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IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRALISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Ana-Maria AMBROSĂ*

Abstract:

Nowadays, state reform is a fundamental theme for public authorities and the civil society and its major goals are to reduce bureaucracy, to increase transparency in decision-making (democratisation) and to transfer competence toward local communities. All these political-economic targets come under the concept of decentralisation. Yet, despite a very strong localist, autonomist and decentralising movement, there are also deep traces of centralism. It lay at the basis of the construction of the modern state and it had not only constitutional but also social connotations (the authoritarian redistribution of welfare). 20th century state centralism was based on a series of conducts derived from the mechanisms of socialisation and from those related to the satisfaction of human needs, on a psychological propensity called "voluntary servitude" as well as on some great ideological movements. The main idea in our study is that all the ideologies of the 20th century promoted centralism and this regardless of their positioning on the left or on the right side of the political line. The communist left and the fascist extreme right used centralism in order to gain absolute control of society; democratic doctrines (from social-democracy to liberalism and Christian-democracy) used centralism as a means of operation within the Welfare State and as a way of mustering resources in view of a possible conflict during the Cold War.

Keywords:

centralism, decentralisation, democracy, ideology, totalitarianism

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Introduction

Starting from the '70s, an *anti-centralist trend* began to develop in the Western world, a general movement aiming at reconfiguring administrative theories and practices which was also imported by the former communist states after the fall of dictatorial regimes. This movement was not obscured (but amplified and strengthened) by the phenomenon of globalisation, even though globalisation involves, in many of its dimensions, the levelling of political-administrative practices at the expense of localism.

Although in most political, economic and social settings the topics of decentralisation, self-government, regionalisation, local specificity, etc. are mentioned quite often, it is quite visible that centralist practices and behaviours have not disappeared from contemporary societies. They are preserved by the *political socialisation of older generations* (who lived in times of poverty in their youth), by the *people's habit of submitting themselves to power* and by *ideologies which justify centralism*. They are all urging us to accept the state's central power as a "given" fact – questionable in theory but intangible in practice.

State centralism: community value and psychological tendency

In legal terms, centralism refers to a decision-making process in which everything stems from a single authority located in the capital and which has the role of establishing the general organisation and of distributing the resources needed for the functioning of the state's territorial units (regions, departments, districts, parishes etc.). From a sociological and political perspective, centralism refers, on the one hand, to the tendency of state authority towards controlling and supervising all the aspects of public life (being motivated by its guardianship and "paternalism" in the relationship with citizens and local communities) and, on the other, to the passive attitude of administrative units and the civil society which are accustomed to being "guided" and funded by the state in everything they do. This is why centralism is the result of two complementary tendencies: the state's proclivity to dominate society in its entirety and the tendency of society towards letting itself at the mercy of the "Leviathan".

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From the standpoint of the post-materialist theory of social values, it is believed that in times of crisis people turn to the state from which they expect to get economic resources, protection against migrations, community security and other forms of support. The habit of seeing the state as a "welfare provider" is less than a century old. It was born immediately after the First World War when governments engaged in the reconstruction of the countries which had been destroyed by armed conflict; several years later, social-democrat, neo-liberal as well as fascist policies attenuated the effects of the economic crisis through ample economic programmes run by the state. Since then people have reinforced their belief in the state's ability to provide peace and prosperity.

In current political sociology, the American Ronald Inglehart[1] has set forth a theory according to which the pro-state or pro-centralist attitude is specific to those generations of citizens who, during various difficult periods of the 20th century, went through economic and social crises (marked by poverty, unemployment, hunger, personal insecurity). When people overcame these periods and entered times of prosperity the fear of poverty lingered in their minds and this is why they continue to put a high price on their material security and to rely on the state for their wellbeing. The social values wherein these people were formed (in their youth) and which they continue to apply (during adulthood and in their old age) are included by Inglehart into the "age of materialism".

In contrast to old people's materialism, Inglehart talks about young people's "post-materialism": the generations who did not experience war, revolution or economic crises are less attached to the idea of state guaranteed security. On the contrary, younger generations take prosperity for granted and see it as a thing which is attainable owing to the virtues of the capitalist competitive economy, with some contributions from the "social state". There are more important values we should keep in mind: freedom of speech, personal autonomy, self-accomplishment, and actual political participation, the quality of the environment, spiritual fulfilment, the cohesion and the self-governing capacities of local communities.

[1] Inglehart worte several books which have become quite famous, being esteemed but also criticized: *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and political Style among Western Publics* (Princeton University Press, 1977), *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton University Press, 1990) and *Modernization and Postmodernization. Cultural, Economic and political Change in 43 Countries* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

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Inglehart's theory starts from the famous pyramid of needs (invented by Maslow[2]), which posits that higher rank (spiritual) necessities emerge in the hierarchy of human interests only after basic (material) needs are satisfied. With this hypothesis in mind, the American sociologist comes to the conclusion that state centralism will disappear when politically socialised generations disappear from the materialist paradigm.

State centralism is not based exclusively on the primacy of people's material and security-related needs compared with spiritual needs. It is also supported by a certain tendency of human beings which is called "voluntary servitude" and which has been discernible in every historical age and in every political regime. The term voluntary servitude was coined by the French philosopher Étienne de La Boétie[3] in the 14th century, i.e. in an age when monarchic absolutism seemed to be a historical permanence endorsed by divinity. Yet, La Boétie posited that human society had not always been dominated by this sense of submission; on the contrary, human nature should encompass a strong instinct of freedom. However, at a certain point, attachment to servitude replaced love of freedom. The state of servitude (which emerged first as a "historical accident" or a "distortion of man") became permanent and transformed into a habit: "the foremost reason for which people serve voluntarily is that they are born submitted and are raised in servitude" – the French thinker said. If submission is voluntary and is a fact of habit then the re-conquest of freedom is not a simple thing and is not even desirable in historical societies, despite its extensive commendation in liberal-oriented philosophical texts.

The fact that there is an enormous gap between the philosophy of freedom and the actual capacity of contemporary societies for detaching themselves from the state's guardianship is visible everywhere, from traditional Western democracies to the new democracies born from the ruins of Soviet communism. In the case of the latter, the state is confused with politics and it covers all the areas of public life, not only without encountering any kind of opposition but, on the contrary, being constantly asked to assume protective tasks.

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[2] Abraham Maslow, A Theory of Human Motivation, in: Psychological Review Journal, 1943.

[3] Étienne de La Boétie, *Discurs despre servitutea voluntară / Discourse on voluntary servitude*, Universal Dalsi, Bucharest, 1995.

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In post-communist societies, the initial rebellion against dictatorial regimes was not followed by a rejection of statism and a real autonomy for communities (rather, the latter manifested itself as the exacerbated nationalism of the minorities who had experienced various forms of oppression, such as ethnicity-based or religious-based secessionism). When the former communist dignitaries were replaced by new, "enlightened" officials with a democratic topping and pro-Western discourses, common citizens expected them to take over the reins of the state in order to use them in a proper manner in their work to democratize and reform the economy. The state and its central leaders remained the entities responsible for the "change for the better"; the centre was expected to provide better laws, reparatory measures, efficient public policies, etc. When post-communist states, under the pressure of the need to adapt to the "common European house", started administrative reforms based on devolution and decentralisation, local authorities were not very pleased because they were suddenly forced to take on new obligations without enough resources or sufficient administrative capacities. Decentralisation was not carried out under the pressure and at the initiative of local communities but according to the will of the state and in the form set forth by it.

A possible conclusion after this brief analysis of centralism as a community value and as a psychological tendency is that leaving the age of centralism (of voluntary or "interested" submission to the state) and entering the age of individual autonomy imply a revolution of prosperity and one of freedom. The revolution of prosperity is unimaginable unless knowledge is democratised, technology is exported and North-South disparities are attenuated. The revolution of freedom needs that contemporary nations be capable of overturning authoritarian regimes as well as giving substance to Van Parijs's redistributive paradigm, "real freedom for all"[4].

Centralist projections of 20th century ideologies

It is sure that centralism – as a way of organising the state but also as "social habitus" or the individual's or society's predisposition to get included into the hierarchical and protective order of central power – has

[4] Philippe Van Parijs, Qu'est-ce qu'une société juste? Introduction à la pratique de la philosophie politique, Le Seuil, Paris, 1991.

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social and psychological foundations similar to those mentioned above: the primacy of material and security-related interests (such as they are arranged in Maslow's pyramid) and the persistency of a fair amount of "voluntary servitude". These elements managed to enter the collective imagery of modernity with the help of ideologies, which are arranged by any ordering endeavour into the classical right / left scheme. According to it, in the modern world there are two ways of organising society which meet in their own manner the various needs of individuals and communities: one is based on the bourgeois bureaucratic state whose main function is to defend private ownership and the freedom of undertaking individuals; the other one uses the instruments of the centralist and bureaucratic state as well but only to destroy private ownership and to create the conditions of economic equality for all people. One uses the state's power in order to protect freedom, through democratic mechanisms; the other aims at the value of equality, through the dictatorial state.

In the following lines we shall attempt to show that modern ideologies and their contemporary derivatives are all responsible for cultivating state centralism even though it is sometimes suggested that totalitarian doctrines were the only ones which promoted the cult of the state.

After decades of using the paradigm based on the left / right cleft and after a long governmental practice inspired by it, current political and administrative sciences are still accustomed to treating political trends and social movements under the sign of the classical "dividing line"; in the actual administration of public affairs the labels of "left-wing policies" or "right-wing policies" are still in use. The discourse on "overcoming / the end of ideologies", although rather fashionable in intellectual spheres, has not significantly changed our bipolar view of the world just as it has not managed to blur the traditional attachments to what is usually called left or right attitudes.

It is true that 20th century ideologies are at least as hard to put in order as the philosophies of that age; if we did not use the tradition left / right rift (considered to be the most relevant and comprehensive) it would be all the more harder for us to produce reasonable classifications, even if we attempted to identify theme-based coagulating formulas. These, structured around a basic existential tension, develop the theme of

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ownership, of the state's role in society[5], of race and nation (in contrast with "minorities"), of the individual and the community, of freedom and duty[6]; of course, the theme of functions, of limits and of the ethical / political engagement of scientific knowledge is not neglected either, all the more so as the contemporary world defines itself essentially through man's ability to understand and transform the world owing to science and technology. In the ideological landscape of the 20th century there are junction points everywhere, "intersections" from which depart multiple ways of managing the public space. However, in a final analysis, all of them may be subsumed to the bipolar left / right view, whose general meaning is the following: to choose one political path means, implicitly, to chose a moral path, that is, the option for absolute good or absolute social evil[7], achievable through the power of the state.

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[5] In the literature, the work *Les conceptions politiques du XXe siècle* (published by François Châtelet and Évelyne Pisier, in 1981, with Presses Universitaires de France; Rom. tran.: *Concepţiile politice ale secolului XX*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1994) identifies the following fundamental themes or perspectives of ideological discourse about the state: the manager-state, the party-state, the nation-state, the scholarly-state. Each of these relates, in some of its parts, to the classical ideologies of modernity (liberalism, conservatism or socialism) as well as to some contemporary ideologies (from left and right extremisms to technocracy).

[6] In what regards these themes, we believe that this work is very comprehensive: Olivier Nay, *Histoire des idées politiques* (Armand Colin, Paris, 2004; Rom. tran.: *Istoria ideilor politice*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2008).

[7] The argumentative structures of ideology refer only to truth and falsity, good and evil, just and unjust, all of them in a pure state, with no possible "contamination"; the truth, the good and the justice of one of the opponents casts the other one into the realm of the false, the evil and the unjust, with no middle way, no right to appeal. Such a simplifying positioning in discourse (called *Manichaeism*) has the advantage of being understandable and acceptable by precariously educated masses, which are not accustomed to considering nuances; it satisfies all those who judge the world in black or white terms, who seek certainty at any price, mustering them quite easily in order to defend "the good" and to destroy "the evil". Yet, inconveniencies emerge as soon as the social experiment conducted in the name of an ideology fails lamentably or as soon as the intransigency of discourse must be attenuated for reasons related to conjectural alliances. However, even under these circumstances, the ideologists who are faithful to their own paradigm do not abandon it but find arguments in order to carry on, in the same line (for instance: during the last days of Nazism its leaders proclaimed the inability of their own people to carry out the project of the Reich for a thousand years; in our age, the "great alliances" – between parties of the left and of the right – are seen as acts of courage and political responsibility, in the national interest, and not as deviations from their ideological identity).

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The bipolar structure of ideological movements originates in modernity being based on the opposition between the conservative spirit of European aristocracy and the revolutionary spirit of the bourgeoisie (which was also joined by the poor strata of cities and towns and sometimes even by a part of the peasantry). After the French Constituent Assembly of 1789 settled for good the positioning of the bourgeoisie on the left side of the parliament hall and of the aristocracy on the right side, the modern world was left with the idea that to be "of the left" meant to support revolutionary changes of the political order while formally proclaiming liberty and equality for all citizens, abolishing class privileges, rejecting the theory of divine right sovereignty and asserting that of popular sovereignty; by contrast, to be "of the right" meant to defend the unequal order of a pyramidal and traditional society in which the monarchs' authority, stemming from God, was unchallengeable. Naturally, the set of ideas specific to the left also included rationalism and atheism, scientism and progressism while the right was associated with religious traditions, prudence and scepticism with respect to the reason's ability to change the world in a systematic and beneficial manner. By slightly thickening the sketch of the two ideological direction we may say that both assumed the condition of "meritocracies": nevertheless, the left opted for the "merit of belonging to the people" while the right for the "merit of belonging to the aristocracy" (to a wider extent, to the class of the rich and educated be it only because the rich proved to have the administrative ability to work for their own prosperity). The left considered that the state should be "returned" to the people, through its representatives; the right – that it should remain the property of the elite. Yet, none of them thought that the state should diminish its presence in society, that the prerogatives of central power should be limited in order to increase the autonomy of local communities. Only anarchist doctrines had a discourse which challenged centralism[8], but it did not produce any change in statist political practice.

[8] In his article called *Centralisme*, Georges Bastien said the following: "Two methods (of governing) have always fought each other in society: one, authoritarian, which seeks to gather everything under the rule of a single person, group or caste, inevitably serving private interests against general ones; the other, libertarian, which seeks to make every man his own master, to be allowed to associate or to separate freely so that, with no constraint, exploitation and tyranny would disappear. Authority and liberty are two opposite poles of attraction: the authority foreseen by today's or tomorrow's masters (in a state of temporary opposition); the freedom foreseen by the exploited who longed for

Compared to its initial meanings, summarised above, the left / right cleft was progressively reduced (after the emergence of Marxism) to a predominantly economic dimension or, to be more precise, to an "economic ethics"[9]: thus, the idea became rooted that left-wing doctrines are in principle the defenders of the poor strata of society whose unjust status imposed by the exploiting rich they understand and to whom they pledge if not prosperity then at least vengeance against the rich (who will

emancipation, by the rebellious of all ages and regions. The two concepts of authority and freedom are perfectly matched by the concepts of centralism and decentralisation, federalism or free-association. Regardless of label and colour, the supporters of power are in favour of centralisation: everything must be centralised under a single rule – a theory endeared by all those who wish to be masters. All centralist theories are based on the same statement: «the people's incapacity to manage itself freely, in other words, its stupidity, which needs to be run by superior people». These theories converge towards the same result: the creation of a caste, of an aristocracy; yesterday the noblemen, today the bourgeois, tomorrow maybe the so-called intellectuals and the civil servants who start to secure a comfortable life for themselves by consolidating their already established privileges or by setting up new ones. Centralism leads inevitably to parasitism, constraint, inequality and injustice. As a matter of fact, by depriving those it governs of the means needed to manage on their own, centralism is carefully maintaining the apparent or actual inferiority of those it governs. Those who are placed by centralism on the top of social organizations are, in fact, people just as everybody else, no more or less competent or moral than others. Yet, the exercise of authority makes them have a special mindset and proud wishes which are redoubtable expressions of evil in social organisations. Centralism has never managed to solve the problems to which the human species was confronted; when it solved them, it did it to the benefit of power holders and against the masses. The only useful aspect of centralism which could be invoked is that related to the benefices of coordinating human efforts. Yet, as it leads to authority, it usually generates the opposite phenomena: ambition, hatred, division, and the candidates' to power mutual tearing down or the crushing of inferior social categories. Or, this coordination could be obtained much more easily and with no risks through the free federalisation of individuals and groups. Federalism is virtually the opposite of centralism (…). Political centralism led to abominable tyrannies and bloody wars. Economic centralism (materialised in cartels and capitalist trusts) seeks to materially submit humankind. As for socialist or communist doctrines, because they dream of integrated centralism…, they are condemned to turn into a new tyranny which would surmount the old one" (http://www.encyclopedie-anarchiste.org/articles/c/centralisme.html).

[9] This dimension almost occults the other themes of socialism or, at least, it gets on top of them to such an extent that left-wing ideological discourse seems to be a permanent quest and justification of the means by which one would be able to get the wealth of the rich and give it to the poor. Whenever socialisms managed to prevail their first concern was to nationalise, to seize fortunes by saying that those values would be re-distributed in an authoritarian manner, through the state's (and the party's) levers and to the welfare of the many.

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be made destitute by the revolution of ownership[10] – sometimes tenants in their former homes, sometimes workers in their former factories). Therefore, "the left" comes with the slogan of economic equality and social justice, and aims at "punishing" all those who, for ages, have been living in luxury at the expense of the poor deprived of property. Punishing the rich and the economic alleviating of the poor are societal targets so great that only one power is able to carry out: the centralist (and ultimately, totalitarian) state which faithful to the interests of the proletariat.

Under the circumstances of the left's "confiscation" of the theme of the economic sanitation of the many, the ideologies of the right were increasingly pushed towards the middle class (various undertakers – producers and tradesmen –, clerks of the bureaucratic apparatus, intellectuals) and towards the traditional elites of the modern society (the great bourgeoisie, the aristocracy, the clergy), animated by the liberal theories concerning work and ownership, by the standpoint of pragmatic individualism, of the citizen's strictly legal equality as well as by the conception of the state's bureaucratic order to whose practical genesis and philosophical establishment they had brought major contributions. Willy-nilly, "the right" takes the shape of a life philosophy structured according to harsh economic competition, the lack of compassion towards the poor (going as far as the opposite attitude, that which blames poverty[11]), the esteeming of the elites and the despising of revolutionary, anarchic mobs. In order to keep alive this unequal order (seen as "natural" and beneficial)

[10] It seems that in almost all historical ages the masses felt a certain "pleasure" in seeing the rich in painful situations of economic misery and lack of freedom; the hatred accumulated over time against the privileged burst regularly into rebellions and revolutions when angry mobs confused the "exploiters" with their goods and destroyed them instead of using them. Paradoxically, this destructive behaviour also targeted the so-called "socialist property, the goods of all the people" during anti-communist revolutions.

[11] In line with the Protestant tradition, the contemporary American right, for instance, goes as far as to claim that poverty is not a political issue (that is, it is not the responsibility of state authorities to solve it) but is relative only to each individual's personal engagement on the way to prosperity. In other words, the poor deserve what they got because they reached this state due to their idleness and indolence. The state has no right to take resources from those who work in order to distribute them to those who prefer laziness. As a result, the only social entities which are to deal with the poor are charitable, religious, etc. organisations, for which charity is an important value.

the preferred tool for acting was (just as in the case of left-wing ideologies) the state.

On the eve of the First World War, despite the apparent stability of world economy and of the system of international relations, things had started to get complicated in the field of ideologies. Both in the Western and in the Eastern world there began to emerge all sorts of political conceptions – based on classical doctrines – which were used to set boundaries, to discuss nuances or, sometimes, even to cause ruptures. Ideological changes were part of an ampler process of historical transformation which engaged the economy (particularly the industry, but also the banking system, transports and services), class structures, the social security (the insurance system), education, science, art, culture in its wider sense, etc. In all these fields, marked by progress and optimism, there were vivid debates on the direction of social evolution, on the ways and means which could be used in order to render more efficient the functioning of the social body.

Thus, the reconfiguration of the ideological space during the first decades of the 20th century started, on the one hand, from the consolidating processes of the Western capitalist society (whose effects also reached other parts of the world which were less advanced in this respect – Eastern Europe and the Far East); on the other hand, ideological metamorphoses multiplied and became more intense due to the "anthropological crisis" represented by the Great War. It challenged the entire system of values that used to guide humankind, it questioned the traditional order and it triggered a frenzy of change in all fields. For instance: the men's going to war made it necessary for women to work in traditionally male industries and this led inevitably to the emancipation of women; as a reward for their participation in the war the peasantry was given lands and thus the economic configuration of the rural world changed; universal suffrage (which, in many European countries, was also introduced as a "reward" for having participated in the war) widened in a significant way the mass of those who received ideological messages and of those called on to take part in the institutional construction of the state[12]; last but not least, the collapse of the European empires as well as

[12] In most European countries census suffrage was replaced by universal suffrage starting with 1918. Although the term "universal" did not actually cover reality entirely – as women, the members of the army and magistrates were not given political rights –, the inclusion of all males who were of age into the mass of voters triggered a major change

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the emergence or consolidation of national states triggered the development of the latter and rekindled the disputes related to themes such as race, ethnicity or nation[13]. In brief, after the war ended the age of progress and prosperity called *La Belle Époque*, the world changed profoundly and irreversibly, with huge consequences on the political world.

After 1918, when peace returned to Europe, the governments of the previously conflicting countries were forced to manage huge problems as they had to rebuild the infrastructure, ensure social protection[14] for

in modern political systems. In the first place, the people with no wealth who formed the majority in all the societies of that age became active citizens; in the second place, the intellectual mean of the mass of voters decreases to a significant extent compared with the census-based system (in which taxpayers were inevitably educated people who were able to run a business); finally, the change in the economic and cultural texture of the electorate, its pronounced ruralisation and the proclamation of the idea that voting is a right (and not a "function" performed only by the most capable, such as it was seen by the French revolutionary Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès – an important participant in the setting down of the Constitution of 1791) transform the elections into a redoubtable political weapon insofar as any political agent manages to muster them in sufficiently large numbers. If the words attributed by Costache Negruzzi to Alexandru Lăpuşneanu were real indeed then their meaning was fulfilled only with the adoption of universal suffrage: "They are stupid but they are many!". The most straightforward consequence of this phrase was the over simplification of ideological discourse, whose complexity, any way, did not even come close to that of political philosophy. Also, in order to attract the new poor and uneducated (and ultimately illiterate) voters it was also necessary to radicalise political messages because it was the only way they could distinguish between electoral offers. Under these new circumstances, extremist doctrines found the most fertile grounds for their emergences and development. They understood that the path towards the political power exerted through the state passed necessarily through the uneducated masses: either through their ballot or through violent revolutions in which the mobs are "cannon-fodder".

[13] 20th century nationalism was, just as much as that from the previous century, an essential part of state centralism. The construction of unitary national states, by the unification of provinces which had previously been parts of multinational empires, required most of all an administrative-territorial, legal and cultural levelling, bringing political practices to a common ground, etc. Sometimes there even took place population transfers, minority denationalisations, linguistic levelling, the abolishment of traditional local institutions and other such forms of "slaughtering" regional specificities. In the European area, where the mixture of peoples is quite impressive (beyond the relative homogeneity of the great nations), the construction and consolidation of national states were carried out through a permanent stress on centralism, regardless of the political system set in place there at a given time.

[14] The idea of social service had emerged during the first modern centuries and had materialised for the first time in the English laws which made it compulsory for the well

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categories such as the orphans, the widows and the people mutilated by war, to recreate the conditions which would foster economic growth, etc. The fact that the former political (liberal and conservative) elite assumed all these tasks was intensely contested by the socialists – who had openly opposed the war and had all the arguments to attack the traditional political order. Left-wing politicians were motivated in their initiatives by what had happened in Russia in 1917: the Bolshevik revolution which resulted in the establishment of the first communist government. Many believed that the Russian revolution confirmed the Marxist theory concerning the succession of the modes of production and that the change of political regime in the rest of Europe was just a matter of time.

The traditional Western democracy was not only challenged by the left but also by the newly established far-right movement – fascism. Without questioning the economic foundations of capitalism, fascism raised another type of political problem: the place of nation, race, state and democracy in the hierarchy of political values. In the eyes of this new composite ideology (which encompasses racist, populist, messianic, etc. elements) the problems of the Western world could be solved not by a revolution of the proletariat or by economic levelling but by erasing the Jewish element from the economy and from culture, by taking down the scaffolding of pluralist democracy – seen as the seed of discord within the nation – and by creating the totalitarian state. Italian fascism, German national-socialism and the other European forms of right-wing totalitarianism were statist doctrines par excellence, as they promoted centralism and its extreme, military-based forms.

Revolutionary socialism rendered radical by the Leninist doctrine, on the one hand, and fascisms, on the other, struck at the political,

off citizens from parish communities to ensure, in turn, the minimum help for the subsistence of the poor; it is also the English system of organising communities which hosted public workshops where the poor could choose to work in order to make a living. Besides some unsuccessful utopian experiments of socio-economic reform (inspired by Owen's and Fourier's theories), in 19th century Europe there had also been a series of successful initiatives from the part of some manufacturers who attempted to support their workers by giving them more than their wages (low rent housing, medical and educational services for their children, etc.). By the end of this century some European countries set up insurance systems which helped the working class get rid of some of the risks represented by professional disease and accidents. After 1918, the authorities observed that these mechanisms of socio-economic regulation were insufficient and began to develop services – public and private – based not on the logic of contribution (specific to insurance) but on that of redistribution (which is the grounds of social work).

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economic and cultural core of modern civilization and each of them proclaimed a true revolution which would lead to the birth of a "new man" and of a new, better and faired society. The projects of extremist ideologies were not limited to the transformation of political institutions or of the rules of competition in the public space but they aimed at, neither more nor less, "human nature" itself. By their actions subsumed to this ideal, extremist doctrines wanted to destroy the moral fiber of traditional men and society in order to make place for a new type of human, adequate to the totalitarian order[15].

As Lamen S. Tzvetkov was right to point out, "the starting point of each totalitarian doctrine is a generalized vulgarization of the human condition. According to Lenin, human personality was entirely determined by social class; Hitler analysed individuals exclusively from the viewpoint of their race; in Mussolini's mind, the human being could not be conceived outside the state (…). Based on an absolute and one-dimensional social or biological determinism the entire complexity and diversity of history was reduced to a struggle between «reactionary» and «progressist classes», between «superior» and «inferior races», between rich and «proletarian» peoples, between peasants and the Jewish people etc. In the name of class, race, the nation-state or other similar categories, in the name of an arbitrarily invented class conscience, everybody had to submit to a military disciple which led, implicitly, to militarism, the rejection of democracy and of the existence of a unique human personality as well as to the idea of a «Führer» or «great leader» as an infallible «genius» capable of interpreting the interest of masses in the most authentic way possible"[16].

[15] First of all, the communism promoted by the Russian Bolsheviks aimed at abolishing religious beliefs (starting from Marx's remark that religion is the "opium of the people") and the attachment to private ownership in order to reach a state in which the cook could become a prime-minister; Italian fascism attempted to bring back into people's hearts a feeling of cultural superiority and of the "civilizing Roman imperialism" so that through them it would be able to support militarism and colonialism – prosperity-bringing solutions; German national-socialism desired a racial cleansing, the cultivation of warrior spirit and the massification of the people so that it would become the tool with which the Führer would be able to fulfill his historical meaning.

[16] Lamen S. Tzvetkov, *Fascism și antisemitism în Bulgaria / Fascism and anti-Semitism in Bulgaria*, in: "Istorie și memorie. Intelectualii și fascismul în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est", supplement to *Revista 22*, 25 January 2006, http://www.revista22.ro/istorie-si-memorie-intelectualii-si-fascismul-in-europa-centrala-si-de-2402.html

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The unacceptable "vulgarization" (or simplification") of the human essence, by reducing it to a mere dimension of existence, allowed for the political space to be caricatured and to take violent shapes within which the centralist state would address the great challenges of that age.

One of these challenges was the manner in which prosperity would become accessible to all people, in the context of an unprecedented socialisation of production and while maintaining private ownership over the means of production. For the liberal centralist state the solution was the unitary regulation of the capitalist competitive market; for the supporters of communism, the central power of the state had to carry out the great work of "expropriating the expropriators". In the liberal view, property was sacred and inviolable and its safeguard was unimaginable in the absence of the power of the rationalised bureaucratic state; from a Marxist perspective, property was a historical blocking factor, a means of exploitation which had to disappear out of existence through the vigorous action of the state of proletarian dictatorship. As a result, liberals came up with the theory of the minimal state (serving the role of regulating the free market from the centre); Marxism created the historicist "prophecy" from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, according to which the bourgeois society sets up the conditions for its own extinction.

The Marxist theory of property is inspired by Rousseau's philosophy, who makes out of the fictitious right of the first occupant of a piece of land an actual right[17], confirmed by social convention and defended by the power of the "general will" materialised in the state. A major contribution to the shaping of the Marxist theory of property was that of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the French socialist who claimed that "propriety is not theft!" In this intellectual setting Marxism manages to build a negative image of property and to place it under the sign of an ancestral "inaugural" violence or cunning based on which swift-handed individuals with no scruples or minimum morals proclaim themselves

[17] There is no actual evidence that at the dawn of civilization the right of property on land was set up by virtue of the "first enclosure" or of the first turning of the soil (although this hypothesis belongs to the field of logical evidence); yet, it is certain that in modern history *the right of the first occupant* became the principle behind the birth of the right of property within the process of colonization of the Wild West (with the amendment that this right was relevant only from the perspective of the white colonisers and not from that of the Amerindians – the true "first occupants").

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masters over goods which should belong to all the members of society[18]. Once established and rendered permanent, once the state's public power begins to serve it, private property becomes, in the Marxists' opinion, the element according to which people are distributed in society based on an unequal scheme: those who do possess means of production rule over those who do not and who are forced to sell their workforce in order to survive. Things were like this in all "historical orders", from the slave state to feudalism and capitalism. Within each order, the classes at the top were in a state of permanent struggle with the classes exploited, even if the phenomenon was not always visible and acute, and even if sometimes the rich seemed to place themselves in a protective, paternalist and responsible position with regard to the poor that they owned or, when applicable, coordinated[19].

[18] The idea that private property can only be obtained and multiplied through illicit operations was not only useful to explain the birth of inequalities in far gone ages but it was also employed quite frequently in the context of the privatisation of various economic sectors in post-communism. Irrespective of the methods applied to achieve privatisation the public conscience remained with the idea that the new capitalists must have been unable to build their fortunes through "honest work"; if they did not steal in the proper sense at least they had allegedly used their privileged position in the administrative structures, had access to the "hidden accounts of the former regime" or deceived the holders of the "shares" distributed free of charge by the state within the "great privatisation". This "dubious" image of private ownership still endures today and it leads to a permanent tension between work and capital. The images is all the more suggestive now as the economic crisis triggered in 2008 struck mainly at common people who depend on the stability of their jobs and of interest and exchange rates.

[19] "The history of al hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in a constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended , either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In Ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes, directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat" (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifestul Partidului Comunist / Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Nemira, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 10-11).

The theory of socialist revolution posited that things might have changed if within capitalism there had been a certain evolution of the working class' self-conscience and organising abilities which would be able to trigger an unprecedented revolution in the history of mankind. This revolution, pushed up to its final consequences, would not only replace a "mode of production" with a different one but it would also produce a deep transformation of society in general, by abolishing private ownership and, ultimately, the state itself (as a tool used to defend private property). Yet, before being destroyed, the state was supposed to pass through a long stage of consolidation as a tool of the working class, and this after it had been, for a long time, the tool of the bourgeoisie.

The issue of a radical change of society, through a proletarian revolution followed by the abolishment of private property, remained a predominantly theoretical one for more than half a century. In an increasingly consolidated capitalist society the attack on property seemed to be a marginal and aimless intellectual exercise all the more so as by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the Western proletariat showed a visible tendency towards becoming "bourgeois". Under the pressure of union movements but also for reasons relative to economic efficiency, the bourgeoisie had made a series of "concessions" to the working class (from the eight-hour working day, to paid leaves or medical insurance) owing to which its situation had improved substantially. An increasing number of working men had managed to secure small properties, to save or make investment in banks so that they no longer supported the revolutionary discourse about "expropriation"; their condition as small owners made them be more in tune with the bourgeoisie than with that destitute category that Marx thought had nothing to lose but chains. For the well off proletariat and for other categories of wage earners who were happy with their economic status – small clerks, free-lancers, the well off peasantry and the small rural bourgeoisie –, the discourse of the left attenuated in what regards the hatred against private property. Instead of talking about its destruction, the supporters of the left came up with the compromise of the "fair social use". This is how the social-democrat doctrine was born as a keeper of the ideals of social justice and yet respectful to the political mechanisms of the bourgeois democratic state within which it hoped to achieve its goals.

The various explicative schemes of social-democracy around the turn of the past century, when Western capitalism was in course of

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developing, talked about the need to organise politically the working class and all the categories of wage earners so that their parties, competing against liberal and conservative parties, would become significant forces in parliament. From this standpoint, social-democrat (socialist) parties were to promote the reforms intended to improve the economic status of disadvantaged classes. The most important mechanism envisaged by the social-democrat ideology was the differential and progressive taxation of income: thus, the great private owners was supposed to contribute to the largest extent to the establishment of public budget[20], and the latter was to be re-distributed to the advantage of the distressed strata of society, with due consideration for the proper maintenance of general public services (infrastructure, education, health). By its reformist options social-democrat thought denied (or, at least, attenuated) the most important idea in the toolbox of Marxist socialism – the destruction of private property , giving a major impetus to the idea of a centralised, interventionist state.

In the ideological landscape of the interwar period, marked by the boom of extremisms and the decline of the tradition right (liberal and conservative), the ideas of state centralism were strengthened by the economic crisis of 1929-1933. It made the governments of most states of the world take active measures in order to stop the financial crisis, to stimulate investment and to reconstruct competition as well as to regulate some field such as retirement or social security. If for such goals social-democracy had in mind energetic actions from the state as owner and shareholder[21], the democrat right and the far right devised their own ways of putting state centralism to work.

[20] For social-democrats there was also another important source of income for the budged and to support social projects: the state economy – industrial and agricultural exploitations, banks and transport companies. Its rightful administration would lead to general prosperity. The idea proved to be correct, in the '30s, when some Western states managed to successfully overcome the economic crisis by applying social-democrat solutions, combined with monetary mechanisms of a neo-liberal (Keynesian) nature.

[21] For instance, in the view of the German social-democrat Rudolf Hilferding (1877-1941), the state had the role of transferring the principles of democracy into the field of the political and that of the economic. As the free marked risks perpetuating social inequities for a long time, only the intervention of an outside irresistible force such as the state will make possible the reorganisation of capitalism, modifying its rules according to the general interest. Thus Hilferding sets forth the concept of "organised capitalism". In such a system (which does not question private property nor the principle of free competition), the state intervenes to correct the inherent deviations of the capitalist

Liberal ideology gives to the state a regulating function which would not let inflation and unemployment get out of control. Lord Keynes's neoliberal theory accounts for the manner in which the state, by controlling the issue of money, increases or diminishes the mass of circulating money and thus influences interest rates, consumption and employment rates. In the area of fascism, the state is also given regulating powers in the economic field but the focus is on its involvement on great infrastructure projects, on its orders for the industry of war and on its control over the banking system through a national integrated economic system.

Post-war ideologies did not abandon the idea of state centralism, at least not in the first couple of decades, and the main reason behind this doctrinarian attachment was the need to manage the political tensions specific to bipolarism and the Cold War. While the demo-liberal Western world (governed by liberal, conservative, Christian-democrat or social-democrat parties) was competing with the Sovietised Eastern world, centralism was the means through which governments gained instant and almost unlimited access to resources in the event of a new world war.

Capitalist states promoted centralism as an administrative formula not only because of the Cold War but also for reasons derived from the ideology of the general welfare state. As neoliberals, Christian-democrats or social-democrats the Western leaders understood that a policy which aimed at redistributing wealth, under the circumstances of economic growth and technological optimism, represented the safest way of stopping the revolutionary impetus of radical left-wing groups. Even in the United States (where people had always been reluctant in what regards the state's involvement in social policies) redistributive measures found a place in the strategies of democrat administrations and being ideologically justified against the background of the "American dream".

The communist regimes developed the theme of centralism less from the standpoint of redistributive economic policies (wherein state property, being predominant, needed no ideological explanations) and more from that of the single party's accession to the structures of the state, under the mask of the citizens' participation in the decision-making process. In this context, communism theorised and experimented with the idea of *democratic centralism*. The phrase was made famous by Lenin (in the

economy, redistributing prosperity and spreading democratic methods in the world of enterprises.

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paper *What is to be done?*, published in 1902), who set down two basic thesis: party leadership shall be elected "from the bottom up to the top"; the decision made by the party, after having discussed the problems in all its basic structures, become mandatory for everyone with no right of contest and of showing schismatic attitudes.

In fact, the idea of democratic centralism should not concern the state but the party; yet, as in communism the party eats its way into the state, democratic centralism slides from the condition of political principle to that of an administrative principle. Thus, the organisation of the state through the party supposes that public policies start "from the bottom", from citizen initiatives and then to materialise in "economic and social development plans for territorial units"[22].

Conclusions

During the first part of the 20th century, the democratic centralism specific to the communist world competed with demo-liberal-oriented Western centralisms for as long as the states managed to support financially the policies of general welfare. As soon as the oil crisis and the systemic crisis of socialism challenged the welfare state (the social state) as a type of political organisation, there emerged or become more loud a series of anti-centralist standpoints which took the shape of decentralisation in the Western world and that of Perestroika in the (still) Soviet Eastern world.

Both systems had to reconsider their centralist policies for a different, not in the least negligible, reason represented by the revival of nationalisms, both in the West and in the East. When confronted with autonomist claims, left-wing or right-wing governments had only one answer at hand, expresses in terms such as regionalisation, autonomy or

[22] In recent history, the simulation of democratic debates in communist states was a lacklustre show which had no moral or technical finality. The citizens who, following the orders of the party-state, participated in the long "meetings of the working men's committees" did not acquire any special administrative skills or any supplemental feelings of attachment to socialist property or work. They were all aware of the falsity of the discourse on the pledges of professional communities related to the achievement of the five-year plan; they all knew that the party dictated and that common people had to convert this dictate into an initiative "from the bottom". Actually, democratic centralism meant transforming party directives into the initiatives and the pledges of the entire people, the party becoming, at the end, the mere performer of the working men's will!

decentralisation. With a hint of regret for its glory days, the centralist state had to forget the ideological justifications it had been invoking for over a century in order to produce an entirely new discourse which seemed to stem from a different world. From the stage when decisions were concentrated at the centre we passed to one when local communities are "flattered" for their ability to diagnose and solve their specific problems; from national levelling we passed to regionalisation, with cross-border extensions. All these changes in the daily discourse and practices of state authorities lead to a major change of political paradigm whose consequences are likely to be found in a new type of citizenship.

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