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SYNOPSIS

SOVIET POLICY AND EUROPEAN COMMUNISM

by

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## SYNOPSIS

This Synopsis presents  of the state of relations between  the Soviets and the most significant West European Communist Parties--the Communist Parties of Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal. Of these, the Italian Communists have just registered new gains in national elections, and have obtained a greater voice in the national government. In France, the Communists hope to win a clear legislative majority in conjunction with their Socialist allies in the national elections now scheduled for 1978. The Portuguese Communists, having failed in their bid for power in 1974-1975, retain considerable organizational strength and are biding their time in hopes of a better day. And the Party in Spain, though still officially illegal, hopes to take advantage of the transition from Francoism to build a solid base for the future.

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The growth in the prominence and political potential of these Parties obviously holds the promise for the Soviets of increased influence in an area of major interest. But these developments occur at a time when Moscow's relationship with West European Communism is in a state of transition. It is a relationship marked by considerable tension, and, in general, by declining Soviet authority. And, in the near term, at least, the principal objective of the West European Communists--the acquisition of political power--does not fully mesh with Moscow's interest in developing a pattern of political detente and economic cooperation with the West.

The paper is concerned with what these underlying contradictions mean and may come to mean for Moscow. Do the Soviets still have ways to induce or compel the Western Communists to act in accordance with their desires? Are they right in thinking that, despite the existing divergencies and frictions, the rising stature of West European Communism will be beneficial to them in the longer run? And, if not, how important are the doctrinal and political problems which West European Communism might come to pose for the Soviets?

#### CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The Western Communists can generally be counted on to staunchly support the main pillars of Soviet foreign policy--"peace" and disarmament proposals, "national liberation" in Third World areas such as Southern Africa, and the like. They will even accept Soviet policies which they find quite distasteful, such as Moscow's heavy-handed domination of Eastern Europe, provided these do not harm their own interests. Despite occasional critical allusions to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, both the Spanish and Italian Communists have accommodated themselves to the Soviet occupation.

However, the major Western Parties are no longer willing to sacrifice their own immediate interests--specifically, their hopes for the acquisition of political power or at least a share of power--for the sake of furthering Soviet policy objectives.

This is true both of the ostentatiously "independent" Parties, such as the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which has formulated its political strategy independently of the Soviets for some years, but also of ostensibly "loyal" Parties such as the Portuguese. [redacted] reports indicate that the decision of the latter Party to push an all-out bid for power in 1975 was taken against the advice of the Soviets, who had few hopes for the success of the venture and feared the results of a Western backlash.

The unwillingness of these Parties to subordinate their interests to Soviet policy poses a potential danger to some important short-term Soviet policy objectives. The Western Communists are preoccupied by the pursuit of power on the national level, but Moscow presently gives priority to consolidating a pattern of economic and political cooperation with the Western powers. The Soviets have been sensitive to the possibility that a role in government for any of the Western Parties would cause deep anxiety in the West and might trigger a reaction against the Soviet Union, threatening Moscow's access to Western technology and undermining its diplomatic initiatives.

The Soviets have demonstrated by their actions that they believe that their immediate interests will not be furthered by aggressive action on the part of the Western Communists.

- Their apparent efforts to dissuade the Portuguese Communists in 1974-1975 from their effort to seize power on their own have already been mentioned.
- In the 1974 presidential elections in France, they sided indirectly with Valery Giscard d'Estaing, sending their ambassador to a well-publicized meeting with the conservative candidate just before the election, and publicly treating him in favorable terms.
- They unsuccessfully opposed the PCI's decision to challenge the power of the Church and the Christian

Democrats in 1974 on the grounds that it was a reckless gamble. Similarly, they have been cool to PCI entry into the government at the present time.

- Moscow's cultivation of the Spanish government against the opposition of the Spanish Party has been one of the principal sources of discord between the Soviet and Spanish Communists.

#### DECLINE IN SOVIET AUTHORITY

At the same time that the immediate interests of the Soviets and the major Western Parties are becoming increasingly divergent, Moscow's ability to impose its will on them has declined. The causes of the decline in Soviet authority are manifold, but two fundamental reasons can be cited.

- Moscow's moral authority within the movement has been eroded by the successive traumas of de-Stalinization, Hungary, the Sino-Soviet quarrel, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and persistent suspicions of Moscow's interest in striking a "spheres of interest" deal with Washington which would leave Western Europe in the American zone.

- The prospect of political power has both given the major Western Parties the incentive to put their own interests over those of the Soviets and increased their ability to do so, as their domestic political and economic resources have increased.

Moscow has traditionally relied on a combination of financial levers, political agents, and ideological bonds to reinforce its dominance over the international movement. All three factors are now declining in importance.

Moscow subsidizes all four of the Parties with which this paper is concerned, but the importance of Soviet subsidies varies according to the individual circumstances of the recipient Party. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) is dependent on Soviet assistance for the overwhelming bulk of its financial resources. At the other extreme, the PCI has made a determined effort to reduce its dependence on Moscow since 1968, when the Soviets retaliated against the PCI for its criticism of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by reducing its subsidies. Still, Soviet subsidies reportedly amount to about a quarter of the PCI's total budget. The French Communist Party (PCF) has had neither the financial resources of the PCI nor--until recently, in any event--the political will to reduce its dependence on Soviet assistance, and reportedly receives considerable financial assistance from the Bloc. However, the amounts involved and the Party's reliance on them have not been enough to deter it from striking out on its own course.

Until recently, the approval of the Soviet Union has been an important prerequisite for advancement within the leadership of a Communist Party. The weight which Soviet opinion carried varied from Party to Party, but in no case was it ignored. As a result the leadership of every Party was liberally salted with Soviet place-men.

However, many pro-Soviet leaders have been culled out and Moscow can no longer count on its ability to manipulate policy within these Parties through its agents of influence. The Soviets are probably worst off in the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), where their most important allies were expelled from the Party in 1969-1970 after the failure of an effort to challenge the independent policies pushed through by the Party's General Secretary, Santiago Carillo. The leadership of the Italian Party under Enrico Berlinguer has also made a

determined effort to shunt aside leaders closely identified with the Soviet Union, although they have not been purged and retain some responsibility.

There has been no comparable reshuffling of the leadership of the PCF, but--so far at least--the leadership has remained united behind Georges Marchais in the stance of ostentatious independence he belatedly adopted in late 1975, despite dissatisfaction with this position at lower levels of the Party. Only in the Portuguese Party can the Soviets feel confident that their friends, led by the Party's First Secretary, Alvaro Cunhal, are dominant.

The Soviets have more support among the rank-and-file than among the leaders of these Parties. Even in the PCI, which has a long history of relative "independence," it is generally estimated that about a quarter of the Party's members harbor strong pro-Soviet feelings and are correspondingly dubious about the "revisionist" course of the Party's leaders. The situation is at least comparable in the French Party, where in 1968 the Soviets succeeded in appealing to the rank-and-file members of the Party to force a retreat from the leadership's criticism of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Only in the Spanish Party, where Moscow has failed abysmally in an effort to muster opposition to a recalcitrant leadership, has pro-Soviet sentiment thus far proven insignificant. However, the rank and file normally have little voice in the determination of Party policy.

The ideological bond which unites the Soviets with the Western Communists, while the least tangible instrument of influence, is arguably the most important of them. Even the most nationally-minded of the Western Communist leaders sees himself as a member of an ideological community in which Moscow is the most senior and powerful member, and sees a corresponding gulf between himself and the most leftist of socialists. The power of this sentiment is best demonstrated, even though in a somewhat different context, by Yugoslavia's Tito, who despite a running quarrel of almost three decades' duration, has been unable to separate himself from Moscow once and for all.

## THE PORTUGUESE CASE

If Soviet policy-makers were influenced solely by considerations of immediate diplomatic and economic benefit they could be expected to disassociate themselves from the ambitions of Western Communist Parties. In fact, many other elements contribute to Soviet policies, among them strategic objectives, the dictates of ideology, and domestic political constraints.

The effect these factors can have on Soviet policy was demonstrated in Portugal. Here the Soviets initially reacted to the coup of April 1974 by lending covert support to the Portuguese Communists, while doing their best to maintain a low public profile, and, as noted, advising against a premature bid for power. This cautious stance was more than justified on the grounds of a rational calculation of advantage and disadvantage.

- The USSR had little political and economic interest in Portugal.
- Any gains which they could score there through aggressive action promised to be more than outweighed by the damage done to Soviet interests in Washington and Western Europe.
- The Portuguese Party was viewed with distaste by the PCI, PCE, and many other Western Communists because its obvious authoritarianism threatened to compromise their own efforts to portray themselves as responsible democrats. Soviet support for the PCP therefore complicated relations with these Parties.

Yet despite all the factors which argued in favor of maintaining a cautious distance from the Portuguese Communists, the Soviets publicly weighed in on the side of the PCP after it had overreached itself and came under pressure--sometimes violent--from its enemies in the summer of 1975.



- They attacked Western "interference" in Portugal and organized demonstrations of international support for the PCP.
- They attempted to pressure the West European Socialists to end their support for their fellow Socialists in Portugal.
- They took a public stand in favor of the uncompromisingly "revolutionary" position of the Portuguese Communists, although they must have been aware that this would force some of the Western Communists to take exception to their views.

In fact, the damage done to Soviet interests within the international movement was serious. It drove Moscow's off-and-on again polemics with the PCI and PCE to new heights. Even more seriously, Soviet polemics against the Communist critics of the PCP brought a reaction in the French Party, as Marchais seized the opportunity to give his Party a "democratic" and "independent" cast. For the first time, the Soviets are now faced with a situation in which the two major Western Parties are frequently aligned against them, marking a serious deterioration in their ability to dominate West European Communism.

Soviet actions in Portugal demonstrate the strength of the fundamental sources of Soviet conduct. Whether Soviet actions arose from ideological conviction or whether they were a result of the internal factors working on the Soviet policy-makers--the need to demonstrate that their policies were "working"--is not as important as the fact that these actions were taken independently of considerations of immediate diplomatic advantage.

Strategic Policy Objectives. There is no evidence that the Soviets have altered the main objectives of their post-war European policy: the displacement or diminution of US influence and the prevention of the establishment of a rival power center in Western Europe. Similarly, there is no indication that they have altered their conviction that the accession to power of any of the Western Parties will facilitate realization of these objectives. All of the Western Parties, even the Italians who have disavowed any plans to bring about a unilateral withdrawal from NATO, support "the dissolution of military blocs" in Europe. This is also an objective which the Soviets support and originally formulated, since it would mean the end of NATO, while permitting Moscow to rely on the network of bilateral military agreements it has built in Eastern Europe.

There is also no sign that the multiplication of points of friction between the Soviets and the Western Communists has altered the perception of Soviet leaders that the advance of the left in Europe is a development which, however troublesome the problems it poses at the moment, is something which is in the long-term interests of the Soviet Union. (Some Soviet commentators at lower levels of the hierarchy, however, have questioned this assumption in oblique terms.) Moscow continues to extend support to Western Communism both in word--via propaganda pronouncements--and in deed--via subsidies.

Ideological Impulses. The stubbornness with which Soviet leaders have clung to their assumptions cannot be fully appreciated without taking into account the ideological underpinnings of their perceptions of the world. They function not only as national leaders and practical politicians, but as convinced Communists. Clearly, the fervor with which these convictions are held may vary from leader to leader. Some party ideologues--Mikhail Suslov, for example--may lend a relatively high priority to the advancement of the Communist cause abroad, both for emotional reasons and because of a long-standing bureaucratic involvement in the affairs of the Communist movement. Others--Brezhnev, perhaps--who have a broader or more mundane orientation, may accord ideology a relatively lower priority. None, however, can ignore it.

Domestic Political Constraints. To do so would be to undermine their own political base and claim to leadership of the Soviet Party and the international movement. No Soviet political leader can lightly risk leaving himself open to the charge that he has been indifferent on matters of ideological principle, particularly not in the environment of political balance which prevails within the Soviet leadership. The importance of this factor has been demonstrated repeatedly, most revealingly in the care with which Brezhnev and others have taken to justify detente as an aid to the cause of revolution abroad.

- Their argument is that detente by easing East-West tensions makes it more difficult for the bourgeois rulers to rouse public hostility to the Communists, and by committing them to the maintenance of good relations with the USSR, makes it more difficult for them to forcibly keep the Communists from power.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVIET POLICY

The same blend of factors which were at work in the Portuguese situation are likely to continue to shape Soviet policy. Moscow can therefore be expected to lend consistent but cautious support to the Western Communists. It probably will continue to:

- Extend covert financial support and low-key public support to the general cause and ultimate goals of the European Communists, but trying to avoid open--and risky--intervention on their side.
- To take full advantage of the organizational, ideological, and financial levers at its disposal, to try to curb the tendency toward doctrinal and tactical independence among the European Communists.

At the same time, Soviet policy will be sensitive to the specific features of the political situation as it evolves in Italy, France, Spain, or Portugal. One of the most important constraints on Soviet support for any particular Party is Moscow's interest in avoiding serious damage to its political and economic relations with Washington and the other major capitals of the West. A major consideration from the Soviet point of view is whether a Party's approach to power is pursued cautiously and with an eye to minimizing the risk of domestic or international upheaval, or whether it proceeds recklessly and in disregard of the potential international consequences.

This inhibiting factor can have the ironic result of putting the Soviets at cross purposes with "orthodox" Parties whose doctrinal positions are close to their own, and aligning them in support of the tactics pursued by the "revisionist" Parties with whom they have the most philosophical disagreements. The Portuguese case is illustrative of the first situation, and the Italian of the second. There are indications that Moscow approves of the PCI's careful handling of its recent electoral gains, and of its apparent willingness to content itself for the moment with an informal role in government.

The official reaction in Washington and the other major Western capitals may directly influence Moscow's response to a developing situation. As it did in Portugal, Moscow will weigh the likely cost to its position as a whole against the benefits to be drawn from a deeper commitment to a particular Party.

A final factor will be the state of their relations with the Party in question. Where these are bad, the Soviets will be disposed to limit their support. This factor may become significant in France, where the Soviets have reacted bitterly to the French Party's effort to compensate for the belatedness of its show of independence with attacks on the internal policies of the Soviet Party, something from which the more committedly "revisionist" Italian Party has shied away.

Whereas the central question for the West is the extent to which Communist participation in the government of a Western country would threaten the bases of that country's constitutional system and alliance commitments, the central question for Moscow is essentially the opposite. To what degree has Communist involvement in a constitutional system weakened the commitment to force fundamental changes in domestic and foreign political alignments, and would this commitment be further weakened by participation in government? Would, in fact, a Communist Party strengthened by participation in government serve as a channel for the intrusion of "subversive" Western ideas into the Communist movement or into the Soviet Union itself?

#### SOVIET PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY

Moscow's conviction that its long-term interests are served by the advance of Communism in Western Europe is reinforced by its judgment that its differences with the Western European Communists are manageable. The Soviets are encouraged to believe that these differences do not affect the basic affinity of purpose and inspiration which they share with the Western Communists and their common views on a broad range of world issues. These include opposition to US "imperialism" and support for "national liberation" movements in the Third World and for leftist political causes in general.

Moreover, although they are becoming increasingly more difficult to deal with, the Western Communists are reluctant to become totally estranged from the Soviet Union. The inter-party negotiations which paved the way for a conference of European Communist Parties in late June were a good measure of the present state of relations between the Soviets and the Western Parties. According to the available evidence, the talks were difficult but both sides made compromises in the interests of maintaining at least the appearance of solidarity. As long as the Western Communists are reluctant to go into schism within the international movement, the Soviets can entertain the hope that they can be brought back into line.

This is not to say that the Soviets are correct in their perceptions of the situation. To the contrary, a persuasive argument can be made that the differences between the Soviets and the Western Communists will become more serious, rather than less, with the passage of time.

- Any accretion in the power of the Western Communists will add to the incentives for them to put their own interests ahead of those of the Soviets, as well as adding to their ability to resist Soviet pressure.
- If they win a role in government in any country, the Western Communists will perforce be driven by considerations of electoral expediency, which in many cases will lead them to put national interests over Soviet interests.
- Given their historical and cultural affinities, the feeling of a regional community of interests quite alien to those of the Soviet Union is likely to grow among the Western European Communists.
- The lessons of the Soviet experience in China, Yugoslavia, Romania--in fact, in almost all Communist countries free of a Soviet troop presence--is that Moscow has been unable to maintain its authority in the absence of a military occupation.

The post-war history of Eastern Europe has demonstrated the past vulnerability of these countries to Western ideas, and they might prove equally susceptible to the more "democratic" version of Communism advocated by the Western Parties. If so, the Soviets might confront a situation in which their position in Eastern Europe is threatened by ideological erosion.

--Over time, a successful and independent Western variant of Communism could aggravate the problem of dissidence in the Soviet Union. Some Soviet reformers and dissidents already lean heavily on the experiences of Western Communism for the legitimization and inspiration of their ideas.

In fact, the most likely source of an open schism between Moscow and the Western Communists would be a threat to Soviet authority in Eastern Europe or the spread of dissidence within the Soviet Union. In this event, the most likely Soviet action would be to act decisively to cut off every source of "infection." This would certainly affect Soviet relations with the Western Communists, and might well spill over to affect Soviet relations with the West in general, if Moscow perceived the threat as serious.

Other factors which could contribute to a deterioration of relations between the Soviets and the West European Parties would be a situation in which the Soviets were compelled to use force to maintain their position in Eastern Europe or a Soviet effort to intervene in Yugoslav affairs after the death of Tito. Either development would inevitably bring Moscow's relations with the western Communists to a new pitch of tension, and both are quite conceivable. Similarly, the behavior of these Parties in power--if they should become too much a part of the system--would add new strains to their relationship with Moscow, as would a fundamental alteration of their presently hostile relations with Washington.

However, any fundamental restructuring of this relationship will have to await a new point of crisis--such as those suggested above--or a change in the Soviet leadership. A new leadership, whatever its composition and priorities, would be certain to bring changes in style, and possibly in tactics, which might affect Moscow's relations with West European Communism.

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Moreover, at least in its initial period in power, it will enjoy even less claim to leadership within the international movement than the present Soviet leaders, thus opening the way to further self-assertiveness on the part of the Western Parties.

A change-over in Moscow, as well as some of the other potential turning points cited above, can be expected to take place within the next five years. In particular, the ability of the major Parties to convert their stance of "moderation" and "independence" into political gains will be tested, in France by the 1978 legislative elections, and in Italy by the ability or inability of the PCI to continue expanding its influence in the face of a weak and demoralized opposition. The success or failure of the PCI and PCF will affect their determination to persist in their present course. This period, therefore, is likely to be crucial to the changing relationship between Moscow and the European members of the Communist movement.

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