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Where Next?*

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Moscow and the Eurocommunists: Where Next?

*Central Intelligence Agency
Directorate of Intelligence
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Summary

Evidence is mounting that relations between the Soviets and the more autonomous Communist parties of Western Europe, the so-called Eurocommunists, are entering a new and more difficult phase. This time the issue is democratic freedoms, which the Eurocommunists profess to champion and which the Soviet bloc states conspicuously violate.

Some of the evidence is available in the public domain, where Eurocommunist spokesmen piously decry the lack of political democracy in the Soviet Union, and Soviet propagandists sternly warn the Western Communists against falling prey to "bourgeois" plots aimed at pitting the Communists of the West against those of the East. Other evidence, [] indicates that the Soviets are becoming ever more worried about the degree to which Eurocommunist doctrines are contributing to dissidence within the USSR and Eastern Europe, and ever more determined to do something about it.

The Berlin Conference: A Dubious Achievement

The worsening of relations between Moscow and the "Eurocommunist" parties—the most important of which are the Italian, French, and Spanish—comes only months after the Conference of European Communist Parties (CECP) in East Berlin. This gathering, in June 1976, was intended by its Soviet sponsors to serve as a reaffirmation of the unity of the international Communist movement—minus such renegades as the Chinese—and as a reaffirmation of Soviet preeminence within that movement.

In the end, the Soviets had to take solace chiefly in the fact they had succeeded in bringing together the leaders of almost all the European parties, including such long-time apostates as Tito of Yugoslavia. Beyond that, the results of the meeting fell far short of Moscow's original expectations. Instead of a document which paid at least indirect obeisance to its central role within the movement and established a general line for that movement, Moscow had to settle for an anodyne document which skirted these and most other contentious issues. The impression of disarray was accentuated by the published proceedings of the conference, as the Eurocommunist leaders took the opportunity to strike ostentatiously independent poses in their speeches to the gathering.

The equivocal results of the Berlin conference had been presaged by the difficulties Moscow experienced in bringing off the meeting. Both the bonds of unity within the movement and Moscow's authority had come under strain in 1975 and 1976 because of developments in Portugal. The conspicuously antidemocratic actions of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) had weakened the credibility of the newly minted democratic credos of the Eurocommunist parties, and impelled them to distance themselves from the PCP and its Soviet mentors. Moscow itself contributed to the breach, as its vocally

aggressive support for the actions of the PCP met with increasingly strident disclaimers from the Eurocommunist parties. Moscow's support for the militant tactics of the PCP in particular contributed to the conversion of the French party, which had been relatively docile since 1969, but which once again became an outspoken critic of Soviet actions.

Nevertheless, nothing that happened at or before Berlin was of sufficient weight to persuade the Soviets that the advance of Communism in Western Europe was not in their long-term interests, despite the irritations of the moment. These irritations centered on the Eurocommunists' rejection of Soviet authority within the movement, and the doctrinal innovations of these parties—especially their verbal commitment to democratic pluralism and their formal repudiation of one-party rule.

Against this, the Soviets were able to weigh a broad coincidence of foreign political views, particularly a general hostility to American political, economic, and military preeminence within the Atlantic community. This fully coincided with the long-term Soviet objective of securing the eventual weakening of the American presence in Europe and the neutralization of Western Europe as a political power factor.

Straightforward calculations of foreign political advantage are not the only factors that have affected Soviet attitudes. Ideological conviction also has played a role. The Soviet leaders see and portray themselves as the leaders of a world movement. In practice, since the defection of the Chinese, this claim has been justified in large part by Moscow's continuing relationship with the large Western parties, the most important nonruling Communist parties still maintaining close ties with Moscow. It is understandable that the Soviet leaders have been reluctant to sign the obituary of the international Communist movement by ending their relationship with these parties, just as the latter have been reluctant

to run the risk of internal schism that an ending of the historical relationship with Moscow would entail.

Soviet Attitudes Toughen After Berlin

In spite of the factors arguing for continuity, however, Moscow's willingness to live with the compromise achieved at Berlin had seriously eroded by the end of the year. The evolution in Soviet attitudes is traced in [] the positions taken by Soviet officials in a series of meetings between November 1976 and March 1977.

The first was the Warsaw Pact summit of bloc leaders in Bucharest in late November 1976. While there is no evidence to demonstrate that the question of relations with the Eurocommunists was directly addressed at this meeting, [] reporting indicates that the subject of dissent within the bloc came in for considerable attention. The problem of relations with the Eurocommunists, therefore, must have come up at least on the periphery of the discussions, since many East European dissidents have repeatedly sought—and occasionally received—expressions of support from the Eurocommunist parties. The Italian party, for example, played an active role in pleading for clemency for the Polish workers sentenced to prison terms after the disturbances of June and July 1976.

One [] report is more specific about the attitudes the Soviets expressed at the next such meeting—a conference of bloc ideological officials held in Sofia in the middle of December. []

[] This time the Soviets came down clearly on the side of a tough approach, both on what measures were necessary to restore order within the bloc and on the appropriate attitude toward the Eurocommunist parties. On the latter question, the Soviets reportedly argued that the popular-front tactics favored by the Eurocommunist

parties could not be approved because these parties had abandoned the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (one-party rule) and "proletarian internationalism" (solidarity with the Soviet Union). The deepening chasm between the Communists of East and West was indicated when the conferees debated—but were unable to agree on—a proposal to split and weaken the deviant Western parties. Nevertheless, the Soviets apparently then went ahead with threats to do just this anyway.*

The same hardening Soviet attitude was revealed in talks with loyal Western European Communists the following month. [] the Communist leaders attending were treated to a denunciation of the Eurocommunists by Mikhail Suslov, the senior ideological spokesman of the Politburo and a notorious hard-liner. Suslov reportedly charged that the Italian, French, and Spanish parties formed an "axis of Eurocommunism" and were attempting to wean the other Western parties away from the Soviet Union. Suslov urged his listeners to resist these blandishments and to cooperate with the Soviets to rebut criticism from abroad.

The most recent meeting was of senior bloc ideological officials in Sofia on 2 and 3 March 1977, dates which appear to have been chosen to coincide with a "Eurocommunist summit" of Italian, French, and Spanish Communist leaders in Madrid. According to one report, the Soviets stated at the Sofia conference that they intended to crack down on their own dissidents and pressed hard for a similar crackdown on political dissidents throughout Eastern Europe.

The [] reporting does not indicate the substance of the discussion of Eurocommunism. One source claims that the East Germans and Bulgarians

*Similarly, they reportedly were unable to agree on the measures necessary to restore order within their own ranks.

were most hostile to the Western parties and the Hungarians most sympathetic. The Soviets were described as "very, very cautious," but visibly displeased by the Hungarian attitude. In any case, it seems clear that the Soviets could not press at Sofia for a tougher line on political dissidents in Eastern Europe without taking into account the impact such a campaign would have on their relations with the Eurocommunist parties, since these relations have been strained more than anything else in recent months by the conspicuous and politically embarrassing denial of political freedom in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Soviet Threats

Other [] reports indicate that since January the Soviets have begun to threaten direct retaliation against parties which persist in public criticism of the treatment of political dissidents within the Soviet sphere. According to these reports, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) has been the target of particularly blatant pressure. Two Soviet officials visited Italy in January, reportedly to try to outflank the PCI leaders by taking the Soviet case on human rights directly to the PCI rank and file. They are reported to have arranged to fund a new pro-Soviet publication as a means of conveying Soviet views to Italian Communists.

The same two Soviet officials accompanied their lobbying with some tough talk in their contacts with PCI leaders. According to one report, they threatened Soviet retaliation against the PCI—specifically the public exposure of past PCI collaboration with Moscow—If the Italian party did not moderate its criticism of Moscow's performance on human rights issues.

Another [] claims that Italian Party Secretary Giovanni Cervetti, who visited Moscow in late January, made the trip in response to a Soviet demand that the PCI send a representative to "explain" the PCI's criticisms of Soviet actions. []

[] CPSU Secretary Ponomarev, who met with Cervetti, denounced the "anti-Soviet" statements of the PCI and warned that the Soviets would launch a frontal attack on the PCI if it persisted.*

Information on Soviet dealings with the French and Spanish parties is much sketchier, but there are some indications that these parties also have become the targets of Soviet pressure. There are reports that Soviet and bloc subscriptions to the French Communist Party (PCF) newspaper—a small but important source of revenue for the PCF—were cut back sharply in January as a sign of Soviet displeasure. To the same end, the Soviets reportedly have denied a visa to a ranking PCF official. A lengthy attack on a French Communist historian which appeared in the Soviet journal *New Times* in January probably was meant as a warning shot.

We have no specific information of any Soviet threats against the Spanish party, but it is noteworthy that the same two Soviet officials who were in Italy in January traveled on to Spain. It is fair to surmise that the Spanish Communists heard much the same message that was conveyed in Italy.

Nor are these parties the only ones the Soviets have sought to intimidate into silence on the question of human rights. According to another [] report, in mid-February the Soviet bloc ambassadors in Copenhagen were preparing to warn the leader of the Danish party against taking a "foolish" position on the human rights issue. They reportedly intended to back their warning with a reminder that continued bloc support was essential to the survival of the Danish party.

Moscow's resort to crude bullying is a departure from recent practice. Even during

* [] claims that the Soviets have sugar-coated the pill by promising generous financial aid if the PCI complies with their wishes.

the height of the Soviets' quarrel with the Spanish and Italian Communists in 1975 and 1976 over the propriety of Communist actions in Portugal, there is no evidence that Moscow employed direct threats or blackmail to attempt to force them to capitulate. In 1974, the Soviets had gone to considerable lengths to patch up their quarrel with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), even though it had questioned the legitimacy of the socialist system as practiced in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Pressure: A Two-Edged Sword

Moscow's previous reluctance to employ direct pressure—either financial or political—was founded on doubts about the efficacy of these methods and uncertainty about the consequences. Doubts on both points undoubtedly were fostered by the Soviet experience after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when Soviet attempts to suppress Western Communist critics had mixed results.

Of the three future centers of Eurocommunism, only in France—where the PCF soon gave up its criticism of Moscow's actions—could the Soviets in 1968 and 1969 be satisfied with the results of their efforts. Results were much less positive in Italy; the PCI eventually put aside its quarrel with the Soviets, but has yet to reconcile itself with the Soviet-supported government in Prague. In the case of the Spanish party, Moscow's efforts boomeranged, even though the Spanish party was subjected to more intense pressure than either the Italian or French. The Soviets went so far as to try to break up the Spanish party and replace it with a new, pro-Soviet organization.

The Soviets not only failed to bring the Spanish party to its knees, but contributed to making it Moscow's most consistent and outspoken critic among the Eurocommunist parties. The Spaniards have gone much further than either the French or Italians in suggesting that the totalitarian features of the

Soviet system are endemic, rather than a product of the personal aberrations of Stalin or any other individual. They attribute these defects to the Soviet Union's "Asian" and "despotic" heritage, all by way of arguing, of course, that the Soviet historical experience will not be repeated if Communism comes to power in Western Europe.

Moscow today has no grounds for confidence that direct pressure and blackmail will have any greater long-term effect than they did after 1968. In the case of the Italian party, withdrawal of financial and political support might well prove ineffective in halting criticism of Moscow for very long. This party now has much more varied financial resources than in 1968—including a large state subsidy provided under a new electoral law—and is much less vulnerable to financial pressure. The Spanish party was able to resist Soviet pressure from 1968 to 1974, when it was a small, illegal organization depending on the charity of other parties. There is no reason to believe that it will prove weaker now that it is in the process of establishing itself in Spain. Only in the case of the French party, whose willingness to stand up to Soviet pressure has proved limited in the past, could Moscow entertain a reasonable hope of forcing a retreat by threats.

There is no reason to believe that these facts are lost on the Soviets. Moscow's decision to seek to club the Eurocommunists into submission, nevertheless, suggests that it sees little alternative to strong action.

Soviet Actions Are Defensive

To a large extent, the Eurocommunists have forced the Soviet hand by showing an increasing inclination to criticize the internal practices of the Soviet state. This is a significant departure from past practice. Even when their past quarrels with the Soviets were most bitter—as over the invasion of Czechoslovakia—most Western Communist leaders tried to make it clear that disagree-

ment on a single point of principle did not signify disillusionment with the essentials of the Soviet system.*

Beginning with the Portuguese crisis of 1975—which coincided with the rise in the political fortunes of the PCI and PCF—the Eurocommunist parties have become more and more outspoken and sweeping in their criticisms of the Soviet system. By the end of 1976, it had become almost routine for the Italian Communists to decry the lack of political democracy in the USSR, for the French Communists to denounce the persecution of dissident luminaries such as Leonid Plyushch and Vladimir Bukovskiy, and for the Spanish Communists to dismiss the Soviet system as having more in common with Russian traditions than with Marxist teaching.

Nor was there any sign at the beginning of the year that this trend was being reversed. On the contrary, in January 1977 [] that the PCI was in the process of establishing a high-level party commission whose sole purpose was the formulation of a sweeping critique of the whole Soviet system. At about the same time, [] the plans for a "Eurocommunist summit" in Madrid began to circulate, and were accompanied by speculation that the Western Communists were intent on creating a rival Communist center.

Instability Within the Bloc

These developments were in themselves alarming enough to Moscow. They occurred, however, at a time when Moscow's ability to tolerate the criticism of its allies—still in evidence at the Berlin conference in June 1976—had sharply diminished because of the spread of political unrest and dissidence in Eastern Europe and in the USSR itself. The specific causes vary but the condition is general.

*The Spanish Communists have been a significant exception to this general rule of conduct since 1968.

- The potential for serious trouble is greatest in *Poland*, a country with a deep strain of anti-Russian nationalism and a recent history of worker unrest and street violence. The latest wave of unrest was triggered by proposals for food price hikes in June 1976. Worker demonstrations against this action erupted, and the jailing of some of the alleged leaders of the demonstrations has led to a new surge of political activism among the intelligentsia and on the part of the powerful Catholic Church.
- In *Czechoslovakia*, there has been a renewal among intellectuals of the reformist sentiments associated with the "Prague Spring" of 1968. Demands for reform were put forward in a document called Charter 77, which won a symbolic significance in Europe far out of proportion to the strength of the Czechoslovak dissidents.
- In *East Germany*, the immediate source of unrest has been revived interest in emigration to West Germany that has been fostered in large part by the Helsinki agreement's guarantees of the right to travel and of reunification of families.
- In *Hungary*, apart from a modest show of support for the Czechoslovak Charter 77 group, there has been no evidence of unrest. But the Soviets confront another potential problem: the Kadar government has been ahead of Moscow in its flexible handling of dissenters. Even though this in large part reflects the lack of any direct challenge to the regime, the Hungarian example could be cited by advocates of change in the USSR or the other more rigidly controlled bloc countries.

- Even in *Romania*, whose leaders are among the most heavyhanded and whose people are among the most cowed in Eastern Europe, there have been isolated manifestations of intellectual unrest.

We have no evidence that developments in any East European country have reached a critical point, that is, a point where popular unrest threatens the security of the regime or a point where dissidence and dissent have penetrated the ranks of the leadership. In other words, we have no immediate reason to believe that a repetition of the Polish upheaval of 1970 or of the Czechoslovak experiment with democratic reforms in 1968 is imminent.

There is every reason to believe, however, that Soviet reporting and perceptions are more alarmist than our own. [] Soviet analysis of the situation in Eastern Europe suggests that the Soviet leaders are very nervous. Their reactions to developments there are colored by a conviction that their fatal error in Czechoslovakia was in permitting the situation to get out of hand. This conviction makes them peculiarly sensitive to signs of incipient trouble in Eastern Europe.

Moreover, the anxieties of the Soviet leaders may be sharpened by continuing problems in the Soviet Union itself. Intellectual dissidence continues unabated, despite the virtual decapitation of the dissident movement through the exile or imprisonment of many of its established leaders. Like the majority of their East European brethren, some Soviet dissidents now are aiming their main efforts at demands for official compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki accord. Moreover, these dissidents claim to be able to see a growing willingness on the part of their sympathizers—always much more numerous than the activists—to align themselves with their cause.

Simultaneously, there have been rumors of worker discontent over shortages in food supplies stemming from 1975's poor harvest. It is widely believed in Moscow that the bomb blasts which occurred early in 1977 were carried out by workers embittered by shortages of food in outlying areas. There are also widespread rumors of scattered work slowdowns and other protests against dislocations in food supplies.

Moscow's toughening stance toward the Eurocommunists must therefore be seen in the light of anxiety over dissidence both in Eastern Europe and at home. The criticism of foreign Communists is more dangerous to Soviet interests than those of even the most powerful non-Communist voices. The fact that Moscow continues to insist that both the bloc parties and the Western parties are united in a single international revolutionary movement lends a certain legitimacy to the democratic programs which the latter have formulated. East European and Soviet dissidents can—and do—cite the programs of these parties to demonstrate the Marxist legitimacy of the reforms they espouse.

For the bloc regimes and their domestic opponents, it matters little whether the Eurocommunists are sincerely committed to the democratic goals which they profess. As long as they publicly stand by these programs, they will continue to serve as a source of support for East European dissidents and a reproach to their governments.

The Eurocommunists have not been entirely involuntary contributors to the ferment in Eastern Europe. The Spanish party has openly attacked Moscow for its treatment of dissidents and failure to observe elementary human rights. Even the more cautious French and Italian Communists have deplored the suppression of political liberties in the bloc and have spoken out in defense of individual dissidents. There have also been direct contacts between bloc dissidents and Eurocom-

munist representatives. At the turn of the year, for example, Italian Communists reportedly met with Czechoslovak dissidents and with Roy Medvedyev, the Soviet historian. The PCI party press has also published the works of Medvedyev, a liberal Marxist, even though they still circulate in the USSR only in *samizdat* (underground press) copies.

Results of Moscow's Efforts

The menacing messages which Moscow has been passing to the Western parties since the beginning of the year are intended, at a minimum, to put an end to this sort of intervention into the affairs of the CPSU and the other bloc parties. For the moment, Moscow's efforts appear to have met with some success.

This success was most visible in the results of the Eurocommunist summit in Madrid in early March. Despite speculation that the summit would produce a Eurocommunist declaration of independence from Moscow, and despite the avowed intention of the Spanish Communists to win an unqualified denunciation of Soviet-style Communism, the actual results were much more modest. The communique issued after the summit reaffirmed the attachment of the Eurocommunist leaders to the democratic values of the West, but completely avoided the delicate question of the suppression of these values in the area dominated by Soviet power.

The actual turnabout had occurred earlier, at about the time that Eurocommunist arms were being twisted most violently by the Soviets

Soviet pressure in January led the Italians, at least temporarily, to abandon their plans for a high-level analysis of the defects of the Soviet system. At the same

time, the tone of the Italian party's public commentary on developments in the bloc moderated. The change was first visible in a speech delivered by party leader Berlinguer in Milan on 26 January. Berlinguer was markedly reticent on developments in Eastern Europe, and sounded a new and tougher note in his treatment of domestic issues.

The Soviets have apparently been equally successful—for the moment—in stemming the tide in France. The French party has been notably more subdued in its comments on human rights issues since February, and the PCF's Marchais was the most conspicuous of the Eurocommunist leaders in his avoidance of the topic at Madrid. Only the Spanish party appears to have been undeterred by any Soviet threats it may have heard.

As long as the French and Italian Communists refrain from pushing their quarrel with Moscow, the Soviets clearly are not disposed to press their side of the dispute. Even though Moscow's public statements have become more and more open in warning of the dangers of ideological contamination and "anti-Sovietism" in exposure to Western parliamentary politics, they have refrained from identifying the Eurocommunists as the targets of their warnings. Publicly they have held to the fiction that Eurocommunism is a label which is used only by the bourgeois press and anti-Communist politicians.

Can Moscow Hold the Line?

Despite the obvious reluctance of either the Soviets or Eurocommunist leaders to pursue their quarrel to the point of open schism, there is some reason to question whether the present polemical cease-fire is anything more than a momentary interruption in the long-term trend toward the splintering of the European Communist movement. Differences began to emerge openly after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, and over the years were intensified by each of

the bloc's internecine conflicts, particularly the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The divergence of interests between Moscow and the major Western parties is real. For the first time since the Cold War years, these parties—at least the French and Italian parties—have a real hope for participation in government. But to do so, they must convince their electorates—as distinct from their militant cadres—of their democratic convictions and national character. The need to make their political platforms and promises credible has driven the Eurocommunists to take positions more and more critical of the dictatorial practices of the Soviet and other bloc parties. It is questionable whether the Eurocommunists can back away from their earlier criticism of Soviet actions without losing much of the ground they have gained by their past assertions of independence.

Moreover, their present reluctance to do battle with Moscow results as much from tactical and national exigencies as from Soviet pressure. These considerations apparently include a reluctance to be too closely identified with a cause which has come to be labeled an "American" one. This at least was the conclusion of officials of one pro-Soviet Western party after meetings with Eurocommunist leaders in February. This reluctance is tied to an unwillingness to provoke defections on the part of old-line cadres already upset by the party's tampering with orthodox dogmas (France) or its overly cooperative attitude toward a bourgeois government (Italy).

The Eurocommunist leaders would no doubt prefer to see the current furor over human rights in the bloc die away, because this would relieve them of the unpleasant choice between internal harmony and a politi-

cal future. Human rights will, however, continue to be an issue unless the Soviets and East Europeans end the current wave of political dissidence without resort to continued or intensified repression. It is doubtful that they can do so.

Moreover, it is possible that Moscow is no longer willing to countenance a moderate approach in areas where it perceives that dissidence has reached a dangerous level. Moscow's reported efforts at Sofia to press for a crackdown on dissidence could have serious implications, particularly in Poland. If the Polish authorities should agree to a crackdown, and subsequent repressive measures should lead to a violent reaction within Poland, the pressures on the Eurocommunists to break with the bloc parties would mount sharply. They might become irresistible if Soviet troops were to become involved in the forcible suppression of worker demonstrations.

Similarly, Moscow's margin for tolerance of renewed Eurocommunist "interference" will become ever thinner if dissent persists in Eastern Europe. Despite Moscow's strong commitment to the international movement, it would undoubtedly accept a new schism if the Soviet position in Eastern Europe were at stake.

Even if there is no further deterioration of the situation in Eastern Europe, the truce may still be short-lived. The French and Italian Communists have softened their criticism of Soviet and East European actions, but they have not entirely reversed themselves. One recent indication of this is a sharply worded critique of Soviet and East European efforts to replace the "battle of ideas" with "police repression," which appeared on 16 March in an article in *L'Unita*, the journal of

the PCI. Similarly, the clumsy efforts of the Soviet ambassador in Rome to suppress an art exhibition on the theme of East European dissidence has led the PCI to criticize the Soviets. Irritants of this sort could eventually provoke the sort of "frontal" clashes which Ponomarev warned the Italian Communists against in January.*

*This conclusion is, of course, speculative. Some analysts argue that, at least for the PCI, there are enduring domestic reasons for it to avoid raising the tone of public polemics with the Soviets. These arise from the fact that the PCI's efforts to enter the government require it to support a Christian Democratic government and urge programs opposed by leftist students, the unemployed, and many workers. Since the PCI leadership must already worry about disaffection among these groups, it can be argued that it will be extremely reluctant to do anything which would antagonize that minority (probably less than 20 percent) of Italian Communists who remain strongly loyal to the Soviet Union. In this view, only a major event that presented the PCI with an unavoidable challenge could lead it to move beyond isolated criticisms of specific Soviet actions.

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