

IAI8535

COMMUNIST
PARTY
UNION
EUROPE

SOVIET EAST-EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES AND
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

by Prof. Giuseppe Boffa

The first thing that has to be pointed out is that it is almost impossible, both theoretically and practically, to distinguish between state relations and party relations when referring to the system uniting Eastern European countries, allies of the Soviet Union. State-party identification in the entity which has been defined as the party-state is, in fact, a common characteristic of the real constitution of all those countries, above and beyond the differences in certain aspects of their social organization.

A tangible change in this situation does not seem hypothetical in the foreseeable future, despite the fact that a great separation of the tasks of state and party bodies does seem to be in view in some countries, including the Soviet Union. Quite apart from the effects it may have in individual cases, it seems unlikely that that separation can extend to the ties cementing the Eastern European bloc which are much more complex than mere political-diplomatic relations. This then, is the given situation to be used as a starting point for analysis both of the present and the immediate future.

The special nature of the resulting relations is also reflected in the institutions. Relations within what is today officially known as the "socialist community" are the specific competence of the leadership of the ruling parties. To a large degree this is true of all foreign policy in the countries in question, at least as concerns main trends, but intersocialist relations constitute a specific domain with special rules in which the authority of the politburo for the Soviet Union and corresponding bodies for other countries, reigns supreme.

Thus, the Soviet Foreign Minister has a section which, according to a rather classic subdivision, deals with Eastern Europe, but problems of any importance having to do with the Warsaw Pact, the Comecon or its single members (even the more traditional aspects of interstate relations) are certainly not handled there.

In this sense, the special section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which handles relations with other ruling parties in socialist countries and which since the Krushchev years has been headed by a Central Committee secretary is much more important. Proportionately, this is true for the smaller parties of the other countries, as well.

As a consequence, the most authoritative talks and confrontations, especially when there are differences to be ironed out, are the meetings of respective general secretaries or party secretaries, both collectively or bilaterally.

A number of lower levels correspond to the one mentioned above which may be referred to as the "summit" level, but whatever their denomination, they do not fall into the distinct province of either party or state.

71/51

A number of factors have contributed in time to establishing these particular relations. Some are rooted in the history of the Communist movement. If the statement is taken correctly, that is, within its historical context, it can be affirmed that the relations among the parties of the international bloc surrounding the USSR are the most substantial survivors of the old Comintern tradition, albeit profoundly transformed by a half a century's evolution. Then again, the attempt to recreate the Comintern, or something like it, after the war - the so-called Cominform of 1947 - grouped together, as we all know, mainly Eastern European parties. Actions intent on expanding the initiative to other parties outside of that sphere may be looked upon as causes of its failure, along with the decisive cause which was Yugoslavian dissidence and the inability of Stalin's Cominform to resolve it.

In the middle of the 1950s, the dissolved Cominform was to be substituted by another connective structure, the international conference of Communist parties, which for the first time tried to reconcile the special relations already existing among ruling parties with the complex needs of a vast international movement. This, too, met with little success, both on a regional and a more ambitious global scale. The last of the three world conferences of the Communist movement dates back to 1969 and essentially registered disagreement more or less explicitly expressed. Attempts to convene a fourth conference, of which news circled approximately a year ago, lacked any real chances of success. Something of the sort can also be observed for the pan-European conference of Communist parties.

Yet, there is a sphere in which the conference method has been regularly applied and it is that of the coalition of states around the Soviet Union, particularly in Eastern Europe. Here, meetings are not only at top levels, nor only in the institutional seats set down in the Warsaw Pact and by the Comecon, but rather, they are periodic, usually annual, and of all party leaders in charge of specific sectors: propaganda and ideology, organization, the press and so on.

The geneology of the phenomenon brings to the fore another decisive factor. Interstate relations among East bloc countries are, in actual fact, considered to be the expression and a part of a political movement - the Communist movement - as it is understood in the countries in question, that is, in keeping with a conception substantially linked to the old Comintern tradition. As we shall soon see, this very kind of relationship was and still is an obstacle to the emergence of a more flexible and articulate idea of the Communist political movement, an idea better suited to the quite different character which international communism has been acquiring in various nations and continents, a conception of the kind that Togliatti, for example, outlined during the last years of his life but which was not very successful because the parties in power never appreciated it fully and were not willing to back it.

Nevertheless, being and proclaiming oneself a part of an international movement is of considerable ideological importance for those parties, in that all their activity can be presented in the context of a much wider, tendentially universal experience and not only valid within the more or less restricted confines of their national boundaries. In this sense, it has sometimes even been suggested as being the reason for "legitimation" of respective governments. The term may be misleading. It can be of use only if it conveys the meaning that the supernational view of a country's activity is thought to be - and actually is - a way of increasing the authority of the parties in power. This is true, above all, in the Soviet Union, where the reason exists the longest, but it also holds for smaller parties in other

countries, even though it has again and again conflicted with latent chauvinism or even elementary nationalistic sentiments. Rarely, in fact, has it been given up, even when contrasts among countries were in defence of specific national interests (see the case of Rumania) or because of divergent political decisions.

Above and beyond the propagandistic formulations justifying the statement, when official mention is made in Eastern countries of the kind of "special relations", "unknown" heretofore in diplomacy, which has been established in the "socialist community", the allusion is to this intertwining of parties and states, with its historic origins and political implications. This was also the ideal motivation backing what was called the "Brezhnev doctrine". It's a kind of relationship which implies a certain hierarchy among the parties which is often verbally denied but which, in fact, does exist. As a support for Soviet hegemony in the Eastern bloc, it goes beyond those obviously decisive factors of disparity of forces and the consequences of the Second World War. It may be defined as a kind of "birthright", conceivable only within the framework of international relations seen as determining an ideological "field", relations which do not fall into a more classic view of interstate affairs and nevertheless constitute one of the major adhesive factors of the bloc.

This phenomenon has had decisive consequences on the split of the Communist movement on an international scale. The first has been on other countries governed by Communist parties or, in any case, of revolutionary origins. They offer a kind of specular image to the phenomenon which we have tried to analyze up to now. Many are also based on the state-party formula and, therefore, a distinction in the international spheres of activity of the state and of the party does not have much meaning for them either. This is surely the case of China and, in a different way and to a different degree, of Yugoslavia. Yet, both the Chinese and the Yugoslavs set great store by making this distinction when referring to their relations with East bloc countries and in particular, with the Soviet Union. At the moment, China speaks of exclusively interstate relations, while the Yugoslavs tend to totally separate the state from the party level. Now, what can this separation mean other than a denial of the kind of "special relations" existing in the "community" with all the political consequences that they imply, in favour of a relationship between governments based on more classic and strict rules, in order to avoid those very consequences?

This is one of the main reasons for division that have emerged in the Communist movement, even in that part which wields power monopolistically within its own countries. But there have been analogous repercussions, though of a slightly different nature in wider circles. Immediately after the war and then increasingly throughout the 50s, the difficulties in having parties which identified more and more with the state coexist with parties intent on undergoing various experiences, be they government or opposition, within a pluralistic framework in competition with other political forces and not backed by the power of the state, became evident. The existence within the movement of a real bloc of party-states, compelled to behave as such, both individually and as a group and to speak the "monolithic" tongue of their respective states finally made coexistence practically impossible, bringing the Italian Communists to the affirmation that it was no longer possible to speak of a single Communist movement. That is the way things stand today.

We do not claim to have touched on all the causes for the conflicts, contrasts and divisions which have come up in the Communist movement during its history. The events leading up to the present situation, so appropriately

synthesized in the words of the Italian Communists and the specific reasons behind each setting apart are rather well known, at least in scholarly circles and do not require repetition here. But we do believe that the phenomenon that we have pointed out constitutes a basic factor, over and above the varying contingencies, which has gradually brought the movement's evolution to the point mentioned above.

As far as Eastern European parties, in particular, are concerned, analysis cannot be limited to this aspect; other aspects of their activity must be taken into consideration. From what we have stated up until now, it should come as no surprise that conflicts involving states with Communist governments have been manifested primarily through relations of their respective parties. This has occurred in all cases whether the protagonists were Yugoslavia, China, Albania, to a certain extent Rumania, Vietnam (with respect to China) or others.

The polemics have often been of an ideological nature, sometimes the expression of divergent theoretical interpretations. But this is the very case in which it would not be a bad application of Marxist determinism to note that these conflicts are not based so much on ideal superstructures, as on substantial state economic, political or strategic interests of such importance at times as to make them matters of principle for those concerned and thus, not easily subject to compromise.

Correct interpretation of possible developments, however, requires the drastic elimination of a number of simplifications which are still too frequent in the West, not only in political circles, but also in the academic world and among numerous scholars and analysts. One of these is the view that all Communist parties in power are simply bureaucratic apparatus aimed solely at maintaining power through police repression. By stating this, we not mean to ignore the widespread existence of bureaucratic degenerations, nor the frequent recourse to repression, but merely to point out that that is not the whole picture, which has different characteristics in each country.

Given their special configurations, the Communist parties of the East bloc (and more generally, those that hold exclusive power) are the main, if not the only, set of political life in the respective countries. (From this point of view and for reasons known to all, Poland is a real exception). On the one hand, they are compelled to act in the interests of the state while at the same time seeking the widest possible active, or at least passive, popular approval among the peoples governed, taking it upon themselves to express some of their more serious grievances. There is no other explanation to the fact that all the major crises which have taken place in the past - from Poland and Hungary in 1956, to Czechoslovakia in 1968 - started within the party and ended up involving relations between the parties and the respective states. Once again, the only exception is Poland, but only in the last years of the 1970s, certainly not for all the previous crises going as far back as 1948.

Therefore, various stimula affect both the single components and the system of special relations in the East bloc today. But they have already been active for many years. With time, a delicate equilibrium - certain dialectics allowing for the interaction of various factors - has been established in the special relations among different party-states. On the one hand, emphasis is put on the bloc's need for unity and compactness, common ideological roots are evoked, the affinity of a social and political system proclaimed, manifestations able to enhance this common context promoted. On the other hand, the national origins of political activity, the historical uniqueness of each country's situation, the need for original solutions for specific problems and also the right to experimentation in all of these fields is invoked. Any revision of common doctrine is and will be denied, but "creative" or, as we might more simply put it, "innovative" application of it is boasted.

Both these not easily reconcilable poles between which the actions of the political parties fall, have established themselves in Eastern Europe by means of the controversies that have run through the international Communist movement in the last decades. Practical effects vary widely from one country to another, but it is within this framework that the experiences being discussed have taken place. The experiences are all different, but all warrant attention, such as in Hungary, in the German Democratic Republic and partially in Poland. Not even Bulgaria can be overlooked today. Furthermore, I believe it can be said that in recent years there has been a general tendency toward a gradual, albeit limited, increase in autonomy, both domestic and international, in each party-state, while at the same time placating the Soviet Union's concern for bloc unity. With due distinctions, I believe we can draw a certain parallel with developments in recent years in the Western bloc. A warning is in order: that margin of independence can also be used individually to oppose any reformist trends that may arise in the bloc as a whole and in the Soviet Union in particular. This, for example, is a very plausible hypothesis with regard to at least a part of the present Czechoslovakian leadership.

Although, as already mentioned, one can no longer speak of a single international Communist movement, the fact that parties in power in Eastern Europe set store by presenting themselves - and in a certain sense can't do otherwise - as a part of a movement that goes beyond national boundaries, has one further consequence worthy of mention. It should be pointed out, first of all, that those parts considered dissident, whether they are other ruling parties, like the Chinese or Yugoslavs, or parties on the opposition in their countries, like several Western European parties, among which the most conspicuous is the Italian Communist Party, or the Japanese party - have been neither "expelled", "excommunicated" or "exorcized" nor considered alien to communism as a whole. On the contrary, an attempt has been made to keep up contact. This has created a situation in which, no matter how curbed and limited by censorial measures, ideas manage to circulate. It becomes more and more difficult to impose a presumed orthodoxy of thought (a concept which has, on the other hand, been explicitly rejected by important parties like that of Italy) of which only a certain group of state are depositary.

The phenomenon is not new. Despite obstacles, there has always been a certain osmosis among different parties. The political lines and general conceptions of the Italian Communist Party, for example, had an influence on the direction taken by Czechoslovakian Communists in 1968. The same, albeit more generally, holds true for that set of trends that we defined at the time as "Eurocommunism", despite the fact that, to avoid its excessive spread, it was looked upon with suspicion by East bloc countries. A similar tendency seems to be manifesting itself, to a degree which is difficult to evaluate at the moment, with the reforms underway in China and in Hungary, and has always been the case with Yugoslavia's self-management.

The most probable conclusion is that these tendencies are more and more difficult to obstruct and are therefore, destined to become stronger in the future, especially in view of a new phase of international detente. This is a process which does not involve only Communist parties. Starting, for example, with the Ostpolitik of the German Socialdemocrats, the dialogue established for international political reasons by certain Eastern European governments with some parties of the Socialist International has made possible the circulation of ideas, no matter how limited and suspiciously viewed.

One condition nevertheless exists. It is that which we referred to as a new phase in detente; that is the main "implication" for the West. The answer to the question "what are the more general implications?" is that it all depends on the political objectives that the West pursues in Eastern Europe. Frankly, there does not seem to be any unitary policy in this direction in the West today. On the contrary, differences exist which are more than mere nuances, not only between Western Europe and the United States (which cannot even be considered as homogeneous bodies in this respect), but in the United States themselves, or, to limit ourselves to an even more restricted sphere, among the currents of American public opinion that have given consensus to the current president and his administration.

Whatever the term used, I feel that a renewed policy of detente is the best that both the East and the West, as well as the two parts of Europe, can hope for, in that it is the only policy capable of furthering non-military competition, with the beneficial ideal and political influence that that would bring about. I know that the word detente is no longer in use in American political speech. In Europe, on the other hand, it has remained. Therefore, allow me to use this term as an expression of European sensitivity. But terminology is of limited importance; what is important is that the meaning be transmitted and that is, that a policy of dialogue and cooperation is needed, involving above all, components of the European continent, both West and East, and neutral and non-aligned countries. This is also in the more general interests of the West, at least as I perceive them.

iai ISTITUTO AFFARI
INTERNAZIONALI - ROMA

n° Inv. 3451

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