

An Empire in Convulsion

IN the last few weeks the world has been subjected to an avalanche of staggering events the outcome of which is not yet in sight. What had initially borne the earmarks of an accelerated but orderly retreat from rigid Stalinism soon degenerated into a nightmarish bloodbath, still rampant as these lines are written. After making concessions to "national communism" in Poland, Moscow is now reported to be subjecting its government to various forms of pressure, all designed to forestall extensive administrative and economic reforms. Soon after the official promise to withdraw its troops from the satellites, the Soviet dictatorship brands the thousands of men, women, and children fighting and dying in Hungary as "fascists," "landlords," and "counterrevolutionaries," brazenly defending its bloody intervention as the "correct position of proletarian internationalism."

Will the brutal suppression of the Hungarian revolution and strong-arm tactics in Poland spell the end of the "thaw" that has been spreading through the length and breadth of the Soviet empire? Or will there be a return to a process of controlled relaxation once the Soviet Union is convinced that it is not threatened with immediate annihilation and that naked force is no substitute for rational economic and political policies? These are some of the outstanding questions that are anxiously raised at this time. But before some tentative answers are advanced, a brief sketch of the forces that underlie the current crisis would seem to be in order.

UNTIL the eruption of violence at the end of October, the Stalinist system at home and abroad showed every sign of a gradual and inexorable disintegration. Seen in retrospect, this disintegration was due to a number of causes, all of them important, though asserting themselves at different times, and with differing effects. The first lay in the fact that the social and economic factors that did much to determine Stalinist policies have been playing an ever-diminishing role. Chief among these factors was the overall backwardness of Russian society, and

its atomization following the upheavals of 1914-1918. This is not to say, as some commentators do, that these factors made totalitarianism inevitable, but to the extent that they did exist, they surely helped to shape the specific form of Stalinist totalitarianism. To industrialize the country in the direction and with the speed desired by the dictatorship, forced collectivization had to be employed. Wholesale collectivization, in turn, was intimately connected with coercion, bloodshed, ruthlessness, a centralized economy—all hallmarks of the Stalinist system. Once Russia emerged as a powerful and in many respects modern industrial state, some of its original social and economic compulsions were bound to become less and less operative.

As Soviet society has changed, so has the Soviet dictatorship. And what was useful and rational—from the Kremlin's point of view—became less useful, less rational—indeed, at times, even dangerous. The Stalin reign was marked by a number of features, which in the hands of an arbitrary dictator eventually became liabilities rather than assets. The Stalin cult, which at first played a rational role in legitimizing the rule of the Leader, was gradually getting out of hand. Suspicion and terror, which at first helped to consolidate the Stalinist power apparatus, finally threatened to become a socially disruptive and uncontrollable force. Massive coercion, which facilitated the process of collectivization and the creation of Soviet military might, became, as time went on, an impediment to the growth of the Soviet economy. To eradicate these irrational elements, which comprised what may be called the "senescence of Stalinism," became in many respects an imperative from which the new Soviet leadership could only shrink at its own peril.

The reasons for the post-Stalin changes would thus seem to be a mixture of objective and subjective factors, of irresistible forces as well as conscious engineering, of expedient adaptation to reality as well as deliberate attempts to steer it along new channels. They cannot be explained entirely either as tactical

shifts or as policies deliberately staged by this or that faction within the Soviet hierarchy in their internecine struggle for power. Both elements undoubtedly play their roles in the present situation, but though the stress on incentives to peasants, in lieu of continuous repression, may be regarded as a change in tactics, the same surely cannot apply to the dismantling of concentration camps in the USSR. And while Malenkov may very well have represented the interests of certain groups in Soviet society, and his downfall the rise of a different group, the fact remains that it was his successor, Khrushchev, at first considered an arch-Stalinist, who gave the anti-Stalin campaign its greatest impetus. Khrushchev's reversal (or, say, that of Ochab in Poland) may be pure opportunism, but it has important roots that go beyond the machinations of the individuals in question.

The disintegration of Stalinism, described above, has until now been controlled—and even, as pointed out, desired and initiated—by the Soviet leadership. Internally, this situation still holds true. There has been a significant degree of continuity of post-Stalin measures in the USSR in almost all areas of public life. Even the Khrushchev assault on Stalin may be regarded essentially as an intensification of a process that took three years to mature. Stalinism, after all, had become not only a symbol, not only a “cult,” but a method of government, a mode of behavior, a system of thought and action that had penetrated into every institutional facet of Soviet society. “The cult of the individual fettered the search of the inquiring mind and set limits on scientific research,” says *Partiinaiia Zbiza*, No. 9, of May 1956. “The cult of the individual did grave harm to the country's defensive capacity,” declares *Krasnaia Zvezda* of July 19. “As a result of the cult of the individual negative phenomena have become rooted in the work of party and Soviet bodies and in the methods of leadership,” according to *Kommunist*, No. 10, August 1956. There is no reason to doubt the underlying truth of these statements—or understatement . . . And there is good reason to believe that the Soviet leaders had come to the conclusion that many of these problems must be tackled—and tackled head-on, through the customary method of ‘shturmovschina,’ or all-out assault.

IT is externally, however, that the breakdown of Stalinism has become so conspicuous these past few months—and so dramatic. The use of force in Hungary can only be understood against the background of the manifest failure of Stalinist policy in Eastern Europe, and in relation to the numerous concessions

that the Soviets have been compelled to make to their erstwhile underlings. Furthermore, Moscow's decision to drown the Hungarian revolution in blood, taken after a period of hesitation and attempted conciliation, must not obscure the fact that in the long run Stalinism would prove viable only at an enormous price, one that the Soviet leaders may well not be willing to pay.

The Soviet concessions to Poland, and the declaration of October 30 promising to discuss with the governments of the “peoples republics” the question of the withdrawal of Soviet advisers and troops, underlined Moscow's readiness to come to terms with the liberalization movement sweeping through Eastern Europe—provided it did not go too far. Clearly, the Hungarian revolution, responsive to its own elemental forces and not to the limits prescribed in Moscow, did go “too far,” and consequently Soviet Russia resorted to wholesale terror in order to suppress it and prevent its entire East European empire from falling apart. But does this mean a full-scale return to Stalinist methods *via-à-vis* the satellites, and the complete end of controlled liberalization? As grim and tragic as the situation may look at this moment, it would seem as if the answer to this question should be in the negative. For one thing, Stalinism has *never* meant brute force alone, but force enveloped in a myth of “popular support,” the “elimination of elements hostile to the masses,” *etc.* Soviet seizure of Hungary—or for that matter any other satellite—did not occur overnight, but progressed piecemeal, through the use of what Rakosi had dubbed “salami tactics,” *i. e.*, the gradual liquidation of all existing or potential enemy forces, under all sorts of hypocritical pretexts, and to the tune of innumerable promises and ideological rationalizations. The promises have now been exploded, the pretexts shown up for what they were, the ideological rationalizations pulverized by the simple fact that force, and only brute force, was used to gain what threats, cajolery and lies could not achieve. The Soviets realize that a return to a Stalinist position could be accomplished only through the use of the essence, but not the trappings of Stalinist politics; and it was on the trappings that their appeal had depended so much in the past. Now it is obvious, however, that never again will the captive peoples in Eastern Europe accept Soviet promises and prevarications. And it is doubtful whether the Soviet leaders would consider it either desirable or practical to keep down by brute force alone what will undoubtedly develop into a continuous movement of passive resistance.

In addition, whatever the innate Soviet contempt for either the views of Communist parties abroad, or for world opinion at large, the fact remains that they can ill afford to disregard them altogether. In particular, they cannot, in the long run, afford to antagonize the very powers in Asia whom they so blatantly have been trying to woo. Their present action in Hungary may have been obscured—at least as far as some parts of the world are concerned—by Anglo-French action in the Middle East. But a *continuous* reign of terror cannot be hidden—or rationalized—forever. Already the Communist world has been rocked by mass defections (*e. g.*, in Italy), angry protests from leaders (in Austria), and genuine soul-searching among intellectual elements (in France). And while Asian opinion, by and large, has thus far been insufficiently outraged by the Soviet massacre in Hungary, it is safe to assume that repercussions in that part of the world will sooner or later make themselves felt as well.

All things considered, therefore, it is possible to assume that Moscow will eventually have to come to terms with reality—and make the best of it. For the outstanding feature of the present situation is that it represents a natural result of the erosion of an empire that began with the death of the man who had held it together—and that cannot easily be brought to a halt. The same forces that have generated the disin-

tegration of the Stalinist system at home are also at work in the Stalinist empire *in toto*. And as in the case of internal destalinization, the Soviet leaders—whoever they will be—will probably have to reconcile themselves to existing trends—in this case, the growing independence of their former vassals. The process of reconciliation has, for the time being, suffered a setback, and it is more than likely that in the immediate future there will be a resurgence of the type of approach and mentality that the world had grown accustomed to under the reign of the omnipotent Stalin. The duration and precise nature of this approach will depend to a significant extent on the kind of reception it receives from the powers that have thus far successfully resisted Communist expansion in Europe and Asia. Should the Soviet leaders see that the flare-up of militancy is—as in the case of Stalinist aggression—leading them into a blind alley, the earlier pressures for gradual relaxation will be bound to reassert themselves with even greater vigor than hitherto. It will be at that time that we may see the further disintegration of the Stalinist Monolith and the emergence of a new *genre* of communism—in the ultimate sense no less abhorrent to the goals and ideals of a democratic society, but certainly different from the type the world has known until now.

A. B

What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? . . .

1. When it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule in an unchanged form; when there is a crisis in one form or another among the upper classes, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class which causes fissures through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth . . .
2. When the want and suffering of the oppressed classes have become more acute than usual.
3. When, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses who in "peace time" quietly allow themselves to be robbed, but who in turbulent times are drawn both by the circumstance of the crisis and by the "upper classes" themselves into independent historical action.

—V. I. Lenin, *"Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International,"* 1916.

Ferment in the Communist Orbit

Editors' Note: As this issue was being prepared for press, it was already apparent that the destalinization campaign initiated by Moscow last February had set off a chain reaction of increasing ferment throughout the Communist world. Nowhere, however, was there anticipation of the lightning eruption of that ferment into the terrible yet inspiring drama which has unfolded in Eastern Europe in recent weeks, shaking the Communist world to its foundations. In the immediacy of this crisis, it is impossible to predict what the repercussions of events in Hungary and Poland will be. One thing alone is certain: the profound heroism of the Hungarian people in their struggle for freedom, and the brutal suppression of that revolt by Russian tanks and guns, has revealed, as nothing before, the naked force on which Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe depends.

In the article below, the eminent political analyst Richard Lowenthal reviews the developments which led up to the East European crisis and offers a tentative analysis of its possible

impact on Kremlin policy. As he shows, the question is no longer one of defining the limits of post-Stalin "democratization" and "liberalization" but of wondering whether these "Khrushchev" policies can survive at all. On the other hand, events in Poland leave room for hope that the powerful impetus toward greater freedom from Soviet domination, put in motion by the "destalinization" program, will be carried forward. A second article by Alexander Korab discusses the developing Polish situation up to the time of Mr. Gomulka's assumption of power.

The less dramatic but nevertheless significant impact of "destalinization" on Communist China is discussed in a third article by G. F. Hudson, who also addresses himself to the problem of future Sino-Soviet relations. The latter two articles were written prior to the crisis in Hungary, though an attempt has been made to add crucial information where necessary.

Revolution Over Eastern Europe

By RICHARD LOWENTHAL

TWELVE years after the Russian armies first established Soviet rule over Eastern Europe, the empire founded by Stalin has been shaken by a revolutionary earthquake of altogether unimagined force and scope. The tragic outcome of the Hungarian revolution must not blind us to the fact that both in Hungary and Poland, essentially revolutionary movements for the first time not only have broken the surface of totalitarian uniformity, but have in their different ways achieved an unprecedented measure of success. Moreover, they have done so entirely on the basis of the crises and contradictions which had developed within the Soviet orbit, without the aid of international conflict and indeed despite international diversions favor-

able to the Soviet rulers. The "national Communist" canalization of the Polish movement and the bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising may restore outward calm for the moment, but the Soviet East European empire will never be the same again. Nor can this shattering blow fail to have profound repercussions both on Soviet relations with the non-Communist world and on political developments within the Soviet Union itself.

What was new in the October revolutions of 1956 was not that the national and social grievances of two enslaved peoples fused in a powerful outburst of mass revolt; that had happened before—in Pilsen and in the whole of Eastern Germany in June 1953 and in Poznan in June 1956. What was new—and, indeed, as unexpected as it was unprecedented—was that the popular movement for freedom managed in Poland to impose on the Communist Party, and through it on

Mr. Lowenthal is chief political analyst for the London *Observer* and a noted authority on East European affairs. His latest contribution to *Problems of Communism*, "Three Roads to Power," appeared in the July-August issue of this year.