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DOGMATISM -- THE PRESENT DANGER

In his speech before the Conference of the Heads of Chairs of Social Scientists on February 2, Mikhail Suslov presented what appears to be a significant revision in the CPSU's evaluation of its enemies in the Communist Movement. The paragraph of primary importance is the following:

"Dogmatism -- is the most dangerous form of the isolation of theory from practice. Under the mask of a pretended faithfulness to Marxism-Leninism, dogmatism, left opportunism, brings great harm to revolutionary theory and practice, to socialism. Efforts to hide from life under a heap of citations signify ignorance or a desire not to assess new historical surroundings, creatively to apply and develop to new, changing conditions the great principles of Marxism-Leninism. This leads to the isolation of communists from wide strata of workers, destines them to passive expectation or to leftist, adventurist, pretended revolutionary activity. Stubbornness in the defense of the dogmatist-sectarian position prevents correct evaluation of newly forming circumstances, and the use of newly arising possibilities in the interests of the working class and communist affairs."¹

Read in context this paragraph is an attack upon the dogmatists Enver Hoxha and Mao Tse-tung. Its first sentence also appears to be a statement by Suslov that dogmatism is now regarded as the most dangerous threat to orthodox communism, a greater threat, that is, than revisionism. If this interpretation is made, it also follows that Mikhail Suslov has introduced a significant revision in the ideology of the CPSU by setting dogmatism above revisionism as the greatest present danger in the eyes of orthodox communism.

In reality the appearance of ideological change is appearance only. Suslov has very carefully avoided revising the official CPSU stand on revisionism and dogmatism. He has, instead, made an important practical shift in emphasis by indicating that Mao is the greater present danger, but he has done this in such a way as to leave the party's former stand untouched. Even this shift of emphasis, however, is an event of considerable importance; it displays a movement in the party's thought and practice toward emphasis upon the danger of

¹ Pravda, 4 February 1961, p. 2. (my italics).

dogmatism, and it could very well presage a formal change in the ideology.

II

The conclusions stated above obviously need discussion and documentation. Perhaps most important in Suslov's speech, is the first sentence of the paragraph quoted above: "Dogmatism is the most dangerous form of the isolation of theory from practice." He has not said that dogmatism as practiced by Hoxha and Mao is now recognized as a more dangerous deviation than revisionism; it is rather only "the most dangerous form of the isolation of theory from practice." Only by implication does this sentence and the rest of the paragraph indicate that there has been a shift in practice from emphasis upon the dangers of revisionism to emphasis upon dogmatism as the greater present danger.

Earlier paragraphs of Suslov's speech support the conclusion that the shift is a tactical re-evaluation of the present danger, rather than a long-range revision of the CPSU's stand on deviations in general. Thus, in dealing with revisionism, to which he gives at least as much space as he gives dogmatism, Suslov said:

"Several years back revisionism acquired an especially dangerous character. However, as the result of powerful blows, which were struck against revisionism, above all by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and by other fraternal parties, it suffered ideological defeat.

"But the danger of revisionism remains. The leaders of the Communist League of Yugoslavia not only have not repudiated their revisionist program, but they even vigorously propagate it. Our position in regard to revisionism remains unchanged: we must resolutely criticize all deviations from Marxism-Leninism."

The conclusion indicated here, is that while the general line on revisionism and on its Yugoslav representatives has not changed, revisionism is not considered by Suslov and the CPSU to be the present danger.

That Suslov's careful shift of emphasis in practice does not involve a formal change of ideology is also argued by the careful way in which Suslov works within the framework of earlier authoritative communist documents treating this subject. The Statement of the Conference of Representatives of 81 Communist Parties (November, 1960) contains this passage:

"The Communist Parties have ideologically defeated the revisionists in their ranks who sought to divert them from the Marxist-Leninist path. Each Communist Party, and the international Communist movement as a whole, has become ideologically and organizationally stronger in the struggle against revisionism, Right opportunism.

"The Communist Parties have unanimously condemned the Yugoslav variety of international opportunism, which is a concentrated expression of the 'theories' of the present-day revisionists. The leaders of the Yugoslav League of Communists, having betrayed Marxism-Leninism and declared it to be obsolete, have counterposed their anti-Leninist revisionist program to the 1957 Declaration and the Yugoslav League of Communists to the entire international Communist movement and have severed their country from the socialist camp, making it dependent on the so-called 'aid' of the American and other imperialists and thereby jeopardizing the revolutionary gains won by the heroic struggle of the Yugoslav people. The Yugoslav revisionists are engaged in subversive work against the socialist camp and the world Communist movement. Under the pretext of pursuing an 'out-side-of-blocs' policy, they are developing activity that harms the cause of the unity of all peace-loving forces and states. Further exposure of the leaders of the Yugoslav revisionists and the workers' movement from the Yugoslav revisionists' anti-Leninist ideas continue to be the essential task of the Marxist-Leninist parties.

"The practice of the struggle of the working class and the entire course of social development have furnished brilliant new confirmation of the all-conquering power and vitality of Marxism-Leninism and have decisively refuted all the 'theories' of the present-day revisionists.

"As the 1957 Moscow Declaration affirms, the interests of further developing the Communist and workers' movement require continuing a decisive struggle on two fronts -- against revisionism, which remains the principal danger, and against dogmatism and sectarianism.

"Revisionism, or Right opportunism, distorting Marxism-Leninism and removing its revolutionary essence, reflects bourgeois ideology in theory and practice, paralyzes the revolutionary will of the working class and disarms and demobilizes the workers and the masses of the working people in their struggle against the oppression of imperialists and exploiters and for peace, democracy and national liberation, for the triumph of socialism.

"Dogmatism and sectarianism in theory and practice, if a consistent struggle is not waged against them, can also become the principal danger at a given stage of the development of individual parties. They deprive revolutionary parties of the ability to develop Marxism-Leninism on the basis of scientific analysis and to apply it creatively in accordance with specific conditions; they isolate Communists from the broad strata of the working people and doom them to passive expectation or to leftist adventurist actions in the revolutionary struggle; they make it impossible to evaluate in good time and correctly the changing situation and new experience and to use all

possibilities in the interests of the victory of the working class and of all democratic forces in the struggle against imperialism, reaction and the war danger; and thereby they prevent the peoples from achieving victory in their just struggle."²

Neither the statements of the new Party Program nor those of Khrushchev at the 22nd Congress differ significantly from the statement of the 81 parties. Thus it would appear that Suslov has simply expressed what must now be a general conclusion among the leaders of the CPSU -- that the present danger is dogmatism as practiced by Mao. In itself this is a recognition of a new tactical situation which does not require (at this moment at any rate) a formal revision of party dogma. On the other hand, despite Suslov's protestations to the contrary, the conclusion that revisionism has suffered ideological defeat might very well imply increased tolerance for its advocates while the Sino-Soviet crisis lasts.

a.a.

² Pravda, December 2, 1960.