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RADIO FREE EUROPE Research

FREE WORLD

WGM

14 September 1964

TOGLIATTI'S TESTAMENT: A NEW EAST-WEST PROBLEM

One of the most interesting aspects of the "Togliatti testament" has been the tardy and mixed reaction which it provoked in the Communist régimes of Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia alone was prompt to publish the full text¹; but Yugoslavia is a special case -- outside the Bloc and having a close ideological alliance with the revisionist Italians. But in the other Communist countries to the East the dam of silence stood for almost a week, until it was breached on September 10 by the publication of the full text, without comment, in Pravda. On the same day the Hungarian party organ Nepszabadsag published what appears to have been a lengthy report (not, apparently, the complete document). That evening the Czechoslovak news agency Ceteka carried the full text, which was also to be published in next day's Rude Pravo. On September 11 it was published in full in the East German organ, Neues Deutschland; and on September 12 it appeared in full in the Polish weekly Politika.

At the time of writing, that leaves Rumania and Bulgaria as odd men out. One wonders how long they can continue to withhold from their party members a document of such controversial importance to all Communists.

It was in any case unlikely that these ruling parties could keep up their stony or embarrassed silence for long. Apart from the reports of Western broadcasts, the memorandum was published in Rinascita and L'Unità of September 5, both of which are normally available in Moscow and other East European capitals; and any attempt to forbid the importation and distribution of these particular issues of the Italian CP organs would have been asking for trouble, in the present state of inter-party and intra-party relations.

¹ The full text was published in Politika (Belgrade) of September 5 and 6, in Vjesnik (Zagreb) of September 6, 7 and 8, and in Delo (Ljubljana) of September 9.

In fact, some of these régimes must have very mixed feelings about the Italian document. First, those of them that, for their own reasons, share the Italian Party's opposition to a showdown with the Chinese are strengthened in their stand by the relevant sections of the memorandum. It has been plausibly reported that the Polish and Rumanian delegations to Togliatti's funeral joined the Yugoslavs in urging the publication of the memorandum, while the Russian Brezhnev urged that it be kept secret, as a private affair between the PCI and the CPSU.²

Yet, while these parties would welcome the memorandum's stress on party autonomy and its warnings against pressing the Sino-Soviet conflict to a final split, they must be disturbed by other passages in the document -- the call for more democracy, not only between parties but within parties, and for more liberal policies on religion and culture; above all, the implicit claim that the PCI and other non-Bloc parties have the right to criticize Communist regimes, especially for their reluctance to complete the process of destalinization. One can understand why ruling parties should be reluctant to publicize this explosive material at home, however useful some of them may find it in their ideological diplomacy.

Answering the Challenge?

This, of course, applies with equal or greater force to the Soviet regime. Why, then, did the Russians decide to publish the memorandum -- and in full? There are a number of possible answers, none of them entirely adequate. One is that the Togliatti memorandum -- when published by the present PCI leadership, converted into a party memorandum and backed by what one can only call a full-scale publicity campaign -- was, among other things, a challenge to the CPSU. It was, that is, a challenge to Soviet authority and influence -- not, any longer, control -- in the divided world movement. Togliatti, we recall, not merely opposed Soviet plans for a showdown, as he had done before; he explicitly condemned as mistaken and harmful the whole Soviet policy on the ideological conflict, and put forward an alternative policy of his own.³ Moreover, the publication of the memorandum by the Italian CP leaders was, in effect, an invitation to other parties to join them in rejecting Soviet leadership on this basic issue. Since the Russians are clearly bent on preserving what they can of their authority and influence over other parties, even at the cost of a final split in the international movement, this challenge (already publicized among parties outside the Bloc) could not be left entirely unanswered.

² See FWA Background Information Paper of September 10, "From Memorandum to Testament," pages 2-3.

³ See FWA Background Information Paper of September 10, "Togliatti: Challenge to Moscow." An editorial in L'Unità of September 9 by Luigi Pintor makes the point explicitly. "The memorandum," he writes, "does not limit itself to reaffirming the validity of the general line of the 20th Congress and the need to combat the mistaken positions of the Chinese comrades, but in this double direction it does much more: it helps to indicate and construct a political strategy which really corresponds to these general affirmations and indications, and may make the whole movement advance by promoting its unity."

It is, of course, eminently possible that the Soviet reply, when and if it does come, will deal with the Italian positions only in general terms, without referring specifically to the memorandum. It would be difficult for the Russians to polemicize with the dead leader whom they exalted so warmly only a few weeks ago.

Indeed, the "Theses on the First International" published in Pravda on September 11, the day after the publication of the Togliatti text, may be taken as at least a partial answer to the memorandum, since the clear drift of the theses is towards an organizational showdown with the Chinese (which Togliatti opposed), and they explicitly commend as still valid the organizational rules of the First International, including "compulsory observance of decisions ... with minority subordination to the majority" -- which not only undermines the Italian position on party autonomy but would oblige the Italians to accept the decisions of a Soviet-dominated international conference, having had their anti-revisionist say to no avail. The Theses must have been prepared by the Soviet Central Committee's Institute of Marxism-Leninism, as an answer not only to the Chinese but to Italo-Rumanian positions, before the contents of the memorandum and the PCI's decision to publish it were known. Yet the publication in Pravda on the heels of the Togliatti document looks like very deliberate timing.

In any case, the Theses are only a partial and far from adequate reply to the arguments of the memorandum. It seems possible, perhaps probable, that a further Soviet reply -- direct or indirect -- has yet to come. However, if it does come, we may expect that it will not be polemical; it will, rather take issue firmly but courteously with the Italian arguments, in the tone of an affectionate and conscientious father reasoning with a wayward child. Times have changed, and the great Party of Lenin must now woo allies where once it could coerce satellites. (During the past half-year the Rumanians, for instance, almost appear to have been seeing how far they can go in pulling the bear's tail -- and it is far, indeed.) Khrushchev himself gave what looked like a foretaste of the official answer to the memorandum in his speech in Prague on September 4, when he referred almost indulgently to the "good intentions" of some fraternal parties (like the Italian CP) that sought a postponement of a conference pending efforts to bring the views of all parties closer together. The Chinese, he explained with paternal emphasis, were not open to honest discussion and just did not want unity.

The Great "Debate"

But, whatever the Soviet arguments, and whatever their effect on the Italians and on other parties, the Russian decision to publish the memorandum and (presumably) reply to it means an important point scored by the Italians in the developing debate. What the Italians want is precisely an inter-party debate, in which party autonomy would be further emphasized, the PCI would enhance its image of revisionist independence and

(if possible) organizational measures against the Chinese would be postponed. In his speech of September 8 Longo euphemistically referred to the ideological conflict as "the international debate," adding that Togliatti's memorandum confirmed the continuity of the positions taken by the PCI. In fact, there has not been, and will not be, a debate in any meaningful sense of the word; but during the next three months the catalytic effect of the Togliatti memorandum will probably encourage a flow of ex-parte comments, emphasizing disunity among the "pro-Soviet" parties⁴ -- an unpromising preparation for the preparatory meeting.

In the circumstances, publishing the memorandum was perhaps a risk that the Russians felt impelled to take; but they must have been aware of its grave implications for their internal policies. This must represent a major policy decision -- but what was the decision? To implement more fully the post-stalinist ideal of equality in inter-party relations, giving at least some major parties the right of criticism and debate? Possibly. To weaken the Italian challenge by acknowledging and perhaps later answering it? Probably. To signal a real liberalization in internal affairs? Almost certainly not.

The publication of the complete text, including the criticism of the USSR and other Communist regimes, is partially explicable in terms of inter-party policy, but it remains a mystery. As one distinguished commentator has put it, the Russians have opened a Pandora's Box. This is unprecedented fare for Pravda readers. The effect on writers, "believers" and party members is incalculable.

Criticism from Comrades

If the Rumanians and Bulgarians follow the Soviet lead by publishing all or part of the memorandum, as the other "satellites" have already done, they will in some ways be running even greater risks. Togliatti's testament will add fuel to the smouldering embers of discontent throughout Eastern Europe. The régimes are used to coping with "capitalist propaganda," but hard-hitting criticism from a Communist leader of Togliatti's stature is something very different: it will not only encourage disaffection outside the party on every level, but will also shake the certitudes of party militants.

This question, in addition to broader Sino-Soviet issues, will certainly be on the agenda when Italian CP delegations arrive shortly in Prague, Budapest, Bucharest and East Berlin for inter-party talks, as announced in L'Unità of September 12. The Italian party organ emphasized the significance of these missions of ideological diplomacy by declaring: "The meetings take on particular significance and importance in the framework of preparations for the meeting to take place in Moscow in December, and of the debate going on in the international working-class movement."

⁴ The most direct and adequate pro-Soviet reply to the memorandum so far has come from the French CP, in Charles Haroche's article, "Ce que nous attendons d'une conférence internationale," in the party weekly France Nouvelle (No. 986, September 9-15, 1964). Rivalry between the French and Italian CPs for ideological influence in Western Europe also plays a part here.

In its attitude to the Eastern régimes Togliatti's memorandum represents policy attitudes which have long been maturing within his party, but carries them farther than ever before. The PCI's grand strategy of "peaceful-way" alliances involved the building of an enlightened, independent public image; and this in turn implied the need to criticize Communist regimes when their policies threatened to tarnish that image by association.

Until a year ago such criticism was muted, infrequent and cautious (except for safe attacks on the stalinist past). Open Italian Communist criticism of Soviet cultural policies during the wave of neo-Zhdanovism in the spring of 1963 could still be interpreted as a tactical liberty permitted to the Italians. But the decisive and unmistakable step forward came with the PCI Central Committee resolution in November 1963 -- the one which rejected the first, indirect Soviet call for a conference. One passage ran:

"Even in Socialist societies there remain acute and profound contradictions...

"Of fundamental importance ... are the overcoming and liquidation of those illegitimate restrictions and violations of democratic principles and of socialist legality which for too long have obscured the ideals of socialism and damaged economic and democratic development both in the Soviet Union and in other Socialist countries.5

During the following half-year the same kind of criticism was implicit in statements developing the Italian Party's positions, especially concerning the need for genuine democracy, debate and the toleration of dissent, as when Pietro Ingrao declared in one article:

"We affirm that the Socialist leadership of the new proletarian state can also be realized through a plurality of political forces ... not through a single party, but through a collaboration (and debate, and confrontation) between various political forces of Socialist orientation."

"Admit Shortcomings"

But in his memorandum/testament Togliatti goes much farther. In the first place (he argues) the shortcomings of the Communist regimes must be frankly admitted:

"It is not correct to refer to the Socialist countries (including the Soviet Union) as if everything were always going well in them. This is the mistake, for instance, in that section of the 1960 declaration dealing with these countries. In fact, there continually arise in all the Socialist countries difficulties, contradictions and new problems that must be presented in their effective reality.

"The worst is to give the impression that everything is always going well, while suddenly we find ourselves faced with the necessity of referring to difficult situations and explaining them."

Going into more detail about these shortcomings, the memorandum questions Soviet and East European concepts and practice of democracy as no Communist leader has ever done before.

With a side-swipe at democratic centralism, Togliatti suggests that intra-party differences should be brought out into the open:

"Perhaps it could be useful in some cases for the Socialist countries also to conduct open debates on current problems, the leaders also taking part."

In another passage, dealing with destalinization, the attack is direct and the criticism explicit:

"The problem of the origin of the cult of Stalin and how this became possible must be considered in general as unresolved. To explain this solely through Stalin's serious personal faults is not accepted..."

"The problem that claims greater attention, one affecting as much the Soviet Union as the other Socialist countries, however, is today, especially that of overcoming the régime of restrictions and suppression of democratic and personal freedom introduced by Stalin."

"Not all the Socialist countries present the same picture. The general impression is that of a slowness and resistance in returning to the Leninist norms that ensured, within the party and outside it, a wide liberty of expression and debate on culture, art and also on politics."

This emphasis on cultural and intellectual freedom is an important component of the PCI's public image, and here the clash with policy and practice in East Europe is inevitable. As the memorandum puts it: "We must become the champions of liberty of intellectual life, of free artistic creation and of scientific progress ... In this area much assistance could come to us -- but has not always come -- from the countries where we already direct the entire social life."

Even more sensitive is the question of religion; one can understand why the Polish leaders, for example, are reluctant to publicize the Italian positions on this issue. These positions are based on the PCI's need to appeal to the left-wing Catholic electorate, but they are rationalized into direct criticism of Communist regime policies, as in the recent Rinascita article polemicizing with Ilyichev.⁶ Togliatti's memorandum speaks of pressure among Catholics in particular for a move to the left, which Communists must understand and assist. "For this purpose the old atheist propaganda is of no use." The implications of this passage are emphasized by an editorial in L'Unità of September 10. This pledges the PCI to the attempt to "build in Italy a Socialist society so constructed as to assure a real plenitude of freedom ... to every citizen and every brand of thought. From this follows, in particular, full and real religious freedom, and not just freedom of worship."

⁶ Lucio Lombardo-Radice, "Religious Freedom and the Italian Way to Socialism," Rinascita, July 4, 1964 (See FWA Background Information Paper, "The Independent Italians," of July 17).

"Western Communism"

This emphasis on democratic freedoms, and the memorandum as a whole, springs from Togliatti's vision of a new Communist order of unity in diversity. An important element in that vision is the stress on national communism and regional communism, with each party and group of parties free to order its own affairs in response to local conditions. Here Togliatti was particularly concerned with the Communist parties of the industrial West. His own party, by its unparalleled success and its revisionist elaboration of the doctrines of the "Italian Way" has a strong claim to the ideological leadership of this important group of parties -- a consideration that clearly weighed heavily with Togliatti in his writing of the memorandum. This can be seen in his proposal for "rather frequent contacts and exchange of experiences among the parties on a broad scale [and] convocation of collective meetings dedicated to studying common problems by a certain group of parties." Specifically, the Italians want West European Communists to work for "a development and coordination of the workers' immediate demands and of the proposals for economic structural reforms ... within a general plan of economic development to counterpose to capitalist planning."

But, as we have seen, a Western Communist alliance formed in the Italian image would also be "counterposed" to the policies and practices of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe -- independent, pragmatically concerned with electoral success and ready to criticize the Communist heartland when necessary. Such an alliance is not yet in sight, thanks to the rival appeal of the French CP and the conditioned reflexes of other parties. But Italian influence is growing, notably in Scandinavia. A September 8 dispatch from London in L'Unità noted without disapproval that "The Times yesterday spoke explicitly of the formation in Rome of 'a third center of the Communist world'." Clearly, the full impact of the Togliatti testament has yet to be felt in Europe -- East and West.

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