

Brezhnev balancing act works for now

By Louis Menashe

New York. In the Soviet Union wags call him Ilyich II, since he has the same patronymic as Vladimir Lenin. Another image plays on his bushy eyebrows; drop them to his upper lip and behold a previous general secretary of the Soviet Communist party who made that office the awesome position it is today.

In the case of Lenin, the resemblance is purely accidental. But comparing Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev to Josef Stalin is a bit like seeing the resemblance between first cousins: Yes, the features are there, yet the set of the jaw and the tone of the voice make them somehow different.

Leonid Brezhnev, and the system he bosses—acared within Stalinist structures of bureaucratic management and political terror—have moved far enough away from those structures to accommodate changes in Soviet society and its new global roles, but not far enough away to repudiate them altogether.

This neat balancing act—requiring great political circumspection both at home and abroad and keyed to the sensibilities, power and privileges of the party and state apparatus—has marked the Brezhnev formula ever since he helped unseat Nikita Khrushchev, who lacked both tact and respect for the bureaucracy, 12 years ago.

The Brezhnev formula represents a politics of the middle ground.

Abroad, it means avoiding confrontations with the U.S., even collaborating with Washington where possible, all the while rendering arms and economic assistance to "progressive" movements or established revolutionary regimes in the Third World. It also means keeping the powder dry on the Sino-Soviet border, but also keeping the door open to a possible rapprochement with Peking.

At home, it means avoiding economic innovation but seeking cosmetic means to touch up established patterns. It has throttled the dissident movement at little expense—not by resurrecting Gulag but by systematically exiling the most outspoken figures, confining others to psychiatric wards and intimidating the rest.

By comparison with the Stalin era convulsions and the Khrushchev era experiments, this is a regime trying to catch its breath.

►At 70, he has survived.

Under Brezhnev the aim has been to settle down, to enjoy the benefits conferred by great-power status as American ability to shape the world declines and to keep intact the main structures of Soviet political rule and economic order against all pressures for change. At 70, Brezhnev has survived bouts of ill health as well as his share of political embarrassments to achieve this aim, on the surface at least.

In 1964, Soviet party chiefs plucked Brezhnev from his prominent but politically powerless position as USSR president to replace Khrushchev as general secretary.

Khrushchev himself was faulted for "subjectivism, voluntarism, boastfulness and 'from above-ness'" and was too fond of "harebrained schemes." It was not just a matter of style; Khrushchev was playing havoc with the bureaucracy's morale and functioning: In search of economic efficiency, he split the party into cadres responsible for industry and for agriculture. He upset the central economic ministries by pushing regional economic councils. He threatened central economic planners by encouraging debates on profitability and market performance for industrial enterprises.

Not only was such juggling not working, but the class interests of definite strata were being bruised.

Official ideology and political structure—the ultimate ramparts of class interests—were for the first time in decades under attack. Khrushchev had inadvertently led the way by denouncing Stalin



and letting dissidence flourish—often openly and in print—in the arts, sciences, literature and in potentially explosive academic disciplines like history.

The dissidence at home paralleled threats to Moscow's hegemony in the world Communist movement. Khrushchev botched relations with the Chinese, toward whom he behaved arrogantly and crudely, producing the gravest rift in the socialist bloc.

Finally, Khrushchev's strategy of peaceful coexistence with the West lacked finesse and could not conceal basic Soviet weaknesses in weapons systems and logistic capabilities on a global scale.

When push came to shove, the USSR could not put teeth into militant rhetoric, as in the Congo in 1960 or Cuba in 1962. The incautious challenge to the Kennedy administration over Cuba brought the two powers frightfully close to nuclear war and probably had as much to do with Khrushchev's downfall as his domestic missteps.

►The conservatives triumph.

Ousting Khrushchev represented the triumph of the Communist party's conservative apparatus. The career apparatchik, Brezhnev, was picked to undo Khrushchev's experiments and roll things back to more stable economic and political grounds.

Brezhnev—ironically a Khrushchev protégé—had made his way up in the party of the '30s when Stalin was annihilating the old Bolshevik cadres. He is, par excellence, the representative of the powerful functionaries who blossomed under Stalin. Their concern has been less with revolutionary transformation of Soviet society than with steady economic growth and development; less with revolutionary challenges to U.S. imperialism than with competition with it over spheres of economic and political influence.

A symbolic touchstone for judging

their attitudes lies in their view of Stalin historically and personally, and in their anxieties over de-Stalinization.

While willing to allow that Stalin had committed crimes and "excesses" and had nearly wrecked the party, they also feel that Khrushchev had gone too far in dismantling his reputation. His reputation, after all, was the historical source for their political legitimacy.

With characteristic balance, they quietly halted de-Stalinization and went about restoring what they considered the positive parts of the Stalin record. Since 1970 a large bust of Stalin looks down on visitors to the Kremlin wall, letting them know that he has been rehabilitated.

Brezhnev, then, heads what may be described as a para-Stalinist system. The critical question confronting the Brezhnev regime—more to the point, confronting its successors—is how long can the old modes contain and manage the inherent dynamism of Soviet society and the global forces of change? And, from a socialist viewpoint, how can those modes operate without seriously impairing the possibilities for a democratic socialism in the USSR?

►Detente a sham solution.

Economic development is one vital area of concern. Detente smooths the way to capital and technology from the West. The Brezhnev government has seen this as a relatively painless and simple method of streamlining the Soviet economy without tampering with institutions. Yet this is a sham solution; the problems run deeper.

For one thing, Soviet ability to finance such assistance on the scale necessary for real modernization is limited. Soviet manufactured goods lack the volume or quality to penetrate Western markets and earn "hard currency" to pay for Western hardware.

The West can either wrest political and other concessions in return for credit or take Soviet gold reserves and raw materials like petroleum—not exactly a comfortable or advantageous relationship for a developing socialist economy.

Soviet dissidents ranging from the liberal Sakharov to the Marxist Medvedev have pointed out that the Soviet economy's real problems cannot be patched up this way. Improving worker morale, breaking up rigid and wasteful bureaucratic structures, speeding up the free flow of knowledge and information among the scientific and technical intelligentsia go to the heart of the matter—and cry out for political reforms.

Sophisticated, computerized econometric techniques imported from Western capitalism might improve the performance of the planned Soviet economy, but socialist planning implies an economy of public choice and resource allocation by the producers themselves—again a political question.

It is difficult to see political reforms in the direction of socialist democracy coming from above, from within the Brezhnev regime. In coming years, however, pressures for such reform will mount inexorably, especially from outside sources.

Eastern Europe has always been a crucible challenging Soviet-style dogmas and coercive patterns. Yet its possible role as a conduit for fresh ideas to the USSR is limited geopolitically. Moscow has not hesitated to resort to direct intervention to stamp out heresy there, as the Czech example demonstrated.

"Eurocommunism" is an entirely different matter. The spectre of an independent Italian or French communism, beyond Moscow's reach, challenging Soviet habits and ways of looking at the world from within a pro-Soviet political tradition can have powerful repercussions in the USSR.

Several interesting trends came together at a recent public rally in Paris in defense of victims of political repression. A French Communist party representative shared the platform with Leonid Plyushch, the exiled Soviet dissident, and Jiri Pelikan, a former Central Committee member of the Czech Communist party under Alexander Dubcek, to speak out for, among others, jailed Soviet dissidents.

So far, Brezhnev has been a master at holding the line. The task of holding to dead center, of resisting the trends symbolized by the Paris rally, will not be so simple for his successors.

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Soviet leader lauded at 70

Moscow. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev celebrated his 70th birthday Dec. 19 with a crescendo of praise and honor that put him firmly among the all-time "greats" of official Communist history.

In the lead-up to the birthday, the party general secretary was given the military rank of marshal, called the "Vozhd" or "Supreme Leader" of the Soviet people and portrayed as the brain behind all the country's successes.

Already the adulation campaign has outstripped that launched before the 70th birthday of Brezhnev's immediate predecessor, Nikita Khrushchev, in April 1964.

The amount of attention being lavished on the Kremlin chief is in fact approaching that paid to Josef Stalin who was 70 in 1949 and was the last top leader to be described publicly with the emotive ancient Russian term of "Vozhd."

—Reuter

A fight for the streets that no



Photo by Ken Firestone

Prostitution and the community

By Judy MacLean
National Staff Writer

It's mostly women on both sides of the fight. Community women see getting prostitutes off the streets as the key to neighborhood survival. For streetwalkers, staying on the streets means personal survival.

Last summer the conflict became suddenly acute in a number of cities.

"It just all of a sudden got worse this summer," Maude Phillips says about prostitution in the MacArthur section of Oakland, Calif.

She and her neighbors organized to put pressure on the Oakland police department. Arrests in the area went way up and now it's relatively prostitute-free during the day.

"But they still do their work after 10:30 at night. My son's always chasing johns out of the back yard. Pimps will be whipping them back there too. And in the morning the streets are filled with paper," she says.

Nearby neighborhoods in Berkeley have had an influx of streetwalkers since Phillips' coalition became active.

►Cleaning up Times Square.

New York's Times Square has been "famous" for prostitution for some time, but this year it got "worse than ever," says Helen Becker, a hairdresser who works at 42nd and Broadway. Angry residents have teamed with storekeepers and theater people to form a coalition to "clean up" the square. On Nov. 15, 1,200 of them marched along the streets, scaring away the usual street people. A sign in a block club window read, "If you're here to pick up a whore your license number will be traced and a letter sent to your wife."

Rev. Robert Rappleyea, a community leader, predicts, "This is only the beginning of the battle. The long-range plans are to declare war. It's come down to a question of survival. People think prostitution is a victimless crime, but it's not. The crime rate in this community is 69 percent higher than in New York as a whole."

In Detroit, says Mary Ellis, of the North Woodward area, "It reached a point of no return this summer."

She and her neighbors—white, black, oriental and arab—joined together and hit the streets every night in groups to picket prostitutes and scare off johns.

"We were out there every night until 2:30 or 3 in the morning," she says.

Word spread, and they formed a coalition. When prostitutes moved to another neighborhood, Ellis's group went there and helped residents picket. They also put pressure on nearby motels to stop renting to prostitutes and demanded more police enforcement and more prosecution by judges.

►It's discrimination still.

The NAACP was one group that joined.

"It's no different, making a black woman get in the back of the bus in the South or in the back seat of a car for sex in Detroit; it's discrimination," executive secretary Joe Madison says. As in most cities the majority of Detroit's streetwalkers are black. White woman work as "call girls," in hotels, bars and "massage parlors."

The coalition pressured the *Detroit News* to publish the names of convicted clients in the prostitution report.

"A lot were white men from the suburbs," Madison points out.

They pressured judges to prosecute johns as well as hookers.

"Prostitution is profitable," Madison says. "You get rid of johns, you'll get rid of prostitution, and you'll curtail the problems of drugs and criminal elements."

Madison, like all community residents interviewed, was relatively unconcerned about the fate of Detroit's streetwalkers.

"I guess they just moved to other cities," he says.

"We have by no means cleaned it up," Ellis says, "but we got it off the street."

►A desire to be neighbors.

Stephen Taylor, a Detroit lawyer, says community groups were successful in certain neighborhoods, but they didn't touch indoor prostitution. Taylor believes the effort to eliminate streetwalkers will be futile. He also believes prostitution is none of the state's business. Yet he feels efforts by community groups, though not directed at Detroit's real problems, can be positive.

"The city needs something," he says, "and it springs from a desire to have neighbors and be a neighbor."

In Chicago, anger by community groups last summer resulted in the "Big Sweep" by police. But mostly it just chased women from one neighborhood to another. Cold weather has brought a lessening of the conflict.

The same situations are duplicated in cities all over the U.S. There are varying opinions as to why the sudden increase this year.

►Unemployment is responsible.

Cassie Lopez of Oakland Neighborhood Coalition blames the "terrible unemployment problems" in the area.

Capt. Francis Daly of New York's police youth division says high teenage unemployment drives more young women 16 and 17 into the city every day—and the only way to survive is prostitution.

Randy Newby, spokeswoman for "Coyote," an organization of and for prostitutes in San Francisco, says she gets calls every day from secretaries who've lost their jobs and are ready to hit the streets. They want to know how to keep from getting caught or hurt.

The proliferation of massage parlors has cut into the streetwalker's business. Capt. Lawrence Hepburn of New York prostitution squad says. The women, their numbers already swollen, are forced to work longer hours and become more aggressive.

"Unemployment hits black women hardest," Madison says. "It's clearly discrimination. These women can't get the kind of jobs they want."

John F. Decker, who teaches at DePaul College of Law in Chicago and has done research into prostitution, cites something else: a more permissive sexual atmosphere in the U.S. sends many middle-aged married men to streetwalkers.

"They ask, 'what have I missed?'" he says. "They have been bombarded with sexual stimulation ranging from movies like 'Deep Throat' to the shocking sexual behavior of their own children," he says.

►A red light district needed?

Opinions also vary about what should be done. Some say a red light district, surrounded by a nonresidential area, is the answer.

But in Boston, recent events in the "Combat Zone," just such a district, have made that seem less tenable. When the Harvard football team was visiting last night, two were killed. The city was shocked—not, evidently, that the football team was there, but at the level of organized crime, violence and police corruption that was exposed.

Others point to Detroit's zoning laws which require 51 percent of surrounding residents and businesses to agree to the opening of sex shops and "adult" bookstores. The laws and militant community action have apparently chased prostitutes to more lenient cities, but if every city tried it, it would just up the ante and prostitution would probably return somehow.

Just as residents seem unsympathetic to the situation of streetwalkers, the few people who defend prostitutes seem unconcerned about the effects on the community.

The ACLU has been a staunch supporter of the rights of streetwalkers. They have initiated court cases against anti-loitering and other laws aimed at prostitutes.

When New York ACLU chair Edwin J. Ennis' neighborhood became a haven for streetwalkers, he announced he would move, hardly a solution for a whole neighborhood.

►It's the johns' fault.

Newby says women are raised to believe their position in life is to go to bed with a man one way or another. Then women who can't get other jobs become hookers to survive.