Sociologist Paul Hollander, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 23, 1990), is not convinced. In academe, Marxism has come to serve "as a stick with which to beat Western pluralist-capitalist systems and their cultures .... Our Marxist academics knew little about existing socialist societies and were not in the least [eager] to learn more or to criticize them; they were afraid that such criticism might put them in the unsavory company of 'cold warriors' or 'red bashers.'" The fall of communism is no more likely to disturb their faith than did its dismal record of performance in decades past.

In the view of William G. Scott and David K. Hart, co-authors of *Organizational Values in America*, the collapse of communism ought to call into question the ideology of "managerialism." The communist regimes, they write in *Society* (Mar.–Apr. 1991), "were managed societies, and their managers proved incapable of satisfying the aspirations of the people .... We too are a managed nation ...."

Be that as it may, it is the status of socialism that is now most at issue. Princeton's Paul Starr, co-editor of the liberal *American Prospect* (Fall 1991), is hopeful that liberals will now face up to that reality. It is finally time, he says, for liberals to cut loose from socialism, even socialism of the democratic sort. "It is now indisputable that communism impoverished the people who lived under it, and it is not clear how or why a more democratically planned socialist economy would do much better—or that such a system is feasible at all." Now, liberals must focus on the reform of capitalism. "Whatever the party of reform once may have had to learn from the ideas of socialism, it has already absorbed; indeed, some of what it learned, it ought to unlearn. Those who have believed socialism to be a higher stage of liberalism now need to take to heart, not the great vision of socialist theory, but the bitter disappointment of the practice."

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Dry Rot?

"The Fragility of Liberalism" by Christopher Lasch, in *Salmagundi* (Fall 1991), Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12866.

In the very hour of its greatest triumph, in the very nation that has been its champion, liberal capitalism is in an alarming state of decay. "[T]he signs of impending breakdown are unmistakable," warns Lasch, an iconoclastic historian and author of *The True and Only Heaven* (1991). "Drugs, crime, and gang wars are making our cities uninhabitable. Our school system is in a state of collapse. Our [political] parties are unable to enlist the masses of potential voters into the political process." And the emerging U.S.-dominated global culture, far from reflecting a regard for human dignity and other liberal values, is "the culture of Hollywood, rock and roll, and Madison Avenue ... a culture of hedonism, cruelty, contempt, and cynicism."

This dangerous state of affairs Lasch partly blames on the allegiance of liberals—classical and modern—to the false god of unending progress. Their commitment led during the past century to the creation of a consumer society and to the centralization of economic and political power, which robbed citizens of their independence. But since the American Revolution, liberals have made another big mistake, in Lasch's view. They have imagined, with Virginia political theorist John Taylor (1753–1824), that a properly designed political system alone would ensure the health of American society, that a society's institutions "may be virtuous, though the individuals composing it are vicious."

By the 19th century, liberals were left with only one prop for civic virtue: The obligation to support a family, they

thought, would overcome the individual man's selfishness. Today, even "the higher selfishness of marriage and parenthood" is losing its influence.

"Liberalism promised progress, abundance, and above all privacy. The freedom to live as you please, think and worship as you please—this privatization of the good life was liberalism's greatest appeal. Having set definite limits to the powers of the state, at the same time relieving individuals of most of their civic obligations, liberals assumed that they had cleared away the outstanding obstacles to the pursuit of happiness." But they also unwittingly cleared away the foundations of civic life.

As today's overburdened state defaults on its assigned responsibilities, Lasch contends, citizens will have to meet their own needs by, for example, patrolling their own neighborhoods. That is to the good, in Lasch's opinion, because it will help to revive the spirit of self-reliance and neighborly cooperation. Yet many Americans, living in cities or suburbs where the shopping mall offers the only "community," have lost the habit of self-help. To help them regain it, ironically, government action is needed: policies to strengthen families and initiatives, such as school vouchers, to give them more control over the professionals who so affect their lives. Indeed, Lasch says, "it is hard to see how the foundations of civic life can be restored, unless this work becomes an overriding goal of public policy."

Stressing The Negative

"Negative versus Positive Television Advertising in U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1960–1988" by Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston, in *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1991), Univ. of Pa., 3620 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6220.

As the countdown to the presidential election begins, Americans are bracing for an onslaught of "negative" political ads on television. That is what they got last time—and to an unprecedented extent, to hear many reporters and political pundits tell it. Especially offensive, said the critics, was President George Bush's 1988 campaign, with its notorious commercial about furloughed murderer Willie Horton. After examining 830 TV political ads aired in the eight presidential campaigns from 1960 through 1988, however, communication specialists Kaid, of the University of Oklahoma, and Johnston, of the University of North Carolina, see a different picture.

Many observers insisted that mud-slinging was the 1988 presidential candidates' main activity.

The proportion of "negative" ads—i.e. those focused on the alleged defects of the opponent—reached its height, Kaid and Johnston found, not in 1988, but in 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson's campaign used the famous "Daisy Girl" commercial to suggest that Barry Goldwater would start a nuclear war. Forty percent of the political ads used in the general election campaigns that year were negative. In the 1976 Carter-Ford contest, by contrast, only 24 percent were. The proportion increased to 36 percent in 1980, when Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan squared off, but has hardly changed at all since. In 1988, Kaid and Johnston report, attack ads were 37 percent of the total.

Negative political ads are not all bad, the authors point out. In fact, they are more likely to contain information about political issues than the positive ones, which celebrate the supposed virtues of the sponsoring candidate.

The most surprising of Kaid and Johnston's findings, however, is this: In the