



Research Article

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Stalinism and the Stalinist model: Comparative study on its origins and characteristics in the communist regime in Albania

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Abstract

For more than 45 years, Albania was ruled by one of the harshest dictatorial regimes that Europe has experienced during the 20-th century. The communist regime in Albania had several special features, starting from its origins and establishment, and continuing further with its special characteristics, the society and the economic-social system it built. These features set it apart from other communist regimes in Eastern Europe. But what remains as the primary feature of the communist regime in Albania is its loyalty and steadfastness in following and further developing the Stalinist model, a model that was finally abandoned in Eastern Europe and the USSR in the mid-1950s, and further in China after the death of Mao Zedong (1978). This study aims to investigate the special characteristics underlying the Stalinist model and the causes that enabled its implementation, adaptation and development in the conditions of the rule of the dictatorial regime in Albania.

Keywords: Stalinism and the Stalinist model, Comparative study, communist regime, Albania.

1. Introduction

More than an ideological approach or position, Stalinism represents a special model of the socialist state, which prevailed in the Soviet Union from the end of the 20s of the 20th century until its denunciation at the 20th Congress of the USSR in February 1956, while it was imposed in Eastern Europe in the years 1945-1956, excluding Yugoslavia that seceded in 1948, as well as Albania that adopted and further developed this model, even after its denunciation. The factors that made possible the appearance of the main characteristics of the Stalinist regime are primarily related to the particular political situation in the Soviet Union. On the basis of the characteristics that the regime received from the Soviet experience, new ideological approaches were built, which led to the dogmatization of Marxism-Leninism in the function of regime propaganda. The triumph of this model in the Soviet Union, as the first socialist country, made

it possible for this model and its dominant ideological line to be exported to other countries of "people's democracies", either through establishing the military-political supremacy of the Soviet Union (as is the case for Eastern Europe), or even by taking it as a ready-made model, the communist regimes established without direct Soviet military-political support, such as in Albania, Yugoslavia, China, etc.

The basic characteristics of Stalinism are presented from various theoretical and political-ideological viewpoints and perspectives. They can be summarized in: the totalitarian view, the leftist view and critique of Western Marxism and Trotskyism, and the view that connects the characteristics of Stalinism with the historical and political tradition of eastern despotism. On the basis of these points of view, the causes and characteristics of the communist regime in Albania can be analysed.

The totalitarian view developed as a school of political, historiographical and sociological thought after the Second World War, in the atmosphere of the ideological and political clash between the West and the East in the Cold War period. The totalitarian approach aimed to differentiate as clearly distinct the model of Western liberal democracy characterized by individual freedom, freedom of thought, plurality and competition of political forces and economic factors, from the totalitarian model of the paternalistic state, represented by the Soviet Union and other states in the "socialist world". The totalitarian school aims to unify or approximate some common characteristics developed by political regimes of a fascist, nazi and communist nature, which conflicted with the principles and model of Western liberal democracy. Precisely according to this view, the Stalinist model is taken as the "par excellence" representative of the totalitarian state.

Despite the fact that totalitarianism as a concept had its beginnings in the 20th century, with Amendola's criticism of the particular totalitarian form of fascist dictatorship, but mainly with the positive use of the term "totalitarianism" by Benito Mussolini, in the sense of the state that aims to acquire every aspect of human and spiritual life (Pipes, 1993), the totalitarian school as a special school in political sciences, historiography, sociology, etc., began in the early 50s. The German researcher Karl Friedrich was the first to define some of the characteristics of the totalitarian model: official ideology, control of weapons and the media, the use of terror, the dominance of a single party, the cult of personality (Davies & Harris, 2005). In "Democracy and Totalitarianism", the French researcher Aron (1965) summarizes five common characteristics of totalitarian regimes: 1) the monopoly of all political activity is in the hands of the party-state; 2) a state ideology, which has the status of the only authority; 3) monopoly on information and the distribution of "official truth"; 4) the economy and the main economic factors controlled by the state; 5) the exercise of terror.

Precisely the greater longevity than the fascist and Nazi regimes, the spread, as well as the political atmosphere of the Cold War, made the Stalinist model and the communist regimes of Eastern Europe or East Asia, to be taken as the most representative forms of totalitarianism. The American political scientist and researcher Wolfe (1961) established as a central element of the totalitarian state in general, and the

Soviet one in particular, the tendency to control all aspects of political, social and economic life, marking the transition from the state as an element of society, to the state identifiable with society. Such a state does not allow and intends to put under complete control any kind of social organism that acts autonomously, such as political parties, labour unions, churches, various private economic structures in society, etc. In the totalitarian society, these organizations, being controlled by the state, turn into what Stalin called "transmission belts", i.e., means of control and propaganda. This enables the subordination of the individual sphere to the collective, socialised one represented by the omnipotence of the totalitarian state, which aims to reshape the nature of the individual, adapt his way of thinking and living to the interests of the state. One of the main mottos of the Soviet regime that was propagated in "Pravda" was: "The interests of the state are above everything" (Wolfe, 1961). Finally, all this is made possible through the control of means of terror, propaganda, control of one party over all state organisms and apparatus. In these conditions, taking into account the complexity of human nature, which, in addition to the socializing tendency, also has the individual character, which aims to maintain a certain degree of autonomy from society, the totalitarian state in this respect is in a constant and continuous war against its own population.

Starting from the totalitarian point of view, we can say that the regime in Albania begins to assume totalitarian dimensions immediately after its establishment. Lined up in the winning coalition in WWII, PKSH (Albanian Communist Party), managed to establish complete control over all state institutions and administration. Securing a wide support, especially in the rural areas of the south, but also possessing a military and political force after the departure of the occupying armies and the collaborationist or opposition forces of the PKSH, the latter managed to ensure complete control over the high state institutions. and the state administration. This then enabled the party to win easily in the elections of December 2, 1945, as well as throughout the lifetime of the regime and exercise complete dominance of the party-state over the country's political life. Secondly, we can say that the communist regime in Albania had complete control over the means of exercising terror and propaganda. Through the possession of military force, the creation of a network of espionage and secret police in the country, and complete control over the judiciary, the regime would crack down on political opponents of the war who had failed to escape, whether or not they collaborated with the invaders, elements of the old ruling class, consisting of noble families and individuals, clan leaders etc., and the bourgeoisie (mainly merchant and light industry entrepreneurs), figures who had been part of the Anti-Fascist Front and who then tried to oppose the establishment of the regime, as well as striking elements within the party itself, including figures who opposed the path taken in the governance of the country, figures who represented certain groups in the struggle for power within the party, figures who opposed the power of Enver Hoxha, groups who opposed the path followed in foreign policy etc. Also, as a totalitarian-type regime, the communist regime possessed all the means of propaganda, through

the imposition of censorship, the prohibition of dissident thought, complete control over the printing of newspapers, magazines, etc. Thirdly, the communist regime in Albania fully realized the overall control of the state over all the country's economic resources. Following the Stalinist model, the regime devoted itself, beginning in the early 1950s, to complete collectivization in agriculture and rapid industrialization of the country, concentrating mainly on heavy industry, and often reaching even more radical stages than the Stalinist model, through the herding process in the 80s (ASHSH, 2009). Fourth, in order to consolidate power, the communist regime in Albania established complete control over all educational, scientific and cultural institutions, which, appreciating the emancipatory role they had for the population in the post-war years, were transformed into instruments of propaganda of the regime. Finally, the concentration of power in the hands of Enver Hoxha and his circle, as well as the cult of the figure of the dictator, gave the complete totalitarian characteristics to the communist regime in Albania. This cult, which began to rise in the first post-war years, took on its full characteristics after 1948, with the breakdown of relations with Yugoslavia and rapprochement with the Soviet Union, and later with the People's Republic of China. Like Stalin in USSR and Mao Zedong in China, Enver Hoxha assumed the character of the infallible supreme leader with despotic power in the party and in the state, reaching such proportions that gave the communist regime in Albania the character of the harshest dictatorship in Eastern Europe.

The construction of the Stalinist model in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe inevitably encountered the criticism of Marxists or leftists themselves who had been part of the revolution and the party, but for various reasons were excluded from the spheres of power, or were persecuted in the internal struggle for power. Leon Trotsky, one of the main leaders of the October Revolution and commander of the Red Army persecuted and expelled from the Soviet Union after 1927 because of his rivalry with Stalin, would be one of the first critics to try to give a theoretical explanation of Stalinism. His criticism starts from the point of view of dialectical materialism, according to which, the clashes of ideas are the product of the conflict of material interests between classes or different social groups. According to Trotsky, after the victory of the Socialist Revolution in Russia, the attempt to create a centralized state to meet the needs of the civil war and economic backwardness of the country produced a new bureaucracy, which, coming from the ranks of the old tsarist bureaucracy of the lower ranks, or from the ranks of the Bolsheviks themselves, ensured an increasingly privileged position within the state structures (Trotsky, 1967). This new bureaucracy of the Soviet state would support Stalin in the struggle for political power that began after Lenin's death. According to Trotsky and the view of Trotskyist authors, this bureaucratic elite agreed to gradually hand over all its political power to Stalin, in order to maintain its social positions. This caused that, starting from the mid-30s, Stalin's power was unchallenged, and the great purges in the administration, army, etc. began. In this respect, the Soviet state ceases to be a "workers state", since the workers soviets and any form of political representation of the workers disappeared,

but turns primarily into a Terindorian and then a Bonapartist regime (Trotsky, 1967). Under these conditions, repression and exploitation of workers in factories, plants and state cooperatives is inevitable and appears through official propaganda built around the so-called "Stachanovian movement" (Trotsky, 1967). Another aspect of Trotskyist criticism, which characterized Stalinism, is the policy of "socialism in one country", as a braking on efforts to spread the revolution on a global level, abandoning internationalist tendencies, in order to consolidate the regime primarily in the Soviet Union itself. According to Trotsky (1967), who was a promoter of the theory of "permanent revolution", of the spread and commitment to the triumph of the revolution on an international scale, the Stalinist policy of isolating the revolution in a single country would produce the creation of a new ruling class and create a series of economic difficulties for the Soviet Union. Grant (1951), would then consider all other regimes in Eastern European countries as Stalinist, in the sense of the rule here of new bureaucratic elites, where power is concentrated in the hands of a despot and where every form of political representation of the revolutionary layers of society has been suppressed. Another term used for these types of regimes is that of "bureaucratic despotic socialism".

This view is further elaborated by the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas (1957), who evidences the rise of the new ruling class, the so-called "red bourgeoisie". This new ruling class is also the new exploiting class, since it is the one that, by placing itself in charge of all state enterprises, exercises an almost despotic power over the labouring masses (working class, peasantry, etc.).

Another point of view, which was developed on a Marxist basis, was the one formulated by the so-called "school of praxis", formed as a theoretical approach initially in the upper circles of the Yugoslav academy in the 70s, and then expanded in the circles of the so-called "Western Marxism". As a typical representative of this stream of Marxist thought, which emphasized the humanistic and emancipatory character of Marxist theory, later deformed and transformed into dogma in the Soviet Union and in the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and Far Asia, we can mention academician Markovic (1977) who defines six basic characteristics of Stalinist regimes:

1. The replacement of the political power of the bourgeoisie or previous ruling classes, with the political power of the state bureaucracy;
2. The leading force of the revolution and revolutionary processes is the monolithic Party with the depot and the hierarchical discipline, which has all the political and economic power;
3. The function of the state in the planning and administrative control of all production. The state, propagandized as the "dictatorship of the working class", in reality turns into the dictatorship of the Party Leadership, centred on the figure of a single supreme leader;
4. Society is organized according to the principle of collective welfare. Common interest, common ownership, is promoted as a condition for improving well-being. However, the old forms of alienation of the worker's labour product according

to the Marxist view, continue to survive. Surplus value and surplus production continue to be absorbed by this new ruling class, which uses it according to its interests;

5. All cultural life is subject to censorship and repression. The party owns all the means of exercising terror to the dissidents;
6. Administrative centralization. In Stalinist regimes, there is a tendency to disappear not only individual freedoms, but also any form of autonomy of provinces or regions. The central authority aims to build a capillary structure, where the administrative life of each province or region is subordinated to the center. According to Markovic (1977), this causes elements of national oppression to appear among ethnic minorities. Through this element, we cannot rule out that the Yugoslav researcher had the aim of highlighting, among other things, the advantages of the Yugoslav system of the Tito period, where there was an administrative decentralization and where the rights of representation of nationalities and different ethnic groups.

Finally, the point of view of the European social democracy, which also derived from the labor movement, but with a different approach in terms of the methods of exercising political power, and the tactics of organizing the labor movement, placed emphasis on all the oppressive factors of the Stalinist model mentioned above, focusing mainly on the lack of political representation of workers and peasants. Also, this criticism extended to the entire Soviet system in general. According to the German social democrat Karl Kautsky, the path taken by the regime in the Soviet Union and other communist countries is based on the Leninist theory of party organization and its role in the organization of the masses (Stenson, 1978). According to Kautsky (1978), the Leninist principle of “democratic centralism” and the “vanguard role of the Party” as a structure from above organizing the masses, principles that were foreign to orthodox Marxism and European social democracy, played an important role in the despotic character that the Soviet regime took in the years following the October Revolution.

Thus, seen from the point of view of Marxist, Trotskyist, or leftist criticism in general, we can state that the political regime that was established in Albania had some special characteristics. First, the social base of the PKSH during and after the war was different from that of communist or socialist parties in Western countries and more similar to the Chinese and Eastern European models. Being a backward country in terms of the development of relations in production, i.e., with an underdeveloped industry and backward agriculture, with small producers subject to large landowners, as well as with backward working tools of the land, in Albania there was no working class that could be organized politically (Pipa, 2007). Therefore, it would mainly be the peasantry of the southern provinces, the social base of the Communist Party. This peasantry, which felt more the oppression of the remaining elements of feudalism (while the free peasantry with tribal organization prevailed in the north) and had felt more the devastation of the Italo-Greek war and the fascist repression, would show

itself more ready to join the ranks of PKSH and partisan brigades. By establishing from the beginning a leadership structure according to the type of “democratic centralism”, the leadership of the PKSH would have an easier time dominating these social layers politically (Gurakuqi, 2023). Also, the elements coming from these social layers, together with the elements of the student youth and lumpen, would manage to be placed in the leading structures of the party and the state and would tend to be tougher towards political opponents (Pipa, 2007). Secondly, according to the Stalinist model, the regime in Albania created a new ruling class, the bureaucracy of high and low party and state structures, officials and directors of cooperatives, factories, plants, etc. (Lelaj, 2015). This bureaucracy, through the privileges and power it possessed, replaced the old ruling class of the old bey families and elements of the native bourgeoisie that had been expropriated and declassified. This bureaucracy would increasingly link its fate with the regime and the figure of Enver Hoxha, and just as in the Soviet case analysed by Trotsky and Djilas, it would agree to hand over political power and submit entirely to the dictator in order to preserve of her social privileges. Third, as a typical Stalinist regime, the regime claimed to govern in the name of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, while there was no representative institution of these social strata. The Anti-Fascist Councils during the war were completely under the control of the PKSH while the political elections under the control of the party were a mere formality. Finally, the communist regime in Albania would realize the Stalinist principle of “socialism in one country” in a completely unique way. Rejecting any other interpretation of socialism or the organization of the socialist state, always in function of maintaining the despotic power by Enver Hoxha and his circle, mainly in the mid-70s, when the complete isolation of the country would be realized, the official propaganda of the regime would announce Albania as the only country in the world where Marxist-Leninist principles were followed in the purest way and which was the only one fighting American-Soviet international imperialism, adding the dictator Enver Hoxha as one of the classics of Marxism-Leninism (Pipa, 2007).

The other theory that aims to provide an explanation on the special characteristics that communist regimes took on in countries such as the Soviet Union during the rule of Stalin or Maoist China, is the theory of oriental despotism. This theory, which evidences the particular way of governance and social organization in regions such as the Middle East, the Maghreb, Russia, Far East etc., which was quite different from the European one, was elaborated and took on a scientific and academic character by the studies of the German-American historian Wittfogel (1981). Since the middle of the 18 – 19th century the peculiarities of the “East” were evidenced by European intellectuals, such as Montesquieu, Karl Marx, Max Weber. Marx was the first to raise the concept of the “Asiatic mode of production”, which differed from the traditional organization of slave and feudal societies in Europe. In these societies, the central government, being the de facto owner of most of the land, had a despotic power over the ruling class and the mass of the population. But this concept was not

elaborated further. Wittfogel (1981) researched and pointed out a number of common characteristics of the so-called oriental states and empires, revealing the causes and conditions why these characteristics appeared. It also puts forward the thesis that precisely these political traditions of countries such as China, the Middle East, India, Russia made the political regimes in the contemporary era have dictatorial, despotic or tyrannical features. According to Wittfogel (1981) since the civilizations of the Ancient East, the control of water resources and irrigation systems, of large public enterprises, required a strong central power with an extended bureaucracy and a ruling class subordinate to the central power. This meant that the political representation of special social groups was impossible, and the subordination of the masses of the population was complete, first to the Levathan state structure, but also to the ruling class, whose power over the lands or territorial units was not full and hereditary, but partial and temporary, since legally all lands belonged to the ruler. This system of "total power" and "general slavery" was characteristic of the empires of the Ancient East, the late Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire of the Golden Age, the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire in India, the Chinese Empire, and the Russian Empire. Wittfogel's thesis is that precisely these characteristics were inherited in a new, contemporary and much more efficient form by the political regimes in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, which despite claiming to overthrow the predecessor empires, after the revolution produced a political system of dominated by the bureaucratic caste of the state headed by a leader with unlimited despotic power over all economic resources and state institutions (Wittfogel, 1981). In the case of Russia, we can say that the political tradition of Caesaropapism, during the Middle Ages was first taken over by the Byzantine Empire in the early 11th century. Mongol rule during the 13-14th centuries played an important role in the installation of the despotic political traditions of Far Asia, in terms of the great difference between rulers and subjects, in the imposition of power simply by force, the imposition of taxes without any form of representation, etc. The rise of the Muscovite state and then the Russian Empire during the 15th-16th centuries happened as a continuation of these Byzantine and Mongol political traditions, with a strong power of the Tsar and his court, with a ruling class subject to absolute tsarist power, in exchange for the recognition of privileges in the exploitation of the peasantry in the provinces and a population without any political representation, as well as with a social and economic structure quite backward compared to that of Western Europe (Wolfe, 1961). Similar traditions, but with a much more efficient bureaucracy and despotism, can be found in the Chinese Empire. For a number of scholars, Stalin's totalitarian rule and Soviet nomenclature can be traced back to the despotic reigns of Ivan the Terrible (the model of the despotic ruler and unscrupulous in suppressing opponents) and Peter the Great (the model of the despot who undertakes reforms imposed from above to reform society) (Wolfe, 1961) and that of Mao Zedong to the unlimited power of the Chinese emperors and their efficient and dedicated bureaucracy in conveying the political will of the central government.

2. Conclusions

Despite the cultural and political penetrations of the Western world, throughout most of the medieval era until the declaration of independence, it was the Eastern political legacy that would prevail in Albania. Political and cultural traditions in Albania were shaped mainly under the influence of two great empires related to the eastern tradition: the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Both of these empires were distinguished by strong central powers with bureaucracies subordinate to the emperor or sultan. The ruling class of timariots in the Ottoman empire had mainly a military function and their properties (even their lives, in the case of high officials and military leaders who were recruited by the devshirme system) were legally the property of the emperor/sultan, who could grab them at any moment (Inalcik, 2013). Unlike the western feudal states, when the king was limited in his activity by independent institutions such as the Parliament (England), the Estates General (France) and the Diet in Germany, traditional law (common law) and the Catholic Church, in Albania the representation of the political and social layers was always reduced, and would be present only in some coastal cities during the Late Middle Ages and starting from the middle of the 14th century they were also subject to the local princes and later were conquered by the Ottomans. Thus, the ruling classes (the central government, the imperial bureaucracy, the nobility) had authoritarian power over the popular classes (the peasantry, artisans, city merchants, etc.). Also, the social structure and political power in Albania dominated by the strata of large landowners, feudal-military aristocracy and tribal chieftains inhibited the development of the elements of capitalism, modern state formation and political representation that appeared much earlier in Western Europe. In conclusion, we can say that the political heritage of Albania was characterized by the tendency towards authoritarian powers, by a ruling class with absolute power over the population, where the social layers had a reduced or non-existent political representation.

Such a political tradition of the ruling classes, the political elite and different social strata would be inherited even after the declaration of independence, where the struggle for power between the groups of the Albanian political elite ended with the establishment of the authoritarian regime of Ahmet Zog. Also, the particular characteristics that the communist regime took on in Albania cannot be separated from such a political legacy. Finding a country, not only backward from the economic and social point of view, but also with marked deficiencies in the traditions of pluralism, political representation, property rights, etc., the regime would have it easier to impose a despotic power, and to bring to power a new ruling and exploiting class, completely subordinated to the figure of the dictator and his close circle, as a successor to the former despotic power of the emperor/sultan or pasha.

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