

ANTI-COMMUNISMS: DISCOURSES OF EXCLUSION

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Communism is a necessary starting point for any political or theoretical discussion of anti-communism. Exorcised for nearly two centuries, communism today is not just occluded by the prohibition of thinking or practicing it, but also expelled by a complete ban on desiring it. Not only does mention of communism bring disgust on the Right, fully aware that the once-horrifying spectre is just its pale shadow today; communism is also an uncomfortable relative for the Left. At best a troublesome legacy of the past – at worst, a foe actively fought against. The desire for communism – as a goal, as an experience of everyday life, as co-existence, co-production and co-abolition of constraints that stand in the way of truly democratic governance – lay at the heart of designing a better future. Therefore, only a mediation in the desire for communism can make the considerations of anti-communism something more than a mere contribution to the emergence of yet another form of “anti” politics.

As early as the 1789 revolution, one may observe the outburst of reactionary conceptions across Europe. However, they reached a more coherent form for the first time only when the Spring of Nations finally waned, at the turn of the 1840s and 1850s. Their cohesion, in turn, resulted from the huge popularity of socialist, and – in particular – of communist doctrines in 1848. The overtly communist club in Paris was the most influential among grassroots institutions flourishing in 1848, and its meetings attracted a considerable audience, as many as 5,000 people at once (Pilbeam 1995, 192).

This history should not be oversimplified: it may sound paradoxically as if the very first anti-communist conceptions were formulated by socialists, who made efforts to avoid being associated with such ardent communists as Théodore Dézamy or Etienne Cabet. However, it was the right-wing version of anti-communism which gained particular momentum after 1848. Brochures challenging communism were printed, running to more than 100,000 copies, and more ardent journals called for new crusades against the modern barbarians (Fourn 2004).

Therefore, as one may notice, anti-communism from the very beginning was not boiled down to one, right-wing ideology. Rather, it constituted a bunch of different political stances, in some cases even internally contradicting each other, but still aimed at curbing any – real or alleged – manifestations of communism.

The rapid development of anti-communist ideologies and practices had far-reaching consequences, especially in the second half of the 19th and in the 20th century. In 1871, when the Paris Commune was finally stifled, France suffered from one of the most brutal terrors against communards. During “The Bloody Week” the French army probably killed more than 10,000 revolutionaries. However, it was only a prelude to the genuine brutality of anti-communist forces. Russia suffered from the tragic civil war in 1917–1922, during which thousands were murdered by the White Army (Witkowicz 2008). Likewise, in the interwar period, Fascism and Nazism were, along with different forms of conservatism, organized forms of reaction against the red spectre. In these doctrines the spectre was embedded in different forms of minorities who were allegedly dangerous to the national substance. Virulent anti-Semitism was of course only one breed of this hatred.

Indeed, linking anti-communism with prejudice towards different social groups became part and parcel of modern reactions against the communist movement. During the Cold War any pacifist activist or partisan of Martin Luther King could easily be charged with receiving money from the USSR.

Therefore, anti-communism, as we understand and experience it, is not just the primary means of strengthening the rule of the Right in capitalism. Historically, it was inscribed into the projects of real socialism – seemingly communist alternatives, as well as counter-capitalist initiatives. Actually, existing socialism was just as anti-communist, as it logically had to rely on the capitalist logic of valorization and extraction of surplus value. Hence the suppression of workers’ self-organization, workers’ democracy, the progress of communism, and the progress of the proletarian cultural revolution. An additional problem was the binding of some socialist projects to the nationalist legitimization of states and the accompanying ethnic purification. All these experiences blocked the possibilities of the expansion of the common – possibilities of communist experience on a large scale, as well as the creation of stable and reproducible material, cultural and social conditions for it.

As it appears, nowadays we have to face a new wave of anti-communist momentum, and not only in Europe: the presidency of Donald Trump in the USA and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil may be seen as the most striking examples. Also, the East Central European countries constitute specific cases, given the fact that – unlike the mentioned USA or Brazil – in such countries as Hungary and Poland no well-organized communist political party exists. Moreover, it may be noted that a specific phenomenon, anti-communism without any red spectre, has gained popularity in these countries.

In Poland, those who reap the real political benefits from fueling anti-communist attitudes are, first and foremost, neoliberal mainstream and right-wing organizations. Nonetheless, they embed the red spectre in different groups of people. For neoliberals, the big social groups are evidence that the remnants of the “communist” or “post-communist” mentality are still alive. They are convinced that all pauperized groups represent the *homo sovieticus* model, consisting of persons who are unable to cope with the free labour market and its challenges. Partisans of far right-wing organizations, in turn, use anti-communism to challenge every political current which is not embedded in a clearly exposed nationalist and racist agenda. For them, both the USSR and the European Union, leftist liberals, ecologists, and supranational corporations – all of these may be called “communist” for the sake of their expediency.

This anti-communist momentum in East Central Europe takes the wind out of far right-wing organizations’ sails, but even some left-wing social-democratic parties reach for anti-communist clichés. In Poland, the party Razem (Together) brought the matter before the court when neoliberal and far right-wing politicians accused them of being communists, implying in this way that being communist is something with which they wanted nothing to do.

In the following volume, we have collected research articles and review articles that confront the different facets of anti-communisms. Although most of the materials refer to the Polish circumstances, we are still convinced that – due to its multidimensionality – it may interest those reflecting on the new wave of backlash all around the world. In a somewhat twisted logic, post-socialist Central European countries are today spearheading the anti-communist paranoia. Now, more than at any time before, it manifests globally, uncovering the fact that neoliberal capitalism is basically founded on anti-communism. We can observe it not only in the emerging figures of far-right leaders, but also in the elitist and oligarchic practices of self-described “democrats” – from French president Emmanuel Macron, who rules in conditions of a permanent state of exception and repressive state violence in response to popular insurrections, to EU politicians’ ruthless maneuvers to ignore or pacify democratic demands formulated in the context of dramatic anti-social austerity policies. Also, the organized crusade of the Western “democratic world” against Venezuela rests on anti-communist and so called “anti-totalitarian” imagination (we should acknowledge this regardless of our opinions on Maduro’s government).

Although the authors of this issue have proposed analyses concentrated on specified facets or dimensions of anti-communism in the realm of politics, history or art, what they share is the conviction that the role played by anti-communism in contemporary capitalism is not peripheral or accidental, but rather overwhelming and systemic. We would be mistaken if we narrowed our understanding of anti-communism to openly anti-Red rhetoric, persecutions of the Left, or the operation of the inner logic of imperialism. Indeed, these phenomena are not

relegated to the past – far from that – as they aim at the eradication of prospects of egalitarianism, which is possible due to much subtler mechanisms than utter repression. The articles collected in this issue reveal and dissect some of these mechanisms. Jodi Dean offers a brief, but powerful manifesto for the necessity of analyzing and contesting today's anti-communism. In *Anti-communism is all around us* the American philosopher presents four strong theses on the general position which anti-communism occupies within the wider picture of international, capitalist ideology. The author of *The Communist Horizon* notes the rise of far-right anti-communism in many parts of the world and interprets it as a politics of fear, which utilizes the disaffection and anger generated by capitalism. Dean tries to convince readers that the strange fascination with which liberals and the Left alike react to anti-communist leaders is problematic, because it shifts attention from the real enemy of the Left: capitalism.

This over-identification with oppositional politics – or “the anti-struggles” – instead of propositional politics is also the argument on which Angela Dimitrakaki works in her article *Left with TINA: Art, Alienation and Anti-communism*. By tracing the debates and transfigurations of radical art in allegedly post-communist and post-historical world after 1989, Dimitrakaki points out that the Left is left with its futile and selective critiques on a range of problems and tensions generated by capital. The author brings our attention to the troubling fact that the effect of a “politics of anti”, which has alienation as its main target, is counterproductive: it generates the strange effect of “alienation against alienation”. In that context Dimitrakaki remains skeptical and suspicious of the recent popularity of commoning practices. When detached from explicitly combating anti-communism and a direct fight for communism, practices that aim for development of the common are nothing more than internal moments of capitalist logic of accumulation, which can even play a positive role for the system, generating participation, social capital and the illusion of rebellion.

After these two broad interventions, the second part of the issue is devoted to Polish anti-communism. The section starts with an article by Bartosz Wójcik, who deals with the influence which the Russian Revolution of 1917 exerted upon the structures of anti-communist discourse in Poland. The author shows how contemporary Polish nationalist historiography generates an anti-communist interpretation of Polish history during the Russian Revolution. The main aim of Wójcik's article is to reveal the logic and construction of the anti-communist narrative, which is based on, among others, the conviction that mulling over the national origin of some main Bolshevik figures (who, in fact, are often portrayed as Jews by right-wing historians) is more important than focusing on the people's activities during the Revolution. Wójcik's propositions may have general and independent application, not limited specifically to the Polish case.

The three following articles are devoted to another crucial transition period, in which contemporary discourses of anti-communism in Poland took shape. The collapse of real

socialism in 1989 and thirty years of capitalist transformation in its most neoliberal and peripheral form resulted in the emergence of right-wing and anti-communist hegemony. Katarzyna Szopa, Michalina Golinczak, and Łukasz Moll propose three ways to read the process. Szopa uncovers interesting affiliations between the rise of liberal feminism and the fall of Marxist feminism. In *Roses or Bread? Anti-communist Narration in Feminist Readings of Anna Świrszczyńska's Poetry* Szopa shows how feminist interpretations of Świrszczyńska's works after 1989 were conditioned by conscious or unconscious anti-communist bias. The fate of Świrszczyńska is presented by Szopa as a symptomatic case study of constructing liberal and Western notions of female agency and paradigms of feminism. The history and accomplishments of feminism and feminists during the socialist period have to be eradicated or rejected by liberal feminism, aimed at forging its own, autonomous and anti-communist genesis. In this way, liberal feminism has contributed to the right-wing anti-communist hegemony in Poland.

In turn, Golinczak focuses on the Polish anti-communism using discourse analysis. Golinczak utilizes especially Martin Nonhoff's theory of hegemony, which is based on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's works, in order to prove that anti-communism in Poland gained the structural role of "general crime", an obstacle that must be removed so that Polish society can be entirely reconciled with itself and reach its mythical fullness. The merits of Golinczak's article lie not only in exposing how – on the right and left sides of the political spectrum alike – communism acts as a "signifier of exclusion" and as a phantasm of the Enemy, the Other, which can be blamed for political failures. Her article offers also certain methodological reflections on possibilities for studying anti-communism using tools drawn from the theory of hegemony.

The article by Łukasz Moll, *Erasure of the common: From Polish anti-communism to universal anti-capitalism*, can be read as a polemic with uses of discourse analysis, of which Golinczak's article is an example. Although Moll also points out that the theory of hegemony can be fruitful in understanding anti-communism in Poland and elsewhere and he applies its tools in his text, he nevertheless claims that its usefulness is limited. This limitation is primarily caused by the hegemonic approach's inability to note non-discursive, more material dimensions of anti-communism. Inspired by Autonomist Marxism, Moll opts for a conceptualization of modern Polish history as a politics of erasure of the common, claiming that the Polish case is symptomatic of universal anti-communist subjugation of commoning practices. In the light of the above, the institution of the common could form the basis for successful anti-anti-communist politics.

In the next section the reader can find two review articles, which are strictly related to the topic of anti-communism. Joanna Bednarek writes on Magdalena Grabowska's recent book on historical repression of feminist traditions in socialist states. *Zerwana genealogia* by Grabowska

is for Bednarek an important point in the discussion on the genealogy of feminism in post-socialist countries and on women's agency in struggles for emancipation under socialism. Bednarek agrees with the author when she complains that liberal feminism in Poland after 1989 went hand in hand with right-wing anti-communism in relegating class issues from the realm of politics. Once again, the Polish example is not a marginal one – rather, it helps to uncover the anti-communist dimension of Western feminism and liberalism.

The review article by Agata Zysiak operates in the controversial area of “politics of history”, which is a crucial feature of right-wing anti-communist hegemony in Central Eastern Europe. *Historical Memory of Central and Eastern Communism*, a book edited by Agnieszka Mrozik and Stanislav Holubec, is an engaged effort to examine the socialist era beyond the right-wing criminalization and demonization. While Zysiak acknowledged revisionist demands offered by the authors of the reviewed volume, she is not fully convinced that their contributions form a coherent and effective antidote to anti-communist and nationalist historiography. Revealing ideological distortions and lies in memory narratives remains important, just the same as acknowledging forgotten or prohibited successes of the socialist era. But what is lacking in the volume edited by Mrozik and Holubec, according to Zysiak, is a counter-hegemonic articulation of history, which could endanger anti-communist domination in the field.

The issue concludes with the results of a short inquiry, which the editors sent to active figures of the Polish Left. Contributors from diverse circles of the Left were invited to answer in short two basic questions:

- 1) Which areas of exclusion are supported by contemporary anti-communism?
- 2) How to contest anti-communist hegemony?

Four participants agreed to answer our inquiry. The responses presented in this volume includes pieces by Przemysław Wielgosz (publicist, editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique – Polish Edition*), Agnieszka Mrozik (left-wing feminist scholar in literary studies), Jakub Majmurek (publicist, *Krytyka Polityczna*) and Tymoteusz Kochan (publicist, *Socjalizm Teraz*). They definitely form a useful resource for everyone with interest in Polish anti-communism and its similarities to anti-leftist discourses in other countries.

We aim to boost the research on the contemporary forms of anti-communism. As a journal published in a country where anti-communist repression is an obvious feature of the dominant vision of society, we feel destined to point to the importance of this neglected topic. It is our conviction that anti-communism is a significant feature not only of the current right-wing offensive in global affairs, but also in the logics of capitalism. Our location gives a good vantage point from which to better grasp its contours.

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CITATION: Praktyka Teoretyczna. 2019. "Anti-Communisms: Discourses of Exclusion." *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 1(31): 7–13.

DOI: 10.14746/prt.2019.1.0