

Some main causes of the defeat of socialism in Czechoslovakia (from the point of view of the Communist Party of Slovakia)

The analysis of the causes of defeat of the socialism in 20th century in the conditions of Czechoslovakia is not possible without a comprehensive analysis of these causes in the entire former Soviet bloc. Approaches to the construction of socialism after World War II. in the former socialist countries, the forms and methods used were almost identical – only a limited number of national specifics were applied. As an example, we can mention Czechoslovakia which in the process of building socialism implemented some specific approaches (parliamentary, national) but ultimately this form of socialism was largely influenced by the Soviet methodology, especially in the 50s, 60s and 70s of the 20th century.

Using the same approach to build socialism, using the same methods of managing society, and finding that the same scenario was used to defeat socialism and basically to observe the emergence of the same counter-revolutionary forces tells us that we also need to look for common causes of the defeat of socialism at the end of the 20th century.

At this point it is also worth recalling Lenin's statement at the beginning of the last century when he said that socialism would be so strong that it would not be possible to defeat it by any enemy, that it would be defeated only by its own mistakes and faults. We believe that this idea deserves a considerable attention in the attempt to analyse the causes of the defeat of socialism in the last century in the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

In keeping with Lenin's words, the main causes of the defeat of socialism must be sought in the internal politics of communist parties in each country. Given the relatively short period of time since the fall of socialist regimes in Europe, our current assessments of the causes of the fall of socialism are merely indicative and probable, corresponding the degree of our knowledge of the causes and events that took place at the end of the 80s of the 20th century.

What was the development in Czechoslovakia?

The Czechoslovak model of socialism of the 20th century (Soviet model with Czechoslovak specifics) can be evaluated in terms of respecting the classical democratic principles and the achievement of the relatively high standard of living and development of the whole society (economic policy, housing policy, high level of health, education and the whole social sphere) as one of the most successful models of socialism in the 20th century. In our opinion, it is even possible to say that in the 20th century the attempt for socialism was at its peak in Czechoslovakia.

After World War II Czechoslovakia belonged to industrially most advanced countries within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. This means that in addition to its own industrialization, it actively participated in the construction of both the heavy and the light industry in other countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Relatively fast, although a largely violent but successful collectivisation of agriculture provided the country with food self-sufficiency. The population was relatively high intellectual, and the Communist Party had a great deal of authority due to the national-liberating and anti-fascist struggle in society.

Despite the various problems (domestic and international related) that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had to deal with during the whole existence of socialism (1945-1989), the Czechoslovak society was predominantly socialist oriented. This finding can be proved by the fact that based on research carried out by the Czechoslovak Statistical Office in Czechoslovakia in 1990, after the collapse of the socialist establishment in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, about 80% of the population claimed to maintain socialism but to implement several reform measures. The Communist Party itself, shortly before its power fell, had prepared serious reforms of socialism.

It can be said that there were many problems, errors and mistakes in Czechoslovak society during the building of socialism, but there were no real internal reasons for counter-revolution in

the end. Most of the Czechoslovak society called for the democratization reforms at the end of the 80s (in the area of politics, human rights and the economy) but not for the dissolution of socialism. However, the counter-revolution was also implemented in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in accordance with the concept of total erosion of socialism in the Soviet Union and throughout its bloc. It was made possible by the betrayal of several top leaders of the party and the state. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia lost its own defensive mechanisms and de facto resigned in the defence of socialism.

In this context it must be stated with time that in order to further develop socialism, its reform was justified and necessary.

If we assume that there were not objective conditions for counter-revolution in the Czechoslovakia, in this brief analysis we will discuss some of the main problems in building socialism in Czechoslovakia.

1. Strong enforcement of the monopoly power of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia after World War II

After World War II and the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gained a strong support of the population. In the parliamentary elections in 1946, the party gained a dominant position in society at the national level. It gained power through parliamentary elections and gradually applied its policy through the National Front (the coalition of political parties). In February 1948 in a constitutional manner and with the support of broad masses of common people, it gained absolute power positions in society. The truth is, however, that under the influence of efforts to strengthen the position of power, the persecution and trial of the political opponents of the new regime, which also affected many important representatives of the Communist Party, including many participants of the anti-fascist resistance, followed. This persecution was in many cases unjustified.

2. Close links to the Soviet economic model

From the economic point of view, it can be stated that the Soviet model of economic development which grew up on the Soviet needs of industrialization proved itself in the conditions of Czechoslovakia only until the early 1960s. It significantly contributed to the industrialization of Slovakia and its regions and to the industrialization supplies to other states of socialist orientation. It was less effective in terms of promoting internal intensive development based on scientific and technological progress and rational value management.

Since the mid-1960s, the Soviet model of development and management of the national economy in the Czechoslovakia had become an obstacle to economic development. The fact that it was not able to initiate a scientific-technological revolution and did not systematically acquire stimuli from outside was decisive for its economic defeat at the end of the 1980s.

The Soviet model of the socialist economy survived in the 1970s, but despite repeated attempts to economic reform in the USSR in the 1980s (in the conditions of the emergence of the science and technology revolution) it collapsed. It was manifested particularly in the inappropriate and bureaucratic system of managing the national economy and in the imperfect implementation of social ownership. The traditional patterns of the market as competition, supply, or demand were ignored. The natural aim of production that was followed by companies wasn't meeting the needs of the population but meeting planned indicators. The whole economic process was insensitively influenced by power elites, regardless of the objective conditions and needs. Monopolistic position of state-owned companies and planned sale of goods and services eliminated competition and thus discredited the effort for higher technical and utility quality of products. This fact affected all the states of the socialist system.

A major problem in the economy was the over-centralization of the entire economy, which reduced the initiative of lower economic components. The chosen dominant form of social ownership prevented the acceptance of social ownership for the real property of a citizen. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviet way was chosen: the construction of the state as the owner and the company as its operative component and administrator. The decisive word had the state

apparatus.

In Czechoslovakia, the cooperative form of "business" was also applied, which was considered a lower form of group ownership. This form was successful in the economy structure mainly in the field of agriculture. However, it was a violent way of establishing cooperative farms, which negatively affected Slovakia.

3. The external economic causes of the backwardness of Czechoslovak socialism

The economic embargo of capitalistic states on the import of strategic products, raw materials and modern technologies.

The international division of labour within the countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance dictated to Czechoslovakia a heavy industry as a priority at the expense of light (consumer) industry.

The political pressure of the USSR to create a system of directive economic governance that does not reflect market patterns or the country's conditions and underestimate the active participation of workers to solve economic problems.

The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic provided many developing and socialist countries with support in the form of long-term loans for the construction of investment units or for the supply of other goods. The repayment terms of the loans were often disadvantageous to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and sometimes the maturity itself was dubious. (The total amount of receivables in 1989 exceeded the amount of its debts and made 7.9 billion USD.) These means of development of the Czechoslovak economy were lacking.

We talked about internationalism, proletarian internationalism, but we were unable to apply these elements in practice within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and to develop the economy of the socialist community uniformly. The created collective economic companies or the cooperation of countries on individual isolated sections were only a weak example of what we should do. Despite our success in collective companies, we could not apply this cooperatively.

4. Marxism – Leninism as a New Religion

We "prayed" to it, but we lived according to the old capitalistic principles of life. The property relationships were promoted and preferred, people were rated not by moral values, but by property conditions. We talked about dialectical thinking, but we acted the old way, often with a metaphysical approach. We didn't understand things and we didn't evaluate the world in development but did it motionlessly and stiff. Marxist ideology lost the form of creative philosophy and became a formal dogma.

5. Using the capitalistic methodology for evaluating the development of the society

We claimed that we were building a new, classless, communist society based on friendly interpersonal relationships where the meaning of life will not be the property but the versatile development of human's personality, the satisfaction of his material and mental needs. However, the reality was different. The criterion of the development of society was how much coal we extract or how much steel we produce and not what kind of humans we are raising and what possibilities we develop for them.

6. Changes in the class structure of the society

There were internal political and ideological differences within the privileged class in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and other socialist countries. Under the influence of a centrally managed economy, a power elite class was created both in the state and in the party which had a strong position in society. The working class was deprived of ownership as well as a real share of the management of the society. It was kept in passivity and neutrality with formal claims about its leadership role in society. The social prestige of the working class was low

despite the formal ideological phrases.

7. Mistakes in cadre (personal) politics

Mistakes were done in the selection of cadres as well as in their preparation. We began to falsely perceive the class principle. In cadre politics, we understood it only as a working or agricultural origin, we forgot that above all, social engagement must be a part of it. By applying the class principle alone, we basically created the possibility of occupying political and economic functions by careerists or false populists, also nepotism and bribery were more common. We can say that November 1989 was led by the grandchildren of the capitalists who came to the state and the party bodies as children of the working class (their fathers were the sons of bourgeoisie and kulaks but ended up as workers because of their origin). The workers felt resistance to the Communist Party as the symbol of domination and privileges of the governing class. The apparatus of the Communist Party became a new privileged social class.

In conclusion

All these but also many other problematic moments of "Czechoslovak" socialism were directly conditioned by the mistakes made by the Communist Party in the construction of socialism.

It is necessary to realize whether the socialism of the 20th century was socialism. According to Karol Marx, socialism is the first phase of a communist society characterized by three basic attributes:

- social ownership of the production means;
- socialist ideology;
- the level of social awareness of the population corresponding to the two previous attributes

We think it is also necessary to deal with this basic yet essential question. Did some of the countries building socialism meet these basic criteria at the end of the 1980s? We are inclined to think that they didn't, and Czechoslovakia was in 1989 at a stage that Lenin called "The period of birth pains". Thus, we consider that the period called the socialism of the 20th century should be called the concept of socialism or the first historical form of socialism to be more accurate. However, these are deeper theoretical questions.

In any case, the first historical form of socialism in the 20th century is a tremendous enrichment of our communist mindset (our communist movement and all anti-capitalist alternative movements) of practical experience. This experience should be one of the main sources in realisation of socialism in the future.