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## The Soviet Changes

One of the difficulties in assessing the real meaning of the upheaval in the Soviet Communist Party that ejected Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Shepilov from the leadership is that politics in the Soviet Union take place behind closed doors. Until Soviet politics are brought out into the open and fought out in the public arena by the methods of free debate it will remain impossible for democratic Communists or Socialists, no matter how great the sympathy with which they watch the events in the Soviet Union, to regard the Soviet system as a model for the rest of the world to follow, in this respect at least. During the discussion which took place in the Communist Party after the 20th Congress I succeeded, after several contributions had been suppressed, in getting an article published by "World News" in which I said, *inter alia*, that inner-party democracy could not be guaranteed until political processes were brought out into the full glare of daylight, and asked why it should not be possible, nearly 40 years after the socialist revolution, when the capitalist class is no more than a memory, to allow uninhibited discussion in a socialist country. "Sharp differences are not reflected in the press until, out of the blue, the struggle behind closed doors produces the announcement that somebody has resigned, somebody been appointed, somebody been decently re-interred."

The proceedings which ended in the fall of Molotov, Malenkov and the others have borne out much of my analysis. The only part of the process which I omitted to describe was the issue of a statement by the next meeting of the executive committee of the British Communist Party fully endorsing, on the basis of a 'Marxist-Leninist analysis,' the decisions taken in Moscow. The reason why nobody can attach any weight at all to these statements is that one knows perfectly well that if the struggle between Molotov and Khrushchov had gone the other way so would the statement from 16 King Street. Marxism-Leninism has become something much more than a dogma when it is manipulated by people who are incapable of objective analysis and independent judgment. It so happens that, the victory of Khrushchov in the inner-party struggle is, from one aspect, a victory of the anti-Stalinists over the Stalinists, and a step on the path to democratic Communism, and for that reason I welcome it. But if I do so with a song in my heart, part of the refrain closely resembles that from the Victorian music hall chorus which says "it ain't exactly what he says, it's the nasty way he says it." Leaving on one side the difficulty of believing, on the evidence available, that Malenkov and Molotov have similar political views, there remains the fact that the struggle continues to take place within the forms inherited from the past, the forms of the

secret inner-party struggle, which may no longer end in death to the vanquished, but does end still in the political destruction of the minority, and their political assassination by the smear label of "anti-party group" and even more serious accusations.

Some of these accusations are probably true: but in the absence of an open political forum in which the accused is entitled to reply, and even make counter-charges, it is very foolish to accept every accusation at its face value. We have, after all, a long and bitter experience of accepting accusations at their face value, from the days of Bukharin to Tito, Rajk and Slansky. When the 20th Congress exploded the horrifying truth in the faces of Communists all over the world the leadership of the British Communist Party put forward the cowardly excuse that it had been "misled by false information." It never, it said, supported wrong policies or actions knowing them to be wrong. How much Pollitt and others really knew we shall never know, although from many talks I had with J. R. Campbell on these questions from the time of the release of Fields in Poland and Hungary onwards, I learned that he, at least knew and privately deplored a great deal of what was going on. But after the 20th Congress we were assured that the automatic acceptance of every statement emanating from the leadership-for-the-time-being of the CPSU was to be ended. A resolution of the E.C. of the C.P. (13th May, 1956) declared: "there is in the future bound to be a more critical examination of policies, from whatever quarter they come." We can now see<sup>1</sup> how this is interpreted !

What the Molotov-Malenkov affair shows very clearly is the difficulty of achieving the transition from Stalinism to democratic communism. In the first place, none of the leaders of the CPSU have any experience of political struggle by any other method than palace intrigues, and the use of political power to crush opposition. Khrushov talks about restoring the Leninist norms of party life, but the particular norm he chooses is not the norm of free public controversy associated with Lenin's earlier years, but the resolution on party unity based on the 10th Congress in 1921, when the Soviet republic and the Party itself were in more acute danger than they had ever been, or were ever to be again. The reaffirmation of this resolution, passed immediately after the Kronstadt revolt, is a most alarming sign of the inability of Khrushov to move more than a very limited distance away from the out-moded conceptions of Stalinism. The last thing I wish to do is to underestimate the great advances that have already been made since Stalin's day, and which are continuing. Although no detailed information is available, it is clear that legality has been restored, the secret police has been deprived of its arbitrary powers, millions in concentration camps have been released, and that there is an upsurge among the youth and cultural circles, and the great bureaucratic apparatus is being

broken down. But the decision on party unity taken by the 10th Congress is utterly incompatible with the free functioning of political life, and the all-important establishment of public political criticism, in a mature socialist society.

One cannot help asking whether Khrushov has any intention of applying Mao Tse-tung's principles "on the correct handling of contradictions among the people". Mao begins by distinguishing between two different types of contradiction: those between ourselves and our enemies, which are antagonistic ones, and those within the ranks of the people which are non-antagonistic. By drawing this distinction he opens the way to a process of political struggle and argument in a socialist society, or in a society which is building socialism, in which the self-devouring process, that has sent nearly all Soviet leaders in the end either to the gallows or to disgrace, will not operate. Dictatorship, Mao emphasises, does not apply within the ranks of the people, nor should one section oppress another. What applies among the people is democratic centralism. And Mao's exposition of democratic centralism is one few socialists will care to quarrel with. Freedom, he says, is freedom with leadership, and democracy is democracy under centralised guidance, for "anarchy does not conform to the interests or wishes of the people." It is, in fact, essential that a government should be able to govern, to enforce the laws approved by the people, and give leadership along the lines supported by the people. But, Mao goes on to say, controversial issues among the people should be solved by methods of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education, not by the methods of "ruthless struggle and merciless blows."

It may be argued that it was Molotov and his friends who wished to resort to coercion, and to settle their differences by using a temporary majority on the presidium to present the Central Committee with a fait accompli. This may well be true. But, in a country where any appeal to the people is out of the question, where political views opposed to those of the government cannot be publicly expressed and debated, it is almost inevitable that both sides in the struggle will resort to so called fractionalism, to intrigue and to attempts to capture the machinery of the party and the government. If it had been open to Molotov to resign, and to stump the country proclaiming the dangers of Khrushov's foreign and domestic policy, that would not be a sign of weakness (as Khrushov obviously thinks it would be) but a sign of strength. It is true that since the Central Committee pronounced in Khrushov's favour there has been a lot of "discussion" but it is the old one-sided discussion (in which only the victors are heard and the vanquished are denounced) that used to take place after other Soviet leaders had been sentenced to death as enemies of the people. It is, in any event,

discussion after the event and not before it, and discussion without access to facts.

Was the contradiction between Molotov and Khrushchov antagonistic or non-antagonistic? By no conceivable reasoning can it be said that Molotov was one of the "enemy." Khrushchov has felt unable to continue the fiction, adopted in the case of Beria, that he was an "agent of imperialism" who had "wormed his way in." The contradiction between Molotov and Khrushchov was non-antagonistic, it was a genuine difference "within the people" on the right course to pursue in domestic and in foreign policy. It should therefore, if Mao's ideas are sound, have been settled by methods of discussion not by the methods of "ruthless struggle and merciless blows." But if one reads the statement issued by the Soviet Communist Party one finds that the language used about Molotov and the other defeated leaders is the language of merciless struggle. They are not treated as people with honestly held differences, but as an "anti-party group" (not far different from "enemy of the people"), that used anti-party fractional methods," that (terrible crime!) "set out to change the party leadership." Khrushchov's speech at Leningrad, accusing Malenkov of responsibility for the Leningrad case (in short, accusing him of murder) was deliberately done to blacken his name and assassinate him politically. Malenkov, of course, is denied the opportunity to make the slanging match **two-sided** by raking up the crimes for which Khrushchov must without a doubt have been responsible—for nobody was more diligent or hysterical than Khrushchov in the late 1930's in the witch hunt for "anti-party elements or "enemies of the people."

Khrushchov still only likes to see only one flower in his garden. The idea of a hundred flowers competing with a few weeds fills him with apprehension and horror. Mao says that the policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is designed to promote the flourishing of the arts and the progress of science, to enable a socialist culture to thrive. But the application of this idea is not confined to the arts, science and culture. One cannot talk about Marxism developing only through struggle and exclude politics. Marxism without politics is freedom of speech for the dumb. If, as a scientific truth, Marxism fears no **criticism**, that applies to politics as well as to philosophy.

**Khrushchov** lives in a hot-house with a single idea, and even Mao is not able to develop his own theory to its logical conclusion. But he goes a long way when, dealing with the other parties in China, he describes the relations between them and the Communist Party as being "mutual supervision." Why he asks, should the other democratic parties be allowed to exercise supervision over the Communist Party? "Because for a party as much as for an individual there is great need to hear opinions different from its own."

It is naive to suppose that a political aim can be realised unless one has the means to mobilise people in support of it: for those who control the press and the other media of publicity will assuredly attempt to mobilise opinion against it. Ultimately, in Communist Society, the Communist Party must disappear, "politics" as they are known today will disappear too, with all their rottenness, intrigue and lack of principle (all of which exist in the Soviet Union, too) It is in the highest degree unlikely that in the Soviet Union other political parties will ever emerge: but it is essential for the democratic development of any socialist society that there should be freedom to express political ideas, that there should be political conflict. If there is only one political party, then the political arguments that take place within the party must be known to the people, and the people who are not in the party must have the right to political expression and criticism, even in opposition to the party. For the alternative is to confine political discussion within the party, to exclude the overwhelming majority of the people from independent political thought or activity, to reduce them to the role of rubber stamping the party's decisions, and to deny them the information or the right to publication on which a critical assessment of the party's work must depend. In any event, the existence of a single political party should not, in a socialist state, be enshrined in the constitution or the law. If the people choose to organise other political groups, which are not counter-revolutionary, they are entitled to do so.

One of the most encouraging signs of maturing democracy in the Soviet Union would be the emergence of voluntary organisations with access to the press and radio, pressure groups if you like, having as their object reforms of any and every kind, whether it be the abolition of capital punishment, reform of the educational system, or even "Hands off Hungary." Until there is freedom for such organisations, nobody will take seriously the peace movement of the Soviet Union, however sincere it may be. A system in which the only people in the world who were denied any opportunity to discuss the use of Soviet troops in Hungary was the Soviet people themselves suffers from a fundamental weakness which, basically, is the government's belief that it cannot trust the people to come to the right decision if they hear both sides of the case. That is why, for example, the Soviet press did not even publish the news of Soviet intervention in Hungary until the Soviet leadership had approved the editorials justifying it, or why the differences between Molotov and Khrushchov could not be publicised except in the form of a one-sided statement after the issue had been settled. Stalinism has gone, but Khrushchov-knows-bestism remains, and that kind of dictatorship, however paternal it may be, is incompatible with the theory of allowing

rival schools of thought to contend.

But it will be said, Mao attacks the revisionists, whom he describes as even more dangerous than the doctrinaires (the Molotovs). But who are the revisionists? According to Mao, they are those who pay lip service to Marxism but whose real target of attack is actually the most fundamental elements of Marxism. The revisionists, he says, are those who oppose or try to weaken the peoples' democratic dictatorship and the leading role of the Communist Party, who oppose or try to weaken socialist transformation and construction. "That being so, I cannot see that I am a "revisionist." On the contrary, I am convinced that the further development of the Soviet Union in the direction of freedom and democracy is inevitable, although it will take place by a process of struggle in which Khrushchov's intermediate position between Stalinism and democracy will become more and more untenable. The changes that must come will help to unite the people of various nationalities, will benefit socialist construction, will help to consolidate the Soviet system, will not undermine but will strengthen democratic centralism, will strengthen the leadership of the Communist Party, and will benefit international solidarity.

It is, unfortunately, now too late for the British Communist Party leadership to reap the benefits that would have come from taking up an independent position of comradely criticism and mutual support in its relations with the CPSU. And the Soviet leadership, which is still badly informed about the real situation in many foreign countries, has not yet grasped the fact that the automatic support of John Gollan and Harry Pollitt is in no way helpful. It does not help the Soviet Union, and it merely serves further to discredit and isolate a Party which has reduced itself in the last two years to a sectarian rump. This has deprived the British working class and Labour movement of some of its best and most loyal members, who are chasing their own tails in an ever-diminishing circle. But sooner or later the members of the Communist Party will have to draw the inevitable conclusions from the shrinking membership, activity and influence that have followed the 20th Congress. They will have to apply their own theory, that policies are best tested in action. The policy of uncritical support of the Soviet Union has been tested and found wanting: and it may well be that the Soviet leaders will be the first to discover the fact.