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CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE

A previous version of this column mistakenly cited Estonia among countries where center-right parties recently won elections.

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Where's the Revolution?

By Anne Applebaum
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We've been waiting and waiting, but the widely predicted European backlash -- against capitalism, against free markets, against the right -- has not come. There are no demands for Marxist revolution, no calls for nationalization of industry, not even a European campaign for what the Obama administration calls "stimulus" -- a policy more colloquially known as "massive government spending."

On the contrary: In last weekend's European parliamentary elections, capitalism triumphed, at least in its mushy European form. Admittedly, these European polls are a peculiar species of election. Far fewer people vote in them than vote in national elections, and those who do cast ballots are far vaguer about what their deputies, once elected to the European legislature, actually do. The European parliament's gradual accumulation of real power seems to have had no effect whatsoever on its popular image, which is still that of a do-nothing institution composed of clapped-out politicians who cost everybody a fortune in airplane tickets. As a result, fringe parties, including the so-called far right, always attract protest voters and do unusually well.

Nevertheless, European parliamentary elections provide the only cross-continental simultaneous political snapshot currently available. While national elections take place at different times and according to different rules, these most recent (and largest ever) European elections took place over a four-day period, according to the same rules, in 27 countries. This time around they told, with some exceptions, an unusually consistent story.

In France, Germany, Italy and Poland -- [four](#) of Europe's six largest countries -- center-right governments got [unexpectedly enthusiastic endorsements](#). In the two other large countries, Britain and Spain, left-wing ruling parties got [hammered](#), as did socialists in Hungary, Austria [and elsewhere](#). In some places the results were stark indeed: In London last weekend, I could hardly walk down the street without being assaulted by screaming newspaper headlines, all declaring the Labor government of Gordon Brown weak, corrupt, tired, arrogant and, yes, [very unpopular](#). In some constituencies, European candidates of the ruling Labor Party finished behind fringe parties that normally don't get noticed at all. So rapidly are British ministers resigning from the cabinet that it's hard to keep track of them (four in the past week -- I think).

But how is it possible that the European right is doing so well -- and so much better than its American counterparts -- during what is widely described as a crisis of global capitalism? At least in part, the

Europeans are winning because their leaders have the courage of their economic convictions. While the European continental welfare states have certainly kicked into high gear over the past six months, there are few equivalents of either George W. Bush's budget deficits or Barack Obama's spending binge. And where there have been -- in Britain, for example -- the high spending has hardly bought popularity. The theoretical version of this Euro-American policy gap is the recent [public spat](#) between the economic historian Niall Ferguson and the economist Paul Krugman, both of whom are at least as well known for their newspaper polemics as for their academic writing. Very crudely, Ferguson and the German government think massive deficits and government borrowing will lead to inflation and ultimately the collapse of the currency. Equally crudely, Krugman and the American administration think he's wrong.

For the record, Ferguson is, at least by origin, a British Tory. For the record, there aren't any American Republican polemicists making the same arguments in quite as public a way. With a few exceptions, the American center-right's loudest and most articulate voices have been focused almost exclusively on national security for the better part of the past decade. Lip service was paid to "small government" and "reduced spending" while successive Republican-led Congresses, hand in hand with a Republican White House, enlarged government and spent like crazy. How can they now criticize Obama's possibly lethal budget deficits when their own were so vast, so recently?

None of this is to say that any of Europe's conservatives would necessarily go down well in the United States (picture Silvio Berlusconi, paparazzi and teenage mistresses in tow, campaigning in Mississippi), and it's also true that they don't necessarily have much in common: Allegedly, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy can hardly stand to be in the same room. But if nothing else, the success of the European center-right during the current crisis proves that there is something to their political formula. They are fiscally conservative. They are, if not socially liberal, then at least socially centrist. They haven't been swayed by the fashion for big spending. They are trying to keep some semblance of budget sanity. And, at least at the moment, they win elections.

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