

Post-war  
Reconstruction in  
Europe: International  
Perspectives,  
1945–1949

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To summarize, the war tended to collapse the distribution of professed loyalty into the true one. As a result, Stalin could identify his enemies and deal with them person by person, not *en masse*. Selective terror became a better choice than mass terror, at least for a few years. Eventually, the natural tendency to conformism under a dictator would again blur the distinguishing marks of the 'enemy'. Rather than return to mass terror, Stalin's successors would try to dispense with terror altogether.

We asked how it was that the Soviet command system effectively mobilized resources into post-war recovery. The increased efficiency with which Stalin managed his enemies after 1945 was an enabling factor in the Soviet post-war economic recovery. Strong political authority was at the core of the command economy; this would be revealed vividly, forty years later, by the economic collapse that accompanied the disintegration of Soviet political authority under Gorbachev.

### Conclusions

We started from the post-war resilience of the Soviet political and economic system, with rapid economic recovery from the war accompanied by political consolidation and an absence of post-war reforms. On close inspection we find that the war contributed to two factors that between them explain both the pace of recovery and the resilience of Stalin's dictatorship.

The rapid growth of the Soviet economy from 1946 was part of a long rebound from a series of disasters of which the war contributed the most recent instalment. The long-run trajectory of the Soviet economy was scarcely dynamic. In 1945, however, it was far below this trajectory; there was great scope for catching up on the backlog of unrealized potential, and this helps to explain the rapidity of Soviet economic development from the late 1940s to the 1960s.

Soviet post-war recovery and growth was organized within the framework of a centralized command system for mobilizing resources. The working arrangements of this mobilization system also benefited from the increased efficiency of Stalin's post-war rule. The war greatly increased Stalin's information about the distribution of loyalty in Soviet society. This explains how Stalin could manage his enemies without incurring the costs of mass terror, and so rule as Soviet dictator more efficiently than before the war.

## Stalin and the European Communists after World War Two (1943–1948)

Silvio Pons

Two basic differences in the Soviet attitude to Europe can be discerned in the years following the Second World War as compared with the aftermath of the First. On the one hand, although conflicts between imperialist interests, state rivalries over hegemony, economic crises and social turmoil were expected to reappear, it was no longer possible to see revolution in its original sense as the answer. On the other, Soviet Russia was no longer marginal to international politics, indeed its role appeared central to Europe's future. Furthermore, Soviet influence in post-war Europe was amplified by the formation of communist parties whose activities in anti-fascist movements and in the resistance had made them stronger and more legitimate than they had ever been.

In 1944–45, Stalin saw the reconstruction of Europe as a process based on the geopolitical division of the continent between Soviet Russia and Great Britain. Sooner or later conflict between the Soviet and the capitalist worlds would arise, but it was not on the immediate agenda. Moscow encouraged both Eastern and Western communists to follow the line of national unity—which reflected the prospect of post-war collaboration with the Western powers—and to avoid any revolutionary uprising. In principle, all communists were given the chance to articulate their own national policy, which was supposed to be consistent with Soviet interests. Radical pressures towards insurrection and civil war were contained, although not entirely marginalized.

Much earlier than expected, when the Marshall Plan was launched in 1947, all this came to an end. Moscow re-established control over European communists by founding a new international organization, the Informburo (Cominform), four years after the dissolution of the Comintern. The 'two camps' doctrine proclaimed a new challenge against the West. Radical elements were on the rise in the international movement, as well as in particular parties. The political objectives of European communists diverged. Eastern communists were called upon to establish a definitive monopoly of power, Western communists to start mass mobilization against the formation of a bloc under US hegemony. Nevertheless, while the new turn was to produce

the definitive shift towards sovietization in East Central Europe, it did not herald any revolutionary thrust beyond the Soviet sphere of influence. On the contrary, promotion of revolution from above in the East and avoidance of revolution from below in the West went hand in hand, and led to the excommunication of the Yugoslav Communist Party, breaking the unity of the 'Socialist camp'.

This article aims to reassess the relationship between Soviet policy and European Communism in the aftermath of World War Two. In the post-Cold War historiography, the central issue has obviously been the establishment of communist regimes in East Central Europe. Nevertheless, although a considerable amount of new evidence (especially archival) has been produced and even published over the past twenty years, a comprehensive approach in the post-war international history of the communist movement has yet to be developed. Traditional accounts have become obsolete in too many respects, while recent studies have usually been limited to single, albeit crucial, questions.<sup>1</sup>

#### The National Fronts: moderates and radicals

From June 1941, the communist parties were called upon to follow a national-unity policy against Nazism. Comintern's dissolution in June 1943 was seen by Stalin as a decisive step forward in applying that policy. As Djilas notes, Stalin attributed real political significance to the thesis of the growing national character of the communist parties.<sup>2</sup> Stalin had always

<sup>1</sup> For accounts of the post-war international communist movement from before the archives were opened, see Fernando Claudin, *The Communist movement: from Comintern to Cominform* (New York, 1975); Paolo Spriano, *Stalin and the European Communists* (London, 1985). For seminal archive-based studies, see the essays published in Giuliano Procacci et al. (eds), *The Cominform. Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, Fondazione Feltrinelli, *Annali*, vol. 30 (Milan, 1994). For some more recent case studies, see in particular: Eduard Mark, *Revolution by Degrees. Stalin's National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941-1947*, CWIHP, Working Paper 31, (Washington DC, February 2001); Silvio Pons, 'Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3 (Spring 2001); Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: the Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953* (Oxford, 2005). John O. Iatrides, 'Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy, and Tactics in the Greek Civil War', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (Summer 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, (New York, 1962); Italian translation, M. Gilas, *Conversazioni con Stalin*, (Milano, 1962), 88-9. Cf. Georgi Dimitrov, *Diario. Gli anni di Mosca (1934-1945)*, edited by Silvio Pons (Torino, 2002), 611-12 (8 and 11 May 1943), 618 (21 May 1943), 629 (8 June 1943). See also N. Lebedeva and M. Narinskii (eds),

considered the Comintern a cumbersome vehicle for the Soviet state's policy. In conditions of war, he thought the time had come for a solution aimed at liquidating the dual institutional nature of Soviet international policy.<sup>3</sup> In his view, effective Soviet leadership of the communist movement required a network of bilateral relationships established between the Soviet state, incorporating Comintern's former apparatuses, and the individual parties. In other words, dissolution of the Comintern did not herald a 'normalization' of the Soviet state, but neither was it simply cosmetic. Stalin truly intended to modify the communist movement's *modus operandi* and to seek ways to strengthen the national parties in their respective societies. The problem, both in Moscow and outside the USSR, was how to achieve such aims.

The theory was first put into practice in Italy, following the Anglo-American landing in July 1943, the fall of Mussolini's regime and the armistice reached on 8 September 1943 between the Allies and the military government which had been installed in the South with Marshal Badoglio at its head. Moscow considered the possibility of lending its support to the anti-Fascists' intransigent positions against any form of collaboration with the monarchy or with the post-Fascist forces. This would mean opening a conflict with the Allies and promoting the political and social radicalization which was already developing in northern Italy with the efforts of the resistance against the Nazi occupiers and against Fascists faithful to Mussolini. The alternative was to reach a diplomatic agreement with the Badoglio government, thus encouraging the communists to collaborate in the name of moderation and 'national unity'. These two options were formulated by Togliatti in late 1943 and early 1944. At that point the radical alternative—which had the support of Dimitrov, head of the International Department, and of Molotov, the Foreign Minister—seemed likely to be chosen. However, Stalin eventually decided in favour of the moderate solution. In his meeting with Togliatti on the eve of the Italian leaders' departure from Moscow on 4 March 1944, the core of the policy to be followed by the PCI (Italian Communist Party) was established.<sup>4</sup>

*Comintern i storija mirovaia vojna* (hereafter KVMV), 2 vols (Moscow, 1994-1998), vol. I, docs 134, 136, 137, 142, 143; Dimitrov and Stalin 1934-1943. Alexander Dallin and Fridrich I. Firsov (eds), *Letters from the Soviet Archives*, (New Haven and London, 2000), 233-53.

<sup>3</sup> Stalin had privately revealed his intention to dissolve the Comintern already in April 1941, before the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. See Dimitrov, *Diario*, 302-3 (20 and 21 April 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI), Moscow, f. 82, d. 1231, ll. 1-2; Dimitrov, *Diario*, 691-3 (4 and 5 March 1944); KVMV, docs 168, 174.

With this decision a precedent was set for the other European parties, based on three founding elements: the rejection of civil war as a political prospect for the communists; the choice to take part in governments of national coalition; and the pre-eminence of communist leaders back from Muscovite exile rather than those involved in the resistance movements. In addition to establishing the first boundaries for spheres of influence, the famous agreement between Stalin and Churchill of October 1944 set limits to communist action in areas of Western interest. Stalin gave Churchill the necessary assurances regarding Italy, suggestively noting that Togliatti would avoid embarking upon an 'adventure'. At the same time, Togliatti reaffirmed his own leadership in the PCI, by containing the party's more intransigent elements.<sup>5</sup> The PCF (French Communist Party) was led to follow the Italian precedent, even though France presented a conflictual situation and the local communists rather expected a rendering of accounts with General De Gaulle. The turning point came after Stalin's meeting with Thorez in November 1944, on the eve of Thorez's return to France. In his talk with Thorez Stalin insisted on the need to prevent the communists from becoming isolated and to build political alliances.<sup>6</sup>

The line indicated by Stalin did not distinguish between Western and Eastern Europe, but placed emphasis on the 'nationalization' of the communist parties, co-ordinated with the guidance of Moscow. While planning Europe's partition into spheres of influence, the Soviets were not interested in a divided continent.<sup>7</sup> In the autumn and winter of 1944, the 'national fronts'

See Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons (eds), *Dagli archivi di Mosca. L'Urss, il Cominform e il Pci (1943-1951)*, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, *Annali*, VII (Roma, 1998), docs 1-9.

<sup>5</sup> RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 283, l. 12-13. On the relationship between Stalin and Togliatti in 1944, see Pons, 'Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins'. For more details, Silvio Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia. L'Urss, il Pci e le origini della guerra fredda (1943-1948)* (Roma, 1999), 155-74. See also Elera Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin. Il Pci e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, 2nd edn (Bologna, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Dimitrov, *Diario*, 769-70 (19 November 1944). See *Istotnik* 4 (1995), 152-8. On the strategy of PCF in 1944, see Philippe Buton, *Les lendemains qui déchantent. Le Parti communiste français à la Libération* (Paris, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Norman M. Naimark, 'Stalin and Europe in the Post-war Period, 1945-53: Issues and Problems', *Journal of Modern European History* 2 (2004), 32. On Soviet plans for post-war spheres of influence, see Silvio Pons, *In the Aftermath of the Age of Wars: the Impact of World War II on Soviet Security Policy*, in Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano (eds), *Russia in the Age of Wars 1914-1945*, Fondazione Feltrinelli, *Annali*, XXXIV (Milan, 2000), 277-307.

line was also followed in East Central Europe, where the advance of the Red Army and the fall of the pro-Hitler regimes put the refounding of states and the creation of coalition governments on the agenda. In these countries, unlike those of the Western sphere such as France and Italy, the communists could count on the Soviet military presence and therefore aim to seize decisive levers of power. But the political line was formulated in virtually identical terms. In truth, the Czechoslovakian communists were the only ones whose cards were already in order on the 'national fronts' line. They could boast primacy in East Central Europe, consolidated at the time of the December 1943 agreements between Stalin and Beneš and founded upon their role in the resistance movement.<sup>8</sup> All the others had difficult adjustments to make. Already in Moscow's sights for having ignored the 'national fronts' line, the Polish communists could not even claim a major role in the resistance movement. They were called on to adopt the image of a national party as an alternative power to the government in exile in London.<sup>9</sup> Stalin himself dictated a moderate line to the Hungarian communists, starting with the composition and programme of the new national unity government. In adopting Moscow's directives the Hungarian leadership adopted the French communists' national party model.<sup>10</sup> The Bulgarian communists had played a leading role in the anti-Nazi resistance and, with Moscow's assent, had insisted on strong representation in the National Liberation Committee. However, Dimitrov asked them to strengthen their positions while not thinking of the party as 'the only decisive factor in the country and dictating our will to the Allies'.<sup>11</sup> The Romanian communists were instructed along the same lines.<sup>12</sup>

The 'national fronts' line and its implications were not accepted by all communists. In the world of European Communism, radical tendencies cut across every party. The Soviet representatives in Europe themselves did not always hinder these tendencies and at times even supported them, as did Aleksandr Bogomolov—the chief Soviet diplomatic representative in

<sup>8</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War. Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York, 1979), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets. The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (New York, 2006), 25-7.

<sup>11</sup> Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria 1941-48* (London, 2008), 69 ff. Dimitrov, *Diario*, 777-8 (13 December 1944).

<sup>12</sup> Mark, *Revolution by Degrees*; Dimitrov, *Diario*, 790 (4 January 1945).

Europe—by harshly criticizing Togliatti's moderation in Italy in September 1944.<sup>13</sup> Some parties proved recalcitrant, unwilling to renounce the opportunity for revolution in a war context. The epicentre of the radical tendencies was the Yugoslav Communist Party, which stood out for a tendency to develop its own strategy without paying too much attention to advice from Moscow.<sup>14</sup> As early as 1942, Dimitrov had criticized the absence of a 'general national character' in Tito's political propaganda, along with the Yugoslav communists' lack of dedication to creating a 'national front' against the Nazi-Fascist occupiers.<sup>15</sup> This friction survived after the creation of the Yugoslav Liberation Committee. In April 1944, Molotov explained to Djilas Moscow's opposition to the sovietization of Yugoslavia, and set out the national unity line chosen for Italy in a political lesson that was to be ignored by the Yugoslav communists.<sup>16</sup>

Euphoric with victory, Tito and his comrades saw themselves as the vanguard of the expanding Socialist world. In a way they embodied the new pride instilled in the communist movement by the successful anti-Fascist struggle, after the defeat and terror of the pre-war years. It was the Yugoslavs who fanned the flames of civil war in Greece, Albania and Italy, besides preparing their own hegemony in a future confederation of Balkan states. The most sensational case of insubordination was that of Greece, where the limits of Moscow's control were made clear. The Greek Communist Party, in complete contrast to the Italians, took up arms in response to the alliance between London and the monarchy in a country assigned to Great Britain by the agreements between Stalin and Churchill.<sup>17</sup> In December 1944, the partisan movement led by the communists launched a mass mobilization that transformed rapidly into an armed uprising in Athens. Stalin was confronted with a *fait accompli*, and his disapproval was total. 'I had advised that this struggle should not be undertaken in Greece', he confided to Dimitrov; the Greek

communists had committed an 'act of idiocy'.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after the Greek communist insurrection had failed, Stalin expressed to the Yugoslav communist Hebrang his strong annoyance at the *hubris* of the Belgrade leadership.<sup>19</sup> A few months later, the Yugoslav occupation of Trieste provoked the first crisis among the Allied powers. Although Tito's move had not initially been discouraged in Moscow, Stalin insisted on a retreat after the Western reaction. Tensions between Moscow and Belgrade ran so high that the Italian communists still in August 1945 feared war between Yugoslavia and the USSR.<sup>20</sup>

### The ambiguities of popular democracy

In the final months of the war, Moscow took steps to rein in the radicalism widespread in the European communist parties. The doctrine of a 'peaceful road' to Socialism based on anti-Fascist democracy—invented at the time of Popular Fronts in the mid-thirties—was now adopted as an alternative to revolutionary insurrection. In East Central Europe this idea held particular importance, as the communists were called upon to play a decisive role in the formation of the social and political arrangements in the USSR's sphere of influence. As the economic and political bases of society had already been sufficiently disrupted by the war, the ground for a revolution 'from above' was largely set.<sup>21</sup> The monopoly of force achieved by the USSR in the eastern portion of Europe was called on to strengthen the new ruling classes formed by the progressive forces and the communists. As early as January 1945, in a meeting with Dimitrov and Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders, Stalin illustrated his openness to possibilities for the post-war period: 'perhaps we are making a mistake when we think that the Soviet form is the only one leading to Socialism. The facts show that the Soviet one is the best, but it is absolutely not the only one'.<sup>22</sup> In April 1945, Stalin expressed this concept to Tito, the

<sup>13</sup> Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (AVPRF), Moscow, f. 098, op. 27, p. 159, d. 11, l. 103–08. See also Pons, 'Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins'.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Swain, *Tito and the Twilight of the Comintern*, in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International* (Manchester and New York, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> KVMV, II, doc. 68, pp. 216–17. Dimitrov, *Diario*, 422, 494–95 (10 March and 10 August 1942).

<sup>16</sup> *Vostochnaia Evropa v dokumentakh russiiskikh arkhivov 1944–1953* (hereafter VEDRA), 2 vols (Moscow-Novosibirsk, 1997–98), vol. 1, doc. 2, 28–35.

<sup>17</sup> KVMV, doc. 198, 474. See also Iatrides, 'Revolution or Self-Defense?'; André Gerolymatos, *Red Acropolis, Black Terror. The Greek Civil War and the Origins of Soviet-American Rivalry, 1943–1949* (New York, 2004), 122–8.

<sup>18</sup> Dimitrov, *Diario*, 793–4 (10 January 1945).

<sup>19</sup> VEDRA, I, doc. 37, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano (APC), Roma, Direzione Nord, Verbali, 5 agosto 1945. Dimitrov, *Diario*, 834, 838 (17 and 28 May 1945). Gori and Pons (eds), *Dagli archivi di Mosca, docs 9–10, Milovan Djilas, Rise and Fall* (New York, 1985); Italian translation M. Gilas, *Se la memoria non m'inganna. Ricordi di un uomo scomodo 1943–1962* (Bologna, 1987), 106. On the relations between Stalin, Togliatti, and Tito in early 1945, see Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*, 175–82.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Grass, *War as Revolution*, in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (eds), *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder, 1997), 17–40.

<sup>22</sup> Dimitrov, *Diario*, 802 (28 January 1945).

European communist leader most reluctant to adopt it.<sup>23</sup> Two months later, in a meeting with the German communists, Stalin declared the inappropriateness of the Soviet model for Germany and pointed to the prospect of an 'anti-Fascist parliamentary democratic regime'.<sup>24</sup> One of the major episodes in the imposition of the 'popular democracies' doctrine in the parties of East Central Europe involved opposing and alienating the generation of Hungarian communists who were veterans of 1919 and nostalgic for the Republic of Councils.<sup>25</sup> In Germany, too, the militants of a communist Left that preserved the memory of the first post-war period and longed for Bolshevik-style revolutionary action were relegated to the margins by the occupation authorities and displaced by the leaders returning from Muscovite exile.<sup>26</sup> Outside the range of the Red Army, the leaderships of the Italian and French Communist parties also moved along that same wavelength. From the final phase of the war onwards, rejection of the 'Greek model' was a point of strategic dissent within the PCI and the PCF, as well as between the Western leaderships and the Yugoslavs.

In the context of tensions between moderates and radicals, as well as between centre and periphery (especially if China is taken into account),<sup>27</sup> the 'popular democracy' formula, however nebulous, raised crucial questions for the communists. As the Second World War had also been a civil war, did its conclusion put an end to a whole era? Or, on the contrary, was the time of 'international civil war', as the Bolsheviks had called the inter-war period, not really over? Was civil war itself still the obvious road to power, or was the brake being imposed by Soviet interests not a contingent aspect, but the opening of a new strategy? Stalin provided no real answers to such questions. The moderation preached by Moscow was not a clear choice of cultural and political revision. In East Central Europe the objective of sovietization was advised against because it would risk provoking the reaction of enemy forces both at home and abroad. In Western Europe the possibility of insurrection was blocked by invoking the supreme interests of the USSR's foreign policy. The idea of promoting 'popular democracy' was an attempt to provide a

communist response to Europe's post-war arrangements. But it was a provisional and reversible response.<sup>28</sup>

Stalin took spheres of influence more seriously than anti-Fascist democracy. He offered his contemporaries no grand design comparable to Roosevelt's. The dichotomy between Lenin and Wilson, which in the final year of the First World War had attracted hopes for peace, was not to be repeated after the Second. In Stalin's vision, state-building, power policy and imperial rivalry were the key concepts. In the long run, he saw post-war Europe as the setting for a new conflict between the Soviet and capitalist worlds, as he confessed privately at the time of the Yalta Conference.<sup>29</sup> His famous prophecy to Djilas about the prospect of each great power establishing its own system in their respective spheres of influence was consistent with that scenario.<sup>30</sup> However, there was no 'road map' in Stalin's thinking.<sup>31</sup> More than in a preordained design, the premises for the sovietization of East Central Europe lay in a political culture incapable of conceiving the exercise of power as anything but domination, conflict, and total security.

In the aftermath of the struggle against Fascism in Europe, several communist parties were building a mass base and in many European countries, including Western ones, they were participating in government.<sup>32</sup> But in the Soviet sphere the rise of the European communist movement revealed areas of shadow. Far from homogeneous, the region showed manifest diversity, socially and politically.<sup>33</sup> Only in Yugoslavia was a communist party firmly in power. Elsewhere, except for Czechoslovakia, growth in party membership did not translate into winning major social consensus and national legitimization. The fragility of the communist presence, and the perception of a strong anti-communist tradition, made the Soviets more ready to adopt methods of preventive repression especially in countries like Poland and Romania, where

<sup>23</sup> Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*; Italian translation, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Dimitrov, *Diario*, 841 (7 June 1945). See *Istoricheski Arkhiv* 4 (1996). Wilfried Loth, *Figliastri di Stalin. Mosca, Berlino e la formazione della Rdt* (Urbino, 1997), 26–7.

<sup>25</sup> Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, 82–6.

<sup>26</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 257–8, 271.

<sup>27</sup> Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945–1950. The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (Armonk, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Fabio Bettzini, *Stalin e l'Europa. La formazione dell'impero esterno sovietico (1941–1953)* (Roma, 2006), 161–81.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitrov, *Diario*, 802 (28 January 1945). See also *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika P. Cueva* (Moscow, 1991), 78. On the roots of Stalin's thinking in international policy, see Silvio Pons, *Conceptualising Stalin's Foreign Policy: On the Legacy of the Ideology/Realism Duality*, in *Stalin. His Times and Ours*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts (IAREES, 2005), 175–90.

<sup>30</sup> Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*; Italian translation, 121.

<sup>31</sup> Naimark, 'Stalin and Europe in the Post-war Period', 36. See also Norman Naimark, *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944–1953*, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. I, *Origins* (Cambridge, 2010), 175–97.

<sup>32</sup> Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford, 2002), 289–91. Aldo Agosti, *Bandiere rosse. Un profilo storico dei comunisti europei* (Roma, 1999), 146.

<sup>33</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc. Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

security interests were given high priority. While advancing reservations and objections, as Gomulka did in Poland, the local communists adapted.<sup>34</sup> They saw Soviet bodies as their institutions of reference in refounding their own states and national governments, and Soviet protection as something to be taken for granted. The alienation of broad sectors of society was considered inevitable in a process experienced as revolutionary. For the communists, although dependence on the Soviet Union was an insoluble contradiction as far as their national legitimacy was concerned, it was the very cornerstone of their political culture. This led them to go along with the Soviets' conduct even when its rationality left a lot to object to, or to play the role of zealous followers, anticipating real or presumed moves. It was not a well judged strategy, but a culturally motivated practice aimed at the incapacitation of democratic society and the systematic destructuring of political life.<sup>35</sup> The interaction between Moscow and the communist parties of East Central Europe thus produced a dynamic discernible even before international tensions had reached a point of no return. While the first post-war year was coming to a close, the USSR's sphere was not sovietized, but was increasingly characterized by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes.

By the summer of 1946, key decisions had been made in Moscow about post-war reconstruction and foreign policy priorities. The Soviet model for reconstruction was based on autarchy and rearmament, while the perceived threat from the United States was increasingly emphasized.<sup>36</sup> In the USSR the rise of Zhdanov reflected the growing role of the party apparatus and greater importance of inter-party relations in international affairs.<sup>37</sup> From the same period comes the first evidence that the possibility of setting up a new international organization of communist parties was being discussed. It was raised at some of Stalin's meetings with Rakosi, Tito, Dimitrov, and other Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders. Rakosi reported to his party on the need to create a 'new International', with no organizational functions, after having met Stalin

<sup>34</sup> *SSSR-Polska. Mechanizmy podchisleniya. 1944-1949 gg. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1995), doc. 30, p. 120; I. Yashborovskaia, *The Gomulka Alternative: The Untravelled Road*, in Naimark and Gibianskii (eds), *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe*, 135. Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland*, 137.

<sup>35</sup> Gross, *War as Revolution*, 32-3.

<sup>36</sup> Vladimir O. Pechatnov, *The Soviet Union and the World, 1944-1953*, in Leffler and Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1, 103.

<sup>37</sup> G. Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaia Evropa*, (Moskva, 1994), 15 ff. Nataliia Egorova, *Stalin's Foreign Policy and the Cominform, 1947-1953*, in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War 1943-53* (London, 1996), 197-207.

and Molotov on 1 April 1946, though he specified that the time was not yet ripe.<sup>38</sup> When Tito and Stalin met in late May, Stalin claimed that re-establishing the Comintern was 'not even being discussed'.<sup>39</sup> But shortly thereafter, at a joint meeting with the Yugoslavs and Bulgarians, though Stalin mentioned the liquidation of the Comintern as a positive decision that had 'untied the hands' of the communist parties, he also discussed the possibility of creating a new international communist organization.<sup>40</sup> It is not clear whether the issue was brought up by the East European leaders or by Stalin himself. In any case, the restoration of an international system of links between the communist parties was on the agenda in top-level talks. The British Pollitt and the Italian Secchia also came out in favour of a new organization, in response to the reinstatement of the Socialist International. It is quite possible that such talk was a trial balloon launched by leaders of the more radical elements of European Communism, starting with the Yugoslavs.<sup>41</sup>

Apparently Stalin continued to lend credence to national articulation of the parties. As he had already done a number of times at the end of the war, he explained to the German communist Ulbricht the essential elements of a 'democratic way' to Socialism.<sup>42</sup> In May 1946 he stressed to a Polish delegation that dictatorship of the proletariat and sovietization of the country were not necessary, because the presence of the Red Army was a guarantee against any return to the past. He portrayed Poland as a 'new kind of democracy' destined to be a model for the Western democracies as well.<sup>43</sup> At a meeting with Polish Socialist leaders on 19 August 1946, he declared that in the countries of East Central Europe the war had opened 'a different, easier way of development, which requires less blood, the way of socioeconomic reforms', and had given rise to a 'new democracy', one 'more complex' than the pre-war experiences.<sup>44</sup> He spoke in similar terms during the same period to a delegation of English Labour Party members and the Czech communist leader

<sup>38</sup> Csaba Békés, 'Soviet Plans to Establish the Cominform in Early 1946: New Evidence from the Hungarian Archives', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 10 (1998), 135-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Istoricheski Arkhiv* 2 (1993), 28.

<sup>40</sup> Leonid Gibianskii, 'The Soviet Bloc and the Initial Stage of the Cold War: Archival Documents on Stalin's Meetings with Communist Leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, 1946-1948', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 10 (1998), 113-15, 127.

<sup>41</sup> RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1353; Pons, *L'impossible egemonia*, 90-2; Geoffrey Swain, 'The Cominform: Tito's International?', *Historical Journal* 35 (1992), 641-63.

<sup>42</sup> Wilfried Loth, *Stalin's Plans for Post-War Germany*, in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> VEDRA, I, doc. 151, p. 457.

<sup>44</sup> VEDRA, I, doc. 169, p. 511.

Gottwald.<sup>45</sup> The Bulgarian communists too, who were by now in power, received word to set aside the objective of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>46</sup> Stalin's statements appeared to authorize a vision of substantial continuity with the policies launched in the final period of the war, which implied abandonment of the Soviet model as the only way. The notion of 'national roads' echoed in the public political discourse of the main European communist leaders, East and West, during 1946.

However, the policy of the communist parties in East Central Europe was already changing as a consequence of the exercise of power. The objective of establishing 'popular democracies', based on the centrality of communists, proved to be intrinsically authoritarian and impossible to reconcile with being a credible national party.<sup>47</sup> Between the second half of 1946 and early 1947 the authoritarian regimes in Poland and Romania took definitive shape, with strict control exercised by the communists over the key ministries and the apparatus of control, the more or less forced fusion with Socialists on the model already adopted in Germany, the false pluralism of the 'national fronts', the holding of elections in a police-state climate, and the persecution, intimidation, and arrest of leading anti-communists.<sup>48</sup> They thus joined Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. National communists were taking on the features of peripheral rulers of the Soviet 'external empire'. It is no accident that Stalin continued to treat their national leaders as junior partners and party functionaries, rather than as statesmen. The political difference between the two parts of Europe was growing. In Western Europe, the communists continued to cling to coalition governments, even neglecting the signs of an emerging bloc policy. In much of East Central Europe the policy of the 'national fronts' was increasingly losing credibility. However, we should not understand this as simply the end to a tactical pretence made necessary by the deteriorating international situation.<sup>49</sup> The discourse of 'popular democracy' was

<sup>45</sup> Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik 9 mart 1933-6 februar 1949* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo 'Sv. Kliment Ohridski', 1997), 533-5 (2 September 1946); G. P. Murashko, A. P. Noskova, *Sovetskii faktor v poslevoennoi Vostochnoi Evrope (1945-1948)*, in *Sovetskaya vneshnaya politika v gody 'kholodnoi voiny' (1945-1985)*, *Novoe prochnenie* (Moscow, 1995), 90.

<sup>46</sup> Vesselin Dimitrov, 'Revolution Released: Stalin, the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Establishment of the Cominform', in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 284.

<sup>47</sup> Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, A Basic Contradiction?* (London, 1999), 100-1.

<sup>48</sup> On the case of Poland, see Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland*, 315-41.

<sup>49</sup> For such a view, see Mark, *Revolution by Degrees*.

obviously instrumental to a large extent—as sovietization remained the basic idea and a permanent option. Nevertheless, to the communists' mind, 'nationalization', still a significant policy, did not fail because of incompatibility between the anti-Fascist transition and the Soviet model. Its lack of success was due to the persistent influence of cultural and political archetypes, combined with the mounting pressure of Soviet security imperatives.

### The Cominform: a failed challenge

When the Marshall Plan was launched, in June 1947, the Soviets were worried about the capacity of some East European parties to maintain power in their own countries and were already trying to strengthen their control of the major West European parties. Moscow saw Hungary and still more Czechoslovakia as the weak links in the Soviet sphere.<sup>50</sup> Very soon after the Paris conference on the Marshall Plan, Stalin forced the Czechs to give up their intention to participate. Reconstruction in East Central Europe was thus to be dependent on the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> On the other side, the French and Italian Communist parties were almost simultaneously removed from the coalition governments, in May 1947, and the Soviet leaders did not hide their dissatisfaction. Zhdanov wrote an angry letter to Thorez, which was forwarded to the communist leaders of Eastern Europe and to Pollitt.<sup>52</sup> The need for control over the Western parties to be re-established was evident during the Paris talks in late June 1947, when Molotov expressed his dismay to Djilas, complaining that the Western communists were not co-ordinating their national policies with Moscow.<sup>53</sup> The Western communists had hoped to remain cautiously positive about the Marshall Plan in order to avoid alienating public opinion and maintain their chances of winning elections.<sup>54</sup> They were forced to abandon this possibility once Moscow rejected the Plan.<sup>55</sup> Even so, in a meeting with Dimitrov on 8 August 1947, Stalin reiterated his displeasure with the behaviour of the French and the Italian communists.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> VEDRA, I, docs. 209, 219.

<sup>51</sup> VEDRA, I, cit., doc. 227, p. 673.

<sup>52</sup> RGASPI, f. 77, op. 3, d. 89.

<sup>53</sup> Djilas, *Rise and Fall*; Italian translation, 144.

<sup>54</sup> AVPRE, f. 098, op. 30, p. 170, d. 13. R. Martinelli and M. L. Righi *La politica del partito comunista italiano nel periodo costituente. I verbali della direzione tra il V e il VI Congresso, 1946-1948*, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, *Annali II* (Roma, 1992), 431-2, 450.

<sup>55</sup> APC, Comitato Centrale, *Verbali*, 1947, riunione dell'1-4 luglio 1947.

<sup>56</sup> Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 556.



The American plan for the reconstruction of Europe took Stalin by surprise, as did the positive responses from Western Europe. Stalin aimed to prevent the formation of a Western bloc by mobilizing the two major Western communist parties, while tightening control over East Central Europe. Under Stalin's hidden direction, harsh criticism of 'parliamentarian illusions' was expressed by Zhdanov to the PCI and PCF delegates at the founding conference of the Cominform in Poland in late September 1947.<sup>57</sup> Moscow stepped back from supporting their national political line. International Communism was now taking a new turn, towards centralization and radicalism. Under the pressure of the Cold War divide, the communist parties had to abandon collaboration with other political forces, moving essentially to social mobilization and even extra-legal action. Four years after the dissolution of the Comintern, Stalin seemed ready for a new challenge, based on a 'two camps' thesis.

However, there was still ambiguity in his plans. Zhdanov called for mass mobilization against the Marshall Plan, without openly indicating the path of civil war. He made no mention of the civil war carried on by the communists in Greece, now backed by Moscow's material aid though not by open political support.<sup>58</sup> Full alignment with the foreign policy theses formulated by Zhdanov did not necessarily entail an insurrectionist thrust in the domestic context. But the parties were called on to promote mass agitation and strikes that might serve as a prologue to insurrection. The Yugoslavs openly pushed for such an outcome, by reaffirming the 'Greek model'. After the conference, both French and Italian leaders sought clarification directly from Stalin. In November-December 1947, Stalin advised Thorez and Secchia to avoid extreme consequences, though he maintained that the parties should be kept ready for any event.<sup>59</sup> It was quite soon to be clear that the step taken with the foundation of the Cominform was conceived by Stalin more as a necessary recovery of leadership over the leading European communist parties than as

<sup>57</sup> The Cominform, 453-60. Stalin was in daily contact with Zhdanov and Malenkov, Moscow's delegates, during the founding Conference of the Cominform. See the documentation in *Sovetskaia Kominforma. 1947, 1948, 1949. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> Artiom Ulunian, *The Soviet Union and the Greek Question, 1946-1953: Problems and Appraisals*, in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 150-1.

<sup>59</sup> *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 1 (1996), 9-10, 14. Gori and Pons (eds), *Dagli archivi di Mosca*, doc. 20.

the complete enunciation of an offensive design against the 'Western camp'. The strategy of discipline prevailed over the strategy of mobilization.<sup>60</sup>

In East Central Europe, the Soviets' apprehension over the weakest link in their sphere of influence inspired Zorin's mission to Prague, which lay at the origin of the communist coup in late February 1948.<sup>61</sup> The Prague coup was destined to sharpen perceptions in Europe of Soviet expansionism following the foundation of the Cominform.<sup>62</sup> But in Western Europe Soviet policy was quite different. The case of Italy is particularly revealing. Despite their criticisms of the PCI, Soviet policy-making on Italy was extremely cautious. In early 1948 Italy, unlike France, was not yet fully included in the Western system. Nevertheless, Stalin made no serious move to shift the country's international status. In March 1948, while tensions were mounting, Togliatti sent a secret message to Moscow stating that the Communist Party was prepared for an armed insurrection in northern Italy. But he also made clear that, even if Moscow should ask them to unleash civil war, the Italian communists would act only in extreme circumstances, and stressed moreover that such a step could lead to another world war. Stalin and Molotov quickly endorsed Togliatti's view. They recommended armed conflict only in the case of a military attack by reactionary forces, while warning against the Yugoslavs' advice.<sup>63</sup> Subsequently, the landslide defeat of the left in the Italian elections of April 1948 demonstrated the resilience of the forces making up the Western sphere. Thoughts of a communist mobilization aiming to inhibit the formation of the Western bloc had largely melted away. Indirectly, the lesson learned from Italian affairs confirmed the Soviet choice to retreat to a focus on the USSR's security objectives in East Central Europe.

The role of the Cominform thus became definitively much more crucial for the building of an anti-Western 'bloc'. In this setting, Yugoslavia represented an increasingly awkward partner in Stalin's eyes. His choice to downsize the militant impact of the Cominform had already dissolved the apparent accordance between Moscow and Belgrade, allowing the old rust to re-emerge. Stalin's determination to consolidate the ranks of the 'Socialist camp' did the

<sup>60</sup> Silvio Pons, *A Challenge Let Drop: Soviet Foreign Policy, the Cominform, and the Italian Communist Party, 1947-48*, in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 246-63.

<sup>61</sup> G. P. Murashko, 'Fevralskii krizis 1948g. v Chekhoslovakii i sovetskoe rukovodstvo. Po novym materialam Rossiiskikh arkhivov', *Novia i noveishiaia istoria* 3 (1998).

<sup>62</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity. The Stalin Years* (Oxford, 1996), 43-4.

<sup>63</sup> Pons, *A Challenge Let Drop*, 259.

rest. The decision to denounce Belgrade was taken in Moscow in March 1948, after the coup in Prague and after Stalin had made clear to the Yugoslavs and Bulgarians that any militant challenge in the Balkans was out of the question.<sup>64</sup> However, in the accusations made against Tito Stalin preferred to avoid posing the real question—that of international policy—and employed the well-worn *leitmotiv* of 'deviationism'. The paradox here was that the Yugoslavs had been more consistent advocates of sovietization than Stalin himself. But their radicalism fuelled autonomy and insubordination. By outlining a distinct regional role, they might supply a reference point for other countries of East Central Europe. The second Cominform Conference, held in Bucharest on 19–23 June 1948, was the excommunication tribunal. The most interesting aspect of Zhdanov's report was what it omitted. He avoided any significant reference to foreign policy issues, thus making clear that they pertained to Moscow exclusively. The delegates from East Central Europe, intimidated by the obvious implications of Tito's condemnation, kept a low profile on the very notion of 'popular democracies'.<sup>65</sup>

The break between Stalin and Tito held a dual significance: the end of 'national ways' in the East, and the abandonment of the cominformist challenge in the West. Historians have almost invariably emphasized the motive of Tito's independence behind the break, underestimating the motive of his radicalism. But the two points were strictly connected. Consequently, the Cominform did not mark any change in the bedrock Stalinist conceptions of international policy, which for twenty years had contained the communists' revolutionary impetus within the confines of Soviet state interests. By mid-1948, when the Berlin crisis delineated the division of Germany, the call to mobilize against American imperialism sounded like an expedient of Soviet foreign policy, aimed at tightening the Soviet bloc. A differentiation was now established between the parties of Eastern Europe, subject to a harsh regime of limited sovereignty, and the parties of Western Europe, led to

<sup>64</sup> 'Na poroge pervogo raskola v socialisticheskom lagere. Peregovory rukovodjashchikh dejatelej SSSR, Bolgarii i Jugoslavii, 1948g.', *Istoricheski Arkhiv* 4 (1998), 92–123. Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 596–603 (10 February 1948). Djilas, *Rise and Fall*; Italian translation, 182–3. Gibianskii, *The Soviet Bloc and the Initial Stage of the Cold War*, 115–17, 128–34.

<sup>65</sup> On the break between Stalin and Tito in 1948, see particularly Leonid Gibianskii, 'The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Soviet Bloc', in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 222–45; Leonid Gibianskii, *The Origins of the Soviet-Yugoslav Split*, in Gibianskii and Naimark (eds), *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe*, 291–312; Leonid Gibianskii, *The 1948 Soviet-Yugoslav Clash: Historiographic Versions and New Archival Sources*, in Jasna Fischer et al. (eds), *Jugoslavija v hladni vojni—Yugoslavia in the Cold War* (Ljubljana, 2004), 49–70.

exercise the uncomfortable role of systemic opposition, in the name of defending national sovereignty against the United States. The Cominform's main activity became the struggle against Tito and the witch-hunting of his followers, which set the stage for the purges of Eastern Europe's communist elites.<sup>66</sup>

Our conclusions can be made in three points. First, traditional leftist criticism of Stalin's policies cannot be dismissed in the light of what we now know. In fact, Soviet state interests were given absolute priority in determining the fate of the communist movement, whether by establishing new communist-led regimes in East Central Europe or by using Western communist parties to consolidate the line of national and international collaboration and, later, to fight against the establishment of a Western bloc. Revolution in the original sense was never on the agenda. Second, however, the primacy of the Soviet state was fully accepted by all communists, as they largely identified their own cause with its existence and strength. The new prestige of the Soviet Union was a source of legitimacy for all European communist parties, even more so after victory in the war. In its turn, the communist movement was an essential vehicle for spreading Soviet influence abroad, to an extent not comparable with the inter-war years. While in East Central Europe the communists, however interlaced with Moscow's agencies, were a crucial force for establishing Soviet rule, in Western Europe they provided the main channel for Soviet foreign policy and for dissemination of the myth. Third, the relationship between the Soviet state and the communist movement was nevertheless more contradictory than historians have usually assumed. The definition of Soviet interests was by no means obvious. All communists pretended to follow Soviet interests, but they actually put forward their own interpretations. Apparent tensions between centre and periphery overlapped with oblique opposition between moderate and radical elements. Although this did not undermine the movement's cultural and political unity under Soviet leadership at the end of the war, that risk was not really prevented. The legacy of the Second World War was diversity, no less than unity.

The strategy of 'national fronts' and the doctrine of 'popular democracy' proved to be scarcely consistent as a moderate scenario for post-war Europe, in the light of Soviet security imperatives and because of the basic assumptions of communist political culture. But the reversal of that strategy at the founding conference of the Cominform did not herald the alternative scenario dreamed by the radicals. Instead, the ambition to challenge the West

<sup>66</sup> T. V. Volokitina, G. P. Murashko, A. F. Noskova, T. A. Pokivailova, *Moskva i vostochnaja Evropa. Stanovlenie politicheskikh rezhimov sovetskogo tipa 1949–1953. Ocherki istorii* (Moscow, 2002).

came into conflict with the need to establish Soviet control over the new states of East Central Europe. Discipline and uniformity prevailed over mobilization and insurrection. This was the real source of the break between the Soviet Union and its main ally in Europe, Yugoslavia. Perceived at that time as a marginal, albeit astonishing, episode in the great game of the Cold War, such a break was a crucial passage. It shattered the monolithic image of international communism, weakening the 'Socialist camp' and affecting the stabilization of regimes in East Central Europe. Furthermore, it signalled that the birth of new communist states, while representing a key achievement in terms of power, also created dramatic contradictions in the structure, influence, and development of the communist movement. The emergence of the Soviet state as a world power had not been more crucial to the wartime growth of the communist parties and to the authoritarian revolution from above in East Central Europe than it was to be for creating the stalemate—and later decline—of the communist movement in Europe.

## Establishing Order in Post-war Eastern Germany

Richard Bessel

Germans are often associated, and often associate themselves, with order. Theirs, it seems, is a culture in which people expect the state, society and economy to function. Yet at the end of the Second World War Germany experienced the most extreme disorder imaginable; then, to the surprise of many contemporaries, order was re-established very quickly. Indeed, Germany's transition in 1945—from war to peace, from extreme violence to the beginning of a long march towards settled conditions—is one of the most remarkable in modern history.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945 Germany became the first country in modern history to achieve total defeat. Germans were confronted with the disintegration of their world at every turn: as a result of the enormous eruption of violence during the last months of the war, the massive destruction of the country's infrastructure, the collapse of public administration, the plummeting of economic activity, the breakdown of law and order, the detention of millions of German prisoners of war, and the arrival of millions of foreign occupation troops determined to tolerate no opposition from the defeated population. When the war ended, a quarter of the entire German population was homeless and half the German population had lost at least one family member.<sup>2</sup> Basic services that

<sup>1</sup> See Konrad Jarausch, *Die Umkehr. Deutsche Wandlungen 1945–1955* (Munich, 2004); Richard Bessel, 'The War to End All Wars. The Shock of Violence in 1945 and its Aftermath in Germany', in Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (eds), *No Man's Land of Violence. Extreme Wars in the 20th Century* (Göttingen, 2006), 71–99; Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945. From War to Peace* (London and New York, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> In a survey conducted in 1952 by the Allensbach Institute for Opinion Research, of 535 young German men asked about their experiences during the war, 51 per cent had lost family members. See Elisabeth Noelle and Erich P. Neumann (eds), *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947–1955* (2nd edn, Allensbach, 1956), 23; quoted in Alice Förster and Birgit Beck, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and World War II. Can a Psychiatric Concept Help Us Understand Post-war Society?', in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (eds), *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge, 2003), 30.