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COMMUNIST AREA

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WCM (General)

● 15 September 1964
USSR

THESES ON THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL A Partial Answer to Togliatti

Why are Theses concerned with a centenary on 28 September published in Pravda on 11 September? In this case the answer is simple enough: the Theses on the 1st International, which were drawn up by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CC, CPSU, constitute a partial answer to some of the criticisms of Soviet methods and tactics contained in Togliatti's Memorandum. The Memorandum had been published on 10 September,¹ and rather than reply to it directly and openly, the leaders of the CPSU chose to use the esoteric method of debate, knowing that no party member who troubled to read both documents could fail to understand that the Kremlin was once again adopting its centralist position. Until 1962, the centralist stance required finding a middle ground between Peking and Belgrade, while leaning heavily towards Belgrade. To-day it means finding a position between Peking and Rome, but much closer to Rome.

Both the Theses and the Memorandum are in broad agreement that the Chinese views are "erroneous and ruinous," in Togliatti's words, and the differences between Moscow and Rome now are primarily concerned with how to avoid ruin. But whereas Togliatti wanted a number of regional communist conferences, the Theses continue to advocate a full-scale international meeting.

The Theses also describe in some detail the organizational principles on which such a meeting (and the whole work of the international communist movement) should be based. When Khrushchev first raised the subject on 3 April 1964 while in Hungary, he only said:

Evidently it would be expedient jointly to think about organizational forms which would improve the constant exchange of opinions and the coordination of foreign policy between the member countries

1) The CPSU was the first ruling party in the Khrushchev bloc to publish it.

of Comecon..... The commonwealth of independent and equal socialist peoples must develop and grow stronger.....

After this minor bombshell, hinting at the revival of a second Cominform, there was a wave of shocked reactions among the more "liberal" European communist parties, in the course of which Luigi Longo wrote in Unità:

In our opinion we must proceed from recognition of different positions and situations, we must base ourselves on a free exchange of opinions and experiences and the autonomy of the Parties in developing their own policy should be maintained.

On 11 April Gomulka objected in Trybuna Ludu to "any form of eccommunication, such as our movement had so painfully experienced in the past," and thereby recalled not only the break-up of the Polish CP before the war but also the Cominform's blunder concerning Yugoslavia. The strength of these, and other, communist reactions to his proposal appears to have convinced Khrushchev that no return to even a second Cominform, far less a Comintern, is now possible. Instead the Theses put forward a program of organization based on a parallel with the 1st International, and define what Khrushchev now wants (not what he is likely to get) in some detail.

In April this year the Institute of Marxism-Leninism published a "newly-discovered" document in "Marx's handwriting" which appeared to show precisely what Khrushchev was thinking of in Hungary (see Problems of Peace and Socialism, No. 4, 1964). This suspiciously convenient document announced that:

The General Council of the First International has the right to exclude temporarily, until a regular congress, detachments, sections, councils, committees and federations of the International.....

/Emphasis supplied/

It is highly significant that the Theses now published, taking due note of Gomulka's (and others') objections, make no mention whatever of the right to "exclude" any party. But they do recommend the "isolation and discarding" of splitters, by whom they mean the leaders of the Chinese CP. What Gomulka might think of such a semantic change is still uncertain, but that Togliatti was thinking along similar lines (though not advocating the same

methods) is shown by his recommendation:

In this way we would also have been better able to isolate the Chinese communists.....

The Institute's Theses begin with a strong plea for proletarian internationalism, which they redefine. Whereas in the past this phrase meant defense of the USSR, the Institute now says that:

The touch-stone of internationalism is the attitude to the world socialist system, and to its unity.

This broader approach no doubt reflects the fact that in the minds of every nationalist communist, "proletarian internationalism" was highly suspect as a concept because it so often meant disloyalty to his own country. Hence the Theses now stress that both Marx and Engels defended "genuine" nationalism. Engels is quoted as saying:

In the working-class movement genuinely national ideas, i.e., ideas corresponding to the economic factors in industry and agriculture predominant in the country concerned, are at the same time always truly international ideas. (Volume 33, p. 374, Pravda's emphasis)

Here is the theological foundation for the theory of national roads to "socialism."

The Institute then uses this rehabilitation of nationalism to argue that if any country forgets the principles of internationalism, it also harms the national interests of its working class. It adds significantly that the revolutionary principles of the International Workingman's Association (the First International):

acquire to-day a special importance. The consistent implementation of these principles is an indispensable condition for the triumph of communism.

This implies a loose type of consultative body, which would act as an ideological council,² and it also suggests a much larger and more amorphous group than Khrushchev had referred to in April, when he wanted to "organize" only the members of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. Now it appears that the Institute

2) New York Times, 12 September 1964.

is suggesting the advisability of drawing numerous other parties, such as the Italian, into the body it recommends as heir to the First International.

A short historical digression is appropriate here to explain what the First International was. Mainly a socialist debating society, it was founded by a number of strong British trade unions in 1864, with Marx and Engels as presiding geni. But most of the British unions remained outside it, as did the Blanquists in France and the Lasalleans in Germany. Its major practical effect was to stimulate the growth of socialist labor organizations in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Holland and Scandinavia. Marx represented the centralist trend, to the leadership of which Khrushchev now aspires, while Bakunin's anarchists formed the extreme left. In 1871, when the Paris Commune was formed, Marx interpreted its principles as being identical with his own. But the British trade unions objected vigorously to the approval of violence which this involved while the Anarchists chose to regard Marx as an usurper. In 1872, the First International split at the Hague Congress into a minor faction (the Marxists) which emigrated to New York, there to expire quietly, and the Bakuninist majority which founded the Anarchists International.

When the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (headed by P.N. Pospelov) describes the First International, it appears to have been a most Khrushchevian affair. For example its ultimate aim was to form a "classless society," and Marx is said to have described the theory of poverty and asceticism as "barracks communism." The implication is that Mao would have been out in the cold.

Nevertheless the Theses maintain that Marx criticized rightist revisionism, opportunism and reformism, although in their version, he spent most of his time combatting the "left." The reader of Pravda soon realizes that Bakunin was the Mao of that time, since his policies are described as "adventurous," "pseudo-revolutionary," "dogmatic," "petty bourgeois," "subjectivist," etc., etc.

Bakunin, it appears, tried to "leap over" necessary stages of revolution and finally his "adventurism became capitulation to the bourgeoisie." Like Mao again, he "tried to split the International and conducted subversive work against it."

The Theses describe the main success of the First International as being its influence on the development of the movement under Engels:

Precisely at this time the social-democratic parties, guided by the outstanding leaders of the

working-class movement, accumulated great experience in ... political struggle, using legal opportunities.

[Emphasis supplied]

The Khrushchev-Togliatti theory of peaceful transition thus receives its historical justification.

The Theses give a broadly favorable account of the Comintern, but they choose to stress not the "leftist" 5th Congress of that body but the united front tactics of the 7th Congress in 1935. Here again they are supporting not a second Comintern, but the line of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, about which Togliatti's Memorandum said:

On the whole we take as a starting point..... for the elaboration of our policy the lines of the 20th Congress. However, these lines must be to-day more deeply elaborated and developed....."

What Khrushchev thinks about the Comintern can easily be deduced from his sarcastic remark in 1956 about Ponomarev, whom he described as:

The last relic of the Comintern³

The Thesis claim that after the decease of the Comintern, the communist movement became more authoritative and more massive. They mention bi-lateral, multi-lateral and regional meetings favorably, but in indirect reply to Togliatti, they describe international meetings as an "important form of collective discussion.

Togliatti, on the other hand, although saying that the Italian CP would go to the December preparatory meeting, wrote:

We retain our doubts and reservations on the opportuneness of the international conference, above all because it is now clear that a number of parties which cannot be ignored will not be present, apart from the Chinese.....

This conflict of views becomes even more striking when the Theses reply to the Togliatti plea for autonomy and diversity. Whereas Togliatti saw autonomy:

not just as an internal necessity but as an essential one against any proposal to create once again a centralized international organization,

3) Pierre Lochak, Der Monat, No. 7, 1957.

the Theses state that relations between parties and "socialist" states "cannot be exhausted solely" by the principles of equal rights, respect for territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty and non-interference in international affairs.... Such relations also presuppose fraternal mutual aid and close cooperation between socialist states." The organizational rules which the First International is said to have used, and which should still be applied to-day, in the view of the Institute, are:

1. Obligatory recognition of the basic principles of the International for all member parties.
2. Compulsory observance of decisions taken by the International, with minority subordination to the majority.
3. Inadmissibility of factional schismatic activity in the International.

There is no reason to think that rules 1 or 3 would be opposed by the Italian, Rumanian or even the Yugoslav CPs in theory. The stumbling block here is rule 2, which is most unlikely to be accepted by such parties in their foreign relations although they apply it domestically in the guise of "democratic centralism." Sooner or later Khrushchev will have to recognize that "democratic centralism," however desirable in theory, cannot be imposed on the other parties and moreover that even if they could be induced to accept it there is no way by which it could be enforced in practice. The Theses are too ambitious on this point, and although rule 2 will no doubt find its way into the Soviet draft for the preparatory meeting, it is unlikely to survive the resistance it will encounter there.

The penultimate section of the Theses, which deals with the Soviet view of how to strengthen unity, is the most important not only because it details the organizational principles listed above, but also because it makes a flagrant attempt to intervene directly in the current phase of "sharpening of the class struggle" in China. At present a number of senior party members there, including the director of the Higher Party School who is also a member of the Central Committee, Yang Hsien-chen, are under heavy criticism for supporting the theory that "two merge into one" (Red Flag, 31 August 1964).

This theory is of far-reaching importance because it "intentionally" meets the needs of the modern revisionists" (i.e. Khrushchev), and because the Chinese leaders are using it as an excuse for the biggest "rectification" campaign since the cutting down of the 100 flowers in 1957. Victims are already being sought in the Chinese film industry, as well as in the upper echelons of the party.

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- 4) Emphasis supplied.

The Theses insert their oar by arguing that the official Chinese theory of the process of natural growth by division and by budding is solely an excuse for splitting the world movement. It is a "gross distortion of materialist dialectics." The world movement, according to the Institute, grew not through constant "beneficial" splits, but by uniting all true Marxist-Leninists and by isolating and discarding the splitters. Hence Yang Hsien-chen is right, and his persecutors on Red Flag, People's Daily, etc., deserve to be "discarded."

This represents the third, and most provocative, phase of Khrushchev's counter-offensive against Mao. The first was his peremptory summons to the December preparatory meeting; the second was the whipping-up of nationalist and chauvinist feeling in response to Mao's latest territorial demands; the third is the blatant attempt to encourage the remaining "moderates" in China to support Yang Hsien-chen against Mao and his ideologist, Chou Yang -- in other words, to split the Chinese party. It is a game which is unlikely to be successful in the long run, since most patriotic Chinese will reject Moscow's meddling. But the scale of the campaign now being conducted by the Peking press demonstrates that the anxiety of the Chinese leaders is real, not artificial. Interference by Moscow is not likely to diminish it. It is, however, likely to multiply the Chinese efforts to retaliate in kind, which until now have been notably unsuccessful.

The Theses end with a strong plea to communists everywhere not to cut themselves off from the other "progressive" forces in the labor movement. Like Togliatti, they advocate cooperation with the socialist parties, a theory which the Chinese rightly point out is bound to lead to more and more "reformism" -- e.g. the Swedish CP at present.

Thus they constitute a partial answer to Togliatti, on the issue of the world conference and on the question of discipline in the movement, but it is not a hostile one. On the world conference, the view of the Theses is more likely to be accepted by the bulk of the movement than the "reservations" of Togliatti. On the more important long-term issue of discipline, and particularly of the subordination of minorities to the majority, the probability is that acentrism (i.e., autonomy and diversity) will eventually win the day.

The Program of the CPSU expressed the most that is now politically practicable for the Khrushchev bloc when it urged that the CPs of the world should "voluntarily and consciously coordinate their actions." Attempts, such as the Theses make, to do more than this in a new ideological council which would inherit the mantle of the First International seem likely to be defeated by the combined resistance of the Italian, Rumanian, Polish, Yugoslav and other CPs.

In conclusion one must note that Pravda deliberately triggered off a wave of reprintings of the Togliatti Memorandum by being the first ruling party organ outside Yugoslavia to publish it. Although Brezhnev had asked in Rome for its suppression, it is entirely possible that at that time Khrushchev was not aware of its contents. Three days after Brezhnev's departure for Bulgaria, it was printed in full. This may have been due, and probably was, to the availability of the Theses as an esoteric reply on the following day. However it may also have been due to the fact that Khrushchev saw it not as an anti-Soviet but an anti-Stalinist document, which is probably what Togliatti intended (he had never meant it for publication).

If the latter explanation is correct, it would be reminiscent of the occasion in the spring of 1963 when Khrushchev reversed Kozlov's decision concerning the May-day slogan for Yugoslavia. Again it is likely that Khrushchev's hand was forced by the unjammed Western broadcasts of the Memorandum, and by its publication in Unità.

Whatever the true reason may have been, and it is only certain that we do not yet know, polycentrism has had its greatest success yet in the publication on 10 September of its manifesto in 6,000,000 copies. The Institute's esoteric answer on 11 September is a reminder of how far apart these two centers still are. The logic of the Sino-Soviet dispute will continue to press Moscow towards compromise with the ghost of Togliatti, but the "slowness and resistance" of the "socialist" countries in returning to freedom of expression in culture, art, religion and politics means that the gap cannot soon be closed. On the other hand the disagreement will not become openly hostile, as happened in the case of China, because the Italian CP is not driven by the same nationalist, ethnic and power-hungry mania that inspires Peking.

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