

• November 9, 1964

BEHIND THE FACADE

Students of international communism are faced with many puzzles these days. A minor but fascinating one is posed by the recent talks between the Norwegian and Bulgarian Communist parties in Sofia, and the joint communiqué issued afterwards.

As published in the November 4 issue of the Norwegian CP organ, Friheten, the communiqué noted that the talks covered "questions concerning the building of socialism...the situation in the international Communist movement...and the fight for peace and peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems." It added that "the two parties had a united viewpoint on the questions discussed."

This is rather like a joint statement announcing identity of views between, say, Governor Rockefeller and Mr. Goldwater. If this is a joint communiqué, one can only say that the joint is showing. On the first two of the three subjects mentioned, and especially the second, Norwegian and Bulgarian Communist positions are far apart; and there has been no evidence that the gap has been diminished through what could only have been an "unprincipled compromise."

Norwegian Rebellion

As the downfall of Khrushchev has shown again, the Bulgarian régime stands out among the satellites (or former satellites) in its virtually unconditional alignment with Moscow -- whoever may be in power in Moscow. The contrast with the Norwegian CP is striking. For almost two years now the tiny Norwegian party (estimated membership 4,000-5,000) has been moving towards a position of independence marked occasionally by direct and blunt criticism of the Soviet Union.

This attitude found striking expression in October 1963, when the Central Committee issued a statement deploring the

vehemence of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and announcing that the Norwegian CP "will not participate in the discussion in a manner which may result in a further sharpening and deterioration of the situation."¹

Maintaining this stand of critical independence, the Norwegian CP called in March 1964 for a cessation of inter-party polemics and "some action" to end the Sino-Soviet dispute,² and followed this by opposing the CPSU's call for an international conference. This, however, did not mean ideological neutrality, but rather organizational independence. Despite the existence of a minority faction of dogmatists, led by the former party chairman, Emil Løvlien, who was forced out of office in January 1963, the Norwegian CP is firmly opposed to the Chinese positions on such issues as the peaceful way to socialism and the strategy of left-wing alliances. It has, however, taken a vigorous part in the campaign for party independence led by the Italian Communists outside the Socialist Camp and the Rumanians inside it. An important development here was the week-long talks which Norwegian and Italian CP delegations had in Rome in May 1964; these produced a joint communiqué indicating opposition to Soviet plans for a showdown with the Chinese, and emphasizing the need for "full recognition of the autonomy of each party."

"We Protest..."

However, the gap between Bulgarian and Norwegian CP positions became even more glaringly obvious in their very different reactions to the fall of Khrushchev. The Bulgarian response was to abandon Khrushchev and transfer allegiance to his successors. The Norwegian CP, on the other hand, declared bluntly that the first official reason for his "resignation" (age and ill health) was "not correct." While other West European parties were beginning to call for explanations, the editorial in the October 19 issue of Friheten went further: "Regardless of the explanations which may be given for this, we protest against a change of leadership for which no clear reasons have been given, and which has not been prepared with more openness."³

¹ Friheten, October 7, 1963; see FWA paper, "Norwegian CP Out of Step," of October 9, 1963.

² See FWA paper of March 12, 1964, "Norwegian CP's Stand."

³ The Chief Editor of Friheten, Reidar Larsen, said in a television interview on October 24 that his party would demand a "thorough explanation of the ouster of Khrushchev; if none was given, confidence between the CPSU and other parties would be threatened."

The editorial granted with suspicious readiness that Khrushchev had his "serious defects"; but asked pointedly why no measures had been taken against them before this:

"The responsibility cannot be placed on Khrushchev alone. There is now cause to point to the complete, monolithic rejection by the Soviets when such questions were taken up by fraternal parties; and one must ask if the CPSU is still suffering from the dangerous vice of not carrying on a completely free and open discussion in all circumstances. If so, it is not least in this field that a change is needed.

"First and foremost, they must get rid of the manner which interprets as hostility criticism of standpoints and conditions one does not like. Together with this, the practice of excluding top leaders from criticism should be abolished. Inside every Communist party there must be tolerance towards other opinions than those of the majority...

"Khrushchev has deserved neither to be placed on the peak of infallibility nor to be thrown into the gutter."

From this it is clear that the Norwegian CP used the downfall of Khrushchev to strengthen its own posture of critical independence. By interfering in the internal affairs of the CPSU through these aggressive statements, not backed by any action such as sending a delegation to Moscow, the Norwegians were in effect warning the CPSU not to interfere in their own affairs. The contrast with the Bulgarian party's positions is striking, and was further emphasized by a Radio Sofia broadcast of November 7 which, with notable disregard for reality, hailed the Soviet Union as the "undisputed vanguard" of the international Communist movement.

One may wonder, in vain, just why the Bulgarians invited a Norwegian CP delegation to Sofia for discussion or debate at this critical juncture. Speculation on the course of the talks would be both fascinating and futile. However, the episode offers a useful reminder that in these confused days one must discount the bland formulas of many a "joint communiqué," and try to uncover the clash of interests and opinions behind the façade of formal unity.

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