

CS -- ALOIS INDRA: PARTY IS OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE MASSES

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Alois Indra, CPCS Presidium member and Federal Assembly Chairman, has written an article for the Slovak CP Central Committee weekly Nove Slovo. (1) While this in itself is rather unusual, the contents of Indra's contribution also go beyond the routine. In a nutshell, he discourses on a fact that must be extremely alarming for the ruling party circles, namely, that the party leadership has lost contact with the masses, and that the party itself is in a bad shape.

Indra reached far back into party history, to the late party leader Klement Gottwald (1896-1953), to borrow from him the title of his article "Face the Masses." (2) For any communist party, Indra lectured, it is imperative to cultivate contact with the toiling people: "Communists without ties to the people are not worthy of the name, they cease to be Communists." In his opinion, this principle began to be neglected with the party's advent to power in February 1948. Disregarding Lenin's warning against the "scum floating along with the pure revolutionary stream," the ranks of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia were boosted by nearly 1,000,000 new members "practically overnight." Among them were "many petit-bourgeois fellow travelers, opportunists, and careerists." With time, they allegedly managed to push the workers' element in the party into passivity. The "revolutionary enthusiasm" within the party began to abate and, in the mid-1950s, the ground began to be prepared for the implementation of "imperialist designs." Ideological vigilance slackened, and doors were opened to the onslaught of revisionism. This, Indra insists, is the true background to all subsequent troubles:

To explain the problems we have been facing in the course of socialist construction by a "mechanical application of the Soviet model" is not only naive, it is a criminal act, a figment of revisionism of the most vulgar brand, a demonstration of the most coarse anti-Sovietism and anticommunism.

And, Indra adds, to avoid calling a spade a spade in this way is a sign of opportunism.

The April 1969 leadership (under Gustav Husak) has renewed Gottwald's call "Face the Masses," but Indra seems to be utterly dissatisfied with the results:

There are organizations whose influence on noncommunists is nonexistent. . . . Their activity smells of formalism. . . . The life

(1) No. 10, 11 March 1982, pp. 1-3.

(2) This slogan was coined by the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921, and was subsequently enthusiastically embraced by Gottwald.

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in such organizations resembles bourgeois clubs, . . . sectarian seclusion is typical for them.

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Other sectors of society do not fare much better in Indra's critical eye. He discovered an "undemanding attitude" among key executives, "inadmissible tolerance" in personnel policy, and formalism in mass organizations. He sees what he calls "communist conceit" as being particularly dangerous for the party. Party officials affecting this overbearing attitude regard non-Communists as a "mass object for their commands, as material for elections, brigades, and socialist competition."

A different breed, according to Indra, are the politically infirm and ideologically unstable card-holders. They "desert" the scene exactly in a situation when they are party-bound to stand up against wrong views, to defend party policy, and to fight for its consistent implementation. In Indra's popular parlance:

There are those who brandish their party cards when the sun is shining. The moment clouds begin to gather in the sky or, God forbid, thunder can be heard, their hearts sink into their boots.

Abiding by his own demand for a "clear terminology," Indra discerns defeatism in the party ranks and traces its roots to "petit-bourgeois thinking, petit-bourgeois comprehension of politics and their implementation." A petit-bourgeois disposition, he warns, "has always been and will remain the midwife of opportunism and revisionism."

As a remedy Indra advocates nothing less radical than what would amount to another party purge:

In the interest of the party's authority . . . we are duty-bound actively (in theory and practice) to suppress any sign of passivity and capitulation. The "how numerous are we" will always be the less important question; the "what are we" is infinitely more decisive.

In practical terms this means, according to Indra, the "raise the overall quality of the party ranks" by careful selection of candidates, strict screening of every member, and by "cleansing the party of people incapable of bearing the burden of revolutionary responsibility."

The party is in disarray. That much is clear not only from Indra's chastising but from various other press articles on the same theme. (3) None of them, however, has treated the problem in

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- (3) The most recent one is the editorial "Party with the People" in Pravda (Bratislava), 11 March 1982, p. 1.

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such a forceful way and using such "clear terminology," and certainly no one has mentioned defeatism and capitulation. The reason for this outburst of ideological mobilization may be seen in the current economic difficulties. They are increasingly preventing the leadership from honoring its part of the "social contract" that has been tacitly concluded with the population at large. (4) In the struggle with pressing economic problems a helping hand from the people would be of the utmost importance. But not much enthusiasm is forthcoming from ordinary citizens or, what is far more alarming, from the party ranks, including functionaries. Losing contact with the masses is a grave offense, not to be trifled with by those lesser officials who are primarily responsible for maintaining the contacts. But what have the legions of trained propagandists been doing? And what about the chain of command? Have the apparats of the higher echelons not been receiving timely signals or, alternately, have they failed to react in time in order to ward off the spreading of "defeatism and capitulation?" Does Indra's criticism aim higher than the low-to-middle level of the party echelons?

Too many questions with no ready answers. Not unimportant in this context is the fact that it was Indra who acted here as the party whip. One would expect Bilak, the party's chief ideologue, to deal with the matter. Indra has been practically silent on ideology ever since he was demoted from the post of a CPCS CC secretary to that of Federal Assembly Chairman in December 1971. Not that he would be an ideological abstainer. On the contrary, he is said to be deeply interested in it, but has found no proper platform and/or occasion so far. Conceivably, with the party in disarray, he feels the time has come to raise his voice. This the more so since he reputedly deeply resents being sidetracked from the party apparat, of which he rightfully feels a child.

With the promotion of Milos Jakes as a CPCS CC secretary (in December 1977) and to full membership in the Presidium (in April 1981), the constellation in the top party body has changed. Indra is said to have been befriended by Jakes, and may be trying to pave his way back to the apparat.

Despite his ideological rigidity, which would place him alongside Bilak, Indra has not been a rabid hard-liner. As the routine classification goes, most insiders would rate him as a moderate. This would, at least in part, also explain why his article was carried in the Slovak weekly Nove Slovo. This periodical,

- (4) The postinvasion "normalization" was greatly facilitated by a unspoken bargain involving material well-being in exchange for political abstinence.

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despite its considerable shortcomings, is still considered a "solid" paper in contrast to its Czech-language pendant, the CPCS CC weekly Tribuna.

Last but not least, the element of succession in Czechoslovakia in the wake (or even independently of it) of Brezhnev's eventual departure must be in the back of the minds of people like Indra. He just turned 62 (on March 17) and may feel that it is never too late to start jockeying for position.

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