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## BOOK REVIEW: POLITICS UNMASKED: CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN SLOVAKIA AFTER 1989

Jaroslav Fabok\*

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DINUŠ, P.: *Politika bez masky: Príspevok k politickému diskurzu na Slovensku po roku 1989 (Politics Unmasked: Contribution to Political Discourse in Slovakia after 1989)*. Bratislava: VEDA, 2014. 240 p. ISBN 978-80-224-1439-5.

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The most important point that the Slovak political scientist **Peter Dinuš** deals with in his book entitled “Politics Unmasked” is the analysis of the arrangement of social relations after November 1989 together with the subsequent impact of this issue on the development of Slovak society in the next period. At this point, we also want to emphasize second part of the publication’s title, i.e. the author’s attempt to highlight the specific nature of the current *political discourse* in our country. Political discourse can be understood as some specific language of politics. In the complexity of the meaning of a concept, we can talk about the expression of “the whole complex of relations between man and society ... [which] ... is functionally focused on shaping the image of perception of the world politics of the recipient.” (Dulebová, 2013) Precisely due to the important function of political discourse and its role with regard to the broad picture of political and social interpretations of reality, the book can be seen as an interesting contribution and discussion of the political and social development in Slovakia after 1989. The book helps to form a plurality of opinions, without which we are losing the capacity of critical thinking not only in relation to the past, but also when it comes to the current state of social development. The author illustrates the point, for example, when talking *about the official discourse and official reflection of social change*, which is based on transitology as from the Department of Political Science. He explains the changes of the arrangement of social relations based on idealism and methodologically based on modelling, while he is also working with the concept of totalitarianism (p. 7).

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Simultaneously, the author defines his methodological point of view, which is the historical materialism.

The primary aim of the book is to focus on post-November development of Slovak society in reflection of its fundamental contradictions (p. 17). The author points out that the work has a reflection character, so it is necessary to approach it with that in mind. The book represents an alternative view that is different from the perspective of the “official discourse”, and brings with it the criticism of the post-November social sciences. “Post-November social sciences can be neither free nor independent of politics and ideology, because they are serving private owners of capital to reflect their social interest. They defend and justify the capitalist ownership” (p. 9). In this context, the different periodisation of development is interesting, which the author builds on the Marxist interpretation. Contrary to Marxist interpretation, he puts “vulgar bourgeois periodisation of time of 'oppression' (covering the years 1948 to 1989) and 'freedom' (after November 1989)” (p. 17). Marxist interpretation, the author's base, comes with different periodisation. “People's Democratic Revolution is overgrowing to the socialist revolution (1944 - 1948), the period of construction of socialism (1948 - 1987), its Thermidor (1987 - 1989), counter-revolutionary coup (1989), a restoration of the old regime - *anciéne regime* (since 1990)” (p. 17). It is necessary to show this periodisation for us to be able to grasp the overall context and direction of the book.

However, let us return for a moment to methodological and ideological background of the book. Author puts the book within the context of orthodox Marxism, which can be seen particularly in his criticism of efforts to misinterpretation of **Marx** (p. 59) not only by the petty-bourgeois writers and by critical revisionists of Marxism, but also of the efforts to inset the structuralism, existentialism and freudism to **Marx's** theory (p. 60). According to the author, “Marxism ... has become a harmless icon for the bourgeoisie” (p. 60), which is related to the actual definition of Marxism itself, which should be dangerous for the capitalist class (p. 60). With this definition, however, the author “returns” to the word bourgeoisie, which should be replaced in political science and sociological literature mostly by terms as class, the political elite or ruling class (p. 14). An important consequence highlighted in the reviewed book is that “bourgeois politics does not answer the fundamental question of who rules in the post-November society” (p. 14). For this reason, the book should become, from its specific (orthodox Marxist) point of view, one of the alternative interpretations of the post-November development.

Another level of criticism, along with the ideological definition, is the criticism of euro-communism and other reformist tendencies within the Marxist theory. The author chose as one possible example the Italian Communist Party, claiming that the causes of its termination are reformism and opportunism (p. 73). He emphasizes that it is not possible to consider the reformist ideas to be the only progressive direction of leftist politics. "Such a policy cannot be called anti-capitalist; quite to the contrary, it aims to promote the existing bourgeois regime" (p. 74).

Following a different approach in the interpretation of the post-November (but also before-November) development, argumentation of **Peter Dinuš** in the first chapter of the book offers several interesting claims. According to him, the main question is whether totalitarian-historical interpretation, which is typical of bourgeois writers, is not only an ideological construction. Basically, we are facing a resistance between claims that the revolution was spontaneous and natural process - one-sided pressure from the masses. Author introduces an alternative narrative, which is based on the assumption that the revolution was on the contrary managed process "that led to the advance of planned change of social dilution" (p. 21). In this context, the author points to the possibility that the regime was not overthrown by movements inside, but rather by external pressures - by the two then-superpowers USA and USSR.

This conclusion is based on the different periodisation of development of society. Pressures from the outside gave emphasis to the restoration of the old regime (according to interpretations of orthodox Marxist) - which ultimately led to the effort to return to capitalism. However, the coup would not have been completed without self-interest of regime in changes of the social structure.

The author derived this approach to the interpretation of the development based on a few examples. For instance, the passivity of the State Security, despite the declaration of extraordinary security actions and extraordinary security measures, which can be illustrated by non-acceptance of adequate countermeasures. "Illogical acting of security institutions as well as party-political institutions of the state after 17. November 1989 remains the most convincing evidence of the "planning-ability" of Czechoslovak state coup" (p. 48). From this the author concludes that the coup had been previously planned and programmed (controlled from above), while the grassroots movement was provoked only as a form of justification and legitimation of the coup itself. The current regime derives legitimacy of its existence from this point. Grassroots movement becomes in this interpretation just a kind of a veil that fulfilled, to time

that was needed, its role of “power chessboard”. Nevertheless, despite the above-mentioned interpretation of the events the influence of grassroots movement cannot be denied. According to the author this sequence of events led to the emergence of post-November bourgeois dictatorship, which ultimately means that capitalism is “back to our history by police staged coup” (p. 53).

In the context of the book, it is necessary to draw attention to efforts to overcome the monolithic historical interpretation that emphasizes the victory of “good over evil”. Ultimately, when we talk about “good” and “bad” within the political interpretation, it is always in a form of obfuscation and mythology. This approach of the “need of demythologisation” of some historical aspects is present in the entire book. In the broader implications of the impacts, it can be observed in such mythologisation in anti-communism that swirled in the late 1990s of the last century and in particular bounds it is possible to follow his direction today. Anticommunism is, according to **Peter Dinuš**, “old and traditional ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie” (p. 179). This is, in fact, one of the main barriers to the creation of alternatives by the radical left parties. Simply put, any alternative that tends to radical leftist ideas is identified as a “communist” and by that, it is discredited.

In the next chapter, **Peter Dinuš** deals with the causes of the demise of Eastern European socialism. He stresses that interpretative scheme that evaluates the Eastern European socialism and the causes of its demise is reflected by the ideological schemes of the concept of totalitarianism. According to the author, the bourgeoisie intentionally falsifies and demonizes the socialist stage of the history. It is also linked to development of anti-communism, while communism is often compared to Nazism. This is a certain ideological tool that makes one-sided interpretation of history possible. In my opinion, equally problematic is interpretation that leads to the glamorisation of social relations in this period. Promoting positive freedom to such an extent that prevents the application of negative liberty is always a negative aspect. One of the problematic part is the possibility of developing a free individual, individualism and uniqueness, by which each individual is characterised.

Within the materialist understanding of history (within the limits of orthodox Marxism), the author elaborates in one of the chapters about the “status quo of bourgeois dictatorship.” According to this understanding, the “power ... becomes a crucial tool to change the entire social structure” (pp. 144 - 145). In his opinion, in the economic field several negative aspects manifested themselves after the coup, and they contributed to shaping the state of contemporary

society. The case in point is the privatisation, which is a reflection of the individual processes and transformations in the economic sphere. Politics, according to the author, becomes just a kind of means of communication of (intermediary) interests of foreign capital. The parliamentary party system is one of the political structures that helps to maintain the legitimacy of the bourgeois dictatorship (p. 156). Another of these "institutions", according to **Peter Dinuš**, is the bourgeois propaganda, which is mediated by the media. The basic objective of such media "hit" is then interpretation of class interests of the capitalist class – which is later related to disguise of the existence of class society. At this point, I would again like to draw attention to the discussion character of the book - with its different methodological background and interpretation of historical events. Plurality of opinions, which contributes to the debate, is extremely necessary for free society - and this is work one such manifestation. On the other hand, it should be said that the plurality of opinion must be balanced in order to avoid unilateral interpretations. It is similar with "ruling interpretation" of the transformation of society on the basis of the materialist understanding of history, although the methodological framework is clearly outlined in advance.

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