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„Behind Iron Curtains” – the unchanged communism

The meaning of the expression „iron curtain” is easy to understand in Central Europe until today. It marked with its existence the western borders of the soviet bloc. Its main purpose was not to keep out the people coming from the West, but to keep in the nations of the soviet bloc. The following clichéd phrases created by the communist dictatorship, such as „peace camp”, „socialist camp”, „the happiest barrack”, describe the situation exactly. It means that the countries of the communist bloc created and maintained a political-economic and social system, which was based on compulsion. It should be noted, we focus just on the Soviet Union and the countries of its sphere of influence, other communist countries fall outside the frame of the project.

The compulsion is the synthetic and converging phenomenon, stood behind the whole communist regime, namely it is its most direct and brutal form. The compulsion in its ordinary form meant terror and lie. The first (concept) was applied against the individuals constituting the society, with the latter they tried to force the world’s phenomena to conform to the vision of communist way of thinking. The latter was described by V. B. as follows: *“The communists are like that: communists, with their inherent belief are convinced that the economics can be deceived/cheated, the people can be fooled/duped and history can be falsified/faked with some cunning effort, and in this deluded way everybody can get to heaven, as long as nobody regains his consciousness.”*

So the Iron Curtain was just the externally visible appearance of the compulsion-based rule of the communism. It is typical/revealing, that the term/conception had been appeared before it came into being and became a symbol. When Churchill gave his famous Fulton Speech on the 5th of March 1946, and he used the expression “Iron Curtain” (*“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”*), it has been

already used and known for a while. Of course it was no accident, that the expression was used just by Churchill, the big former and further enemy of the Soviet-Russia

Probably it was used for the first time in the relation to communism by the philosopher and writer Vasily Rozanov in 1918. In his short essay called: „The Apocalypse of *Our Time*” he wrote: *“With a rumble and a roar, an iron curtain is descending on Russian history. ‘The performance is over!’ The public stood up. ‘It’s time to get on your fur coats and go home!’ We looked around, but neither our fur coats nor our homes have been in our possession anymore.”* Later, it has been referred exactly to the western boarder of Soviet-Russia, the British, socialist politician Ethel Snowden used the expression “Iron Curtain” in the book - *“Through Bolshevik Russia” (1920)* - about her journey in the Soviet-Russia, and reported that “an impenetrable barrier” had been set up between Bolshevik Russia and the outside world, similar to the iron safety curtain used in Europe’s theatres. The expression was used by the Nazis as well during the WWII for propaganda purposes. It became a bitter and weird joke, because it marked – with a huge exaggeration – the phenomenon just later has been realized. According to Goebbels an iron curtain would fall over the territory controlled by the soviets as a consequence of the yalta agreement, *“behind which nations would be slaughtered.”*

The „Iron Curtain” hasn’t been used just in conjunction with the territory controlled by the soviets. Earlier it had been used for the Yugoslav royal dictatorship, or after the war for Tito’s Yugoslavia; It has been used for the Nazi regime, for the industrial civilization itself by Chesterton.

Finally, during 1945, not even Churchill, but others used as well the expression many times, in the same sense as later in the Fulton speech was meant.

It’s quite evident: the expression, “Iron Curtain” in political sense/terms especially makes sense referring to the communism or to the Soviet Union. It had been referred to the fact, that something was hidden from sight violently from the rest of the world, something was isolated mightily. The “Iron Curtain” became a synonym for compulsion, because the dictatorship committed what it just wanted, behind the intransparent/impenetrable iron curtains, hidden away from the outside observers.

The compulsion and consequently the intangible, but very real iron curtains were present in the communist regimes from their beginning. Because the people didn’t want to become the New Man and neither the rough picture of the perfect society wanted to be realized, constraint had to be applied.

In 1917 the ideological planners and executors of the Bolshevik putsch thought the set-up of Communism won't be difficult. Just some decrees have to be given out, the property has to be taken away from the rich and the perfect society is already in place. In fact they have faced difficulties from the very first moment. In the first instance the problem was, that Marx and Lenin have not written about how will be the communism and how can it be achieved exactly, but they criticized and analysed the capitalist arrangements. Beside the theoretical problem, the practice was a serious challenge as well: because the putschists hadn't got much support. The Bolsheviks could vanquish/subdue the former empire of the tzars through a long and bloody civil war.

First of all the war communism represented the state based on violence and lie. As a matter of fact every components have been already possessed they characterized later the world of the iron curtains. These were: secularization, and strict centralized management, introduction of state control of foreign trade, imposition of obligatory labor duty onto non-working classes, requisition of agricultural surpluses (in excess of an absolute minimum) from peasants for centralized distribution among the remaining population, rationing of food and most commodities, with centralized distribution thereof in urban centres, private enterprise banned, military-style control of the railways. The first forced labor camps have been created as well.

There has been a debate about the war communism already at that time, if it is an exceptional collection of regulations justified by the war, or it is the standard operation/functioning of the communism. The practice of the communism sprang from the doctrine derived totality, that is when interpreting some provisions and occurrences on the current position of the party depending explanation could be provided, however, on the face of it/ seen from without the war communism itself was in accordance with the revolutionary impetus/pathos of the Bolsheviks, and with Ludendorff's model of "war socialism" applied in the German Empire.

For example Trotsky wrote the following about the compulsion to work in the Pravda in 1920: *"Because the soviet state organized the work on behalf of the workers itself, so the compulsion to work is by no means in contrast to the interest of the workers."* He said about the military discipline: *"An army-like organisation is due/according to its own/inner logic is a soviet-like organisation"* Other bolshevik leaders made similar statements. One of their leading ideologist, Buharin wrote about the war communism: *"We conceived/viewed the war communism as the universal or more precisely the normal economic policy of the victorious proletariat, and not as being related/connected to/with war, namely conforming/adapts to a*

definite state of civil war.” For this reason without precise/adequate conception they just hoped that the war communism will lead to the universal state of communism that eliminates immediately private property, commodity production and market exchange.

They should have disappointed in all of this. The war communism has been terminated by series of nationwide uprisings and fall of production that caused not least million’ victims of famine.

The basic features have been outlined in the first phase of the communist regime, and haven’t changed anything yet.

These are the followings:

1. The lie of the communism: in fact there hasn’t been any just only approximate plan suggesting when and how can you get to the state of communism. Because of this from time to time it came to some different social engineering actions, in other words human experiments.
2. Adulteration of reality: Due to the statement above it was impossible to reconcile the experiential reality with the communist word magic, therefore they had to try to create a virtual reality.
3. The reign of violence: because there were no real institutions of the popular sovereignty, thus the Communist Party referred/alluded to the people in vain, in fact the ultimate base of its reign was the armed violence. Similarly instead of constitutional state and rule of law only existed a pseudo-law based on the will of the Party.
4. Permanent state of war: the Communist Party have been conducting a permanent war against the subjecting/subdued society. In some cases it mobilized the majority against some parts of the society, in other cases waged a total war on the country subjected of its power.

After a while the constant presence of the four theses above resulted that the communists countries were unable to adapt to the external environment/circumstances. Because of that during the entire existence of the communist system was observed that periodically reforms have been introduced/brought. It was the essence of all reforms that sooner or later collided with the Communist Party’s totalitarianism/monopoly of power and with the image of society of the scientific socialism. This constant movement created a vicious cycle of communism.

The first reform in the Soviet Union was the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was a defeat regarding the fourth item, because the peasantry could not be forced to get on the knees. The last attempt at reform was the “uskoreniye” (acceleration) associated with Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party that soon led to the policy of “glasnost” (openness) and „perestroika” (restructuring) that tried to dynamise the collapsing/disintegrating Soviet Union. It became clear that the communist dictatorship cannot be reformed, its reformation corresponds to its mop-up/liquidation.

In the international scene two attempts at reform divided/disrupted fatally the adherents/disciples of Communism. First in 1956, when Khrushchev during the XX. Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union uncovered/unveiled the mistakes of Stalin, many considered “Stalinism” as a slip, and they hoped to begin the construction of the “real” communism. In fact it turned out that was not the case, because Khrushchev did not rush Stalin totally out of the communist pantheon - he hadn't had the opportunity, because the all of the leading party cadres (himself as well) started their careers by favour of Stalin. Moreover the Hungarian revolution of 1956 totally unveiled/exposed the edifice of communism based on raw violence and lie, so the international communist movement has been hit hard by the year of 1956.

The next severe blow happened in August of 1968, when the Warsaw Pact troops led by the Soviet Union stifled the “Prague Spring”, which was found especially attractive by the left-wing fellow traveler. This case raised the issue: if the Prague communist leaders did not want to leave the Soviet Bloc, just to introduce/inaugurate “socialism with human face”, but they were not allowed to make it – what kind of face has the “existing socialism” then?

Concerning Hungary the series of reforms showed the floundering of communism in a deep crisis. The first attempt at reform was in 1953. The short-lived reforms of Imre Nagy meant the short-term repeal/annulment of the most prejudicial measures. In 1957 after the crush/defeat of the revolution an uncertain attempt at reform has been made, which was rejected/dismissed, because the party just carried on a war with soviet assistance against the whole society.

Further short-term attempt at reform was launched in 1968, the New Economic Mechanism. But after 4 years by reference of Communism's vicious circle of logic failed in a short time. Small-scale looking but very important reforms were launched at the end of the 80's. 9 new types of business operations were introduced by a law adopted in 1982 . In the same year

Hungary joined the International Monetary Fund. This clearly showed the truth of the Hungarian proverb: “the existing socialism doesn’t function, the functioning socialism doesn’t exist.” In 1985 the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party decided on the acceleration of economy, investments, but this program failed barely in one and a half years as well. From 1988 such by the reform socialists promoted processes started, they led to the termination of the communist command economy essentially in a year’s time.

It can be concluded on the basis of the above: the communism actually represents the constant crisis of society, economy and politics, because it shift out the human communities of their natural state, of the basis of natural law and common sense, and hold them in this perverse state with the help of compulsion.

The „Iron Curtains”, this plural expression imply the wide range of manifestations of compulsion. Its physical forms and different institutions were very varied/diverse from the outer offset/edge/periphery of the soviet bloc, from the “big Iron Curtain” inwards. These were the in 1918 established concentration camps, prevailed throughout the history of the Soviet Union, which existed in the satellite states in certain periods as well. These were the borders between the communist countries – there were no free trips at all. These were the internal borders in the Soviet Union, not even between the constituent republics, but within them between certain/some areas. An internal passport was necessary for crossing them!

These were the prisons full of political prisoners – it is not a coincidence that in the resistance working István Fehérváry wrote a book with the title: “Prisonworld in Hungary”. These were the involuntary treatment/forced psychiatric treatment institutions, the Psikhuski in Soviet Union. But these were the system of the employment record books and the bonded labor exchange. But in cultural sense that was the Z-classified library holding in Hungary, which could be only researched with the permission of the Party; or that kind of “iron curtain” was Aczél György’s famously infamous system: forbidden-tolerated-supported.

The „Behind Iron Curtains” refers to the common Central-European destiny on one hand, namely did not get behind the Iron Curtain of our own free will, but under external constraint. On the other hand this title: “Behind Iron Curtains ‘70” alludes to the world of communism controlled by compulsion. As Nadjezsda Kavalirová the chairman of the Czech Political Prisoners Association has recently said: *"I can assure everyone that everyday communism was a bad experience, and also that we know that the Communists (and their ideology) cannot be reformed."*