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COMMITTEE OF POLITICAL ADVISERS

THE CRISIS IN SOVIET-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS

Comments by the Canadian Delegation on AC/119-WP(58)52/4

We wish to thank the French Delegation for submitting this careful analysis of Soviet-Yugoslav relations. We are greatly impressed by it and consider that examination of such important problems in the Political Advisers' Committee is a fruitful undertaking.

2. We have no criticism to make of the chronological survey. We likewise agree substantially with the subtle analysis of the evidence which suggests that the Chinese took the lead in the controversy and may have forced the breakdown in relations further and faster than Khrushchev may have wanted. We outline later in this paper further comments on this interpretation.

3. We should like first to comment on the thesis developed in Section II, Part 1 (p.16-18). While we agree with the cautious statement on page 18 that the publication of the Yugoslav Party Programme was used by certain elements in the Sino-Soviet Bloc to force a showdown with the Yugoslavs, we do not think that this disproves the argument that the publication of the programme in a certain sense precipitated the crisis. In our view there is some truth in the Sino-Soviet charge that the Yugoslav Party, in formulating the Party Programme, had broken the Bucharest Agreement. The implication of this argument is that the Yugoslav leaders were not unaware of the possible ramifications of publishing a party programme at the time they chose to do so and that they were prepared to accept the anticipated consequences. In order to develop this argument it is necessary briefly to review developments with Yugoslavia and in Soviet-Yugoslav relations following the Belgrade Declaration of 1955.

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4. Soviet-Yugoslav relations after the 1955 reconciliation never achieved a state of stable equilibrium. Strong mutual suspicion remained, particularly after Yugoslavia's criticism, albeit cautious, of Soviet intervention in Hungary. The Moscow Declaration of June 1956, in which both parties agree to accept "comradely criticism" had to be replaced by the Bucharest Agreement of August 1957 in which both sides undertook to remain silent on the subject of the other's form of Communism. In the following months the Soviet Union adhered so carefully to this arrangement that its silence got on Yugoslav nerves. Tito even complained in public that the Soviet press never mentioned Yugoslavia.

5. These suspicions at the higher level did not prevent the development of confusion at lower levels of the Yugoslav Party. In the months that followed the Khrushchev-Tito talks in Bucharest, growing domestic pressures were forcing Yugoslavia closer to the Soviet Bloc. There was a recognition of the failure of Communism to attract youth, and of the need to revivify the Party. Attempts to stiffen party and state discipline, taking such forms as a trial of harmless old men, led to greater isolation from the West. Difficulties in its foreign exchange position forced Yugoslavia to increase its economic links with the Bloc and the desire to avoid difficulty with minorities led it to seek friendlier relations with its Communist neighbours. There was, it would seem, a growing realisation on the part of the Yugoslav leadership that these steps might lead to Yugoslavia's becoming inextricably involved with the Bloc. A determined move had to be made if this danger were to be avoided and the Party established on a firm ideological foundation.

6. It is in this context that the Yugoslav decision to formulate a party programme must be analysed. A party programme is an important document and this programme was only the third in the history of the Yugoslav Party, the first having been prepared about 1920 and the second in 1948 immediately after the break with Moscow (the Soviet Party, for example, has issued only one programme and that in 1919). Though in one sense there was nothing new in the Yugoslav Party Programme, a programme is a credo or systematic statement of faith and as such cannot be overlooked by any Communist, as can less formal statements of policy. To make sure that it was not overlooked, the Yugoslavs distributed copies in all Communist states (80,000 in China alone as the paper points out) and directly invited comment.

7. It has been reported that the Polish Party endeavoured privately to dissuade the Yugoslavs from issuing the programme, which had been in preparation for a year, on the grounds that it was bound to provoke a dispute. The Yugoslav leaders must have had important reasons for disregarding this advice. They may have hoped that a firm line on domestic policy would overcome the

uncertainty and lack of discipline among the party rank and file. In international affairs it is possible that they felt the need to answer the Twelve Party Declaration of November 1957. Another object may have been to formulate a line of demarcation which would have been clear to Yugoslav Communists so that Yugoslavia could more safely co-operate with the Soviet Bloc and yet remain independent.

8. This analysis suggests that the Yugoslav leaders had considered the possible Soviet reaction and had decided that the risk had to be taken. It is probable that the Yugoslavs had not taken into account the strong Chinese reaction, which seems to have pushed the break in relations much further than might otherwise have been the case. Certainly the violence of the Yugoslav response to Chinese condemnation has been stronger than its response to Soviet criticism.

9. In another respect, too, there is a possibility that the Yugoslav leaders miscalculated. It is not to be excluded that Khrushchev's elevation to the premiership may have encouraged the Yugoslavs to hope that his more flexible attitude might result in passive acceptance by the Bloc of their programme. Some such explanation is required to account for the sudden decision, apparently taken immediately after Khrushchev's elevation to premiership, that Tito should meet Kadar and visit Poland, and Voroshilov should be invited to Yugoslavia. In view of the fact that all steps - apart from the publication of the programme - contributing to the rupture have been taken by the USSR or China, it is to be assumed that the Yugoslav leaders were not seeking a breach with the Soviet Bloc for its own sake. They wanted a new party programme, and were perhaps prepared to accept a breach if it could not be avoided.

10. It is an inevitable feature of controversies between Marxist states that both sides should attempt to represent any breakdown as being the entire fault of the other side. The paper well points out that there seems to have been an element of blackmail in the policy of the USSR during the period prior to the Yugoslav Party Conference. In our view, some reference might be made to those instances where Yugoslavia could be accused of a similar lack of candour. Although the Soviet Party informed the Yugoslav Party on 5th April that they would not be attending the Congress, the Yugoslavs continued until the USSR made their decision public on 18th April to pretend that a Soviet delegation would attend. It is possible that the Yugoslavs hoped until the last moment that the Soviet Party would change its mind and be represented at the Congress, but it could more readily be argued that the Yugoslav leaders had decided to play to the limit the part of the injured party - which they undoubtedly considered themselves to be.

11. Turning to the second part of the hypothetical section of the paper, we fully agree with the suggestions that Khrushchev may have been under Chinese pressure and may even have had to take a decisive stand against Yugoslavia in order to protect his own position. As the paper suggests, the contradictory nature of Soviet policy at that time can most effectively be explained by the hypotheses that there was domestic and inter-bloc controversy on basic issues. Khrushchev was after all particularly vulnerable at a time when he was making radical changes in the organization of industry and agriculture to the charge that he was being soft with Yugoslavia. In this connection we have been impressed with the renewal at that time of charges against the anti-party group.

12. It will be recollected that this hypothesis was generally accepted in Polish Party circles, as reported by a well-informed correspondent of the New York Times. The Yugoslav Party in contrast accepted the hypothesis that Khrushchev led the attack on Yugoslavia. But Yugoslav interpretations of Soviet intentions in this dispute are suspect because they were directly involved and had strong reason to adopt an interpretation which would not undermine the thesis that no responsibility attached to the Yugoslav Party for issuing the programme.

13. The French paper analyses in detail the different positions taken by the several parties of the Sino-Soviet Bloc. It might have suggested some of the conflicting national interests which may account for these differences. Thus Bulgaria and Albania, whose leaders have long been opposed to the Yugoslavs, both for national and doctrinal reasons, have entered into the controversy with enthusiasm. The Polish and Hungarian party leaders quite evidently fear the underlying doctrinal implications of the charges against Yugoslavia and their parties have tried to play down the dispute. The East German Party, which might have been expected to criticize the Yugoslav Party strongly has been restrained by the fear that Yugoslavia would break relations. The French paper points out the doctrinal reasons for China's strong attacks on Yugoslavia; one might also mention the undoubted desire of China, which has had no Soviet credits since 1954, to use the dispute as a way of securing a part of the large credits which the USSR had pledged to Yugoslavia.

14. Our comments suggest that national differences underlie the differing attitudes taken by the members of the Bloc. The same comments can be made of the Soviet position. The breach with Yugoslavia will work against Soviet policy in the uncommitted world, while the danger of revisionism is perhaps less severe in the USSR than in China or in some satellites. Indeed, it may well be that the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute represents an instance where Soviet responsibility for the Communist Bloc may have obliged it to follow a policy which runs counter to the USSR's national interest.

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