

## THE FAILURE OF KHRUSHCHEVISM

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### I

THE decade in the course of which N. S. Khrushchev stood at the head of the Soviet Communist Party and of the U.S.S.R. was an interregnum and a **provisorium**.<sup>1</sup> One cannot speak of a "Khrushchev era" as one speaks of the Stalin era, not merely because Khrushchev was in office only one-third of the time Stalin had been, and exercised not even one-third of the ~~power~~.<sup>2</sup> Khrushchevism has not represented any great positive idea (or even policy) of its own. It did not even stand for a new canon or myth which might meaningfully express, as *Socialism in One Country* did, the "false consciousness" of a real historic situation. Khrushchevism was devoid of any creative aspiration; whenever Khrushchev himself voiced any of the familiar and elementary purposes of socialism, he invariably produced a vulgar parody (a "goulash communism"). In many respects he continued along lines long set by Stalin, but pretended that he was putting forward his own, breath-taking, innovations. "Peaceful coexistence" is a case in point. So is the slogan of a "peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism." So are the "national roads to socialism." These are all refurbished Stalinist concepts dating back to the Popular Fronts of the middle 'thirties and the National Coalitions of the middle 'forties. And Khrushchev was an epigone of Stalin above all in his emphasis on the "monolithic character" of the Soviet party and state. His determination to tolerate no opposition, no open criticism, no free debate, inevitably led to the "cult" of his own "personality," that is to attempts at establishing his own autocratic rule.

Yet Khrushchev, the epigone of Stalinism, was almost completely overshadowed by the popular image of the champion and hero of de-Stalinization. Such was the paradox of his career that despite his stake in Stalinism and his large share in its misdeeds, he had to assume an even larger share in its destruction. He was torn between his attachment to Stalinism and his revulsion against it, and, on personal grounds, between his adoration for Stalin and his burning memories of unbearable humiliation suffered at Stalin's hands. In this he was representative of a whole generation of party leaders on whose backs Stalin had risen to power and who then had to endure the master's kicks and cruel whims. Helpless in Stalin's lifetime, they revenged themselves on the ghost. However, they were in a position to satisfy

their emotional urge for revenge only because broader political interests—the needs of the nation at large—called for de-Stalinization.

But was Khrushchev really the initiator and champion of the progressive reforms of the post-Stalin decade? Historians who will one day relate the "inner story" of the campaign of de-Stalinization will probably represent other members of the Presidium, especially Mikoyan and Malenkov, as the moving spirits. In any case, up to the time of the 20th Party Congress, i.e. till February 1956, Khrushchev either sided with Molotov and Kaganovich, the Stalinist "die-hards," or hesitated and sat on the fence. In the meantime de-Stalinization, necessitated by economic and social needs, had gone so far that it was impossible to halt it; indeed, it was necessary to carry it much further. The slave labour camps had **been** disbanded even before the 20th Congress. The surviving victims of the terror and the Great Purges had been released and were claiming full rehabilitation for themselves and their dead comrades and relatives. Their cry broke into the debates of the 20th Congress. For any Soviet leader it was suicidal folly to ignore it or resist it, as Molotov and Kaganovich were presently to find out; the Stalinist terror had already been exposed and had been condemned by a new national consciousness. Fairly late in the day Khrushchev yielded to the prevalent mood and let himself be swayed by it. His "secret speech" was the surprise of his life, even to himself. Through it he became the medium of a tremendous popular emotion, the mouthpiece of a national sense of grief and shame; and so he surpassed himself and the scope of his own personality. The more reluctantly and belatedly he had assumed his new rôle, the more abrupt and explosive was his performance. He concealed his embarrassment and inner misgivings behind his over-emphatic gestures and his strident denunciation of Stalin. And ever since the 20th Congress his activity was marked by this contrast between the melodrama of his anti-Stalinism and his anxiety to keep progressive reform within narrow limits.

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A large section of Soviet opinion was well aware of the ambiguity of Khrushchev's political character, and of the motives that had induced him to give his blessing to the party's break with Stalinism. This blessing, largely platonic, was becoming a curse in disguise, for it was concealing a stubborn and cunning obstruction to any genuine socialist democratization of the U.S.S.R. (Incidentally, the image of Khrushchev the champion of **de-Stalinization** was in recent years far more widely accepted in the West and in some East European countries, especially Poland, than it was in the U.S.S.R.) Consequently, at the moment of Khrushchev's fall Soviet opinion was quite confident that this event far from impeding further progress would facilitate it.

The 1964 "crisis of leadership" was an event unprecedented in Russian history. Never before had a Russian ruler been stripped of power

in this way, while holding all supreme offices in the state. For this to be possible, the old inertia of autocratic rule had to be broken. The crisis was resolved by a combination of a palace revolt and a quasi-democratic vote at the Central Committee. Neither the revolt nor the vote would have gone as smoothly as they did if only a few "power-hungry men" had joined hands to oust Khrushchev. For the action to succeed the main body of the ruling group had to turn against the Leader. The several hundred members of the Central Committee would not have agreed to the deposition of the man who had for eleven years been their First Secretary unless they, their friends and associates had become convinced that this was justified and necessary on grounds of policy. True, Khrushchev had antagonized the Central Committee by posturing as the single leader; and so he provoked it to assert its claim to collective leadership. All the same, his quasi-autocratic ambition was, by Moscow's standards, rather mild; and the fact that it should have aroused so determined a reaction is itself remarkable. Any bureaucratic oligarchy or caste, so the "political scientists" have told us, prefers one-man-rule to government by committee and invariably replaces any collective leadership by the single leader. This, we have been told, is the "iron law" governing every struggle for succession at the top of the Soviet hierarchy. What then has, in this case, undone the "law"? Why did the Soviet ruling group unequivocally refuse to reconcile itself to Khrushchev's one-man-rule?

## II

Looking back upon the post-Stalin era, one can see that it falls into two distinct chapters: the first, covering the period from 1953 till 1959, was crowded with intense reformist activity and was alive with de-Stalinization; the second, extending over the remaining years of Khrushchev's government, was on the whole characterized by stagnation and even retrogression. The two chapters may overlap; yet their contrast is real and sharp.

It was during the first period that the terror and the arbitrary power of the political police was broken and the mammoth concentration camps were disbanded; that the old draconic labour code was abolished in industry and the extreme inequalities prevailing hitherto were mitigated; that the *kolkhoz* peasantry were offered a New Deal; that the overcentralization of the economy was relaxed; and that official control of intellectual and artistic life relented. Soviet citizens began to breathe more freely than they had been allowed to in a quarter of a century; and the effect was seen in rising curves of economic, social and cultural activity and achievement. Most of the many-sided progress the Soviet Union accomplished in the post-Stalin era was accomplished in those first years. It was then, between 1953 and 1958, that Soviet agriculture, overcoming a depression lasting several decades, raised its

output by over 50 per cent. Although the gain was insecure—much of it had been obtained through extensive farming on virgin lands—it nevertheless provided the basis for an appreciable rise in the national standard of living.<sup>3</sup> For the first time the Soviet Union appeared to cope successfully with the perilous disproportion between its huge and ever-expanding industry and its narrow and shaky agricultural base. The *élan* of the industrial expansion was extremely powerful; it provided the impulse for the triumphant flights of the first *Sputniks*.<sup>4</sup> There was a new spirit abroad among workers, managers and administrators, and a new confidence in the future.

This forward trend was reversed or slowed down in the latter part of Khrushchev's term of office. The decisive setback occurred in agriculture, the weakest sector of the economy. This was by no means only a matter of the natural calamities and the disastrous harvest of 1963. The slump had occurred much earlier and was followed by a protracted depression: of the five harvests reaped in the years 1959–63, four were bad or mediocre, only one was average. What the natural calamities of 1963 did was to reveal with exceptional force the weakness of the agricultural structure. Exposed also was the incompetence of the administration, which was unable to distribute meagre food resources adequately. The cities and towns experienced a scarcity of food such as they had not known since the grim aftermath of the Second World War; and some sections of the population appear to have been hit worse than the Chinese people were by three years of floods, droughts and poor crops. The rise in the popular standard of living came to a halt, even though production of industrial consumer good continued to expand.

In the last six years of the Khrushchev régime the average wages of Soviet workers rose only by 2·4 per cent per annum, according to what A. N. Kosygin told the Supreme Soviet in December 1964. Because of a partial inflation—official prices of meat and milk had been increased by 25 to 30 per cent—real wages were reduced or remained unchanged. An undeclared wage freeze had actually been in force since 1959 or 1960 (and the world was to learn about it only by the end of 1964 from a brief aside in an exposé of the new Soviet Prime Minister). The realization of legislative measures providing for a further shortening of working hours in industry and for the rise of low incomes and old-age pensions was postponed. Even the housing programme, never yet planned to match the people's real needs, was curtailed. The general rhythm of economic activity slackened. Net national income rose in 1964 only by 5 per cent compared with a 7 or 8 per cent rate of growth in previous years (and an 8 per cent rate planned again for the year 1965). The rate of growth in the construction and equipment of factories amounted to only 3·3 per cent in 1964—it is planned at 8·2 for 1965. The scale of industrial development was still impressive: the steel industry, for instance, with its 85 million tons of annual output, almost

caught up with the American level of the early 1960s. But the growth was once again, as it had been in the Stalin era, uneven and lopsided, relatively smooth in old-type heavy industry and armament, but slow and jerky in new industries (e.g. in synthetic fibres and electronics). Quantity of production was not matched by quality; and so State trading organizations reported huge unsaleable surpluses of durable consumer goods of inferior make. These surpluses were valued at 2 billion roubles, a sum amounting to about one-third of annual capital investment in light industry. Behind this mass of unsold goods there looms the reality of an immense consumer strike, a development which, though unthinkable in the years of acute scarcity of consumer goods, indicates how rigidly backward and inadaptably Soviet light industries have been. The social disproportions that were characteristic of Stalinism have reappeared on a higher level of development, together with new elements of disequilibrium.

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Why did the reformist impulse, so powerful in the first half of the Khrushchev decade, exhaust itself in the second half? In part the predicament was (and is) inherent in objective circumstances, especially in the burden of the unending, nuclear and conventional, arms race. It is not known just how large is the actual Soviet armament expenditure, as distinct from the nominal defence budget. But it seems that of the sum total of the net national income (which amounted to 175 billion roubles in 1964 and is planned to reach 189 billion in 1965) only 55 per cent or so is allocated to private consumption, social services and education.<sup>5</sup> The rest is distributed, in unknown proportions, between the national accumulation fund and armament expenditure. Of all new, strictly industrial investment, about 15 per cent, at the most, is allocated to consumer industries; new investment in farming is approximately of the same order. It is enough to state these proportions to realize the magnitude of the problem. A nation spending continuously nearly half its income on new investment and defence is bound to suffer from severe strains and stresses in its economy and its social organism. True enough, the national income has more than doubled in the post-Stalin era; and the volume of civilian consumption, even if it represents an unchanging proportion of the income, has grown accordingly. But, as we have seen, the major part of that growth occurred before the year 1960. The subsequent slowdown has had its moral-political consequences. As long as the poverty and destitution of the Stalin era were fresh memories, even a slight rationalization of economic policy and modest concessions to consumer interests were enough to evoke contentment and boost morale. But with the rise in the general level of the national economy the level of social needs and expectations has risen accordingly; and as many needs and expectations remained unsatisfied, there was bound to be much frustration and discontent.

These difficulties were (and are) dangerously aggravated by the arbitrariness, the muddle, and the corruption of officialdom. Of this the Soviet Press brings countless grotesque, and shocking, illustrations, reminiscent of pages of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The stupidity and wastefulness of its own administration cost the Soviet Union no less than do some of the most expensive armament drives—they “freeze” immense resources and energies. Genuine social control over the bureaucratic establishment is therefore the precondition of any thorough-going rationalization of the economy. Yet the bureaucracy has stubbornly resisted control; and in his last year Khrushchev personified that resistance. His arbitrary decisions—his “projectomania” denounced by his successors—had much to do with the disarray in agriculture. He willfully promoted extensive farming on immense areas of virgin land in preference to intensive cultivation; and in doing so he disregarded opposition within the party, expert advice, and warnings about the danger of soil erosion and of crop failures on the virgin lands. He was so confident that he had *the* answer to the chronic shortage of meat—maize—that he forced cultivation of maize all over the country, regardless of soil and climate. He prescribed the modes of grass cultivation to be adopted throughout the length and breadth of the Soviet Union. By his decision the small plots of land the collective farmers owned and cultivated privately were reduced or confiscated in recent years. (This decision affected many millions of farmers; yet it remained a “secret” while Khrushchev was in office and only his successors disclosed it.) He feverishly manipulated the machinery of the administration, overhauling it time and again. These reorganizations were his substitute for genuine reform: he was like the orchestra conductor of the Russian proverb who continually re-seats his musicians in order to improve the music. As a rule the reorganizations changed the modes in which control over the bureaucracy was to be exercised from above; they hardly ever created any opening for control from below. Without satisfying the mass of the people, they irritated the bureaucracy which became weary of the all too frequent shake-ups, and turned against Khrushchev.

### III

In the first years after Stalin the conflict between state and society, or between bureaucracy and people, was greatly mitigated; now it is again becoming acute. The old tension between the progressive dynamics of the U.S.S.R. and the conservatism of its ruling groups is mounting again. This was the conflict and the tension that had undermined Stalinism in the early 1950s. The new structure of Soviet society had by then become incompatible with the backward political superstructure. A method of government designed to keep in subjection a semi-barbarous and pre-industrial nation could not be imposed on a nation transformed by a quarter century of mass education, urbaniza-

tion, and industrialization. Nor could an ideology and a party canon, which reflected the Soviet Union's post-revolutionary isolation and moral depression, suit the Soviet Union which a generation later stood at the head of "one-third of mankind."

Stalin's successors and ex-disciples alleviated the **conflict**; but they could not resolve it. They could offer only half-solutions and palliatives. They lifted from the state they had inherited the insanity of the Terror and the Purges; but they failed to bring sanity into its workings. They freed the Soviet people from fear, but they were unable to inspire them with hope. They relieved them from harsh oppression, but denied them genuine freedom. They encouraged them to think for themselves, but did not allow them to express critical thought. As to Khrushchev, he began with trimming the bureaucratic Establishment and cutting its privileges. But, although he did this in order to consolidate its dominance and immunity, the Establishment clung to its privileges and pretensions, and showed little zeal for subduing even rank corruption in its midst.

The popular mood differs, of course, from what it was in 1953-54. Stalin's rule had left the mass of the people resentful yet awe-struck, despairing yet numb with helplessness, unable to endure their lot, yet unable also to change it. At the end of Khrushchev's rule there is hardly any sense of awe, and there is only little of the old numb resentment. Instead there is open discontent over the disarray in the economy, and over the suppression of criticism and opposition; and there is much irritated impatience with incompetent and incorrigible officialdom.

It is true that the bureaucracy has, since Stalin's days, greatly changed to the better. But Soviet society has changed even more. Its intrinsic progressive dynamics has been working within it and transforming it. Urbanization and industrialization have been ceaselessly altering its entire structure. The following table shows the scope of this transformation which stands unique in history.

THE PROGRESS OF URBANIZATION IN THE U.S.S.R.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total population</i>		<i>Rural</i>
	<i>in millions</i> <i>(round figures)</i>	<i>Urban</i> <i>population</i>	
1920	137	21	116
1926	147	26	121
1939	171	56	115
1950*	178	69	109
1959	209	100	109
1962	220	112	108
1964	226	118	108
1965	230	122	108

\* The statistics for the years beginning with 1950 include the population of the lands incorporated by the U.S.S.R. since 1939. The figures for 1959 are those of the official census; for the following years we have only official estimates.

Thus within the lifetime of one generation the urban population of the U.S.S.R. has grown by nearly 100 million souls; and nearly half of this growth has occurred since the end of the Stalin era! In the early 'fifties the rural population still formed the great majority; in the early 'sixties the majority consisted already of town dwellers; at present the latter constitute about 55 per cent of the population.

Simultaneously, the mass of industrial workers and office employees has grown from 44 million in 1953 to over 75 million in 1965, that is by over 70 per cent (55 million or so are workers). People employed by the state constitute about three-quarters of the entire working population. The *kolkhoz* peasantry form the remaining 25 per cent. In little over a decade the entire balance between the social classes has changed. For the first time the working class forms the majority of the nation. The peasantry is not much more numerous than is the intelligentsia, the mass of doctors, teachers, office workers, managers, scientists, officials, etc. The Russia of the *muzhiks* has receded far away into the past, much further than she had moved by the early 'fifties. Not only has the peasantry shrunk in size; its moral-cultural weight has also greatly diminished. The ties which used to bind the working class and intelligentsia with the *muzhik's* way of life and way of thinking have been dissolving. With every few years passing now, that section of the urban population whose mentality is not marked by rural origin and a culturally primitive background is growing. Ever more people are town dwellers in the second and third generation. The outlook of the cities and towns has been changing; there has been less and less of the old Slavonic sloth and listlessness; and the urban crowds have become more "westernized," i.e. they have been acquiring individuality and modernity. Continuous educational advance has given breadth and depth to the change. In the last ten to twelve years the number of pupils in secondary schools has approximately doubled; so has the number of university students.

Khrushchevism represented quite faithfully the social balance and cultural climate of the early and middle 'fifties, when the weight of rural primitivism was much greater than it is now. Khrushchev himself belonged to the borderline between the old and the new Russia; he stood with one foot in the modern town, with the other in the archaic village.

"Despite all the progress achieved hitherto," I argued in 1959, "there still exist vast areas of backwardness and primitivism in the Soviet Union today; and it is the strength of Khrushchevism that it is the authentic product of this mixture of progress and backwardness. There is still much of the old *muzhik* in Khrushchev himself—he is the *muzhik* who has reached the threshold of the atomic age, the last *muzhik* to speak in the name of Russia. . . . In another few years there will be hardly a trace left of the Russia of the *muzhiks*. A new working class is growing up. Already in the 1950s most of the young workers who came to the factory bench had

received secondary education. They have played their part in changing the atmosphere in industry. They have behaved towards managers and party bosses with the self-assurance that comes with education. With every year the weight of these educated 'factory hands' is growing; and demands for workers' control of industry will acquire new meaning with the workers' growing ability to exercise such control. . . mass education is narrowing the gulf between manual labour and brain work. It was in the abysmal depth of that gulf that the Russian bureaucratic absolutism—and Stalinism—had been rooted; and one can foresee that the narrowing and bridging of the gulf will render obsolete and impossible even the milder, the Khrushchevite form of bureaucratic dictatorship.

"Despite his great self-confidence, untameable vigour, and slapdash drive [so I concluded], Khrushchev presides over what can be only a relatively unstable and short interregnum. What lies ahead is not a Khrushchev era comparable to the Stalin era. Not only are Khrushchev's days as grass—he has risen to power in his sixties, whereas Stalin did so in his forties. Far more important is the tremendous flux in which Soviet society finds itself, and by which it is being transformed so rapidly that the passage of only a few years renders obsolete and makes untenable relations, institutions, laws and political practices which have long seemed to be deep-rooted and almost indestructible. This flux has broken through the heavy crust of Stalinism; it will break through the much thinner and flimsier crust of Khrushchevism."

Yet, despite the manifestly changed outlook of the Soviet working class and intelligentsia, despite their new cultural capacities, and despite also their evident restiveness, they have not formed so far any articulate political movement from below, any nation-wide opposition to the bureaucratic régime. There has been no lack of industrial strikes, local street demonstrations, even food riots. Clandestine opposition groups have existed in Russian universities—various "Leninist study and propaganda circles," membership of which has been punished as high treason. An impressive number of tracts, essays, poems, and short stories, which could not pass the censorship—a whole semi-clandestine literature—is circulating from hand to hand in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities. Yet all these reflexes of social discontent have been sporadic and scattered; they have not merged into any national expression of protest. In this one respect the situation has not decisively changed in all the years since Stalin. And even if a few poets and novelists have managed to raise dissenting voices and to find wide response, society at large is still inarticulate. The working class remains politically mute.

What accounts for this state of affairs? And what are the prospects? In the 1950s the "crust" of Stalinism had to be broken from above, by the Stalinists themselves precisely because no movement was rising from below to change or reform the system of government. After a further decade, for the same reason, the "crust" of Khrushchevism is

being broken by the **Khrushchevists** themselves. No one else was able and ready to break it. The ruling groups seek once again to readjust structure and superstructure by means of Reform from Above. Yet the limits of such reform are rather narrow, much narrower than they were in the 1950s. Then Stalin's successors could shed a huge ballast of terrorism, and still leave the basis of the bureaucratic régime intact. Khrushchev's successors cannot achieve any comparable feat; they cannot once again appease popular discontent by concessions as startling as those of the 'fifties. The new concessions must cut deeply into the bureaucratic structure itself, which now stands exposed and stripped of safety margins. What is at stake is no longer the "right" of a Leader and a ruling group to terrorize the nation, but the very essence of their political monopoly, their "right" to speak for a people which is not allowed to speak for itself. The predicaments with which the Soviet Union is contending at present call not for a new dose of patriarchal-bureaucratic "liberalism," but for genuine liberty and a genuine advance to socialism.

The continuing disparity between the need for control from below and the apparent inability of those below to exercise control is puzzling and even alarming. At the end of the Stalin era that inability was not surprising: thirty years of totalitarian pressure had atomized the working class and the intelligentsia and reduced their political thinking to utter formlessness. During the post-Stalin decade the masses have been re-learning the habits of independent opinion-formation; but they have been re-learning much too slowly, and the ruling oligarchy has been all too successful in obstructing the process. It is not so much police persecution that has prevented any progressive Soviet opposition from crystallizing and acting on a national scale. In recent years there has probably been less persecution than there was in Tsarist Russia, when, generation after generation, rebels and revolutionaries put forward their programmes and fought for their aims openly and clandestinely. Evidently the antagonism between rulers and ruled is now different in kind, and less fundamental, for it is not a class antagonism; and it is hard for people to overcome the hiatus that decades of monolithic conformism have left in their political thinking and social initiative. Yet, in their own interest, and for the sake of socialism, they have to overcome it.

#### IV

The international record of Khrushchevism runs parallel to the domestic one. There too the marked progress of the early years came to a halt or was reversed later until foreign policy and the conduct of international communist affairs were left in an impasse.

Since the early 'fifties significant shifts have occurred in the world's balance of power. The growing economic and military potential of the

U.S.S.R., Soviet triumphs in the outer space, Sputniks, missiles, and multi-megaton-bombs contributed powerfully to the "balance of deterrents" that now forms the basis of "peaceful coexistence." At the same time, however, the extreme polarization of power, which had resulted from the Second World War, has been weakened. The two super-powers no longer confront each other across the economic-military vacuum that Western Europe was in the early 1950s. The exceptionally prolonged and vigorous expansion of the capitalist economy has more than counter-balanced the growth of Soviet power. It has given the bourgeoisie a new confidence in the soundness of "neo-capitalism." It has immensely impressed the western working classes, subdued their socialist aspirations, and fostered in the labour movement an **ultra-opportunism** compared with which the old social-democratic **reformism** looks almost like revolutionary extremism. Amid the recuperation of the old social system all over the West, German capitalism has achieved its second resurrection and placed itself, by sheer economic weight, at the head of Western Europe. German militarism too has risen from the ashes to reach out for nuclear weapons, to become America's potentially most powerful ally in Europe, and to become once again the terror of Europe, especially of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., Poland and Czechoslovakia.

To prevent such a development was the declared purpose of Stalin's successors, the purpose of their new version of "peaceful coexistence." Yet once capitalism was preserved to the west of the Elbe, and given the circumstances of the cold war, nothing could avert this resurgence of German power. The idea, which Stalin once entertained, that the members of the "Grand Alliance" would jointly de-industrialize and de-militarize Germany, looks now like the reactionary illusion of a very remote past. In theory Stalin's successors could either appease the U.S.A. and Germany or unyieldingly oppose them. But Soviet diplomacy lacked the courage and the consistency it needed either to resist or even to appease its enemies. It has cashed in on a few more or less platonic gains, such as the partial nuclear test ban and a mild abatement of the cold war. It has not been able to render less explosive the world's political storm centres, Berlin or South Vietnam. Indeed, twenty years after the war the powder kegs are all there in the familiar spots, threatening to blow up the world.

Amid these dangers the Soviet Union had an overriding interest in consolidating the unity of the Soviet bloc and, quite especially, in cultivating its alliance with China. This was admittedly no easy task. Stalinism had left behind a heavy burden of tensions and resentments: it had wounded, offended, and humiliated all its communist allies. The first sound impulse of post-Stalinist diplomacy was to do away with that legacy. In the middle 'fifties Moscow was compensating many Communist governments for the wrongs inflicted on them: it disbanded the Joint Stock Companies through which Stalin had controlled the

Chinese and the Eastern European economies; it annulled the unequal trade treaties he had imposed on them; and it gave up other forms of "penetration." The Stalinist "empire" was being transformed into a "socialist commonwealth." The logic of de-Stalinization led Khrushchev, Malenkov and Bulganin to pronounce the rehabilitation of Tito, Rajk, Gomulka and other "traitors" and "spies." The Soviet government could not impose abroad the rigid despotism it could not or would not maintain at home. True, the desecration of Stalin brought in its wake the Berlin rising of 1953, the Hungarian insurrection of 1956, and moral sickness among communists everywhere. All the same, the advantages of de-Stalinization outweighed the disadvantages. The hopes and expectations to which the new course gave rise were stronger than the disillusionment.

And (strange though this may seem in the light of the newfangled legend about Mao's unswerving fidelity to Stalinism) the heyday of de-Stalinization in the U.S.S.R. was also the heyday of Sino-Soviet solidarity and co-operation. It was between the years 1954 and 1958 that Soviet economic and cultural aid to China reached its culmination, enabling China to make a much more powerful start in industrialization than she would have been able to make had she relied only on her own resources; it enabled China to tackle primitive socialist accumulation in a far less painful manner than the U.S.S.R. had to tackle it in the 1930s. Even if the U.S.S.R. had to make certain "sacrifices" in order to assist China, these were amply compensated by the strength accrued to the entire Soviet bloc. An inspiring long-term prospect was opening up before the Soviet Union, China, and all their allies: the prospect that they would be moving towards socialism not in isolation from one another, not while each of them would be developing its own autarchical socialism in its own "single country," but in close co-operation on the basis of a broad and planned international division of labour. A fresh wind of internationalism was dispelling the stifling air of distrust, fear and national egoism that had hung over Stalin's "empire."

These hopes were nipped by the aftermath of the Hungarian civil war and the Russo-Chinese conflict. The trend towards international integration was reversed. This is not the place to survey in detail the vicissitudes and "ideological" accompaniments of this development. Overshadowing them all there is one act of Khrushchev's policy, the full import of which was not quite clear until recently: his recall from China, in July 1960, of all Soviet engineers and technicians engaged in developing China's industry.<sup>8</sup> This was the most outrageous and bizarre excess of Great Russian arrogance and brutality that Moscow had ever allowed itself. It is quite immaterial whether the Chinese, as Khrushchev claims, had provoked the recall by disregarding the advice of the specialists and insulting their superiors in Moscow. No such provocation could justify the indiscriminate, wholesale and savage retaliation. At a stroke a vast number of industrial constructions was brought to a stand-

still, because the Soviet technicians had been ordered to deprive the Chinese of all Soviet construction plans, blueprints and patents. The Chinese had heavily invested in the factories and plants under construction; the investments were frozen; masses of half-installed machinery and unfinished buildings were left to rust and rot. For a poverty-stricken nation, only beginning to equip itself industrially, this was a crippling blow. Its effects were as cruel as might have been the impact of full-scale armed intervention. For about five years China's industrialization was interrupted; it was slowed down for a much longer period. Millions of workers were suddenly condemned to idleness and privation and had to trek back to the villages. The blow was even more devastating because it coincided with widespread floods, droughts and bad harvest.

Such a shock is bound to have traumatic consequences. The Chinese felt that they had been betrayed. Mao told them that they must never again rely on any foreign assistance; that as far as the Russians and their "revisionist" friends were concerned, proletarian internationalism was an empty phrase. This reaction has in some ways been comparable to the sense of betrayal and isolation to which the Bolsheviks had succumbed in the formative years of Stalinism. The Maoists too have sometimes seemed to respond to their isolation with an ideology of isolationism, with their own version of Socialism in a Single Country. However, they contradict themselves and also speak emphatically as internationalists. They know that against Moscow's Great Russian arrogance they must appeal to the international conscience of communism; and that they can strengthen their positions in the world only through their solidarity with the rising peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But there is no denying the painful tug-of-war between the conflicting ideological elements in Maoism, a tug-of-war of which it is still impossible to predict the outcome. Even if the record of Khrushchev's foreign policy consisted of the most striking successes (which is by no means the case), this one Herostratus-like deed of his would be enough to ruin it for ever.

The Russo-Chinese conflict has imparted fresh impetus to all the centrifugal forces, open and latent, that had been at work in the Soviet bloc and in international communism. The Maoists blame for this Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, saying that it robbed the socialist camp of the moral authority that was its unifying element. In truth, de-Stalinization could only help to release the centrifugal forces; it did not bring them into existence. Stalinism had taken care of that. It cannot be repeated too often that by its bureaucratic effrontery, which offended every nation, great and small, within the Soviet orbit, Stalinism was preparing a terrible explosion of nationalist emotions. And just as, after 1953, the tensions pent up within the Soviet Union could not be contained any longer, so the strains and stresses within the "socialist camp" could not be repressed any further. They had to find an outlet.

It was necessary that the accumulated national grievances and resentments should be openly voiced in order that they should be remedied or removed. And it was even more necessary that whoever now ruled Moscow should be free, and should be seen to be free, from any taint of Great Russian chauvinism and brutality. Only then could the U.S.S.R. gain, or re-gain, the confidence of other peoples; and only then could the released centrifugal forces, instead of acting disruptively, contribute to a new balance and cohesion of the Soviet bloc. Not less **but more** de-Stalinization, i.e. another kind of de-Stalinization, was needed in order that the U.S.S.R. and its allies should be able to cope with so difficult a historic transition. Khrushchevism allowed the grievances to come into the open, but then it incensed them instead of calming them. It released powerful centrifugal forces, but then it stirred them to the highest pitch of disruptiveness. That is why the stroke against China was followed by the new crop of nationalist discords in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of "international communism."

## V

The key to most problems, foreign and domestic, which confront the U.S.S.R. lies in the relationship between the ruling group and the working masses. With Khrushchev's overthrow the system under which the single leader tyrannized the bureaucracy while the latter terrorized the **working** classes has been shattered for a second time. The ruling group did not allow Khrushchev to establish himself on its back—it shook him off before he managed to saddle and bridle it. This was for the bureaucracy something like an act of political self-determination, through which it proclaimed that henceforth its collective interest and ambition must prevail. Under Stalin the bureaucracy was only a pretorian guard, devoid of a political identity of its own. Now the pretorian guard has become a ruling stratum, jealous of its prerogatives and conscious of its rôle, ready to delegate power to its leaders but unwilling to abdicate to them.

The Soviet ruling group has established its "internal democracy" for its own exclusive use. It is careful not to extend democratic rights to workers and peasants, to the lower ranks of the bureaucracy and to the intelligentsia. The contradictoriness of such an attitude is obvious. The ruling group has owed its own "emancipation" from the despotism of a single leader to the nation's new cultural level and self-confidence and to its need for a more modern and rational system of government. But these factors, having rendered well-nigh impossible the re-establishment of any personal rule, militate also against the rule of an oligarchy. Having outgrown the despotic paternalism of the Dictator, the working masses cannot reconcile themselves to any "collective" form of a bureaucratic tutelage either. Even if they are unable to struggle against

it openly and on a national scale, they are obstructing it silently and are finding innumerable ways to render it less and less effective.

The scattered and inarticulate yet pervasive pressure from below is the determining factor in Soviet politics. The hierarchy has, willy-nilly, to share its newly won freedom with others and to demonstrate that it no longer treats the state and the national economy as if these were its own private domains. Khrushchev in the new party programme proclaimed that the U.S.S.R. was no longer ruled by a proletarian dictatorship, because the Soviet state now "belonged to the entire people." The Maoists retorted that by "liquidating" the proletarian dictatorship, Khrushchevism had abandoned the Marxist teaching on the state and had brought to light the "bourgeois degeneration" of the Soviet ruling group and even the danger of a capitalist restoration in the U.S.S.R. But here the Maoists have confused appearances with realities. From a theoretical Marxist viewpoint the idea of the Soviet state "belonging to the entire people" is, of course, as incongruous as was the Lassallean concept of the Volkstaat, which Marx had demolished in his Critique of the *Gotha* Programme. In Marx's scheme of things the proletarian dictatorship was to "wither away" and usher in a classless and stateless society. But the Khrushchevite "thesis" (just as some of the canons of Maoism) has little to do with Marxist theory. It was (and is) important for what it was meant to convey and to suggest, rather than for its so-called theoretical content. It was addressed to a people in whose minds proletarian dictatorship and Stalinism had become one; and to them the slogan about the end of proletarian dictatorship was a pledge and a promissory note—a pledge that there would be no return to Stalinist methods of government and a promise of an extension of civil liberties for which the people had been yearning.

We have said that uncontrolled government (apart from the burden of armament) is the greatest single obstacle to the balanced growth of the Soviet economy and to a healthier development of society. No new overhauls of the administration and no new devices and artifices of planning can serve as substitutes for free criticism and social control. Civil liberties are for the U.S.S.R. today less than ever a matter of pure politics—they are the indispensable element of the rational planning and management of a modern and publicly owned economy. As long as the workers are not free to make and express their own choices, either as producers or as consumers, the economy is estranged from its own human elements, a prey to bureaucratic fantasies and corruption. Khrushchev dodged this problem; but the various projects, advertised since his downfall, like the so-called Lieberman scheme, also fail to come to grips with the issue. They propose novel methods of accountancy, changed amortization rates on fixed capital, the adjustment of the supply of consumer goods to demand, and other administrative rearrangements. Whatever the merits and de-merits of those proposals, they cannot add to overall national efficiency even a fraction of what

would be contributed to it by the producers' feeling that the bureaucracy has ceased to be the sole master of the economy. Such a feeling would release immense creative energies. It would amount to something like a second nationalization of industry, the genuine nationalization as distinct from the formal one prevailing hitherto. Only when the state which controls the economy is itself controlled by the society does socialism begin to function. The incapacity of the Khrushchev régime to remedy the faults and disproportions of the economic structure reflected the continuing deep cleavage between state and society.

Irresponsible government has also been the greatest single source of the disarray in Soviet foreign affairs and of the disastrous exacerbation of the conflict with China. Clearly, it is not the political differentiation and the division of the Communist Parties into Right, Left, and Centre that should be blamed for this state of affairs. On the contrary, this division, resulting from the dissolution of the ideological monolith, is potentially a most progressive development. The emergence of various schools of thought reflects real contradictions inherent in a living historical process and real dilemmas confronting a living movement. The tragedy consists in what the various "communist" bureaucracies—the Soviet one in the first instance, but the Chinese also—have done and are doing first to suppress the divisions, then to magnify them beyond all measure, and to distort them. As the interests of the bureaucracies are national by definition, and as their thinking moves always within the confines of their "own" nation-state, they have perverted and falsified the clash of opposed viewpoints, and its essentially international dialectics, into a collision of nationalist ambitions and emotions. Thus a controversy, which at the outset centred on the validity or obsolescence of Lenin's view of imperialism and on the strategy and tactics of communism under the menace of nuclear war, has degenerated into a feud over territorial claims and frontiers and into vulgar displays of nationalist pride and prejudice worthy of old-fashioned racialists and imperialists. Even if Moscow and Belgrade have stopped their mud-slinging, the release of so much stupid and downright reactionary propaganda is bound to leave behind a huge trail of demoralization.

But would the Russo-Chinese controversy have ever assumed such grotesque forms if in Moscow and Peking the leaders had to account for what they were doing to a Congress of Soviets or to another representative body? If Russian communists could say publicly, without fear or favour, that they were in sympathy with Mao's, or anyone else's, views rather than with Khrushchev's? And if, similarly, the Chinese were free to reject as false the revelations of their Divine Oracle?

To pose the question is almost to answer it. There is no need to idealize the state of mind of the masses. Nearly half a century after the October revolution some Soviet workers, peasants and intellectuals are still infected with virulent chauvinism, even with racialism; and the

same is no doubt true in other countries of the Soviet bloc. Whether under Stalin or under Khrushchev, the ruling groups have, for their own purposes, all too readily condoned or fanned nationalist prejudices and emotions; and then, having warped the minds of the masses, they have felt that they have to pander to their hatreds and suspicions. Such is the interplay, familiar also from western social-democratic experience, between the reactionary inclinations of the leaders and the reactionary emotions of the led. Yet, as Lenin often underlined, there is a difference between the ignorant and bewildered chauvinism of ordinary workers and peasants, and the sly, calculating and incurable national arrogance of the rulers (just as there is an even deeper difference between the nationalist feelings of the oppressed and those of the oppressors). Deep down in the people, and in the intelligentsia, there are at least two large currents of thought, one tending towards internationalism, the other towards nationalism. Indeed, at every level of Soviet society these two trends have been struggling with one another. An open confrontation between them would almost certainly weaken the reactionary elements and enhance the progressive ones. Social control over bureaucracy would at the very least make it much more difficult for the latter to pursue its nationalist intrigues and power political games directed against other "workers' states." It is difficult to imagine that a duly informed Soviet public opinion would ever have approved as unscrupulous an attack on China's vital interests as the recall of the Soviet specialists. Not for nothing did Khrushchev—Stalin's true disciple in this—conceal this move from the Soviet people and the world in the course of nearly four years, until the Chinese themselves began to expose the immensity of the outrage.

An end to secrecy, open debate, and public criticism of those in office, are essential for the U.S.S.R. and for all its allies, if they are to get out of the slough in which Khrushchevism has left them.

Unfortunately, Khrushchev's successors still belong, as he did, to the breed of leaders that had been formed under Stalinism, even though they have been reformed in the post-Stalin era. Leaders of a different kind can come only from a younger and more civilized generation; but they have not yet had the time and the opportunity to step forward. Meanwhile, Khrushchev's successors have committed themselves explicitly to continue the work of de-Stalinization and implicitly to do away with the "Khrushchev cult." It is in their own interests that they should honour this pledge; but as they also have their stakes in both Stalinism and Khrushchevism, their behaviour is likely to be compounded of ambiguities.

How these ambiguities have been piling up! Stalin employed barbarous means to drive barbarism out of Russia; Khrushchev was destroying Stalinism in a Stalinist manner; and now Brezhnev, Kosygin, and their associates are trying to deal with the confused balance of Khrushchevism in a more or less Khrushchevite fashion. Each of the

successive régimes has thrown out of Russian life much of the evil it fought against; yet because of the nature of the means employed much of the evil has kept creeping back. Huge elements of the primordial Russian barbarism were still there in the U.S.S.R. at the end of the Stalin epoch; a large residuum of Stalinism remained embedded in Khrushchevism even after Stalin's mummy had been ejected from the Mausoleum; and now, after Khrushchev's exit, the Soviet scene remains cluttered up with the debris of Khrushchevism. However, history has not been moving in a vicious circle. What has remained of the old barbarism and of Stalinism has been gradually diluted to suit the needs of national and international progress. Now the retrograde elements of Khrushchevism are perhaps being similarly reduced. And as the ambiguities follow one after another, they also parody each other: if Khrushchevism filled only an interval between two epochs, the régime of Brezhnev and Kosygin may be no more than its insipid tail-end. The opening, the unequivocal opening, of a truly new phase of the Russian—and not only Russian—revolution is long overdue.

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## NOTES

1. Khrushchev was First Secretary of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. from September 1953 and Prime Minister of the U.S.S.R. from March 1958. He "resigned" from both posts in October 1964.
2. This difference alone might not matter. Lenin's "term of office" was only half of Khrushchev's; yet the five or six years during which Lenin led the Bolshevik Revolution were one of history's greatest formative epochs, far more important in its impact on mankind than had been the previous five decades or even five centuries of Russia's existence.
3. The following table shows the physical volume of all retail trade, which is a good index of the volume of consumption (1940=100):

<i>Year</i>	<i>All goods</i>	<i>Foodstuffs</i>	<i>Other goods</i>
1940	100	100	100
1950	110	94	140
1955	208	177	263
1956	226	190	289
1957	258	214	336
1958	274	225	359
1959	296	241	390

The index of retail trade per head of population rose from 100 in 1950 to 208 in 1957.

4. These technological feats had, of course, been partly prepared by the intensive research and investment of the Stalin era.
5. I have made this calculation on the basis of official statistics, using the Soviet definitions of the national income and its components. In view of the vagueness of some of the official data, a margin of error in the calculation cannot be ruled out; but this is not likely to affect significantly the broad proportions between consumption, investment and armament expenditure.

6. The brain workers constitute at present **22** per cent of all gainfully employed people, only **3** or **4** per cent fewer than the **Kolkhoz** peasants. The growth of the "intelligentsia" (in the broadest sense of the word) is indicated by the following data: the number of technicians and other specialists **employed** in the Soviet economy has risen from about **2** million people in **1940** to about **11** million in **1964-65** (**40** per cent of these have higher education and **60** per cent have secondary **schooling**). There were **2.5** million teachers and educational workers before the Second World War; there are **6** million of them at present. Scientists, research workers, and employees of research institutes amount to **2.5** million, compared **with** less than half a million in **1940**. Doctors and employees of the health services make up over **4** million, compared with **1.5** million before the war. The size of the state administration (including central economic managements) has decreased from **1.8** million in **1940** to **1.3** million in **1962**.
7. Isaac Deutscher, *The Great Contest*, London, **1960**, pp. **20-1**.
8. I must admit that when I wrote my essay on Maoism for *The Socialist Register* 1964 I was not fully aware of the scope and consequences of this event.