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Рецензия

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Review / Rezension



Belás Ľ.

History, Politics, Reason and Historical Memory Review of the Monograph

**Dinuš P. *Politics Unmasked. A Contribution to Political Discourse in Slovakia after 1989.*
Bratislava: VEDA [Publisher of the Slovak Academy of Sciences], 2015, 240 p.
ISBN 978-80-224-1439-5**

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In this review, I represent my reader and philosophical vision of Ph.D. Peter Dinuš's monograph devoted Czechoslovak 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989 and evolution of Slovak society after November 1989, wherein serious historical, social-philosophical, social-economic and politological analysis was carried out. I have shown monograph cuts across a range of key issues of revolution, counter-revolution, capitalism, etc.

Keywords: Czechoslovak 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989; Slovak 'post-revolutionary' society; philosophy of history; revolution; counter-revolution; capitalism.

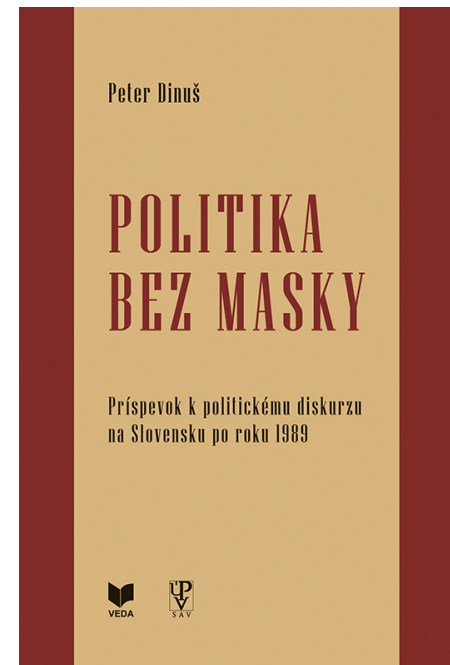
I have been following the career of my colleague Mgr. Peter Dinuš, Ph.D., since the successful defence of his doctoral dissertation, albeit often only from a distance. I have also been familiar with the, not insignificant, fact that he has widely published in a number of journals and has achieved success in the scientific research area. Indeed, he has been a prominent figure not only in our domestic academic community but also in the foreign community of authors and researchers.

I will begin my review of his monograph by what may rather appear a premature move at first glance, namely, by overruling the author's modesty and amending its subtitle as follows: A **significant** contribution to political discourse in Slovakia after 1989. In doing so, I would like, in the first place, to point to the thoroughness of coverage of the subject and the monograph's potential benefits with regard to both subsequent discussion and anticipated critical opinions, which may ensue once the book captures the attention of wide readership. It is true that some of the views expressed therein will provoke the interest of mainstream analysts and other independent experts on the issues of politics. Such a situation, however, may ultimately be only productive, having a potential of broadening and deepening the knowledge of the presented problems, especially in constructing historical experience, seeking the truth and studying history. In Kantian terms, we should be careful about what we pass on to our followers with respect to global citizenship [Kant 1996, s. 72].

Before I move to the very review of the monograph, I deem it necessary to mention an important circumstance: politics has been married to history since its inception. This also holds in reverse, provided that one takes into account historical time [Angehrn 1991, p. 25]. It was D. Bonhoeffer who, in his musings about 'the question of the legacy of history,' said that this very question, which implies its carry-over from the past into the present as well as into the future, is slowly dwindling [Bonhoeffer 2001, s. 274].

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Peter Dinuš, Ph.D., and his monograph *Politics Unmasked. A Contribution to Political Discourse in Slovakia after 1989* (Bratislava, Veda, 2015)

"There is no more future and there is no more past. What is there is only an instant spared from nothingness and an attempt to capture the next moment. Yesterday has already fallen into oblivion while tomorrow is too far ahead to constrain us today". Based on the above, we can conclude that we are now slowly but surely losing historical memory, 'we live in the present, while the future is a mere object of the game By losing both the past and the future, life is torn between a brutal moment of pleasure and a gamble on the future.' The policy of the West has also changed, we do not know what is right, what is responsible; there is no trust in the truth, which is supplanted by sophistic propaganda. Today, we have implemented many effective innovations and techniques that seek to explain, or rather obscure, everything; we must be patient; a good life and a functional state are already close ... only that common sense cannot win through. This is where the impetus for my *revisionism* concerning the subtitle stems from.

The content of the monograph under discussion is functionally divided into five chapters, which are further subdivided. The introduction outlines the fundamental problem of the submitted monograph, which is "the question of evolution of Slovak society after November 1989" [Dinuš 2015, p. 7].

To this, the author adds:

"It was to become a breakthrough event in our modern history for it brought about a fundamental change in the makeup of social relations. This change has been described in the official discourse as a revolution that overthrew the totalitarian communist regime and established general freedom and democracy" [Dinuš 2015, p. 7].

In accordance with this line of reasoning, there were also impassioned voices speaking of the *ethos of the Velvet Revolution*, or of the recovery of human dignity. However, they did not have a longer duration for their ethos was contaminated by the lie about the killed student. Under the slogan of 'Truth and Love' — I apologise for the following wording — a blatant power-political perversion was enthroned. Now, a cardinal task is to find the author of this Victorious scenario of the November revolution. He still remains unknown. Alas...

In contrast to the official version of the events, which soon found its place in the post-November social sciences, P. Dinuš chose a vastly different methodological position, Marx's historical materialism. One could also argue that an important concomitant of the reinstatement of capitalism is the resurrection of K. Marx and of his **Philosophy of History**. If we want to tackle a critical analysis of contemporary society through the prism of Marx's legacy, it is necessary to recall one of his fundamental ideas:

"The point of departure of the old materialism is civil society; the point of departure of the new materialism is human society, i.e., social humanity" [Marx 1977, p. 211].

According to the author, it is necessary to point out one important aspect, which is "obscuring the class nature of post-November society and legitimizing the dictatorship of the minority of capital owners under the pretence of general democracy and freedom. The bourgeoisie has put on a mask of a promoter and advocate of the latter to conceal the class nature of their power. To this end, it has also adopted specific terminology, in which capitalism is labelled "market economy" with associated

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"business environment", capitalists themselves are denoted as employers, entrepreneurs, investors or private businessmen. To refer to the process of capitalist restoration, the terms social "transformation" or "transition" are used [Dinuš 2015, p. 16].

In a public setting, the concept of capitalism emerged only after a long lapse of time, specifically in the slogan "We do not want capitalism", which appeared on posters and banners at a large trade union demonstration in Prague only as late as April 2012. On another occasion, on 6 July 2014, two politicians, more precisely, two dissidents, Petr Pithart and L. Walesa, met in a TV show entitled "The Questions of Václav Moravec". They talked with enthusiasm and involvement, each promoting their own stance. While Walesa spoke of democracy and solidarity, the Czech politician declared categorically that we **should contemplate a different capitalism**. I must admit that, for a dissident, this statement was rather bold and unexpected. Now, I am reasoning within the constraints of the situation in Czechoslovakia. We have long heard of nothing but **freedom and democracy, or of a second Austria, and, surprise, surprise, all of a sudden — capitalism!** And this even at a time when we were getting ready for the grand celebration of the **fall of the Iron Curtain, the end of communism, return to Europe and the Velvet Revolution. We were disappointed; they truly did not want to celebrate. Nor speak in public. Why, you would ask?**

What actually happened? Indeed, from the mouth of dissidents as self-appointed bearers of morality, truth and love, the word "capitalism" was unheard of, and now, there you are! What should one think? Where are those lofty ideals? And, ultimately, what is actually *our social reality today*? Let me reiterate the question of 1989: Who should be held accountable?

As part of the introductory section, which defines the scaffolding of the monograph, the author polemicizes with the crude bourgeois periodisation of the era of oppression (1948—1989) and of the period of freedom (after November 1989). There is an interesting article on this subject, written by J. Vít and entitled '**The Velvet Plunder of the Republic.**' What is essential — in the context of the introduction — is the author's declaration that "this work, presenting an alternative view of some of the basic aspects of the developments in our society, starting with the events of November 1989, is written in the form of a debate. It therefore makes no claims to absolute truths" [Dinuš 2015, p. 17—18]. This opinion appears to be well thought out and has a rational underpinning. I firmly believe it would be beneficial to open a credible public platform for debate with the potential participation of representatives not only of various institutions but also of the general public at large.

Chapter 1, entitled '**Czechoslovak Termidor and Counter-Revolutionary Coup,**' is a clear proof that the author does not accept the official interpretation of the events of November 17, 1989, based on heroizing or mythologizing its main figures — heroic students and dissidents of high moral standing. This may raise objections from the opponents. In this context, the author takes further notice of such problems as the activity of opposition pressure movements and groups, and points to the remarkable passivity of certain elements of the then regime. There are also other interpretations, one of them presented by the renowned Italian historian — a specialist in Central European history Francesco Leoncini, who speaks of the second defeat of the **Prague Spring**; one can also quote other opinions, different from the official ones held so far, such as by W. Thompson and others. Without a doubt, I could add my own observations of the reviewer, but, having learned from my own experience, I want to avoid being associated with the so-called conspiracy theory. Anyhow, I appreciate the endeavour of the author, whose views are rather close to mine. In this regard, I am reminded of a story of Alexander Dubček, who once made his appearance on the balcony of Melantrich but was stopped from speaking at the Letná Stadium by a reputed foreign special services officer, who had come from Czechoslovakia. And there is also J. Fojtík's affair... Although this case is opened occasionally, and there is also some new information, the situation still is SEMI-CLOUDY.

The Demise of East European Socialism is analysed extensively and comprehensively in the same-named second chapter. Here, the author primarily focuses on issues such as causes and evaluation, socialism within the set borders and socialism in the conditions of the Cold War. On this part of the monograph, my opinion is exclusively positive, only perhaps I would ask the following question: Why did people in the West fare so well in the post-war period that it provoked envy in many of us? When this prosperity reached into our country, it was available to a mere handful of individuals.

Summarizing my previous statements on the first two chapters, I may reasonably conclude that, being on a strong historical footing, they also constitute a starting point for further exploration in the remaining three sections.

The third section entitled '**Restoration of Old Regime: Issue of Basis,**' discusses the rise of the capital, the issue of economic reform and the still-unresolved privatization issue, particularly the privatisation of strategic companies by foreign investors. Its protagonists, who have faded away from the political and economic arena, claimed that the state is a bad custodian, a conclusion made especially on the basis of the Lessons learned from the activities of their nominee in the management of the SPP ("Slovakia Gas Industry" — Slovakia's market leader in natural gas supply). Curiously, this fact has been meticulously overlooked by the arbitrators of fairness and transparency from the journalist flagship of Slovak democrats and liberals. The fourth chapter of the monograph, '**The Status quo of Bourgeois Dictatorship,**' devoted to the analysis of the post-revolution regime, critically examines the functioning of the **Centre for**

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Voting Opinions and Trends in Election Research and also the author's opinion on current and important problem of the relationship between propaganda and the media. In the final, fifth chapter of the reviewed work, '**Ideological Super-structure**,' P. Dinuš, Ph.D., seriously and meticulously analyses the ever present issue of the democracy that has taken root in our country, the issues of pluralism highlighted during the coup and to such important themes as anti-communism, clericalism and nationalism.

Before concluding of this review, I would like to make a few observations.

1. Further study of the pre-November developments in the then Czechoslovakia requires detailed examination of the document **Draft Law on the State Enterprise**, which was, in the given period, a subject of considerable albeit vague and confused party and public debate, and which, however, faded into insignificance. The point is that many smart entrepreneurs today claim that this document served as a launch pad for capitalism in our country.

2. With regard to this subject, I would like to point out an interesting monograph entitled '**Why so easy...**' by Ivo Možný [Možný 2009], which offers an interesting insight into the then society. It is on this basis that I would like to bring forward a viable method of investigation offered by Ch. Meier [Meier 1980, p. 379] — a specific historical form of causality, which can be further characterized by the multisubjectivity of action.

3. Now, a few more words on the basic idea of the work, outlined on page 17, where the author wrote that "he offers a brief outline of the development of post-November Slovak society with its fundamental contradictions." It can be stated that the development of both sovereign states took a similar course, even though with some significant differences. 2012 saw the release of a document assessing societal changes in Slovakia with a bombastic title '**Rovnosťárstvo na Slovensku sa skončilo**' (The End of Egalitarianism in Slovakia) [Šimková 2012, p. 3] It maintains that, in recent years, the disparities between the poor and the richer have widened. This trend still continues. On the other hand, it describes the phenomenon of nostalgia for the pre-1989 welfare system. Currently, there is severe unemployment and impoverishment of large groups of society with the associated migration for work abroad, which has serious repercussions on other areas of social life. Academic discourse has been widened to include the element of inequality. On the issue of its potential elimination, M. Filko, Head the Institute for Financial Policy said:

"There is no optimal level of inequality; it is a matter of social convention" [Šimková 2012, p. 3].

Yet how about its practical implementation? What part should the state play in the process? These questions are urgent while also perennial, and are deeply rooted in the history of philosophy. If we assume the detached perspective of the latter, each period is marked with a model that Baumgarten terms dominant philosophical form, with a classic example of **the philosophy of history** in the century of reason.

I am confident that today there is a room for revitalization of social philosophy, which should bring together the facts, the data, the phenomena of our sensory social world and our own historical experience with philosophical standards, such as viewed by Kant in his *Dispute of the Faculties* or *Gemeinspruch-Schrift*. Without importing from abroad. And that is a great challenge.

* * *

I began my review in an unconventional way, and so I conceived its conclusion. In keeping with the tradition, I should criticize, recommend and the like but, on the contrary, I want, first of all, to express my satisfaction as a reader with the quality of the monograph and with its overall rendition, large volume of the researched material and sources from diverse areas of social knowledge, which are harmoniously blended into a meaningful, organized and interesting whole. This title is a living book with an ambition to enrich and consolidate the part of our recent historical experience shared with the brotherly Czech nation; it may also serve as an indicator of the possible reinforcement and deepening of our historical memory and a useful tool for those researchers who will attempt to further explore our recent history and social reality, which came as a consequence in both successor sovereign states. I wish its author discerning and critically minded (in the spirit of M. Horkeimer) readers.

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**ИСТОРИЯ, ПОЛИТИКА, РАЗУМ И ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПАМЯТЬ.
РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА МОНОГРАФИЮ ПЕТЕРА ДАНИША «ПОЛИТИКА БЕЗ МАСКИ.
ВКЛАД В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ДИСКУРС СЛОВАКИИ
ПОСЛЕ 1989 ГОДА» (БРАТИСЛАВА: ВЕДА [издательство Словацкой Академии наук], 2015):
Dinuš P. *Politika bez masky. Príspevok k politickému diskurzu na Slovensku po roku 1989.*
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Публикация представляет собой рецензию на монографию, в пяти главах которой — «Чехословацкий Термидор и контр-революционный удар», «Распад восточноевропейского социализма», «Реставрация старого режима: вопрос оснований», «Статус-кво буржуазной диктатуры», «Идеологическая суперструктура» — дан скрупулезный политико- и социально-философский (а в ряде случаев — и социально-экономический) анализ состояния словацкого общества после «бархатной революции» 1989 г. Как и в самой монографии, так и в рецензии на нее поднят широкий круг таких остающихся актуальными для политического пространства современной Восточной Европы концептов, как революция, контр-революция, капитализм, а также вопросы отношений элиты и электората и характера элиты в современных восточноевропейских государствах.

Ключевые слова: чехословацкая «бархатная революция» 1989 года; словацкое «пост-революционное» общество; философия истории; революция; контр-революция; капитализм.

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