

FOUR SYSTEMS

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Random House  **New York**

First Edition

9876543

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Cohen, Carl, 1931-

Four systems.

Includes index.

1. Democracy. 2. Fascism. 3. Communism.
4. Socialism. I. Title.

JC348.C64 321 81-13949

ISBN 0-394-32531-1 AACR2

Manufactured in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Bryna Graff.

“Justice, justice shalt thou pursue.”

TO THE READER

Governments set the frames of our lives. They establish policies and make decisions that limit our freedoms, affect our economic well-being, and contribute greatly to our happiness and to our discontents. Which system of government is best—for each of us individually, or for all of us collectively—is therefore a question of great and universal concern. It is also a question around which bitter disagreements have long raged. The aim of this book is to present, concisely and fairly, the strongest case that can be made in support of four conflicting systems of government.

Each of these systems—socialist democracy, individualist democracy, fascism, and communism—is defended, in turn, in the authentic voice of its advocates. The best arguments for each are given their most forceful statements. I try to represent each with complete honesty, holding nothing back, distorting nothing to the advantage of one system or the disadvantage of another. I try to defend each so persuasively that its wise and earnest supporters would say, upon reading my account, “Yes, that’s just what we mean—and that’s just the way we would say it ourselves.”

Each of these defenses is *serious* in that it makes a case for a system of government that is and has been widely and enthusiastically espoused. Fascism and communism, as well as the varieties of democracy, are not merely academic possibilities, but genuine systems that have won the loyalty and intellectual support of deep thinkers and ordinary citizens. It is a grave mistake to caricature

any of these systems, to erect a straw man to serve as a foil for the system to which we have in fact committed ourselves in advance. That common mistake breeds superficiality. It results in failure to comprehend why statesmen, political scientists, philosophers, and whole nations have adopted world views conflicting with our own. We may be right—whichever view is ours—and they wrong, but we will remain puzzled by their conduct and by their enthusiasm until we have heard and understood the best case that can be made in their defense. To appreciate that best case we must—at least for a while—adopt their perspectives, feel their concerns, follow their reasoning. We must think and empathize with each serious spokesman in turn.

Each of these defenses is *deep* in that it makes the case for its system on the most solid foundation possible. Political systems rely not merely upon rhetoric, or tradition, or force—though all of these are used, of course—but also upon reasoned beliefs. Each system rests upon a different set of fundamental premises about the nature of human beings, their needs and capacities, their rights and obligations, their histories and aspirations. The best case for each will be firmly built upon these premises and will give evidence from history and from common life in their support. Each case, therefore, encompasses both abstract arguments and the application of these arguments to concrete circumstances. Details may be bypassed, but the roots and the realities of each must be exposed.

Each of these defenses is *passionate* in that it makes the case for its system not coldly, with a clinical treatment of argument and evidence, but with the warmth and enthusiasm that a loyal advocate will exhibit in real life. Rights and freedoms are much more than topics for academic discussion; they are so precious that people will fight and even die for them. Naturally, therefore, they argue in defense of what they think just—government by the many or by the few, the primacy of the individual or the state or the class, the centrality of economics or politics or morality—in words and tones that convey the intensity of their convictions. I try to capture that spirit, bringing the arguments to life with inflection and phrasing that reveal the feelings as well as the judgments of the human beings represented.

But isn't emotion out of place in rational argument? If right and wrong in matters of government can be objectively deter-

mined—as the advocates of all four systems believe—won't enthusiasm obscure the truth and mislead the unsophisticated? It may, but it need not. There is no incompatibility between a sound defense and its effective formulation; effectiveness involves much more than heat. In this John Stuart Mill gave good counsel. We ought to determine our verdict, he wrote, after considering both the substance and the manner of each advocate,

... condemning everyone, on whichever side of the argument he places himself, in whose mode of advocacy either want of candor, or malignity, bigotry, or intolerance of feeling manifest themselves; but not inferring these vices from the side which a person takes, though it be the contrary side of the question to our own: and giving merited honor to everyone, whatever opinion he may hold, who has calmness to see and honesty to state what his opponents and their opinions really are, exaggerating nothing to their discredit, keeping nothing back which tells, or can be supposed to tell, in their favor. This is the real morality of public discussion: and if often violated, I am happy to think that there are many controversialists who to a great extent observe it, and a still greater number who conscientiously strive towards it" (*On Liberty*, Chapter 2).

The most effective advocate of each system of government will be one who combines the virtues of intellect and spirit, who is enthusiastic but honest, penetrating in argument, and personally convinced. The full force of each system is best exhibited in its most persuasive defense.

A delicate problem arises here. To be persuasive, earnest advocates tend to emphasize the strengths of their own case, the weaknesses of their opponents' cases. There is a temptation to color the true state of affairs, to gloss over failings in one's own system while exaggerating those in others. How, then, can we expect a balanced account of any one of these systems? From its own defenders we cannot. Just for that reason we should not be content to hear one case alone, especially that one toward which we may have some prejudicial leanings. The several cases contend with one another. In each case, flaws are better elucidated by incisive critics than by evasive or confusing advocates. Each defender will strike without reservation at the others; each will try to ward off attacks foreseen. What the fascist would soft-pedal, we can rely upon the democrat to underscore; what the democrat may omit, the fascist will spotlight. The faults of individualism,

and of socialism, will each be grist for the mill of the other. The defense of each system, taken singly, should be understood as the best sets of arguments *from that point of view*. But the points of view differ vastly. True balance comes in the presentation of all four cases; it arises from the tension among competing advocates aware of their opposition.

Each advocate will present a defense of his own system in its *ideal* form. He will exhibit the benefits and extoll the justice of his system when it functions at its best, in the best of circumstances. Opposing systems he will criticize for their practical failures in the real world. We must therefore avoid a common mistake: comparing the ideals of one system with the realities of another. We must be careful to weigh ideals against ideals, and realities against realities. On both levels—as competing theoretical constructs, and as rival practical solutions to human problems—these four systems must be judged.

A word about the structure of the book is in order. The four systems—socialist democracy, individualist democracy, fascism, and communism—are not simply coordinate; they have complicated interrelations. Because two of them are varieties of democracy (socialist and individualist), the arguments that support both of these come before the arguments for each of them separately. This general defense of democracy I call the Prologue. Upon that foundation the special case for socialist democracy (System One) and then that for individualist democracy (System Two) are constructed. A short concluding note on democracy in general highlights the chief agreements and disagreements of the first two systems. Fascism (System Three) and communism (System Four) require no such combination and receive no such review.

The need to be scrupulously fair in allocating space to the competing advocates gives rise to an apparent—but unreal—inequity. The special case for socialist democracy receives (it will be seen) far fewer pages than that for individualist democracy. Later in the book, however, extensive arguments against capitalism and individualism—arguments that strengthen the case of the social democrat—are incorporated in the case for communism, which is sharply distinct from that for socialism in what it proposes, but related to that case in what it condemns. Equity in the apportionment of space is to be found—as is all balancing of

the opposing arguments—not in any one section, or two, but in the structure of the whole.

No conclusions are drawn in this book. For the author to extract a political moral, or to score final points for one system against the others, would betray the entire enterprise. These arguments are not charades. If, when all is said, I have a rational preference for one among the systems presented, I earnestly hope that it cannot be detected within these pages.

It cannot be true, of course, that two (or more) of these systems are both (or all) right. It is conceivable that all of them are wrong, or that on such matters there is no right and wrong. And more than one system may share a given principle. But each denies much of what the others assert, and each asserts much that the others deny. Therefore, if one of these systems is sound, as a whole, the others are not sound. Which system we ought to adopt, and why, remains for each of us to decide.

I make two requests. I ask, first, that the reader join my enterprise by making up for deficiencies that may be encountered in each defense. All my efforts to be fair, to put the best case in the best way for each system, may neglect arguments thought to be important, or may give too much or not enough weight to some considerations. I urge the reader to fill gaps that may be found and, where there is imbalance, to reestablish the balance I had sought to achieve. Then, with a perfected view of the arguments in tension, each reader can more wisely make the needed judgments.

Finally, I ask the reader to approach the defense of each system with an unprejudiced spirit and a mind truly open. Bias and doctrine are embedded so deeply in us that impartiality is extremely difficult to sustain. But if there is truth to be found in these matters, we need to find it. Resolving such monumental issues wisely, in our own minds and for our communities, is so very important that it behooves us to use in judgment all the intelligence, experience, humanity, and good sense that we can muster.

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