



Communist Policy and Tactics 1969, 3. hluti

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Communist Policy and Tactics

March 1969

Summary

Sino-Soviet Frontier Clashes

The clashes in March were probably the most serious to date. The Chinese may have instigated the first clash, or it may have had local causes. Both sides gave the clashes full publicity. For the first time the Soviet Government made diplomatic representations in Western capitals about the Sino-Soviet dispute. Neither side is likely to back down and negotiations are improbable. Tension on the Sino-Soviet frontier will remain endemic but large-scale hostilities seem unlikely.

Preparations for the World Communist Conference

2. The March meeting of the Preparatory Commission revealed continuing disagreement on the main document for the Conference and postponed the Conference until June. The main document, if agreed at all, will probably end up as little more than a general call for unity and co-operation. The Russians will be unable to obtain condemnation of the Chinese or confirmation of the doctrine of limited sovereignty. The main Soviet aims in holding the Conference are probably to demonstrate that there is still some degree of unity in the Movement and to save face.

Warsaw Pact Consultative Committee

3. The meeting on 17 March was very brief. Its decisions on defence have not been announced but they are unlikely to involve any radical increase of Soviet institutional control. The declaration on European security, which was issued by the meeting, contains very little that is new. Soviet motives behind the declaration probably included the desire to recreate the atmosphere for East-West contacts which existed before August, 1968, and to refurbish the "peace-loving" image of the Soviet Union. The more positive aspects of the declaration, especially the call for practical co-operation between European states, are supported by some of the smaller members of the Warsaw Pact.

Yugoslav Party Congress

4. For the fourth time since the war, the Soviet Union boycotted a Yugoslav Party Congress. The reason was presumably the strongly worded resolution restating Yugoslav condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union are likely to remain cool. The major innovation approved by the Congress was the establishment of an "executive bureau" under Tito's chairmanship.

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Czechoslovak-Soviet Relations

5. The anti-Soviet demonstrations following the Czechoslovak victories over the Soviet Union in the world ice hockey championship went beyond the limits of what is tolerable to the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders. But reactions on both sides were stronger than seemed warranted and reflected the continuing failure of the two countries to establish a modus vivendi. Any Soviet disposition to tolerate the present leadership in Prague must have been weakened. The position of the progressives within Czechoslovakia will have been weakened and permanent damage to their cause will hardly be avoided if there are further incidents.

Czechoslovakia: Internal Situation

6. The resolution of the Czechoslovak Trade Unions to speak with an independent voice in defence of their members' interests is one aspect of a decentralisation of authority away from the Party bureaucracy. This process is unlikely to be set quickly into reverse. But it remains to be seen whether public enthusiasm for it will prove durable. If the pluralistic structure survives, it may prove a model of importance beyond Czechoslovakia.

Sino-Soviet Frontier Clashes

There have been numerous incidents and occasional references to use of arms on the Sino-Soviet frontiers in the past decade. But the armed clash on 2 March, when thirty-one Russians are said to have been killed, was the first to be publicised and was probably the most serious incident to date. After a comparatively minor clash on 14 March, another followed on 15 March, which was probably on a larger scale than that of 2 March; a couple of thousand troops may have been engaged on either side. The Russians reported further Chinese firing on 18 and 19 March.

2. It seems unlikely that the Soviet Government would have calculated that the escalation of the Sino-Soviet dispute was in their interest at this time. They probably wanted a relatively tranquil period for the consolidation of their grip on Eastern Europe after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and for the preparation of the World Communist Conference and strategic arms limitation talks with the United States. Moreover, they were preoccupied, at the time of the first incident, with Berlin. The Chinese may have had an interest in embarrassing the Russians for these very reasons. But the most likely explanation is that the incident on 2 March arose from local causes and the undoubted tension on the frontier generally.

3. Damansky Island on the Ussuri river, where the incidents took place, has been claimed by both sides. The Ussuri frontier was fixed by the Russian-Chinese Treaty of Peking in 1860 and the ownership of the Islands was demarcated on maps exchanged with a protocol to the Treaty in the following year. These maps are not available. But in any case Damansky island's position in the river changes over the years with variations of the main stream's course and depth.

4. Both sides immediately publicised the clash on 2 March, the Russians just beating the Chinese to it. The Russians were no doubt genuinely concerned at this serious clash and wished to forestall the inevitable Chinese accusations. The Chinese propaganda campaign, which began immediately but cooled off by 21 March, was designed to embarrass the Russians and perhaps also to provide a stimulus for national unity preceding the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Party. After the first wave of Chinese propaganda and the anti-Soviet demonstrations in Peking on 3 and 4 March, the Soviet Government, which had not yet given the incident all-out publicity, launched a full-blast campaign on 5 March, with anti-Chinese demonstrations on 7 and 8 March. The campaign was still running, although no longer at full blast, at the end of the month. "Radio Peace and Progress", the ostensibly unofficial Soviet radio, drew attention in its Chinese language service, but without specific threats, to the great Soviet nuclear superiority over China. An obvious attempt was made in the Soviet Union to create a jingoistic atmosphere.

5. However, the affair was kept within certain limits. Neither side made a direct threat of attack. The Chinese, while hinting at other areas of possible dispute, stressed their own forbearance; and the Russians seem to have been content with regular patrols of Damansky Island, rather than uninterrupted occupation.

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6. Meanwhile, the Soviet Government made their first diplomatic representations in the West about Chinese actions. Démarches were made in at least seventeen capitals including London and the EEC countries. Some representations were made at Prime Minister or Foreign Minister level, and some less formally. In London, the Soviet Ambassador raised the matter on 13 March with the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. He described the clash on 2 March as "a very serious matter", and emphasised that the Soviet Government took "a very serious view" of the incident and would not hesitate "to take the right measures". He called again on 1 April, to hand over to the Secretary of State a copy of the Soviet Government's statement of 29 March. The main purpose of the Soviet representations was probably to impress upon certain Governments, and indirectly upon the Chinese, that the Soviet Government would act unhesitatingly to prevent Chinese occupation of any territory which is claimed by the Russians. They may also have wished to suggest that China represents a threat to peace and to enlist sympathy with their own case. The list of countries approached and the level of representations in certain cases suggest that a subsidiary Soviet motive was to dissuade certain Governments from recognising the Chinese People's Republic or otherwise drawing closer to it.

7. What will happen now? Both sides have declared their inalienable right to Damansky Island and have engaged their national prestige. Retreat by either is therefore highly improbable. Negotiations, which were proposed in the Soviet statement of 29 March, are not likely either. Tension will remain endemic, although the risk of incidents on the Ussuri may be less from mid-April, when the river unfreezes, until the winter. Clashes may occur at other points on the Sino-Soviet frontier. But large-scale hostilities between China and the Soviet Union, or a pre-emptive Soviet strike against China's nuclear installations in Sinkiang, also seem unlikely. The Chinese know that they remain far weaker than the Russians in military technology; and there is no evidence that the Soviet Union, although it has shown itself prepared to use force to achieve certain policy objectives in Europe, is contemplating outright aggression in China.

8. The Ussuri skirmishes will no doubt have added substance to existing Soviet apprehension that major hostilities will one day occur, though the Russians probably reckon that they can contain the Chinese threat on their frontiers for a long time yet. The clashes provided further proof that the element of nationalism and power politics in the Sino-Soviet dispute is no less important than the ideological differences.

Preparations for the World Communist Conference

The meeting of the Preparatory Commission in Moscow from 18 - 22 March revealed that agreement has still not been reached on the main conference document. The meeting started a day late; it postponed the World Conference from May until 5 June; and it referred back to Central Committees the existing, but not yet agreed, draft of the main conference document, which presumably covers the subject of the conference: "The tasks at the present stage of the fight against Imperialism, and unity of action of Communist and Workers' Parties and of all anti-Imperialist forces". It was also decided that a further, hitherto unexpected, meeting of the Preparatory Commission should take place on 23 May.

2. The prolonged difficulties in agreeing the draft suggest that the document will end up as little more than a general call for unity and a routine reiteration that differences should not prevent the parties from co-operating closely on questions of common interest. Even agreement on these lines may prove impossible. Either outcome would be in sharp contrast to the last World Conference, in 1960, which agreed a document covering not only the struggle against imperialism but more detailed and controversial matters as well. Moreover, fewer parties will be present in 1969 than in 1960 and six of the fourteen ruling parties will probably be absent (China, Albania, Yugoslavia, Cuba, North Vietnam, North Korea). All these except Yugoslavia were present in 1960.

3. The Rumanian Party, among others, are most unlikely to agree that the Conference should pass judgement on the Chinese. The CPSU may therefore have to be content with reiterating its current propaganda line that Mao and the Chinese leadership - but not all elements in the party - have ex-communicated themselves by abandoning Marxism-Leninism and becoming "allies of imperialism". There is no question, moreover, of the Conference endorsing the Soviet doctrine of limited sovereignty.

4. The Soviet leaders still feel that they have a duty to give a lead to the international communist movement and to lay down a general policy for it. But the CPSU originally wanted a conference largely in order to condemn China. Two other motives are probably more important now: the desire simply to bring together as many parties as possible, thus demonstrating that there is still some degree of unity; and the desire to save face. Since the CPSU has been calling for such a meeting for a very long time, it has inevitably become to a large extent an end in itself. Thus the likelihood that the conference will not achieve very much and the continuing setbacks in its preparation will not easily deter the CPSU now from holding it.

Warsaw Pact Consultative Committee

After prolonged efforts, the Russians succeeded in convening a meeting of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee in Budapest on 17 March. This was the first Warsaw Pact summit since the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It lasted only 2½ hours and there can have been time only for perfunctory consideration of previously prepared texts. There are plausible reports that the delay in the opening of the meeting was caused by a Soviet attempt, blocked by the Rumanians, perhaps with tacit Czech and Hungarian support, to have documents agreed about the Sino-Soviet dispute and the doctrine of limited sovereignty; and Ulbricht has since confirmed that Sino-Soviet relations were discussed. The Russians may have considered that the meeting, however meagre its results, would at least give the impression that some degree of unity had been restored.

2. The communiqué was short and uninformative. New regulations were agreed on "combined armed forces and combined commands" and a Committee of Ministers of Defence was established. The nature of these measures has not been revealed. But there is no mention of "integration" of the Pact in the published documents and Rumanian endorsement of the new measures suggests that they contain no radical increase in Soviet institutional control. Indeed the reverse, if anything, seems to be suggested by Dubcek's remark to Rude Pravo that the participation of individual countries in solving the Pact's problems, and in the command structure, would be increased. The decisions of the Committee of Ministers of Defence may be expected to be unanimous and not by majority vote. This outcome, together with the continued failure to hold the long-heralded CMEA summit meeting, adds to the impression that the Soviet Union is having considerable difficulty in consolidating its grip on Eastern Europe after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

3. The Budapest meeting also issued a declaration on European security, which calls for a conference of all European countries. It reiterates various pre-requisites of a European settlement. The declaration contains very little that is new, although the language is less provocative than in similar communist documents in the past. There is no indication that Soviet opposition to United States participation in a European security conference has diminished. The declaration also calls for good neighbourly relations and practical co-operation and contacts between East and West Europe. These have long been an objective of the West. Their inclusion in the declaration contrasts with the constant insistence in Soviet propaganda that the development of normal business-like contacts is nothing more than subversive "bridge-building" by the West. The declaration seems, however, to envisage that practical co-operation would follow a European security conference, while Western Governments hold that such co-operation need not wait for a conference but, on the contrary, can help create the mutual confidence necessary for achieving a European settlement.

4. The motives for issuing this declaration no doubt included the desire, which can be seen in many aspects of Soviet policy at present, to recreate the atmosphere in which East-West relations in Europe were conducted immediately prior to August, 1968; and to refurbish the Soviet Union's "peace-loving" image, so badly tarnished by the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

/The Russians

The Russians probably calculate that the shameless references to independence and sovereignty of states, though they may attract some hostile comment with reference to Czechoslovakia, will soon be forgotten; while the appeal for European co-operation might find a response in Western public opinion and perhaps serve the constant Soviet aim of causing difficulties between members of NATO. Alternatively, the Russians may reckon that an outright rejection of the declaration by NATO would help them in connection with the preparations for the World Communist Conference due to open in Moscow on 5 June. But the more positive aspects of the declaration, especially the call for practical co-operation, were certainly supported and perhaps initiated by some of the smaller members of the Warsaw Pact. They might hope that, if the Western reaction to the declaration was not entirely negative, this might genuinely help to reduce tension in Europe and thus enable them to maintain and even strengthen their links with the West and so give them a better chance of resisting the tightening of Soviet control in Eastern Europe.

The Russians

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Yugoslav Party Congress

The ninth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) was held from 11 - 16 March in Belgrade. All Communist parties (except the Chinese, North Korean, North Vietnamese, Albanian and Cuban) were invited to send delegates as were, for the first time, several social democratic parties. No ruling Communist Party accepted the invitation apart from that of Rumania, making this the fourth occasion since the war on which the Soviet Union has boycotted a Yugoslav Party Congress, and the first on which an East European ruling party and the major non-ruling parties of Western Europe failed to follow the Moscow line.

2. The principal reason for the Soviet boycott of the Congress was presumably the strongly worded resolution on international affairs which restated the LCY's condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia and its rejection of the doctrine of limited sovereignty. In addition to the Yugoslavs' refusal to appease or compromise with Soviet views on Czechoslovakia and international aspects of the World Communist Movement, the documents before the Congress and proceedings at it inevitably gave prominence to Yugoslav ideas on internal party democracy and workers' management which have come under increasing attack from Soviet theoreticians in the last few months. Although (no doubt for tactical reasons connected with the approach of the World Communist Conference) the Yugoslav Congress has not so far been formally rebuked or condemned by the Soviet party, it seems likely that relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union will remain cool for the foreseeable future and that Soviet pressure on Yugoslavia may be stepped up when Moscow judges that the time is right.

3. In dealing with internal affairs, the Congress was sharply critical of the "excesses and exaggerations" of the preceding period of economic reform and stressed the necessity, within the framework of decentralised institutions and devolution of economic decision-making, for some reinforcement of the Federal administration and of the Party's control. A return to dirigiste methods is not in prospect - the new Party statutes, for example, create important safeguards for the expression of minority views by members, and constitutional changes which will come into force for this year's elections will, at any rate, ostensibly, strengthen the role of the Republics in the Federal Assembly. But it seems clear that there is an intention to curb extremism of all kinds and to re-assert the authority of the Party in the machinery of Government.

4. The major innovation approved by the Congress was the establishment of a 15 man "executive bureau" which will work full-time in Belgrade under Tito's chairmanship. The motives for this appear to have been to establish a firm centre of Party authority to combat Soviet-directed pressure and hostility from without and fissiparous tendencies within the Federation and the economy, and to provide a basis for stable leadership when Tito dies or retires (he is now nearly 77). The membership of the bureau is drawn from all the constituent republics and autonomous provinces and contains a representative mixture of old guard leaders (e.g. Kardelj and Bakaric) and newer men (e.g. Crvenkovski).

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Czechoslovak/Soviet Relations

The Soviet-Czechoslovak tension which followed anti-Soviet demonstrations throughout Czechoslovakia on 28 March after the Czechoslovak victories over the Russians in the World Ice Hockey Championships in Stockholm showed how relations between the two countries remain subject to the influence of the unpredictable. In the past, notably after the funeral of Jan Palach, demonstrations in Prague have been conducted within the limits of what was tolerable to the Czechoslovak and the Soviet leaderships in the context of the prevailing political situation. But the most recent demonstrations, which resulted in considerable damage to Soviet office buildings and even some attacks on Soviet vehicles and barracks, went beyond these limits. In this situation both a severe Soviet reaction and a readiness on the part of the Czechoslovak leadership to admit the need for stricter Party control were to be expected. In the event, however, the reactions on both sides were stronger than the immediate situation appeared to warrant and reflected the continuing failure of the two countries to establish a real modus vivendi.

2. The failure of the Czechoslovak leadership to take adequate measures to control the display of feeling both in the press and in the streets at the successes of the ice hockey team, after many months of Soviet pressure, must have weakened any disposition in the minds of the Soviet leaders to think that the present leadership will ever learn the lessons which they have been trying to teach them. Moreover, the swiftness of the Soviet reaction to the demonstrations betrayed little sign of hesitation or divided counsels. On the Czechoslovak side, the recent crisis comes after a period in which the conservatives have been active in trying to strengthen their position at all levels in the Party. While professing, like the progressives, to be working for unanimous acceptance of the resolutions of the November Central Committee Plenum, the conservatives clearly interpret these resolutions differently from the progressives. Now that, after the demonstrations, the leaders have been obliged to introduce stricter control of the mass media and, for the first time, to criticise in public one of their leading members, Smrkovsky, the position of the progressives is bound, for the moment at least, to be weakened. Whether or not there will be a permanent shift in the balance of influence within the Party remains to be seen. The Central Committee meeting which, after being postponed, possibly because of differences of view among the leaders, is now planned for the end of April, will be crucial in this respect.

3. The stern statement by the Czechoslovak Praesidium on 2 April about the demonstrations is likely to have a sobering effect on Czechoslovak public opinion. There is an obvious danger that the emphasis in the statement on the dangers of anti-Sovietism, which is equated with "anti-Socialism", could lead the public to conclude that the leaders have taken a fatal step towards complete subservience to the Soviet Union. But many Czechoslovaks are likely to realise that the demonstrations did overstep the mark and that consequently some concessions to Soviet demands were inevitable. This realisation may result in a more moderate attitude in the coming weeks; and several important institutions, notably the Czech Trade Union Council, were quick to give support, albeit in some cases

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qualified or selective support, to the line taken in the Praesidium statement. Nor will the strong words of the statement necessarily be translated into harsh irrevocable measures. Permanent damage to the progressive cause will, however, hardly be avoided if there are further incidents and demonstrations like those of 28 March or those following the death of Palach.

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Czechoslovakia: The Internal Situation

The 7th Congress of the Czechoslovak Revolutionary Trades Union Movement on 4 - 7 March confirmed the assumption by the Trade Unions of a new political role. In future, the Unions are resolved to act vigorously in defence of their members' interests and, despite reservations about this, which the federal leaders have recently expressed, the Congress even asserted the right to strike. It has hitherto been assumed in communist countries that the interests of the Trades Unions coincide with those of the Communist Party whose authority derives in any case from the working class. Indeed, the old régime (and probably the Russians) were counting on working class support in 1968 in their attempt to slow down the process of liberalisation embarked upon by the Dubcek régime. But in practice, in their active lobbying of the leadership on the effects of the price reforms and in favour of the workers' councils, the Trades Unions, who speak for a third of the population of Czechoslovakia, have already made apparent their determination to pursue their own progressive policy.

2. This change in the nature of the Trades Union Movement has been only one aspect of a broad transformation in which several new centres of responsibility and influence are evolving within a system which, under the old régime, was severely constrained by the weight of the Party bureaucracy. Similar changes will probably take place in the management of the economy, where the reforms have prescribed a decentralisation of authority and initiative to individual enterprises. The establishment of separate Czech and Slovak Government systems in the new federal framework has created further potential institutional counterweights to over-centralism. The increased importance attributed to the National Assembly and the National Front in the Party's Action Programme (and repeatedly reaffirmed by the leaders since the invasion) also foreshadows a diffusion of responsibility, even if not of actual power, which would radically alter the process of government in Czechoslovakia. The press and mass media have undergone similar changes which have been more publicised, though they are possibly less fundamental to the process of "democratisation", and less enduring. The student movement too has been able on occasion to exert a significant and immediate influence on developments, notably after the death of Jan Palach in January. But, as is the way of student movements, the Czechoslovak students are unlikely in the future to weigh as heavy in the new balance of political influence as the Trade Unions or the enterprises.

3. These broad changes in Czechoslovakia are the culmination of a process which began at least as early as 1963. In almost every instance, they derive from the reaction against over-centralisation and bureaucracy. A process so long engaged and so deeply rooted is unlikely to be quickly set into reverse, even if the leadership desired this. The present Czechoslovak leaders, however, seem content with a system which allows initiative and responsibility to institutions other than the Party. This need not, in their view, weaken the Party's leading role since this role must in any case depend on the support and confidence of the population. Whether or not, however, when confronted by a clash of interests on a major issue between the Party and, for instance, the Trade Unions they would modify this attitude remains to be seen. The problem of the powers to be given to

/the Workers

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the Workers Councils, on which the Czech Government, in tacit alliance with the enterprise managers, are already in conflict with the Trade Unions could yet become such an issue. To the Soviet leaders, however, the new institutional system in Czechoslovakia is bound to seem less acceptable. But the Czechoslovak leaders, in their dealings with the Russians, may find it useful to be able to plead that they must consider the state of opinion in the Trade Unions.

4. The Dubcek régime has, since before the invasion, claimed that the Czechoslovak reforms would create a more broadly based and stronger communist society than that which existed under the old régime. Quite apart from the uncertainty which the renewed Soviet-Czechoslovak tension in early April underlined, whether these institutional changes will be jeopardised by political developments, it remains to be seen whether the public enthusiasm for the reforms will prove deep and durable. A rebirth of the apathy which contributed so greatly to the downfall of the old régime could result in the slow restoration by its successors of the methods and habits of the past. The Trade Unions, as the most solid of the "progressive" institutions, may well exercise the decisive influence here. Paradoxically, while continuing economic stagnation may well create difficulties by sharpening their differences with the Government, it may also reinforce their determination to defend their members' interests actively. If such attitudes do survive, the pluralistic political and social structure which has developed in Czechoslovakia may yet prove to be a model whose importance extends well beyond her frontiers.

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CHRONOLOGY

March 1969

- 1 Berlin-Helmstedt autobahn closed for a time (also on 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 March).
- 2 Sino-Soviet armed clash on the Ussuri river frontier. Protest notes exchanged.
- 2 - 9 Soviet Minister of Defence Grechko visits India.
- 3 - 4 Gomulka leads Polish Party-Government Delegation to Moscow.
- 4 - 7 7th All-Union Congress of the Czechoslovak Trade Union Movement.
- 6 Soviet Note to China complaining of demonstrations outside Soviet Embassy in Peking.
- 6-11 Algerian Foreign Minister visits Soviet Union.
- 10-15 Grechko visits Pakistan.
- 10 - 12 East German Politburo member Mittag in Moscow.
- 11 and 12 Chinese Notes of protest about treatment of Chinese diplomats in Moscow.
- 11-16 Ninth Congress of League of Communists of Yugoslavia.
- 12 Further Chinese Note of Protest to Soviet Union about frontier incidents.
- 12 Soviet Politburo member Pelshe completes two-week visit to Czechoslovakia.
- 12-14 Meeting of Rumanian Grand National Assembly; new Defence Council established.
- 13 Czechoslovak Premier Cernik in Moscow.
- 14 and 15 Further clashes on Ussuri frontier
- 15 China and Soviet Union exchange protest Notes about border clashes.
- 17 Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee meets in Budapest; declaration on European security.
- 18-22 Meeting in Moscow of Preparatory Committee for World Communist Conference.

/24-29 President Ceausescu

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- 24 - 29 President Ceausescu of Rumania visits Turkey.
- 25 - 26 Moscow Meeting to celebrate 50th Anniversary of
Foundation of Comintern.
- 25 - 1 April Soviet-Rumanian-Bulgarian staff exercises in
Bulgaria.
- 26 - 1 April President Podgorny visits Algeria.
- 28 Anti-Soviet demonstrations in Czechoslovakia.
- 29 Soviet statement to the Chinese proposing border
talks.
- 29 Announcement that Soviet-Czechoslovak-Polish-
East German exercises were taking place in Poland,
Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

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COMMUNIST POLICY AND TACTICS

JANUARY 1969

SUMMARY

SOVIET/U.S. RELATIONS

The Soviet press has been careful to avoid critical comment on President Nixon. The Russians have emphasised their readiness to begin discussions on missiles with the United States. They have also continued to exercise some moderating influence on the North Vietnamese and have made new moves in an attempt to reduce tension in the Middle East. Some of these moves are coincidental and there has been no basic change in the direction of Soviet foreign policy.

C.M.E.A.

At the meeting of the CMEA Council in East Berlin the Russians failed to find acceptance for proposals for a closer integration of the economies of member countries. The Rumanians adopted an independent line throughout, supported on certain issues by the Czechoslovaks and Hungarians. It is still uncertain when the Summit Meetings of the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact will be held.

Czechoslovakia

There has been renewed tension in Czechoslovakia. The suicide of Palach was a shock to public opinion. There have been renewed fears that Soviet pressure and the conservatives in the country are making a major effort to turn the clock back. However the wave of strong support for the liberalisation programme is a source of strength to the present leadership.

China

The new draft Party constitution has a strongly authoritarian character and is designed to strengthen the grip of Mao and the Politburo on the Party. The constitution is due to be adopted at the 9th National Party Congress fairly early this year. Meanwhile the work of re-building the Party at lower levels continues under the control of the revolutionary committees. The Soviet press has attacked the new constitution and other recent developments in the Chinese Communist Party. The Russians are however being careful not to push polemics too far since they wish to achieve maximum attendance at the World Communist Conference in May. They do not wish to give the impression that they wish to put the Chinese in the dock at the Conference; equally they will be working for the adoption at the Conference of a line which would involve, if only by very clear implication, criticism of Chinese policy in recent years.

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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

Soviet-United States Relations

Since the election of President Nixon the Soviet press has been careful to avoid critical comment on the new President's likely policies, or on the leading members of the administration which he has chosen. On the day of the President's inauguration the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement to the press in which they emphasised the readiness of the Soviet Government to begin discussions on offensive and defensive missiles with the United States as soon as the latter were ready to do so.

There may be a number of reasons lying behind this latest Soviet move, some connected with the missile problem itself, and others ranging rather wider. The Soviet Government may well be concerned at the great cost of the arms race and they may be anxious to see whether some compromise with the United States is possible. At the signature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in July 1968, Mr. Kosygin spoke of the reduction in military budgets which might result from the conclusion of the Treaty. At the same time missile talks would provide an excellent opportunity for the Russians to probe the general intentions of the new American administration towards the Soviet Union and to test their powers of negotiation.

Not only have the Russians made plain their wish to begin a serious political discussion with the United States, but they have also continued to exercise what influence they have on the North Vietnamese in the direction of moderation in the talks at Paris, and have made new moves in an attempt to reduce tension in the Middle East. In each case, there are good reasons of interest why the Russians should be moving as they are. There is also the general consideration that they wish to try to recapture the international standing which they enjoyed before the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It would seem good tactics on their part, in any case, to show an accommodating face towards a new U.S. Administration. It is, however, largely fortuitous that things should have reached a point where serious negotiation may be possible on a number of major international issues at the same time. It is not necessary to look for a pattern which would suggest any basic change in the direction of Soviet foreign policy as a whole.

The Middle East

Early in January the Soviet Government approached the United States, British and French Governments with proposals designed for making progress towards the achievement of a settlement in the dispute between Israel and the Arab States. The Soviet Government also endorsed a proposal by the French for a meeting of the four permanent members of the Security Council at the end of January.

Despite their preoccupations in Eastern Europe the Russians clearly wish to demonstrate that they have a major interest in events in the Middle East. At the same time they may be genuinely worried that if some effective steps are not taken to defuse the situation, fighting on a major scale may break out again between Israel and the Arabs. Once again the Soviet Government may be wanting to test the intentions of the new American

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administration, while making a genuine effort to lower tension in the Middle East, the continuing increase in which could easily lead to a new war. The Soviet interest in a final, comprehensive settlement is more problematical. A degree of tension in the Middle East encourages the Arab States to lean on the Soviet Union for support, both material and diplomatic, and serves the Soviet purpose of extending her influence in the area.

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C.M.E.A.

A meeting of the CMEA Council took place at Deputy Prime Minister level in East Berlin from 21-23 January and this was followed by a meeting of the Executive Committee, also in East Berlin.

The published text of the communiqué was lengthy but uninformative, being mainly devoted to a recital of past achievements of CMEA. A call by the Soviet Secretary of the Council at the opening session for "new organisational forms of specialisation and cooperation" does not appear to have met with general support; the communiqué merely refers to "measures for speeding up the elaboration of recommendations" on specialisation and cooperation over certain types of machinery, as well as on related problems of foreign exchange, finance and foreign trade.

The Russians, who probably received most support from the Poles and the Bulgarians, may well have been obliged to shelve or water down many of their proposals, particularly with regard to closer co-ordination of national plans. The Rumanians and Yugoslavs (the latter attending as observers) are said not surprisingly to have adopted an independent line throughout, supported on certain issues by the Czechoslovaks and Hungarians; even the East Germans were reportedly less than solid in their support of some of the Soviet proposals, particularly those relating to supra-nationalism.

The meeting was preceded by a number of articles in the Rumanian press which amplified Ceausescu's speeches in November rejecting supranationalism in any form. It is equally clear that for their part the Russians have been pressing for a closer integration of the economies of CMEA member countries. The December 1968 issue of the Soviet journal "Questions of Economics" contained an article by the Director of the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, Sorokin, which elaborated the most extensive proposals for economic integration which have been put forward by the Russians since Krushchev's ill-fated supranational project of 1962.

Summit meetings of CMEA and the Warsaw Pact are expected to be held in the next few months but the uncertainty which still surrounds their timing and location suggests continuing divergences among the participants.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The self immolation of Jan Palach on 16 January, which recalled the burning at the stake of the Bohemian Jan Hus by the Council of Constance, came as a rude shock to a world accustomed to thinking of the Good Soldier Schweik as typical of the Czechoslovak national character. More striking than the historical parallel was that of the Buddhist suicides in South Vietnam. But whereas the Vietnamese suicides were represented by the Russians as powerful political gestures against the U.S., Palach's death was ascribed to the influence of anti-socialist forces.

The ideals which inspired Palach can be traced back before the invasion when there were already those in Czechoslovakia who advocated confrontation with the Russians rather than compromise. Many Czechoslovaks who remember Munich and some of the post-Munich generation who wished to avoid the responsibility for a new national betrayal instinctively inclined to put principle before prudence. For this reason, as President Svoboda has said of Palach, they were prepared to choose what appeared to be the shortest and most direct path to the top of the mountain, even though it might lead into the abyss, rather than the way of detours which would lead slowly if more reliably to the summit. Such sentiments help to explain the identity of views between intellectuals, students and workers, especially in the Czech lands, which already existed before the invasion and has been highlighted by recent events. Even though their interests may in the long run diverge, the most active sections of the trade union movement have for the moment committed themselves to the same political objectives as the students.

While accepting that limited concessions to Soviet demands were inevitable, the supporters of liberalisation never intended to connive at an unending drift back towards the practices of the old régime. The widely held belief that the leadership had reverted to a system of "Cabinet Government" was therefore likely sooner or later to result in a display of public disquiet. While admitting that Government cannot be carried on publicly, many Czechoslovaks see the growth of official secrecy as symbolic of a wider retreat from the principles of liberalisation. The incomplete explanation given of the meeting with the Russians at Kiev in December led many to suppose, probably with some justification, that the Czechoslovak leaders had come under greater pressure to make concessions than was revealed. Their handling of the Smrkovsky affair only confirmed suspicions of the leaders' motives. No less important, the meeting of the Central Committee on the day of Palach's suicide seems to have been the occasion for a major effort by conservatives in the Party to turn the clock back further. The leadership tried during January to respond to these feelings by a series of public appearances. But they were unable to give reassurance on major issues, such as early elections and a Party Congress, which the Czechs, if not the Slovaks, increasingly see as the only guarantee of the reforms.

The wave of strong support for the liberalisation programme which, contrary to earlier reports of growing public apathy, showed itself after Palach's death, in some ways strengthens the position of the present leadership and should enable them to put up more resistance to conservative pressures. The leadership could seek to appease popular feeling in two ways. They could press the Russians to make some concessions to Czechoslovak opinion. But it is difficult to see what the Russians would be

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able or willing to do without damage to their own position, unless it were to suspend or curtail the illegal occupation journal Zpravy and Radio Vltava. The leadership could also demonstrate their determination to press on with reforms wherever they can. Prime Minister Cernik's statement of the Federal Government's policy objectives in his speech to the Federal Assembly on 31 January paid more than the usual lip service to the aims of strengthening socialist legality, pressing on with economic reform, and taking public opinion into account in the formulation of policy; but his words still have to be measured against action.

The conservatives will have drawn the opposite conclusion from recent events, that still more resolute measures are needed to bring the situation under control, especially in the massmedia from which the current voluntary censorship has by no means eliminated uninhibited comment. There have been several signs of such an approach, which doubtless has Soviet support, not least the explicit hints in recent speeches by Svoboda and other leaders that if demonstrations in support of Palach got out of hand, they might have to give way to more conservative politicians (or even to a Soviet administration). For all their activity, there is no evidence that the conservatives have strengthened their position within the Party significantly or are yet in a position to mount an effective challenge to Dubcek and his colleagues. But they may be able to profit from increasing divergencies which may be expected within the Central Committee and Praesidium about the best way forward, and from continuing tensions, especially between Czechs and Slovaks, arising from Slovak ambivalence about Palach's suicide and complacency at the progress of "normalisation" in Slovakia, which has already aroused Czech resentment. The argument that in a difficult situation it is essential to ensure the goodwill of the Russians by installing a leadership wholly acceptable to them could prove tempting to some. It would certainly be sedulously fostered by the Russians.

Whether or not Dubcek and his colleagues will be able to continue the political balancing act which they have had to perform since the invasion remains to be seen. If public opinion is again inflamed as it was by Palach's suicide, their task will be increasingly difficult. Even if things go well, differences of approach within the leadership and the growing risk of an outright conservative challenge may make it hard for them to adopt a sufficiently unambiguous public attitude to satisfy public demands, which are unlikely to moderate rapidly. But it would be wrong to under-estimate the ability of the public to keep within the limits of acceptable protest which they respected even in August, or the ability of the leaders to preserve the unity which, however fragile it may seem, has withstood a lengthy trial by ordeal since then.

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CHINA

The draft Constitution

The new draft Party Constitution reportedly approved for distribution and discussion by the 12th Plenum in October 1968 consists of a General Programme and 12 Articles - in all 6 Chapters. It is very much shorter and less detailed than both preceding Party Constitutions, i.e. those adopted by the 7th Congress in 1945 and by the 8th Congress in 1956.

Important innovations in the new draft, as compared with the 1956 Constitution, are the tributes to Mao, his thought and his political line and to Lin Biao as exponent of Mao's thought, his close comrade-in-arms and successor. The naming of Lin as successor may be intended to forestall any dispute when Mao dies.

The General Programme says that Mao's contributions to Marxism-Leninism are relevant not just to China but to the world struggle by Communists against imperialism and revisionism. It names the United States and the "Soviet renegade clique" as the respective leaders of imperialism and revisionism, for whose downfall, the Chinese Party and all the "oppressed" are striving. The General Programme declares that the Chinese Party will pursue relations of "mutual support" with other "genuinely Marxist-Leninist" (i.e. Maoist) Parties and all oppressed peoples and races.

The draft has a strongly authoritarian character, which is scarcely diminished by the injunction that Party members must listen to the opinions of the masses. The rules governing the composition and functions of Party organs at all levels are drawn up in very flexible terms. At the central level, this has the effect of investing the Politburo with virtually unlimited powers, while relegating the Central Committee to a subservient role. The electoral procedure, which was specified in the 1956 Constitution for Party organs at various levels, has been dropped. The new draft says merely that "leading organs at all levels are formed by democratic consultation and election" - a formula apparently designed to facilitate the manipulation of appointments from above.

The principle of democratic centralism is retained presumably to provide for general discipline within the organisation, but a new principle is introduced reflecting Mao's distrust of formalised procedures. This provides that a Party member may refer points of disagreement directly to the Central Committee and the Chairman. A further indication of Mao's distrust is the omission of the 1956 references to "unconditional" implementation of directives from above.

Several recent reports indicate that preparations are under way for the convocation of the 9th National Party Congress fairly early in 1969. The Congress will have among its tasks the adoption of the new Party Constitution in its final form, which will probably not differ greatly from the draft.

The Revolutionary Committees

In the meantime, the work of rectifying and rebuilding the Party at lower levels continues with a greater measure of caution than haste, under the control of the Revolutionary Committees (these are for the most part dominated by military officers). It seems likely that even after the convocation of the Congress, much work will remain to be done in order to reactivate lower-level Party organs and restore them to their former leading role.

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The importance attached to the role of the Revolutionary Committees was evident at the 12th Party Plenum (in October), when leaders of these Committees were among the non-members of the Central Committee, who took part in the Plenum. The latest major exposition of policy, the New Year editorial published by the People's Daily and other papers, focused on the Revolutionary Committees as the instrument of "unified leadership". The editorial indicated that the Committees are to concentrate on reinforcing their control, strictly curbing factionalism and preventing the indiscriminate denunciation of officials as "class enemies".

Sino-Soviet relations

The Soviet reaction to the October Plenum of the CCP and the draft Party Constitution was contained in a major article in Pravda on 11 January which used these events as evidence that the CCP had abandoned the last vestiges of Marxism-Leninism and was no longer a Communist Party at all. In spite of its uncompromising position, however, the article was not written in the most polemical style that the Russians have sometimes employed in their criticisms of the Chinese leadership. Its appearance was probably dictated by the need to react to an important event in China and to provide material to be used by Party propagandists for internal consumption. The article concluded with an expression of guarded confidence that "the Chinese people under the leadership of the communists" would eventually rejoin the fold. A similar expression of optimism over the eventual outcome of Sino-Soviet relations was voiced by Kosygin in his New Year interview with the Japanese newspaper Mainichi.

The Russians have a number of reasons for not wishing to inflame their relations with China unduly at the moment. They are fully occupied with their troubles in East Europe; and they are showing concern to give an appearance of moderation in their foreign policy as a whole. They also inevitably have their eye on the forthcoming International Communist Conference. They have taken the occasion to put their views clearly on record well in advance of the next preparatory meeting for the Conference, which is due to take place in March. But they will be careful not to give the impression that they wish to put the Chinese in the dock at the Conference, since they still want parties such as the Vietnamese to come, and the latter are unlikely to do so if there will be polemics against China. In keeping with this attitude, a recent articles in the journal Kommunist dealt with subjects for discussion at the Conference, but did not mention China at all. At the same time, it is inevitable that discussion at the Conference of strategy and tactics in the struggle against imperialism will involve, if only by very clear implication, criticism of the line which the Chinese have been following in recent years. The Russians will not seek to soften the effect of such implications. On the contrary, one of their purposes at the Conference must remain to assert their leadership over as wide a movement as possible. Consolidation on a narrower front may be necessary, but the Russians will still wish to discredit the Chinese in the movement at large. These recent developments suggest that they may go about this with rather more subtlety than they have sometimes shown in the past.

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CHRONOLOGY

January

- 1 New Czechoslovak Federal Government announced
- 1 3 American prisoners released by the NLF
- 2 Slovak Government announced
- 2-7 Soviet naval visit to Aden
- 2-8 Soviet Delegation led by Kirillin in Paris for the Third Session of the Franco-Soviet Grand Commission
- 3 North Korean Exhibition opens in Rangoon
- 3-6 20th Conference of the Austrian Communist Party
- 4 Statement by the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Central Committee on Mr. Smrkovsky
- 5 Publication in Soviet Union of Kosygin's interview with Japanese newspaper Mainichi
- 6 Soviet Economic Delegation (arrived 19 December) leaves South Yemen
- 7 1969 China-Ceylon trade protocol signed
- 7 Appointment of A. A. Smirnov as Deputy Foreign Minister
- 7-9 U.A.R. Foreign Minister visits Yugoslavia
- 8 Signature of 3 Soviet-Cuban economic agreements
- 8 Professor Colotka proposed as Chairman of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly
- 9 KPD Delegation visits Moscow
- 9-12 KPD Delegation visits Poland
- 9 Czech Government announced
- 9 Soviet ships visit Hodeida
- 10 CPSU Delegation, led by Katushev, leaves Czechoslovakia
- 11 Pravda article on China
- 11 Japanese Trade Mission visits North Vietnam
- 13 Soviet Delegation of "intellectuals" leaves for United States
- 13-18 Syrian Foreign Minister visits Poland
- 13-15 Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Trade visits Moscow

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- 10-17 Yugoslav Premier visits Paris
- 14-16 Soviet manned space experiments
- 15 Hungarian Premier arrives in Poland
- 15 Modzelewski and Kuran sentenced to imprisonment in Poland
- 16 Marshal Grechko visits Soviet units in Hungary and has talks with Kadar
- 16 Ulbricht arrives in U.S.S.R. "on vacation"
- 16 Delegation from the Confederation of British Industries arrives in Moscow
- 17-24 Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Novikov, visits Iran
- 20 Soviet statement on disarmament
- 21 Delegation from Soviet Merchant Navy concludes talks with Spain
- 21-23 Deputy Prime Ministers meet in East Berlin for meeting of C.M.E.A.
- 21 Soviet delegation arrives in Czechoslovakia to discuss stationing of Soviet troops
- 21-27 Bulgarian First Party Secretary visits India
- 22 Kremlin reception for cosmonauts
- 22 Shots fired on Soviet cosmonauts procession
- 22 Signature of Franco-Soviet Consular Convention
- 24 1969 China-North Korean trade protocol signed
- 24 Mongolian accuses China of asserting extra-territorial rights
- 25 Mao Tse Tung and Lin Piao receive "40 thousand revolutionary fighters"
- 26 Funeral of Jan Palach
- 26 1969 China-Afghan trade Protocol signed
- 27 People's Daily article attacks President Nixon
- 28-3 Feb. Soviet delegation led by Shelepin in Cairo for Congress of International Federation of Arab Trade Unions
- 28 President of PRSY arrives in Soviet Union for official visit
- 30 China-Cuba trade protocol signed

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