

August 19, 1965

Radio Liberty Policy Position Statement: The Soviet Leadership

Citation:

"Radio Liberty Policy Position Statement: The Soviet Leadership", August 19, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Released by the Central Intelligence Agency on October 16, 2019, in response to Mandatory Declassification Review request EOM-2018-00930. Contributed by A. Ross Johnson.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/290945>

Summary:

Radio Liberty outlines how they will respond to Soviet leadership's "scientific approach", stating they seek to provide listeners with alternative perspectives.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

yellow 7.3.2.1
August 19, 1965

14-9595

RADIO LIBERTY
Policy Position Statement

THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP

(This paper supplements Sections II-B, C, and D and IV-B and D of the RL Policy Manual.)

17 SEP 1965

11

Assumptions

The present Soviet leadership is made up of colorless but hard-headed administrators who are intent upon making the existing Soviet system function more effectively. Having disposed of their former mentor, N.S. Khrushchev, under conditions still not revealed to the Soviet public, the new leaders have undertaken what official media describe as a "scientific approach" to everything.

This "scientific approach," to be undertaken "without undue haste," is intended to repair the damage done by many of Khrushchev's latter-day "hare-brained schemes" and win popular support, while maintaining traditional one-party control over the population of the USSR. Inherent in it, however, is the continuing contradiction of the Soviet system - the conflict between the need for more freedom to assure faster progress in all fields and the desire of the regime to retain its monopoly of one-party control over all areas of Soviet life.

In economics and science, the "scientific approach" has attempted to reconcile increased freedom and retention of control. Academician Lysenko, who used biology as an ideological weapon, has been removed, and biology has apparently been restored to its place among the sciences where freedom of inquiry is accepted. Significant changes in agricultural policy, concrete though limited steps to increase consumer goods, housing, and personal incentives and some decentralization of technical decision-making are being tried to promote more efficient production in agriculture and industry. At the same time, Stalin's system of collectivized agriculture is retained and Khrushchev's division of the party and state structure into industrial and agricultural sectors has been reversed in order to eliminate detailed involvement by party functionaries in economic production and to facilitate centralized party direction.

In contrast to an increasingly rational approach to economics and science, the cultural policy of the new Soviet leadership is still largely hidebound by the bankrupt ideology which it uses to justify and maintain one-party control. It continues to rely on Marxism-Leninism as the "scientific approach" to culture, refusing to allow full freedom of artistic expression, which would inevitably call into question the basic tenets of the Soviet system. The new regime tries, as did Khrushchev before December 1962, to keep hands off, as works of the more creative writers and artists are scheduled to appear and the cultural bureaucrats fight them, but periodically it issues warnings to both sides in the official press.

There has been some progress in the area of legal guarantees, the official press has been used to defend the rights of wronged individuals, and political science has been proposed as an academic discipline. History is gradually being re-written to recognize Stalin's war-time role, while more of his prominent victims are being more truly rehabilitated. However, relaxation of the Soviet system itself and creation of real, institutional safeguards of individual rights and freedom are a long way off. Only the surface of the problem of de-Stalinization has been scratched. Stalin's repressions directly affected millions of Soviet citizens. Those who survived the camps, as well as millions of the relatives of those who did not, secretly nurse a demand that justice be done to the collaborators of Stalin, without whose assistance he could not have ruled and carried out his repressive policies. Until satisfaction has been given in some form to this demand, or until most of the people of this generation have died, the problem of "correcting the abuses of the period of the personality cult" will remain unsolved.

In its foreign policy, the present Soviet leadership is influenced on the one hand by its outdated "revolutionary" attitude toward the "imperialist" powers of the West, which impedes true international cooperation, and, on the other, by its "peaceful coexistence" policy which the Chinese comrades in Peking assail as a sell-out to the "imperialists."

Professing "peaceful coexistence" to the Western powers, the new leaders proceed to practice it as Khrushchev originally conceived it before he became preoccupied with USSR-US detente. They have taken a generally harder diplomatic approach toward the United States and utilized American involvement in Vietnam, difficulties in NATO, and the German question to try to play the Western powers against each other and undermine US leadership.

At the same time, while trying to stem the forces of polycentrism in Eastern Europe and Communist parties in Western Europe, the new Soviet leaders departed from Khrushchev's active polemics against the Chinese, which they apparently felt helped only the Chinese. They have sought to restore a Soviet presence in Southeast Asia, while also seeking to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States, and have increased their behind-the-scenes competition with Peking for influence in "national liberation" movements.

But unless and until the Soviet regime decides to cooperate more actively with the Western powers in working for peace all over the world and to abstain from encouraging "wars of national liberation," the contradictions of its over-all foreign policy position cannot but contribute to, instead of lessening, continuing world tension.

The personal and power relationships within the new "collective leadership," are, as always, concealed from the Soviet public. On the basis of past history and the lack of orderly succession to party leadership, maneuvering and plotting for power in the new hierarchy are to be expected. While it is possible that satisfactory working relationships among Khrushchev's heirs could develop and continue for a number of years, this is not probable; indeed, signs of differences are already discernible. As the new leaders face the various solutions for the continuing problems they have inherited from Khrushchev, and as they dispute these solutions among themselves, the man who has a combination of a solid power base in

the party apparatus and the ability to win support for effective policies in various fields will probably emerge as top leader. Soviet society may now be entering a "time of troubles" during which the CPSU leadership will be forced to make increasingly significant concessions to the interests of important groups within the country - the managerial elite, the creative intelligentsia, the peasantry, etc.

The Soviet public, which greeted Khrushchev's abrupt ouster in October 1964 with apparent apathy, has not so far shown any great enthusiasm for the new Kremlin leaders. The colorful Khrushchev developed considerable personal popularity while his various policy initiatives were bearing fruit, but when they began to falter after 1959 the Soviet public became increasingly critical of Khrushchev the man.

Whether any of the new leaders can ever win great personal popularity is questionable, but the policies so far enunciated for increasing agricultural production, consumer goods, and housing have considerable potential for mustering popular support for the regime if it is able to implement them successfully. Thinking and politically conscious Soviet citizens, however, who do not "live by bread alone" and who resent the paternalistic Soviet system under which a small oligarchy of top party leaders controls and manipulates their lives, will be pressing for more basic changes in that system and some voice in the decisions which affect their interests. Now that the present regime has called for more rational economic policies, Radio Liberty's Soviet listeners can be encouraged to press for similar rational approaches in politics and ideology.

Objectives

1. To stimulate and help listeners to evaluate critically just what the "collective leadership's" policies, domestic and foreign, mean for all Soviet citizens and to press for (a) more rapid implementation of rational policies and (b) modifications in those policies which are not clearly in the interests of the peoples of the USSR.

2. To encourage listeners to ask why the Soviet regime's "scientific approach" is confined to science and economics; why is it not extended to the realm of politics in the form of thorough-going de-Stalinization and institutional guarantees of individual rights? to ideology in the form of creative freedom and peaceful competition of ideas? and to foreign policy in the form of opposing the world-wide aggressive designs of the Chinese Communists and more actively cooperating with the Western democracies, directly or within the framework of the United Nations, in constructive, step-by-step negotiations for disarmament, trade, joint economic development of the new nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, etc.

3. To suggest and encourage alternatives to present Soviet practice: the need for orderly, constitutionally-guaranteed succession to political leadership of the USSR, instead of secret power struggles within the Party Presidium; a responsible press which serves the Soviet citizen by giving him complete information, instead of what the regime wants him to hear; true inner-party democracy instead of "democratic centralism"; several candidates, instead of one, on the ballots in party and government elections; the need for more than one party to assure a continuing loyal opposition which keeps the party in power honest and responsible, etc.

Treatment

The Soviet leadership's "scientific approach" requires a consistently dynamic approach by Radio Liberty. When Khrushchev launched his flamboyant initiatives, particularly in his later years, RL could point out their "hare-brained" aspects, just as his successors have done since his ouster, and thus build up our credibility. This approach cannot be so easily applied to the more rational, pragmatic internal policies of the new regime which, if implemented at all effectively, offer considerable potential for genuine improvements in the lot of Soviet citizens - and gradually increased support by them of the Soviet regime, as a result.

Hence, all RL analysis and comment must always be abreast of current internal developments in all fields, so that (1) our criticism is not either premature or outdated and (2) the alternatives we point to are practical and not naive. If we allow ourselves to fall behind in our knowledge and assessment of current Soviet developments, we run the risk of underestimating the popular appeal of some constructive policies of the new regime and the weakness of others - which will hurt our credibility and lessen the impact of everything we say.

Radio Liberty's task is to try to stay ahead of the Soviet regime: we welcome and try to push constructive changes farther; we show up lags in these areas where faster change is necessary in both domestic and foreign policy.

While we emphasize discussion of policy changes in the interests of the Soviet citizen, we also closely follow and comment on personnel shifts in the top leadership, since the succession problem and top-level power struggles still characterize the one-party dictatorship in the USSR. We treat this, however, not from the standpoint of being fascinated by secret internecine struggles within the "collective leadership," but from the point of view of encouraging listeners to support policies which show promise of improving the lot of the Soviet population. In so doing, we take care not to give the impression that those leaders who advocate constructive policies are motivated simply by good intentions. We note that such leaders are acting in what they conceive to be the best interests of a Party whose monopoly of power they are trying their best to preserve. We indicate that their reformist policies are prompted by a pragmatic assessment of what they must do in order to solve increasingly complex economic, political, and social problems and, thereby, to give partial satisfaction to the demands of the people.

As a general, over-all theme, RL looks to the next (23rd) CPSU Congress which, according to the Party Statutes, should convene in 1965. The doctrinal and major policy pronouncements - perhaps including a new draft Constitution and the Five-Year Plan - and the personnel changes attendant upon that event may be as important as were those at the 20th Party Congress; some thinking Soviet citizens have already said, "What we need is another 1956!" It is RL's task to encourage expectations and demands among the population as a whole and within the CPSU itself that the Soviet regime will use the occasion to launch a new wave of de-Stalinization, in such fields as agriculture and the creative arts, with or "without undue haste" but clearly spelled out.