

SUMMARY

This book presents the political writings of the noted Czech philosopher Egon Bondy (actual name Zbyněk Fišer) which were written during the latter half of the 1960s. While his works of fiction (with only minor exceptions) have already been published, some more than once, and his philosophical, poetic and dramatic texts have even seen their appearance in published collections of his works, his political texts from the 1960s have remained more or less unavailable to the Czech public. Until now, the reading public could become acquainted with Bondy's political thinking (if we leave aside the political reflections that are presented in his fictional, poetic and dramatic oeuvre) primarily through two books: *Neuspořádaná samomluvy* (*Unordered soliloquys*), written in 1984 but published in 2002, in which he analyzes the nature of the social system of the Eastern Bloc from a Marxist perspective; and the book *O globalizaci* (*On Globalization*), published in 2005, in which Bondy steps forth as a critic of economic globalization and the restoration of capitalism. However, an analysis of political issues and social conditions always play a significant, even key, role in his works, with the publication of this book we are attempting to give the reader a more complex understanding of the ways that his political thinking evolved. This would include his contemporaneous views of Prague Spring; in fact, the majority of the texts in this collection date from 1968.

The primary text in our collection of essays, however, is *A Working Analysis* (*Pracovní analýza*) from 1969 which, together with the two books mentioned above (*Neuspořádanou samomluvou* and *O globalizaci*), form a certain freely linked troika of Bondy's political works. This is its first appearance in book form. In fact, it has never before been published, not even in samizdat or exile editions, and was only preserved as a typescript in the archive of Egon Bondy.

Pracovní analýza is the author's most extensive work dedicated to political issues. In it, he analyzes many theoretical questions and presents various explanations for his political views, which follow from his theoretical analysis. It contains several thematically linked themes,

above all in this regard a critique of the Stalinist and Post-Stalinist system. This is tied in with an effort to explain, historically and structurally, the causes of that system's birth, its genesis, internal contradictions and, at the same time, the possibility of its being subverted in the concrete geopolitical situation of that time. Another distinctive theme in the work concerns the issue of social self-management and workers' councils, which in the latter half of the 1960s was a much discussed political question. He analyzes the possibility of attaining and sustaining workers' self-management, as well as the problems linked with it. The author also strongly puts forth the Maoist convictions he held at the time and occasionally engages in a discussion regarding the character of the Cultural Revolution. (His concept of Maoism here however tends to recapitulate that which was elaborated another contribution - "The Marxism of Mao Zedong" - published in this volume. However, the primary theme of this book is, as was already indicated, an analysis of the nature of the regime in the USSR and the countries in the Eastern Block, which he labels "state capitalist". Here he places himself in the tradition of Marxist-oriented thinkers such as F. Pollock, R. Dunayevskaya, B. Péret, C. L. R. James, T. Cliff, and others. In the second part of *Pracovní analýza*, Bondy devotes himself to the problem of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and an investigation of the historic causes of the rise of state capitalism in Russia.

Here he examines the process that gave rise to economic-technical management, which soon had the character of economic-technocratic management; he investigates its ambiguous relationship to the political elite, with whom on the one hand it is tied by common interest but, on the other hand, with whom it shares a certain mutual antagonism as the one keeps trying to subordinate the other. He also examines the gradual creation of a group self-interest for both of these elites and their subsequent group identity, and their gradual emancipation from the rest of society, a process that reaches its climax when these elites assume a position of control over the society. He reflects on the objective factors which conditioned these developments - that is, the objective contradictions and tensions which are special to the system - and discusses the risks associated with an erroneous solution to these contradictions. Against this background, Bondy ana-

lyzes the process by which these elites are transformed into a new ruling class and the newly created class relations that result from it.

In this analysis, Bondy not only addresses general questions but also describes concrete political battles, such as the factional struggle between Stalin and Trotsky, the Moscow trials and their background, collectivization, the battle between the Central Committee and the ruling elites, how the gradual separation of the ruling elites from the rest of society projected itself into changes in civil law, and so on and so forth. It must, in this regard, also be added that though Bondy considers the developments in the USSR and the dialectic of its degeneration to be prototypical, they were not inevitable. To the contrary, recognizing these developments and learning from them can, in Bondy's view, protect us against their being repeated in the future. The second part of *Pracovní analýza* is motivated by just such an effort to mediate this recognition.

In the third part of *Pracovní analýza* the question of the genesis of state capitalism is developed further, and the trend towards state control in lands which tried to create a post-capitalist society (the Eastern Block countries, the USSR, China, Cuba, and so on) is examined. At the same time, Bondy investigates this trend in relation to Western economies, which are designated as being monopoly capitalist, and supposes that between the monopoly capitalist lands and the state capitalist lands a certain convergence is taking place that is leading to a fundamental convergence in the economic structures of the West and the East. He also analyzes the (geo)political consequences that result from this convergence, especially in relation to the Third World.

At this point Bondy arrives, in his analysis, at a general investigation of a trend in the Western Block: the immanent movement of capital in the direction of monopoly and centralization, the disruption of the original relations of the minor, competing subjects and the creation of monopolies which come to disrupt the free market to such an extent that they sometimes, according to Bondy, border on state capitalism. At the same time, according to Bondy, this movement also creates an appropriate political structure, a structure, which "substantially restricts democratic political freedoms and maximally secures the political monopoly of the ruling class." The shift from

monopoly capitalism to state capitalism can happen in such a way, as Bondy comments elsewhere, that the economic elite, whose influence on the state has been, to this point, indirect, now begins to govern it directly. He had already considered this possibility in his text “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat” from late 1949 and early 1950. Similarly, in the 1968 text “Workers’ Councils and the Revolutionary Party” that is a part of this collection, he writes that “in modern capitalism things are moving steadily towards a direct unification between the economic and political spheres.” Bondy here also forms a certain theory for the explanation of those cases – which are becoming more and more frequent in the present day – when the oligarchs clearly become the official political representatives of the state. In such cases their influence on the state, which they now begin to govern directly, is less and less hidden (in our case, for example, A. Babiš while, abroad, we see S. Berlusconi, D. Trump, and others). In this section Bondy analyzes the scenario in which liberal democratic institutions are maintained – people can vote in elections – but their actual influence on substantial issues is minimal. Bondy (contrary, we will add, to the majority of theoreticians both of that time and of our time) had no illusions about the democratic nature of the West. No more, indeed, than he had any illusions about the meritocratic character of the Western world – that it allows the most capable to excel, that all inequality (or at least its substantial portion) is above all overcome by the abilities of individuals who can freely compete among themselves, etc. – and he emphasizes the ideological and legitimizing character of those theses, which ignore the issue of social origin, which is, in truth, much more important in Western societies than an individual’s abilities.

Another of the themes analyzed in *Pracovní analýza* is the already mentioned question of social self-management and workers’ councils. Bondy resolutely describes as naive the idea of workers’ councils as an aggregate of small enterprises or communes that would compete with each other by a means not dissimilar to capitalism. He similarly rejects the syndicalist conception as an “a historical illusion about the value of liberal ‘democracy’ and its applicability” and likewise considers “illusions of the anarchist type to also be false”. Bondy

attempts to work out, in more detail, a theoretical system of workers' councils. He investigates the question of economic and political self-management and discusses problems with which this concept is directly or indirectly connected: the political aspects of workers' council, such as the question of direct or representative democracy; the function of the "revolutionary party" in a self-managed society (its structure and organization); the meaning of ideology; the question of class relations under socialism, and so on. One key question – already somewhat dated – links all of these questions: How to achieve and thereafter maintain a society with a socialist character, that is, free, democratic and self-managing? Or, put differently, how to prevent the restoration of class relations when society stops being self-managing and instead becomes *controlled*, and what types of organizations is it necessary to create and how should they, in rough outline, function so as to prevent such a restoration?

At the same time Bondy realizes that a self-managing society cannot be sustained in the long-term if it is encircled by capitalist states. According to his Maoist convictions, in the final analysis the sole possibility is "to focus oneself on the global clash of the revolutionary movement with imperialism". The paramount task in this context is, in its first part, the liberation of the countries of the Third World and the struggle for national liberation since that would strip the imperialist economies of their main source of surplus value and paralyze the possibility of their economies growing (and thus hinder the possibility of military intervention) and, in its second part, the creation of regions which would extricate themselves from the influence of the American-Soviet spheres of interest – including the creation of an independent region in Europe.

It is with this question that Bondy occupies himself in the fourth part of *Pracovní analýza*. According to him, the primary strategic aim is the integration of the European radical left across the power blocks and the creation of a united European revolutionary movement which, however, would not be separated from the global revolutionary movement and national liberation struggles of the Third World.

A further theme that Bondy examines in this fourth part is a critique of the liberalistic position that is also present in reformist

communism. He especially addresses this in the chapter “Recent Experiences in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic”, where he also discusses the question of the middle class and casts doubt on the thesis that it is hypertrophying. He also looks into the changes in class structure that are contemporaneous with advanced capitalist society, the mythologization of the concept of the “working class” and the political consequences of the fetishization of this concept. In this part of *Pracovní analýza* Bondy also analyzes rather extensively the problematic of ideology, its significance in the emancipation struggles and its anticipatory function; he also critiques the rigid model of base-superstructure, in which the superstructure is mistakenly conceived as only being a passive reflection or epiphenomenon of the base. Last but not least, he also analyzes the role of intellectuals in the emancipation struggles and develops his idea about the importance of theory and philosophy in contemporary society. With this the fourth and final part of *Pracovní analýza* closes.

We decided to attach to the end of *Pracovní analýza* – as a kind of appendix – other political texts by Bondy that were written in the late 1960s. In part this was because they overlap the subject matter analyzed in *Pracovní analýza* and, in many respects, help to fill them out; in addition, the majority of these texts are practically inaccessible and we therefore consider it to be appropriate to publish them alongside *Pracovní analýza* so that the reader will have them all in one volume. We believe that this “topping up” of his work from that time will make it possible to both get a better idea of Bondy’s political views (his assessment of Prague Spring or the Cultural Revolution) and his activities in the course of 1968 (especially the promotion of workers’ democracy). Many of the questions discussed in *Pracovní analýza* are also analyzed in the attached texts and so help to flesh out the longer text: the question of workers’ councils, and a critique of Post-Stalinist, but also liberal approaches (the texts: “Workers’ Councils and the Revolutionary Party”, “Viewpoint”, “Declaration and Entreaty”); Maoism and the Cultural Revolution (“The Marxism of Mao Zedong”); the revolutionary movement and the national liberation struggle of the Third World (“What Rudi Dutschke Wants and Calls For”).

A reading of *Pracovní analýza* and the texts attached to it sketches the problems and concerns of that period that Bondy, as a figure of the radical Marxist left, encountered and the things that he placed his hopes in. As Bondy himself indicated from the distance of time, *Pracovní analýza* is, along with some number of further texts, “at its core a document about what we experienced and how we brought it into line theoretically. Possibly long before and much better than it was done in the West. Which is to say that our theoretical work grew out of many years of direct experience.” To mediate this experience and infer theoretical conclusions from it is the aim in the publishing of this work.

And so the reader has the opportunity to read an analysis of the regime of that time that is carried out from a position of an undogmatic and unofficial Marxism. It is a unique text as there are few works of Czech origin that systematically inquire into the nature of the previous regime from a critical Marxist point of view. While it concerns the subject of work and the manner of its investigation, the text presented here analyzes many theoretical questions which were being discussed in parallel elsewhere in Europe and the world as well; it thus offers the possibility of a comparison with those contemporaneous authors involved in these discussions. We will only enumerate the main areas: the theory of state capitalism and the problem of the constituting of a “new ruling class” (F. Pollock, R. Dunayevskaya, B. Péret, C. L. R. James, T. Cliff, M. Djilas, and others); the theory of convergence (Jan Tinbergen, P. Sorokin and J. K. Galbraith), parallel assessments of the Cultural Revolution (e.g., L. Althusser, A. Badiou), an emphasis on workers’ democracy and workers’ councils (e.g., J. Kuroń, K. Modzelewski), and so on.

This edition also includes a wide-ranging introduction by Petr Kužel, the editor of the collection, which sketches the evolution of Bondy’s political thinking from the end of the 1940s until the time of his death in 2007. This introduction places *Pracovní analýza a jiné texty* in the full context of Bondy’s political and philosophical thinking and, above all, situates it in the historical context and political debate of its time.

Petr Kužel