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A Dogmavisionist in Warscow

Internationally acknowledged as a leading authority on Marxist economic theory, the author of this article has recently returned from a lecture tour in Poland and the U.S.S.R.

'Personally I don't like Krushchov,' said the young Soviet lady. 'He's too ambitious, too rude, and too careless in what he says in his speeches. And it looks as if he's making himself into another dictator, just like Stalin. That's the trouble with our system, of course - it makes it too easy for a strong leader to become a dictator.'

The restaurant was crowded, and the lady was speaking in a loud voice. I had a strange feeling of unreality, which increased as she continued with her catalogue of Krushchov's sins. 'Why did he have to attack Stalin in that silly one-sided way? Here we were, brought up to look on Stalin as a god: when I was ten, I didn't know whether I loved my father or Stalin better. Then suddenly all the students at our institute are summoned to a meeting, and Krushchov's speech is read out. You can imagine the effect it had on us. Then there was Hungary - that was a difficult situation admittedly, but I think the Soviet action was quite unpardonable. And Nagy - why did they have to *kill* Nagy? Put him in prison if you like - but why kill him? And why does Krushchov change his attitude to Yugoslavia every six months? Let's be friends or enemies - either one thing or the other.'

Politics to this by no means unintelligent Soviet citizen was purely a matter of personalities. The tall buildings were erected because 'Stalin liked towers'. Krushchov attacked Stalin in the way he did because 'Stalin had held him down'. She had little sympathy for Malenkov, Kaganovich and company: 'If they were weak enough to allow themselves to be kicked out like that,' she said, 'they couldn't really have been worth much.' And politics was something, as it were, external to her - something over which she obviously felt she had little control, and over which she did not seem to think that it was possible for ordinary mortals to have any control. At any rate, she saw no connection between the political errors which she condemned so strongly and the restrictions on public political discussion in the U.S.S.R. 'Where has all your freedom got you in Britain?' she asked. 'You're free to criticise official policy in the *Daily Worker*

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and so on, but official policy goes on being just as reactionary as ever.'

The important thing which emerges from this incident, however - and from a dozen others which came to my notice when I was in the U.S.S.R. this autumn - is that people seem to feel much freer than they formerly did to speak their minds on subjects like this, and much less inclined to accept the official view without question. In spite of the anti-revisionist campaign, the general atmosphere remains much easier than it was before the twentieth congress. Whenever I asked economists what they thought were the main changes which had taken place in the U.S.S.R. during the last few years, they almost always emphasised that discussion was now much freer, that they felt safer in putting forward new ideas, and that it was easier to get dissenting viewpoints published. On my previous visit to the U.S.S.R., in 1954, I found no one who was prepared to admit that any restrictions on freedom of discussion existed at all. ('We are always having discussions in the U.S.S.R.,' they said.) Now, in 1958, when I asked one group of economists whether they thought that any further extensions of freedom were likely in the near future, someone replied 'That's up to us'.

In all spheres one definitely feels that a new pressure is being exerted against the tyranny of the official view - the pressure of a growing desire for greater freedom of thought and expression. Official Soviet art remains dreary and often downright bad; but one can occasionally see exhibitions by young artists who are seeking new and more adventurous paths. *Ivan the Terrible*, Part Two, was showing to crowded and excited audiences in Moscow when I was there. There is some evidence of increasing *avant-garde* tendencies, in the theatre and film worlds. The books of Malenkov and Kaganovich still remain in the libraries. And in certain fields the range of subjects which can be publicly discussed has been widened. It is still true, of course, that except for people who read foreign languages or listen to foreign broadcasts the information available about events inside and outside the U.S.S.R. is more or less restricted to what the government thinks it desirable for the people to know. And it is still true that monolithic unity has to be displayed on important policy questions: it is just as hard today to find an economist who disapproves of selling tractors to the collective farms as it was five years ago to find one who approved of it. The degree of freedom in such respects as these is still far below that which we are accustomed to accept as normal in Britain. But the Soviet citizen, of course, compares his present freedom not with freedom in Britain (which he does not properly understand), but with freedom in the U.S.S.R. before the twentieth congress. And he cannot help but be pleased with the comparison.

One of the touchstones here is the attitude towards the oppositionists of the 'twenties and 'thirties. Looking at the library catalogues, it is still quite impossible to find any evidence that these people ever existed. Specialists can get hold of their books, of course - but then up to a point they have always been able to get hold of them. ('Even ten years ago' said one economist proudly, 'I was able to get the works of Preobrazhensky in the Lenin Library.') I did get the impression, however, that these works are now being made somewhat more accessible. At one meeting, for example, someone remarked 'It's now becoming easier to get the books which were forbidden under the cult of the individual,' and no one objected to this way of putting it. And at an interview with a prominent historian of economic thought, I was given to understand that the problem of making a more balanced and objective assessment of the economic ideas of the oppositionists might fairly soon come on to the agenda. 'We're approaching this modern period very carefully,' he said. 'We're quite clear about the economic views of people like Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin and Ordzhonikidze, but we're not quite so clear about those of Bukharin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Quite a lot of scholars and post-graduate students are now studying the problems involved, and perhaps in a few years a discussion will be held. We are preparing for this already, especially in our institute, which will go ahead with a study of the modern period as soon as it's finished its present work on the imperialist period.' I was impressed by the lack of embarrassment in his reply: this was just another of those problems which they were gradually getting round to.

How has the anti-revisionist campaign affected the growth of freedom in the U.S.S.R.? So far as I could gather, the ordinary man in the street does not feel himself much less free as a result of it. So far as the intellectuals are concerned, however, the situation is very different. When I asked one quite responsible economist what he felt about it, he denied very firmly that it had meant any curtailment of freedom at all in the field of economics: on the contrary, he said, 'the number of discussions during the past year has been greater than ever before'. I did not like his unqualified denial, which I thought insincere (the Polish economists, as I shall describe later, were rather more honest); and I did not like the implied identification of discussion with freedom of discussion any more than I had liked it in 1954. It is true that the range of subjects thrown open for public discussion continues to increase - a year or two ago price policy under socialism was added to the list, and this year the problem of rent under socialism is due to be discussed. It is also true that in the case of many of the subjects of immediate interest to Soviet economists there has been no

reimposition of limitations on freedom of discussion and publication during the past year, and in the case of some (the law of value, for example) my impression was that there might even have been some improvement in the situation. But surely it can hardly be denied that as a result of the anti-revisionist campaign a Soviet economist is not today as free as he was a year ago to make an objective analysis of contemporary capitalism, or of Yugoslavian socialism, or of bourgeois economic theory. In the case of these quite crucial subjects, the 'Marxist-Leninist framework' within which discussion may proceed has substantially contracted.

The fact that freedom of discussion is being circumscribed in connection with these particular subjects seems to me to be something of a tragedy. If the speeches of men like Suslov and Mikoyan at the twentieth congress meant anything, it was that Marxists ought to start developing Marxism so as to bring it back into proper contact with reality. If Marxism was to survive and extend its influence, if it was really to be made a 'guide to action', they were in effect saying, strenuous efforts must be made to close the gap which had emerged between theory and reality, even though this obviously meant running the risk of 'revisionism' rearing its ugly head. Today, however, the job of developing Marxism has in the U.S.S.R. taken second place to the job of condemning most of those who have been trying to develop it. At the same time as the anti-revisionist campaign attacks those who by any standards can be said to have deserted Marxism, it also attacks many of those who are genuinely and sincerely attempting to carry out the tasks announced by Suslov and Mikoyan. When I asked one Soviet economist for the names of those foreign economists whom they regarded as particularly 'revisionist', he replied 'Djilas, Giolitti, Strachey, Gates and Gaitskell'. But the campaign does not confine itself to attacking these unfortunates. Anyone who suggests that the capitalist state may now be more able to control economic fluctuations than it used to be, or that the Yugoslavian experiment may have something to contribute to the theory of planning, or that some bourgeois economic concepts may be usefully employed to enrich Marxism, runs the risk of being condemned as a 'revisionist'. Once again, as so often in the past, the long-term development of science is to some extent being sacrificed to the short-term exigencies of Soviet foreign policy.

But even in the U.S.S.R. attitudes towards 'revisionism' are by no means uniform. In Poland I met a young economist who was introduced to me by a mutual friend as 'one of our best-known revisionists'. It appears that when a Polish translation of Keynes's *General Theory* appeared a year or two ago, this young man wrote an article on Keynes for a Polish economic journal. 'It really didn't

contain anything more than platitudes,' he said. 'But soon afterwards an article on *The Present Position of Economic Science in the People's Democracies* appeared in a Soviet journal. This article mentioned only four people - Marx, Keynes, Bohm-Bawerk and me. I was very severely criticised, and labelled a revisionist, partly because I had said that it might be possible to separate the scientific from the ideological elements in the work of Keynes, and partly because I had suggested that capitalist governments might have learned something from Keynes about how to control the economy. Well, some time after this I happened to be in Geneva, where I met the deputy-editor of the Soviet journal. I asked him why this rather harmless article of mine had been singled out for such severe criticism. 'Look here,' the deputy-editor said, 'don't you worry about it. Your article was very good indeed. The authors of the article attacking you are just a couple of damned dogmatists.'

In Poland, there did not seem to me at first sight to be very much difference between the present situation and that in 1956, when I last visited the country. The majority of the economists I met seemed to be putting forward much the same views as they had put forward then, during that memorable hey-day of free speech. There was obviously less sympathy for the Yugoslavian experiment than there had been then: but this, I was assured, was not because of 'pressure' but rather because they had now come to realise that the concrete economic results achieved by the Yugoslavian system were not satisfactory. The Polish controversy on 'the law of value under socialism' had now clearly changed its form, being less concerned with theoretical generalities and more concerned with the practical problems of price-fixation: but this seemed to me quite a natural and unexceptionable development. The presence of the arch-anti-revisionist of Poland at two meetings which I attended did not inhibit a number of economists from proclaiming very forcibly certain views which 300 miles to the east might well have led to their dismissal.

Nevertheless, some of the Polish economists were quite prepared to admit that there was now less freedom than there had been in 1956. 'Not much less, but certainly less', said one man, adding that things were still a lot better than they had been before 1956. Another economist elaborated upon the point. 'There hasn't been much curtailment of freedom to discuss issues on a high scientific level, even in economics', he said. 'The restrictions since Hungary have mainly affected discussions on a more popular level. You've got to be more careful now when you're publicly discussing issues of party policy and organisation, and so on.' He went on to draw an analogy between the attitude of the Polish government and the attitude of the Russian censor who let Marx's *Capital* through

because it was too difficult for the masses to understand. 'That's why we are still able to publish more or less what we like in our scientific journals,' he said. But he was by no means happy about the present situation. 'I can't imagine things staying just as they are now,' he said, 'and short of some big political change they may well get worse. We don't know what will happen about all this anti-revisionism business after our party congress.' And he went on to ask me about the *New Reasoner*.

The main issue which has divided Polish economists since 1956 is the question of how far and in what way Marxists should make use of economic concepts of bourgeois origin. ('Of course this is an issue only among Marxist economists,' someone reminded me. 'You have to remember that in Poland we have a large number of economists who aren't Marxists.') In essence, the quarrel concerns the problem of what 'Marxist economics' is, and what 'developing' it actually means. Some Poles take the line that 'developing' Marxist economics means keeping it on the basis of certain fundamental Marxist principles, such as emphasis on the relations of production and so on, but incorporating into it certain 'bourgeois' tools - for example, the concept of the margin, the multiplier, the accelerator, elasticity, etc. 'To call these concepts "un-Marxist" just because Marx, writing a hundred years ago, didn't use them,' said one economist, 'seems to me to be just silly. How could he have used them?' But he went on to remark that the majority of Polish economists unfortunately did not agree with him. The debate between the two sides seems to have been an interesting and useful one, particularly in its earlier stages, and in spite of the anti-revisionist campaign it is still continuing. Oskar Lange, for example, is writing a new textbook on political economy, some chapters of which have already been published, in which this issue is discussed. 'The book will be called "revisionist", of course,' said one economist. 'In fact the East Germans have already fixed this label on it.' And Lange has also been severely criticised by the arch-anti-revisionist of Poland whom I mentioned above. But the arch-anti-revisionist himself holds 'new' views on certain other matters of economic theory, for which he has in turn been severely criticised in an article by a Soviet economist. 'The Soviet article didn't go quite as far as to call him a revisionist,' I was told, 'but it was pretty obvious that they thought he was one. Revisionism, you see, is a geographical concept.'

And this is of course true, at any rate so far as Poland and the U.S.S.R. are concerned. Not only does the degree of tolerance afforded to 'revisionist' views vary widely from one country to the other, but the very concept of what is and what is not 'revisionist'

tends also to be different. This is due in part to the fact that the Polish economists are very much more familiar with western bourgeois thought than the Soviet economists are, so that the debate over 'revisionism' has assumed a rather different form in the two countries. My own personal experience in lecturing in the U.S.S.R. and Poland brought home to me very forcibly the geographical character of the concept of revisionism. In the U.S.S.R. my audiences were usually very tolerant, but whenever I strayed outside the strict boundaries of the Marxist-Leninist framework - and in particular whenever I tried to use a 'bourgeois' concept like supply price - there was something of a disturbance in the hall. My Soviet hosts could hardly have been more pleasant and generous to me than they were, but in the discussions on my lectures they made it fairly clear that they regarded some of my views as 'revisionist' - although naturally they were too polite actually to use that dirty word. In Poland, on the other hand, where I repeated one of my Moscow lectures, it was clear that many people regarded my views as smacking of the opposite sin of dogmatism. 'You are still sitting in the clouds of dogmatic Marxism,' said one economist in the discussion after the lecture. Maybe, in some curious dialectical way, they were both right.

How is the anti-revisionist campaign likely to develop? Clearly a great deal depends upon imponderables such as the international situation and the relations between the countries in the socialist camp. But there are also a number of less obvious forces at work which may eventually lead to an easing of the situation. First, there is the undoubted growth of freedom in a number of socialist countries since the twentieth congress. The appetite for freedom usually grows with what it feeds on, and we may surely expect increasing pressure to be exerted against the remaining citadels of the official view. Second, there is the fact that in certain countries where Marxism is influential, students and scholars are beginning to vote with their feet against the religious elements in vulgarised Marxism. In Japan, for example, I was told that many students are now turning away from Marxist economics because they find that it does not give satisfactory answers to certain important contemporary problems. In Poland I was told, in almost the same words, that a similar sort of thing was happening; and I have no doubt that it is also happening, though perhaps to a lesser extent, in the U.S.S.R. Third, there is the fact that what the Russians are fond of describing as 'life itself' will in the long run demand a development of Marxism in certain directions which are at present barred by the anti-revisionist campaign. 'How do they expect us to do our economic planning properly,' asked a Polish economist, 'without the concept of the margin, the idea of elasticity, and a certain

amount of demand analysis?' Already there is a considerable amount of interest in the socialist countries - and not least in the U.S.S.R. - in bourgeois work on such subjects as input-output analysis and national income accounting, and the demands of economic planning may well lead to an extension of this interest into other fields where bourgeois theory has made relevant contributions.

At the moment, the way in which the anti-revisionist campaign is being conducted is an object lesson in how to lose friends and alienate people. And its intensity unfortunately shows no signs of slackening: if the appetite for freedom grows with what it feeds on, so evidently does the appetite for witch-hunting. But forces such as those I have just described will, I think, win out in the long run. The trouble is, of course, that the long run may be very long indeed. The fact that the anti-revisionist campaign is in a certain sense a historical anachronism is no guarantee against its survival for some considerable time. The anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the 'forties was also a historical anachronism, but it did an immense amount of damage before 'life itself' succeeded in curbing its worst excesses. If there is anything to be learned from history about campaigns like these, it is surely that it is unsafe to leave it to history to stop them.