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Obituary

After the death of Vaclav Havel: history is rewritten

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The death of the former Czech president and emblematic figure of the dissident movements in the countries of Eastern Europe is giving rise to a somewhat debatable rewriting of history. Havel is presented today as an “anticommunist resistant”, a combatant “against communism”, the liberator of Czechoslovakia “from the communist yoke” against which the Czechoslovak people “rose up” in 1968 during the Prague Spring and in 1989 during the Velvet Revolution.

There was absolutely no question of all that before 1989; this vocabulary has been invented subsequently, in the recent past. It is a reinterpretation of history, in the spirit of “history written by the (Western) winners” of the Cold War, a reinterpretation such as it has been imposed for the last twenty years, prohibiting all “dissident” ideas.

From 1968 (the crushing by the tanks of the Warsaw Pact of the movement of democratization) to 1989, the Czechoslovakian dissidents (and those of other Eastern European countries) took care not to be defined as “anticommunists”. They fought for civil rights and freedoms, that was all. Many of them were communists: supporters of the Prague Spring, expelled (like 500,000 others!) from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia after 1968. From this Spring, some had drawn radical conclusions, wanting to put an end to the regime which called itself “socialist”. But some of them persisted in wanting to see a communism that was democratic, based on workers’ councils, on self-management, a perspective that was certainly not pleasing to “the liberals” ... to whom history finally gave victory. Let us admit that liberalism and capitalism are the big winners of this history, sweeping aside not only the regimes of the East, but the ideas of an alternative, of a “third way”. The “end of history” as Fukuyama said... or the “happy globalization” of Alain Minc.

Was Havel in his heart anticommunist? It is more than probable and he subsequently presented himself in this way. But many among those whom he represented (in Charter 77) were not. The irony of history is that he was to be found, at the time of the Velvet Revolution of 1989, hand in hand with Alexander Dubcek, former leader of the Spring of 1968 and former general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party... But Dubcek was already a man of the past, and Havel a man of the future, not only of the Czech lands freed from a repressive regime, but of the New World Order of which he was an artisan, very close to successive American administrations and, for example, taking part in the war in Iraq.

It should be said in passing that “those who evoke history” forget to specify that the principal artisan of the Velvet Revolution, of the liquidation of the Soviet bloc was... the Soviet communist leader Mikhaĭl Gorbachov. That is still a “cumbersome” truth for those who want a “smooth” retrospective of history.

That people can say today that Vaclav Havel, child of the Prague bourgeoisie, was from time immemorial an adversary of communism is all very well. And it did not prevent him from being an artist and a man of great courage. But to present all dissidents in former times as “anticommunist”, there is a name for that: it is called falsifying history. Stalinism does not have the monopoly of brainwashing!

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