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AS MAKI SEES IT: A DISSIDENT VIEW OF THE COMMUNIST WORLD

Summary: Since the June War of 1957 the "Jewish" Communist Party of Israel, MAKI, has been treated as an outcast by the CPSU and most other Communist parties. Thus, it was not invited to the 1969 Moscow Conference or to the 24th CPSU Congress, its place being taken by the rival RAKACH party. MAKI has reacted by becoming more independent. In a recent lecture a MAKI theorist, Ya'akov Silber, denounced "Soviet hegemonism" while declaring that the Chinese line was no acceptable alternative.

There is some question as to whether the Chinese CP and some of the parties supporting it actually received invitations to the 24th Congress of the CPSU. One reputable Western correspondent reports that the most common story circulating in Moscow is that the Soviets, having conducted discreet soundings, decided not to subject themselves to the certain humiliation of a refusal. (1) Whatever about this, there is at least one Communist party which neither received an invitation nor expected to receive one, even though it was invited to the 23rd Congress in 1966--together with a rival, secessionist Communist party. Only one party in the world fits that description: MAKI, the acronymic title of the original Communist Party of Israel.

The split in the Israeli Communist movement, which took place in the summer of 1965, was unique in that it owed nothing to the Sino-Soviet conflict or other wider issues; instead, it was over attitudes toward Zionism and the surrounding Arab states. After August 1965 there were two Communist parties in Israel: MAKI, headed by Secretary-General Shmuel Mikunis, which was overwhelmingly Jewish in membership; and RAKACH(2), headed by Secretary-General Meir Wilner with mixed Jewish-Arab membership and a heavily Arab electorate. The Soviet party, obviously embarrassed by the split, did its best first to avert it and then to reunite the two factions; but secret tripartite talks held in Moscow in November 1965 were of no avail. Refusing to take official cognizance of the split, the CPSU invited "the Communist Party of Israel" to its 23rd Congress in March 1966, and treated the two delegations which arrived separately as an undivided unit. It was clearly under Soviet pressure that the two delegations managed to produce a blandly uncontroversial joint message to the congress. The pressures of Middle Eastern policies gradually led the Soviet leadership to evince favor for RAKACH, while relations with MAKI deteriorated accordingly. Nevertheless, the CPSU still refrained from backing either side fully, and continued to press intermittently for reunification; thus, in the autumn of 1966 representatives of both factions were summoned to Moscow for tripartite talks which again produced no agreement.

The June War of 1967--in which MAKI supported the Israeli government, while RAKACH condemned Israeli "aggression"--put an end to this unstable, interim situation. The CPSU promptly condemned MAKI, and henceforth accorded RAKACH formal recognition as the legitimate Communist Party of Israel. The overwhelming majority of other Communist parties followed suit, although there were some interesting exceptions among parties which had already developed independent positions. The most notable example was Rumania, which broke with the East European pattern by maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel and inter-party relations with MAKI. The Australian, Dutch, Norwegian and Swedish Communist parties also continued to recognize MAKI as well as RAKACH.

#### The Shattered Monolith

Thus, it came as no surprise when MAKI was excluded from the international conference of Communist parties held in Moscow in June 1969, and it was equally obvious that it would not be invited to the 24th Congress. On both occasions Israeli communism was represented by a RAKACH delegation headed by

Meir Wilner, who has duly and dutifully taken the floor at the congress to denounce the "Zionist leaders" of Israel for their "unbridled anti-Soviet propaganda" and the Chinese leaders for their "anti-Soviet splitting policy." (3)

This isolation has had one advantage for MAKI: its spokesmen can, and frequently do, criticize Soviet policies and practices--the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the treatment of Soviet Jewry, factionalist intervention directed against fraternal leaderships, and so forth. A striking example of this independence is provided by a lecture which the Politburo member Ya'akov Silber delivered at the 15th plenum of the MAKI Central Committee on 13 February 1971, under the title: "The Situation in the Communist Movement and the Chances of MAKI." (4)

It is characteristic that in his introduction Silber can mention, as one stating an indisputable fact, that the international Communist movement, which in Stalin's day could boast of monolithic unity, has now become fragmented "to [such] an extent that it is difficult to speak today of one 'movement', just as one has almost ceased speaking of a 'camp' of socialist states." In his view this fragmentation over the past decade has been in large measure due to "intensified [Soviet] efforts to bring about a Soviet-American world 'condominium.'" The consequent weakening of the international movement, "together with the fading of exaggerated hopes for the superiority of the socialist world system, made the spread of revolutions a remote prospect."

#### Chinese Line No Alternative

This, Silber goes on, occurred during a period when the Chinese leadership, "as a direct outcome of the Stalinist stagnation and deterioration in the Communist movement," was calling for "the renewal of the revolutionary line." One result of this Chinese campaign which he notes with approval was that it "brought masses of youth to an anti-capitalist and socialist understanding and activities, and provoked an ideological discussion in the Communist parties." Silber, however, is no Maoist; and he makes it emphatically clear that MAKI has not exchanged dependence on Moscow for reliance on Peking:

But the "Chinese way" did not prevent new negative features--it even encouraged them--nor did it lead to the consolidation of an alternative. People's China herself adopted a power policy--as was shown by



her cool attitude toward the "New Left," toward Guevarism, the extremist liberation movements (Tupamaros, Hauatmeh (sic) and others) and even toward the Maoist parties that exist in almost all countries...

The Chinese line, with all its affiliated branches, however opposed to the Soviet line, is no alternative. Experience has shown that both incorporate a deviation from the revolutionary way, toward a power policy and toward hegemonism in the Communist movement.

The trouble is that the Communist movement, at all its turning-points, has not gone so far as to criticize fundamentally, in principle, the deviation from the revolutionary line of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Even the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which exposed the crimes of Stalin, did not go as deep as that--did not condemn what we call, in something of a simplification, the phenomenon of Stalinism.

The Soviet leadership's "neo-Stalinist line," as Silber terms it, has not only caused frequent crises in foreign Communist parties, but has also aroused recurrent opposition:

After the Second World War this line caused crises with the implementation of the Yalta agreements (France, Greece), further crises broke out: in 1956--Poland and Hungary; in 1963--the dispatch of the missiles to Cuba and their removal; in the same year the split with China and Albania became an overt fact; in 1964 Togliatti raised in his testament objections against the theory and practice of the CPSU; in the same year many Communist parties disagreed with the manner of Khrushchev's dismissal; and in 1968 the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army aroused the vehement opposition of most Communist parties. And this list does not claim to be complete...

The CPSU has learned to adopt flexible tactics toward such opposition, with the result that it can draw the overwhelming majority of foreign parties (including notably independent ones) to Moscow for an international conference or a party congress. At the same time, Silber charges, the CPSU is always ready, when the occasion offers, to interfere in an attempt to change the line of independent parties

"and even to split parties...when it seems that the Moscow-oriented faction has a chance to win (Denmark, Israel, India, Greece, Finland, Austria, Australia, Spain, Venezuela, Paraguay, and others)." This list illustrates some of the analytical weaknesses of Silber's essentially polemical approach. In his point-scoring zeal he tends to oversimplify and often to claim too much. The inclusion of Denmark can be explained only by reference to the split of the mid-1950s, when former Secretary-General Aksel Larsen seceded from the Danish CP to form the Socialist People's Party; but there was no significant degree of Soviet interference. The splits in India, Finland and Paraguay were of local origin; and although Soviet intervention may have been a factor (particularly in Paraguay), it was not a causative one.

#### Growth of Dissent

The same kind of over-emphasis may be seen in Silber's picture of a CPSU that is steadily losing support--he claims too much:

Very few parties are left whose leaders are "absolutely loyal." Among the 14 socialist states these include, in addition to the Soviet Union herself, only the German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria. There seem to be only four such parties in capitalist Europe: Western Germany, Denmark, Luxemburg and Portugal--all small parties. The Soviet leadership may add to these the Greek (Koliyannis) and Spanish (Lister) factions and the Stalinist factions in Finland and Sweden. The "loyalists" in America include the leaderships of the tiny Communist parties of the United States and Canada (while a considerable part of their members, especially Jews, are opposed) and several parties in Latin America. In Asia, only the Dange faction in India, the small Ceylonese party and several exile parties are faithful to the Soviet line.

The Arab Communist parties, though they are small, are highly appreciated by the Soviet leadership as supporters of its general line--but the Sudanese, Iraqi, Algerian, and to some extent also the Syrian party, disagree

with the Soviet policy with regard to the definition of the ruling regime in their own countries.

What is true, on the other hand, is that many more foreign leaderships than in the past are prepared to assert their own interests even when they conflict with the demands of "proletarian internationalism" as interpreted in Moscow; in doing so, they are prepared to dissociate themselves publicly from damaging developments in the USSR and other Communist regimes; on occasion, they are even prepared to go beyond comradely criticism to downright reprobation. The outstanding example in recent years has, of course, been the reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Silber does not fail to bring it up:

Characteristic is the approach toward the invasion of Czechoslovakia: there is no big Communist party in any capitalist country that does not continue to dissociate itself from the invasion--Italy, France, Spain, Greece, the majority in Finland; in Asia--Japan and India (Marxists), as well as the majority of the European parties. The Communist parties of Australia and the Netherlands disapprove of the line as such (sic).

The differences of opinion between many Communist parties and the Soviet leadership come into the open from time to time, in spite of all the efforts to reach a "normalization"; this happened again when the Soviet authorities objected to the Nobel Prize award to Solzhenitsyn, and recently during the shootings at the workers of Gdansk and Szczecin and the trial of a group of Jews in Leningrad.

### "Limited Independence"

In most cases, Silber suggests, the Soviet leadership will not worry too much about rebellious divergence on the part of smaller Communist parties. "When the tendency is to introduce -- in addition to 'limited sovereignty' -- also a 'limited independence' of the Communist parties, the decision is clear." Moreover, this predominance of Machtpolitik is "not a specialty of Brezhnev," but the continuation of a tradition. Thus, "Soviet publications (recently: A.D. Shutov (sic) in the booklet "The World Communist Movement at the Present Stage")



say quite frankly that the international conferences are now regarded as an institution that determines the 'general line' binding every Communist party in the world and 'excommunicates' everyone who disagrees with it."

Here one must note again the overemphasis of the polemicist. The significant change in the Communist world since Stalin's time is precisely that other parties -- minor as well as major -- can disagree with and even attack the CPSU, and do so without incurring an "excommunication" which the Soviet leaders are no longer capable of imposing. What is more interesting is Silber's analysis of the motives that inspire the CPSU and the other parties in this situation:

This trend persists because the Soviet leadership is interested in a Communist movement that supports it. It needs this support to maintain its ideological image in the Soviet Union and abroad. A country that seeks "two-power rule" with the United States needs more than ever a public image that only a world Communist movement can provide. It certainly needs the support of the big Communist parties to strengthen its bargaining positions.

The Communist parties respond to some extent to this trend, because the link with the Soviet Union grants them an international importance that enhances their status compared with other workers' parties, turns them into factors of national importance (in regimes that want to tighten their ties with the Soviet Union, as happened in Sudan and Ceylon), and also protects their internal stability. Whereas conflicts with the Soviet leadership are apt to inflict upon a Communist party sanctions, attempts of [sic] a split from outside and inside, and disintegration.

These reciprocal relations explain why the Soviet leadership makes such extensive efforts to gain the support of the leaders of every party, however small, on the one hand -- and why almost all parties do their best, in spite of everything, to find a modus vivendi with the Soviet leadership.

### Divergence and Diversity

Silber is outlining a complex and still evolving system of interparty relations from which his own party has been virtually excluded -- a fact which explains his penetrating frankness. But a psychologically necessary optimism goes with the frankness. Granted that there are these factors making for a continuation of the status quo (i.e., Soviet hegemony), there are other factors making for further changes. Silber lists five reasons for believing "that, in the existing conditions of contradiction, these occurrences [of "opposition to the big-power-line and to Stalinist hegemony"] will become still more frequent and more intensive":

- a) If the Communist parties accept the Soviet line of "two power rule" with everything it implies for their countries, they will lose the support of part of their membership and mainly their attractive influence on the younger generation. An acquiescence in "limited sovereignty" in the style of the military intervention in Czechoslovakia must necessarily undermine their credibility and obstruct their own policy of establishing fronts with other sections of the labor movement, including the social-democrats, and an advance along the parliamentary way. Therefore even leaders who are afraid of the risk will be forced to adopt a more independent policy, first of all in countries where the Communists are mass parties that lead trade unions, whereas the country is ruled by reactionaries...
- b) The "Czechoslovak Spring" and the recent events in Poland show that in the European socialist countries, too, despite all efforts of the Soviet leadership, the policy of "limited sovereignty" for the sake of "two-power rule" encounters increasing difficulties.
- c) The growing power of People's China and the new tendency of the U.S.A., and also of China, to pursue a "policy within the triangle" U.S.A.-Soviet Union-China are a further difficulty for the Soviet line in its multilateral confrontation.
- d) On the other hand, the new "Ostpolitik" of West Germany, with whom the Soviet Union is trying to compromise, might change static positions and raise new problems. This is still more probable in the case of "package deals" with the United States.



e) There are some indications that growing strata inside the Soviet Union, too, are seeking changes and all the above circumstances strengthen this trend.

Despite all the negative factors and traditions, therefore, Silber places his hopes on a perspective of change, leading to a looser international movement in which divergences and diversity are not only tolerated but even welcomed, and in which MAKI is reaccepted as a member of the new commonwealth of equal and autonomous Communist parties. He cites his party's official conviction that, at the present stage of the world Communist movement, "the principal obstacle is the hegemonism which the Communist parties of the two great powers, the Soviet Union and China, are trying to impose on the whole movement." (5) This, though, is a formidable obstacle. One may readily grant his point that there exists a reciprocal relationship between the wider problem of the struggle for "the liberation of the Communist movement from Stalinism" and the particular problem of the outcast MAKI. But one wonders whether time will justify his bold conclusion, that "the line that adapts itself to the Soviet and even Chinese power policy, including adaptation to Arab anti-Israeli chauvinism, relies on elements that are bound to pass. Though a hard struggle against this line is still ahead -- [this line] is doomed to final failure."

Kevin Devlin

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(1) Alain Jacob in Le Monde, 31 March 1971.

(2) The name RAKACH is a Hebrew acronym for "New Communist List," the title under which the secessionist party contested the 1965 Knesset elections.

(3) TASS, 7 April 1971.

(4) MAKI Information Bulletin, April 1971, pp. 8-17. In the quotations given here some solecisms and obvious errors in the Bulletin's translation from the Hebrew have been corrected.

(5) From the General Resolution adopted at the 16th Congress of MAKI in October-November 1968 (Paragraph 25).