

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

COMMUNIST AREA

USSR/30

- USSR: Party affairs
19 February 1969

"PARTY LIFE" ARTICLE ON COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

(See end for summary)

Partiinaya Zhizn (No. 3, February, 1969) contains an eight page essay entitled "Collectivity in Work - A Most Important Feature of the Leninist Style." This article was signed to press on 28th January, at a time when Kosygin was beginning the seventh week of his annual holiday, which was interrupted by the invasion of Czechoslovakia last August and recommenced on December 21th approx. It therefore became the occasion for some diverse interpretation. Is it an attack on Brezhnev, on Kosygin, or is it simply what it purports to be?

Party Life (Partiinaya Zhizn) is a magazine published by the C.C., CPSU. Its editor-in-chief is M.I. Khaldeyev, who is not a full member of the C.C., nor a candidate member, but is a member of the Auditing Commission. He was in a relatively obscure position on the C.C. staff for industry in the RSFSR until the removal of Khrushchev, and in 1965 Brezhnev had him promoted to be head of the Agitprop Department of the C.C., CPSU, for the RSFSR.

In 1966, however, Khaldeyev appears to have had a disagreement with Brezhnev (perhaps because he is one of Shelepin's group of ex-Komsomol leaders; he was in charge of the Moscow Oblast Komsomol when Shelepin was head of the youth organization), and Khaldeyev was then downgraded to become the Chief Editor of Party Life. The magazine has a larger circulation than Kommunist (934,000 copies compared with 760,000) but it has nothing like the same degree of influence as the theoretical journal. It is intended for middle-rank and low-level party professionals.

The author of the "collective leadership" article is V. Zasorin, a writer who is almost completely unknown in the West, and who is not known to hold any position in the Party, government or mass organizations (he is not listed in "Prominent Personalities in the USSR" (1), which contains more than 6000 biographies).

To the regular reader of Soviet propaganda tracts, 90% of the Zasorin article appears to be routine. But the passages which have attracted much attention in the West read as follows:

Collectivity is the method of leadership which best corresponds to equality of rights in the intra-party relations of colleagues at work. Violation of these relations, the glorification of any one person in breach of collectivity undermines the very basis of party democracy, extinguishes the independent thought of communists, suppresses their initiative, belittles the role of the party masses and impoverishes the ideological life of the party. All this is incompatible with Leninist norms.

Lenin repeatedly emphasized that unity is impossible without organization. "Rejection of the subordination of the centres to the leadership is equivalent to a refusal to remain in the party, it is equivalent to the destruction of the party" (Coll. Works, volume 8, page 351). The Party, at all times in its history, has fought against the attempts of opportunists and nationalists to counterpose federalism and anarchic autonomism to centralism.....

Only the collective will of the party and of its organizations, and the independent judgement of the whole mass of party workers is capable of ensuring the maintenance of party discipline, of cooling the ardour of individual anarchy, and of correcting those who stray (Coll. Works, volume 8, page 94).

These passages are followed by an attack on Mao Tse-tung for setting himself above the party, for paralyzing the work of the C.C., and for suppressing internal party democracy. He is accused of setting up a military-bureaucratic dictatorship and of carrying the cult of personality

(1) Compiled by Institute for the Study of the USSR, Munich, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.Y., USA, 1968.

so far in the new charter of the CCP that he is effectively legalizing the principle of inheriting power.

"The supreme organ of collective leadership," Zasorin writes, "which expresses the collective opinion of all communists, is the Party Congress. Lenin attached particular significance to congresses, to their regular convention, methods of preparation and of holding them....." (This reminder seems likely to have been included because the forthcoming Chinese congress is so long overdue).

Zasorin follows up with a paean of praise for the 23rd Congress of the CPSU (which is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the theory that he is covertly denouncing Brezhnev, who presided over that Congress), and then goes on to describe how collectivity is practised at republican, oblast and raion levels whenever the Party meets.

In the intervals between congresses the whole work of the party and of local organs is guided by the C.C., CPSU. For the guidance of party work between Plenary sessions of the C.C., the C.C. elects a Politbureau; for the conduct of current work, mainly the selection of cadres and the organization of checks on performance, it elects a Secretariat. The C.C. elects the General Secretary of the C.C., CPSU.

(This latter sentence is also hard to construe in the context of an attack on Brezhnev).

Zasorin then reminds his readers that decisions of the party's C.C. are binding on all members and that the C.C. must meet in plenary session at least once in six months, according to its charter. He adds that in practice it meets significantly more often. In fact it met in December 1968, in October, in August in secret session -- though that may not have been a Plenum in view of the time shortage -- in July and in April. At least four of these meetings were Plenary.

Zasorin next turns his attention to Khrushchev:

For the assertion of Leninist norms of collective leadership above all, the October and November Plenums (1964) were of principled significance. The Party corrected the errors

connected with the subjectivist approach to the solution of vital economic and political problems, and with the unjustified reconstruction of the Party, Soviet and economic apparatus. The 23rd Congress noted with satisfaction that, expressing the will of the Party, the C.C. had resolutely followed the line of strict observance of the Leninist norms of party life and of the principle of collective leadership.

Here again it is difficult to read this passage as anything but praise for Brezhnev's "collective" approach by comparison with the methods of Khrushchev.

Zasorin then goes on to stress how collective leadership at raion, city, okrug, oblast and krai levels of the party improves the activity of the masses and how essential strict centralization and discipline is to success. He lists the recent cases in which the C.C. has had to intervene in local party affairs (the Mikhailovsky State Farm, the Dobrinsk raion scandal, the Omsk and Volgograd oblast affairs, the Estonian and Tadzhikistan resolution) most of which were attributable to failures of collective leadership in one form or another.

His next couple of pages are a discussion of collectivity at the primary party unit level. He urges punctuality in convening meetings and abstention from the practice of trying to impose selected leaders on unwilling basic units.

It is important to stress that the party not only proclaims the principle of collectivity, but also guarantees its implementation.... But nevertheless the free expression of opinion should be based on the ideological and organizational foundations of the party.

This type of double talk does not significantly advance democratization, but as in the case of the Chicherin memoirs in Komsomolskaya Pravda (2), Zasorin explains what happens to minorities:

It is perfectly possible that in deciding on some question, a section of the comrades may be in the minority. Once the point of view of

the majority has been defined, has become a directive, talk has to give way to action. Unity of action is necessary in all conditions, otherwise no organization is possible.

Zasorin ends with the usual assurance that Lenin "profoundly respected" the opinions of others, but did not tolerate any ambivalence, ideological weakness, fictitious comradeship or organizational slackness. It is the duty of every communist to master Lenin's style.

The above is a necessarily abbreviated but accurate description of the contents of the article. If one asks oneself in what way it differs from all the hundreds of previous articles on the same theme (many of them in the same magazine), the answer is not at all except in timing. It happened to appear in Moscow a couple of days before Kosygin returned to work.

Its main purpose would seem to be to show how much better the collective way of leadership, as practised ever since the October 1964 plenum, is than the methods used by Mao and Khrushchev. It clearly is not an attack on Brezhnev, and since Kosygin returned to work, looking fit and well, a week after it was signed to press, it seems unlikely to have been intended as a criticism of him. If it was, it was one which seems to have misfired.

For the Kremlinologist, 1969 has been a frustrating experience (after Brezhnev and Kosygin both were seen to be firmly in the saddle, Kirilenko also returned to duty from leave at the due time -- February 13th 1969). Ever since Khrushchev was removed it has widely been forecast that the new regime would be a transitional government and that a strong man, or some form of one-man rule, would eventually emerge. But the overt evidence is that, while there may well be deep disunity in the Politbureau as between the hawks and doves (abundantly clear in the case of Czechoslovakia and the ICBM-ABM limitation negotiations, less clear in the case of the Middle East, the Stalin issue, and the problem of the revisionist writers and scientists) there is still little sign of one faction being strong enough to be able -- or willing -- to attempt to purge the other. The differences in emphasis among the leaders are far more often based on their respective functional tasks than on firm indications of internecine struggle or strong ideological conviction.

The emphasis on collective leadership has been with us ever since October 1964, and those who doubt this are recommended to read a whole book about it called "Collectivity -- the Highest Principle of Party Leadership." It was published in Moscow in 1967 and is written by P.A. Rodionov. Zasorin appears to have used it as his source material, with little attempt at originality.

The most probable interpretation of the Party Life article is that it is not directed against Brezhnev nor against Kosygin nor any other individual leader. It appears to be not a dart from below aimed at the top leadership, but the usual routine homily from above directed against medium-rank and lower-level party officials who, even now, all too frequently behave not like collectivists, but like the neo-Stalinist autocrats of twenty years ago. For a similar interpretation please see the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (18th February 1969).

Summary: This paper describes Zasorin's article in Party Life (No 3, February 1969) on "collectivity at work -- a most important feature of the Leninist style." It also describes the three main Western interpretations of the article. One of these argues that Brezhnev's position has been endangered during the last month, and that Zasorin should be read as an attack on him by unspecified forces (the Shelepin "group"?) in the Politbureau. The second theory is that the article constitutes an attack on Kosygin and the anti-invasion forces (notably Suslov and Shelepin). This school carries perhaps marginally more credibility, but is severely weakened by the fact that Kosygin has been back at work, looking fit and well, since February 6th, performing all his usual duties. (Kirilenko also returned to work from his annual leave on February 13th). The last theory now current is the dull, unsensational, but probably more accurate view that Zasorin's essay is simply one in the series of many hundreds of this type published since 1965, and that it is not directed against Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny, Suslov, Kirilenko or any other Politburo personality. It may well not be a blow from below at the top leadership, but the usual homily from above aimed at middle-rank and low-level party officials who all too frequently do not behave like collective leaders, but like neo-Stalinist autocrats.

r.r.g.