

Francesco Di Palma u. a. (Hg.), Der Eurokommunismus. Schlüsseltexte und neue Quellen, Berlin (Metropol Verlag) 2024, 310 S., ISBN 978-3-86331-743-0, EUR 24,00.

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Michael R. Krätke, Amsterdam

The short-lived period of Eurocommunism in the 1970s and early 1980s was a time of hope and renewed encounters between the Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the Social Democratic and Socialist parties of Western Europe. The Eurocommunist movement was led by the great Communist parties in Italy, the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano), in France, the PCF (Partie communiste français), and Spain, the PCE (Partido Comunista de España). Some of the smaller Communist parties followed their example. Their leader tried to develop new strategies for their parties suited for their political environment, the Western European democracies and their developed welfare states. Strategies summed up under the name of a »historical compromise« between the Communists and their Conservative and Social Democratic counterparts. It was a joint effort to break free from the tutelage of the Soviet Union and the Communist parties in Russia and Eastern Europe. For the first time in ages, Communist politicians and communist intellectuals engaged in public debates with politicians and intellectuals from the Social Democratic and Socialist Left in Europe.

The aim of this volume is rather modest. The editors want to provide access to some core texts and some background materials hitherto unknown in the German speaking countries. According to the editors, there is no common starting point for the Eurocommunist movement, although the Communist parties in the West were all strongly influenced by the policy of détente which began in the late 1960s. However, some of the ideas launched by leading Eurocommunists, like »national roads to socialism«, »democratic socialism«, »unity in diversity«, »peaceful roads to socialism« etc., had been discussed before.

The volume is organized in five sections, each dealing with one of the parties in the era of Eurocommunism. The first is devoted to the largest Communist party in Western Europe, the PCI, introduced by Francesco Di Palma. Among the documents he presents we find an interview with the party's leader, Enrico Berlinguer, from April 1975. There, Berlinguer gave a sketch of the changing balance of power since the end of the Second World War, assessing the opportunities for communist policies during the past thirty years. He emphasized the importance of the »struggle for democracy« as an integral part of any transformation towards socialism in Europe. In another interview given in 1979, he stressed the »impulse to revolution« which came and would come from the



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countries of the West, contrasting this to the standstill of every theoretical and political development in the Soviet Bloc.

The following section on the PCE is introduced by Walther L. Bernecker, who discusses the role of Santiago Carillo, the Spanish party leader at that time, who was fluctuating between opportunism and new won insights, as many saw him then. The *Manifesto* of the PCE from 1975, which is presented here in extracts, stated in remarkable clarity that socialism in the Western parts of Europe could only succeed through the full development of democracy, with full respect of individual and collective freedoms, relying on a plurality of competing political parties, on freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of science, freedom of culture – and renouncing any kind of official state ideology.

Documents from the PCF are presented in the third section, introduced by Jean-Numa Ducange. There we find a remarkable text by Jean Kanapa, then the leading party ideologue, from 1978. Kanapa defended Eurocommunism against the sceptics in his own party: It should not be regarded as a new ideology, and certainly not as a variety of Social Democratic thought but rather as a response to the very different conditions and political and social structures in the different countries of Europe. In his view, Eurocommunism was nothing else than a true expression of the urge of the working classes in Western Europe towards a socialism of their own, a form of socialism with full political and social freedom.

The fourth and the fifth section, introduced by Maximilian Graf and by Wolfgang Müller and Irina Kasarina, present documents which show the reaction to Eurocommunism by the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) and by the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), respectively. Unfortunately, we find only notes pertaining to debates between officials of the SED and the CPSU on the phenomenon of Eurocommunism and how they should react to it. Notes and other background material referring to debates between representatives of the SED and/or the CPSU and representatives of Western European Communist parties are absent. That is a pity, because quite a lot of such encounters took place – and were kept secret.

In the section on the CPSU, however, we find some documents that show how high-ranking party officials in the Soviet Union were prepared for discussions with their counterparts in the Western European Communist parties. For instance, a briefing for Leonid Breshnew, then general secretary of the CPSU, for a meeting with Georges Marchais, then general secretary of the PCF, in December 1975. The documents show that the Russian officials took Eurocommunism seriously, and deeply disapproved its main tenets regarding political democracy.

The volume does not tell us anything about the impact of Eurocommunism upon the political-theoretical debates in the Western European Left. Eurocommunism had such an impact

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because it was during this period that Antonio Gramsci, the icon of Italian communism, was discovered and fully embraced by the Western European Left. And it was during this period that Austro-Marxism, the only genuine development of Marxism within Western Social Democracy, was fully recognized and to a certain degree embraced by Communist intellectuals in Western Europe.

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