

Senior Research Staff on International Communism

7 September 1960

Comments on Vice President Nixon's Statement,
"The Meaning of Communism to Americans," of
21 August 1960

The purpose of the article, namely to make clear to the American people the meaning and danger of international communism, is an admirable one, and there are many paragraphs in the statement to which one can heartily subscribe. However, the statement could have been made more effective, we believe, if it had dealt with communism not so much in terms of historic Marxism but rather in terms of the post-Stalinist Khrushchevite concept of Marxism-Leninism, the interpretation as set forth authoritatively in "Foundations of Marxism-Leninism," which was published in Moscow in 1959. Basically, the position of the paper is somewhat old-fashioned. It does not refer sufficiently to the changes which have occurred since Stalin's death. It fails to explain the difference between "socialism," the present "transitional" period of development, and communism, which admittedly has not as yet been achieved. It includes no reference to the "world socialist system," or as it is sometimes called, "Socialist Commonwealth," and it does not indicate the significance of Khrushchev's ideas for the "transition to communism."

As a further general comment, we believe that it is important for us to keep in mind when discussing "communism as an idea" that the communists' values are not ours; that their concept of political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual life is different from ours; that words have a different meaning for them than they have for us. Because of this fact, comparisons of the democratic and communist ways of life from the viewpoint of our principles and standards are often more confusing than enlightening. It is important, therefore, to educate our people towards a recognition that we have here in this bi-polar world a different value system; that our national goals cannot be compared with theirs; that our economy, our education, even our foreign policy, are conducted on a different plane.

There are in the paper a number of statements with which we would differ or would wish to qualify. On page 2, 4th paragraph, it is stated that "the appeal of the communist idea is not to the masses." Were it not for the following of the masses, the communist leaders of Moscow and Peking would have been unable to carry out their plans to the extent they have. Moreover, the appeal of communism, misunderstood as its purposes and doctrines may be, to the underprivileged millions in the African, Asian and Latin American regions, is a matter of great concern. These people may be misled by "an intelligent minority," but among many of them there is a receptivity to communist ideas which produces eager followers.

In the discussion of communist economic ideas (page 4 ff.), we feel that the Vice President's statement is based too much on "pure" Marxist concepts which are no longer applicable. Marx certainly envisaged a communist order dominated by economic principles and practices, and the theorists still adhere to the doctrine that economic relationships determine the "superstructure" of government and law. In the practice of communist countries, however, political purposes have been controlling, and the character of their economies has been formed by political and ideological considerations. If it is not particularly useful to compare the two vastly different types of economy, yet it should be pointed out that a communist economy, different from ours, is not a profit economy. We do not detect a tendency in the USSR toward a market economy (in the capitalist sense of the word) but rather an attempt to improve production and distribution. Certain phenomena, such as recent experiments with advertising, should not lead us to the conclusion that a second NEP (New Economic Policy) is in the making, but even if it were, it would not mean that the Soviet system is striving for an approximation to capitalist economy, just as there was nothing further from the mind of Lenin than to return to capitalism when he initiated the NEP. What is good and profitable for a prosperous American economy does not necessarily have to be good and profitable for the Soviet economy.

Another point which we would suggest qualifying is the statement in the middle of page 11 that "Communism starts with the proposition that there are no universal or general truths of human nature." It would be a mistake to assume that Marxism-Leninism is altogether devoid of fundamental truths - as it sees them. (Naturally, it is not our kind of truth). On the contrary, one might point out that the concept of a communist conquest of the world and the construction of a communist world state consisting of nationalities but not of nations, and having no boundaries, is from the communist point of view a universal and general truth. In a perverted way it is what one could call the Communist Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It is quite true that many of the teachings of the past ages are not acceptable to the communists and that their own and very different concepts are often denials of the Western or Christian tradition. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the Kremlin leaders have stated frequently that the Soviet Union should make the best possible use of the cultural goods of the West, selecting from them what is acceptable under its system.

In a similar vein, the statement on Communist philosophy (page 12) is somewhat misleading. As the Marx-Engels idea of a society completely regulated by economic factors is no longer true, the "superstructure" has

developed in a somewhat changed relationship to the basic structure of the communist system. Since the death of Stalin considerable efforts have been made to reconstitute what is called "socialist legality" and to foster the concept of "humanism." In other words, under Khrushchev an undeniable effort has been made to humanize the legal and political system. There are many indications that this is not mere talk. As the Soviet leaders have become more confident of their strength and as their belief in ultimate victory without war has grown, they have felt that concessions could be made to the people, that coercion by fear was no longer necessary as the only way to keep them in line, but that, in psychological terms, "positive reinforcement," i.e. motivation by rewards, could be used to a greater extent. We may add that Vishinsky's Stalinist law concepts are not necessarily representative of the present regime.

The observations on pages 18-19 about personal freedom do not take into account that from the communist point of view the approach to all forms of social life has to be a total, integral one. It is impossible, in the view of communist leaders, to permit anyone to deviate seriously from the mould into which society has to be pressed. That is why it would not be astounding to a communist that the exemplified Soviet architect might be involved in the zigs and zags of policy. If it is determined to change the party line for strategic or tactical reasons and the work of the architect does not fit the change, then he has to revise his style or be dropped by the wayside. This again indicates the necessity for us not to think in Western terms when we wish to explain communism.

Concerning the conclusions on page 20 ff. we feel that some of them are rather outdated. We believe that it would be preferable to use the word "imperialism" instead of "capitalism" as having more meaning for present day communists, and we think that an explanation of what dialectics means for communism would be desirable. We would suggest explaining the difference between individuality and individualism as the communists see it. Indeed, from their point of view, a single person proceeding as an individualist can not shape destiny. He can only do that as an individual who is part of a collective. He does not necessarily lose his individuality. Under communism the goals to strive for are collective goals; in western democracy each human being has an individual goal all his own, which only in a very broad general sense has to be subordinated to the goal of society.

On page 25, last paragraph, a statement is repeated which implies that the communists have "cast off the intellectual burden left behind by men like Confucius, Mencius, Plato, Aristotle, etc." It should perhaps be reiterated.

that our value judgments are null and void so far as communists are concerned. Their historians study this intellectual burden only for the purpose of refuting its thesis. Communism wishes to separate itself completely from previous experience because it views these "burdens" as impediments to the development of its own doctrine. Nevertheless, it should be repeated that whatever is considered useful is not cast off but retained for specific purposes.

In conclusion, although the article contains many perceptive, even eloquent passages, we do not feel that it presents an adequate interpretation of the dynamic movement which is present-day communism. It is possible to refute nearly all the political, economic, and social propositions of classical Marxism and to point out the many contradictions between communist principle and practice. Nevertheless, the ideology has sparked and continues to justify for its adherents a system of organizing and wielding power that is challenging us on every front. It is an understanding of this purposeful, aggressive system that the peoples of the Free World require if they are to counter its strengths and exploit its weaknesses. Perhaps the Vice President will deal with the problem in these terms in the succeeding article he intends to issue.

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REMARKS:			
Requested comments on "The Meaning of Communism to Americans" by Vice President Nixon.			
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