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NEW SOVIET ELEMENT: COMPROMISE

One of the more interesting aftermaths of the Cuban crisis is the apparent modification of the Khrushchevian concept of peaceful coexistence to include provision for concessions from the USSR. Heretofore, in spite of Soviet withdrawal from Austria (1955) and from the Porkkala base in Finland (1956), and agreement to a cease-fire in Laos (1961), an underlying assumption of the peaceful coexistence formula has been a gradual Western capitulation before steady, if generally cautious, pressure from the USSR. This assumption has been evident in Khrushchev's Berlin policy. The 7 November celebrations in Moscow have, however, produced remarkable statements both by Khrushchev and by first Deputy Chairman Kosygin which could, if carried through, give an important new definition to peaceful coexistence.

Khrushchev reportedly told Western correspondents at the 7 November Kremlin reception that the Soviet Union 'was in favor of compromise on the basis of mutual concessions'. The most important qualities today, Khrushchev is reported to have told U.S. Ambassador Kohler, are 'reason, a sense of responsibility, and flexibility'. Kosygin, speaking at the 6 November anniversary meeting, spoke at greater length on the virtues of compromise. Explaining the Soviet agreement to withdraw offensive weapons from Cuba, he said:

"Who gave in to whom in this situation? We consider that it was a concession from both sides, a concession to reason and peace...On the basis of compromise and mutual concession, the acuteness of the conflict has now been eliminated...Some may ask: was it worthwhile making concessions? We consider that concessions had to be made by both sides, because they were wise concessions and a wise compromise. The compromise was in the interest of all the people, because the danger of world thermonuclear war was averted on its basis.

"The Leninist policy of peaceful coexistence means that the two antagonistic systems existing on our planet...have conceded that they can live without war, in other words exist. This, indeed, is a compromise and a mutual concession."

The compromise-mutual concession line was picked up shortly thereafter by Radios Warsaw, Prague and Bratislava which carried the verbatim text of the above Kosygin quote. Prague

and Bratislava presented the material simultaneously in their weekly roundup commentary on 11 November, indicating the existence of a general guidance on the subject. The Soviet weekly magazine Novoye Vremya (New Times) of 10 November, in an article titled "The Blockade of Cuba" by Boris Izakov, pointed out that there had recently appeared on the international scene "a tendency toward negotiations, peaceful settlement and reasonable compromise." The latest commentary comes from Italian communist leader Togliatti, who told a press conference in Rome on 12 November that "the Albanian government had failed to understand that communism had had to make compromises in the interests of peace, while also keeping pace with modern progress".

It is possible that this modification of peaceful coexistence to include "compromise" and "mutual concession" has been adopted solely as a more credible smokescreen for the Khrushchev retreat in Cuba than exaggerated claims of victory could be. On the other hand, taking the long view, the Cuban crisis may have initiated a trend toward relativization of Soviet foreign policy objectives and a reduction in the driving force toward complete world domination. Finally, the compromise line may serve Khrushchev as a further esoteric weapon against the Chinese, particularly in relation to the current invasion of India. In any case, however, it should be realized that any degree of digestion of the compromise concept is occurring in a Russian and not in a western stomach. If the process is taking place at all, it has been set in motion by the fear of nuclear destruction and recognition, under shock, of the limitations of Soviet power rather than by a sudden impulse of humanism. The foundation from which such a development must proceed has been succinctly described by Professor Philip Mosely:¹

"One of the difficulties of the Soviet-Russian vocabulary is that the word 'compromise' is not of native origin and carries with it no favorable empathy. It is habitually used only in combination with the adjective 'putrid'. 'Compromise for the sake of getting on with the job' is natural to American and British people, but it is alien to the Bolshevik way of thinking and to the discipline which the Communist Party has striven to inculcate in its members. To give up a demand once presented, even a very minor or formalistic point, makes a Bolshevik-trained negotiator feel that he is losing control of his own will and is becoming subject to an alien will. Therefore any point which has finally to be abandoned must be given up only after a most terrific struggle. The Soviet negotiator must first prove to himself and his superiors that he is up against an immovable force. Only then is he justified in

¹ "Techniques of Negotiation", a contribution by Philip Mosely to the book Negotiating with the Russians, Dennet and Johnson, World Peace Foundation, Boston, 1951, p. 295.

abandoning a point which plainly cannot be gained and in moving on the next item, which will again be debated in an equally bitter tug-of-wills."

Following the behavior pattern laid out in the above quotation, we may expect the "next item, which will again be debated in an equally bitter tug-of-wills" to arise in Berlin. Indeed, the development of Soviet Berlin policy in the coming days and weeks will be the first great test whether "compromise" and "concession" are to play a new role in the peaceful coexistence formula.

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