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Research and Evaluation Department
Background Information USSR

Sino-Soviet

25 October 1961

FOR MOLOTOV READ MAO?

The most significant new development at the 22nd Party Congress in the past 24 hours is the speech of L. F. Ilyichev, head of the Agitprop Department of the CC, CPSU for the Union Republics, of which at present only a summary is available. Even the summary, however, contains some passages of considerable analytical interest.

After implying that the cult of Khrushchev's personality is now undergoing criticism and arguing that a hostile attitude to the new cult is erroneous because all that is involved is the "authority of a leader," Ilyichev gave a revealing official version of the early fate of Khrushchev's agroroda article, published by Pravda in March, 1951. This is said to have contained "new theses of principle on the development of agriculture" and to have been permeated with "deep humanism." Ilyichev then said that Stalin had objected to the article, and had had "a correction" published on the following day (the Guardian, 25 October 1961, reports that it was Malenkov who was acting for Stalin in this matter).

Was Ilyichev merely currying favor with his chief, or could he have had a more important motive for raising this subject? Naturally to a Soviet official in 1961, Khrushchev's thesis on agriculture even ten years ago must have been correct. But if Khrushchev was right in claiming that the way ahead for socialized agriculture lies through the agrorod, Mao Tse-tung could not have been right in 1958 when he put forward the commune program. There can scarcely be two communist theoretical solutions to the same problem, both equally tenable, and it may well have been this lesson, among others, which Ilyichev's speech was discreetly attempting to drive home.

But a clearer example of the underlying anti-Chinese polemic which is one of the themes constantly recurring in the denunciations of the anti-party group by the 22nd Congress was Ilyichev's criticism of Molotov.

It appears that in 1957 Molotov had published a "pretentious" article on Lenin, and according to the agitprop chief, had "posed as a 'monopolist' on Lenin -- and this at a time when Molotov clearly departed from Leninism." Three years later, on April 18, 1960, Molotov submitted to Kommunist a further manuscript on the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth.

This article, Ilyichev said, "bears the stamp of the dogmatic position not only on many political and economic problems but also on questions of theory, the stamp of the position which has been condemned by the 20th Congress." All students of the Sino-Soviet controversy, including most of Ilyichev's audience, are well aware that in point of fact a dogmatic article "Long Live Leninism!", not in Kommunist but in the Chinese theoretical party journal Red Flag (No. 8, April 16, 1960), was the signal for the beginning of the most acrimonious public stage of the dispute. In other words Molotov, who may well have written the article for which he is now condemned, is being used as in Mikoyan's speech to represent Mao, because the time factor shows that the Molotov article could well have been influenced by Red Flag's thinking.

On the day before Ilyichev spoke, N. G. Ignatov had made another new accusation against Molotov, alleging that while the latter was in Ulan-Bator he had been engaged in "double-dealing" (Izvestia, 24 October 1961). It now appears that he had also been writing his article on Lenin, because it was in April 1960 that he was sent back to Moscow from Mongolia "for reasons of health."¹ Looking back, it surely seems more likely that the real reason for his removal from Ulan-Bator was the "dogmatic" article on Lenin, which Kommunist refused, but which may well have been strikingly similar in many passages to Red Flag's "Long Live Leninism!". If so the nature of the "double-dealing" is plain enough -- Molotov may in fact have been intriguing with Mao against their common antagonist.

But "Long Live Leninism" was more than just a hide-bound, ultra-orthodox reiteration of fundamentalism such as Molotov might have written. It was also the first overt challenge to Moscow's self-conferred right to lay down the policy for the whole bloc and therefore a direct threat to Khrushchev's leadership. Molotov alone, a tired, discredited, defeated old Bolshevik cut off from all the sources of power in the USSR is scarcely a real danger to Khrushchev, either in Ulan-Bator or Vienna. But Molotov as a symbol of and in collaboration with Mao is a very different matter. This axis would easily explain and justify the concern expressed in Ilyichev's, Ignatov's and Mikoyan's speeches.

In view of the possibility that Ilyichev was in fact attacking the Red Flag article, it is worth recalling a small part of what the latter said:² "War is an inevitable outcome of systems of exploitation and the source of modern wars is the imperialist system..."

The contrast between this and the Chinese -- as well as Molotov's -- acceptance of the 20th Party Congress thesis of

¹ London Times, 9 September 1960.

² The Sino-Soviet Dispute, The China Quarterly, London, 1961, pp. 78 et. seq.

peaceful coexistence is clear enough. Red Flag also described "peaceful transition" to socialism in bourgeois countries as "an extraordinarily rare opportunity." It would be "difficult to imagine" it said, that a Communist Party could come to power by parliamentary methods -- civil war must be the road for true communists. It will be recalled that on this latter point Mikoyan, in his speech on October 21st, had denounced Molotov for "serious mistakes...on the diversity of the forms of transition of various countries to socialism." To sum up, it seems that the main current political significance of Ilyichev's speech is not that Molotov is in the dock. After all, as Ignatov put it, the anti-party group in the USSR is "a snake without fangs." One part of it is cringing, the other is hissing. But it cannot bite." The point is that beside Molotov looms the shadowy figure of Mao, a man with 700 million fangs, plus the ability to use them should ever Khrushchev and the Soviet Party drive him too far.

r.r.g.