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Background Report

General Desk

"BI-LATERALISM" OR "MULTI-LATERALISM" -- THAT IS THE QUESTION

One of the points which separate Yugoslav and Soviet
Communists

In his speech before the Czechoslovak CP Central Committee the CC Secretary Jiri HENDRYCH, when criticizing "modern revisionism", rejected as "completely unfounded" views that "bi-lateral" talks between the various Communist Parties "are the only possible or even admissible form of international co-operation between the Communist Parties." Rather, "conferences of a larger number of parties" (i.e. multi-lateral talks) would seem only natural. HENDRYCH even proposed the publication of an international Communist review of political theory, in other words a new "Cominform Journal".

HENDRYCH's attack on "bi-lateralism" was in fact an attack on the Yugoslav Communist theoreticians. It has been BELGRADE's view that "bi-lateral" talks were sufficient and that any larger meetings could only lead to a re-establishment of a Cominform-type organization. One of the leading Yugoslav theoreticians who have advocated "bi-lateral" and sharply rejecting "multi-lateral" talks between the Communist Parties throughout the world, has been Veljko VLAHOVIC. VLAHOVIC is the President of the Commission for International Relations of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia, a front organization dominated by the Yugoslav CP.

Soon after KHRUSHCHEV's and BULGANIN's visit to BELGRADE at the end of May and beginning of June 1955, VLAHOVIC published a long article in the June/July issue of "Komunist" (then still a monthly theoretical organ of the Yugoslav CP) under the title "On the Forms of Co-operation Between Socialist Forces".

VLAHOVIC decisively rejected old Stalinist forms of multi-lateral co-operation which led to the foundation of the Cominform and complete domination of the Soviet Union over all other Communist countries, and said that the old forms of co-operation "cannot meet the demands and requirements of contemporary co-operation between socialist forces".

VLAHOVIC added that "the attempts to revive the Comintern through the Cominform have shown all the illogicality and impossibility of resuscitating old forms in present conditions. Once again we have confirmation of the truth that the contemporary situation cannot be viewed through old spectacles".

In VLAHOVIC's opinion the "conflict termed in a simplified way as the conflict between the Cominform and Yugoslavia" was in fact a conflict between two opposing tendencies: one which tended toward complete "organizational and ideological monopoly", the other which fought all "patterns and monopolies".

"The creation of the Cominform", VLAHOVIC continued, "confirmed once again that ... it is impossible, and moreover, directly harmful, to form any center which would direct the workers' organizations of various countries... For us, today, it is clear that every attempt to install new life into the existing forms of association of the labor movement, would be absurd and a waste of time. The present situation requires forms of co-operation suited to it. It would, however, be just as foolish now to start prescribing or determining in advance the forms of future organization. The ground must first of all be cleared for the strengthening of all positive elements in the co-operation of socialist forces, now appearing on the horizon. And this means renouncing the existing organizations, renouncing every attempt to prolong the life of these organizations by injections... This process presupposes the repudiation of all attempts to impose monopoly upon the labor movement... Future co-operation between socialist forces will evolve in a process of constant struggle against similar attempts which, no doubt, will appear in the future too... under the most varied guises..."

Only 10 months later, on 17 April 1956, the Cominform was dissolved. TITO visited MOSCOW in June of that year and a series of "bi-lateral" talks between various Communist Parties took place. It seemed as if the Yugoslavs had won the round. They virtually had, but their victorious mood lasted only for several months. The October events in Hungary had shattered most of TITO's hopes, including the one based on the principle of "bi-lateralism". Advocating this principle to replace the Cominformist "multi-lateral" system of co-operation, VLAHOVIC said in the above-mentioned article: "There can be no co-operation if any one side should harbor designs aimed at hegemony, should make attempts to impose ideological and organizational hegemony upon the workers' movement..."

Two Years Later ...

As we said, the article by Veljko VLAHOVIC was published at the end of June 1955. Two years later the Yugoslavs were compelled to conclude that nothing had changed essentially. True the Cominform was dissolved but VLAHOVIC's words that the attempt at hegemony "will appear in the future too... under varied guises" proved correct. The slogan of "proletarian internationalism" became a new kind of "Cominformism" and the "old forms of co-operation between the Communist Parties", the forms so vehemently fought by the Yugoslavs, remained intact. The only change was the change of tactics.

In an interview with "Komunist", which in the meantime had become a weekly, Veljko VLAHOVIC dealt with same theme as in his June 1955 article. Although the Titoist idea of "bi-lateral" co-operation suffered heavy losses, VLAHOVIC said in the paper's May 10 issue of this year:

"In the course of the last few years has come an even stronger affirmation of co-operation on the basis of bi-lateral relations. Bi-lateral co-operation, which for a long time has characterized the international relations of our workers' movement, has become a much broader phenomenon both in the theory and practice of the international workers' movement..."

As a culminating point of "bi-lateral" co-operation VLAHOVIC quoted the BELGRADE and the MOSCOW declarations "after which a series of bi-lateral talks between various Communist Parties took place". All this, in VLAHOVIC's opinion, "has shown the correctness of the Yugoslav analyses and conclusions claiming that the classical forms of multi-lateral co-operation have become outdated..."

VLAHOVIC continued: "The latest forms of co-operation which, judging from everything, in the nearest future will be expressed even more, should especially be pointed out. What is in question? It has appeared now that within the framework of bi-lateral co-operation, the necessity for a series of organized discussions and lectures about specific problems has become inevitable". As an example of such a discussion, VLAHOVIC quoted the recent exchange of Italian and Yugoslav theoreticians who discussed various problems both in ROME and BELGRADE. "Such meetings", VLAHOVIC added, "despite different views were very successful and it can be expected they will develop still more in the course of further co-operation".

Asked to say what he thought the most characteristic sign for the future co-operation within the international workers' movement, VLAHOVIC answered: "The present period is characterized by the clearing of the ground for a broader and fuller co-operation". (Note: VLAHOVIC also spoke about same "clearing of the ground" in his article two years ago! - Ed.) "It should not be forgotten that many differences have piled up in the course of the past years; these differences have contributed much to the widening of the gap within the international workers' movement. This gap cannot be bridged overnight..."

VLAHOVIC showed the old Titoist optimism when he said: "What is now appearing on the horizon is the process of the annihilation of dogmatism which has nestled within the workers' movement for a long time; it was this dogmatism which made the solution of contemporary problems difficult... We are at the beginning of the process of a much stronger increase of consciousness in the workers' movement..."

To the question: "What makes successful co-operation within

the workers' movement difficult?" VLAHOVIC answered: "Every sharpening of the international situation influences in a negative way the development of this co-operation. This was shown especially in the course of the events in Suez and Hungary... The narrow bloc conceptions are also a great obstacle to co-operation... In this connection different analyses of the Hungarian events are very characteristic, as well as the attitude toward our analyses and appraisals of these events. It is well known that our analyses of the Hungarian events were criticized by the workers' movement both in the East and the West. Of course, this double criticism came from different starting points."

In this connection VLAHOVIC attacked "anti-Communist propaganda in the West" and especially "the activities of the American trade unions". In VLAHOVIC's opinion this anti-Communist propaganda "has come to the surface especially in periods of international tension and is harvesting excellent results". In periods of relaxation of tension "this propaganda becomes unpopular and the workers are able to identify it with reactionary-political propaganda which serves reactionary interests and actions..."

Concluding his interview, VLAHOVIC expressed his "great optimism" for the future because "further development will more and more compel the working class to keep in step with the needs of contemporary development and to seek such forms of co-operation as will be in the interest of the working class and of the further successful development of socialism".

The same theme on "bi-lateral" versus "multi-lateral" co-operation was dealt with by J. BOZOVIC in the June 14 issue of "Komunist". In the author's opinion "the conception of bi-lateral co-operation is gaining ever more ground" throughout the world.

In conclusion we quote similar ideas published by "Politika" of May 1, 2 and 3 in an article written by Djuka JULIUS. Speaking about the "original Yugoslav socialist experience" with regard to co-operation among Communist Parties, JULIUS said:

"We have approached this co-operation in a new way, on the basis of bi-lateralism which includes in itself the struggle against hegemony and centralism... We have understood brotherhood as equality... The slogan of proletarian internationalism must not be identified with loyalty to a single socialist country... This is the reason why bi-lateralism, in one form, or another, is affirming itself even where it was not implemented before... All those who have attempted to prevent contacts between the socialist from the West and the Communist from the East, are completely losing the ground from beneath their feet..."

S.S.

End