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"Talkin' bout a Revolution"[1]

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Abstract: The proclamation of liberal democracy as the absolute winner of the Cold War and the emergence of "prosecutorial" history after the fall of the Eastern Communist Bloc seemed to have established a certain path for researchers with regard to post-war dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe. A closer look at the meaning of "revolution" as well as at new research efforts reveal strong connections between the East and the West during that time, that determined changes in the pattern and style of the scientific discourse analysing the post-war decades.

Keywords: Revolution, Cold War, propaganda, connections

Captain Planet was an educational cartoon produced in the United States that aimed at educating children on ecological issues and teaching them to protect the Earth and its resources. Captain Planet and the Planeteers would fight against the greed and massive industrialization that had led to the negative impact on the environment, while symbolizing the unity of all continents in defending the Earth as the better alternative to fighting each other and contributing to the planet's destruction. Except for Europe, all the other continents had a representative (a Planeteer). The Soviet Union also stood for Europe[3] and it was somehow considered a continent. Unlike in previous antagonistic propaganda materials, the Soviet Union was portrayed as part of the solution and not part of the problem; it was not vilified but accepted as one entity with equal responsibilities towards the planet, and even used as a metonymy for one important continent. Although this was a deep substratum of the cartoon that could not have probably been of any interest to children, it did reflect the place of the USSR in the American imaginary. It is true that by

[1] Song by Tracy Chapman.

[2] The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, Alecu Russo str. no 16-19, Bucharest, Romania.

[3] During the second series, from 1992 to 1996, Soviet Union was replaced by Eastern Europe.

then the USSR was already undergoing a thorough democratization process initiated by Gorbachev and his Glasnost and Perestroika policies and it is also true that within one year it would disappear form the world map. Even so, this cartoon is an example of how the idea of the "Soviet Union" came to be taken for granted and accepted as such.

Nevertheless, after 1990 historians were quick to adopt a moralizing position. The "prosecutorial" historians – a term used in Claude Lefort's book *Complications. Communism and the Dilemmas of Democracy* (translator's introduction) – including Martin Malia, François Furet, Stephan Curtois and others were ready to paint a Manichean picture of the former Communist world. One example is Malia's remark: "the time of judgment has come!" as quoted and criticized by Lefort, who immediately added: "As one has been incapable of judging beforehand…"[4].

While some of the nations still trapped in the Soviet structure could not afford to speak out against the poverty and inhumane living standards imposed by their anachronistic Stalinist leaders (and I am referring here especially to Albania and Romania) and austerity policies, the Western world had the freedom to judge and speak out the "truth". For them, there was no sudden break, no actual moment to "stop" and reconsider anything, no moment of sudden "illumination" to spell out the arguments needed for a "moral" re-positioning of the historical discourse. The time of "judgment" was always there and the Western world was fully informed about the poor and harsh conditions in some of the Eastern countries of the Soviet bloc. Still, the Western symbolic geography of everyday life accepted the Soviet Union domination over these countries.

One must admit that for decades this particular *status quo* of the world was acknowledged as such and eventually agreed upon by the two superpowers. The Cold War was the better arrangement in terms of Realpolitik and the two "spheres" became laboratories for variants of democracy and dictatorship, as well as for different forms of cooperation and conflict.

But there was more to Communism than symbolic geography, the East versus West perspectives, the Soviet bloc and the Western bloc etc., because on the one hand the Communist movements in Russia/Soviet Bloc and Europe shared similar 19th century roots and up until the '60s evolved at a comparable pace, and on the other the relationship between the Blocs proved to be symbiotic over time, exhibiting a mirroring pattern – a decision in one part of the world would immediately trigger another one in the other part of the world[5], with significant cultural and social implications. In the last years especially, there have been many efforts from scholars in different academic areas to revaluate and reconsider the manner of analysing the relationship between the two Blocs, to overcome the right/wrong Manichean approach and to

[4] Lefort 2007: 40.

[5] i.e. the arming race, the race to conquer the cosmos etc.

understand the profound consequences the Communist regimes had upon the societies they emerged in. I dare say it was not an illusion[6] in the sense Furet argued it had been – that it left no traces, unlike other civilizational societies – since we can still see the consequences up to this day. Scholars study these consequences, as well as at the cooperation between experts in the two Blocs, the reconceptualization of the Global South and the role it played in the Cold War conflict, the cultural links and interactions, the economic interplays and the military issues.

It is important then to analyse and understand the legacy and the heritage, the trauma and the progress of this "illiberal modernization"[7], its peculiarities and the impact the international and national systems had on everyday life and individuals.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th were characterized by much turmoil and social unrest[8]. The pressure for change was increasing in the rest of Europe as much as in Russia and it was brought about by high levels of poverty and low standards of life among workers and, in many parts, peasants. "Revolution or reform" had been the most pressing question for decades – with a stronger preference for reform in the West, where representative institutions had had a longer tradition and had proved to function, unlike in Russia – where they were introduced only at the beginning of the 20th century, with limited representation and short life[9]. From the Bolshevik point of view, revolution not only had a political meaning, but it also implied radical changes of everyday life, from work life to family life – as most Russian socialists considered themselves bearers of moral virtues[10].

The Western developments of Marxism and the Soviet Marxism respectively approached the role of workers and intellectuals in politics and the role of revolution differently. These differences became clearer as world history unfolded – starting with the positioning on the First World War, the relationship between the Communist Parties inside the Comintern, the relationship between the Comintern and the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs[11], the positioning on the political developments during the interwar period and the Second World War, the many changes in approach coming from Moscow – from blaming the Social Democrats of "social fascism" to transforming them into the better allies in the fight against Nazism once the latter proved to be an unreliable ally[12]. The fact that most Communist parties, especially those in Europe, acted as forerunners of the Soviet Communist Party, with little to almost no space to act according to their own strategies (due to the 21 points

[6] Furet 1996: 8.
[7] Iacob 2011: 525.
[8] See Diner 2008, Kowalski 2006, Pons 2014 etc.
[9] Kowalski 2006: 76.
[10] Figes 2008: 31.
[11] Hopper 1941.
[12] Pons 2014: 69.

of admission to the Comintern designed by Lenin), led to a loss of their credibility and slow decay in the Western world. They regained legitimacy and trust in the Western world only after the Second World War and due to the anti-fascist fights and rhetoric. In most of Central and Eastern Europe though, Communist parties became the dominant rulers or even the (l)on(e)ly rulers, which were ascribed the grand task of revolutionizing the society in the absence of the basis of a real revolution but through a long and very complex process that would leave many casualties behind. This process included the post-war recovery and reconstruction. The Stalinization of countries might not have been Stalin's initial plan, but a reaction to the Marshall plan, as Kowalski puts it[13]. And, of course, if one takes a closer look at Stalin's decisions during the time frame covering his coming to power to the post-Second World War period (his shifting strategies towards the Spanish civil war, towards Social Democracy in Western Europe and in Germany especially, that, to some, cost Germany its democracy and gave support to Hitler's ascension[14], towards Nazism itself, towards collaborating or not with the rest of the parties, towards building or not the "national fronts" or the "popular fronts") one may not notice a clear, coherent strategy in international relations, but, *au contraire*, many trials and errors, many fractuosities and decisions taken according to the Soviet Union's best interest at various times.

Was anything scientific, one might ask, about the implications of the communist (r)evolution? Marx's own considerations on historical materialism were not supposed to provide a recipe for reaching the most evolved society, the communist one[15]. Marx was focused on analysing the present, not the future. But Soviet Marxism was creating just that – a scientific recipe for achieving the superior world order of unexploited work and happiness, a recipe the countries in the Eastern Bloc were expected to apply. While Marx and Western Marxists were more than aware of the importance of local specificities and the role they played in the development of societies, Soviet Marxism became increasingly rigid, inflexible and full of determinisms[16], while intervening and crushing several attempts to reinvent, reinterpret or adapt the "recipe" to local necessities (as was the case in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia).

Moreover, everything that was revolutionary about the Russian revolution in the romantic sense – new, creative and energetic – was destroyed by the institutionalization of the revolution, by creating the paradox of wrapping the establishment in revolutionary language. According to Claude Lefort, Hannah Arendt was the one to explain the functioning of a totalitarian regime, namely by creating organizations and institutions that incorporated the

[13] Kowalski 2006: 175.
[14] Piper 2003: 75, Pons 2014: 74.
[15] Kowalski 2006: 4.
[16] Kowalski 2006: 61.

ideology – i.e. creating the Comintern – since there was no proof needed for the truth it was preaching other than the existence of bodies fighting the enemies it preached against[17]. This was not very difficult to achieve in a society that had never made any room for rights, as Claude Lefort further notes[18]. For Diner, the revolution in Russia was an expression of the military and social exhaustion[19] the country had reached at the time, while other extremely important differences in the perception of the meaning of revolution were pervasive in the region: in West-Central Europe there were "deep social divides" and class conflicts, which on the territories of former dynastic empires took the shape of national struggle[20]. Revolution was definitely understood differently across Eurasia and differently in time – especially after the Second World War when the Revolution and the path towards building Communism required the implementation of the Soviet recipe in the Soviet Bloc, while in the Western Bloc it was equated with "national roads to socialism" as they were negotiated by Togliatti, the president of the Italian Communist Party, with Stalin, in 1949.

Hannah Arendt's analysis *On Revolution* argues that the social question played a revolutionary role only in modern times, once human beings began to doubt that "poverty is inherent to human condition"[21]. Freedom, equality, the end of poverty are values that informed and inspired violent human action and the French Revolution was the first event when the word "revolution" was used not with its meaning from physics, but in its full political sense. The word, states Arendt, needed 200 years to enter the political realm, and once it did it was more radical and carried with it political connotations that were foreign "to the political realm" itself[22]. Marx was the one to transform the social question into a political one by employing the term "exploitation"[23], but it was during the Russian Revolution that terror was employed as an institutional practice, not in the name of "good faith" as in the French Revolution, but in the name of ideological differences and by identifying "objective enemies"[24]. Revolution, notes Arendt, produces its political bodies spontaneously – councils (in the Hungarian revolution, Soviets in the Russian one), but they are not meant to take upon social, economic and administrative tasks, which in turn are the duties of parties as representative bodies. The professionalization of the party elites and the restricted access to these positions, the "lack of public spaces to which the people at large would have entrance and from

[17] Lefort 2007: 104.
[18] Lefort 2007: 134.
[19] Diner 2007: 63.
[20] Diner 2007: 64, Pons 2014: 16.
[21] Arendt 1990: 22.
[22] Arendt 1990: 46.
[23] Arendt 1990: 62.
[24] Arendt 1990: 99.

which an elite could be selected, or rather, where it could select itself"[25], the careerism and bureaucratization of party members drove them away unfortunately from the revolutionary spirit and scope. It became "a caste" in Trotsky's terms, a class of bureaucrats that managed to mask their own characteristic as a class out of fear the proletariat would endanger their social gains[26].

The Revolution was thus defeated by bureaucratization and the Soviet control, and its spirit buried under the need for a secure, unique though violent front and path towards communism. Science was used within clear ideological frames and purposes, as was the case with Lysenkoism[27]. But in time the bureaucratization and the humane image of Communism imprinted by Gorbachev's reforms, plus the economic interests, determined the symbolic integration of the Communist world in the Western imaginary not as an enemy but as a state of fact, as demonstrated by the *Captain Planet* example in the beginning. Once this general context of seeming acceptance lost its significance due to its (partial) collapse, some Western historians launched the idea of "prosecuting" Communism, thus producing a master narrative and a general pattern of addressing this history, and, moreover, imprinting a "Western", normative way of dealing with this troubled past.

Fortunately, the time of judgement seems to have passed and the time of analysis has come. What did the apparent "revolutions" bring? By using multiple voices, narratives, original documents and by addressing a large spectre of fields connected to Communist Studies, researchers from the former Soviet Bloc and from the former "Western" world have joined forces to deconstruct and try to understand the true meaning of Communism and its impact on the countries that experienced it.

This year's issue of *History of Communism in Europe* gathers contributions that analyse from an in-depth perspective the characteristics of Communist regimes, Communist parties, the impact of regimes on different professions and the reactions and fates of some of the Communist parties after the Eastern Bloc disintegration.

The issue is divided into four sections: I. "Make-Believe". Communist Propaganda and its Impact on Society; II. Professions in the Communist Regime; III. Communist Parties after the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc; IV. Essay.

The first section deals with different aspects of propaganda and its multiple consequences on the respective societies and in international affairs. Enis Sulstarova's article, *"Eurocommunism is Anti-Communism": The Attitude of the Labour Party of Albania about Western Communism in the early 1980s* analyses Enver Hoxa's ideological positioning towards the attempts of Western Communist Parties to integrate and participate in the democratic game of liberal

[25] Arendt 1990: 274-277.

[26] Lefort 2007: 122.

[27] For example, in Hungary Lysenkoism was introduced as the victory of revolutionary science over "apolitical bourgeois science", Pallo and Müller, 2017: 4.

democracies. While considering the latter a "revisionist" attitude, his interpretations were founded on the belief that a Communist world was still possible.

Switching from international propaganda to national propaganda in Albania, the collaborative work of Klejd Këlliçi and Ermira Danaj depicts the interactions between gender propaganda and gender practices in the article *Promoting equality, perpetuating inequality: Gender Propaganda in Communist Albania*. By using archive material and film propaganda, the authors investigate the iconology of women's emancipation discourse, while considering their true role as an additional work force during the post-war reconstruction and industrialization phases.

The last paper in this section, Roman Jankowski's *Media, Censorship and the Church in the People's Republic of Poland,* deals with the relationship between censorship and propaganda in the Polish communist society, with an in-depth perspective provided by an analysis of the interplay between the Communist state and the Polish Catholic Church.

The second part of the Yearbook consists of articles that examine various professions in the Communist regimes from a national and transnational point of view, thus attempting to understand the connections between the Communist state and professionals, or between the professionals themselves beyond the Communist state and the Iron Curtain. Francesco Zavatti's *Propaganda across the Iron Curtain: The Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Research Affiliated to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party and Its Network in Italy* examines the work of historians and the attempts of the Romanian Communist Party to recruit intellectual elites and create an international network in the '60s by establishing partnerships with academics, historians and publishers in the West.

Mara Mărginean's contribution, *Mutable socialist displays. Transnational Romanian architectural exchanges during the first two decades of the Cold War,* traces the careers of architects in the Communist regime and the impact transnational experiences had on those as well as on party members. In time, these experiences shed light on choices regarding the iconic images of self-representation both at national and international levels.

Elisa Goudin scrutinizes the relationship between the German Communist Party in the DDR (SED) and artists, intellectuals and workers in her article *Faire collaborer artistes, intellectuels et ouvriers pour créer une société meilleure : les stratégies politiques du SED en matière de gestion de la culture en RDA.* By using documents preserved in their entirety at the Berliner Haus fuer Kulturarbeit in Berlin ranging from 1953 to 1991, Goudin reconstructs the strategies of the SED designed to transform art into an actual medium for conveying the socialist revolutionary cause and a vector for national identification with the Communist state.

Alexandra Iancu's contribution, *The 'Westernisation' of the Communist Elites in Romania: Elite Modernity, Integration and Change*, ends the section on

professions in Communism. The article is an analysis of the professionalization of public offices predicated on a "Western" system of recruitment taking into account the level of education, academic degrees and economic experience.

The third section of the Yearbook contains contributions that examine the reactions of Communist parties as well as their destinies after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. Boris Popivanov's *Between the Past and the West: Bulgarian Post-Communist Left in Search of Legitimacy* examines the strategies of the Bulgarian Communist Party to comply with post-1989 realities: changing the name of the party into Bulgarian Socialist Party, attempting to mix elements of socialism and communism, but ultimately failing to transform itself into a Western Social Democratic Party.

Álvaro Cúria's contribution, *Southern European Communist Parties' Public reaction to the 1989/1991 Set of Events in Eastern Europe: Framing the Analysis Through a New Perspective* traces the reactions of five Southern European Communist Parties in the aftermath of the fall of the Communist Bloc from 1989 to 1991, by analysing their reactions in the party press.

The closing section is an essay written by this year's issue special guest, the historian Stefan Lémny, who analyses the problem of delation in Communist Romania in the text *La délation dans la Roumanie communiste. Lectures pour une nouvelle recherché.* After introducing a short history of the practice of delation from Antiquity to contemporary history, Lémny's analysis proceeds by considering two aspects: the individuals' behaviour and the politics of the totalitarian regimes. The author opens up new research perspectives on this topic via this case study on Romania, by resorting to recent methodological contributions on the subject and by arguing for the importance of a thorough discussion on a topic with such historical and judicial implications.

The contributions gathered in this volume portray a more nuanced picture of the outcomes of "revolutions" in the Communist Bloc and could act as magnifying lenses to improve our perspective on the relationships that occurred between party members, professionals, state institutions and also on the mechanisms and methods used by communist dictatorships to influence and control the everyday life. The articles encourage a broader understanding of the communist decades and facilitate the move beyond schematic knowledge and "prosecutorial" approaches.

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