

Problems and Prospects of Our Time: In the Mirror of the Sino-Soviet Polemics

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Far from having been overcome after the meeting of the representatives of the various Communist Parties at Bucharest, the conflict between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party is developing and broadening. The forms that it has taken up till now are not the same as those that marked the conflict between Moscow and Belgrade ten years ago, and it still appears improbable that it will reach a quite open and violent rupture. Nevertheless, an objective logic of such polemics has already asserted itself: just as in the "Jugoslav affair," now in the "Chinese affair," from a starting-point of certain particular questions, the discussion quite quickly spread to a whole series of fundamental problems closely concerning not only the tactics but also the strategy and prospects of the Communist movement.

Contents

- [The Essential Themes of \(...\)](#)
- [The Intervention of Kardelj](#)
- [Why Do They Do It?](#)

It will be recalled that the first symptoms of divergences were foreshadowed in the Summer of 1958 at an especially critical international conjuncture. But it was beginning with Khrushchev's trip to the United States that polemics developed more and more clearly to the point of reaching the articles by the Chinese on the occasion of the anniversary of Lenin's birth, and to the point of the clash at the Council of the World Federation of Trade Unions at Peking, where the Chinese trade unionists practically rejected the Khrushchev report on orientation. The third stage of the polemics – in the Summer of 1960 – was marked by a very brisk counter-attack by the Soviets; this, though it seems to have influenced several Communist Parties, did not drive the Chinese into renouncing their struggle (they limited themselves to an occasional reshaping of certain attitudes).

It is not without interest to summarize here the themes that have been and remain the subject-matter of the divergences in question.

The Essential Themes of the Debate

1) Question of the War and Peaceful Coexistence

After having adopted at the XXth Congress the theses on the "non-inevitability" of war, the Soviets laid more and more stress on peaceful coexistence, and, especially in the period marked by "optimism" about Camp David, Khrushchev went quite far in a sort of theorization of a possible and desirable compromise with US imperialism, or, at least, with one of its tendencies.

In his 31 October 1959 speech on the international situation to the Supreme Soviet, he emphasized

that

the Soviet Union and all the socialist countries have opened up to humanity the road of a social development without war, on the basis of a peaceful collaboration, [that] the conflict between the two systems must and can be solved by peaceful means, [that] coexistence is a real thing [...] an objective necessity arising from the current world situation, from the present stage of development of human society.

On the other hand, Khrushchev explained on the same occasion that the imperialists can really “make certain concessions,” that there are “peaceful” tendencies even among American capitalists, and that “many well-known figures, and in the first place President Eisenhower [...] want to find the way to strengthen peace.” [1] These “optimistic” theses were confirmed by Khrushchev himself in another report to the Supreme Soviet three months later.

The Chinese Communists did not reject the theses of the XXth Congress on war and peaceful Coexistence. But they laid the stress in a completely different way. They insisted on the idea that war is part of capitalism’s nature, that imperialism has not changed and cannot change its nature, and that, as long as capitalism exists, war remains possible.

The Chinese more particularly denied that there are “peaceful” tendencies in imperialism: US imperialism, even after Camp David, had not changed its policy, and was staking, and is still staking, on war (“The ice of the cold war has never been broken,” it was said in Pekin). [2] It is absurd to let oneself be fooled by the idle chatter of Eisenhower, who, far from seeking “coexistence,” is the most qualified representative of imperialism, which is preparing for new military conflicts.

The Chinese furthermore constantly emphasized the need never to forget that Marxists cannot be opposed to every kind of war, but must distinguish between just and unjust wars.

2) Question of the Consequences of a Possible War and of Disarmament

Khrushchev did not explicitly share the viewpoint formerly expressed by some Soviet leaders or the leaders of certain Communist Parties that a Third World War might mean total destruction [3] (he asserted several times that the war would mean the end of capitalism). But in spite of that he insisted and still constantly insists on the frightful extent of the destructions that would be brought about by a nuclear conflict and its “fatal consequences.” [4] He was, furthermore, among those who did not exclude the hypothesis that the United States might pull off a come-back in the field of the most powerful weapons and “sooner or later reach the level of the USSR [January 1960 speech to the Supreme Soviet].” The Chinese viewpoint is perceptibly different. According to them – as was the case after the 1914–18 and 1939–45 conflicts – war would mean a new and decisive advance of the revolution, and even “a rapid destruction of the imperialist monsters.” The peoples ought to brace themselves for heavy sacrifices, but they would be recompensed because, on the ruins of dead imperialism, the victorious peoples would create with extreme rapidity a civilization a thousand times higher than that of capitalism, and a marvelous future for themselves.

On a more confidential level, so to speak, the Chinese do not hesitate to assert that, in the worst of hypotheses, they might in a war lose half their population while three hundred million would still remain to build communist society. It was arguments of this sort that provoked Khrushchev’s reply at Bucharest: “I cannot say, Let us make war: half would die, the other half would survive. If I talked like that, they could put me in a strait jacket!”

As for disarmament, Khrushchev is a convinced supporter: he thinks that it would be really possible to bring it about. The fact that that has never been possible in the past does not form a decisive

argument in the matter (v. Gromyko's January 1960 speech to the Supreme Soviet). The Chinese – who consider a swindle the thesis that the resources rendered available by an eventual disarmament would be able to be used by everybody in favor of the underdeveloped peoples – declare that they are in agreement with the Soviet proposals, and have put forward proposals themselves. But they explain their attitude by saying:

The Soviet proposals are a test for the imperialist countries. By rejecting them, these countries will later unmask the fraudulent character of their peace [v. 7 June 1960 Hsinhua despatch].

3) Question of the Attitude Toward the Colonial Revolution

Khrushchev and the CP of the USSR have always proclaimed their support for the struggle of the colonial peoples. But in practice they have often sacrificed this support to the needs of their policy of detente.

The Chinese criticize such attitudes, explain that the Khrushchev line forms an obstacle to the struggle of the colonial masses, and that the armed struggles of the colonial peoples against imperialism are necessary and must be hailed as just wars. The divergence became concrete in a quite visible way in connection with Algeria. Khrushchev hailed de Gaulle's 16 September speech; the Chinese sharply criticized it; the Chinese recognized the Algerian government; the USSR did so more tardily, and even then only *de facto*.

The Chinese, furthermore, are more and more critical of certain leaders of the colonial bourgeoisies (especially Nehru and Sukarno). The Soviets accuse the Chinese of not understanding the progressive role of the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries and the need for a national bourgeois-democratic stage in which problems of a socialist nature are not raised (v. for example, Zhukov's article in the 26 August **Pravda**).

4) Question of the Peaceful and Parliamentary Road to Socialism

The theses of the XXth Congress of the CP of the USSR on the parliamentary and peaceful road to socialism are the object of open and quite closely argued polemics by the Chinese, who do not forget to emphasize the need to destroy the bourgeois state apparatus and to replace it by the dictatorship of the proletariat. May we be permitted to have recourse for once to a rather long quotation? —

*We must take part in parliamentary struggles [**The Red Flag** writes], but without any illusions about the bourgeois parliamentary system. Why? Because, as long as the state machine of the bourgeois warlords and bureaucrats remains unchanged, parliament will always be an ornament of the bourgeois dictatorship, even if the party of the working class possesses a parliamentary majority or becomes the strongest party in the parliament. As long as the state machine exists, the bourgeoisie is completely in a position, at any moment, according to its own interests, either to dissolve parliament if necessary, or to use various open or hidden tricks to transform a workers' party which is the strongest party in parliament into a minority or to obtain the result that it has fewer seats even if it has received more votes than previously. That is why it is hard to imagine that in a bourgeois dictatorship there can be changes as a result of votes in parliament and it is equally hard to imagine that it be possible for the proletariat to adopt in parliament measures likely to ensure the peaceful passing over to socialism as a result of having obtained a certain number of votes. Several experiences in capitalist countries over a long period have completely proved this, and the experiences undergone in different countries of Europe and Asia after the Second World War furnish new proofs.*

The criticism of the "new roads" of the XXth Congress and of the different Communist Parties could

not be clearer.

The Communes and the “Uninterrupted Revolution”

The polemics about all the foregoing themes has been for several months pretty open and generally known. But divergences have arisen and are arising also in other fields, whether political or ideological, even if the indications are not equally clear and if the reservations and criticisms are most often only implicit.

This concerns first of all the very question of the communes. The communes are considered by the Chinese – and quite rightly, too – as a turn of capital importance in their orientation of economic and social policy, especially in the rural regions. Despite the rectifications that have been repeatedly made, and despite the obvious vacillations in connection with extending them to the cities, the Chinese continue to present the communes as an original contribution of the Chinese Revolution, as the specific form whereby the revolution moves up to a higher stage. The communes are supposed to have the effect either of giving a *coup de grace* to capitalist survivals or of ensuring a spectacular increase in production – not to speak of the revolution of capital importance that they seem to have introduced into social life by freeing women from the yoke and routine of the family.

Now the Soviet Communists have – to say the least – maintained an absolutely discreet silence on this matter – which quite clearly means an implicit criticism. Otherwise, how would the Soviet Communists not have celebrated in their own way, if they entirely approved of it, an experiment that is so significant and so important – they who never miss a single opportunity to hail the advances and successes of brother parties? But it is sure that the Soviets privately formulated criticisms, and certain reflections thereof can be found in the official texts. They repeatedly stressed, for example, that it is not possible to pass from capitalism directly to communism, that a whole stage of building socialism is necessary. This theme was put forward by Khrushchev himself in his report to the XXIst Congress. [5]

It is highly probable that the Soviets had brought forward objections to certain theorizations of the Chinese – especially in the second half of 1956 – according to which the communes might be an anticipation of communist society [6] (more recently it was stated that they are the best form of transition between socialism and communism). [7] A noted economist, Strumilin, it seems, engaged in rather curious polemics: he set up a chart of what the commune of the future would really be, while criticizing certain possible future aspects of a commune that was not without analogy with the present communes of the Chinese, and specifying in any case that it was not a “problem of today or even of tomorrow.” [8]

But it is not this aspect of the problem that most worries the Soviet leaders, who, good empiricists that they are, would not worry excessively about theorizations that were really hazardous. What is more important for them is that the communes represent roughly an experiment in development in the rural regions that is quite different from both the Stalinist experiment of the '30s and from the present Khrushchev experiment.

It is well known that the post-Stalinists, in order to overcome the critical situation created by Stalinist practice in the Soviet villages, made a very broad turn by adopting an agricultural policy that might be defined, so to speak, as a new form of NEP under radically changed objective conditions. It is above all in staking on the stimulation of the individual interest of the peasant – which Stalinist collectivization had stifled without being, obviously, in a position to replace it by historically superior stimuli – that Khrushchev sketched out the new course in this field. The post-Stalinist reform in certain people's democracies (around the period 1956-58) had a basically analogous meaning, despite great differences in objective conditions from the viewpoint both of

economics and of social structure. If Khrushchev's course corresponds to the attempt to use for productive purposes whatever remained of backwardness, of still looking to the past, in the Soviet peasantry – which was to a certain degree possible without major risks in view of the country's general structure and the extraordinary upsurge in industrialization – the Chinese course involves the attempt to overcome, already at this stage, the particularism and egotism which constitute the heavy historic burden of the peasants.

It is therefore comprehensible that Khrushchev should be worried when faced by so original an experiment that is being developed on a gigantic scale. If the Chinese communes attain their goal by really achieving the successes counted on by those who are promoting them, then there will be a striking confirmation of the fact that there is a way of socialist construction in the rural regions which is not the Soviet way, which is not that of Khrushchev. The practical example might be able to cause polemics to rebound also in the Soviet Union, where people will not fail to wonder about the possibility of following different paths, closer to those of China, which might no doubt be followed more easily in view of the higher level of the Soviet economy. It is obvious that in the people's democracies as well a whole series of problems might be raised from a different angle. [9]

We may say in passing, for it is not the subject of this article, that it is the general orientation of the development of the Chinese economy for now several years, and not only the more recent orientation in the rural regions, which is marked by an undeniable originality. Actually the Chinese leaders seem to have taken into account most attentively the more negative experiences of the Stalinist line of the '30s, and – whether in the development of agriculture, or in the proportionality that they try to establish among the different branches of industry, or in the care they show for certain minimum needs of consumers – they are following a course which, due allowances being made, is closer to the conceptions of the Left Opposition than to those of Stalin and his theoreticians.

The capital importance of this differentiation, of the existence of a “Chinese way,” appears in its full scope if one reflects on the influence that the Chinese example will be able to exert on the new countries, especially the underdeveloped ones, who will in the future tackle the construction of socialism. Although it is for the moment a matter only of an eventuality, it must all the more worry the Soviet leaders that some country in a quite specific and almost unique transitional stage [10] has already demonstrated in practice its interest in the communes.

On the more theoretical level, in the last months and especially in the polemical articles accompanying the celebration of the anniversary of Lenin's birth, the Chinese Communists further insisted on their thesis about the uninterrupted revolution, on their very special interpretation of the formula “democratic dictatorship of the people,” and on the criticism of the orientation of the Chinese leadership during the second revolution (1925–27). [11]

Lenin [they wrote among other things] applied and brilliantly developed the Marxist idea of the uninterrupted revolution, considering it a basic principle of orientation of the proletarian revolution. Lenin explained that the proletariat must win the leadership of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and, without interruption, transform the bourgeois-democratic revolution into socialist revolution. Lenin later specified that the socialist revolution is not the final goal, and that it is necessary to advance still further to accomplish the transition to the higher level of communism. [...] Lenin specified: “The first [the democratic revolution] grows into the second [the socialist revolution]. The second solves in passing all the problems of the first. The struggle, the struggle alone, decides to what extent the second succeeds in rising higher than the first.” [Report of Lu Tin 1960]

It is true that a little further on, with an offhand eclecticism, the writer of those lines praises his party for having combined the “doctrine of the uninterrupted revolution and the development of the revolution by stages.” But this concerns an attempt at an *a posteriori* justification of past policy on

which our magazine has already had the opportunity of expressing its opinion [12], and whose reach is inevitably limited by the Chinese themselves, when, for example, they give the famous formula of the democratic dictatorship of the people an interpretation to which Trotsky would have had no major objection ("The people's democratic dictatorship is set up by the working class and based on the alliance of the workers and peasants" – editorial of the **People's Newspaper**, quoted in a 22 April 1960 Hsinhua despatch), or when they criticize the party's 1925–27 course in the following terms:

During this period the opportunism of Chen Du-Siu showed that the policy of the united front of the Communist Party with the Kuomintang was an abandonment of the principles and positions which those of a communist party ought to be. He advocated that the Communist Party must be reduced in principle to the level of the Kuomintang. The result was the defeat of the revolution. [**The Red Flag**, quoted in a 21 April 1960 Hsinhua despatch]

Let us leave aside the unfortunate Chen Du-Siu, who was only applying the line imposed by Stalin and his Comintern (as the Chinese know very well, even if they still find it to their interest to take shelter behind so petty a falsification): the criticism that **The Red Flag** formulates here more than 30 years later is exactly the same that the Left Opposition formulated against Stalin at the time itself. It cannot be said that Max Reimann is wrong if he says that this business of the uninterrupted revolution reminds him of the themes of Trotsky's polemics [13], any more than it can be denied that Khrushchev and his companions have good reason to be worried about what is going on in their powerful and dynamic ally!

The Khrushchevist Basic Perspective and Chinese Criticism

In an article appearing in **Pravda** on August 12th, the Soviet leader Ponomarev endeavored to specify the scope of the problems raised in the current polemics by explaining that the divergences on the war and coexistence in reality implied divergences also on a whole series of basic problems, both tactical and strategic. It could nowise be disputed that these assertions are well-founded. [14]

Indeed, the polemics between the Soviets and the Chinese, in spite of fundamentally ridiculous reserves and often Byzantine argumentation, have such burning interest because they bring into discussion the essential questions of the orientation of the communist movement at this stage. These questions can be reduced to the following three:

- How is the historical transition from capitalism to socialism going to be carried out, or, by what ways will imperialism be totally defeated and will socialism be victorious on the world scale?
- What is the role of the colonial revolution and what must be the dynamic of development of this revolution at the present stage?
- By what ways will the proletariat of the capitalist countries be able to beat its adversary and conquer power?

Now the prospect of the Khrushchevist Soviet leadership is absolutely clear. In the new stage that we have entered as a consequence of the crisis of imperialism and the economic upsurge of the USSR and the other workers' states, imperialism can be blocked in its race toward war. The nature of the new weapons is another factor operating in the same direction, given the fact that the interest of the peoples is more than ever to avoid a war of catastrophic consequences and that the old ruling classes, or at least a part of them, would not be able to decide to trigger off a war likely to be transformed into suicide. [15] The historic conflict between capitalism and socialism, therefore, must and can be solved in coexistence, above all on the basis of economic competition between the USSR

and the USA.

It would be simplistic to say that Khrushchev and his supporters are completely unaware of the contribution of the struggle of the colonial peoples and the proletariat of the capitalist countries. But the main line of their policy consists in “competitive” coexistence: the economic development of the USSR is the essential factor which in the last analysis will decide everything, while the other factors are assigned, upon the whole, the role of creating, if possible, more favorable conditions for the victory of the USSR in the economic race. [16]

With this outlook, it is understandable that Khrushchev and the Khrushchevists are staking on every possibility of collaboration, were it only with sectors of capitalism, and that they are heading towards a prolonged collaboration with the colonial or semi-colonial bourgeoisies despite the reactionary role that these can play against the mass movement in their respective countries. This picture is completed by the perspective of the “peaceful,” and indeed “parliamentary,” road to socialism that the masses of the capitalist countries ought to accept as a consequence of Khrushchevist coexistence. Furthermore, if by this path they do not succeed in fact in winning power and the Communist Parties can at most only limit the action of their adversaries, that will not be so important, for the outcome of the game will be decided on another level.

The Chinese Communists visibly do not believe in such prospects, at least when they are pushed to their logical conclusions. They do not exclude coexistence between different social regimes, but they visibly do not accept the idea that the final defeat of imperialism could be ensured without war, without very violent clashes on the world scale. For them, war is not inevitable, but it seems to be still the more probable term of the alternative; in any case, the only way to avoid it is, if not wholly to destroy capitalism, to paralyze it more and more by the revolutionary struggles of the masses. For this purpose, the re-enforcement of the FLN’s struggle is for them more important than attempts at agreement with Gaullist France, and the struggle of the Japanese people is more important than Khrushchev’s trip to the United States.

Of course, they do not express themselves with full clarity; but basically, while still taking military force into account, and especially that of the USSR, they insist more on the contribution of the revolutionary rise of the masses than on developments in purely military relationships, and, while still constantly emphasizing the importance of the economic upsurge of the workers’ states, they are not staking on a final victory emerging above all from this factor [17] – which means, in other words, that their viewpoint and that of the Soviet leaders are very different, if not squarely opposed.

That finds its logical translation in a different attitude toward the colonial revolution and concerning the roads to socialism in the capitalist countries. If primary importance is attributed to mass movements, they cannot be sacrificed to any extent to the needs of coexistence, and one is inevitably led to enter into conflict, especially with the national bourgeoisies of certain countries, who at this stage are playing the most harmful role by becoming more and more the means of transmitting imperialist – even “new-style” imperialist – influence in the colonial movement. On the other hand, no interest can be felt in joining in the idle chatter about the “peaceful and parliamentary” road – which is an illusory prospect that can only demobilize the masses, and one is on the contrary driven to recall certain first truths of the Marxist-Leninist concept of the state, which experiences, even the most recent ones, have regularly confirmed.

We have insisted here on what is the real bedrock of all these polemics between the Chinese and Soviet Communists, on what its essential logic is, even by partly putting aside the desire and consciousness of each. The arguments they bring forward are, in the last analysis, less important, especially if account is taken of the often indirect and veiled form imposed both by their bureaucratic education and by their interest in avoiding a political activization of the rank-and-file

members.

Still, there is no doubt that the Chinese fashion of arguing is very disputable. Their documents often have a scholastic and schematic form, and quotation of texts often replaces analyses and demonstrations, which usually remain very summary. Their polemics against the revisionists, which aim sometimes at the Yugoslavs and sometimes at Khrushchev himself, are blended with crude deformations and even falsifications. Especially toward the Yugoslavs they adopt a terminology that very closely recalls the classic Stalinist style (with the traditional epithets of "traitors," "agents of imperialism," etc.) and do not even renounce virulent campaigns on the occasion of quite insignificant incidents that are very probably wholly invented. [18] And lastly we have already emphasized in our magazine that they have not failed to revive Stalin's lamentable idea about the possibility of a new inter-imperialist world war in our time. [19]

It is all these sides of the Chinese polemics that have led some people to present the Chinese position as being Stalinist or neo-Stalinist. Let us leave aside here all that may be Stalinist - or more generally, bureaucratic - in the Chinese experience at this stage. If we consider the current discussion, we should be able to speak of "Stalinism" only by limiting ourselves to certain formal and superficial aspects and by arbitrarily exaggerating them. At bottom, the Chinese orientation is very far from Stalinism, just as it would be very difficult, for that matter, to find serious analogies with Stalinism concerning the economic line and the general policy in the rural regions - not to speak of all the ideological subjects to which we have already drawn our readers' attention.

But though such an analogy would be entirely false, the limits of the Chinese arguments remain, as perplexity also remains about their attitude concerning the eventual consequences of a nuclear war. In our opinion, they underestimate this problem in too offhand a way (it would suffice to read what the scientists who are expert in this matter are writing, to be convinced of this), thus laying themselves wide open to the criticism of their adversaries. Furthermore, among the very members of the Communist Parties it is exactly that attitude that most often arouses objections and reservations which the Khrushchevist bureaucrats hasten to exploit.

What is more, Mao and his collaborators seem seriously to minimize the forces left to imperialism when they present it as just "a paper tiger." It is exactly because, after all, imperialism still retains imposing forces and resources that the danger of a new war remains very concrete. [20]

The Soviet Communists and their supporters argue with more subtlety and nuances, and apparently more dialectically: Khrushchev personally contributes his peasant common sense which is not unattractive to more naive and less experienced people. Besides the argument of the destruction that a nuclear war would cause, they seem to state questions correctly when they say that it is necessary to take new situations into account and that it is absurd and childish to limit oneself to repeating what Lenin said fifty or Marx a hundred years ago, or when they attack possibly sectarian attitudes that deny the role of colonial movements under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership.

But, in the first place, it is not a matter of proclaiming methodological criteria which are after all obvious; it is a matter of applying them concretely and showing how and to what degree certain of Lenin's conceptions should in fact be corrected. On this field, the Soviets remain very discreet and brief: just as, at the XXth Congress, they formulated in a few hasty sentences an allegedly new conception of the conquest of power, so now, without any really scientific organic analysis, they revise the conceptions on war and sketch out a prospect of passing over to socialism on a world scale within the limits of peaceful coexistence.

"Only madmen can wish for such a catastrophe as war - which Lenin termed barbarous and monstrous - to make socialism triumph in the world," [21] This seems correct, but it is, basically,

very vulgar. It is one thing to observe that after the two world wars the revolution made historic advances and to put forward the hypothesis that still more decisive advances would be possible during or after a third world war, and quite another thing to wish for that war. The question is not to know whether war is desk able or not but whether the objective trends of *present-day* world reality are or are not driving toward war. The question is not to know whether it would be well to pass over to socialism in the world on the basis of predominantly economic competition, but whether that is concretely possible. Granted, war is barbarous and monstrous, and even absurd, if you will; but it is the internal logic of capitalism, which engenders all sorts of barbarisms and monstrosities, of which war is only one.

Let us take another example. What Zhukov writes in part of his article in the 28 August **Pravda** on the progressive role that can be played in the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies even by bourgeoisies or petty bourgeoisies is roughly correct. But the problems raised at the present stage are concrete in a different way. To what extent are certain national bourgeoisies still progressive, to what degree can the movement in certain countries go forward without directly attacking the new bourgeois or petty-bourgeois dominant strata? That is the problem that is raised in countries as important as India or Indonesia, and in practice the attitude of the Chinese toward Nehru and Sukarno is different from the Soviet attitude. Zhukov gives no clear theoretical or practical reply, but in fact he sticks to the prospect of a compromise with the colonial bourgeoisies, even the most conservative, and he accepts that the workers' movement in the colonial countries be relegated for a whole period to an essentially subordinate role.

If the Sino-Soviet polemics are examined from this viewpoint, reducing the formal sides to proper proportions, it is clear that the Chinese are providing answers that correspond much more to the objective necessities of the revolutionary process and to the needs and aspirations of the masses.

The Intervention of Kardelj

The Yugoslav Communists also wanted to make their voice heard in the debate that is developing. Once again it was Edvard Kardelj who was entrusted with the task of organically expressing their conceptions.

Let us say right away that the Yugoslavs have confirmed the fact that, on questions like war and the prospects of the international workers' movement, they have a dangerously opportunist orientation. If the Kardelj who theorizes about the contradictions within a society in transition or about the organisms of proletarian democracy or about the agrarian question in Yugoslavia is capable of expressing very valuable ideas, the Kardelj who discusses "socialism and war" gets lost in a painful confusion by giving us in substance a worsened variant of the Khrushchev theses. [22]

Kardelj insists on the idea that war is not just simply a natural consequence of imperialism, but that it involves a question of correlation of forces: in that, he joins up with the Soviet point of view. He goes, however, very far in the polemics by putting forward a whole series of often absolutely astonishing arguments. [23]

It suffices for us to point out, for example, that, starting out from the fact that the Second World War was carried on by two coalitions, one capitalist and the other composed of capitalist countries and a workers' state, he draws the conclusion that in that war coexistence surmounted a particularly difficult test; that he attributes to Marx and Engels the idea that a socialist country can start an unjust war; that he asserts that the same Marx and Engels were for peace and against war especially because they thought that war hinders the development of progressive processes inside different countries. Even more than the Soviets, he polemicizes against the Chinese as if they thought that the

revolution must triumph thanks to the bayonets of the workers' states; and he even presents us with the scarecrow of a "socialist Bonapartism" which would lead the workers' states to take the initiative in starting a war of invasion. It is obvious that it is easy for him to knock down these straw-men that he himself has conjured up. [24] Naturally the reference to Trotsky is not lacking - no fear - as it is not lacking in the polemics of the Khrushchevists [25]: Trotsky is set up in opposition to Lenin and his outlook is once again deformed. Thus an old falsification is picked up again for the purpose of arbitrary polemics against adversaries who are the victims of new polemics, for neither Trotsky nor the Chinese were ever supporters of "socialist Bonapartism," of the theory that the revolution could be exported with the aid of Red Armies.

To the basic problems of the revolutionary process at the present stage, Kardelj gives a response similar to that of Khrushchev, whose opportunist orientation he even accentuates. He thinks that the passing over to socialism will be accomplished in coexistence, and that outside said coexistence there is no salvation. He accuses the Chinese of sectarianism in the question of the colonial countries, and it is well known that he does not share their ideas about the question of the "new" roads to socialism. On this occasion, he picks up in passing the Yugoslav themes about state capitalism accomplishing a progressive task in the economic development of backward countries, always forgetting that the question of the objective premises of socialism which are posed within capitalism itself is entirely different both from the question of the political (class) leadership of any process and from the question of knowing how the proletariat will be able to replace the old ruling class in power.

But for Kardelj what seems to be most important is to know whether the revolution and socialism should be built by factors that operate inside each country or by violent pressure from outside. The answer is obviously clear: without the part played by factors inside each country, there cannot be genuine socialism; but, in the context of the world situation as it exists in the second half of the XXth century, it is more than ever absurd to be unaware that the internal factors are powerfully conditioned by the reality of the world process, in view of the fact that the struggle between capitalism and socialism is developing not only inside each country but also on the world arena. Anyone who would like to forget this factual element would automatically put himself outside reality, and, in the best of hypotheses, he would be replacing a scientific analysis of the real situation and trends by an illusory and sterile wishful thinking.

Why Do They Do It?

It remains only to point out the specific factors that influence each side, pushing it toward its respective orientation.

The Soviet leaders, in the new objective conditions, can no longer hold to a rigidly inspired conception of a maintenance of the *status quo*, as was the case in the Stalinist era. But they still want to do everything possible to avoid all imbalances and clashes, by simultaneously limiting the dynamic revolutionary intervention of the masses. Their instinct of self-preservation as a privileged social stratum causes them always to understand that the more the revolutionary process spreads throughout the world, the less chance they have of keeping power and escaping the settlement of accounts with the Soviet masses, who hope to suppress all privileges in the workers' state and to build a genuine proletarian democracy.

The prospect of peaceful coexistence, of economic competition, corresponds very well to these needs of the bureaucracy, which hopes in this way to avoid more and more powerful waves of the revolution and keep the maximum possible control over the development of the world situation,

thanks also to the upsurge of the Soviet economy. Khrushchev is all the more engaged in this line in that he likes to present himself to the Russian people, so sorely tried by a still recent war, as the one who will be able to ensure the *détente* and prevent them from being hurled into a new conflict. There is no doubt that his political fate is tied up with the results both of his internal reformism and of his line of foreign policy centred entirely around peaceful coexistence.

Their specific situation leads the Yugoslav leaders in the same direction. They cannot count on a real solidarity from the other workers' states, and for ten years have tried to hold out by exploiting a situation of equilibrium, even though it be precarious, created in Europe, and by trying to obtain advantages from both sides. They think that their situation in a war would become untenable, and that they run the risk of being quickly swept away by the storm. That is why they are such ardent supporters of coexistence, which they tried to theorize about even before Khrushchev. The fact that for years they were subjected to virulent attacks and threats by Stalin, who, if the international situation had permitted, would have chosen the path of direct violence to get rid of them, explains – without, however, justifying – how they can express their pseudo-theory of possible unjust wars even by socialist countries.

To interpret the attitude of the Chinese, the hypothesis has been put forward that they are inclined to bring on a military conflict because they consider it would have a favorable outcome, especially for themselves, who, starting out from a more backward level, would, among other things, have less to risk. We are not at all in agreement with such an interpretation, for in reality, from all points of view, they have no interest in deliberately provoking such a course of events. Even leaving aside the fact that basically a world-wide overthrow would be, for the survival of the Chinese bureaucracy, no less a danger than it would be for the Soviet bureaucracy, the Chinese more than anyone else can justly consider that time is working on their side. In a showdown at the present stage, they would find themselves, from the economic and military viewpoint, in a very clear state of inferiority: no doubt, proportions will be considerably changed, if not reversed, in 10 or 15 years.

Their present orientation is rather the following: they think that – since the crisis of imperialism is getting more and more grave and the East Wind is prevailing over the West Wind – this favorable situation must be exploited, something that the Khrushchev policy, according to them, would not do.

It is certain that their exclusion from summit diplomacy and their being kept out of the UNO have played a certain role: they cannot accept being represented by intermediaries; they want in reality to play a more and more important part – and one proportionate to the real force of China – both in world politics and in the leadership of the anti-imperialist front. In particular they want to play a growing part not only in Asia but also in Africa and Latin America; and though the Soviet bureaucracy can at a given moment sketch out a compromise, even if only a precarious one, with Washington, in regard to Africa or South America, for example, this possibility absolutely does not exist for the Chinese, and their line consequently can be only one of very clear opposition both to the old colonialisms and to the new Yankee colonizers. Furthermore, for a whole series of evident objective conditions or special circumstances, they are in a much better position than the Soviets to establish liaisons with the colonial movements, and they have run into conflict with certain colonial bourgeoisies whose real nature and purposes they have in practice been driven to unmask. They can record all the more success in this field in that they seem in spite of everything to have learned well the lesson of certain past experiences. [26] In the final analysis, therefore, the present positions of the Chinese are the reflection of a profound reality, namely, the reality of the Asian revolution and of the colonial revolution in general, a revolution which cannot accept an attitude that is not that of an all-out struggle, which cannot be satisfied by idle talk about “coexistence” or “irreversible” *détente*. For their part, the Chinese are also under the attack and constant threat of imperialism, which, among other things, still controls a part of their territory. Somehow or other they see, in the steady spread of revolutionary movements in the world, the concrete way to remove the threat and to

improve their conditions, including on the economic plane.

In the debate developing in the Communist Parties, in the workers' movement in general, and even in the colonial peoples' movements [27], which is destined to exert a very serious influence, especially among Communist cadres and militants, whom it will aid to political maturity, it has been stated on several sides that the Chinese have adopted the positions of the Trotskyists. We need not recall here our basic criticism of the Chinese leadership, which, in spite of all, remains bureaucratic and has a bureaucratic conception of the problems of the transition to socialism, beginning by that of the structure of the workers' state. We have already expressed elsewhere our reservations about their successive theorizations. Still, it is after all clear that at the present stage certain of the conceptions that have traditionally characterized our movement are penetrating on a large scale, by the intermediary of the Chinese, into the Communist movement, even though in a rather approximate and deformed way.

The dialectics of the historical process in its dynamics is such that even certain bureaucratic leaderships are obliged more and more openly to raise for themselves problems of the development of the revolution, and thus to draw near the conceptions of revolutionary Marxism.

22 September 1960

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- Marxists.org.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/maitan/1960/09/problems.htm>

- From **Fourth International** [Amsterdam], No. 11, Autumn 1960, pp. 11-20.

Transcribed & marked up by [Einde O'Callaghan](#) for the **Encyclopaedia of Trotskyism On-Line (ETOL)**.

Footnotes

[1] We are relying especial on the ample summary published by **Avanti!**, organ the Italian Socialists, who, being very close to the Yugoslavs on these questions, may be considered to reproduce their arguments quite faithfully.

[2] See a 27 May 1960 despatch of the Hsinhua News Agency. For the Chinese texts summarized in this article, see the same source, and particularly its despatches of the following days: 1, 21, 22, 23 April; 27 May; 7, 8, 16 June

[3] The Polish delegate to the Council of the World Federation of Trade Unions explained that the war might destroy the earth in a few minutes (v. Hsinhua News Agency despatch of 9 June 1960). Togliatti, for his part, wondered out loud in the following terms:

Let us suppose concretely that there should fall on our country 20 or 30 nuclear devices capable of causing causing total destruction and a desert; what socialism would one be able to build under those conditions? [v. **I'Unità** , 24 July 1960

[4] Khrushchev returned to this theme in his speech to the Bucharest Congress, while, more recently, the **Kommunist** wrote that a war would mean the destruction of entire countries and that “the masses cannot pay no matter what price” to aid the transition to socialism (v. **L’Unità** , 1 September 1960).

[5] Khrushchev at the XXist Congress denied the existence of divergences between the Soviets and the Chinese by saying: “You will not be able to see divergences any more than anyone can see his own ears.” Obviously the divergences existed, despite the fact that at that moment they could not be seen, exactly in the same way that ears exist even if nobody can see his own

[6] Cfr article in our Autumn 1958 issue.

[7] See 19 August Hsinhua despatch.

[8] > v. **Le Monde**, 30 August 1960, where Li Fu-Chen is quoted as saying: “The best form of transition from collective property to the property of the whole people, the best form of transition from capitalism to socialism.”

[9] It seems that in certain people’s democracies (Bulgaria and East Germany) tendencies rather inclined to follow the path of the communes did in fact tend to appear at a given moment

[10] We allude to Sekou Toure’s Guinea.

[11] On the “uninterrupted revolution,” see our Autumn 1958 and Spring 1960 issues.

[12] Especially in the Spring 1960 issue already mentioned

[13] According to certain news information originating with **Neues Deutschland**, Reimann seems to have expressed himself in such terms during a speech in the Central Committee of the SED in August 1960.

[14] Unfortunately we were unable to procure the integral text of this article, but on the basis of press reports its general significance appears quite clear.

[15] v. Khrushchev’s speech at the Bucharest Congress, and a report of Togliatti, an ardent supporter of the Khrushchevist theses, to the CC of the Italian CP in July (**L’Unità** , 24 July 1960)

[16] This emerges also rather clearly from a key-article in **Kommunist**, no. 10, 1960.

[17] For example, an article about Cuba in **The Red Flag** insists much more on the possibility of defending the island against an imperialist attack by a mobilization of the masses than on possible outside aid (v. 1 September 1960 Hsinhua despatch).

[18] See, in the Hsinhua News Agency despatches and releases for the first ten days of September, their support of the polemics of the Albanians against an alleged attack by “Jugoslav bandits.”

[19] See, among other references, page 7 of the 1 April 1960 Hsinhua News Agency bulletin.

[20] In obvious polemics with the Chinese, the Soviets wrote that “imperialism is still,

unfortunately, a powerful wild beast.” [See already quoted article of **Kommunist**.] In a more recent (October) article, **The Red Flag** has tapered off the expression “paper tiger” by specifying that this expression has a strategic value but does not exclude on the tactical level a real temporary strength on the part of imperialism.

[21] Quoted by **Le Monde**, 19 September 1960.

[22] The Soviets are somewhat embarrassed by this fact and have tried to differentiate themselves, either by criticizing certain extreme assertions of Kardelj or by resorting to real sophism (see the reply to Kardelj published in **Pravda**, 2 September 1960).

[23] > We are relying especial on the ample summary published by **Avanti!**, organ the Italian Socialists, who, being very close to the Yugoslavs on these questions, may be considered to reproduce their arguments quite faithfully

[24] He does so, what is more, with passably vulgar arguments.

[25] See for example Khrushchev’s 31 October 1959 speech and the already mentioned report of Togliatti in the article in **Kommunist**, no. 10, 1960.

[26] The agreement of China with Guinea provides that Chinese specialists in Guinea may not have a higher standard of living than the Guinean citizens who are carrying out the same tasks. Evidently the Chinese have not forgotten the Yugoslav polemics against the Soviets on this subject, and in practice it is the Yugoslav point of view that they accept.

[27] It seems that the most direct support for certain Chinese positions is given by Sekou Touré