

Introduction

The time has come to make an assessment of communism in the 20th century. Twenty years ago this would have been a much more complicated task, at a time when Communist states covered a third of the world's surface and their influence could be felt well beyond their borders. The great change occurred in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Central and Eastern Europe, Communist regimes collapsed one after the other in a period of less than two months, under the pressure of mass protests and without any intervention by the Soviet Union. Statues of Lenin were toppled; the legacy of the October Revolution was rejected. In resignation they acknowledged their unpopularity, and most of the parties in power moved aside, either dissolving or changing their name and doctrine. New non-Communist governments came to power, and so did multiparty political systems and market economies. In 1991 it was the Soviet Union's turn. Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms had allowed the peaceful changes of 1989 and the end of the Cold War to take place, but they also unleashed economic collapse and political and social chaos in the country. After the failure of the coup attempted by orthodox Communists in August 1991, the leaders of the opposition forced Gorbachev's resignation and the abolition of the Soviet federal government. Communist power was abolished in its own place of origin.

Today only a few countries still adhere faithfully to Communist ideology: China, Vietnam, Cuba, and North Korea. Notwithstanding their proclamations of Marxist orthodoxy, China's evolution points to a different reality: unrestrained capitalist development. Vietnam has taken the same path. Even Cuba has opened its economy to a restricted number of foreign enterprises. North Korea remains as the lone, irreducible custodian of the Communist past. In those countries where Communist parties were never in power, a rush to abandon Leninism and

embrace the Social Democratic tradition has occurred. Not all Communists have agreed to scrap their identity, and in Asia and Latin America especially, small splinter parties have kept it. But Communist parties mostly have been shaken by the events of 1989–91. Those parties that remained politically loyal to Moscow lost the financial support that had kept them going for decades. The few that were more independent still had to change their identity. They have all lost the supranational dimension that existed into the 1980s, even if it was a much paler and weaker version than the original.

The collapse of most Communist governments has led to the accumulation of an enormous amount of information, thanks to the opening of the archives. Reform-oriented Communists themselves disclosed a significant quantity of secret documents before losing power. After the regimes' dissolution, the opening has begun to look more like a flood of new knowledge. Conferences, articles, books, and editions of documents—in large numbers—are changing the foundation for historical work. This “archival revolution” could not be contained within the experts' world, even though its echo has mostly reached the wider public in a distorted fashion. Public opinion's interest in Europe and elsewhere has mostly been drawn to revelations that were more alleged than real, and in any case not always well documented and presented. This interest still appears to be very much alive and does not cease to cause controversies in formerly Communist countries, or in others, like Italy and France, where the Communist presence was substantial. It is difficult to establish whether there is a widespread awareness that the political and intellectual life of the present cannot be deprived of a historical understanding of the past, including the Communist past. Not to mention the fact that although today's world is quite different from the one that gave rise to the October Revolution, the circumstances

Introduction

that led the Communists to increase their influence—poverty, inequalities, unemployment, social immobility, national conflicts, and poor education—have not disappeared. Certainly one of this volume's main goals is to aid in the diffusion of more specialized forms of knowledge, especially those that have accumulated in recent years, among a broader spectrum of educated public opinion. Communism's "presence" in public discourse, and even in people's political psyche and outlook, is still significant in Europe, but less so historical knowledge of the phenomenon.

The October Revolution changed world politics. Initially it appeared improbable that the Bolsheviks would hold on to power for a long time. But they solidified their position during the ensuing civil war, and in March 1919 founded the Third International (Comintern) in Moscow. In the space of a few years almost every country in the world had a Communist Party affiliated with the Comintern, the veritable headquarters of the world revolution. Each one of these parties, whether legal or clandestine, accepted the rules and doctrine that the Bolsheviks imposed, and in this manner a break developed in their relations with Socialists who remained tied to their own traditions. Having conceived of themselves as the answer to the Socialist parties' and Second International's inadequacy in confronting nationalism and imperialism, the Communists became an element and a contributing factor to the radicalization of European politics after the war—one destined to witness the birth of a Fascist radical Right. The world between the wars was basically the scene of a struggle between communism, fascism, and parliamentary democracy.

This struggle modified the plans for world revolution that the Bolsheviks had entertained in 1917. Europe passed through the postwar crises unscathed, and its political order did not collapse due to pressure from a proletarian revolution. Revolutionary Russia was isolated. The Communist movement had its ups and downs, but was deprived of an immediate revolutionary perspective, especially after the last illusion of a German revolution was dispelled, in October 1923. The Communist revolution seemed to inescapably become a long-term goal, the outcome of an entire era of future social and political struggles. As a result, the original connection between the Soviet state and the Communist movement was strengthened, following the agenda of "socialism in one country." Stalin was both the architect of the Soviet state and system, on foundations laid by Lenin, and a leader bent on centralizing the Communist movement.

He eliminated other Bolshevik factions; in many respects he reinforced the Leninist tradition, and in others he deformed it. But he certainly elevated the USSR to the level of European and Asian power in the 1930s, creating a "model" to follow for all those Communists who might come to power. This model was based on dictatorship as well as the social and political violence that Bolshevism had experimented with, taking the use of terror as a tool of government to extremes.

This did not affect the blind devotion to the cause, messianism, and identification with the Soviet state that were characteristic of most Communists. Self-denial, sacrifice, and discipline had been distinctive traits of the Communist ethos since Lenin's times. The consequences for militants were often serious, both in and out of Russia: persecutions, prison, and concentration camps. Numerous European and U.S. Communists volunteered for the republican cause in Spain. Most Chinese Communists who participated in the Long March did not live to see its conclusion. Communists of all nationalities lost their life to Stalin's web of terror in the USSR without abandoning their faith.

The ten-year period between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s saw communism reach its highest level of consolidation, even if in pursuit of different and frequently contradictory political choices. Antifascism substituted for anti-Social Democratic sectarianism around the mid-1930s, but was then discarded in favor of the imperatives of a Hitler-Stalin alliance in 1939. Only after the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany in 1941 did antifascism once again return to center stage. Communists led movements for the liberation from fascism and Nazism in Europe in several instances. The Communist movement seemed to develop new momentum with the combination of anti-Fascist legitimation and the USSR's defeat of the Third Reich.

In the aftermath of World War II the USSR had become a great power, apparently able to defy the most important force emerging in the West—the United States. The Soviet Union was no longer an isolated state but instead surrounded by a belt of countries subjected to its influence; in a few years, between 1945 and 1948, these countries, too, became Communist. In 1949, the "Socialist camp" witnessed a second formidable expansion with the victory of the Chinese Communists in the civil war and the birth of the People's Republic of China. Mao Zedong's emphasis on the revolutionary potential of the countryside seemed to open new paths to communism outside of Europe. In the adversaries' camp Communist

parties increased their influence. The division of Europe blocked German communism from reestablishing itself in the Federal Republic of Germany, while the Greek Communist Party was swept away after having precipitated a civil war. But in France and Italy mass Communist parties managed to take root, and had an important social and political role. In the third world the Communist presence would be significant in countries like Korea, Vietnam, and later Indonesia.

The Communist world, however, was monolithic in appearance only. In the 1920s the Communists were divided into factions, and had fought one another both in and out of Russia. This tradition was suppressed by Stalinism's triumph, with the exception of the Trotskyist heresy, which was lively but reduced to a few followers who ambitiously founded the Fourth International outside the USSR. Trotsky's assassination at the hands of a killer hired by Stalin in 1940 symbolically laid the last brick in the foundation of the monolith. But the emergence of a system of Communist states after World War II did not contribute to this building's strength; in fact it actually weakened it.

The West's anti-Communist reaction had essential long-term consequences. After World War I, a parliamentary and democratic reaction had gradually given way to an authoritarian and Fascist one, which contained or destroyed some of the main European Communist parties (in the 1930s the German and Czech parties), but it also offered the Communists renewed forms of legitimation in the anti-Fascist resistance. The definitive emergence of the United States to the world stage after 1945 saw a renewed democratic anticommunism. The beginnings of U.S. containment initially led to greater restrictions in the Soviet sphere of influence, but over time its effects on the stability and endurance of the system of USSR satellite states could be felt, and this contributed to undermining the system's credibility. At the same time the Cold War permanently excluded Western Communists from the government.

The sources endangering the cohesion and expansion of communism were above all internal, though. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 was mostly a tactical move by Stalin, who felt secure in his control of "national" Communist leadership groups and conducted bilateral relations with each party by means of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's International Department. In 1947 he once again adopted centralist criteria: the Cominform's founding was meant to close the ranks of the main Communist parties faced with the Cold War

in Europe. And yet this postwar reorganization of the Communist movement immediately revealed significant limits and cracks. The break between the USSR and Yugoslavia in 1948 was a blow to Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe and cut the Cominform's role down to size. Not long after the outbreak of the Korean War, Stalin planned a renewed push for the Cominform, but nothing really happened. The Cominform was dissolved by Stalin's successors, who did not pursue the restoration of a Communist organization and replaced it with periodic international conferences.

With Stalin's disappearance, unity and compactness soon became a memory, especially after Khrushchev had denounced his crimes. Eastern Europe was immediately shaken by rebellions, whose climax was the 1956 revolution in Hungary. Moscow's violent reaction and the invasion of the country exposed the ferocity of Soviet domination. But centrifugal tendencies appeared once more during the Prague Spring in 1968. The Soviets again intervened using force, but in the long term it did not increase their authority or the stability of the satellite countries, as Poland's experience ten years later was to prove. The Eastern European Communist regimes' dependence on Moscow fundamentally compromised their legitimacy. From Moscow's point of view Eastern Europe was a geopolitical area distinguished by the servility of the Communists in power and the widespread hostility of the respective populations.

In the meantime the split between Moscow and Beijing had ended international communism's unity. While they had already surfaced during Stalin's era, the ideological and governmental tensions between the two main Communist states exploded after 1956, became public in the 1960s, and reached the point of armed conflict in 1969. Unlike the Yugoslavs who had attempted to adopt a revised Soviet model after breaking with Moscow, the Chinese acted as defenders of Stalinist orthodoxy and accused the Soviets of "revisionism." But even after Mao's death and the advent to power of the "revisionist" Deng Xiaoping, the wound between the two states did not heal and in fact worsened. Communists divided into followers of the USSR and followers of China, even if the latter remained a minority, and only counted Albania as the other country in which a sympathetic regime was in power. The numerous attempts made by the Soviets to excommunicate the Chinese from the movement's world pulpit were unsuccessful because of the opposition of a fairly significant number of parties, including the Romanian and Italian. Communism could claim two

Introduction

especially important successes, Cuba and Vietnam—two countries that for a while would give new life to its symbolic resurgence. The national liberation movements in the third world were still an area in which the movement's influence, in an anti-imperialist vein, could be felt. But from the 1960s on, no one could seriously argue that the Communist movement was monolithic or expanding according to a unitary design.

In the 1970s this monolithic appearance was given a final blow by the emergence of Eurocommunism. The two main Western Communist parties, the Italian Communist Party and the French Communist Party, together with the Spanish Communists, formed an alliance, while arguing for “socialism with a human face” along with respect for democratic principles and human rights—positions that for Soviet orthodoxy were akin to heresy. The Eurocommunists had silent sympathizers in the more moderate Communist establishments, especially in Hungary and Poland. They influenced other parties, even outside Europe, as in the case of Japan. They started a dialogue with the Chinese. In actuality, however, theirs was a temporary and somewhat incoherent alliance, politically divided and subject to the USSR's influence, especially in the case of France. Yet it was the first time that the destiny of some Communist parties was entrusted explicitly to policies based on not only an increased distance from the USSR as a “leading state” but also the social and political model it represented, which had been exported, or in any case adopted in its fundamental outlines by all Communist states. The idea of a reformed communism was viewed with hostility by the Soviets, even though the USSR certainly did not intend to renounce Leninist or Marxist legacies. Even though Eurocommunism fizzled out before the decade's end, the strongest Western party, the Italian Communist Party, continued to represent a thorn in Moscow's side. In many respects, the banner of reform communism was to be picked up by Gorbachev and carried to its extreme. On the eve of his exit he had virtually emptied communism of its Leninist components.

The fragmentation of communism as a supranational movement is inseparable from its decline. In the last twenty years of its life Soviet communism lost whatever residual attraction it still had after Stalin's myth had been demolished. The protest movements of 1968 gave rise to a minority neo-Leninist and neo-Marxist Left, but one that was hostile to the old Communist parties. At a deeper level, sociocultural changes in the West marginalized communism's ideological appeal, while the eco-

nomical and technological changes in capitalist systems were destined to outperform the stagnant systems of a Soviet type. The USSR and its Eastern European satellites followed the path of inertia and conservatism up to Gorbachev's failed attempt at reform. China soon ceased to represent an alternative source of legitimacy, once it was clear that Mao had been Stalin's equivalent in the 20th-century gallery of horrors, and that Pol Pot, Cambodian and pro-Chinese, had actually outdone both of them. The romantic mythologies built around the figures of Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro Ruz, and Ernesto “Che” Guevara did not last long.

It was nationalism instead that was to play an ever-increasing role. Stalin had been the first to resort to patriotism and nationalism, especially during World War II. The instrumental use of nationalism was characteristic of other Communist leaders like Gomulka and Ceausescu. Western Communists always cultivated the idea of their own “national path.” Outside of Europe Communists used nationalism for anti-imperialist purposes. All this produced continuous tensions with the internationalist and universalist tradition—a symptom of the Communist movement's fragmentation. In the early 1980s communism's crisis was proclaimed starting from its Achilles' heel, Eastern Europe. Only a few Communist leaders were actually aware of it. But Communist political culture was revealed as incapable of renewing itself without self-destructing. In any case, remedies arrived too late.

Notwithstanding fragmentation, crisis, and decline, the Communists' sense of belonging to a common history and reality never weakened. Differences and distances, controversies and disputes, did not stop the overwhelming majority from feeling part of the same “world movement” that had originated in the October Revolution, and believing in its Leninist virtues. Among simple militants, even those belonging to different generations, the tendency to review one's past, even after the shock of 1956, was limited. But it was never significantly encouraged by Communist leadership groups either. Those parties that abandoned the idea of being part of an “international Communist movement” were forced to by circumstances or did so very late. Even those Communists in power who had been excommunicated by the Soviet pulpit, like the Yugoslavs, renewed relationships with orthodox parties, even though only partially and without renouncing their experience; or like the Chinese, they tried to establish a rival system of relationships, but without much success. Even the most successful Communists in the West, those most able to

distinguish themselves on the level of intellectual legacy and political culture, like the Italians, feared a break with the Soviet Union would represent an irreparable loss of roots and identity. Before Gorbachev's ascent to power, no important Communist Party, with the exception of the Italian Communist Party and the League of Yugoslav Communists, seriously questioned their belonging to an organized movement, while the Chinese and parties close to them disputed Soviet hegemony more than the notion of a Communist movement itself. Not even the few who were fairly aware of the crisis (Gorbachev himself and the heirs of "reform communism" in the East and West), following in the steps of ideas and human beings born seventy years earlier, conceived of the possibility that communism did not have a future.

In other words, during their entire history, the Communists thought of themselves subjectively as the protagonists of a unified movement, whatever the forms and variations it might assume. *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism's* editors believe that this can and should be taken as a criterion for its historiographical orientation. Until now published studies have alternately stressed monolithic or pluralist aspects, international or national elements. An entire tradition of "Sovietological" studies separated knowledge of Communist societies and regimes from communism as a worldwide phenomenon. Ever-burning passions have had a determining influence on interpretation, following polarizations that started within the history of the Communist movement itself, or arising from the ideological opposition of pro- and anti-Communist. Even during the time that has passed since the fall of the Soviet Union and Communist regimes in Europe, the renewal made possible by the archives' opening has still not produced a noticeable change in outlook. Sometimes archival documentation has simply been used to confirm or deny pre-established lines of reasoning. And it has not necessarily helped broaden historians' perspective to include more general issues.

When the Italian edition of this dictionary first appeared, in 2006, we wrote that "we still do not have a true history of world communism at our disposal." New histories of 20th-century communism have been written by Robert Service (*Comrades: A World History of Communism*, 2007), Archie Brown (*The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 2009), and David Priestland (*The Red Flag: A History of Communism*, 2009). So our dictionary is now part of a growing literature, while maintaining its own distinctiveness. The task of completing an

encyclopedic work like this dictionary has been particularly arduous. The difficulty is due to several factors: historiography based on archival material is still fairly recent; both comparative and national approaches in ex-Communist countries are weak; and strong tensions exist between two requirements that cannot be renounced—a moral condemnation of the mass crimes that are scattered through the history of communism and a historical understanding of communism itself. At the same time, we believe that precisely this difficulty may provide a justification for this enterprise and underscore its usefulness.

This volume contains more than four hundred entries on 20th-century communism, written by a sizable group of authors chosen among major experts from Europe, Russia, the United States, and other countries on the basis of their past contributions and most recent significant studies. The entries include figures, historical events, organizations, institutions, societies, and numerous keywords. The authors present a plurality of approaches and interpretations that cannot in any way be reduced to a single perspective. *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* does not claim to give its readers an interpretation but rather a historical and historiographical overview. It does not claim to be based on single-cause or one-dimensional views; in fact it tries to avoid them. It does, however, offer an accurate system of references. The entries overlap each other, and cross-referencing allows the dictionary to present communism as a global historical phenomenon, which affected the principal social and political, state and supranational, military and international, mythological and ideological aspects of the past century at its most important moments. Communism is treated here as a fundamentally homogeneous phenomenon during the period from 1917 to 1989–91, from its roots in the experience of the Soviet Union to its most significant developments, especially in Europe and Asia.

Communists followed the most diverse paths during the history of the 20th century. When they were not in power, they contributed to struggles for liberation and social emancipation. When they were in power, they established oppressive and tyrannical regimes. But communism has come to the end of its road, losing the fundamental challenges it launched with the October Revolution. The revolutionary threat it posed may have forced capitalism to undertake some reforms, but that was not its goal. Its universalism has not left any substantial cultural or institutional legacy. Its capacity for global

Introduction

expansion has been matched by the speed of its decline. Communism's experiment on social structures has been revealed to be as disastrous as it was gigantic. Its ambition to build an alternate model of society, economy, and modernity has not survived reality's tests. At the state level the original dream of a liberating palingenesis was transformed into a totalitarian nightmare. At the global level it ended up affecting imperial policies more significantly than the urgent problems of the world we live in. Its memory cannot be separated from some of the worst tragedies and most infamous crimes against humanity perpetrated in contemporary history. In some countries,

communism's survival seems to be proportional to its capacity to embrace the lessons learned from its long-standing enemies: nationalism and capitalism.

It was not a phenomenon that was extraneous to the 20th century, though; it was an integral part of it. We will only be able to understand our recent past and immediate future with difficulty, if we do not take the place of communism in this history into account.

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