

Recent Studies of Communist Affairs

THE UNITED STATES

Russia Since Stalin: Old Trends and New Problems (series of 16 articles), in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, January 1956.

The expert analyses of 16 specialists in Soviet affairs have been combined, under the capable editorship of Philip E. Mosely, into an excellent symposium.¹ Is the Soviet Union after Stalin more responsive to the aspirations of its own people for a better life and for peace? How can the oft-stated Soviet belief in the inevitable world-wide triumph of communism be reconciled with Moscow's recent espousal of co-existence with other political systems? Can we expect a calmer and less tension-ridden world? These broad questions are posed by Mr. Mosely in his foreword. And in an attempt to provide meaningful answers, he has organized the articles into four large sections—"Political and Social Developments," "Economic Developments and Problems," "Cultural Life," and "Soviet Role in World Politics."

In an introductory survey article Barrington Moore suggests that the Soviet need to obtain higher production and productivity is the basic reason for the relaxation of internal tension. He stresses, however, that in the context of Soviet society the relaxation of tension, which means less coercion and a more "rational" use of natural resources, men and technology, does not imply more democracy—an opinion in which John Hazard, after a painstaking review of "Governmental Developments in the USSR Since Stalin," also concurs. Mr. Hazard observes that the slight administrative decentralization which has been carried out in the interests of efficiency has been accompanied by "very little lessening of centralization in the interest of public participation in the making of decisions."

¹The exigencies of space have prevented specific mention of the following articles: Joseph A. Kershaw, "Recent Trends in the Soviet Economy"; M. Gardner Clark, "Soviet Iron and Steel Industry: Recent Developments and Prospects"; Robert M. Slusser, "Soviet Music Since the Death of Stalin"; Paul E. Zinner, "Soviet Policies in Eastern Europe."

Merle Fainsod's article on "The Communist Party Since Stalin" indicates that the different methods used by Stalin's successors have had tangible positive results within the Soviet Union. "Whatever the motives which have inspired this activity, the result has been to project an image of personalized and humanized leadership which suggests a change from the past." Mr. Fainsod feels, however, that softer methods are not indicative of a substantial change in the party's position in Soviet society: "The supremacy of the party continues to be the alpha and the omega of Soviet rule." Nor can the habits ingrained in the present leaders by twenty years of Stalin's rule be shed easily. Although Khrushchev has not yet "attained a position of indisputable primacy," his post as First Secretary of the CPSU, and as head of the recently formed Section of Party Organs for the RSFSR, offers him many opportunities to do so.

The section on "Economic Developments and Problems" highlights the basic problem of the Soviet Union today: the chronic shortage of consumer goods and of food caused by the doctrinaire emphasis of Soviet economists on a high rate of industrial growth at the expense of consumer wants. Gregory Grossman, in an article on "Soviet Agriculture Since Stalin," indicates that farm production could be increased somewhat if a large portion of the resources and manpower now dedicated to military uses were applied in the agricultural sector. But he also feels that substantial and continuing improvement in the food situation is impossible unless monetary incentives for the peasants are vastly increased and consumer goods become generally available. Unfortunately for the Soviet people, the present order of priorities in the Soviet Union makes this unlikely; nor will there be significant imports of consumer goods.

In this connection, Oleg Hoeffding expects Soviet foreign trade "to remain the trickle that it is today." Its purpose will likewise remain unchanged: to bind the satellite economies more closely to the Soviet economy, and to woo underdeveloped areas with promises of loans and machinery. Thus the Soviet people can expect only partial amelioration of their

economic plight unless and until the leaders of the Soviet Union abandon the dogma that in the "historical race" a Soviet "victory" depends upon the present order of priorities stressing industrialization.

Devoted to the arts and sciences, the section on "Cultural Life" indicates both hopeful signs and the limited scope of the changes occurring since Stalin's death. In the field of literature, there has been some criticism of regime-imposed restraints by Soviet writers themselves. An example is Ilya Ehrenburg's statement that a good writer does not need the "social command." ("Can one imagine," he added, "commanding Tolstoy to do *Anna Karenina* or commanding Gorky to do *Mother*?") Yet neither Ehrenburg's nor other writers' criticisms have challenged the ultimate authority of the party; and if the Soviet writer is now permitted gentle criticism of controls, still he must couple it with acceptance of authority. "Each of us writes according to the dictates of his heart," said Sholokhov at the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, "but our hearts belong to the party. . . ." ²

Similarly in architecture: Although there are signs that antiquated modes of expression will now give way to "a new aesthetic, an engineer's approach to building," the reason is solely a desire for economy in construction. "A study of the post-Stalin aesthetic trends does not reveal any deviations from the Marxist philosophy of art," writes Arthur Voyce.

George Kline's review of "Recent Soviet Philosophy" is even more explicit:

There is no sign at all of any slackening of the generally authoritarian and dogmatic character of Soviet philosophy and no indication, despite misleading verbal claims to the contrary, of any genuine freedom of philosophic reflection, discussion, or criticism.

The situation in Soviet science is different. Realizing that the economy and armed forces depend on modern and rational technology, Soviet leaders decided that the roadblock of Stalinist dogma had to be removed. Consequently, writes John Turkevich:

The last three years have seen a change in Soviet science, . . . the isolation of Soviet scholars is being lifted. . . . Soviet science and technology [have shown] . . . an increasing conformity with the principles of world-wide science . . . the Academy [of Sciences] does not appeal to the principles of Marxism for the development of Russian science.

This change from Stalinist authoritarianism has been combined with a tremendous increase in study and training facilities. The leaders of the Soviet Union have sought to establish that as the country moves

² Quoted in the article by Ernest J. Simmons, "Soviet Literature, 1950-1955."

toward more "competitive coexistence," it is assured a modern science and technology.

Although some Soviet methods have changed and the danger of a Communist-fomented war has lessened, there should be no mistaking the Soviet conception of competitive coexistence as an active process indeed. The hard core of post-Stalin diplomacy in Europe, says Robert F. Byrnes, remains unalterable opposition to the unification of Germany except under Soviet auspices. However, in an attempt to oust United States forces and destroy the organizations fostering intra-European unity, "softer, subtler, more persuasive" methods have been used. Local Communist parties have been ordered to form popular fronts with other domestic groups and infiltrate political, religious, educational, and labor organizations in an effort to destroy the unity of the Western world from within.

In Asia, too, the aims of Soviet policy remain unchanged, writes Harold H. Fisher:

The Soviet Communists . . . still hope to prevail upon the peoples of Asia to follow the Communist lead and to use Communist methods to achieve peace, progress, and equality.

Wherever possible, Soviet diplomats try to forestall the use of Western resources, technology, and capital. Soviet propaganda associates the United States' offers of aid with the exploitative imperialism of a bygone era, while Soviet policies are identified with the anti-colonialism of the Arab and Asian nations.

In his closing summary, Philip Mosely rejects the theory that the recent changes in Soviet society reflect weakness in its structure. Nor does he believe that they signify a democratic future for the Soviet people. It would be as unrealistic to read this into the recent modifications of policies as it would be unreasonable to expect the Soviet people to be unimpressed with what must be a welcome relaxation in the tension of their everyday lives. If some of the most heinous features of Soviet policies have been softened in outline, it has not been out of fear but out of a calculated desire to lessen resistance to a program which, in all essentials, remains unaltered: there are no institutions which democratize decision making, the party dispenses orthodoxy, the creative artist must pledge his heart to the party and its canons, collectivization remains the basis of agriculture, heavy industry is still stressed over the production of consumer goods, investments in military strength have increased steadily since 1953.

In like fashion, though the relaxation of the tension generated by Stalinist foreign policy is also welcome, it is essential not to confuse a slight shift in tactics with a major change in goals. Quite the contrary—

the policies of Stalin's successors reveal their calm confidence in the durability of the Soviet system and a clear determination to extend its influence should the non-Communist countries be careless enough to allow them to do so.

The Soviet Union Since Stalin (series), in *Current History*, January, 1956.

The seven articles herein under review offer a largely homogeneous and closely-reasoned evaluation of the major factors shaping the recent alterations in the facade of Soviet society. It would have been unreasonable, argues Alfred G. Meyer in his introductory survey article, to have expected that Stalinism as such could have survived the death of its creator; but it would be equally foolhardy, he continues, to look for significant changes in Soviet goals, no matter how skillful the alterations in tactics. He singles out four forces which have shaped the Russian revolution and which continue to operate in the Soviet Union today:

. . . (1) an urge toward totalitarian dictatorship and control; (2) an urge toward rational management; (3) an urge toward the formation of vested interests and their crystallization in a new class structure; and (4) an urge toward socialism and democracy.

What has happened since Stalin's death, says Mr. Meyer, is that the first of these "urges" has been restrained by the counter-pressures exerted by the others:

The present phase seems to be . . . a fight *against* power . . . a striving for a society in which the talented rise and the competent rule . . . without the disturbances created by politics.

The author suggests, however, that this desire will be frustrated—already, less than three years after Stalin's death, the party has reasserted its control and is again defining the ideological criteria by which talent and competence will be judged. In his article "Soviet Society Today" Kent Geiger corroborates the view that the Communist Party is still firmly in control of Soviet society. The entire process of change in post-Stalin society has been carefully directed, he says, "through the mechanism of centralized planning, and tends to have a forced rather than spontaneous quality."

Kruschchev's campaign to develop the virgin lands as a major corn-producing area is a case example of continued forced and irrational planning. Lazar Volin's discussion of "Soviet Agriculture and the New Look" indicates that it will be many years at best before this program can be successful, while the cost in money, materials, and manpower can hardly be reckoned. Greater incentives may help agriculture as a whole, especially if coupled with a significant

increase in consumer goods, but Mr. Volin does not expect agricultural production to rise commensurately with the demands of a steadily increasing population.

In his short article on "Soviet Industry and the New Look" Michael Florinsky indicates that although "the outlook for Soviet industry—barring the outbreak of a new major war—is not unpromising," production of consumer goods will increase only slowly because recent Soviet industrial policies "conform closely to Communist orthodoxy" in emphasizing the development of heavy industry. He points out, however, that while Soviet economic advance in itself poses no intrinsic threat, the non-Communist world must remain watchful: for "a true reconciliation" between Communist and non-Communist countries "is precluded so long as the Moscow government remains faithful to Communist theology."

Frederick Schuman and Wayne Vucinich, though their two articles agree on the unlikelihood of war, differ in their interpretation of the essence of "peaceful coexistence." Mr. Schuman sees it as a long period of ideological rivalry and "competition in economic, moral and spiritual emulation in meeting the universal aspirations of mankind." Mr. Vucinich, on the other hand, sees the new Soviet diplomacy as a much more active process, as a clever tactic necessitated by the fear of an atomic war. Far from being calculated to satisfy "the universal aspirations of mankind," the continuing Soviet drive toward the Middle, South and Far East will merely strive to substitute economic domination for military conquest. "Imperialism has not ceased to be an essential tenet of Soviet communism," he concludes.

N. S. Timasheff's article on "Soviet Education's New Look" reveals the core of the Soviet system to be highly centralized and regimented in spirit and content. In defining the goal of Soviet educational methods, he writes:

The dream of "new men" enthusiastically acting in the spirit of communism is a thing of the past. Men trained to obey unquestioningly form a much more solid foundation for a totalitarian despotism.

Far from presenting a picture of a dynamic society evolving in the direction of more democracy, these articles paint Soviet society as essentially stratified in structure and conservative in policy. Change in Soviet society has been more verbal than real, and when real—controlled. The seemingly basic changes occurring since Stalin's death in March 1953 are thus not so much progressive moves auguring democracy for the Soviet people as comparatively minor adjustments of the excessively rigid structure of Stalinist society.

R. B.

Correspondence

Editors' Note: Readers are welcome to send communications dealing with matters discussed in *Problems of Communism*. Letters should be addressed to the Editors, *Problems of Communism*, U.S. Information Agency, 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue NW., Washington 25, D.C.

SOVIET JUSTICE AFTER STALIN

In his article "New Trend in Soviet Justice?" (issue No. 1, 1956), Mr. Vladimir Gsovski devotes a great deal of attention to the "Special Board" of the Soviet Ministry of Interior, which "officially has the power to incarcerate any person or persons the regime deems 'socially dangerous' for a period up to five years" without a trial and without the legal guarantees offered to political offenders in non-totalitarian countries. Contrary to various unofficial reports, states the author, the "Special Board" continues to exist, "even if the regime is not making use of it at the moment." He points to the persistence of this institution as an important indication that there have been no basic changes in the Soviet concept of legal justice.

Without disputing some of the author's other assertions (all of which are well argued and substantiated), let me point out that he is wrong insofar as the "Special Board" is concerned. The proof is contained in the January 1956 issue of the authoritative *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo* (Soviet Government and Law) which states unequivocally that the "Special Board" was abolished in 1953. Although the journal does not elaborate, there seems to be no reason to assume that it represents anything but the truth. Is it not possible, therefore, to assume that the Soviet Government is making a genuine effort to remove the most odious features of its legal system (instituted under Stalin), and is slowly moving toward a concept of justice more consonant with those cherished by democratic societies?

Toronto, Canada

Robert Gilman

Mr. Gsovski replies: The article "New Trend in Soviet Justice?" was written and printed before issue No. 1, 1956 of the Soviet legal periodical *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo* reached this country. Two sentences of an editorial in the issue constituted the only statement yet published in the Soviet press to the effect that the Special Board under the Ministry of the Interior has been abolished. The sentences read:

The Communist Party and the Soviet Government have recently been carrying out serious measures directed towards further fortification of socialist legality and protection of rights and legitimate interests of citizens. In this connection, as early as 1953 the Special Board attached to the USSR Ministry of the Interior was abolished with the transfer of criminal cases of all categories . . . [to] organs of the general judicial system.

The question still remains whether this brief statement is enough to show that the imposition of heavy penalties, especially confinement in camps of correctional labor by administrative action, was discontinued. Heavy penalties have been imposed by administrative action without trial ever since the inception of the Soviet regime. The Cheka or Vecheka of early days was superseded by the GPU. This, in turn, became the OGPU which was transformed, in 1934,

into the People's Commissariat for the Interior (NKVD) which was renamed, in 1946, the Ministry of the Interior (MVD). The powers of this Ministry and the Special Board under it were for the last time legally defined by several acts of 1934 and especially that of September 5, 1934 (printed in the Collection of Laws and Decrees for 1935, item 84). These acts were passed by the Central Executive Committee, a legislative body of that time; as laws they would be subject to change only by an act of the Supreme Soviet, which alone enacts law under the present Constitution. The resolutions of the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium are published in a special periodical, *Vedomosti* which is currently received in this country. No act supporting the above quotation was ever printed there, or in any other publication containing laws.

The Act of September 5, 1934, reads in part:

1) The People's Commissariat for [now Ministry of] the Interior shall have the right to apply to persons considered socially dangerous the following:

- (a) Exile for a period up to five years to [certain] places, the list of which shall be established by the USSR Commissariat for the Interior . . . [the exiled] persons are to be under open surveillance;
- (b) Expulsion for a period up to five years, [with offenders] under open surveillance and prohibited from residing in capitals, large cities and industrial centers of the USSR;
- (c) Confinement in camps of correctional labor up to five years;
- (d) Expulsion from the confines of the USSR of aliens who are socially dangerous.

2) For the application of measures mentioned in Section 1 a Special Board shall be established under the People's Commissar for the Interior under his chairmanship . . .

From this wording of the Act of September 5, 1934, it is clear that the broad powers specified in Section 1 were granted directly to the Ministry of the Interior; while the Special Board was created merely as the instrumentality for the exercise of these powers. The passage in *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo* mentions only the abolition of the Special Board; it does not state that the powers granted to the Ministry to impose exile and confinement are also abolished. It is logical to assume that Section 1 remains in effect, that the powers of the Ministry may be exercised by the Minister himself, or that the jurisdiction of the Special Board may have been transferred to the Committee on State Security. The devious and, to say the least, indirect way in which the abolition of the Special Board was announced is proof positive that, if some of "the most odious features" of Stalinism have been removed, the Soviet leaders still have the power to deal swiftly with "socially dangerous" opponents without being bound by the "cumbersome" delays of legal procedure.