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CZECHOSLOVAKIA CONTRADICTS CHINESE
ON "PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM"

An interesting phenomenon in the present phase of the Sino-Soviet dispute is the eagerness of certain smaller parties to assist one or the other of the main contestants while trying to prove with their own individual example certain points under debate. Such help was quite recently given to the Soviet side by a Czech article published in the theoretical monthly, Nova Mysl. The article, written for the 15th anniversary of the February events of 1948, tries to support the Khrushchevian argument on one of the most debated theoretical issues of the conflict: the problem of "peaceful transition" to socialism.

The debate on this point has been going on since Khrushchev, at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, first advanced his new thesis that in some countries, and under favorable conditions, a communist seizure of power might take place without violent upheaval and civil war as a peaceful revolution, carried out with the help of legal parliamentary institutions. During the years that followed, this thesis was subjected to heated attacks from the Chinese side. In the course of the debate the Chinese communists ridiculed Khrushchev on the basis of his "creative" application of Marxism-Leninism, and argued that in the process of the transition from capitalism to socialism it was necessary to make a revolution that would smash the bourgeois state machine and replace bourgeois dictatorship with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Without a revolution of that sort, the Chinese maintained, all talk about socialist transformation remains nothing more than talk.

The main argument that the Chinese brought up to make their point especially biting, was that although a peaceful transition would be perfectly desirable, it is not likely to take place. At any rate, there has been no precedent to such an event in the history of the communist movement. They expressed this opinion recently in a long polemic article against Togliatti and the revisionist course of the Italian communists.

"From the Marxist-Leninist point of view, it would naturally be in the interest of the proletariat and the entire people if peaceful transition could be realized. Whenever the possibility for peaceful transition appears in a given country, the communists should strive for its realization. After all, possibility and reality, the wish and its fulfillment, are two different things. Hitherto history has not witnessed a single example of

peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism...."1

The argument cited above has proved to be a strong one. The Russian reply a week later was a great deal less convincing. Instead of giving an example for peaceful transition -- a very difficult task indeed -- they tried cleverly to go around the subject by hiding behind the prestige of Marx and Engels and carrying the argument to an entirely different field.

"In their opposition to the thesis of variety of forms of transition to socialism, the dogmatists usually invoke the following argument: 'Up to our days, history has not yet known a single instance of peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism.' But had Marx and Engels proceeded from such 'argumentation,' they could not have drawn the conclusion concerning the inevitability of the victory of socialism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, because it did not then exist as yet anywhere in the world. The force of Marxist-Leninist theory lies in its ability to make a profound analysis of the key features of an epoch, and to draw from this analysis conclusions lighting the way for the revolutionary forces for decades to come. The dogmatists seek to orient the fraternal parties in all circumstances, under all conditions, towards armed struggle for power only. These views deviate from Leninism...."2

At the same time, the Russians also counterattacked, accusing the Chinese of trying to force their violent, dogmatic formula on other parties and thus setting up the CCP as a "teacher of all communist parties."

"Revolutionary theory can provide only orientation, and it is up to the proletariat of each country itself, and above all to its communist vanguard, to determine the forms and methods of struggle to be chosen by the proletariat of the given country in the specific historical conditions. To believe that a recipe for a socialist revolution can be invented to suit all times and all countries, and to thrust it upon the fraternal parties operating in the specific conditions of their countries, is to do a harmful thing, to display haughtiness alien to communists, to set oneself as a teacher of all communist parties, and a teacher divorced from life, at that, and therefore incapable of offering anything but dogmatic formulas."3

1 "The Differences Between Comrade Togliatti and Us," People's Daily, 31 December 1962.

2 Pravda, 7 January 1963.

3 Pravda, 7 January 1963.

In the fourth place, it is pointed out, the peaceful transition was in no way incidental: it was a well thought out course, and any other (violent) course would have led to disastrous consequences.

"...A thorough examination of all the factors involved has led to the conclusion that although the favorable factors predominated, their predominance was not of a kind which would make it appear auspicious for carrying through the socialist revolution in Czechoslovakia with one blow. This conclusion did not arise from any fear or overestimation of imperialism and of the strength of the internal bourgeoisie, nor from any unwillingness to make sacrifices. It was the result of a sober appraisal of the balance of power within the country and in the world."

Should anyone miss the point the Czechoslovak communists wished to make in proving the possibility of such peaceful transition, the assertion that their experience could be applied in the case of other countries, too, disperses any illusion.

"To the Czechoslovak people and the progressive world public, February 1948 served and still serves primarily as a test confirming the correctness of the policy of a creative and Marxist approach to socialist revolution. Hence it is still a live and inexhaustible source from which we can draw valuable knowledge for the present practical work of our Party and contribute to the experience of the entire world revolutionary movement. Today, when it is again necessary to defend the Marxist theory of revolution against revisionist and dogmatist distortions, it will do no harm to return to these events."

Unfortunately, the dogmatists (and not the revisionists) to whom the above remarks are undoubtedly addressed, might not be entirely impressed by the force of the argument itself. It is difficult to forget that the "peaceful transition" in Czechoslovakia was effected under very peculiar conditions, namely under the presence of Russian bayonets which were enough in themselves to quell, if necessary, any attempt on the part of the "reactionary bourgeoisie" to counterattack and turn the tide of the revolution. The role of Soviet influence on the Czechoslovak events was so obvious that the article could not fail to mention it even if only in a subdued form:

"A substantial influence upon the revolutionary process and upon the manner of decision-making of the workers' class and the bourgeoisie was no doubt exerted by help extended by the USSR, without which the revolution in the CSR could neither have been victorious nor survived. The Soviet Union prevented an imperialist intervention, which would otherwise undoubtedly have taken place."

In this sense, therefore, the Czechoslovak case was a very unique case of "peaceful revolution," and is of little if any use to the Asian, African or Latin American communist parties as an example to follow.

The Soviets themselves have been much more cautious in citing the Czechoslovak case as an example for peaceful transition than have the Czechs. Nor do they talk much about the two known examples (Kerala and San Marino) where such a peaceful takeover did take place, since in both cases the experiment proved to be abortive and was given up more or less peacefully in a short time.

In this argument, therefore, it seems that the Chinese still have the upper hand and in spite of the eager (but probably unsolicited) support of the Czechoslovak comrades, the Russian case still lacks the convincing force.

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