

REFLECTIONS ON THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACIES

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The Party is the brain of our class
But I, can't I
Have a single thought?

The Party is right
But the man at the top
Is he always right?

The Party is monolithic, of course,
But am I a renegade
Whenever I doubt?

VICTOR WOROSZYLSKI (1956)

By Way of Preface

THE problem which underlies these reflections concerns all Communist parties, whether they are in power or in opposition. That problem is the difficulty, common to them all, of fashioning for themselves new long-term perspectives, and of forging new guidelines to replace those which have finally collapsed in the process of de-Stalinization. But while the problem is common to them all, it is in the countries where the Communists are in power that the present malaise has been most acutely felt, and where their inability to resolve the crisis has been most sharply underlined. This is why these general reflections are focused on the particular case of the East European People's Democracies.

Communist governments exist today in thirteen countries. Two of these, the Soviet Union and China, have continental dimensions. Three others, East Germany, North Korea and North Vietnam, hold power in countries artificially divided and they therefore face very special problems. Yet another two, Yugoslavia and Albania, are also special cases, because their recent history has placed them if not outside, then at least on the margin of the international Communist Community.

The five remaining countries — Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia—did not have much in common when the new régimes were established in 1945. Poland had suffered terribly in the Second World War, Czechoslovakia hardly at all. Rumania, despite its oil riches, was a century behind Bohemia and Moravia, the developed regions of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, there had long been ancient and obscure boundary disputes between these countries.

All these differences, and even national rivalries, have not disap-

peared in the course of the last twenty years. The standard of living in Prague is still different from that of Sofia. Rumanians and Hungarians are still full of mutual animosities. The list might be lengthened indefinitely of differences which make every People's Democracy a particular case in itself. It is, therefore, quite true that there is a degree of arbitrariness in lumping together these five countries and discussing them as one entity.

However, such a discussion is justified for two reasons: firstly, that the People's Democracies have adopted a path of economic and political development since the establishment of their *régimes* which is, roughly speaking, similar; and secondly, that they all confront at the present time certain problems which have the same origin and which call, therefore, for similar solutions.

A Difficult Birth

The East European People's Democracies celebrated in 1964 the twentieth anniversary of their foundation. For it is in 1944, as the German armies retreated, that the Communists and their allies formed Committees of National Liberation in these countries and issued revolutionary calls to their people. After Germany's capitulation, these Committees formed the skeleton of the governments of the People's Republics. Their revolutionary call was adopted as the programme of the new *régimes*. All this is well known, and there can be no question of the courage and ability of the militants of the extreme left in these countries, where anti-German resistance had been largely dominated by right-wing nationalist elements, often as much concerned with fighting against Communists as against the Germans.

Even so, everybody knows too that the strength of the Committees of Liberation would nowhere have been sufficient to establish the new *régimes*. The decisive fact was the presence of Soviet armies on their soil and the agreements made by the Big Three. The real birth certificate of the People's Democracies was signed at Yalta, in 1945, when Stalin obtained from Roosevelt and Churchill the right to establish "friendly governments" in specific countries as part of a Soviet zone of influence.

By bringing them to power, Stalin can hardly be said to have violated some natural law of political morality which forbids foreign interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries. On the contrary, he acted like all the other leaders of the big powers and he helped his friends where he could. What he did can probably be explained by his concern to protect the frontiers and the interests of the Soviet state rather than by proletarian solidarity with the Communists of countries adjoining the Soviet Union.

Be that as it may—and this is not the place to examine the basic motives of Stalin's foreign policy—it is easy to understand why the men who now govern the People's Democracies do not engage in

solemn celebrations of the anniversary of a Conference to which they were not invited, and which later became a subject of bitter controversy among its participants. The Yalta agreements were undoubtedly as important for the fate of Europe after the war as was the Versailles Treaty for Europe after the First World War. But it is safe to predict that the date of 11 February 1945 will never shine with much lustre in the eyes of posterity.

These historical facts are not mentioned here in order to blame the rulers of the People's Democracies for choosing one date rather than another to celebrate their national day, but merely to recall the very special way in which the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe came into being. It is necessary to do so in order to place some of their present problems in their appropriate context.

The Missionaries' Truth

The Communists knew perfectly well in 1945 on how slender a political base their regimes were being established. They were not deceived by their own proclamations concerning the revolutionary wishes of the masses. They knew, on the contrary, that the masses had little liking for and were even hostile to the Communists' socialist programme. But this fact, though disappointing, did not seem to them either incomprehensible or irreversible.

In these mainly agrarian countries, devastated and demoralized by war, the working class was small in numbers, and in some cases almost non-existent. Czechoslovakia was, of course, an exception, in that parts of the country were industrialized and had a substantial and long-established working class. But even here, one-third of the country, Slovakia, approximated to the general East European pattern. In all these areas the Church continued to enjoy enormous prestige and it had an extremely solid hold on the minds of semi-literate peasants. For their part, landowners dominated the peasant parties, which were strongly implanted in the countryside. How could anybody be surprised in these conditions that socialist ideas should not yet have permeated their populations?

Confronted with such a situation, the Communists took up their task of governing rather like missionaries. They felt they had a truth capable of ensuring the secular salvation of their countrymen, while the latter, for historical reasons independent of their will, were not yet able to understand where the path of salvation lay. However, the new rulers were missionaries of a new kind. They relied not only on the word, on the Book, to get their truths accepted: rather did they trust in the revolutionary dynamic which was part of their programme.

Thus, they believed that they would, with industrialization, create a powerful **working** class which would constitute the basis of the Communist movement; and with agrarian reform (there was no talk then of collectivization) they would get rid of the class of landowners, the

traditional bastion of reaction. With education, finally, they would break the grip of religion on the young and create new cadres, **unshakably** devoted to socialism.

The basic Communist idea might therefore be summarized as follows: "Give us the time required to create the material basis of the new society and we shall uproot prejudices, political illiteracy and primitive nationalism, which are now our main enemies. Once prosperity combined with equality has been achieved, all citizens, with the exception of the old privileged minority, will understand the advantages which the new order has bestowed upon them, and democracy and freedom will be established almost automatically, as a kind of bonus for good conduct."

In this equation of the future development of the People's Democracies, all the elements seemed to harmonize. Future results, congruent with logic and "historical necessity," were not subject to any surprise, to any unknown quantity. Everything seemed perfectly coherent and mathematically arranged.

The Great Leap Forward

Whatever may be thought of the means employed and of the "mistakes" that were made (and these are now officially acknowledged), it is a fact that the leaders of the People's Democracies have achieved their aims in two vital domains: firstly, these countries have ceased to be mainly agricultural and industrialization *has* brought into being a large working class, which becomes ever more skilled; and secondly, not only has illiteracy been very largely eliminated, thanks to the particular attention given to education, but there now exists a very large stratum of intellectuals of proletarian origin.

The leaders of Eastern Europe have good reason to be pleased with these achievements. For industrialization has finally cured these countries of their traditional sickness, namely the over-population of the countryside. Rumania is an exception here: 60 per cent of its population still lives on the land, and **the** countryside is still over-populated. In the last two years, however, Rumania has been the one People's Democracy which can claim a quite remarkable rate of economic growth. But in Eastern Europe as a whole there are no longer those millions of peasants who used to scratch a bare subsistence on their plots of land or who were exploited as seasonal labourers—the men who were often called, by a curious euphemism, "useless men" under the old régime. With them has also gone destitution. One no longer finds beggars, tramps, and under-nourished children in these countries; such witnesses to a country's under-development now belong to the past.

Similarly, the great leap forward in education has unquestionably been successful. Who could have thought that in Poland and Hungary, for instance, where country schools used to be a rather uncommon

phenomenon, compulsory schooling up to the age of 16 could have been introduced in so short a period of time? To which may be added the fact that there are today more students in Polish universities than in England or France, despite Poland's much smaller population: such a development betokens a major achievement.

Last but not least, a society based on the public ownership of the means of production has been consolidated to the point where no restoration of capitalist enterprise now seems ever possible. No serious politician can now demand the return of the former owners and it seems inconceivable that new industrial complexes, often of gigantic proportions, like the steel works of Nowa Huta or Szatalinvaros, could one day be sold to private concerns.

Popular "Ingratitude"

Yet, despite all that has been done for yesterday's under-privileged, despite the fact that new opportunities do exist for the new generations, the new society does not seem to generate much enthusiasm even among those who are its principal beneficiaries. This lukewarm attitude of the populations towards the regimes is as striking as the new steel works. All foreign visitors to Eastern Europe observe it immediately. All conversations with citizens of the Peoples' Democracies provide clear confirmation of it.

The Communist leaders are both aware of the fact, and baffled by it. The caution of their present language stands in remarkable contrast to their optimism of a previous period: the path of the future, which seemed to be straight and open in 1945, now seems full of unexpected obstacles. It was normal that socialist ideas should be at a discount in the backward peasant universe of yesterday; but how can one explain that these ideas should still be so alien in countries which would seem structurally ripe for proletarian democracy?

There are of course many official—or rather unofficial—explanations. Some people have even discreetly advanced a theory of permanent opposition-mindedness among the working class. In the course of a private colloquium with Western Communists, this was expressed in the following form: "The masses always harbour a certain amount of resentment against those who govern, whoever the government may be. Their resentment favours Western Communists, since these are in opposition. With us, on the contrary, this type of mentality favours a-social attitudes and creates conditions unfavourable to the development of society."

Such a theory can hardly be taken seriously as an explanation of the political condition of Eastern Europe. It is only significant as a token of the perplexity of those who govern and who find that the equation of 1945 — industrialization + education = a population politically committed and devoted to socialism—has not been verified. The question is, why not?

If socialism does not attract the citizens of the People's Democracies, might it not perhaps be the fault of those who define it inadequately and who give it an unattractive meaning?

In reading the speeches of the rulers of the Eastern countries, one has the impression that the present battle for socialism is synonymous with the battle for higher production. For what do they talk about in their Party Congresses or in their parliamentary assemblies? Their reports, bursting with figures for every sector of the economy, read like sermons in favour of higher productivity, or of a better work discipline, against waste and inefficiency; and the conclusion is always that if everyone works better today, the economy will develop harmoniously and everybody will be better off tomorrow. Communist militants are thus directed to see their main task as being to prod the workers to greater efforts for economic expansion, this being the only way to obtain a better life for all.

All these exhortations are the more necessary in that the lukewarm attitude of the workers towards their regimes is above all expressed in their indifferent attitude to work. There are no strikes in Eastern Europe and the unions are not expected to fight for immediate benefits for their members. But the workers, as individuals, have their own opinion about the promises of their governments. Instead of working zealously and patiently, in the expectation of future benefits, they prefer to make what arrangements they can according to the old slogan "Every man for himself." Productivity interests them far less than the small private jobs they may be able to do outside their official work. Others are simply sceptical about the future and ceaselessly complain about the present. Hence that close and even threatening political climate which seems to prevail in some of the large enterprises of the People's Democracies.

What is particularly striking in all this is not only how difficult it is to achieve economic targets even where the unions are docile; at least as important is the demonstration provided that the promise of socialism cannot be reduced to the single question of the standard of living.

Regimented Parties

The absolute priority given to economic development is, of course, not a new feature of Communist programmes. But in earlier epochs this economic concern formed part of a comprehensive and coherent vision of the future. Certain things then seemed beyond doubt, notably that the capitalist world would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, while the socialist world, based on a planned economy, would stride ahead by leaps and bounds. It was thus possible to explain and to promise anything merely by integrating it within the framework of historical inevitability. The Communists were believers, in most cases sincere believers, who, though often intellectually confined, were

capable of effective action, since their faith in the future was often contagious.

It is often said—and it may even be true—that the new generation of the People's Democracies was strongly permeated by the vision of an assured future. But suddenly the mystique collapsed, and everything had to be questioned again. From one day to the next the leaders of the People's Democracies were required to explain an inexplicable past and to formulate new promises. For the intellectuals, and for the rank and file of the parties, the shock was even greater. One consequence of that shock was to cast doubt even on the conviction that the nationalization of the means of production would suffice to ensure the rule of the people, by the people and for the people. And so it was with most of the other old certitudes.

Yet the Communist Parties were singularly ill-fitted to undertake any kind of reappraisal. For they had been conceived and organized as para-military formations, strongly disciplined and highly hierarchical in character. The general staff, invested with supreme power, issued orders which the lower echelons transmitted to the base. It is not by chance that these parties always showed themselves to best effect in periods of war and clandestine activity, and in circumstances where discipline and total acceptance seemed the highest virtues.

"*A la guerre comme à la guerre*," says an old proverb, and this seemed a convenient excuse for acts of injustice and arbitrariness. The general staff, which was held to represent the party, "knew what it was doing." Its judgment was to be accepted without argument and without too much heart-searching.

All this worked until the day when the aims of the war had to be submitted to reappraisal and when the infallibility of the general staff ceased to be taken for granted. At that point there was only left an army which hesitated, and which did not know where it was going, or what battles should now be fought.

The situation might have been made easier if, at the time of the great reappraisal, the compromised general staffs had withdrawn in favour of new men. It was in the interest of the parties to get rid of its leaders, guilty of such grave errors, and to replace them by new leaders, free from guilt. But nothing of the kind was done, or was even possible. For the general staffs which direct and represent the parties are sovereign. They are their own judges. Nobody could force them to resign, just as in an army free from external control, nobody can force a general to resign, least of all the non-commissioned ranks, whose only task is to execute orders.

It is true that, here and there, under the pressure of external events, the general staffs did make some changes among their number, and brought back some formerly persecuted "generals," while trying to present what amounted to a system of co-optation as a total overhaul, which, of course, it was not. This was the case in Poland, where the

former "commander-in-chief," Gomulka, was called back to active service. But even in Poland the larger part of the general staff has remained where it was, to the utter confusion of the rank and file and the bulk of the population—not surprisingly, since they saw the same men who had for years praised Stalin to the skies suddenly accuse him of all sins, including their own. If the special task of Communist Parties had been to propagate political cynicism, they could not have acted otherwise than they did in Eastern Europe in 1956.

Liberalization and Politics

A major change did occur in those countries at that time: everywhere the supreme leaders formally promised that they would no longer resort to terrorist methods, that they would no longer make irrevocable "mistakes" (posthumous rehabilitations, after all, can hardly be said to be much good to the victims). They promised also to take greater notice of other people's "truths," to pay more regard to other people's susceptibilities—in short, they adopted the policy which the whole world has come to call "liberalization."

Conscious as they are of past mistakes, and of a general refusal to believe in large promises, the leaders of the People's Democracies have resigned themselves to view the present period as one of "consolidation and readjustment" for their régimes. They have proclaimed that no major social changes remain to be accomplished; what is needed is to consolidate and improve on the changes which have already been made. This is the basis of their conviction that the one and only question which is really important is that of economic growth.

The present "truth" of the rulers of these countries would now be expressed thus: "We don't know any longer if the grandchildren of President Johnson will live in a Communist America; we don't even know what kind of socialism our own grandchildren will live under. But we are as convinced as ever that we shall succeed in developing our planned economy and assure a higher standard of living for all." These leaders are well aware of the economic difficulties which they face, and which they would face even under more favourable political circumstances. One of their difficulties is the considerable problem of absorbing into the economic system the new generations produced by the exceptionally high birth-rate after the war; another is the much higher consumption needs and expectations of a new urban population. But these problems merely reinforce the leaders' belief that the solutions are primarily if not exclusively to be found by concentrating on economic questions. As a result, one might almost say that the Communist Parties have ceased to be an ideological vanguard. They have become an administrative vanguard. One joins the Party if one has the ambition to have a civil service career, not because of an interest in politics.

"Let us talk less and do more," Gomulka is supposed to have said in

1956, and given the complexity of the Polish situation at that time, this cautious slogan was thought reasonable. Since then, however, it has been institutionalized in all the People's Democracies, and even extended. Today it might be formulated as follows: "To make progress, let us not talk politics at all." Indeed, so completely was politics excluded from the last Congress of the Polish Communist Party in June 1964 that one of the delegates from the Italian Communist Party remarked that this was not a political Congress at all but a conference of economic technicians.

A curious paradox has thus come into being in the Communist countries. They are "liberal" and allow a fair amount of artistic experimentation and diversity. Abstract art, the *bête noire* of Russian Communists, is doing very well in the People's Democracies. The French anti-novel has its admirers in Warsaw and Prague. Jazz festivals are even subsidized by local authorities. The latest Western dances are all the rage in the night clubs of Budapest. Even Mods and Rockers have already found "socialist" imitators. Last summer some exceptionally beautiful girls agreed, without fear or shyness, to pose naked, or practically naked, for the exacting team of photographers from *Playboy* magazine. All this is allowed, tolerated and even sometimes encouraged.

But not politics. Politics are suspect and damned. Intellectuals are no longer required to write propaganda; the authorities know that they would not readily do it. They are simply asked not to write on politics at all. Those who have infringed this tacit rule and submitted their manuscripts for publication have immediately come under suspicion as unreliable and uncooperative: sometimes the rule is not tacit and Party members have had to choose between silence and membership. Those who are not quite "reliable" are not sent to jail or to lunatic asylums; liberalization has proceeded too far for that. They are merely prevented from travelling abroad, from attending various international seminars where exactly the problems which interest them are discussed. Thus are avoided "difficulties" and "scandals."

Among those who have thus been reduced to silence and immobility are some of the best young Communist intellectuals, the very people who really do try to examine the nature of Stalinism and to elaborate the theoretical perspectives of the next epoch. The ruling groups know perfectly well that these dangerous heretics are faithful to Communism. The discriminations to which they are subject are neither fortuitous nor the result of the **bloodymindedness** of a few bureaucrats. They spring from a particular concept of what is and what is not desirable. "The Communist Parties of the People's Democracies," to quote a Czech intellectual, "would like to eliminate Stalinism without giving it a name; and they would like to lay the foundations of a non-Stalinist socialism, without a theoretical discussion of it."

A False Tranquillity

At this point a parenthesis is necessary. Since 1956 and the XXth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the People's Democracies have enjoyed a considerable margin of independence from Russia. This margin has widened even more in the course of the last three years, because of the Sino-Soviet **conflict**, which has compelled Moscow to take heed of even the minor susceptibilities of its allies lest they should turn to Peking. It seems that the Russians not only refrain from actually intervening in the internal affairs of the People's Democracies but that they even refrain from giving their governments and parties the benefit of their advice. At the same time the Russians are never very happy to see foreign Communists propose new and bold socialist policies or ideas. Ever since the time of the Komintern they have seen themselves as the best interpreters of Marxist doctrine and they are not in the least ready to concede this title to the other parties either in Asia or in Europe. It is therefore more than likely that a political debate started in a People's Democracy would displease the Russians. But experience has shown that Moscow's thunder has no longer the same terrifying effect that it had in the past. Rumania, for instance, has evoked Russian anger more than once in the last few years without any very startling consequences. Alliance with the Soviet Union certainly does not enhance the possibility of political debate and controversy; but this cannot be held to justify the absence of politics in these countries. That absence seems rather to correspond to the leaders' yearning for a period of respite and of consolidation.

The old (and false) notion that "silence is golden" was certainly invented by a political ruler. For rulers have always been suspicious of talkers, of agitators, in short, of the politically minded. Revolutionary **régimes** appeared to be exceptional in this respect. For such **régimes** need words to engage in a dialogue with the masses. The present a-political condition of the People's Democracies is a token of the process of ageing which has affected their **régimes**.

In the West, pop music, jazz and other interests of the young—and even of the over-forties—constitute excellent safety valves for the **régimes**, and a very good means of turning the attention and energy of potential subversives into innocuous channels. "Rebels without a cause" are undoubtedly preferable from the point of view of the American Government to rebels with a cause. Why shouldn't the same be true for the People's Democracies?

The analogy is in fact misleading. The present "liberalization" which permits "Western"-type leisure activities has subdued certain explosive tendencies which had appeared among young citizens of Eastern Europe in 1956. The students who attended the Poetoffi Circle in Budapest or the "Krzywe Kolo" in Warsaw were more "dangerous" than those whose main interest lies in the festivals of song in Sopot or on Lake

Balaton. Public matters do not seem to concern them, and those who are in charge of the government can thus rule "in peace." If the aim of the People's Democracies was merely to endure, political indifference might, at least in appearance, be turned to the benefit of the regimes.

But this is only the appearance. For the problem is, in reality, a good deal more complicated. When they grow older, politically indifferent young people in the West generally accept their societies, enter the competitive world of free enterprise, and nurse the dream of doing better than the Joneses; and some may even dream of great wealth. After all, no taxes are paid in Western countries on such dreams: they form part of the mythology of the free, democratic, capitalist world.

In the East there are no comparable perspectives open to the individual, once the golden age of youth has come to an end. The Soviet humorists *Ilf* and *Petrov* described long ago the adventures of *Ostap Bender*, the great schemer who wanted at all costs to become a millionaire in a socialist country. But even he, who was a genius among speculators, had to admit defeat. Since they wrote, the point has become even more obvious: in the collectivist societies the rat-race does not get one very far. To get on, one must work like others, and with others. But how is this to be accepted if there is neither awareness of a collective endeavour nor confidence in the future?

The political indifference of the workers may be a great boon to Western employers and governments. But in the East it is the nightmare of the nationalized enterprises and, in the long run, the curse of the regimes. Rather than ensure their stabilization this indifference undermines them by reducing their economic dynamism, by transforming men capable of enthusiastic initiative into passive people, unwilling to do much for the social good.

As a result, production, which is supposed to be the keystone of the whole edifice, is in permanent trouble. Plans are carried out with delays; towns are insufficiently supplied; bottlenecks appear in many sectors of life, so that the rulers are constantly forced to improvise *ad hoc* solutions. Promises made to the population cannot be kept, and the population, for its part, becomes more sceptical and more apathetic. Truly, here is a vicious circle.

The Nationalist Plague

Mention has been made of the recent conflicts between Rumania and the Soviet Union. This brings up yet another disquieting aspect of the present era of "consolidation," namely the resurrection of certain forms of chauvinism in the People's Democracies.

It is of course perfectly legitimate and healthy for the Rumanian Government to object to this or that project of economic integration, or severely to criticize incompetent Soviet economists. In the preceding period the People's Democracies had to accept without demur every directive from Moscow and this proved exceedingly expensive economic-

ally. It is much better for all concerned that the economic plans for the future should be carefully and critically dissected and discussed.

However, having decided that they did not like the ideas and proposals of their allies, the Rumanians launched a major whispering campaign on the theme of the "poor Latin nation, exploited and overwhelmed by its Slav neighbours." This kind of propaganda has nothing to do with the economic integration of the People's Democracies, and it has certainly nothing to do with socialism. Yet it is almost officially put out by the survivors of the Stalinist Old Guard, who only yesterday spoke Russian—and other Slav languages—better than Rumanian. Nor do they hesitate to explain privately to their foreign comrades, particularly to their Italian comrades, no doubt because of the latter's similar "Latin" origins, that this resurrection of the slogan of "national dignity" seems to make for popularity.

Unfortunately they are by no means alone in discovering the value of nationalist celebration. All at once Poland celebrates the historic feats of arms of Polish warriors, and Poland, as is well known, has had its fair share of warriors.

In Czechoslovakia nationalist sentiments are often directed against "the blacks," who are often held responsible for the country's economic difficulties. Many Czechs do believe that if they suffer shortages it is because what they lack is sent abroad, to Cuba or Africa, and that much that is sent out is in any case wasted, since these savages do not know how to use it. Students in Prague have even demonstrated against such scandalous waste and against foreign aid generally.

Primitive nationalism, against which Communists once so bitterly campaigned, has never disappeared in Eastern Europe. It existed before, during and after the Second World War. During the period of Stalinist repression it went to ground, disappeared from public view, but remained buried in the hearts of people. It was perhaps inevitable that it should return to the surface once the methods of government became less oppressive. But what was neither inevitable, nor easy to foresee, was that Communist leaders should try to exploit these sentiments in order to consolidate their régimes or that some Party members should feel tempted to play on the old anti-Semitic impulses of their populations in order to enhance their own standing.

Mr. Gheorghiu Dej may think he will win popularity by talking of his Latin nation and Polish Communist leaders may try to move their compatriots—and to be accepted by them—by celebrating the nationalist uprising of 1944. "After all," they say, "we did underestimate the strength of nationalist sentiments." And they draw encouragement from the experience of the West, where they see de Gaulle and other nationalists win support on the basis of the same kind of appeal.

But here, too, the analogy is only true in appearance. For de Gaulle has no dangerous rivals in the bid for nationalist support. This indeed

is his chosen field of battle. The same is not the case for Communists, least of all for East European Communists. For Mr. Gheorghiu Dej is a mere beginner in the battle of "the Rumanian Latin nation against the Slavs." The former members of the Fascist Iron Guard are the veterans of that struggle—and thus may find a chance to remind their compatriots of their past achievements.

De Gaulle and other nationalists can only gain from the exacerbation of nationalist sentiments. But in Eastern Europe that exacerbation entails very great risks for the régimes, even if it appears to bring some immediate rewards to their leaders.

Party Democracy

The pioneers of the People's Democracies, despite their errors, have done a great deal to clear the ground and lay the foundations of new societies. But some strange weeds have begun to grow in these foundations, and it is as well to remember that the edifice itself is a long way from completion.

The experience of these societies clearly suggests that it would be wrong to rely purely on the happy results of an "inevitable" socio-economic development. On the contrary, what is urgently required is a serious discussion of the means which would ensure the humane and progressive development of such societies.

It would be absurd to pretend that the means are obvious or the solutions easy. But there are certain lines of approach that would seem to be of prime importance. First, it is impossible to build a socialist society in silence. Conscious action cannot be evoked without discussion and without theory. By seeking to stifle speech which could hamper action, one ends by impoverishing political consciousness and thereby preventing any action at all. In this perspective the People's Democracies clearly need a large debate on their past experience, on their immediate future and on their long-term perspectives. This debate is above all urgent for Communists, since it is they who have the primary responsibility for these régimes and it is they who have the task of formulating—and getting acceptance for—the necessary solutions.

But Communists cannot innovate so long as their parties remain organized on the model of armies, with all-powerful and sovereign general staffs. Since de-Stalinization began, the notion of the leaders' infallibility has become wholly discredited. Everybody today is quite certain that the men at the top can be wrong, may now be wrong, and will often be very wrong indeed if they are allowed to proceed unchecked. The problem is precisely how to prevent mistakes, and how it may become possible to say publicly that the Party, meaning its ruling groups, is on the wrong track.

The first step in the transformation of the Party into a civilian rather than a military instrument must surely be the recognition of the right

of every member to question publicly the wisdom of the decisions taken at the summit. This is obviously impossible so long as the expressions of such disagreements are treated as acts of indiscipline, and even of treason, rather than as means of encouraging explanations and of promoting discussion.

Secondly, innovation and change are bound to be more **difficult** so long as the leading organizations of the parties are composed of permanent functionaries whose freedom of speech and of action is narrowly circumscribed by their—very natural—fear of losing their jobs. It does not seem desirable to have the immense majority of the delegates to Party Congresses selected from among the full-time members of the Party apparatus. It would be much more rational for such permanent officials to present their reports before an audience genuinely free to judge their actions and equally free to withdraw their mandate from them.

Thirdly, the divergences which occur frequently among the leaders surely need to be discussed publicly instead of being resolved in private committees. One knows, for example, that disagreements often occur in the working out of plans for economic development. Why cannot these be submitted to the free and public discussion of the Central Committee and of the Party Congress? Palmiro Togliatti had a point when he said in his "Testament" that public discussion among the leaders of the Eastern countries would increase rather than diminish their prestige.

Fourthly, a system of rotation in the leading organs of the Communist Parties would seem of crucial importance. Power uses up men, Communists no less than other men. After many years in **power**—even without the pressures and tensions of Stalinism and de-Stalinization—the old leaders' capacity to innovate is bound to be reduced. Moreover, the men who stay in office decade after decade prevent the rise of young cadres. The need to choose new men, according to definite political criteria, would make possible the clarification of different positions; it would also make easier the formulation of programmes; and it would bring in new blood at the top of the Parties.

At this point it may be worth while to take up one fundamental objection which has often been raised against such proposals, namely the objection that democratization would lead to the formation of factions which would eventually become real parties inside the Party itself, and whose struggles would expose the **régime** itself to the greatest dangers.

It is true that democracy does entail risks. But it is not clear why debate between men who share the same basic ideas and who have the same aspirations should necessarily lead to an uncontrollable struggle and even to splits. After all, since so much is being said about a return to Leninism it might be useful to remember that in Lenin's time, and despite civil war, Communists used to argue about their

differences in public. The **rule** of unanimity and of the authority of the supreme leaders had not then been established.

But even if democratization does entail certain risks, its promise is surely even greater. Notwithstanding what is often believed on the basis of tendentious reports in the Western press, large numbers of young people in the People's Democracies are not seduced by the Twist and other delights imported from the capitalist West. This new generation is better educated and more keen to participate in political life than previous generations ever were. It wants opportunities to express itself and to become part of a live and dynamic political movement. A non-regimented communist Party, allowing free discussion, would provide precisely the platform this generation now lacks.

The Grand Design

Conservatives and the Right in general can afford to be content with empirical politics. But the Left needs a theory of the future world which it wants to bring into being. It also needs a vision. It cannot be content with the denunciation of present injustices. It must be able to formulate its long-term aims, and to act in accordance with these aims. To use the expression of Leszek Kolakowski, the Left "cannot live without a Utopia," without the vision of an ideal society towards which it must strive even if that vision cannot soon be realized.

Stalinism and de-Stalinization have both engendered too many doubts for socialism to be spoken of today in the same way in which it was discussed yesterday. The Grand Design of the Left must be **re-formulated** in a manner which takes account of the lessons of recent history.

Such a re-formulation cannot be the work of one man or of a small group of men. It demands a wide and open debate. Twenty years ago, when the East European **régimes** were established, it was possible to speak of an enlightened minority—a vanguard—who alone were capable of creating a social and economic system that would benefit all. Today it is difficult to know who represents the vanguard, and who is hindering the growth of socialist societies in Eastern Europe. One thing, however, is certain: it is now abundantly clear that socialism will not come as an inevitable by-product of economic development and industrialization. There will never be a **truly** developed society in Eastern Europe without a genuine democracy for all who want socialism; and their numbers today are far greater than is commonly believed.