workingmen, writes Korshak, became the "quintessential French liberty cap." During the Revolution the symbol proliferated—on plaques, furniture, tea sets, and atop the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Unlike the first American coins, which eliminated the cap, the French versions maintained it. Today it remains a powerful symbol for the state on French coins and postage stamps. In the United States, says Korshak, the cap's "radical meaning" faded simply by being forgotten. In France, by 1800, the goddess and the cap "shed their connotations of liberty and became instead symbolic of the republic."

### *Hugo the Politician*

"Victor Hugo: On the Legacy of Myth" by Renee Winegarten, in *Encounter* (Sept.-Oct. 1987), 44 Great Windmill St., London W1V 7PA, United Kingdom.

Victor Hugo (1802–1885), the French novelist and dramatist, relished battling in the political arena. As early as 1829, Hugo began a lifelong campaign against the death penalty, which led him to condemn the executions of both American abolitionist John Brown and Emperor Maximilian, the French-installed ruler of Mexico (1864–1867). At various stages, Hugo supported Russian Jews, homeless children, and Irish Fenians.

Yet Hugo's "love for the People," argues Winegarten, a biographer and critic, was ambiguous. Even the title of his most famous novel, *Les Misérables* (1862), could refer either to persons living in poverty *or* people who were "vile and despicable." In an autobiographical work, Hugo wrote that his philosophy was to see "right on both sides, wrong on both sides."

Hugo began his career as an ultra-Royalist. But the banning and stringent censorship of his early plays—such as *Marion de Lorme* (1829) and *Hernani* (1830)—led Hugo to question his monarchist convictions. It took the Revolution of 1848 to complete the transformation of Hugo from a "vaguely liberal conservative" to a man who routinely "voted with the Left" as a *député* in the French Parliament.

After President Louis-Napoléon declared himself emperor in 1852, Hugo fled France for Brussels, where he stayed until Napoléon was deposed in 1870. *Les Misérables*, the major work of this period, both praised and denigrated the poor. Those underprivileged people who, by their own achievements, transcended their fate (such as hero Jean Valjean) were admirable; characters who stayed trapped in the mire of poverty were *la*

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*canaille*—the underworld, the condemned.

Hugo returned from exile as “the incarnation of the Republic”; his birthday became a day of national celebration, and the Parisian street on which he lived was named for him. In 1985, on the centennial of his death, French politicians of both the Right and Left claimed Hugo as their champion. The National Assembly president, a socialist, declared that Hugo “is and will remain part of the Left.” Conservative politician Jacques Chirac, now France’s premier, countered that Hugo “could have been a Gaullist” because of his belief in “the greatness of France.” Indeed, Winegarten observes, Hugo’s shifting political positions allow him to “be claimed by almost all as a genuine part of their mythic patrimony.”

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 OTHER NATIONS
 

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### *Kiwi Success*

“New Zealand’s Economy: Learning to Fly” in  
*The Economist* (Nov. 21, 1987), 25 St. James  
 St., London SW1A 1HG, United Kingdom.

New Zealand’s economy has been failing ever since 1950, when the British Empire began to recede. But the market-oriented policies of Labour Prime Minister David Lange, argues a staff-written *Economist* report, may be halting New Zealand’s long economic decline.

During the early 1980s, New Zealand was “one of the most regulated and distorted economies outside the communist block.” National Party Prime Minister Robert Muldoon attempted to bolster domestic industries through massive subsidies to farmers, energy producers, and steel manufacturers. As inflation rose, Muldoon imposed wage and price controls, dampening the economy further. When Muldoon’s regime fell in July 1984, New Zealand’s foreign debt exceeded Brazil’s on a per capita basis.

The Labour Party took drastic steps to bring the New Zealand economy back to health. Finance Minister Roger Douglas combined tight-money policies with deregulation. Wage, price, and credit controls, interest-rate ceilings, and foreign-exchange restrictions were abolished. The maximum rate of income tax was reduced from 66 percent to 48 percent.

In April 1987, nine state-owned agencies (whose earnings represent 12.5 percent of New Zealand’s gross domestic product) were “corporatized”—transformed into firms designed to be run like businesses instead of bureaucracies. The new corporations (including the post office, the electricity monopoly, and Air New Zealand) have made dramatic changes. Both the Forestry Corp. and the Coal Corp. have reduced their staffs by two-thirds, yet coal production has increased by 10-20 percent and the Forestry Corp. expects to turn a loss of \$45.5 million in 1986 into a profit of \$19.5 million in 1987.

Many regulatory burdens still exist. While some tariffs have been reduced, they remain extremely high, averaging between 30 and 40 percent on manufactured goods. Union membership is still mandatory, and centralized bargaining means wages cannot respond to changes in the demand for