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NEO-STALINIST MANIPULATION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF COMINTERN

Summary: Upon Lenin's initiative the Third Communist International, the Comintern, was founded on 4 March 1919. Today, the leadership of the CPSU is trying to take advantage of every opportunity in its past history to formulate arguments against the "revisionists" and the "Maoists." The anniversary of Comintern is one of these opportunities. A number of articles that appeared on the history of the Comintern have changed or ignored certain facets of this organization's past and have been directed towards one goal: to direct the world's communist parties -- as Lenin once himself considered -- more firmly from Moscow.

"The 50th anniversary of the Comintern is an outstanding date in the history of the world revolutionary movement." In this way, Boris Ponomarev, head of the CC International Section, begins his article in the international communist journal Problems of Peace and Socialism. (1) Many Soviet newspapers have also published articles on this occasion. The same tendency is clearly perceptible in all of them: the problems and conflicts which existed a half a century ago, and Lenin's formulations, should now be brought "up-to-date" and moulded into requests and teachings of the Soviet leadership for the fraternal parties.

(1) Problems of Peace and Socialism, No. 2/1969, p. 147.

As 50 Years Ago -- Against the Revisionists

It is certainly not by mistake that the organ of the defense ministry, Krasnaya Zvezda, reveals the most direct approach to the problem: (2) After counting off the "Leninist principles of Party work" and praising the great achievements of the Comintern in leading the other parties of the world to adopt these principles, the paper continues:

...This and other Leninist principles of organization have provided the communist parties with a strong power of upheaval, and it is not by accident that the renegades from Marxism-Leninism attack these principles with great bitterness. It is well known that a splinter group of Mao Tse-tung's has crushed the Leninist basis of the activities of the communist party, has destroyed the principle of democratic centralism, has done away with democracy and has introduced the control of a military-political group over the Party.

In the same breath, the paper also attacks present-day revisionists and makes a manipulated example out of Lenin's battle against the revisionists in his day:

Sharp attacks are being carried out against the centralized principle of the communist parties. The revisionists reject the necessity of unity of will and action, they encourage anarchy without consideration of the fact that this leads to the destruction of the bases of party activity and to the weakening of the leading role of the Party.

Krasnaya Zvezda recommends to the communist parties of the world that they make use also of the "gigantic experience" from the period of the Comintern. It is said that this experience is especially interesting today, for -- just as in the past -- revisionists and splittists, sectarians, nationalists and others are hard at work. The most important teaching which can be learned from the Comintern is, according to the journal, to retain the unity of the international communist movement at any price.

Yet over all these words there hangs a spectre -- the meeting of communist and workers parties in Moscow in May.

Silence on the Destruction of CP Cadres

Significantly, the fatal consequences of the Stalinist personality cult is not mentioned in any of the important Soviet articles on Comintern. However, this sort of neo-Stalinist manipulation cannot be carried out with such consistency in publications appearing in the communist world outside the Soviet Union. In the article by Ponomarev already mentioned, this

(2) Krasnaya Zvezda, 4 March 1969.

unpleasant problem is dismissed with the following two sentences:

Unfortunately the negative consequences of the cult surrounding the person of Stalin and the resultant deviations from Leninist norms had an influence within the activities of the Comintern also -- especially in relation to its cadres. As it is known, the CPSU condemned at its 20th Party Congress and at following party congresses all manifestations of the personality cult and took measures to overcome its consequences. (3)

Ponomarev writes that "in the quarter century of its existence, the Comintern [educated] a whole generation of leading cadres in fraternal parties in the spirit of proletarian internationalism," and as for the Soviet Comintern leaders, he listed six people, dividing them in the following Solomonic manner: three died of natural causes -- Stalin, Zhdanov, and Manuilskii, and the three others ... were murdered upon the formers' initiative -- Knorin, Piatnitskii and Gusev. Such a compromise was certainly worked out at a high level, for the "three to three" ratio provides a certain "just" impression, while a complete list of cadres would have revealed that, in fact, more were liquidated than died of natural causes.

During Khrushchev's era, the "damages to socialist legality" in the Comintern carried out by Stalin and his accomplices were documented in detail. In a volume of Sovetskaya istoricheskaya entsiklopediya which appeared several months after Khrushchev's removal from office, the following passage can be found:

...Unfortunately the Comintern and some of its sections were exposed to great damages precisely at this period through the misuse of power and through reprisals stemming from the cult of personality. In 1938, the Communist Party of Poland together with the Communist Parties of the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia which belonged to it were slandered and dissolved. The members of the leadership of the Polish, Yugoslav, Latvian and other communist parties were exposed to reprisals, as were some functionaries of the ECCI (International Executive Committee), the MOPR (International Assistance Organization for Revolutionaries), Profintern, KIM (Communist Youth International), and other organizations (Yu. Lenski, M. Gorky, Bela Kun, etc.). These losses were reflected clearly in the activity of some of the parties. (4)

(3) Problems of Peace and Socialism, 2/1969, p. 164.

(4) Sovetskaya istoricheskaya entsiklopediya, Vol. 7, Moscow, 1965, Col. 766.

Even this formulation has been clearly thought through and carefully stated. As Stalin's crimes were discussed at the 20th Party Congress (1961) and as not only Khrushchev but also Shelepin gave long reports on the subject, the destruction of cadres in some sections of the Comintern was stressed. The First Secretary of the CC of the Lithuanian CP, A. Yu. Snechkus, complained in a meeting held that year:

A group of well-known Lithuanian Communist leaders who lived in the Soviet Union became victims of capriciousness in the Soviet Union. Now they have been rehabilitated. How many worthy cadres could Soviet Lithuania have today had not the criminals during the time of the Stalinist cult been at work! (5)

Exact reports on the destruction of Latvian cadres exist. The Foreign Office of Latvia's CP, which was located since 1920 in Moscow, was decimated. Stalin claimed that the office was a spy organization and it was dissolved in 1936, followed soon after by a purge among the Latvian Communists who were living in the Soviet Union at the time. The co-founders of the Latvian CP were liquidated (Ja. Berzin -- Ziemelis and Ja. Lenzman) as were the members of the provisional secretariat, Jan Krumins-Pilat and E. Apine, and such well-known persons as Jan Radzutak, E. Eikhe, K.-Ju. Danishevski, V. Knorin, K. Petchak, R. Endrups, R. Bause, E. Sandreiter, F. Pauser, O. Dzenis and P. Stuchka. (6)

The Estonian section of the Comintern also lost its best members in the Soviet Union, among them Ja. Ja. Anvelt, as well as such old Bolsheviks as Ch. Pegelman, N. Janosn, R. Mering, O. Fjastas, I. Kjaspert, R. Vakman, Ja. Saks, E. Alas and A. Sakkart. (7).

If one were to attempt to discuss the liquidations which took place within the ranks of the Polish CP, several pages would be filled with the most important names of the Polish, Western Ukrainian and Western Belorussian CP leaders alone. Then one would have to add to this the murdered functionaries of the German, Yugoslav and Rumanian Communist Parties and -- as was seen in documents which were published shortly before the invasion of the CSSR in 1968 -- of the Czech and Slovak Communist Parties.

(5) Sovetskaya Litva, 11 November 1961.

(6) "Za pravil'noe osveshchenie istorii Kompartii Latvii," in Kommunist, No. 12/August 1964, p. 65 ff.

(7) Ocherki istorii Kommunisticheskoi Partii Estonii, Tallin, 1963, p. 343.

Resistance to the Comintern Manipulations

The distortions and attempts to write a chapter of present-day political history from the experiences of the Comintern as cited above have met with resistance especially in the socialist countries outside the Soviet Union. It is no accident that the Rumanian Communists are the most vocal opponents. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Comintern a series of critical articles have appeared in Rumanian newspapers on the role of the Comintern in the world communist movement. The Stalinist debasements are especially criticized. The Rumanian Communists interpret "experiences of the Comintern" in an almost diametrically opposed manner to that which is understood in the Soviet Union. A Rumanian daily newspaper wrote:

...Life revealed more and more the improper character of the interpretation according to which the [various] communist parties were seen as divisions of a supra-national organization; it revealed the negative consequences of certain practices and methods which consisted of determining the political line and the specific tasks of the [various] communist parties without recognizing the circumstances in each individual country, of proscribing the forms and methods of their activities, of forcing upon them instructions which were seen as generally applicable, and of intervening in the activities of the [various] parties. Life itself showed that, considering the great diversity of circumstances and concrete tasks which are incumbent on the [various] communist parties, it is practically and objectively impossible to lead them from one center. (8)

The accent is also put on different syllables in the Rumanian and Soviet discussions of the end of the Comintern. Soviet sources speak quietly of a resolution on the dissolution of Comintern, while the Rumanian newspapers speak of it as an intelligent and far-sighted step.

Unity Above All

The major goal of these manipulations of Comintern history was already mentioned: the use of the historical experiences of the Comintern on the basis of Marxism-Leninism for the present time. Ponomarev expresses this in the following words:

Internationalism in fact -- amounts to the joint actions of various national divisions of the international communist and workers movement, it is the common battle for the interests of the working class, against imperialism and its aggressive policies, for peace and security, for socialism.

(8) Neuer Weg, Bucharest, 12 March 1969.

Internationalism in fact -- that is the strengthening of the unity of the socialist community, in which each socialist country does its very best to fulfill its international duty -- the construction of socialism and communism; it is, the carrying out of such a policy within the socialist countries and in the world arena which contributes to the strengthening of the world socialist system, the major factor in the present revolutionary movement. (9)

Ponomarev's article is full of such phrases as "uniformity of the socialist community," "joint responsibility for the course of socialism," "unity of action" and finally the following conclusion:

Internationalism means recognition of the international meaning of the Marxist-Leninist teachings.

In the battle for unity at any price, Pravda has found an accomplice -- the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the USA, Gus Hall. A long letter, which was probably written at Soviet request, was published, which ends with the following wish:

The problems have changed. The concrete conditions have changed. The development of closer relationships, of stronger ties and of a more solid unity of the communist, Marxist, world movement is a necessity and remains an irrevocable task.