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MOSCOW'S SEARCH FOR UNITY AT THE CONGRESS

In the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the 23rd Congress of the CPSU was by and large a non-event; that is, it was distinguished by developments which did not take place. It might be appropriate to draw an analogy between the Congress and an experimental musical composition of recent notoriety in which the pianist is commissioned to open ceremoniously the keyboard and after a precisely specified lapse of time to close it -- without playing a single note. A musical non-event takes place, not by accident or coincidence, but by design. The hearer is confronted by carefully orchestrated silence. Such was the case in Moscow during the past two weeks.

The Policy of Restraint

The leadership of the CPSU took an explicit decision to treat the Sino-Soviet dispute on the lowest possible key. The conduct of the Congress both manifested this decision and, by all indications, assured its continued application in the near future. The tone was set by the report of First Secretary Brezhnev which indicated in subdued terms that relations between Moscow and Peking are bad, that Peking has rebuffed the most reasonable proposals for containing the conflict, but that Moscow remains prepared to enter any discussions and entertain any proposals that do not presuppose basic ideological concessions. By underscoring its continued adherence to the lines of the 20th and 22nd Party Congresses, to the principles of peaceful coexistence, and the priority of internal economic construction, the CPSU has indicated its refusal to renounce one iota of all

that Peking labels "modern revisionism." In so doing, Moscow has rendered it certain that moderate and conciliatory tactics toward Peking will have not the least effect in healing the breach. However, there is every indication that the Soviets will continue to pursue their policy of moderation and conciliation in public.

Brezhnev permitted himself only the most fleeting and indirect criticism of Chinese "hegemonism and chauvinism"; and while these allusions were seconded in the concluding resolution of the Congress, they hardly constitute any significant departure from the policy of "no public polemics" which the Soviets have attempted to pursue, with several lapses, since the removal of Khrushchev.

Nevertheless, "moderation and conciliation" are by no means the whole story of Moscow's Sino-Soviet policy as it stands at present. The rest of the story is contained in the secret circular letter which the Soviets presented to members of the CPSU and an undetermined number of other parties. If the authenticity of the secret letter, leaked through East Berlin, can be accepted -- and there is no evidence to discredit it -- the real picture of China and the real appraisal of Sino-Soviet relations entertained in Moscow are something quite different from those cast on the public screen of "moderation and conciliation". The authentic China in the minds of Soviet leaders is a China which has declared political war on the Soviet Union and the international communist movement and which is driven not by the desire to defend ideological purity but by the desire for national power and hegemony pure and simple. As seen by Moscow, the real China is not prepared to make any concessions even in the interest of tactical unity against the United States.

As if to underscore this assessment, the Chinese have, in their message to the 21st Conference of the New Zealand Communist Party, once again affirmed their intention to draw "lines of demarcation between true Marxist-Leninists and the modern revisionists."¹ Does not this state of affairs render the line of "moderation and conciliation" one of appeasement? Is there not a contradiction between the urgency of the secret circular letter and the tepid pronouncements of the 23rd CPSU Congress?

The contradiction is, of course, only apparent. A public posture designed to convey Moscow's supposed willingness to conciliate China and eagerness to avoid an open exacerbation of relations is, like the "united action" slogan, part of the CPSU leadership's effort to contain and counter the Chinese challenge. It is likely that, as these words are written, Peking's polemicists are preparing to make the very same observation. Since Khrushchev's fall, the Soviet leaders have

1. Hsinhua, 9 April 1966.

operated on the eminently correct premise that a policy of open show-down against China can only be counter-productive. During Khrushchev's tenure, such a policy not only failed to move China favorably, but it forced the CPSU to share at least half the blame for splitting the movement and it alienated a long list of ostensibly pro-Soviet parties. It further prevented successful courting of parties leaning toward Peking. In its year and a half in office, the new Soviet leadership has avoided these pitfalls with notable success. It would have been surprising therefore if the 23rd Congress had authorized some sort of return to the policy of open confrontation with China. Yet, without a doubt, the CPSU is striving with subtler tactics to forge a front against Peking. By assuming a moderate and reasonable public posture it hopes that the Chinese leaders will isolate themselves.

The crucial question is how far the CPSU is willing to go in augmenting this process. The secret circular letter indicates that the Soviets are unprepared to see the full dimensions of Chinese policy remain unspecified and undisclosed to other parties. It is of great significance that the letter was drawn up and distributed at about the same time invitations were being sent out for a bloc-wide conference on the Vietnam question. Even had such a conference not publicly criticized China, delegates would have been appraised of the current status of the Sino-Soviet dispute and their very presence at a conference would have served to underscore Chinese isolation. In large part because the North Vietnamese could not be persuaded to take such a clear stand against China, the conference failed to materialize. It was then the Soviet hope that the 23rd Party Congress would serve as a substitute manifestation of international communist unity against Chinese factionalism.

The Tally for Unity

As might have been expected, the propaganda media of the Soviet Union are already trumpeting the 23rd Congress as a dramatic demonstration of proletarian unity. "By universal recognition," proclaimed a participant in Radio Moscow's weekly international discussion, "the distinguishing feature of the Congress was the mighty international solidarity of communists, gathered from all corners of the globe."² One may also expect the Soviets to attach the 23rd Congress to a growing list of events which have, according to Moscow, manifested communist unity: the Havana conference of November 1964, the 1 March Consultative Meeting in Moscow, the Brussels conference of European parties (sic.), and the Prague commemoration of the 7th Comintern Congress. But like these other "unity events", the 23rd Congress established a mixed record, to say the least.

2. Radio Moscow "Discussion at the Round Table", 10 April 1966.

The positive side of the ledger is not to be underemphasized. By Soviet count, 86 Communist and so-called revolutionary-democratic parties sent delegations to the Congress. Of those which were given the floor to address the congress, all spoke with varying fervor for the international communist unity. The great coup for the Soviets was, of course, the appearance of high-level delegations from North Korea and North Vietnam, in spite of Peking's denunciation of the Congress. China's displeasure with the behavior of its erstwhile allies is clearly registered in the admonition of Liu Ning-yi, heading Peking's delegation to the New Zealand CP Conference in Auckland, that "true" Marxist-Leninists "must in no circumstances prettify" [modern revisionists] and so help [them] deceive the people of the Soviet Union and the world." In Chinese terms, the two delegations from Vietnam were certainly guilty of "prettifying" the USSR by their profuse gratitude for Soviet assistance against the United States.

But for all these achievements, the negative side of the Congress's record is not inconsiderable. In no formal sense could the CPSU Congress be considered an international communist conclave for it issued no joint appeals or statements of any sort. Such consultations among parties as appear to have taken place were strictly bi-lateral or at least limited, and the hurried departure of most delegations after the Congress has laid to rest any lingering rumors that Moscow might attempt some sort of international meeting in its wake. What is more, the Soviet proposal for a new international conference "when the time is ripe", made by Brezhnev and the Congress's concluding resolution, failed to find any widespread support.⁴ Among ruling parties, even though several leveled indirect criticism at Chinese policy, not one mentioned the need for a new international conference. Thus the fear that a new conference might lead to some form of organizational discipline against China remains strong. Significantly, visiting delegations called with equal frequency for "equality, mutual respect, and non-interference" in internal party affairs as for international unity. In addition, it should be noted that the Vietnamese delegations, while calling for international unity, studiously avoided endorsing the "united action" slogan so dispised by Peking. Thus, whatever Radio Moscow may say about the strong desire for unity manifested at the congress, the parties represented are hardly pulling in unison toward their declared goal. Each has its own interests to protect and unity continues to be interpreted in the light of these interests.

3. Hsinhua, 9 April 1966.

4. Waldek Rochet, Chairman of the French CP, endorsed the proposal as did Victorio Godoviglia, head of the Argentinian CP. Godoviglia's statement was by far the stronger in that it called for a meeting even in the absence of some parties. Pravda, 4 April 1966. The full list of speakers supporting a new international conference must await receipt of further full texts of speeches delivered at the Congress.

Polemics Under Wraps

Significant differences of political line emerged from the speeches of various foreign delegations at the Congress. These differences indicate how superficial is the substantive unity of those parties which regard themselves, if not pro-Soviet, at least as opposing Chinese factionalism. The speech of Armando Hart Davalos, head of the Cuban CP's delegation, was perhaps the most striking manifestation of the divergence of views which the Soviets so blandly attempt to bring under the umbrella of "solidarity".² Davalos delivered himself of what can be termed without exaggeration a frontal assault on Soviet policy toward the so-called national-liberation revolution. The attention of observers was immediately drawn to his remarks on Vietnam in which he called for "expending all available resources and assuming any necessary risks" to turn North Vietnam into a "graveyard for American aircraft." This line, an obvious criticism of Soviet caution in Vietnam, is not new, however, and Davalos appropriately quoted from a speech of 13 March 1965 by Fidel Castro to the same effect. However, he went further than the limited issue of Vietnam, even though he explicitly labeled Vietnam a "question of principle"; i.e., a test of the Soviet Union's revolutionary credentials. Alluding to the recently held Tri-continental Conference of Havana, he proclaimed, "The ideas, tactics, and methods which arose in the 20-year [post-war] period have proved outdated." This was stated after Brezhnev and a host of other Soviet spokesmen had expressed complete satisfaction with the revolutionary methods and achievements of the past. The Tri-continental conference, Davalos lectured, had established "the right of the people to make revolution, to pose revolutionary violence against imperialist violence, to support armed uprising as a method of struggle..." He continued by arguing that the current situation in the world called for "violent militant action on the part of the revolutionary vanguard and the popular masses. Compromise and passivity in the face of violence...will never be a revolutionary strategy." The situation in Latin America, particularly, "speaks with utter clarity of the necessity to counterpose to imperialism the revolutionary violence of the popular masses." "We stand on the brink of momentous years," he thundered. "The example of Cuba has made it clear that the question of the seizure of power by the working class and the victory of the socialist revolution on the Latin American continent depends mainly on subjective factors, on the decisiveness of the vanguard, on the readiness to conquer or die." "The Cuban people headed by their Communist Party, not hesitating before any effort, risk or sacrifice, will fight with all its powers for the cause of revolution, for the cause of socialism and communism."

One can well imagine that this outburst from a relative non-entity, a callow youth among the graying giants of international communism, was met, as reported, by "animation in the hall." Of parliamentary roads to power, of peaceful coexistence, of revolutionary caution and other tactical preferences of the

Soviet Union, the delegate from Havana had nothing to say. That the Cubans favor violent over peaceful methods of revolutionary action is, of course, not new to the Soviet leaders. That Castro should have dispatched a spring chicken to lecture the Soviet Politburo on the proper roads to power, however, must have reminded Moscow anew of the problems involved in dealing with its obstreperous Caribbean ally.

Rebuttal of the Cuban line was not taken up directly by any Soviet spokesman; but the task was tactfully performed by other Latin American delegates, notably by Luis Corvalan, General Secretary of the Chilean Communist Party.⁶ After pointed criticism of China for manifesting hegemonial ambitions toward other parties, he hoisted polemical cudgels against his Cuban colleague. Sooner or later, he argued, all Latin American countries will "follow the example of Cuba". But, he added, communists face "difficult and complicated labors which will be more or less protracted." He then outlined his party's policy of alliance with other political forces of Chile and qualified cooperation with the ruling Christian-Democratic Party of Eduardo Frei, a frequent target of Cuban reproaches. "We must not forget," admonished Corvalan, "the necessity of correctly evaluating circumstances, of avoiding subjectivism..."

The Supremacy of Tactics

"Here there arises an important question of principle: How to interpret internationalism?" This is the way Lenin posed the problem of communist international relations in 1922. He could very well be speaking in 1966, for the question has hardly lost any of its importance after more than forty years. During its entire existence the world communist movement has had only one operative theory of international relations between parties and party-states: Stalinism. Stalinism and its iron interparty discipline are dead beyond recall. What survives is a mere verbal shell called "the principles of Marxism-Leninism" or the "norms of inter-party relations" or "the terms of the 1957 and 1960 statements." The prevailing disorder within the communist movement is ample testimony to the inadequacy of these verbal forms as a real guiding theory of communist international relations. Like a ghost from the Comintern past, Janos Kadar pleaded at the 23rd CPSU Congress that loyalty to the USSR and its interests is still the true test of internationalism. But for whom did he speak: He certainly did not speak for the Cubans, who have well-placed doubts about the revolutionary enthusiasm of the USSR. He certainly did not speak for North Vietnam or North Korea, whose balancing acts between Moscow and Peking have lately assumed the quality of comic opera. Did he speak for Rumania or the Italian Communist Party? Did he really, in the final analysis, speak for his own party?

6. Pravda, 3 April 1966.

Of the monolithism of the past only one vestige remains. It is the feeling among all parties which came to Moscow that, somehow, the communist movement ought to be unified. Among the ruling parties this feeling is compounded by a fear that continued international disunity will eventually give rise to a challenge to their legitimacy as autocratic oligarchies; but however desirable unity appears, there has never been such a wide gap between what is desirable and what is possible in international communism.