

Which Europe?

Communist parties between nationalism and internationalism 1945-1975

Linda RISSO

The contribution of European Communist parties to the struggle for national liberation during the Second World War seemed to signal the final reconciliation of Communism with patriotism, after three decades of swaying back and forth between the primacy of the international revolutionary discourse and the need to “build socialism in one country”. The fight against fascism provided a strong and ideologically legitimised course for broadening the recruitment base of Communist militancy. The Yugoslavian and Italian Resistance movements offer two good examples of how the antifascist fight, combined with the strong charisma of their leaders, could transform small Communist groups into mass parties, attracting unprecedented support reaching far beyond the working class. On the model of the Soviet “great patriotic war”, Communist parties everywhere in Europe combined the need to defend their country with the hope of bringing about permanent and radical social change at the end of the conflict. In order to do so, they took a first step towards greater instrumental collaborations with other political parties, thus ending their political isolation.

With the beginning of the Cold War, such developments were rapidly effaced. If nationalism, internationalism and the geopolitical interests of the USSR were compatible at an international level, they stood in antithesis at a national level. With the division of the world into two blocs, the Communists found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to defend patriotic interests while simultaneously opposing all policies that might jeopardise Soviet geopolitical interests. The rejection of the Marshall Plan and the subsequent opposition to the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Defence Community and the Treaty of Rome seemingly left the Communist parties with no other strategy for the reconstruction of Europe but the *repli national*, thus becoming defenders of national sovereignty. The creation of a new supranational political order for some West European countries, the establishment of a strong transatlantic political and economic collaboration and the need to find a solution to the Trieste question are further examples that demonstrate the extent to which the Communists were torn between their traditional adherence to internationalism and the obligation to safeguard Moscow’s interests.

Historians have already widely shown that the Communist parties widely rejected the early stages of the European integration process. The integration process was criticised by the Communists as an imperialist and clerical project conceived to strengthen US control over Western Europe’s economic development and political affairs in preparation for an aggressive war against the Soviet Union. Yet, if historical researchers have often examined the reasons behind Communist

opposition, they have rarely focused on a number of alternative projects proposed by the Communists and the question how internal dissent among national parties developed over time. Even less is known about internal opposition within Eastern European parties. Apart from enquiries into direct international exchanges between party militants, pacifist manifestations and the involvement of intellectuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain, little research has been undertaken in this area. The solidity and consistent development of Communist criticism have often been overemphasised. Communist opposition has been seen as a monolithic rejection of any proposal put forward by Western European and American policy-makers. However, closer inspection reveals that Communist opposition changed over time and that there were national differences. Both national and international contexts had a deep impact on the parties' respective positions concerning the integration process, and by the early 1960s their views differed greatly.

Instead of merely resulting in a catalogue of misconceptions, an analysis of critical discourses around the European integration process should also provide a true account of various alternative sources of legitimacy and take into consideration the section of public opinion that rejected integration. To what extent were the Communist parties able to offer a viable alternative to European integration beyond a mere rejection? Is it possible to identify the development of a cultural environment that could give rise to a vision of a united Europe as an intermediate stage between the world revolution and the parties' national interests? What was the actual significance of the transnational and cross-Curtain contacts? New sources available in Moscow and in many Western and Eastern European countries offer invaluable new material to examine these issues. At the same time, the passage of time itself allows us to re-examine previously studied cases, such as the French and Italian Communist parties, under a new light.

The articles gathered here look at various national cases, often by taking a comparative approach and trying to identify a series of national characteristics and changes over time. They are a selection of papers presented at the conference *Quelle Europe? Les partis communistes entre internationalisme et patriotisme, 1945-2005* organised at the Institut d'études européennes in Brussels on 5th May 2006.

The question of how Communist parties on both sides of the Iron Curtain dealt with the problem of balancing nationalism (as a major propaganda tool to oppose the integration process) with their traditional adherence to internationalism is a thorny issue rarely addressed by historians.¹ The merit of the contributions gathered together in this issue is to focus precisely on this point through the study of national examples on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Linda Risso and Maud Bracke examine the situation in France and Italy from 1950 to 1975; Muriel Blaive focuses on both the Czechoslovak Communist Party around the end of WWII as

1. The most notable exception is the work by Marc Lazar and particularly his article "The French Communist Party between Nation and Internationalism", in: T. SAARELA, K. RENTOLA (eds.), *Communism: National & International*, SHS, Helsinki, 1998, pp.41-59.

well as the Prague Spring and Dagmara Jajesniak-Quast offers a comparative analysis of Polish and Czechoslovakian policies to further integration between the 1950s and the 1970s.

These articles make extensive use of archival material and unpublished sources including parties' internal documents, private correspondence as well as various articles published in the parties' newspapers and magazines. Risso and Bracke base their research on documents from the *Archivio del PCI* (APCI) of the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome and several articles taken from *L'Unità*. Bracke also uses material from the *Auswärtiges Amt* (AA) in Berlin and the *Archives du Parti Communiste Français* (APCF) in Paris, which are currently closed to the public. Jajesniak-Quast uses the hitherto largely unexplored *Archiwum Akt Nowych* (AAN) in Warsaw and makes ample use of files from the *Ministerstwo Przemysłu i Handlu II* (MPIH II) (ministry of Industry and Trade), the *Gabinet Ministra* (minister's Cabinet), the *Centralny Zarząd Przemysłu Metalowego* (central administration of metalworking industry) and the *Uzasadnienia ogólne do 3-letniego planu gospodarczego* (general reasons to the three-year economic plan) files. Muriel Blaive's article offers a sharp analysis of the writings by numerous Czechoslovakian party members, which have not yet been translated into English.

In her article, Linda Risso takes a comparative approach to Communist opposition to German rearmament in France and Italy. She demonstrates how Communist opposition evolved from a total rejection of the project between October 1950 and March 1953 towards a more balanced strategy in the following years. The study of archival material along with a detailed analysis of the parties' newspapers and congress decisions reveals that after the death of Stalin and the end of the Korean War, outright rejection of the integration process gave way to more differentiated criticism in the following years. The aim was to delay the ratification process in the hope that the governing coalitions in France and Italy would divide over the issue and that the public would grow weary of the debate. This article also deals with the reasons behind the Communists' alleged "silence" during the debate concerning the Western European Union and demonstrates that although in 1953 the French and Italian Communists accepted a controlled form of German rearmament, they still opposed the political unification of Western Europe.

Maud Bracke also focuses on the French and Italian Communist parties but turns her attention to the period that followed the rejection of the European Army project. She takes a wider perspective which includes the two parties' respective positions on the idea of a unified Europe in general, and the EEC in particular. According to Bracke, in addition to the Soviet-lead rejection of the EEC as a product of American dominance over Western Europe, the anti-EEC stance of the PCI and PCF was based on specific social arguments including the claim that European integration was an imperialist and capitalist project and an instrument to curtail national sovereignty. Bracke demonstrates that despite some common ground, the two parties developed different political strategies. The PCI gradually shifted towards a more positive view of the EEC and by the early 1970s, the party came to see the EEC as a potential vehicle for social and political change.

Conversely, the PCF persisted in its opposition and only in the early 1970s did the French Communists timidly accept European integration.

Muriel Blaive's article deals with the chasm between internationalism and patriotism within the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) through the analysis of the writings and correspondence of leading Czechoslovak politicians and intellectuals. Whereas the "international" aspirations of the KSČ have frequently been said to conform to Moscow's official stance (which often symbolizes the gloomiest aspects of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia), the "patriotic" side, has been made to embody national democratic traditions and the positive side of Communist achievements. According to Blaive, this black-and-white picture fails to address a number of crucial issues concerning Communist domination of Czechoslovakia even though it has so far not been challenged.

Dagmara Jajesniak-Quast examines the Polish and Czechoslovakian cases between the 1950s and the 1970s and demonstrates how, contrary to common assumptions, after the turning point of 1947, Eastern European states did remain interested in maintaining economic relations with the West. Although the Eastern European Communist parties officially rejected the European integration process, the Polish and Czechoslovakian governments undertook a number of steps towards greater economic collaboration with the West. It follows that their attitude towards the economic integration of Western Europe differs substantially from their formal opposition to the political unification process. Thus, Poland and Czechoslovakia along with other Eastern European countries found ways to "permeate" the Iron Curtain by approaching the neutral states – Austria, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland – that seemed to have been willing to enter negotiations in view of trading raw materials and organizing know-how transfers as well as capital movements. Similarly, the increase in Eastern European exports to Western Europe and the promotion of national productivity in view of achieving a positive balance of payments offered additional incentives to develop more intricate economic relations with the EEC countries. International organizations, such as the Economic Commission for Europe and GATT, offered additional channels through which relations with the West could be improved.

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