

A THEORY about history has set the intellectual world a-buzz – even not so intellectual Washington – and has been widely commented on.

It is outlined in an article "The End of History?" by Francis Fukuyama in the Summer 1989 issue of *The National Interest*. "Something very fundamental has happened in world history," he says, and that is "the triumph of the West, of the Western idea," that is, democracy.

Karl Marx had predicted that history would end with the achievement of a communist utopia. The opposite has happened – according to Fukuyama, history is ending with the collapse of communism and its hopes of achieving utopia.

Apparently, "history" is understood to take place when rival world outlooks contend with one another. The triumph of liberal democracy and a market economy is rapidly becoming world-wide and is discrediting the various command economies and dictatorial governments.

Fukuyama is undeterred by Hegel's pronouncement that history was at an end when Napoleon defeated the Prussian monarchy in 1806. The age of the "rights of man" was succeeding obsolete monarchies. However, the end of history was postponed, as we got a pack of "history" for the next 150 years.

THERE HAVE been other epochs when it was supposed that the then present order or the one just coming would be the final and permanent one. The Romans thought so in the heyday of their empire, but that ended badly. The year 1000 was widely thought to usher in the millennium – but instead there came wars, plagues and religious contentions. A century after Hegel, Wilson thought that World War I had made the world safe for democracy. But then we got more "history" in the next few decades than in any other comparable period.

Already Fukuyama speaks of the "post-historical world." His thesis has not gone unchallenged. In the same issue of *The National Interest* as his article, appeared several comments by various intellectuals and officials. (Mr. Fukuyama is himself an official in the U.S. State Department.)

Allan Bloom said fascism still has a future. He noted, however, Leo Strauss's comment that "ideology is dead but philosophy has a future."

Pierre Hassner said that democracy is more fragile than Fukuyama thinks and that communist and Third World countries are not likely to adopt it.

Gertrude Hummelfarb offered the caveat that "we only know what was, not what will be."

Irving Kristol (publisher of *The National Interest*) advised that there is no "wave of the future" and that American democracy is at risk.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan predicted that lots of things will still happen. Stephen Sestanovich said that a generalization was being made on too slim a foundation, and concluded with the observation that "the strong will (still) do what they can, the weak will (still) do what they must."

Many more comments have been made far and

All over now?

BOB CLANCY reflects on 'History'

wide, most of them sceptical, possibly provoked by the very attractiveness of Fukuyama's thesis which is "too good to be true."

What is oddly missing in both Fukuyama and his commentators is attention to bad economic conditions and unsolved economic problems, those that precipitate changes, conflicts, upheavals history.

So it was with Rome when huge estates and deteriorating economic conditions weakened the Empire and left it a prey to ruder, freer peoples. So, too, when Hegel thought history was over, the new liberal philosophy carefully formulated civil rights but paid scant attention to economic rights.

And following the war to "make the world safe for democracy," the unsolved economic problems led to Bolshevism in Russia, then Fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain.

No sooner had World War II ended with a promise of world peace and the formation of the United Nations, than the Iron Curtain went down; then China became communist.

Now we are hearing of the collapse of communism. Let's bear in mind that if this is so it is because communism did not live up to its promises but instead led to economic shortages and hardship.

We must also remember that the concept of human rights has by no means gained universal acceptance. Whatever loosening up takes place is by "permission" of the leaders, whatever "reforms" take place is by their planning. They do not easily give up power.

WHILE WE may be gratified at the apparent triumph of western liberal democracy, we should keep firmly in focus the conditions in our midst that could easily lead to a lot of "history".

There is the growing gap between rich and poor, the plague of drugs and crime, the housing problem and the growing homeless population, the frenzy of financial markets, the increasing foreclosures of small farms, the vast problem of pollution and ecological damage, to name but a few of our economic problems.

There's enough there to ignite revolutions and disorders that would hardly be benign.

At the bottom of economic activities lies the land – and so at the bottom of economic disorders lies the land. Certainly more attention needs to be paid to inequities with respect to access to land.

Most of the world's population is landless and in poverty. A more just system compatible with the freedom we vaunt must be sought.

We have the key to this in the taxation of land values which would vastly improve equitable access to land. Adoption of this measure might not end "history" but it would make it a lot easier to take.