

The European Popular Democracies of the 20th century: a specific form of the dictatorship of proletariat

1. Between August 1944 and May 1945 the Red Army, in its overwhelming advance toward Berlin, freed from the Nazi rule Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and the East Germany, favouring also the liberation of Yugoslavia and Albania.

In those countries were set up against the Nazi occupiers some antifascist fronts (for example, the Patriotic Front in Bulgaria, the Independence Front in Rumania, the National Antifascist Front in Czechoslovakia, the Antifascist Front of National Liberation in Albania, and so on). With the exception of Albania, where the Communist Party (afterwards, the Party of Labour) undertook by oneself the direction of the new democratic-popular State arising from the war of liberation, in other countries took shape some coalition governments with the participation of several political parties, expression of different social classes.

The communists who took part in those governments had, at the beginning, the task of assuring the democratic development of those countries against the reactionary and fascist survivals, of constructing inside the Front a bloc of left-wing forces, and of preventing the right-wing forces from strengthening their traditional ties with the urban middle-classes and the country folk. Profound agrarian reforms were brought about and some nationalisations were introduced; new organs of popular power were established, as the Popular Councils in Albania, the Committees of the Patriotic Front in Bulgaria, the Committees of the National Front in Czechoslovakia, and so on.

But from the theoretical and political point of view, the problem of prospect. Which was the class nature of these new regimes of popular democracy? And which «road» they should follow in their development towards socialism?

In this article we intend to examine - through the declarations of some leaders of the communist parties of those countries - the positions assumed by their parties, and how those positions were later modified through a process of profound Bolshevik criticism and self-criticism. (*Editor's bold face*).

2. «*The struggle for socialism is different to-day from the struggle of 1917 and 1918 in the tsarist Russia, in the times of October revolution. It was essential, then, to overthrow the Russian tsarism, it was essential the dictatorship of proletariat in order to pass to socialism. Since then, more than thirty years are elapsed, and the Soviet Union, as a socialist State, has become a great world power. [...] Is indubitable that both the great and the little nations are destined to pass to socialism, because that is historically inevitable for the little and the great peoples. The crucial point of the question, and we marxist-leninists should know it well, is this: every nation will carry out the passage to socialism not through a road already drawn, not exactly as occurred in the Soviet Union, but proceeding along its own road, in accordance with its historic, national, social and cultural peculiarities*» (G. DIMITROV, Report to the Congress of the Bulgarian Worker Party, February 1946).

«*Our people is for a parliamentary republic which should not be a plutocratic republic. It is for a popular republican regime and not for a bourgeois republican regime. What means this? This means: 1) that the Bulgaria will not be a soviet republic, but a popular republic in which the leading function will be performed by the very large majority of the people - by the workers, the peasants, the artisans, the intellectuals linked to the people. In this Republic no dictatorship will be, but the fundamental and decisive factor will be the labouring majority of the population*» (G. DIMITROV, Discourse of September, 16, 1946).

«*The experience and the marxist-leninist teachings show that the dictatorship of proletariat and the construction of a soviet regime are not the only road leading to socialism. In certain*

conditions, socialism can be achieved through other roads. The defeat of fascism and the sufferings of the peoples have revealed in many countries the true face of the dominant class and have increased, at the same time, the confidence of the people in itself. In similar historical moments new roads and new possibilities do appear. [...] We are marching on our road toward the socialism» (K. GOTTWALD, Discourse to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. October 1946).

*«We must show how the edification of the popular democracy and the road leading to socialism are interdepending. The communist parties have learned, in this last quarter of century, that **there is not a single road to socialism**, but that the only road leading effectively to this aim is the road followed taking into account the situation of each country. [...] Only the popular democracy allows to our country the march toward socialism through the social evolution, without the civil war» (M. RAKOSI, Discourse to the 2nd Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party).*

3. In these analyses, in these theoretical and political positions, are evident some indefinitenesses, confusions and errors, owing both to an initial and not very mature experience of the «new roads», and to a not clear relation between **the immediate task** (the consolidation of the new democratic regimes arised from the antinazi and antifascist victory) and **the long-term tasks** of the edification of socialism. There is also an excessive and unilateral emphasis on the **national** element, who is «isolated» and untied from its links with internationalism.

These declarations acknowledge and state rightly that each nation will carry out the passage to socialism not «through a path already drawn», but «according one's own road, in conformity of its own historical, national, social and cultural peculiarities». There were **some particularities** in that historical situation: for example, the driving out of power of the old dominant classes not at the conclusion of a civil war, but on account of the armed presence of the Red Army on the territory; the survivance of the parliamentary institution (an inheritance of the pre-war period) who coexisted with the new organs of popular power. But these particularities are confused with the **fundamental question of the class nature of the new power**. Is not asserted, or is overshadowed, **the leading role of the working class and of its party - the communist party - in the power system of the popular democracy** (a role that is decisive and irreplaceable in the dictatorship of proletariat).

In the following years these errors of analysis and perspective were autocritically rectified, as we have above mentioned. But one must not forget that, inside some communist parties, there were also some right opportunistic tendencies wich **arrived to the open theoretic revision of the fundaments of marxism-leninism**.

The more organic revisionist position was the one expressed in the Unified Worker Party of Poland by the right tendency represented, in those years, by its general secretary Wladislaw Gomulka. In his discourse of 30 November 1946 to the Assembly of activists of Warsaw of the Polish Worker Party and of the Polish Socialist Party [that lately fused themselves in the Unified Polish Worker Party], Gomulka so expressed his views:

*«The Polish Worker Party has established its conception of a Polish road to socialism that not implies the necessity of violent revolutionaries shocks in the evolution of Poland and **removes the need of a dictatorship of proletariat as the form of power in the more difficult moment of the transition**. On the basis of real elements, we have realized the possibility of an evolution toward socialism through a popular democratic system in which the power is exercised by the bloc of the democratic parties».*

Then he explained «the three principal differences between the road of evolution of Soviet Union and our road»:

*«The first difference is this: the social and political changes were accomplished through bloody revolutions, whereas in our country they are accomplished in a pacific way. The second difference consists in the fact that, whereas the Soviet Union had to pass through a period of dictatorship of proletariat, **in our country this period not existed and can be evoided**. The third difference that characterizes the roads of evolution in the two countres is that, whereas in Soviet*

*Union the power is in the hands of the Counsel of Deputies. or Soviet, that reunites in itself the legislative and executive functions, and that represents the form of socialist government, in our country the legislative functions and the executive ones are separate, and a **parliamentary democracy is at the base of the national power.***

*[...] In Russia the dictatorship of proletariat remained a government form necessary also after the knocking down of the counter-revolution. [...] **Today the dictatorship of proletariat has changed its form and was going to extinguish itself** with the disappearance of the class of exploiters and of their ideology; its place has been occupied by the soviet democracy as the government form of our country. The enemies of the Soviet Union, who do not understand the significance of the dictatorship of proletariat, go on asserting that this dictatorship is still existing in Russia. This is naturally a political nonsense (sic!)».*

*[...] So we have chosen a Polish road of evolution, and have named it the line of Popular Democracy. On this road and in these conditions, **a dictatorship of the working class, and let alone the dictatorship of one of the parties, is not necessary and would be aimless.** We think that the power should be exercised by the coalition of all the democratic parties. [...] The Polish democracy exercises the power through a parliamentary system of many parties, whereas the Soviet democracy accomplish the power of the people through the Soviets. [...] The Polish road to socialism is not the road that leads to the dictatorship of the working class, and the form for the exercise of power by the working masses should not personify itself in a system of Counsels».*

Gomulka - who went so far to deny the existence of the dictatorship of proletariat even in the Soviet Union - so synthesized the essentials characteristics of the Polish popular democracy: «*The elimination of the reaction from the power **in pacific way**, and the accomplishment of great social reforms by the democracy without a bloodshed, **without revolution** and without a civil war*».

These anti-leninist positions (that - it's correct to remember it - never had any right of citizenship in the Party of Labour of Albania under the firm political and ideological leadership of Enver Hoxha) were defeated later in Poland in consequence of the sharp class struggle developed inside the party. But they re-emerged with Krusciov in the 20th Congress of CPSU, arising the principal trend of modern revisionism.

As much burdened of errors, and particularly meaningful, is this definition of the countries of popular democracy supplied, in Hungary, by Eugene Varga in the first years of the post-war period:

*«It is **neither the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, nor the dictatorship of the proletariat.** The old State apparatus was not destroyed as in Soviet Union, but it renews itself through the continuous assimilation of the supporters of the new regime. They are not capitalist States in the usual sense of the word, but not even they are socialist States. Their evolution toward socialism is founded on the nationalisation of the principal means of production and on the distinctive character of these States. **Even though the State power is maintained as it now exists, they can pass progressively to socialism** pushing forward the development of the socialist sector that already exists beside the simple-mercantile sector (peasants and artisans) and beside the capitalist sector that is losing its dominant position».*

4. In the second half of 1947 the international situation went through some profound changes, as a result of the passage of the American imperialism to an aggressive and expansionistic politics (creation of military bases in the eastern part of the basin of Mediterranean, loans and military aides to the reactionary regimes in Greece and Turkey, rearmement and support to all reactionary international forces): a politics who had its utmost expression in the «Truman doctrine», the «Marshall plan» and the violent ideological anti-communist campaign unleashed by the American imperialism all over the world.

In his Report to the Conference of Information of the representatives of nine communist parties (Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, France and Italy), set in Poland in September 1947, Andrej Zdanov denounced the tendency of the United States of America to the world rule, underlined the formation - at the international level - of two

camps (the imperialist anti-democratic camp and the anti-imperialist democratic camp), and criticized the tendency, present in some communist parties, to interpreting the dissolution of the Communist International as if it meant «the liquidation of any link, any contact between the brotherly communist parties».

As the conclusion of that Conference was build up the «Information Bureau of Communist and Worker Parties», and inside the parties were reconsidered some important questions of theoretical and political nature, inclusive those relatives to the class nature of the States of popular democracy.

5. In his Report to the 5th Congress of the Bulgarian Worker Party (19 December 1948), G. Dimitrov stated:

*«In order to proceed with decision and firmness on the road leading to socialism, it's **necessary to utterly clarify the ideas** about the character, the function and the perspectives of the popular democracy and of the State of popular democracy. On that matter, **we must define with more precision some positions we had until now, and rectify other positions**, starting from the experience accumulated up to now and from the more recent data on this complex question. Briefly, in what lies the question?*

*Firstly. The State of popular democracy is the State of a period of transition and has the task of ensure the development of our country toward socialism. This means that, although the power of capitalists and of large landowners has been demolished and the goods of these classes have become property of the people, **the economic roots of capitalism are not extirpated**, the capitalistic elements aiming to restore the capitalistic slavery remain and still develop. Therefore the march toward socialism is possible only **conducting an implacable class struggle** against the capitalistic elements **in order to utterly liquidate them**.*

*Secondly. In the conditions created by the military defeat of the aggressive fascist States, in the conditions of the rapid worsening of the general crisis of capitalism and of the huge strenght of the Soviet Union, our country, like the other countries of popular democracy, having obtained the assurance of a strict collaboration of the USSR, is seing **the possibility of accomplishing the passage to socialism without the creation of a soviet regime**, through the regime of popular democracy, provided that this regime will strengthen and develop itself with the aid of Soviet Union and of the countries of popular democracy.*

*Thirdly. The regime of popular democracy, representing in these particular historical conditions **the power of the labouring people under the guidance of the working class, can and must - as the experience has already proved - exercise with success the functions of the dictatorship of proletariat** in order to liquidate the capitalistic elements and the landowners knocked down, in order to crash and liquidate their attempts of restoring the power of capital».*

As much important and rich of teachings is the analysis performed, in his Report to the First Congress of the Unified Polish Worker Party (December 1948), by the new secretary of the Party, Boleslaw Bierut, who had denounced the positions of Gomulka as the issue of a «nationalistic narrowness» and of a «petty-bourgeois mentality», as «*a return to opportunistic social--democratic conceptions, no utterly defeated and unceasingly coming alive again; against them our party has incessantly conducted and must onduct a without quarter fight*».

In that Report, Bierut so indicated the role and character of the State of popular democracy:

*«The Polish road to socialism, in spite of its particular characters, is **not something of essentially different, but only a variant of the general road of development in direction of socialism**, a variant which can exist just thanks to the victory of socialism in USSR, with regard to the specific nature of the new historical period which determines the conditions of the historical development of Poland.*

*«What is a State of popular democracy according to the marxist-leninist theory? How is definable the essence, **the class contents** and the character of the popular democracy? Some people were inclined to think **that the popular democracy was a system qualitatively and essentially***

different from a system founded on the dictatorship of proletariat. In the definition of the system of popular democracy in Poland as a specific Polish road toward the new regime, its particularity was often understood in the sense that it was considered a special process of development whose point of arrival was impossible - from what some people said - to establish previously.

Some people imagined the outcome as a «sui genesis» syntesis of capitalism and socialism, as a particular socio-political system in which lived together, on two parallel tracks and on the basis of a reciprocal acknowledgement, the socialist and the capitalistic elements. Other people, believing that the system of popular democracy was a temporary effect of the specific situation determined by the post-war conditions, strived to temporarily stabilize this situation, in the hope that was possible the return, in a second time, to the situation preceding the September [he alludes to the Nazi invasion of the Poland of the 1st September 1939, Editor's note].

[...] The popular democracy is not a form of syntesis or of a steady coexistence of two social regimes of different nature, but is the form through which are undermined and progressively liquidated the capitalistic elements, and in the same time is the form that allows the development and strenghtening of the future socialist economy.

The popular democracy is the particular form of revolutionary power arised in the new historical conditions of our epoch, it's the expression of the new array of the class forces at international level.

[...] The development of our march toward socialism tooks place through the accomplishment of the basic principles of marxism-leninism in new conditions and in a new international situation.

The principles are these:

- 1) necessity of the conquest of political power by the working class at the head of popular masses;*
- 2) prominent position of the working class in the alliance with the peasants and in the democratic national front;*
- 3) leadership entrusted to the revolutionary party;*
- 4) class struggle without quarter, liquidation of great capital and of large landowners, offensive against capitalistic elements.*

6. The historical experience of the worker and communist international movement is an extraordinary heritage of conquests, of elaborations and events: in virtue of it, some fundamental pages in the search of the road leading to communism have been written. The capability of verifying in the practice the theories and the political positions, of correcting and overcoming the errors, of arriving to new formulations and conclusions, is a distinctive feature of marxism-leninism.

In the last century, the revolutionary creativity of the working class and of the popular masses has produced, in specific historical conditions, different forms of the dictatorship of proletariat, from the Soviets to the regimes of popular democracy, that we communists must to take heart as powerful tools for the development of our theory and revolutionary practice.

The coming of the popular democracies as new forms of State power of the proletarian dictatorship, as socialist States in the first phase of their development, that run across various stages and adopt different measures in order to destroy the bourgeois production relations, has a great historical and present importance.

The study of the forms in which is embodied the necessity and inevitability of the political rule of proletariat at the head and in alliance with the labouring masses for the passage to the society without classes is essential for the today's communists. We have the task of conquering the vanguard of proletariat and leading the masses to the conquest of power, applying the principles of marxism-leninism and finding the specific forms of approach to the proletarian revolution and to the construction of the new society, in accordance with the historical conditions and the characteristics of each country.

The idea of the popular democracy is still alive in the conscience of the working class and of the labouring masses, and maintains its great force.

Italy of the future will be a popular democracy? Surely, in the new century opened not long ago, in which we communists go on with our battle, new proletarian revolutions will shake the world and new States will arise from them: but each State will be a particular form of the dictatorship of proletariat. *«Is absolutely sure that all nations will arrive to socialism, but all will arrive with some particularity, each nation in the one or the other form of democracy, in the one or the other variant of the dictatorship of proletariat»* (Lenin).

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Communist Plat-form (Italy)