Eurocommunism and Czechoslovakia*

Eurocommunism of the 1970s and the pluralistic Communism of Czechoslovakia of the late 1960s share some important similarities, and an exploration of the origins and development of Czechoslovak Communism may help to reveal the roots and the evolution of Eurocommunist ideas and tenets. In addition to the historical aspects of Czechoslovak Communism, I will discuss the mutual influence exerted by Eurocommunism and Czechoslovak Communism upon each other in the 1960s and 1970s, and the consequences of this interaction.

A disquisition on Eurocommunism is not necessary at this point, as the subject has been discussed elsewhere by myself and by Vernon Aspaturian. Herein I shall use the term not to designate a concept or condition, but, in a somewhat more imprecise and ambiguous fashion, to describe a current trend in the international Communist movement. This trend can be loosely identified as movement toward an independent form of Communism that, unlike the Soviet, is pluralistic in nature. Despite the ambiguous confines of this tendency, Eurocommunism emerges as something more than a myth or the "pseudo-phenomenon" some have labelled it. Indeed, such West European Communist officials as Spanish Communist Party (PCE) leader Santiago Carrillo and Italian Communist Party (PCI) leader Enrico Berlinguer have embraced the term as a convenient, though somewhat sloppy, shorthand for their parties' searches for a pluralistic, independent form of Communism. Carrillo traced

*In writing this article I utilized my previous research on the history of Czechoslovak Communism undertaken with the late Professor Josef Korbel in preparation for his book Twenty-First-Century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of Its History (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977). I have also benefited from interviews that I conducted with many Czechoslovak officials—former members of Alexander Dubček's government—and many of Dubček's advisors, including scholars and dissidents now living in Western countries.


2. See, for example, Angelo M. Codevilla, "Eurocommunism, a Pseudophenomenon," Strategic Review (Fall 1978), pp. 62-70.
the evolution of the Eurocommunist trend in his "Eurocomunismo" y estado, the publication of which brought him into collision with conservative ideologists in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The concept of Eurocommunism also exists in the minds of many conservative leaders in Eastern Europe. While there are those who continue to doubt its existence, some (such as the Czechoslovak leaders Vasil Bil'ak and Jan Fojtik) see Eurocommunism as a viable threat. For these men, Eurocommunism is an "instrument of anticommunism" designed to undermine the foundations of "real socialism" in Czechoslovakia and to return to power such "right-wing opportunists" and "traitors" as Alexander Dubcek.3

Unlike most East European countries, Czechoslovakia shares many cultural values and political traditions with Western Europe. The prevailing democratic tradition has been a main force in the development of a Communism that is unique in Eastern Europe.4 Czechoslovak Communism is characterized by two main tendencies: the first, authoritarian (Leninist and/or Stalinist); the second, more democratic and pluralistic. H. Gordon Skilling has persuasively argued that this dualism helps to explain some of the dramatic shifts and crises in Czechoslovak Communism since 1921.5 The prevailing traditions and political culture in Czechoslovakia as they have affected the dualism in Czechoslovak Communism must first be explored in order to assess the origins and development of pluralistic, reform Communism, leading to the Eurocommunist-type renaissance of 1968.

**Democratic Traditions in Czechoslovakia**

The dominant tradition in Czechoslovakia has been pro-Western and democratic. There is a deeply rooted heritage of Protestant religious reform—Hussitism—that came to life in the Czech lands one hundred years before it surfaced elsewhere in Europe. The Czech Protestant ethic stressed the ideas of equality, tolerance, reason, and individualism.6 Despite the forced conversions to Catholicism in the seventeenth century, the persecution of the Protestants during the early stages of Austrian rule, and the numerical majority of Catholics, the Protestant ethic survived as an important factor in shaping the character of

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3. See, for example, Jan Fojtik, Tribuna (Praha) 19 April 1978.
4. Aspaturian, "Conceptualizing Eurocommunism."