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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Senior Research Staff on International Communism

THE 20th CPSU CONGRESS IN RETROSPECT:
ITS PRINCIPAL ISSUES AND POSSIBLE EFFECTS
ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM

CIA/SRS-1



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This is a speculative study which has been
discussed with US Government intelligence
officers but has not been formally coordinated.

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Pertinent Background Factors	1
The Main Issues of the Congress	2
Internal Aspects	5
External Aspects	8
The Meaning of the Congress for International Communism	11

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**THE 20th CPSU CONGRESS IN RETROSPECT:
ITS PRINCIPAL ISSUES AND POSSIBLE EFFECTS
ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM**

Pertinent Background Factors

1. The CPSU is the leading Communist Party in the world. Its ideological leadership has been acknowledged even by the Chinese Communist Party. Being in control of the Soviet state, it controls the political, military and economic power of the USSR, the stronghold of World Communism. Thus its pronouncements on doctrine, strategy, and tactics are of decisive importance to International Communism. Communist courses of action are determined primarily in Moscow; the Chinese "People's Republic", for all its potential strength, is still dependent upon Soviet guidance and assistance. The USSR remains the base of world Communism, and there is no indication that this situation is about to change. If now, at the fountain of Communist wisdom, a new course is set which appears to deviate considerably from that of the Stalin era, repercussions are likely to occur which may be of great moment for both the Communist and the non-Communist world, if not immediately, at least in the foreseeable future.

2. The reasons for the announced changes must be sought far back in the Stalin regime. Long before his death, the men around Stalin must have recognized that he paid only lip service to the doctrine of flexibility. After World War II, when the USSR had become a great power, the rigidity

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of Stalinist thought and action produced a stalemate in Europe, fear of Soviet interference in non-committed nations, and a widening gap between the Party and the Soviet people. It is probable that designs for altering the basis of the regime were pondered - and perhaps to some extent discussed - in the dictator's entourage. When it became obvious that Stalin's days were numbered, immediate plans for a reorganization of government and Party were made, and these were put into action upon his death. The successors to Stalin must have realized that the reorganization and economic incentives, initiated by Malenkov's "new course", could not, by themselves, create the desired political climate at home and abroad. Even the liquidation of Beriya and the sharp limitation of police power were not sufficient to demonstrate that Soviet Communism had embarked on a new, less violent, more gradualistic approach toward its objectives. Only an official break with the symbol of past policies, Stalin, could really impress the Soviet people and the world. The underlying purpose of the leadership was to promote political security and socio-economic incentives internally, to develop the concept of "competitive coexistence" externally, and to achieve global Communist "respectability". These objectives were defined during the three years following Stalin's death; they were confirmed and explained by the 20th CPSU Congress and made explicit through the denigration of Stalin. It is against this background that the 20th Congress must be understood.

The Main Issues of the Congress

3. The institution of Communist Party Congresses cannot be likened

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to democratic conventions. Primarily, these Congresses are used as sounding boards for the justification of past policies and the outlining of new ones. The 20th Congress served these traditional purposes, even though it differed from previous Congresses in both tone and substance. The results did not indicate that Communist fundamentals are to be sacrificed. On the contrary, the Congress emphasized that Communism is, and remains the wave of the future. But it did point out that the successes of International Communism have given the "Socialist camp" a more solid status in world politics and have thereby rendered Stalinist tactics obsolete. The revolution has not been called off, the Congress admitted; revolutionary techniques, however, are being changed. Revolution can become more gradual and respectable. In other words, the policies set forth by the 20th Congress are designed to make the anticipated eventual victory of Communism more easily acceptable and to eliminate at least the more dangerous tensions which have troubled the world throughout the cold war. To put this new approach on a firm ideological basis, some doctrinal "modifications" were announced, primarily with a view to rationalizing the type of successor regime, discarding some of the more obnoxious Stalinist principles, and advertising the so-called "return to Leninism".

4. However, a change from violence to "diplomacy" and from tension to relaxation, no matter how well explained, cannot but have a deep psychological impact on the people inside the Communist orbit and on the Communist parties outside. Even if such "mellowing" process is only superficial, it may set in motion forces extending far beyond the contemplation of the present

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collective leaders of the CPSU. These leaders must be mindful that the Bolshevik regime is a unique historic phenomenon. It has been able to maintain itself in power for almost four decades after its original objective, the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, was achieved. It has achieved this extraordinary feat by what might be called "permanent revolution from above". Tensions had to be kept high in order to prevent a peaceful post-revolutionary development. Totalitarian dictatorship had to be justified by alleging the necessity for an unending struggle against the "class enemy" within and "capitalist imperialism" without, according to Lenin's concept of the "inevitable death struggle between the socialist and capitalist camps". Stalin merely extended and exacerbated this struggle, and, since the significance of nuclear weapons apparently escaped him, he continued it without letup after World War II. Since the new Soviet-Communist platform calls for a general relaxation of tensions, the question naturally arises whether the leaders of the CPSU and other parties can dispense with permanent tension without at the same time undermining their monolithic dictatorship. The 20th Congress refrained from exhorting the people to continue the "relentless struggle against the class enemy"; the bugaboo of internal danger was, for the time being, played down. However, it maintained the theory of hostile camps, albeit in a much milder form. The Party has modified its strategy against the capitalist camp enough to tone down the "struggle against foreign enemies of socialism", thereby weakening the argument that socialist vigilance requires the continuation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is unlikely that the shrewd managers

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of the USSR have not recognized these problems. The fact that they nonetheless decided to launch their new approach, suggests that their reasons must have been weighty indeed, and their confidence great.

Internal Aspects

5. Stalin's successors, generally speaking, have heavily emphasized inducements rather than force. There is apparently less of arbitrary police cruelty; slave labor camps are allegedly being dismantled. Labor laws have been liberalized, and - with few exceptions - economic inducements, first introduced by Malenkov, have been continued by Khrushchev though with changed emphasis. But while Malenkov, still very much under Stalin's spell, counted on the support of the governmental bureaucracy against the Party whose influence had been waning, Party leader Khrushchev re-established Party predominance and turned dictatorial power back to it. At the same time, Khrushchev sought to improve relations between the Party and the people, which in the Stalin era had seriously deteriorated. This method is likely to strengthen Party dictatorship in a time of diminishing tensions. The Soviet leaders are as unwilling now as they have ever been - and will be in the foreseeable future - to democratize their system and to permit public discussion of political problems. This was demonstrated by the lack of discussion during the 20th Congress, as well as by PRAVDA's recent warning not to extend criticism to include the Party and the system.

6. It is clear, therefore, that the "return to Leninism" does not mean the return to "Party democracy". Nor is the substitution of Party dictatorship for one-man rule necessarily an improvement from the viewpoint of US security.

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There is no reason to assume that the modified "Neo"-Leninism, now so heavily propagandized, is more than formally different from the Soviet system as we have known it. It may be recalled that the practice of "Party democracy", or "democratic centralism", was severely limited by Lenin, who warned against "fractionalization" as early as 1921, after the Kronstadt revolt. At the 10th CPSU Congress in the same year, Lenin justified his position by referring to the danger of hostile class interests using the instrument of debate for their own counter-revolutionary purposes. Nevertheless, there still occurred occasional intra-Party discussions, cautiously airing opposing views. So strong was this habit that Stalin, having succeeded Lenin, could not completely eliminate its remnants until 1928 when his position was firmly consolidated. During the remainder of Stalin's regime "party democracy" disappeared under the secret police terror. The collective leaders of the USSR now claim that they are re-instating this principle. However, the mere fact that Khrushchev has called for more frequent plenary meetings of the Central Committee is no proof that genuine "democratic centralism" has been restored. He may permit perfunctory discussions so long as they do not show any deviationist tendency. Generally, however, such meetings probably can and will be used as a means of maintaining better control of this body and of coaxing - or pressuring - it into rubberstamping the edicts of the collective leaders without resort to the overt threat of police action. In truth, the heavily advertised "return to Leninism" consists primarily of a change in methods. The leaders of the CPSU have given up the Byzantine trimmings of the Stalin "cult of personality" without relinquishing any of their powers.

7. The return to Leninism, we are told, means the return to "collective leadership". There were, indeed, traces of this principle under Lenin, which Stalin managed to eliminate by 1928, prior to forced collectivization. Its highly vaunted renovation does not mean that power will now be distributed with checks and balances; it merely indicates a different method of using power. At best, "collective leadership" might develop into an oligarchy with quasi-"democratic" trappings. It might transform the present despotism into a form of "enlightened absolutism".

Collective leadership at present is a euphemism for the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Within this Presidium, predominant power is exercised by the half-dozen active "old Bolsheviks", of whom Khrushchev seems to be primus inter pares. In contrast to Stalin, Khrushchev and his colleagues appear to be willing to listen to arguments and consult with experts. They may be demanding and receiving more objective intelligence reports. As they develop a more realistic attitude toward the facts of international life, they may be able to look beyond the narrow confines of their ideology and formulate more realistic and subtle policies to achieve their goal peacefully. The result of this change can already be seen. The Soviet leaders have recognized both the destructive consequences of war and its futility in the nuclear age. They have therefore resorted to such peaceful methods as economic competition in lieu of military pressure. They are trying to stabilize their own economy by stimulating productivity; and they have introduced measures improving the lot of their own underdogs while at the same time whittling down the incomes of the nouveaux riches.

8. In order to carry out these policies, the break with Stalin had to be complete. The break itself was not a surprise. Surprising, only, was the violence of Khrushchev's attack against Stalin in his "secret" speech of 25 February. This action may have been designed to perform psychological surgery on the Party. But it was also conceived as a warning to the Communists throughout the world that flexibility had been restored to Soviet policy, which could now employ tactics adequate to cope with the fact that the nature of revolution had changed. The reversal of more than 25 years of Stalinist indoctrination unquestionably will force many communists throughout the world to make difficult adjustments. But such adjustments have been made before and have not impaired the continuing vigor of the International Communist movement. The Soviet leaders must have known that the 20th Congress would produce a period of confusion, particularly among the parties outside the orbit. But they probably calculated that eventually adjustments could and would be made. In any case, the interests of the USSR both as a nation and as the base of world Communism had to take precedence. We suggest that the Soviet leaders earnestly pondered these problems for many months and, having come to their conclusion, felt no hesitation to consummate the break with Stalin. If this assumption is correct, it would appear that they had not been forced to make the violent attack against Stalin on 25 February because of internal or external pressures.

External Aspects

9. It was stated above that the CPSU leaders left the "class enemy"

within unmentioned. The same cannot be said of the "capitalist imperialists", even though the noise of sabre rattling sounded rather muffled. The Soviet leaders have continued to emphasize the differences between the socialist and imperialist camps; by implication they have retained the thesis of basic irreconcilability. Nevertheless, they did transform their once rude and vitriolic aggressiveness into a politer version of Communist verbiage, which was made more tolerable, if not actually conciliatory, by diplomatic flourishes and by some actual "concessions" such as the withdrawal from Austria. The development of nuclear weapons and jet propulsion, together with the growing belief, especially since the Summit Meeting, that the West does not now harbor aggressive designs, probably contributed decisively to Communist confidence in the future and led to the reinvigoration of what had long been known as "peaceful coexistence". Stalin had used this term in the Twenties but never gave it practical meaning. Malenkov reintroduced the concept, and Khrushchev, applying "creative interpretation", transformed it into "competitive coexistence". This new doctrine harmonizes admirably with the de-emphasis of armed power. At the same time the Soviet leaders may believe that it will stimulate the domestic Soviet economy while at the same time weakening the Western economic system. This, in turn, would stimulate the "contradictions among capitalist states fighting for world markets". Moreover, by inferring that the USSR is no longer isolated but has become the center of a world-wide system of socialist states, the Soviet and Communist leaders have admitted implicitly that at least some of the former "colonial and semi-colonial countries" have become politically independent. Their policy of creating a non-committed

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"peace bloc", of keeping it at least neutral, and perhaps winning it over to the socialist camp, may have led to revisions of their classic colonial doctrine.

10. The break with Stalin signifies that the leaders of the CPSU will no longer insist that they have a monopoly on the "correct" way to "socialism". During Stalin's lifetime the only ex-post-facto blessing of a deviation from this Soviet doctrine was that which he had reluctantly given to Mao. A Canossa trip to Belgrade would have been unthinkable. The Leninist formula that various ways can lead to Socialism - with the end of the road always the conquest by Communist revolution - was not used by Stalin. The reaffirmation of this formula by the 20th Congress has probably quelled some misgivings on the part of the less sophisticated neutrals. It is likely to create increasing demands from the satellites to follow their own path to "socialism". If Moscow denies them this right, it will have proved its insincerity before the world and may lose, thereby, much of the good will it now possesses in some non-committed countries. Nor will it, in the long run, be able to maintain the appearance of respectability, particularly vis-a-vis potential United Front partners. Much less will it be able to impress non-Communist democracies with its claim that it will attempt to gain power legally by parliamentary means, and not by violent overthrow of governments.

11. It should be restated here, and it cannot be emphasized too strongly that recognition by the Soviet leaders of the significance of nuclear weapons is the underlying cause for their policy shift. For the present, at least, atom and jet are the basic deterrents to general war, and probably also

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to local wars. Despite repeated pronouncements that a nuclear war would destroy only Capitalism, the Communists have no real ideological "guide to action" in this field; they surely must realize that the atom knows no ideological preferences. Stalin probably tried hard but in vain to come to grips with this problem since the day of Hiroshima. His successors appear to have found a temporary solution by shifting from dangerous military pressures to less dangerous economic blandishments. Nevertheless, although their policies are designed to avoid war and to let capitalism die "peacefully", there is no prohibition for Communists to divide the capitalist camp and render it harmless. Meanwhile, the "socialist" camp will continue to solicit allies among the imperialists, be they states, groups, or individuals. 20th century changes in capitalist economy are minimized or ridiculed. The Leninist view of the inevitable downfall of capitalism at its highest stage, imperialism, has remained intact. Evolutionary tendencies, which goaded Lenin into writing vitriolic pamphlets, are still outlawed in spite of United Front overtures to socialist "opportunists".

The Meaning of the Congress for International Communism

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12. The basic structure of Marxist-Leninist Communism has remained untouched. There is no indication that the present Soviet leaders have renounced the goal of world domination. However, they no longer insist that this conquest can and must come to pass under exclusive Soviet leadership. Nor is there any hint that a Communist world would have to be dominated by the USSR. This means the acceptance of a gradualist approach

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to Communist objectives which not only is considered feasible in view of the strength of the Sino-Soviet bloc and the growth of the uncommitted neutralist "peace camp", but also is made necessary by the destructiveness of nuclear weapons and by the great jeopardy to Communism's continued existence in the event of war. The post-Stalinist concept of Communist victory is the achievement of "socialism" in individual countries in a manner suited to national conditions, followed by the joining of such countries in a loose community of "socialist" states. At first, these states would retain their national identities but as time goes by they would gradually merge into a World-Communist community which would rule itself according to ideologically motivated universal laws, having discarded national governments as we know them today. Apparently the Soviet leaders anticipate the completion of the first step, the end of capitalism in individual nations, by the end of the century. It is conceivable that they think in terms of a classless society emerging only in the 21st century, inasmuch as the establishment of such a society is hardly possible so long as politically inimical camps continue to exist.

13. If this view of the Soviet leaders' estimate is correct, it would follow that they can give considerably more leeway to the satellite parties. From the Soviet point of view, the military and economic integration of these countries with the USSR is sufficiently strong to permit a modicum of what Stalinists used to call "nationalist deviation". Communism in the Far East has to be adapted to conditions prevailing in that area, as was already recognized in the Soviet acceptance of Maoism. While there is, and

probably will continue for some time to be, confusion among the Party rank and file, resulting from the break with the Stalin idol, this confusion is unlikely to provoke many defections. Outside the USSR, it will be easier to achieve socialism by the "national" road than under the Soviet yoke. Soviet control and influence will be maintained, but in a subtler manner. Resistance against Communism will thus be overcome by a process of attrition rather than revolution.

14. The confusion resulting from the break with Stalin will last longer and probably have deeper consequences in the parties outside the Communist orbit. Their doubts will be shared by leaders of international Front organizations. This period of efforts to adjust policies and methods to the new Soviet approach could be lengthened, and confusion could be widened if Western political warfare adequately exploits this unique opportunity. Nevertheless, the climate of political relaxation in non-Communist governments and the prospect of broader interpretation of the Communist objectives will enable the leaders of these parties and fronts to maneuver overtly with a minimum degree of obnoxiousness, while covertly strengthening their cadres for the tasks ahead.

15. It is suggested that the long-range result of the 20th CPSU Congress will turn out to be beneficial from the Communist point of view - provided the lack of tension does not soften the movement's hard core vanguard. The Soviet approach is realistic and ingenious. It takes into account military facts of life. It explores the increased stature of the Communist part of the world and the nationalistic sensitivities of the former "colonial

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and semi-colonial" countries. It feels strong enough to engage the US in an economic popularity contest. It tries hard, and not altogether unsuccessfully, to raise the level of Communist respectability. On the other hand, it does not hesitate to stir up trouble in areas of political vacuum, such as the Middle East, if it can thereby advance its influence to hitherto closed parts of the world. Unless it is stopped, it will do the same in Latin America and Africa. Altogether, Moscow, under Stalin, has learned its lesson. It now uses psychology, taking initiatives designed to put the West on the defense. With this strategy, and appropriate tactics, it appears hopeful of a bloodless victory over a system which, in the Communist belief, is doomed to collapse sooner or later - probably sooner.

16. The question arises whether the new Soviet-Communist line will require more of an organization than is presently at its disposal. Not enough is known about the intricacies of Communist international communications to come to definite conclusions. Overtly at least, the Soviet missions abroad avoid contact with national Party and Front leaders. Covert connections exist to provide personnel guidance, policy directives, and financial assistance. This machinery, however, is expensive, cumbersome, haphazard, and dangerous. Thus the problem may arise how to give comprehensive guidance to the apparatus in different countries whose political, social and economic developments vary. Better means of overall coordination may have to be developed. It is therefore possible that sometime in the future a new device may be put into operation which would take care of

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Communist communication in a more systematic way. This would probably not be an organization as such. Rather, it might be an international Party "conference", possibly under an "innocent" cover, and conceivably with participation of non-Communist Marxists, set up to transmit policy directives and solve operational problems. Such a "conference" would be particularly necessary if the Communist leaders came to the conclusion that the relaxation of tensions had produced a slackening of Party discipline and a deterioration of Communist resourcefulness. This possibility raises certain fundamental questions: Can Communism withstand the changes resulting from the 20th Party Congress without losing its revolutionary zeal? Is there in preparation a "mellowing process" which in time will bring about a metamorphosis of Communism? Or, is the present line merely a gigantic shift of tactics, imposed by the development of nuclear weapons and their jet-propelled delivery and made possible by both the greater strength of the Communist bloc and the emerging independence of former colonial nations?

17. We cannot but assume that the Communist leaders would reject a "mellowing" process. They will try to do all in their power to prevent it from developing. Their only concept of Communist metamorphosis is linked to the shift from socialism to Communism, i. e. from the dictatorship of the proletariat to a classless society. They are likely to seek a period of some years of relaxation during which they can extend their influence with the help of overt respectability while building up and toughening their covert organizations and, what is more important, strengthen-

ing the overall potential of the USSR. At the same time, they might also consider the usefulness of permitting the Satellites a greater show of independence. As national states, remaining under veiled Soviet control, they would testify to Moscow's good faith. They might assist in the development of relations with Western Europe, possibly through their own liberated socialists who might be put in touch with Free World socialist parties. This would greatly advance the United Front tactic on an international scale. But all these measures would be designed only to further basic Communist objectives. Since violence has characterized Communist actions in the past, subtler methods could be mistaken, even by Party members, as an indication of "mellowing". Nothing would be farther from Soviet-Communist intentions.

18. There is, however, an outside chance that Khrushchev's newer course, deviating as it were from the irreconcilable, aggressive precepts of Lenin and Stalin, may carry the germs of revolutionary paralysis within itself. It is conceivable that a psychological transformation could vitiate the Marxist doctrine of historical materialism. Once freed from the confines of permanent tensions, mental attitudes may develop which could become stronger than Communist faith and discipline. Such a transformation would be slow, at first hardly noticeable, but it might work itself up persistently from the grass roots to the "leading circles". It is impossible to estimate how long such a process would need to become apparent, nor is it possible to foresee its ultimate outcome. Much would depend upon the character of future Soviet leadership.

19. The premise for a successful Communist holding operation is the continuation in power of the CPSU's Presidium as presently constituted. The shrewd "old Bolsheviks" will ruthlessly (and noiselessly) suppress any evidence of "mellowing". Nor can it be expected that the middle and higher ranks of functionaries and officers have any intention of jeopardizing their position by crowding the present leaders. It is futile to speculate on the character of the regime which will succeed today's collective leaders, but it is possible that the present constellation may last 5-10 years, provided "peaceful coexistence" continues. If antibiotics of transformation have penetrated the Communist body politic, their effect, if any, probably will not show during this period. If transformation is permitted to come to the surface later, it will do so very slowly, almost unnoticeably. It may be a generation or two before tangible changes become apparent. Moreover, any major disruptive event, such as internal upheavals or local wars, would be likely to interrupt the healing process. Thus it cannot be expected that a "mellowing process" could become effective during the next decade. Nor is it overly pessimistic to predict that a healthy transformation of Communism into a movement of constructive social endeavors cannot be expected in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile we shall be compelled to continue warding off a diabolically clever opponent whose ingenuity and resourcefulness, unfortunately, is growing.

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