YUGOSLAV PARTY CONGRESS: NEW PARTY STATUTES

The closing sentence of the Yugoslav Party Program adopted at the Seventh Party Congress in Ljubljana in April 1958 read: "Nothing that has been created should be so sacred to us that it cannot be transcended and superseded by something still freer, more progressive and more human." It is to this principle that an ever growing chorus of Yugoslav Communists has turned to justify demands for further change in the past seven years.

The new Party Statutes proposed to the Eighth Party Congress also seem to be inspired by this formulation. Indeed, Lazar Kolisevski, the Politburo member who proposed to the Congress on December 9 the draft text of the revised Statutes, claimed that "they were actually quite new statutes."

The official explanation of why the Party Statutes had to be changed has claimed that there was a need "to adjust as far as possible the method and content of the Party's work to the level attained in political, economic and social development." This is a further sign that all new theories introduced by the Yugoslav Party have reflected the pragmatic experiences of the country.


Positive Aspects Of The Statutes

The new Party Statutes may be considered a compromise between the forces which demand that the self-management system be introduced also into the Party, and those which insist that much too much freedom has been allowed. Neither side has succeeded in completely gaining the upper hand. The suggestion that the self-management system be made a leading principle in Party life has been rejected "as but one more attempt to introduce "through the back door" the multi-party system."

On the other hand, a concession was made to those people "who insisted on the legalization of the creation of different groups [In the Party] and on emphasizing the relationship between majority and minority." In this connection, the third paragraph of Article 3 of the new Statutes, Kolishevski said, provides that "every member of the League of Communists has the right to make, on the basis of practical experience, remarks and proposals to [Party] organizations and leaderships in the course of the implementation of views and decisions that have been already adopted." In other words, "once made, decisions should not be made into a fetish to so great a degree as to be beyond all criticism."

This aspect of the new Party Statutes is certainly an encouraging one. It should be noted that, in contrast to the old Statutes, which restricted criticism of Party leaders and functionaries, the new Statutes give every member the right to criticize not only the behavior of every ordinary Party member, but also that of every Party leader and functionary.

Another positive feature of the new Statutes is the system of rotation in Party bodies of all types, including the Central Committee. At least one-fourth of the present 135 Central Committee members will be replaced, and a further 20 added, so that the new Central Committee will include 155 members. Voting for the members of the Central Committee will be by secret ballot.

The new Party Statutes provide that in the future Party conferences can be convoked not only at the federal but also at the republican level. A Party conference is a kind of a "little Congress." In the past such conferences were held in

3) Vjesnik u srijedu, Zagreb, 16 September 1964, in the article "What is New in the New Statutes."

4) Ibid.

5) Ibid.
the form of "extended" meetings of the Central Committee. Under the new Statutes, these conferences can be convoked by the different Central Committees "to discuss especially significant problems." At the same time the provision providing for the convocation of extraordinary Congresses has not been dropped.

In the course of the discussion of the Draft Statutes, there were attempts aimed at "diminishing the role of the Politburo while enlarging the role of the Central Committee plenums," but they were rejected. On the other hand, it was also advocated in the discussion that "the Politburo become broader bodies," i.e. with a larger membership than heretofore. It remains to be seen whether this latter suggestion will be accepted, as it was submitted for further discussion to the Congress Commission dealing with the new Statutes.

Finally, the new Party Statutes omit the formulation contained in the old Statutes about the incompatibility of membership in the Party with religious worship. Although there was strong opposition to omitting this statement from the new Statutes, it was nevertheless dropped.

Democratic Centralism And Self-Management

Needless to say, democratic centralism was a focal point in the discussions concerning the new Party Statutes. This

6) Marijan Cvetkovic, the Organizational Secretary of the League of Communists of Croatia, in a talk broadcast by Radio Zagreb on 12 October 1964.

7) Ibid.

8) According to the Belgrade daily Politika of 7 December 1964, a new law is being prepared by the Government in Belgrade which will liberalize the legal statutes of religious communities in Yugoslavia. There will be greater freedom for the religious press and for confessional schools, while the age by which children have to decide whether or not they want to be baptized or attend religious instruction has now been raised from 10 to 14.
whole problem in Yugoslavia has a rather long history. After the Sixth Party Congress (held in Zagreb in November 1952) the Yugoslav leaders saw how difficult it was "to replace the method of command by the method of persuasion." Here again, the system of workers' self-management greatly contributed to the general confusion among the Party's rank and file, especially at the time of Milovan Djilas' famous Borba articles of November and December 1953. Most of the Party members were incapable of adjusting themselves to the new requirements. At the time there were two types of Party members: 1) Those who had been raised in the Stalinist era but, led by Tito, had revolted against Moscow; and 2) People who had joined the Party after Tito's expulsion from Cominform. The first group was educated to command rather than persuade; the majority of the other group were opportunists who had joined the Party in the hope of making their career. From the Party point of view they were capable neither of commanding nor of persuading.

In the meantime a third group of Communists has come to the fore: young people who were educated completely during the period when the struggle against Stalin was at its height. These young people have shown little interest for democratic centralism, for they had been taught for years that any orders coming from any center were in opposition to the system of workers' self-management. They have thus acquired an almost instinctive distrust of anything which, in their eyes, smacks of too great an insistence on strict discipline. Rankovic admitted in his speech at the Congress that since the Seventh Party Congress in April 1958, the percentage of young members of up to 25 years of age had declined from 23.6 to 13.6 per cent. By means of the system of rotation, helping young people take over various Party functions, Rankovic believes that the number of young people in the Party will increase. This, however, is only one side of the coin. The other is that while young people will rejuvenate the Party in the physical sense, they will also be bringing dangerous ideas as part of their luggage. Even though many of these young people do not like Milovan Djilas personally, they are imbued with Djilasist ideas to so great an extent that they represent for the Party a potentially explosive centrifugal force which might even eventually endanger the very existence of the regime, as we know it today.

9) Mito Hadzi-Vasilev, a Macedonian Party theoretician, in the Skopje daily Nova Makedonija of 1 November 1964. His article was entitled "From the Sixth Congress to the New Statutes of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia."
Djilasism In Action

The Party's leadership's answer to this danger is democratic centralism. This is less the invention of the more dogmatic elements around Rankovic than the result of generally recognized urgent need to create a counterbalance to the idea of rotation, which has its roots in the system of the workers' self-management. The majority of the "angry young men" of Yugoslavia cannot accept democratic centralism in its present form. They are fascinated by the idea that "full freedom in the struggle of opinions" must not be restricted by anything or anybody. For this reason, they argue, "the process of the development of the social idea cannot be made subordinate to democratic centralism, which ends every discussion with a binding decision." In this way "the ideas and views defended by minority groups [within the Party] are put in an unequal position -- only because the majority did not understand them." 10

Hadzi-Vasilev asserts that "a confrontation between the struggle of ideas and democratic centralism destroys the ability of the League of Communists to assume and bear any responsibility for the implementation of the political line." Without democratic centralism, tendencies demanding free groups on the basis of different views, and even in the form of separate organizational groupings, are openly coming to the fore. There exists "a thesis that our development does not exclude the possibility of the existence of several Marxist-oriented Parties." 11

The new Party Statutes are designed to ensure carefully that the "rotating" young people do not introduce the heresy of a "multi-party system," even if they have only "Marxist-oriented Parties" in mind. On the other hand, there is another feature of the new Party Statutes which deserves attention: the work of the Communists will in the future not take place behind closed doors, but will be public. The Party members will not only be responsible for their work before the Party, but also "before the working people in the enterprises in which they work," Kolisevski said.

10) Ibid.
11) (In his original article, as published in Nova Makedonija, Hadzi-Vasilev claimed that all these ideas had their roots "in the phenomenon of Djilasism." In the Serbo-Croat version of his article published in Komunist on 12 November 1964, the paragraph on Djilasism was omitted.)
However, it is very difficult to demand full responsibility from each individual Party member and at the same time insist on his dependence even on non-Party people. Hadzi-Vasilev explains this dilemma as follows:

It has been impossible to maintain any longer the higher level of political responsibility of the Communists...in the system of workers' self-management, which favors both self-management rights of working people and creative independence of political factors (i.e. the Party), -- by strengthening the responsibility of the Communists before the Party, as the agents of the implementation of the policies of the League of Communists. In other words, by demanding discipline in relations vis-a-vis the leadership...  

In spite of this demand for discipline, in the past the Party has done one thing and "the majority of Communists quite different things." The new Party Statutes intend to change "all present relationships within the League of Communists," placing the emphasis on individual members in lower (opstina) Party organizations.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussion, the new Statutes of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia represent an attempt to preserve the unity of the Party by creating a balance between those forces in it which are calling for firm central control and those which stress the need for a greater freedom. It should be kept in mind, however, that, as Hadzi-Vasilev puts it, "no document can by itself produce a desired result." Despite their important role in the past, the Party Statutes have never been able to preserve the ideological unity of the Party. For disciplinary rules alone cannot bring about such unity in a Party which for years has itself allowed its members to call openly for a "withering away of the Party."

Slobodan Stankovic

12) Ibid.