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BREZHNEV AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE

(See end for summary)

The Brezhnev speech on 7th June 1969 has been covered by the world press almost exclusively in the light of his extraordinarily harsh attack on the policies of the Mao Tse-tung group, a manoeuvre which he had previously undertaken not to carry out. But, unusually for one of his speeches, it also contained a wealth of other material (the attack on China lasted 15 minutes in a speech of more than two hours), much of which is both new and significant. The other subjects included new concessions to the convergence theory, a passage putting the arms lobby in its place, a proposal for an Asian collective security system, and an unusually moderate line towards the moderate political leaders of the West.

This paper will discuss these topics in the order in which Brezhnev placed them, without attempting to rate them in the order of their importance.

Brezhnev divided his speech into three parts, the first of which discussed "the contemporary international situation and the tasks of the anti-imperialist struggle. At the beginning of this section, he made an analysis of developments in the capitalist world which included far more concessions to the convergence theorists than on any previous occasion. Here are some excerpts:

... Above all we cannot but consider that imperialism in our day still disposes of a mighty and highly organized production mechanism. We cannot but take into account the fact that modern imperialism also uses the opportunities

given it by the ever-increasing coalescence of the monopolies with the state apparatus. Programming and forecasting of production, state financing of technical progress and of scientific research, measures aimed at a certain restriction of spontaneous market forces in the interests of the biggest monopolies are becoming more and more widespread. In a number of countries this is leading to a certain increase in the effectiveness of social production ...

Brezhnev also admitted that capital is making "certain concessions to the working people in the social sphere," and that it is resorting to various forms of economic integration, such as international monopolies supported or partly-owned by "bourgeois" governments. He sees sharply increased contradictions caused by the growth of the reciprocal penetration of capital in the Western countries, and the rising interdependence of their national economies. Certainly he put a strong propagandist gloss on all this, but nevertheless the attentive reader would note his apparent concern at the growth of planning, social security and state intervention in capitalist economies.

Those concerned with Comecon affairs would also no doubt observe that to judge by Brezhnev, economic integration is clearly in a more advanced stage in the West than anywhere in the Comecon orbit. Capital seems to be far more genuinely international than communist economics. But later in the first section of his speech, he made the claim that in the past decade, the national income of the Comecon countries has grown by 93%, whereas in the developed capitalist countries it had risen in the same period by 63%.

As Kosygin has often done in the past, Brezhnev stressed the need to put the main emphasis now on the quality of Comecon's output and on increasing the efficiency of production. He added:

It is precisely for this purpose that the economic reforms in the European socialist countries are being implemented. The same aim is served by the complex, long-term programme for the further development of socialist integration, the basic trends in which were defined at the recent special session of Comecon in Moscow.

This passage is worth noting, as a reminder that Brezhnev and the CPSU are still backing the policy of reform, provided that it does not progress faster than the Kremlin considers safe. The 1968 Czechoslovak reforms were considered dangerous, but Hungarian, East German or Soviet reforms are still approved.

If he only hinted at the economic problems confronting the USSR, Brezhnev was appreciably more frank about his political difficulties, to describe which he selected a Lenin quotation:

The road to socialism will never be straight, it will be incredibly complicated. (Works, volume 36, page 47).

He then added, on his own authority, a passage which seemed to be aimed mainly at liberal communists in areas like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia:

Where ever vigilance is dulled, where ever communists underestimate the need for a class approach to social phenomena, the intrigues of imperialism lead to a definite result: right-opportunist and even frankly anti-Soviet elements become more active, and nationalist moods are strengthened.....

The impression that he was criticizing the former Dubcek leadership, among others, was strengthened a few sentences later when, after preaching the inevitability of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Brezhnev said:

Our party highly appraises the resolute struggle of communists in the fraternal countries against any attempts to weaken the leading role of the C.P., to replace socialist democracy by political liberalism of the bourgeois type, and to erode the positions of socialism.

In the next paragraph Brezhnev paid his usual hypocritical tribute to "equal rights, sovereignty, independence and non-interference in the internal affairs" of the "socialist" countries, but this was in a mammoth

sentence listing numerous other desiderata, far behind "socialist internationalism," which came at the top of the priority list.

As regards Asia and Africa, Brezhnev seemed particularly concerned to explain away the inherent contradiction in Soviet policy which proclaims that the "workers" must lead the revolution, but is operating in an area where the proletariat is conspicuous largely by its absence:

"In Asia and Africa," he said, "the peasantry is a mighty revolutionary force. But as a rule it is an anarchic force, with all the wavering stemming from this fact, with all the resultant contradictions in ideology and in politics... The experience of the revolutionary movement in various parts of the world has shown that the most reliable way to draw the peasantry effectively into the struggle against imperialism... is the establishment of a firm alliance between them and the working class... But historical conditions have been such that in the majority of Asian and African states there is as yet no large-scale industry, and the working class is not yet formed. Where industrial development has begun, the working class movement has won important positions... In the first count the working class movement will play a determining role in this part of the world.

The passage above seems to indicate that Brezhnev is still optimistic about the future of Moscow-style communism in the third world. But in fact the only two underdeveloped areas to acquire communist governments since the last world conference, Cuba and Bengal, are both much more independent of the Moscow line than Brezhnev's speech would suggest. In Cuba Castro has opted for a policy of limited independence, while in Bengal the new government is too preoccupied with its internal economic and political problems to have decided yet on an attitude towards Brezhnev's type of "working-class" hegemony.

No countries were specifically listed as "national democracies" by Brezhnev, but he did say that the CPSU maintains contact with 18 "national democratic" parties, most, if not all, of which are probably ruling parties.

The Sino-Soviet Dispute

Most of the important material in the second section of the speech ("Some Problems of Communist Unity...") has already been fully covered in the world press. But some additional points should be made. In speaking of the heresies rampant in the movement, Brezhnev was careful to place revisionist influences first, always ahead of "leftist" trends. On the other hand, at no time did he claim that "revisionism is the main danger," and only devoted one paragraph to it alone, compared with about thirty on the perils of Maoism. The one paragraph on "right-wing opportunism" seemed to have Czechoslovakia even more than Yugoslavia in mind, because of its reference to the dangers of social democracy:

Right-wing opportunism means sliding down into liquidationist positions, it means compromise with social democratism in politics and ideology. In socialist countries it goes so far as to deny the leading role of the marxist-leninist party, which may lead to surrender of the positions won by socialism, to capitulation to anti-socialist forces.

The paragraph in which Brezhnev seemed to be criticizing Rumania, as well as China, argued that nationalism must lead to national socialism. It reads as follows:

The link between "leftist" and rightist opportunism is often provided by concessions to nationalism, and sometimes by direct transition to nationalist positions. V.I. Lenin long ago disclosed this connection. He wrote that: "The ideological and political kinship, ties even the identity between opportunism and social nationalism is not open to doubt." (Volume 26, page 151).

Brezhnev's excuse for raising the China issue was highly unconvincing. He argued that the CPSU had not originally intended to raise the issue (without actually admitting that he was breaking an agreement not to do so), but that he had changed his mind because of the 9th Congress of the C.C.P. That Congress ended two months ago, so Brezhnev had had ample time to warn his colleagues such as Ceausescu, who deplored the breach of what they thought was a firm undertaking. The major difference between 1960 and today, according to Brezhnev, is that

then the Mao group was criticizing peaceful coexistence, whereas now it is "organizing armed conflicts."

Brezhnev accused Mao of global imperialism, of splintering almost 30 C.P.s around the world (although the State Department's latest report "World Strength of the C.P. Organizations" (1) has only identified twenty-one of these), and of cynically accepting the loss of half of mankind in a nuclear war during the 1957 Conference held in the same Moscow hall. At this point Brezhnev's younger listeners no doubt wondered why, if Mao's statement was so cynical and frivolous as to be repugnant to the General Secretary, it was not the CPSU but that revisionist, Tito, who first disclosed it many years ago. Brezhnev mentioned the calls from Peking for his own overthrow, but put no great emphasis on them. He also deplored Peking's attempts to split all the front organizations, including those for youth, women, scientists, "peace partisans," trade unionists etc.

He "resolutely rejected" the repeated Chinese claims to Soviet territory, and said that Chinese military border "provocations" are continuing (note the use in June of the present tense, thereby tending to confirm the Chinese statements of June 6th and June 11th which publicize a variety of new small-scale clashes at widely separated points on the Ussuri River and on the Kazakhstan-Sinkiang border).

In concluding his attack on Mao, Brezhnev was careful to leave the door open for a future reconciliation, by exonerating the "genuine" Chinese communists from blame and by stressing that a return to alliance politics would lead to a "genuine" national revival of China.

Criticism of Western Parties

After blandly denying that there is a theory of limited sovereignty, the General Secretary fired a warning shot at the numerous Western C.P.s which tend to put electoral considerations and their own sovereignty ahead of Brezhnev's doctrines and proletarian internationalism. The relevant sentence reads:

The attempts "to strengthen" the positions of parties by weakening or even disrupting international ties, by repudiating joint actions

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with other detachments of the communist movement lead only to the loss by such a party of its ideological independence from the bourgeoisie and inevitably harm the political authority of the party concerned.

Arms Lobby Reminded of its Dependence on Economy

In the third and final section of the speech, Brezhnev began with an interesting reminder to the domestic arms lobby, as well as to those in the world movement who preach war and violence (mainly for others) as the road to revolution that increased arms spending can only be supported by a strong economy:

Immediately after the end of the civil war, V.I. Lenin stressed that "now we exert our main influence on the international revolution by means of our economic policy (Volume 43, page 341). Our party thinks that this thesis preserves its importance in contemporary conditions. The defense capability of the USSR and to no small extent of the whole of the socialist commonwealth, the potential for opposing the imperialist policy of war and aggression depend on our economic achievements. (2) Our potential for supporting revolutionary and liberation movements throughout the world also depends on these (economic) achievements.

If, during his attack on Mao, Brezhnev seemed to be echoing much of the Suslov speech of 1964, in this passage on the priority of economics over the defense lobby, Brezhnev sounded as though he were using the vocabulary of Kosygin, as well as Lenin.

Reviewing the economic progress of the sixties, Brezhnev claimed that industrial production had more than doubled in the past eight years, that agricultural output has risen by nearly a third, and that real incomes have risen by 43%.

More controversial than these impressive claims was Brezhnev's next sentence, which reads:

The distance separating us from the most powerful and richest country of the capitalist world, the USA, has been seriously reduced.

(2) Emphasis supplied.

In 1960 the volume of our industrial output was 55% of the U.S. level, whereas in 1968 it was already about 70%.

Brezhnev is therefore now claiming that the USSR has been narrowing the industrial output gap at almost 2% p.a. throughout the sixties. His figure will certainly be disputed by Western economists, but in political terms the importance of his boast is that the CPSU has by no means abandoned the theme of "catching up with and overtaking the US," as Khrushchev used to call it, although it no longer ventures to set terminal dates for this distant and oft-postponed target, and although it no longer uses Khrushchev's terminology, which aroused more ridicule than support in both East and West.

On the topic of agricultural investments, Brezhnev referred to the many difficulties in Soviet agriculture, and added:

Never before has a state made such great investments in the complex mechanization and electrification of agricultural output, in its chemicalization and in irrigation.

Despite this complacent remark, he did not indicate any change in future investment programs, but went on to say that the economic changes of recent years had had "a favorable effect on the economy," and that these changes would continue.

CPSU Membership

In his search for more voices in support, Brezhnev now announced a further increase in CPSU membership, this time to "almost 14,000,000" communists. In November last year the Party was said to have 13 1/2 million members, so apparently it is now growing at the rate of about 1,000,000 a year. The last figure claimed for Chinese Party membership was 17,000,000, but that was in 1961, and presumably the Party has grown since then despite the depredations of the Red Guards. The Ninth Congress has not yet been reported as giving an up-to-date figure for C.C.P. membership.

Foreign Policy

Brezhnev held firmly to the 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd Party Congresses of the CPSU, backing peaceful coexistence, the Security Council Resolution of November 1967 on the Middle East, and the Tashkent meeting between India and Pakistan, which ended their war under the auspices of Kosygin.

Brezhnev reasserted that peaceful coexistence does not extend to ideology, but he also pointed out that it is a principle involving the settlement of international disputes by negotiation (echoing Kosygin's speech of November, 1962). No doubt many of his listeners regretted that he did not apply the principle to his Czechoslovak allies as well as his antagonists.

On the question of the moderate statesmen of the West, as opposed to the "extremely aggressive circles," Brezhnev was more definite than ever before. Here are his words:

We also distinguish in the capitalist camp a more moderate wing. While they remain our class and ideological opponents, its representatives estimate the present balance of power in the world soberly enough and are inclined to seek mutually acceptable solutions for disputed international problems. Our state takes such tendencies into account in forming its foreign policy.

None of these "moderates" were identified, but Brezhnev gave the list of countries with which the USSR has good relations as follows: France, Finland, Italy, Japan. Britain and West Germany were conspicuously not mentioned, but as regards the U.S., Brezhnev said that he did not exclude it from the countries to which peaceful coexistence could apply.

Concerning Asia, the General Secretary put forward a novel proposal for an Asian collective security system, which would apparently be designed more to contain China than the USA. At least it can be said that much more of his speech was directed against Peking than against Washington. He presumably is hoping for a cordon sanitaire to include India, Pakistan, Mongolia, and the USSR as a minimum, with N. Korea, N. Vietnam and perhaps Burma as longer-term candidates for membership. The drawback is that

if his proposal seems too nakedly anti-Chinese the neutralist states will tend to contract out.

Under the disarmament heading, Brezhnev gave his support to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which he described as urgent, to strengthening the ban on chemical and bacteriological weapons, to measures to restrict nuclear and missile armaments, and to the purely propagandist theme of general and complete disarmament. He did not mention limiting ABMs as such, but his remarks on missiles were general enough to cover them as well as ICBMs.

Altogether it was a remarkable speech, which was conspicuous not only for its concessions to convergence theorists and for its stress on the precedence of economics over the defense lobby, but also for its relative moderation towards the West and its intransigence towards Chinese communists, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav revisionists, and Rumanian nationalists. Not even the major C.P.s of the free world, such as the Italian, escaped without reproof from Brezhnev, the schoolmaster of the Moscow symposium for proletarian internationalism. Yet the paradox of his doctrines remains that they can only be made effective by military occupation or economic pressure, and for half of the ruling parties in the world these methods are either not applicable or are insufficient to achieve Brezhnev's aims.

Summary: This paper reviews some aspects of the Brezhnev speech which have largely gone unreported in the Western press. It finds new concessions to the theory of convergence, a passage stressing the primacy of economics over the arms lobby, and a more moderate attitude towards the moderate leaders of the West, who are contrasted with the more conventional "aggressive circles." It also notes that revisionism has apparently ceased to be the "main danger."

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