

Nils Andersson

My journey is quite simple

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[EROL NOTE: Extracted from an Interview with Nils Andersson by Jean-Numa Ducange]

My journey is quite simple, I lived in Switzerland where I was born. During the Algerian War, I reissued *La Question*, *La Gangrène* and published other books, also seized, denouncing the colonial war waged by France. This put me in contact with support networks and networks of rebellious and deserters, with the FLN and African liberation movements (Niger, Cameroon, Angola and others) or anti-fascists in Europe (Spain of Franco and Portugal of Salazar). Since 1957-1958, I have been engaged in the anti-colonial and anti-fascist struggle. I had therefore been able to judge the political reservations which were those of the Communist parties, and the positions, to say the least, of the PCF towards support for the FLN and national liberation struggles in general.

I was still unaware of the differences within the communist movement; note that I was not a member of the Swiss Labor Party (PST), but a "traveling companion". I discovered the existence of divergences within the communist movement in an article by Raymond Aron published, I believe, in *L'Express*, which I then considered to be part of anti-communist propaganda. Subsequently, I read the documents from the 1961 Conference of Communist Parties in Moscow. Through these documents, I discover passages concerning decolonization which are neither in line with the positions of the CPSU nor with those of the PCF. Whether it be independence or the importance of revolutionary struggles in the Third World, the documents of the Conference are more radical. This was my point of approach with the positions of the Chinese party.

I learned that it was a compromise text and that, on the question of independence struggles, the Chinese position had prevailed; however, if the Albanian party had broken with the Khrushchevite line during this conference, this was not the case for the Chinese party. I am inquiring as to whether, as at the 1957 conference, the 1961 documents will be published and disseminated. They answer me yes, but nothing comes ... Obviously, there is a desire to mute this conference. At this moment, I learn, from a bookseller close to the PST, that he received a

circular asking to withdraw all the texts published in Beijing or by the Social editions, by and on China, including those of Mao Zedong!

So it turned out that something is happening. There was a lot of talk at the time of a CCP text, "Long Live Leninism," but it remained almost inaccessible. As, during the Algerian War, I had reissued texts banned in France, an approach for the edition of ostracized Chinese positions was part of the same logic. I therefore contacted the Chinese Embassy in Bern to offer them, in the face of this embargo, to publish the writings of the Chinese party, so that its positions could be known. We are in 1962, Beijing Information does not yet exist in French, nor the mass of publications which will be published in the following years. So I published, until 1965, Mao's writings and the main CCP documents from this period; thereafter, the Chinese editorial force set in motion,

Beyond the work of the editor, I extended my engagement in the political field by participating in the formation of the Organization of Communists of Switzerland. We are at the beginning of the 60s, at this time the "pro-Chinese" organize themselves, in most of the countries of Western Europe and on the other continents, in parties or organizations, according to the Leninist rule that it does there can be only one organization per country. I note this point, because this is a situation completely different from that of the "Maoist" movement where, in each country, organizations will multiply.

The attachment to the USSR weighed heavily among the militants of the Communist parties, we often found the same arguments: the USSR homeland of socialism, its major role during the Second World War, loyalty to the Soviet Revolution ... Nevertheless, things were not played out, the balance of power was an uncertain moment and its evolution unpredictable. In many European parties, there were, including at the level of the leaders, doubts about the possible evolution of the debate in the communist movement. Recall that in 1964, Khrushchev was removed from the leadership of the CPSU, proof that the denunciation of "Khrushchevite revisionism" was not without resonance. In Asia, many parties (notably the Indonesian) were pro-Chinese, and in Latin America, large fringes broke with the line of the Soviet party.

Here I give an opinion: the Cuban revolution representing a strong attraction, especially among young people and third world people, the choice of Cuba to support the CPSU was a determining moment. Many people thought, referring to the positions of Castro and Guevara that Cuba was going to be in the anti-revisionist camp. Geopolitical and economic realities, because of the blockade, made that Cuba took position for the Soviets, while marking its difference with the Tricontinental. Consequently, the two strongest representations of a socialist revolutionary current, attached to the communist movement, were not found in the same camp. Consulting the archives of the Soviet, Chinese and Cuban parties could help understand the process of this choice.

To stick to Western Europe, without wishing to generalize, it was firstly a question of breaking with the pro-Soviet parties and relying on ruling or other parties who had broken with the CPSU, to give a revolutionary character to the communist movement, to find a militant spirit in the workers' movement and an abandoned internationalism. We still rubbed shoulders with those who had participated in the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, in the International Brigades in Spain, in resistance to Nazism or had been blacklisted during the Great Depression; they were present in social and anti-colonial struggles and demonstrated another militant commitment.

With the exception of Belgium, the only country in Europe where the split within the party was vertical, from the central committee to the base, in the other European countries, the new organizations were formed without ever touching, or at the margin, the party executives. The result was an ideological, historical, intellectual insufficiency, a lack of experience to combine political action and critical capacity. The Trotskyist movement was, from this point of view, incontestably better armed; but, in history, events must be assumed at the time and under the conditions in which they occur. The Bolshevik Revolution was accomplished, in 1917, in Tsarist Russia, the Sino-Soviet rupture occurred in 1962, at a time when, in Western Europe, the "Thirty Glorious",

On the other hand, the links established by the new organizations with the Chinese, Albanian and other parties made it possible to have knowledge, as long as one did not fall into idealism and "servilism", of the problems concrete forms posed by the socialist transformation of a society under the conditions of an unequal power relationship with the capitalist and imperialist world and, knowing that it is men and women who make revolutions but that it is also men and women who make counter-revolutions, of the issue of individualism and society.

I come back to what you said at the beginning about the link between your anti-colonial engagement and your pro-Chinese engagement. I consulted your work, could you come back to the edition of *La Question* d'Henri Alleg that you helped distribute with the Cité-Editeur? You mentioned Maspero editions, what relationships have you had with them?

I was in contact with Jérôme Lindon for the distribution in Switzerland of Editions de Minuit; when *The Question* of Alleg was banned in France, Jérôme Lindon asked me if it was possible to reissue the book in Switzerland in order to show the French authorities that a banned book is not a dead book. Another reason, books banned under the Occupation had been published in Switzerland, the Second World War was still close and the symbolism of the resistance very strong. So I reissued *The Question* with Sartre's text, *A Victory*, where he writes that Alleg "paid the highest price for the right to remain a man". I then reissued, also after its seizure in France, *La Gangrène*, then other works, all prohibited in France, *Les Disparus*, *La Pacification*, *Le temps de la justice*, denouncing the reality of the Algerian war.

So, very logically, as soon as François Maspero created his editions in 1959, I contacted him to ask him to distribute his works in Switzerland, then La Joie de Lire broadcast in France those I published. Editorial relations and anti-colonial activists, for me François Maspero is a beautiful friendship. When he founded the review *Partisans*, he included me on the editorial board, I was very sensitive to it. The quality and richness of *Partisans* and Maspero editions stemmed from the very conception that François had of his publishing profession, he wanted all the positions of the revolutionary left and anti-colonialists to be published, outside of any spirit of chapel or belonging. So if in *Partisans*, an important place was granted to the Cuban revolution, were also published Chinese texts (which I bear, for one part, the responsibility); there are also writings from Togliatti, Cabral, Ben Bella, Mandel, Jacques Grippa ... It was all the richness of the debates and controversies at the time of which the review was expressed.

Something less known, when Beijing started to massively distribute its publications, the Chinese embassy in Bern asked me if I knew of a relay in France for their distribution (there

was not yet an embassy in Paris); quite naturally I asked François Maspero the question. La Joie de Lire was therefore, before the constitution in France of a party or the existence of pro-Chinese bookstores, the first bookstore to distribute texts from Beijing. François was much closer to the positions of Castro and Guevara than to those of Mao Zedong, but militant practice and conception of political publishing and engagement, we were both in radical opposition to all dogmatisms. The main thing was to liberate the word and revolutionary ideas.

Let us return to the question of China and the networks it supports: what was the real place of China in supporting Western anti-colonialists? Has a new International attempt on this basis been considered?

When it was obvious, as we have already discussed, that relying on loyalty to the Soviet Union, its prestige among the members of the Communist parties and the adherence of their leaders to the political line of the PCUS to which their political course was intimately linked, a line of demarcation was clearly established between the two currents, the idea of an "international Marxist-Leninist" was naturally raised; it was even debated in 1966, behind the scenes, at the V^e Congress of the Party of Labor of Albania, which was in favour of it. This idea was then defended by a good number of parties present, but the delegation of the Chinese party, led by Kang Sheng, during discussions which were lively, opposed it to an absolute refusal. Geostrategic reasons have been mentioned or, entirely justified argument, the lack of maturity of new organizations. One could also think that this was due to other considerations, for example that it is easier to make one's views prevail in bilateral relations than in a multilateral framework, especially when one is the dominant party. Reproducing in this the role of the Soviet party, this signified the return to the "father party" of which we have spoken, which some, at first, accommodated when others engaged in flattery.

The policy of "ping-pong" and the rapprochement with Nixon had to show that the Chinese party had little tolerance for different opinions, including coming from another ruling party like the Albanian party, which led to the break between these two parties. The CCP asked to choose sides. Parties, either because they were ideologically in agreement with the Chinese party line, or by allegiance, adopted or accepted this 190-degree shift in China's foreign policy. Others, especially in Latin America and Europe, opposed it, they formed themselves into a Marxist-Leninist movement which still meets regularly and publishes a review. Within a multilateral structure, the divide would probably not have been different,

In the Third World, the Chinese party has adopted positions which follow the same logic as that followed in relations with parties belonging to the anti-revisionist movement. I remember discussions in the mid-1960s with Angolan comrades, Marxist-Leninists, members of the MPLA, who had gone to the marquis to explain that the positions of the CCP were more anti-colonialist than those of Moscow. They were often told: "You may be right, but my gun is Czech" ... Relevant answer, when these Angolan comrades told the Chinese about this problem, they were told that adherence to their theses was a prerequisite for receiving material aid. It shows an incomprehension of what a national liberation movement is, even if some of its members may be communists, even if the leadership of the MPLA is close to the CPSU (which was foreign to many combatants in the marquis), a national liberation movement is not a component of the communist movement and n does not have to decide mechanically on his internal debates. I do not want to generalize this example but it confirms, as in the case of the rapprochement with Nixon, an attitude of the CCP asking for alignment on its positions and not to let "flower a hundred flowers".

Coming back to your personal story, could you explain your problems with the Swiss government, linked to your political commitment, which led to your expulsion?

As I said, born in Switzerland but of Swedish father and French mother, I therefore did not have Swiss nationality. Concerning the activities linked to my engagement against the Algerian war, I had been questioned on several occasions by the Federal Police (the French DST) and had received warnings: although born in Switzerland, my activities were considered to be contrary to my "foreign status". By editing Chinese texts, in a country where anti-communism has always been particularly strong and active, I crossed a Rubicon and was again warned, several times, to cease my political activities. Based on my convictions, I made another choice and in 1966, the Swiss government decided to expel me, which provoked a strong reaction in Switzerland, in the media, with the launch of a petition.

The problem was not exclusion per se - a federal adviser (minister in Switzerland) said at the time "for once that the Soviets and the Americans agreed" - but the procedure. The decision taken was without appeal, without right of appeal, without there having been a judgment and, initially, without giving reasons for the decision; I was even denied access to the file. Before the protests, the reasons were made public - they were part of what we are talking about. The decision was irrevocable, I knew it very quickly from people who had wanted to intercede with the Minister. This decision was taken at the end of 1966, a little over a year before the events of 1968 ... The tension in power and the political police had its reasons which must have to do with the political context and the implication for Switzerland represented by my editorial and political activities in the anti-imperialist field. So I had to leave Switzerland in January 1967.

Before seeing what you do next, I would like to come back to your meetings with the Chinese Embassy. Could you evoke (as you did in the Social History Notebooks) these questions, including financial ones, which gave rise to many fantasies in the history of the communist movement ("Moscow money", etc.)?

Two things to clarify. First, there is nothing contrary to principle or immoral in the aid which may have been provided by the Chinese party; secondly, this aid to parties was much lower than that of the USSR to the "sister parties" and infinitesimal compared to the budgets of the United States, western countries and foundations, under religious or cultural cover, to fight against Communism. In the case of the "pro-Chinese" organization in Switzerland, there was no financial support, but material aid was given to certain parties; there is, once again, nothing but very normal. I would add that among those with whom I have campaigned, no one has benefited personally from this aid, and for none of them has it served as a springboard for a career.

Regarding the publication of CCP texts at the Cité-Éditeur (the editions I directed), China bought 300 or 500 copies, the Chinese Embassy telling me who to send them to. In other cases, there was more funding. For example, the Beijing publishing house had subscribed 10,000 subscriptions to the English edition of *Africa-Asia-Latin America Revolution (AAA Revolution)* edited by Jacques Vergès, which I initially printed. The Albanian party naturally did not have the same means as Beijing and the support it was able to grant could only have been very marginal. [It is in this regard that I have made some clarifications and corrections in *Les Cahiers d'Histoire sociale* # 8, 1997]

You talk about Albania, the bridgehead in Europe of the pro-Chinese movement. After your expulsion from Switzerland, in the midst of a Chinese cultural revolution, you go to Albania and stay there for a few years. Could you talk about this departure?

When I left Switzerland, it was not in any of my projects. The intention was to go to Sweden (my "home" country, of which I only knew scraps of the language). At first, I worked in Brussels at *Éditions Internationales*, the editions of the Belgian party. Precious mutual aid which allowed me to seek a base for myself and my family in Sweden, which was by no means obvious. I had naturally had contacts with Albania where I had visited twice. It was while I was still in Belgium that I was contacted to come and work for two years in Albania in publishing and on the radio, which lacked the resources of editors.

I responded favourably to the proposal of the Albanian party for two reasons: first, it was part of the logic of my commitment and my convictions, then it was a possibility to know concretely, on a daily basis, life and the problems of a socialist country. For that Albania had the advantage of being a small country, a little more than two million inhabitants at that time; so it was easier to understand than the vast China. In addition, it is a Mediterranean country, closer in mentalities but also geographically, which allowed me to keep links with my friends in Europe. Finally, I stayed with my family for five years in Albania. This allowed me to understand a lot about the effects of an identity and independence long denied to a people by its occupants, and this independence acquired, this one remained subjected to the pressures and the blockade of the great powers. I also learned about the functioning of society, the problems to be solved, the relationships between people and power, in a socialist system, deeply imbued with the Soviet model like Albania was, but also still stamped of ancestral clan and feudal rules.

On the subject of Albania, before tackling more historiographical questions: You worked there for publishing, radio, etc ... What do you draw from this experience? You yourself are a connoisseur of Albania (articles in *Le Monde Diplomatique* during the Kosovo War) and you are aware of the image of the regime in which you lived, reputed to be the most "Stalinist" in Europe.

Albania was a dictatorship of the proletariat, a concept institutionalized in the international communist movement, it was affirmed and proclaimed. As Balibar wrote, the crisis of the dictatorship of the proletariat coinciding with a crisis of Marxism, we are not going to open this debate here. Let's agree to keep it simple and bring in a few things to take into consideration. In the forms that a power takes, one cannot ignore the history of a people. After Turkish domination, the guardianship of the Powers, the dictatorship of King Zog, the invasion, in the spring of 1939, of the country by Mussolini, then the German occupation, an essential question for the Albanians is that of national independence. The first legitimacy of the communist power in Albania is to have liberated the country from the fascist and Nazi occupiers by relying on their own forces and by refusing any intervention by the Allies. When the English wanted to disembark to "come to the aid" of the National Liberation Army, they were ordered to withdraw, or the partisans would open fire.

Preserving acquired independence was a constant concern, whether against Western aims, those of Yugoslavia or the USSR. The result for Albania, as for Cuba, was a situation of economic blockade, with the ensuing difficulties for a country which, in 1944, was not "liberated from capitalist oppression" but from colonial status (that of Mussolini's Italy), within the framework of a clan society, a country without industry, which counted four secondary schools, no university and not a meter of railway. In addition, we are in a feudal society where, especially in the north of the country, vendetta was until liberation a "code of honour" and

where the husband received from the father of the bride a ball which marked the right of life and death over his wife. Finally, with one exception, in the early 1920s, Albania had never known democratic elective forms. The conditions were therefore very far from our Western references to democracy, whose content in the Western world should be put into perspective today.

The reference to Stalin was permanent, the break with Khrushchev, whose motives for the Albanians touched as much on the national question as on ideological questions, justified even more the references to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, whether to mark the anchoring of the PTA in the international communist movement or the ideological justification of a more specific approach to Albania. It is neither to ignore nor to deny that the Albanian party largely reproduced the operations of the Soviet party, a party born against tsarism and in a given historical and development context, then those of communism stratified by Stalin.

I come to the period when I lived in Albania. It was a few years after the break with the Soviet Union in 1961, the Albanians asked themselves the question "can we stand alone?" "The economic collapse of Albania and the loss of its independence were announced. In 1967, the year I arrived in Albania, the country was in a particular state of confidence, it had not given in to pressure, it had remained independent and, while remaining a poor country, its economic situation was improving. It was therefore a period of cohesion and not of conflicts in the leadership of the PTA, unlike the very difficult one which had followed the liberation,

This pride in remaining independent and having resisted in a hostile environment could have led to delusional decisions, such as bunkers, symbols of impregnability, or a wrong population policy. Based on the idea that we could remove from the map a country of one million inhabitants, that it was more difficult with two million and even more when there were three million Albanians, it resulted a nationalist policy, constituting an economic pressure to which, under the conditions of encirclement which were those of Albania, the resources of the country could not respond. This explains not the implosion of socialism in Albania (the international context was decisive), but the forms that this implosion took with massive departures towards the capitalist "El Dorado".

When I was in Albania, from 1967 to 1972, I found, as during the Algerian liberation struggle, the pride of a people to acquire an identity that breaks with submission and humiliation. When you belong to an undisputed citizenship, you have to understand what it means for those who, because of their history, do not benefit from this recognition. The country remained poor, of course, but where there were no schools or hospitals, health and education were assured, the role and situation of women, a commercial object at marriages, changed profoundly.

There were frustrations, certainly: for example, one could only travel officially, but before the communist regime, except for exile without return, very few were those who had a horizon other than their valley or the banks of the Adriatic. There was schematism, sectarianism, a difficulty in accepting the new demands of the young generations, a truncated way of learning history, a dichotomy between the "good" and the "bad", we were one or the other from birth to death. All of this was due to the clan character of society, the decimated modes of functioning of Sovietism, the country's past and present isolation in the context of the Cold War.

Following the break with China and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the regime could not survive; it ended as we know. As we said, it is men who make revolutions, it is also men who make counter-revolutions. Some then asked the question, why did the party not use the army to "defend socialist power"? I had the opportunity to question Enver Hoxha's wife on this

subject; she replied: "It was not possible, we no longer had the confidence of the people". A fascist power does not ask itself these questions. Albania was a "dictatorship of the proletariat" with its laws of coercion, but it was necessary to be able to evoke the "legitimacy of the working class and the people".