

July 1, 1969

Radio Liberty Policy Position Statement: The Soviet Union and International Communism

Citation:

"Radio Liberty Policy Position Statement: The Soviet Union and International Communism", July 1, 1969, 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/290947>

Summary:

Radio Liberty analyzes the current situation of international communism where Moscow is regarded as the leading city. RL states their objective in broadcasting about the Soviet Union as a way to influence developments in the USSR away from communism and towards international cooperation.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

Program Policy Division
Radio Liberty

July 1, 1969

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Broadcast Position Statement

THE SOVIET UNION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM

Assumptions

The Soviet Union's claim to leadership of the international communist movement derives first of all from the fact that, in the aftermath of the First World War, it was only in Russia that communists succeeded in seizing and holding state power. Hopes for world revolution, for a chain reaction of national workers' revolutions were quickly blighted after communist efforts to seize power in such countries as Germany and Hungary failed completely.

The infant Communist parties that received their inspiration and support from the Bolshevik Party accepted Moscow's leadership as a matter of course. For its part, Moscow attempted to give organizational form to its pre-eminent position in international communism by creating the Comintern, where all Communist parties had representation but the direction was openly Soviet.

The Second World War, ending in the defeat of the axis powers, not only assured the survival of communism in the USSR but it provided territorial gains and the basis for an enormous accretion of power. A more fundamental change in the situation of international communism and more fateful for its future was the emergence, more or less under Soviet tutelage, of a number of communist states.

It also developed that a common Marxist ideology by no means ensured the absence of conflicts between these communist states -- conflicts based on consideration of power, national interests, etc. and sometimes even exacerbated by ideological quarrels.

Even before Stalin's death, there occurred the Soviet break with Yugoslavia in 1948. Another milestone was the beginning of the great split with Mao Tse-tung's China in 1958. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was directed against a Soviet-recognized communist leadership, unlike the crushing of revolts against communism in Germany in 1953 and in the later stages of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Apart from these major crises, there have been many other less dramatic conflicts in the past two decades which have inevitably affected the attitudes of Communist parties and individual communists throughout the world.

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Peking has set itself up against Moscow as a rival center of world communism. Tito sees himself as a potential example and inspiration for communists of Eastern Europe. Castro views himself as the leader of a communist movement that will ultimately seize power in the countries of Latin America and he opposes Soviet Communist policies toward these countries and, in particular, the Communist parties there. Other less ambitious communist leaders like Ceausescu have sought to assert their independence from Moscow.

For at least a decade, Soviet communists have tried to use the international conference of Communist parties as a medium to "unite" international communism under Moscow's leadership, just as they had used the Comintern until World War II and the Cominform on a smaller scale (in Eastern Europe) up to Tito's defection. At first, these conferences included China. However, as the split with Peking widened, the Soviet leaders aimed at uniting international communism against Peking. They hoped to consolidate the CPSU's position at the head of the communist movement, leaving China and other rebel parties in purgatory until more favorable conditions developed, such as Mao Tse-tung's passing from the scene and perhaps the emergence of potential allies in the new leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. However, in the event that the Sino-Soviet conflict should degenerate into a war between the two states, the Soviet party leadership hopes to ensure that the moral and material support of the majority of communist parties will assist the USSR against China.

Rivalry between Moscow and Peking has become acute in the third world where the CPSU and the CCP are both trying to win new allies against each other. Soviet support of the Arab states in their struggle against Israel assures Moscow for the time being a dominant position in this area, but a split between "hawks" and "semi-hawks" or "doves" in the Arab camp gives Peking the opportunity to make headway against its rival. The CPSU appears to be still optimistic about the future of Moscow-style communism in the third world. But in fact the only two underdeveloped areas to acquire communist governments since the last world conference, Cuba and Bengal, are both much more independent of the Moscow line than Soviet claims to influence in this part of the world would suggest. As in the case of the Arab countries, Sino-Soviet competition seems likely to ensure greater rather than fewer opportunities for the pursuit of independent policies by left-leaning third-world countries in the future.

Despite their growing independence in relations with Moscow, the non-ruling communist parties are faced with a dilemma. The rift between the ruling orthodox Communist parties of the East and enlightened reform-communist parties of the West, which was greatly widened by the military intervention in Czechoslovakia, seems more likely to grow than to narrow in view of the increasingly repressive policies in the USSR and their echo in Eastern Europe. Leaders of non-ruling communist parties have good reason to be concerned about a complete break with the CPSU, if only from a practical point of view. A party like the Italian CP has a substantial power-base of its own, but it has been estimated that about one-quarter of its resources is derived from subsidies provided by Moscow. In the case of smaller parties, it may not even be possible to continue to publish a daily newspaper if Moscow withdraws its support.

The assessment of the situation by the present CPSU leadership seems to be that it cannot adjust to the demands of reform communists for more enlightened and liberal policies both inside and outside the USSR without running a serious risk of losing power altogether. Unless there is a change in this assessment, the basic conflict of interests with the non-ruling parties and some, if not all, of the ruling parties is virtually irreconcilable. Continuation on the present course appears certain to accelerate polycentrist tendencies, conflicts within the communist camp, loss of authority by the CPSU, and -- in the event of ruthless Soviet actions as in Czechoslovakia against other communist countries -- the possible emergence of a third communist bloc in the world, perhaps in a more distant perspective, even to the creation of a new anti-Soviet Communist International.

A regrettable aspect of the Soviet leadership's preoccupation with the international communist movement is the resulting neglect of state affairs which are normally the exclusive concern of any government and which directly involve the real interests of the majority of Soviet citizens. The contradictions between Soviet aims to extend the ruling group's power abroad through communist or revolutionary means and the legitimate interests of the peoples of the USSR have become sharper in the recent past.

Radio Liberty's Long-Term Objective

Radio Liberty's long-term objective in broadcasting about the Soviet Union and international communism is to influence developments in the USSR in such a way that the government and people will perceive state interests to lie in international cooperation and the genuine interests and welfare of its citizens rather than in the promotion of other communist regimes and local revolutionary movements as a means of expanding Soviet power.

Immediate Broadcasting Objectives

1. To persuade listeners that Soviet policies designed to promote communism and revolutionary movements abroad lead to costly and risky foreign adventures.
2. To convince listeners that the claim of the Soviet leadership that there still exists one Communist movement is a myth and that some of the most potentially dangerous conflicts lie within the Communist camp itself.
3. To impress upon the audience that various progressive changes taking place in other Communist parties have relevance to the possibility of progressive change in the Soviet Union and CPSU policy.

The above objectives are differently applied according to the nature of the audience Radio Liberty is seeking to reach:

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1. For a general audience in the USSR, RL stresses that the CPSU leadership's efforts to expand Soviet power abroad through communist or revolutionary activities are irrelevant and possibly even harmful to the USSR's national interests and the interests of the population in general. RL points to the disproportionate attention and concentration of the leadership on such matters to the detriment of the solution of more basic and pressing problems. RL shows how the huge resources of the Soviet Union in natural wealth, manpower, and talent, which might be used to raise the people's standard of living to unprecedented heights, are being misused to a very large extent in pursuit abroad of communist goals which have become increasingly unrealistic.
2. For Communists and politically concerned people in its audience, RL devotes some of its programming to communist themes, describing the real issues between the CPSU and other parties, providing detailed information and analysis concerning the situation and attitudes as well as currents of opinion within individual Communist parties, their relations with one another, etc. and focusing on those matters about which the CPSU prefers to remain silent or to misrepresent in domestic Soviet media. RL shows that Marxism, far from being a "science" (as the CPSU claims) which provides clear and precise solutions for all problems, is interpreted and applied differently -- often with better results -- by other Communist parties.

Treatment

Radio Liberty will treat this subject seriously, entirely without sarcasm or invective. We avoid highly emotional presentations (unless this appears to be warranted by the seriousness of a particular event) and are not frivolous or petty. RL endeavors to present facts and information without the same kind of distortion of statistics and other data indulged in by Soviet media, and to stimulate thought on the part of listeners by analysis which ends with questions rather than ready-made conclusions. RL's critiques of communism as a world system or as an ideology providing universal solutions should be based on a sceptical attitude toward the claims of any ideology to solve all the problems of mankind.