

# CONSTITUTIONALISM AND REVOLUTION: NOTES ON EUROCOMMUNISM

Ralph Miliband

## 1

The following notes are intended to discuss some of the most important characteristics, tendencies and problems of Eurocommunism; and to do this by reference to three of the books which have been published on the subject recently—Santiago Carillo's *Eurocommunism and the State*, (Lawrence and Wishart, 1977); Fernando Claudin's *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, (New Left Books, 1978) and the discussion between Eric Hobsbawm and Giorgio Napolitano, published under the title *The Italian Road to Socialism*, (The Journeyman Press, 1977). None of them are weighty publications; but they do offer a useful view of the main lines of thought of Eurocommunism and, in Claudin's case, a qualified critique of its strategy. The focus is on Italy, Spain and France; but the discussion is relevant to all advanced capitalist countries. What is at issue is the elaboration of a strategy of socialist advance which, notwithstanding obvious differences, is broadly applicable to all such countries.

Such a discussion is both important and long overdue; and it is of considerable significance that it should now be occurring inside as well as outside Communist parties. Santiago Carillo is the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain and Giorgio Napolitano is a member of the Secretariat of the P.C.I. But they write in a style very different from that which has by tradition come to be associated with the pronouncements of high Communist officials, and in a manner which invites comment rather than requiring assent. This reflects pressures which cannot be contained or stifled by the suppressive practices of the past, even the fairly recent past. The same pressures are now at work inside the French Communist Party; and these too are unlikely to be easily neutralised. If this is right, the consequences for the left of all advanced capitalist countries will be very large.

## 2

As a preliminary, the point needs to be made that Eurocommunism must be sharply distinguished, in theoretical and programmatic terms, from

social democracy. There are no doubt definite tendencies towards "social democratisation" in the practice of Eurocommunist parties; and it may be argued that Eurocommunism in the end cannot or will not do more than manage capitalism, if it is given a chance to do so. This is what much of the discussion on the left about Eurocommunism is about. But the Eurocommunist purpose, at any rate, quite clearly goes far beyond that of social democracy. As Carillo puts it, "what is commonly called 'Eurocommunism' proposes to *transform* capitalist society, not to *administer* it; to work out a socialist alternative to the system of state monopoly capitalism, not to integrate in it and become one of its governmental variants." (p. 104) Eurocommunism proceeds from an explicitly socialist purpose. It advocates the thorough transformation of capitalist society; and it proceeds from theoretical premises which social democracy mostly ignores or denies. This is by no means conclusive. But to assimilate Berlinguer to Callaghan, Carillo to Olaf Palme and Marchais to Schmidt is at this point in time sectarian prejudice. As of now, social democracy and Eurocommunism must be taken as basically different enterprises, in the sense in which Carillo defines the latter's purpose. The real question is how the transformation is envisaged; and whether the project is politically viable.



The essential and distinguishing feature of Eurocommunism is that it seeks to achieve the transformation of capitalist society in socialist directions by constitutional means, inside the constitutional and legal framework provided by bourgeois democracy; and even though it seeks to effect a great extension of bourgeois democracy itself, the idea is to achieve this also by wholly constitutional and legal means.

There is a sense in which this is an old strategy. After the implantation of the German Social Democratic Party in German political life with the lifting of the anti-socialist laws in 1890, constitutionalism and legality became a major strain in Marxism, and not only in Germany. Carillo quotes at length from Engels's famous Introduction of 1895 in Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50*; and it is indeed the case that its reliance on universal suffrage and constitutionalism, though somewhat qualified, is unmistakable, and may legitimately be used to serve as a justificatory text, if such texts be needed, for the stance adopted by Eurocommunist parties. Nor did Communist parties, after the revolutionary hopes and upheavals following the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of the First World War, seek to operate outside the framework of constitutionalism, at least in bourgeois democratic regimes. In these regimes, and with exceptional episodes that were mainly forced upon them, Communist parties have followed the constitutionalist path of advance, and shunned any other.

One of the most spectacular demonstrations of their willingness—indeed their eagerness—to follow that path was of course provided by their entry, where this was permitted, in bourgeois coalitions at the end of the Second World War, notably in Italy and France, and until their expulsion from office with the onset of the Cold War.

This eagerness to join bourgeois coalitions in this period cannot simply be explained by reference to Russian pressure; or to the craving for office by Communist leaders. There was also at work a view of socialist advance, based precisely on constitutionalist perspectives.

There remained, however, a major ambiguity about this Communist constitutionalism, namely whether it was intended as a means of advance to a point at which an opportunity would offer itself for a revolutionary seizure of power, a "storming of the Winter Palace", to be followed by the proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, meaning in effect the imposition of a "monolithic" one-party dictatorship on a pattern which has long been familiar. Engels's Introduction is itself ambiguous, and can certainly be interpreted to suggest that a period of electoral and parliamentary advances would have to be complemented by a revolutionary upsurge on what he called "the decisive day"; and there is in any case Engels's well-known protests at the emendation of his text in *Vorwärts*, the central organ of the German Social Democratic Party, which was intended, as he put it, to make him appear a "peaceful worshipper of legality" at all costs, a "disgraceful impression" which he wanted wiped out.

One of the main concerns of Eurocommunist pronouncements has been to dissipate any such ambiguity and to insist that the commitment to "normal" politics was total and irrevocable. In this perspective, Communist insertion into the political processes of bourgeois democracy is not the necessary means to an ultimately insurrectionary purpose: there is no such purpose. What is envisaged is the gradual transformation of capitalist society by way of its progressive democratisation in all areas and at all levels. Napolitano speaks of giving "ever newer and richer content to democracy—promoting an effective mass participation in the management of economic, social and political life, transforming economic and social structures, carrying out substantial changes in the power relationship between the classes"; (p. 29) and Carillo discusses in some detail the democratisation of state structures and of economic and social life in general. Neither Carillo nor Napolitano suggests that this process will necessarily be smooth. Carillo evokes the possibility that a government of the left, duly brought to office by constitutional procedures, might "find itself confronted with an attempted coup", in which case it would be necessary "to reduce by force resistance by force". (p. 76) But the intention at least is to proceed by gradual means, and within a strictly constitutional framework.

Before taking this further, it is worth asking why Eurocommunism should have come to full flowering now.

An answer to this question would obviously have to take account of the failure of the USSR to "liberalise" or "democratise" in any significant way in the aftermath of the XXth Party Congress in 1956; and of the dramatic demonstration of its opposition to the democratisation of Communist regimes provided by its crushing of the Czech reform movement in 1968. There was, after 1956, a hope in Western Communist Parties that the denunciation of the "cult of personality" and of the crimes associated with it (or at least of some of them) would take care of Stalinism, and usher in a new era which would make it possible for these parties to continue to point to the USSR as an exemplar of socialist democracy in practice, much as they had done previously, and with greater plausibility.

With the passage of time, however, it became ever more obvious that this was a vain hope; that the USSR remained an exceedingly repressive and authoritarian regime, even if it was less repressive than it had been under Stalin; and that to point to it as an exemplar of socialist democracy must discredit both those who were doing the pointing and the notion of socialist democracy itself. In other words, dissociation from the example of the USSR became a condition of political viability let alone success. The process of dissociation was protracted and halting, as is well documented by Claudin; but it was cumulative and irreversible. It also had the advantage of making possible a renewed emphasis by Communist parties on their national vocation, in full freedom from external dictation and in the defence of national sovereignty, independence and so on.

This assertion of independence from the USSR is a feature of Eurocommunism, but it cannot explain its strategic options: after all, the assertion of independence could easily have been allied to an affirmation of a new "revolutionary" purpose, using the word in a sense which Western Communist parties have categorically rejected.

The reason for this rejection has to do with much more than the USSR and reaches out to the very nature of working class politics in advanced capitalist countries, at least under bourgeois democratic conditions. The point is simply that bourgeois democracy imposes certain definite constraints upon parties which seek to achieve mass political and electoral support: by far the most important of these constraints is the acceptance of "normal" politics and the categorical repudiation of insurrectionism. This rejection of insurrectionism is the largest and most important fact about the working class in advanced capitalist countries since 1918; and it has been very greatly reinforced by the experience of Soviet Russia and other Communist regimes.

The point has to be handled carefully. The rejection of insurrectionism must not be taken to signify an enthusiastic endorsement of bourgeois democracy, parliamentarism and representative institutions. On the contrary, there is very deep and widespread scepticism about all of this, and the chances are that it has always been so. For the working class in general, it is probably the case that "politics" has been a term charged with many negative and suspect connotations.

But this scepticism about bourgeois politics has never meant any kind of commitment to its obverse, namely the politics of insurrection and violent revolution. No doubt, there has always been a section of the working class, of different proportions from one country to another and from one period to another, which has found such an option and commitment acceptable. But it has always and everywhere been a small section of the whole; and the overwhelming majority of the working class, not to speak of other classes, has always rejected the politics of revolution. In so far as a proletarian revolution of the classic type requires mass support, the conditions for such a revolution have not been present.

It is of course possible to attribute this to poverty of leadership, to opportunism, or to treachery, or whatever. But this is to put far too much weight upon leadership and much too little upon the structures and circumstances in which leadership operates. Lenin was possible (though not inevitable) in Russia but not in Germany. It is no good saying that the German revolution would have been successful in 1918 if only there had been a well-organised German Bolshevik/Communist Party in existence, with proper leadership. This may well be so. But there are reasons why there was no such party or leadership, which have very little to do with will and persons and a great deal with structures and circumstances. There is a dialectic between leadership and organisation on the one hand, and structures on the other; but that dialectic cannot possibly produce positive results unless there is a minimal "fit" between them. There has been no such "fit" between revolutionary organisation and leadership and the structures and circumstances of advanced capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Another way of saying this is that advanced capitalism and bourgeois democracy have produced a working class politics which has been non-insurrectionary and indeed anti-insurrectionary; and that this is the rock on which revolutionary organisation and politics have been broken.

This is not to say that leaderships of working class movements and parties—in this instance Communist leaderships—could not have done more to further the interests of the working class and the subordinate classes in general, in many different ways. Here the dialectic of leadership and structures does have play, for positive results as well as negative ones. But no leadership, however inspired, and no organisation, however efficient, could have carried mass support for a project whose ultimate purpose was a revolutionary seizure of power.

If failures of leadership are no adequate explanation of this working class rejection of the politics of revolution-as-insurrection, neither is the invocation of a presumed false consciousness on its part leading to an exaggerated regard for the institutions of bourgeois democracy.

Regard for these institutions varies from country to country (higher say in Britain, lower say in Italy), but it is nowhere very high. But in any case, it is not because of an illusory view of bourgeois democracy and of the power which it confers upon the working class that the latter rejects revolution; it is rather because the fruits of revolution, particularly in the political realm, appear so doubtful and indeed so sour that there is acceptance and endorsement of the kind of institutional framework which has been fashioned, not least as a result of working class pressure, in the context of advanced capitalism. Claudin makes the point that after 1919, there developed in what he calls "Comintern ideology" an "essential conflict between council democracy and representative or delegated democracy" with the implication that—"only the first was suited to proletarian rule; the second was designed exclusively for bourgeois rule"; and he notes that "the effective workers' democracy of the model was short-circuited (in the Soviet Union—R.M.) by the reality of a system of military, police, economic, administrative, juridical and ideological apparatuses which had escaped all popular control and were now the real power centres—in turn organised and controlled by the central apparatus of the single party." (p. 78) This experience has weighed very heavily upon the socialist project in bourgeois democratic countries; and it is that experience which has helped to legitimate bourgeois democracy, rather than the latter's own intrinsic virtues. It is not these virtues which robbed the working class of a sense of alternatives, but the repulsive character of the actual, existing alternatives. The *idea* of the dictatorship of the proletariat, out of classical Marxism, is not nearly sufficiently compelling to overcome the impact of these alternatives.

In a broader perspective, it is obvious that conditions in advanced capitalist countries would have to become enormously worse, in ways which it is at present difficult to envisage, for the necessary basis of mass support to be engendered which would significantly advance the prospects of a "vanguard party" bent on an ultimate seizure of power. Those groupings which see themselves as embryonic (or actual) "vanguard parties" do in fact work on catastrophist assumptions, and expect that economic collapse, the replacement of bourgeois democracy by some form of authoritarianism and fascism, and even war, will eventually bring about the necessary conditions of revolutionary success and make it possible to repeat the Bolshevik scenario of 1917. On any other basis, the road to power by way of insurrection is blocked. The major difference between Eurocommunists and many—though not all—groupings on the far left which oppose them is that the former believe that it will remain

blocked; while the latter believe that it will not. These divergent expectations also naturally produce different strategies: the groupings on the far left do see themselves as potential or actual vanguard parties preparing for the moment of violent confrontation; Eurocommunists for their-part see themselves as engaged in what Gramsci called a "war of position" as distinct from a "war of manoeuvre", with the purpose of achieving a gradual and ever-greater implantation in capitalist society and in politics, to the point where the achievement of governmental power by the forces of the left becomes possible, on the basis of a majority registered at the polls.

There is of course no way of knowing whether the catastrophist perspectives are mistaken or not; and they may not be. But they do not seem to afford the basis for an adequate political strategy. It is reasonable to suggest that the bourgeois democratic state, under the pressure of economic, social and political unhingements and crises, may well seek to strengthen further its repressive apparatus and to erode the democratic concessions which it has been forced to make, for instance in the area of labour and trade union law. The process is not uniform: labour may win something inside the factory and lose as much or more on the picket line. The struggle between the forces which seek to constrain and weaken labour and those which seek to reinforce it is a permanent one. But this is obviously a very different perspective from the one advanced by the proponents of the catastrophist thesis. As will be suggested later, Eurocommunism tends to underplay the harsh realities of class struggle. But Eurocommunism's catastrophist critics on the left are forced into far too rigid a mould because of their preconceived view of what socialist transition entails. This, however, should not obscure the problems associated with Eurocommunism.

## 5

One such problem has to do with the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and with what its rejection by Eurocommunism entails.

The dictatorship of the proletariat may be taken to have three different meanings: firstly, as the "dictatorship" which the proletariat exercises over its enemies in a revolutionary period, with a clear denotation of class violence and repression; secondly, as the hegemony which the proletariat is expected to exercise in society in a post-revolutionary period, in the same sense in which the notion is used in regard to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie in a capitalist society; and thirdly, as an entirely new form of government.

Eurocommunism rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat in the first of these meanings, in so far as it rejects a notion of transition in which revolutionary violence plays a major part. The second meaning presents no

great problem, at least in this context, in so far as hegemony, meaning the "domination" of society by the overwhelming majority of the people (an extended version of the working class) is what the whole project is about. The third meaning of the concept, which is also the most important and the one to which Marx was most closely wedded, is much more difficult.

In that meaning, the concept entails an extreme extension of popular rule, almost amounting to direct democracy, with councils and other such institutions as the main form of mediation between people and power; and that mediation was itself expected to be weak and subordinate. The old state was to be "smashed" and replaced by what Lenin called "other institutions of a fundamentally different type." Even though this form of government does involve an element of delegation and representation, the "Comintern ideology", to which Claudin refers in the remark quoted earlier, was right in suggesting an "essential conflict between council democracy and representative or delegated democracy." It is the vision of an all-but-direct democratic form of rule, with a state strictly subordinated to society and in any case in a process of "withering away", which constitutes the essence of classical Marxism's theory of post-revolutionary politics.

I do not believe that this is a viable project in its literal meaning, least of all in a revolutionary period; and that it will not in any case be viable in its literal meaning, under any circumstances, for a long time to come. It represents a leap into a fairly distant future, and leaves the question of the exercise of socialist power unsolved.

But if not the dictatorship of the proletariat in this meaning, what then? The answer which Lenin gave to the question is well known—the dictatorship of the party. Eurocommunism rejects that answer, or at least finds it politically unviable, which is the same thing. What then?

The answer, suggested by Napolitano and Carillo, is a modified, democratised version of parliamentary or representative democracy, but definitely a version of a familiar system. Carillo puts it thus:

**"As regards the political system established in Western Europe, based on representative political institutions—parliament, political and philosophical pluralism, the theory of the separation of powers, decentralisation, human rights, etc.—that system is in all essentials valid and it will be still more effective with a socialist, and not a capitalist, economic foundation. In each case it is a question of making that system still more democratic, of bringing power still closer to the people." (p. 105)**

The idea is to extend still further—and very considerably an already existing democratic system. Napolitano speaks of a "whole series of modifications to be made in the structure and functioning of the state machinery, aiming fundamentally at decentralisation, developing regional and local autonomy, popular participation and control"; (p. 50) and

Carillo similarly speaks of "the bringing of the State apparatus closer to the country, to the people", of "the setting up of regional organs of power", and of "creating a living democracy at all levels throughout the country—a democracy in which effective power will reside in the organs of popular power (i.e. regional organs—R.M.) so that the vitality of that power is such that no groups installed in the central zone of power could wipe it out at a blow." (p. 75)

Carillo concedes very readily that "this conception of the State and of the struggle to democratise it presupposes the renunciation of the idea, in its traditional form, of a *workers' and peasants' State*; of a State, that is, built from scratch, bringing into the offices workers from the factories and peasants from the land, and sending functionaries who had hitherto worked in the offices to occupy their places." This is a very crude characterisation of the Marxist vision and Carillo renounces it all the more readily because, as he goes on to say, "such a State has never really existed, except as an ideal. Even where the revolution triumphed by an act of force, the bureaucracy, with some exceptions, has continued as such and the new functionaries have rapidly acquired many of the bad habits of the old." (p. 76. Italics in text) This being the case, Carillo is content to advocate a democratised version of existing state structures.

What Carillo expresses here is representative of Eurocommunism in general, and is of great importance. He does not accept the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat which Lenin put forward in *The State and Revolution*. This, I have indicated earlier, seems to be sensible: that idea is not a realistic blueprint for democracy. But having thus given up the dictatorship of the proletariat, Carillo then retreats—and so does Eurocommunism in general—to the advocacy of what is in effect another version of radical bourgeois democratic politics.

Of course, Carillo and Napolitano and other Eurocommunists do emphasise the importance they attach to further democratisation, to "participation" and to other features of democratic politics; and the genuineness of their concern is not here in question. But the fact remains—and it is a crucial fact—that this whole perspective amounts, conceptually, theoretically and in practice, to a retreat from the Marxist vision of a disalienated politics as a vital part—perhaps the most vital part—of the socialist project. In its sense of an all-but-direct sort of government, the dictatorship of the proletariat was intended to give form to that vision. To stress its "utopian" side—as I do—because of its under-estimation of the role of the state in a post-capitalist society and in any relevant future (and to under-estimate therefore the *problem* of the state) is one thing. To surrender that vision altogether is another and very different one.

This is what Eurocommunism does, for all its democratising concerns and commitments. Its theorists conceive of democratisation as an infinite multiplication of representative bodies at various levels; and this is no

doubt required. But they seem remarkably insensitive to the possibilities of enhanced statism and "officialisation" of political life which this *also* opens up. After all, it does not seem unreasonable to think that the multiplication of organs of power, however "representative" they are intended to be, may not do much to dis-alienate politics; and may simply create an enlarged officialdom of "representatives" of one sort or another. But even if this danger is averted or attenuated, the difference is obvious between an elaborate structure of officially sanctioned (and controlled) organs of power, however "representative", and a network of associations, councils, committees and whatever at the grassroots, armed with a genuine measure of power, and operating *alongside* the state and *independently* of it.

The point is a difficult one. It involves breaking with an *either/or* schema (*either* the dictatorship of the proletariat *or* some version of bourgeois democracy) which has been long firmly fixed, and exceedingly constricting; and it involves breaking with that schema in favour of a search, which is bound to be arduous and problematic, for an adequate relationship between two forms of power—state power and popular power. Marx in *The Civil War in France* and Lenin in *The State and Revolution* made much too light of the former; Eurocommunism is not much interested in the latter where it is not deeply suspicious of it. The socialist project requires a "dialectical" relationship between both.

Claudin has a strong sense of this requirement, though he mainly refers to it in connection with the struggle for hegemony and the achievement of power. He writes that "organs of rank and file democracy should be developed and . . . co-ordinated with the organs of representative democracy." (p. 117) But this is obviously required after the achievement of power as well as before, in the consolidation and extension of a new system as well as in the struggle towards it.



Euro-communism is not only based on a working class recoil from violent upheaval in the countries of advanced capitalism and bourgeois democracy. This would hardly constitute the basis for socialist advance of any sort. It proceeds rather from certain assumptions about what the immediate and near future holds for these societies.

The major such assumption, which figures prominently in both Carillo and Napolitano, is that the large majority of the population of advanced capitalist countries now constitutes a **potential** constituency for socialist transformations; that the "working class" is no longer an isolated and relatively small part of the population but a section of what Marx called the "collective worker" of the capitalist mode of production; and that an alliance between the different parts of this "collective worker", represented

by different parties and groupings, is entirely possible, given the massive and growing contradictions of capitalism.

There is nothing inevitable about the coming into being of such an alliance; and neither Carillo nor Napolitano suggests that there is. On the contrary, they both stress that it has to be forged out of a disparate array of social and political forces.

At this point, however, there occurs a very marked difference in approach and emphasis between Eurocommunist party leaders like Carillo and Napolitano on the one hand, and a sympathetic critic of Eurocommunism like Claudin. That difference has a number of facets but it essentially consists in the preoccupations of Eurocommunist leaderships with political and electoral gains for their parties; and the preoccupations of their critics on the left with social and political struggles. Neither set of preoccupations need or does exclude the other: but the difference is nevertheless very real.

In effect, Eurocommunist leaders conceive their parties as having a dual vocation—that of both being what Claudin calls "parties of struggle" and "parties of government." In the former role, they want to be the dominant force in the class struggle waged by the subordinate classes. In the latter role, they want to be at the centre of a constellation of forces capable of affirming their hegemony and of translating that hegemony into an effective political presence, whether inside a governmental coalition or outside.

The reconciliation of these two roles is however an exceedingly difficult exercise; and it can easily turn into an impossible one. This is surely the case when a party of the left enters a governmental coalition which is not wholly or predominantly of the left. The following quotation makes the point well:

**"A proletarian party which shares power with a capitalist party in any government must share the blame for any acts of subjection of the working class. It thereby invites the hostility of its own supporters, and this in turn causes its capitalist allies to lose confidence and makes any progressive action impossible. No such arrangement can bring any strength to the working class. No capitalist party will permit it to do so. It can only compromise a proletarian party and confuse and split the working class."**

The quotation is from Karl Kautsky's *The Road to Power*, which was published in 1909, and it seems apposite today. An "historic compromise" which includes minority participation by the left in an essentially conservative government is most likely to have as its main result the compromising of those on the left who enter into it.

But even where such participation is not involved, the dual vocation of large working class parties with serious socialist purposes is bound to create difficult problems for them in the context of bourgeois democracy; and it is facile for critics on the left to ignore the very real dilemmas which

it poses or to pretend that they do not exist or that they can be resolved by the resolute incantation of Marxist-Leninist slogans. On the contrary, the dilemmas are unavoidable and the danger is that party leaders will seek to resolve them by giving in to the pull towards social-democratisation, which also requires the stifling of the criticism which the tendency arouses inside the party. Claudin writes that "between the adventure of extremism and the adventure of the 'historic compromise' (understood as collaboration with the forces that constitute the most fundamental block to the kind of change the present situation demands), space must be found for a realistic policy of advance towards the democratic socialist transformation of Italian society." (p. 119) The point is of wider application. But to find and occupy such a "space" may well require party leaders to forego immediate and apparent political advantage for the sake of a longer-term view of what socialist advance entails; and also the acknowledgement that being a "party of government", in a meaningful and effective sense, is itself a long-term undertaking, which requires not only electoral success but deep and solid popular implantation.

## 7

Such implantation, and the popular support which it betokens, is the essential (but not the sufficient) condition for the success of the enterprise which ultimately defines Eurocommunism, namely the achievement of constitutional power for the purpose of socialist change.

Unlike social democracy, Eurocommunism has no illusions about the nature of the capitalist state. "The State apparatus as a whole", Carillo notes, "continues to be the instrument of the ruling class." (p. 13) But unlike classical Marxism, Eurocommunism is also founded on the belief that it is possible to transform the various parts of the State and to apply to them the same democratising processes that must be applied to all other parts of the social system. In this instance, what is involved is not the kinds of transformation that were discussed earlier in the representative organs of the state, but in the mechanisms of administration and coercion—the civil service, the judiciary, the military and the police.

This derives very logically from the initial premise that it is possible to conceive of a constitutional transition to socialism. But it is surely enough to note this for the ambitiousness of the whole enterprise to be underlined. To transform this or that aspect of capitalist organisation is bad enough, but to attempt a profound restructuring of the state apparatus, including the military and the police, which the project involves, is much worse, or may well so be taken.

On this subject (and on the project as a whole) Eurocommunist writers such as Carillo and Napolitano leave a strong impression, not of ignoring the difficulties and dangers that are bound to be encountered, but of

underestimating them. They repeatedly refer to the internal and external pressures to which a government of the left intent on serious business must expect to be subjected: but what they say about it in no way matches the gravity of the issues.

The reason for this cannot be taken to lie in the personal intellectual merits or political intelligence of either Carillo or Napolitano. The reason for the weakness of exposition lies rather in the basic approach to the whole question of transition. Given their concern to see their parties integrated into the "normal" political process, Eurocommunists are necessarily driven to understate the problems of that transition: to do otherwise would compel them to place much greater emphasis than they deem desirable upon the class struggles which are bound to be part of it; and to discuss with much greater precision their parties' role in these struggles.



One of the main features of Eurocommunism is its much reduced claim for the pre-eminence of Communist parties. Thus Carillo on this subject:

"It continues to be the vanguard party, inasmuch as it truly embodies a creative Marxist attitude. But it no longer regards itself as the only representative of the working class, of the working people and the forces of culture. It recognizes, in theory and in practice, that other parties which are socialist in tendency can also be representative of particular sections of the working population, although their theoretical and philosophical positions and their internal structure may not be ours. It regards as normal and stimulating the competition between different policies and solutions to specific problems, and it has no hesitation in accepting, when circumstances warrant, that others may be more accurate than it in analysing a particular situation." (p. 100)

These formulations raise more questions than they solve; and so does Carillo's view of the relation of the Party to the state and society. But there is, in immediate terms, another question relating to the Party which is of great importance and interest, yet which he barely touches upon; and which Napolitano altogether ignores; this is the question of the Party's internal structure and its organizing principle, democratic centralism.

Carillo refers to "organisation as a main component of the effectiveness of political action and unity in action and discipline—once the majority has taken a decision at congresses or in leading bodies between one congress and another—as indispensable weapons." (p. 101) This is code language for two characteristic features of all Communist Parties: the first is a hierarchical organisation which permanently ensures that the leadership carries the day at congresses, and is not therefore much troubled between one congress and another; the second and related feature is the famous ban on factions, which

Lenin imposed on the Xth Bolshevik Party Congress at a point of great crisis in 1921, and which has ever since been used by Communist Party **leaderships** to disarm and paralyse opposition. There was a time, not so long ago, when the need for discipline was invoked to silence all criticism inside Communist Parties, and to expel the critics. This is no longer the common practice. Criticism is tolerated, so long as the critics do not try to render themselves effective by seeking to come together, and by together pressing their views upon the party.

The simple fact of the matter is that Communist Parties have always been exceedingly undemocratic organisations. In this, they have hardly been unique: all parties are in some degree undemocratic. But the degree matters a good deal; and Communist Parties have been undemocratic to an extreme degree. Not surprisingly, well-entrenched leaders have little reason to want it otherwise, and find it easy to invoke the need for "unity in action" to "protect their supremacy". On the other hand, the contradiction is blatant between Eurocommunist protestations of commitment to democracy on the one hand, and commitment to undemocratic practices inside Communist Parties on the other. That contradiction has now broken surface in the French Communist Party and is a very long way from having played itself out, either in the French or in any other Communist Party. Until it is resolved—and resolved in democratic directions—socialist advance must remain significantly impaired.