The Eighth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, held in Belgrade between December 7 and 13, was brought to a close with the following words of Tito: "No Congress becomes historic only because of the topics discussed and the decisions made at it, but rather through the manner in which these decisions are implemented." These words by the Yugoslav Party leader may well indicate what will determine future appraisal of the recent Party Congress' significance. As viewed today, however, its main importance appears to lie in the open, frank discussion of the problems and negative features of Yugoslav life which took place — much to the evident bewilderment of the Soviet-bloc delegates present.

Leaving aside the question of future implementation of the decisions outlined in the Congress Resolution, it can be said that the Eighth Party Congress provided no sensational or unexpected results. The first three postwar Congresses (the Fifth in July 1948, the Sixth in November 1952 and the Seventh in April 1958) were, in international terms, of much greater significance. The reason is quite clear: at all these Congresses, anti-Soviet slogans were inscribed on the Party banners. The Eighth Party Congress was the first to be attended by Soviet and East European delegates, i.e. was the first Party Congress without any anti-Moscow overtones. The strong anti-Chinese position taken at the Congress could not arouse the same interest, either in Yugoslavia or abroad, as the anti-Soviet one had in the past.
This automatically turned the Eighth Congress into a platform for discussing largely domestic issues and for seeking solutions to an ever increasing number of internal problems. With the exception of China, which is safely distant, nobody today -- for the first time since 1948 -- represents a threat to Yugoslavia's existence. On the contrary, it must even be claimed that both the West, led by the United States, and the East, led by the Soviet Union, are competing with each other to help Tito and his brand of Communism. If any danger does exist, it is to be found in Yugoslavia itself, in the Party and its weaknesses. This could clearly be seen at the Congress.

Self-Management and Party

It is quite understandable that the Western journalists attending the Eighth Party Congress in Belgrade were chiefly interested in Yugoslavia's present attitude toward the developments within the international Communist movement. Tito and the Yugoslav Communists were the first to leave the Soviet bloc. This enabled them to develop Marxism-Leninism "in a creative manner," introducing a great number of new ideas and practical measures. The Eighth Congress demonstrated once again clearly that the Yugoslav Communists are several years ahead of the other ruling Parties as far as the "creative application" of the Marxist and Leninist teachings is concerned.

This, of course, is only one side of the coin. The other side is that the courageouslyness of the Yugoslav Communists has provoked troubles not only for other Communist countries, but also for Yugoslavia itself. These troubles are manifold. Some of them have been successfully solved; others have, on the contrary, become more complicated than ever. The split in Yugoslavia is not only to be found at the nationality or ideological level, but, so to speak, within each individual Communist. Even though he may fully support the ruling Communist regime, he is not necessarily sure about the way in which this regime can best be preserved. It is therefore not surprising that the Yugoslav Communists have in all sincerity favored greater democratization and liberalization in the economy, and at the same time a "strong-hand" line in the Party.

Not only Tito's speech, but also those by Kardelj, Rankovic, Vlahovic and many of the delegates who spoke at the Congress, demonstrated how serious this fundamental dilemma of the Yugoslav Communists is. The system of workers'
self-management, which is the pride of all the Yugoslav Communists, their "baby," as it were, has moved the country in a direction bringing the Party into serious conflict with Marxism and Leninism. All the greater, therefore, have been the Yugoslav leaders' efforts to prove that precisely the Yugoslav system is the true Marxist-Leninist one.

One of the main by-products of all these efforts has been the growing intensification of the discussion about the leading role of the Party. No other ruling Party has thus far found it necessary to discuss openly the question whether or not the Communist Party is entitled to lead or rule. For no other system or organization in the countries ruled by Communist Parties has been allowed to challenge the Party and its rule. With their workers' self-management system, the Yugoslav leaders have not only greatly loosened the unity of state power and Party ideology, but have placed the Party on the defensive: instead of ruling unchallenged, the Party has been compelled almost daily to persuade people that it is leading and ruling and that the people should recognize this fact. In many respects, the system of workers' self-management has grown too big to be treated as a little child by its parents.

This was illustrated by a cartoon entitled "Anxious Governesses," which appeared in the December 13 issue of the Belgrade daily Politika. It shows an overgrown child, who has just leaped out of his baby carriage, running, driver's license in hand, toward a waiting brand-new car, while his two erstwhile governesses -- administration and bureaucracy -- watch astonished.

Of course, not only "administration and bureaucracy" are trying to restrain the grown-up "child" of the workers' self-management system. There are also the forces of centralization, which have been very active in recent years in Yugoslavia, both in the economic and ideological field. These forces, gathered, by and large, around Tito's deputy Aleksandar Rankovic, have insisted on unity as Yugoslavia's chief source of strength, and, in general, have rejected pluralism as detrimental to the Yugoslav cause. Even though the forces of decentralization have also favored unity, their insistence on toleration of political and doctrinal differences, in the form of a full-fledged struggle of opinions, has led to a situation where neither of the two forces has actually been winning the upper hand. The resulting stalemate has caused many difficulties for the Yugoslav economy. For however
economically sound the measures were that were proclaimed
to solve the existing problems, their implementation in most
cases proved almost impossible. Recently a Yugoslav econ-
omist wrote: "While bureaucracy represents for one group
of people the source of all misfortunes and difficulties,
and all its fire has therefore been directed against it, a
second group of people see the root of all the difficulties
in liberalism and anarchism..."¹

As was to be expected, the Eighth Party Congress could
not provide a definitive answer to the dilemma of which school
of thinking is correct. Instead, a compromise solution was
found, at least theoretically, according to which neither side
is right or wrong. The Congress Resolution states that
"a democratic struggle of ideas is indispensable for the
development of socialist relationships." In his speech,
Rankovic said that "unity must be the fruit of a democratic
contest of opinions both within the League of Communists
and on a broader front."² However, he qualified the nature
of this "contest of opinion," when he raised his voice against
"various petty-bourgeois, self-styled 'champions of freedom'..."
who exploit "the authority of the League of Communists...
in order to further some particular aim..." These people have,
Rankovic asserted, advocated the idea that the Party should
be organized "according to the principle of self-management,"
a view "which is usually accompanied by the advocacy of the
legalization of the 'rights of the minority.'"³

¹ Milan Knezevic in the Sarajevo daily Oslobodjenje of
29/30 November and 1 December 1964.

² Borba, 9 December 1964.

³ Ibid.
Fundamental Dilemma Remains

If Ranković and his group of centralists succeeded, as was to be expected, in having the principle of democratic centralism accepted as the basis of Party unity, the liberals, headed by the Croatian leader Vladimir Bakarić, succeeded -- also as expected -- in having workers' self-management proclaimed "the irrevocable basis of life" and "freer market relations" as the only way to solve the existing economic problems.

Even though the official Yugoslav comment on the Congress decisions insists that democratic centralism, as the basis of the Party life, and workers' self-management, as the basis of the State and economic life, complement each other, it is clear that these two lines are actually opposed. For if Ranković and his group really wanted to adapt the Party to a situation in which a "democratic contest of ideas" takes place, then democratic centralism would become meaningless. The principle of democratic centralism itself may someday prove beneficial for the liberals, who are succeeding in mobilizing large popular forces for their idea of greater freedom -- and may thus themselves eventually become a majority.

The centralists have thus far been able to maintain their position because of the nationality problem in Yugoslavia. They believe that they have full support of such underdeveloped sections of the country as Macedonia and Montenegro. Out of the 19 members of the newly elected Executive Committee (the equivalent of the Politburo of other Communist Parties), at least 12 belong to the group of centralists: four Serbs, four Montenegrins, two Bosnian Serbs and two Macedonians. The liberal group consists of four Croats, including Tito, and three Slovenes. Even if the minority in this body does not have the right to defend its liberal ideas once the majority has imposed its own views, in everyday life it will still be impossible to prevent the self-management system from becoming "the irrevocable basis of life." For though the struggle at the top level might in most cases end with the victory of the Ranković group, at the republican or communal level, the trends toward further decentralization and liberalization are too strong to be checked permanently. To be sure the resistance of the centralists certainly could slow down the process of decentralization, at least in some parts of the country, but
not necessarily in such advanced regions as Croatia and Slovenia.

Ranković and his group insist on a "strong-arm policy" in order to eliminate manifestations of nationalism, chauvinism and localism. This, however, to quote a Party theoretician from Macedonia, Kiro Hadzi-Vasilev, can only be done "without restricting in any way freedom of expression." In the opinion of Kiro Hadzi-Vasilev, who spoke at the Eighth Party Congress, "the only way to avoid this danger is to view all ideological-political problems through the prism of objective difficulties." Hadzi-Vasilev also pointed out that "one should draw a line between the natural strivings of individuals aimed at fulfilling their personal interests, on the one hand, and manifestations of egotism, on the other."5

This leads once again to what the Belgrade Professor Mihailo Marković described as the fundamental dilemma: namely, whether even limited forms of democratization, coupled with the mechanism of the market economy, must not necessarily lead to the erosion of the Party monopoly. The liberals in the Yugoslav Party believe that Party power is not endangered by democratization. Moreover, they insist that the very change of the Party's name to League of Communists has long since transformed the essence itself of the Party as a leading force. Further liberalization and democratization, they believe, can only help the Party to strengthen its power, not in the old centralistic way, but rather through the full support of broad popular masses.

As already said, the Eighth Party Congress in Belgrade did not give a carte blanche to either the centralists or the

5) Ibid.
6) See Background Information Yugoslavia, "Yugoslav Party Congress - A Fundamental Dilemma," 8 December 1964, by Slobodan Stanković.
liberals. Tito's opening and closing speeches clearly indicated that as long as he is alive the two opposing wings in the Party will continue to fight each other, with each side winning occasional victories. In the meantime the rejuvenation of the Party and State apparatus will proceed, and young Communists in Yugoslavia are normally inclined to follow a more liberal line.

The forthcoming changes in the economic system -- the revaluation of the dinar, the modifications of the banking and credit system, the raising of workers' wages and the lowering of taxation -- will, as Tito said, show whether the decisions adopted at the Eighth Party Congress will gain historical significance or not. It is true that the Yugoslav Communists have demonstrated greater realism than their colleagues in other Communist countries, but only in the course of the next two or three years will it be possible to see whether this realism can help the country solve its present problems and thus whether the "Yugoslav road to socialism" is viable.

Slobodan Stanković

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