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WORKING GROUP ON TRENDS OF SOVIET POLICY

THE THAW IN EASTERN EUROPE

Note by the Secretary

The Political Division has prepared the attached paper for discussion by the Working Group at its next meeting, to be held on Tuesday, 18th September, 1956, at 10.30 a.m.

2. An agenda for the meeting will be circulated later in the week.

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THE THAW IN EASTERN EUROPE

The present paper is divided into two parts: the first section reviews the recent development of de-Stalinisation (the "Thaw") in the various East European Satellites; the second attempts a broader analysis of the entire picture, gives a summary and suggests certain questions which the thaw poses for the Western powers.

Part I

POLAND

The recent history of the Polish thaw up to the time of the Poznan riots was reviewed in the earlier paper, AC/34(56)WP/6. Developments since the riots have indicated that the régime intends to pursue the policy of liberalisation without in any way condoning the armed attacks against its representatives.

The leaders have acknowledged that "the bureaucracy" bears a considerable measure of responsibility for the conditions which led to the riots. It has made several moves toward alleviating the worst of those conditions, at least for the immediate future, including arrangements for a hard currency loan from the Soviet Union with which consumer goods could be purchased.

The régime has not, however, shifted its basic orientation away from high investments in heavy industry. It has been surprisingly frank in pointing out to the population that the 30% rise in real wages promised for 1960 will not make of Poland an earthly paradise. Ochab, in speaking to the workers of the Zispo factory where the trouble started, said very bluntly that people were mistaken in putting forward wage demands "as though our government were sitting on a sackful of gold".

Exactly what course will be followed with regard to the arrested rioters is not yet clear. The trials have been postponed into September. It appears that foreign observers will be permitted, the régime having declared that the trials will be open. However, requests for visas from the International Commission of Jurists have gone unanswered by the Polish authorities.

HUNGARY

Hungarian ferment - 1953-55

The background to the current ferment in Hungary is substantially different from that in Poland. During Stalin's lifetime, the régime in Hungary seemed to be one of the most "Stalinist" in Eastern Europe. Social and economic policies were as extreme as the rulers could possibly impose. The police terror and repression of the population were very severe. The government's attitude toward the West and toward Tito was most hostile. A "cult of the personality" on the Stalin model was developed around Rakosi, particularly after he had eliminated Rajk in a purge trial closely modelled on the Moscow trials of the thirties.

Then in the period just after Stalin's death, the pendulum swung back perhaps more sharply than in any other satellite. Rakosi became much less prominent, though he clearly retained considerable power. The "New Course" under a new leader, Imre Nagy, seemed to promise a substantial slackening of the pressure on the Hungarian people, especially in the economic field.

The "New Course" ended in confusion and disarray. The promised relief had not materialised and the people were at least as restive as before the rise of Nagy. Rakosi was returned to full authority and the screws were tightened again both in the economic area and in the general control of the population. However, the situation by no means reverted to what it had been before 1953. During the 16 months of Rakosi's second tour of duty (March 1955 - July 1956), a number of conflicting tendencies were apparent, as though the régime were not really clear about the course to be followed.

On the one hand the leaders plainly would have to get the country back on the pre-1953 programme of building heavy industry, pushing the rapid collectivisation of agriculture, and organizing a monolithic state and party on the Russian model. On the other hand they were not willing to use the sort of repression which would have been required to force Hungary back on to this line of development. It is not clear how far this restraint was the result of orders from Moscow, dissension within the leadership or increased resistance from below. Very likely all three factors were involved and interacted. In any case, from the beginning Rakosi seemed to be trying to steer a middle course between his old "hard" line and Nagy's excessive "softness".

Unrest among the intellectuals

Since late 1955 the signs have been multiplying that Rakosi's compromise was not working out. Criticism from below of various aspects of Hungarian life grew sharper and Rakosi reacted with a series of stern but ineffective calls for discipline.

As in Poland, it was the intellectuals within the Party whose complaints came to the attention of the outside world. In the Nagy period, there had been a measure of relaxation and Rakosi's efforts throughout 1955 were directed toward "containment" and "roll-back" of these dangerous tendencies. Toward the end of the year the intellectuals seemed to realise that the régime would not or could not turn loose on them its full powers of repression. They resumed the initiative at a meeting on 10th November of the Writers' Federation. The Party Central Committee in December roundly condemned this and earlier signs of "rightist deviation" - a striking contrast to the not unfriendly, though cautious, attitude of the Polish authorities. However, reprisals do not seem to have been taken against the individuals concerned.

The intellectuals in Hungary, as elsewhere behind the curtain, were emboldened by the Moscow Party Congress in February. Although the régime handled the dethronement of Stalin in a very restrained way, word of Khrushchev's speech was slowly disseminated and had its usual unsettling effect on Communists and sympathisers.

A meeting of the Writers' Union in March is reported to have been suspended and another meeting in April was no less hostile. Meanwhile a broader forum was developing in the meetings of the Petöfi Club. Apparently organized by the régime in March as a grouping of discussion circles, the Club had by June become the focus of complaints against the régime. A tumultuous all-night meeting on 27th June turned into a public demonstration against Rakosi and his policies.

Other political developments

A feeling of relative security against reprisals is necessary before intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain will speak out in even indirect criticism of the Party or régime. To a certain extent, the shake-up in the Hungarian secret police in 1953 served this function. The head policeman, Gabor Peter, was denounced for various crimes and linked to Beria. Rakosi's revived influence in 1955 brought some increase in police activity but evidently not a real wave of terror. Then following the Moscow Party Congress, there was renewed stress in the newspapers on "socialist legality". There has not, however, been any campaign on the Polish model against past abuses and those responsible for them.

There was an amnesty in Hungary which curiously enough coincided with the fall of Nagy (April 1955). It seems not to have had very significant results, at least for some time after its promulgation. However, in March 1956 Rakosi admitted that the notorious purge trial of Rajk and seven associates was an error. Subsequent reports indicated an increased tempo of releases from imprisonment, including some leading Social Democrats.

The Hungarian press in recent months has carried hints that some revival of the rôle of Parliament might be under consideration. As yet, however, this revival remains even more hypothetical than in Poland. There has also been greater emphasis on decentralisation of authority and on the rôle of the trade unions.

The fall of Rakosi

During the first half of 1956, the No. 1 political issue in Hungary was Rakosi - would he maintain his position or not? He was clearly unpopular, not to say reviled, among the masses as a whole. For them he personified the worst features of a bad régime. Among the intellectuals sympathetic to Communism he was looked on as an anachronism, a Stalinist survival who was blocking progress toward an improved "Hungarian" socialism. Even within the Central Committee of the Party there seem to have been critics of his methods. And of course he was anathema to Tito and, as such, was a real handicap to the Moscow drive for better relations with Yugoslavia.

On the other hand, it seems clear that he had considerable, though not unqualified support from the Soviet leaders. During the past spring the Russians made a series of gestures indicating their high opinion of Comrade Rakosi. For them he must have represented a very desirable force for stability and guarantee of pro-Soviet

orientation, especially welcome after the disorder of Nagy's last months. Rakosi should also have been able to count on the support of the top figures in the Party and government: they were his own creatures and had been for years closely associated with his policies and actions. They must have been aware of the difficulties inherent in Hungary's situation, difficulties calling for ruthless, able leadership.

As late as 1st July, the Central Committee resolution on the Petöfi club indicated that Rakosi was still in firm control and intended to crack down strongly on his critics. Then, for reasons which are not clear, though certainly related to the general considerations above, the balance suddenly shifted against him. On 18th July he announced that his health plus his past mistakes made his resignation as Party Secretary desirable.

The "new" régime

There seems to be little doubt that Rakosi's eclipse is definitive this time. Barring a bloc-wide revival of Stalinism, it does not seem possible for him to make yet another comeback.

The immediate effect of his departure has not been very great. His successor, Geroe, is a very old associate of Rakosi whose main field of activity has been economic. He is thus closely linked with the régime's policy of industrialising at all costs and stands for the maintenance of this policy in the Five Year Plan which has just begun. Although his first speech as Party Secretary contained some concessions to consumer needs, close examination indicates that they are largely verbal concessions. Moreover, one of Rakosi's last acts was to exclude his old rival, Nagy, from the Communist Party and one of Geroe's first acts has been to re-affirm that "right deviations" centring around Nagy are just as dangerous as "left-wing sectarianism", (i.e. Stalinism). Geroe's line thus seems to bear a very close resemblance to the sort of half-and-half policy which Rakosi tried to pursue, "liberalisation" and "democratisation", but as little as possible, all essential elements of Communist control and policy remaining untouched.

There is a general tendency to doubt whether this compromise can be a lasting solution. Geroe and the Prime Minister, Hegedus, are looked on as second-rate figures whose only advantage over Rakosi is that, living in his shadow, their names have not become symbols, like his, of the evils of the past. This is a transient advantage. Moreover, as their difficulties grow, their relative lack of stature will make it difficult for them to impose their authority in the Rakosi manner.

Probably the most important consequence of Rakosi's fall will be its effect on the intellectuals and the middle ranks of the Party. It seems to have been their pressure which in the end "got" Rakosi and their self-confidence cannot fail to be bolstered by their success. It can be expected that their increasing influence will be felt over the longer run in the sense of growing liberalisation along the lines being followed by Poland. The admission to the Politburo of a Social-Democrat only recently released from prison is an indication that now that the log-jam has been broken, events may move with surprising speed.

Economic and military questions

It has been noted that all the turmoil in intellectual and political circles has not strikingly affected the economic policies of the régime. Even Rakosi's fall has brought no sharp change in direction. However, the current Five Year Plan does represent some moderation or caution when compared with its Stalinist predecessor. Or, to put it another way, there remain some elements from the "New Course" of the Nagy period. Investments are to take a lower share of the national income, goals in general are more modest, there is more emphasis on raw materials and energy than on further expansion of the engineering industries. Along with increased attention to agriculture, the use of force to achieve collectivisation is deplored, even though a fully collectivised agriculture remains the goal.

The Hungarian régime also has been reducing its military expenditures. Budget allocations this year were over 25% below the 1953 level and a further reduction of 15,000 men was announced in August. Certain spokesmen have even gone so far as to blame the low standard of living on excessive spending for defence in the past.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Unrest among intellectuals and students

Although Czechoslovak intellectuals were clearly not immune to the malaise which was manifested within the Soviet bloc after the death of Stalin, their symptoms were mild compared to those of their Polish and Hungarian colleagues. Until well along in 1955, the Czech press carried almost none of the sort of basic criticism which was by then common in Poland. This lag may be explained both by the cautious Czech temperament and by the careful, restrained manner in which the régime itself has handled the various changes which have followed on Stalin's death.

The Summit Conference stimulated greater activity in Czech intellectual circles. Hopes were raised that contacts with the West might be greatly expanded. An increasing number of deviations from the established literary line began to find their way into print. As in Poland and Hungary, one of the first targets of the critics was party control over literary content. The Writers' Union was specifically attacked.

The régime counter-attacked in December. It made certain concessions to the spirit of the times in calling for an end to "lifeless dogmatism" but it took at least as forceful a position against art for art's sake or unlimited freedom for the writer. The Czech Communist leaders thus stood much nearer to the position of Rakosi than to the "liberal" attitude of the Polish régime.

Both the régime and its critics altered their stands following the Soviet Party Congress in February. At the Congress of Czechoslovak Writers in April, various régime spokesmen put forward a more positive programme designed to meet some of the earlier complaints. This programme was apathetically received, and then on the third day of the Congress the meeting was brought to life by a series of bitter attacks on past policies and persecutions. These attacks were printed in the press over the

next few days. The Congress ended in something of a stand-off between the régime and the rebels with a less offensive individual named as new Secretary of the Writers' Union.

In May, the ferment spread to the students. For the first time since the Communist coup d'état, the government permitted the traditional student carnivals to take place. The students responded by reviving the pre-war custom of using these carnivals as a vehicle for biting political satire. The slogans chanted by the marchers reportedly went so far as to call for the removal of President Zapotocky. Moreover, a number of meetings drew up resolutions setting forth students' demands. The régime, its response conditioned by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinist repression, reacted mildly to the carnivals but more strongly to the resolutions. In June, some arrests of older persons, "former capitalist elements", were announced and the resolutions were ascribed to their activity.

In mid-June a conference of the Czechoslovak Party was held. It seems to have represented a broad effort by the leaders to set a limit to the thaw and hold the line. Although there was some discussion of past mistakes, the emphasis was regularly placed on avoiding harmful criticism, on the dangers of right-wing deviations, etc. The leaders hope thus to regain control of the "peripheral" fields of ideological activity, writers, scholars, the youth movement, trade unions, while simultaneously reasserting discipline within the Party itself.

Other political developments

The Czech thaw, aside from the student demonstrations, has been a very quiet process. The régime has spared itself any convulsions over how to control the secret police and assure "socialist legality". The great Czech purge trial, the Slansky affair, stands unrevised. In fact, several leaders have recently indicated that Slansky will not be cleared, although certain charges (e.g. Titoism) are now retracted. There has been no general amnesty of political prisoners.

Nevertheless the atmosphere has changed. A series of amnesties has affected non-political prisoners and many if not most of the officials purged along with Slansky have also been turned loose on an individual basis. A minimum of publicity has accompanied these political rehabilitations. A number of calls have been issued for strict observation of "socialist legality" in the future, past errors being cynically laid at Slansky's door. Although these measures fall far short of what has occurred in Poland, the recent activity of the writers and students does indicate a significant reduction in the "level of fear" in Czechoslovakia.

Other signs of the thaw have not been numerous in Czechoslovakia. The dissemination and discussion of the Khrushchev speech did not have (at least in the press) the violence of the Polish operation. However, the régime proceeded to this unpleasant task without delay, unlike Rakosi who backed into the process with very evident reluctance. De-Stalinisation has not brought any major shake-up in the top Czech leadership, perhaps because the Stalinist leader, Gottwald, so obligingly passed on only a few days after Stalin's death. The only recent changes of note were the dismissal of Cepicka, Minister of Defence, who

had risen so rapidly after he became Gottwald's son-in-law, and of the Minister of Culture, a leading target of critics at the Writers' Congress in April. There have been echos in Czechoslovakia of the Polish call for an end to rubber-stamp parliaments. Trade unions have been exhorted to fulfill their "double rôle", i.e. not merely to push the workers toward higher productivity but also to stand up for the workers' rights vis-à-vis management.

Economic and military questions

Three and a half years after Stalin's death, the Czechs have, in their economic policies, come out at about the same point as the Hungarians, meanwhile avoiding such violent shifts in direction as those which have made so much trouble for their neighbours. Their new Five Year Plan, like those of most satellites, is a continuation of the Stalinist programme (heavy industry, collectivisation, etc.) but the goals are relatively less ambitious and the concessions to the population somewhat greater. The Czech price cut of last April was one of the most substantial in the Soviet bloc for some time.

The Czech military establishment has also had a slight budget cut. A reduction by 10,000 men of numbers under arms was announced in July 1956.

EASTERN GERMANY

Like Hungary, East Germany had a period of "liberalisation" after the death of Stalin which has complicated its subsequent development. This New Course, although it attracted great attention through its connection with the June 1953 riots, petered out rather more quickly than in Hungary. By early 1954 the Party line had again hardened to about what it had been under Stalin.

Subsequent de-Stalinisation in the German Democratic Republic has proceeded less rapidly than in any of the other northern satellites: the pace has been more like that followed in Rumania and Bulgaria. There is little evidence of the sort of ferment among Communist intellectuals which, appearing in the press of other satellites, has been for the outside world the most striking symptom of the thaw. This silence is not unnatural, for the East German régime, unlike say the Polish, has not undertaken any extensive downgrading of the secret police. Indeed, almost the contrary, since its most prominent recent gesture in this direction was the appointment of a commission "to extend the basis of democracy" which includes three notorious individuals, Tollweber, the Minister of State Security, Melsheimer, the Attorney-General, whose conduct had even been attacked by Grotewohl, and "Red Hilde" Benjamin, the Minister of Justice.

East Germany has not, of course, been wholly exempt from the trends apparent in the other satellites and the Soviet Union. There have been some releases from prisons, including several prominent Social-Democrats and others arrested in the Stalin era after the June 1953 riots. However, the individuals who were then considered to have represented the most serious threat to Ulbricht's position have not been freed to date.

The dethronement of Stalin following the Soviet Party congress was taken up promptly in East Germany and some of the

first evidence of the violence of Khrushchev's speech came via the declarations of the East German leaders. However, the natural extension of this denunciation to the Stalinist leaders of the Pankow régime was ruled out before it had gotten really under way.

In general, the East German régime seems hopeful that it can ride out the current "reform" wave without sacrificing its leaders or its policies. Although the Party is suffering from the same sort of creeping paralysis which in other Communist countries has been a factor in favour of "shock treatment", Ulbricht and his associates evidently fear this paralysis less than the dangers of liberalisation. Moscow appears to be supporting this viewpoint. Although there are reports that some of the few gestures toward the population (e.g. the release of prisoners) were made under pressure from the Soviets, it is likely that the Soviet leaders realise clearly that if Ulbricht must go, his exit would pay greater dividends on the eve of the 1957 elections in the Federal Republic than now.

For the mass of the East German population Stalin was scarcely an idol; his fall therefore produced no shock. The timid "democratisation" of the régime is likewise greeted with considerable cynicism. The Poznan riots do not seem to have touched off any similar demonstrations in the East Zone, the people having realised after June 1953 that the Red Army cannot be driven out by workers with sticks and stones.

As might be expected, the economic policies of the Ulbricht-Grotewohl régime remain very Stalinist. There is little to recall the doubts and confessions of error of 1953. Heavy industry receives priority in the new plans just as it has since the consumer goods controversy was resolved in Moscow in late 1954.

On the military side the régime has made a small concession to current fashions by reducing the target of its military build-up from 120,000 to 90,000 men.

RUMANIA

The thaw in Rumania has been a very slow - indeed almost imperceptible - process. From the death of Stalin to the end of 1955 the régime made only the most superficial gestures to keep in line with developments elsewhere in the bloc. A Party Congress was held at the end of 1955 and there was speculation that it might witness some real changes. The outcome was rather the reverse for the leaders took the occasion to reaffirm the validity of their purge (in 1952) of Anna Pauker and her group. Even the sensational events of the Soviet Party Congress have caused only verbal shifts in the Rumanian line.

The unrest among intellectuals, so apparent elsewhere in the bloc, has had only feeble reflections in Rumania. These stirrings have been decisively repressed by the Party. In May one prominent writer, Alexandru Jar, was expelled from the Party for "vile slanders" against it. Two others were censured and no further evidence of ferment has since appeared.

There were two amnesties in Rumania last year; one as part of the "re-defection" campaign which all the satellites have

been conducting, the other for criminals and some political prisoners. Political prisoners sentenced to more than five years (i.e. the majority) were not covered. In addition certain outstanding non-Communist politicians were released from prison and put on display by the régime.

Clearly, the Stalinist leaders of Rumania have retained the confidence of Stalin's heirs in Moscow. A more surprising feat has been their renewal of amicable relations with Tito, especially if one recalls that Bucharest was the seat of the Cominform after it was obliged to vacate Belgrade. For whatever reasons, Gheorghiu-Dej has not been personally obnoxious to Tito and the Soviets have not been under pressure to sacrifice him as they did Rakosi and Chervenkov. (It is not suggested that Tito was the only force behind the fall of those two leaders.)

The economic plans of the Rumanian régime have been surprisingly unaffected by fluctuations elsewhere in the bloc. When Moscow emphasised consumer goods, Bucharest talked about consumer goods. When Moscow changed over to corn, Bucharest found that corn deserved more attention. There seems to have been little substance behind these verbal shifts. Presumably in the same spirit of cheerful cynicism, Rumania too has made a "great contribution to the relaxation of international tension" by planning a cut of 20,000 men in its armed forces.

BULGARIA

Among the southern group of satellites, Bulgaria has had the most perceptible thaw, though it scarcely bears comparison with those of Poland or Hungary. Some ferment began to show up in the press early in 1955: the usual articles deploring the absence of creative freedom, greyness, schematism and sugar-coating of reality in literature. The brunt of this criticism was born by minor officials, the top leaders indicated that ruthless editorial interference in the content of literature should stop without, of course, taking any blame themselves for such past policies. Editors naturally passed the criticism down to writers, accusing them of everything from hypocrisy to illiteracy. Some writers hit back and their discontent came to a head in a meeting of the Writers' Union on 28th December. They were put in their place by Premier Chervenkov himself, from whose speech, published only in February, one can gain a fair idea of the nature of the struggle. (For example, one writer charged that "all the key positions in our literature are held by Fascist mercenaries".)

Chervenkov's counter-attack kept things under control until he himself was demoted in March. In the atmosphere created by that event and by the reverberations of Khrushchev's secret speech, there was a certain recrudescence of discussion. However, the new Yugov government has been scarcely less severe toward deviations than was Chervenkov. In June a critic was expelled from the Party and the action was publicised as a warning to others. Bulgaria is the only satellite which has not announced an internal amnesty. Nevertheless, it is clear that since Stalin's death, the prison population has been considerably reduced and the activity of the political police has declined. As in Rumania, a number of non-Communist political figures have been released and made use of by the régime. Bulgaria's purge trial, the Kostov affair, has been revised and the survivors are said to have been freed.

Despite the rather sensational character of certain events such as Chervenkov's demotion and Kostov's rehabilitation, there has clearly not been any change in the Bulgarian political climate which could compare with that in Poland. Chervenkov's successor, Yugov, is a "hard", perhaps no less hard than Chervenkov. Moreover, the former Premier is not disgraced, he has not even retreated to obscurity like Rakosi but remains in the top councils of Party and Government. Perhaps the most sensitive barometer for Bulgaria is furnished by the Yugoslavs who are clearly not yet satisfied with the changes in their neighbours' orientation.

Bulgaria is predominantly agricultural and the régime has pushed a Stalinist programme for the countryside with surprising vigour. After virtually standing still from 1953 to 1955 (at a level of about 60%), the share of the total land in collectives jumped this past winter to 75%. The régime merely claims that collectivisation will be complete "within the next 2 or 3 years" but if the drive is resumed after the harvest with the same tempo as last winter, their goal may be achieved by Spring.

ALBANIA

Albania has shown less political development since 1953 than any other state in the Soviet bloc. The Party Congress which took place there from 25th May to 3rd June could scarcely be distinguished from a Stalinist congress. The only changes were the dropping of Stalin's name and the proclamation of friendship for Yugoslavia. Even the latter concession was made very grudgingly and Hoxha (Khodja) flatly refused to rehabilitate his late rival Xoxe (Djodje) whom he had executed in 1949 for conspiring to bring Albania under Tito's hegemony. The charges (probably well founded) of Titoist conspiracy were withdrawn but the balance of the indictment still stands. Tito in return has indicated that he is less than satisfied with the course of events in Albania.

The Albanian régime has adhered to its policy of developing heavy industry, by which is understood principally mining. It has also pushed vigorously on collectivisation of agriculture although the rugged character of the terrain and its inhabitants has made the task more difficult than in, say, Bulgaria. The régime reported that the number of collectives roughly doubled in 1955 and it plans that the proportion of land in the "socialised" area (i.e. in all types of co-operatives) will reach 85% by 1960.

Keeping the country on this difficult course naturally implies firm control and, even though an internal amnesty was proclaimed last January, there seems to have been less relaxation of the régime's grip on the population than anywhere else in the bloc.

Part II

THE THAW IN PERSPECTIVE

Developments in the satellites during the past year or so have a sufficient number of features in common to justify

generalisations about the bloc as a whole. Plainly the people and the régimes in these states are in roughly similar situations, subject to roughly similar social and political forces, (e.g. governments of unpopular cliques ultimately dependent on Moscow and struggling with economically and politically backward areas).

The outstanding symptoms of the thaw are two: (a) a considerable limitation of the rôle played by the security apparatus and police terror; (b) greater freedom of expression for intellectuals and sharper and more basic criticism of many practices of the various régimes. To these two principal symptoms have been added in certain cases a variety of secondary phenomena: revival of parliamentary activity, lessened hostility to the West, rejuvenation of trade unions, reduction in military expenditures, shifts of top personnel, lessened sycophancy toward the Soviet Union.

It would be wrong to look on the thaw either as something forced on unwilling régimes by discontent from below or as concessions freely dispensed by Moscow and imposed on the local Communists from the "Centre". Rather it should be viewed as a response to the political and economic situation which Stalinism had created: - a situation which may be characterised as an impasse in both domestic and foreign affairs. Internally, the Stalinist techniques of ruthless exploitation had extracted from the masses everything that they had to give. Further economic progress was becoming increasingly difficult, the working classes were becoming, if not disaffected, at least apathetic, the agricultural situation (not just in the satellites but in the Soviet Union as well) was in danger of passing from an incipient to a real crisis. Externally, the advances of the immediate post-war period had been consolidated but the very process of consolidation had created effective barriers to further advances. A new approach seemed in order.

The response which Moscow has been making to this situation was not the only possible one. However, a number of factors seem to have ruled out the most important alternatives: (widespread purges and foreign adventure, for example, or at the other extreme, a genuine shift away from heavy industry), and in this sense one might say that the passive resistance of the masses and the more active resistance of the West imposed the thaw on the Communist leaders.

The decisive moment was Moscow's downgrading of the security apparatus. (One can hardly doubt some connection between this event and the fall of Beria, though the nature of the connection may be debated for years.) The downgrading was generalised to the satellites and in a very real sense the whole of the subsequent thaw may be said to have developed from this event.

The most important consequence has been the ferment of discussion and criticism in the circles called "ideological activists", writers, journalists, lecturers, scholars, artists, etc. This group, whose function in a Communist state is to enlist the support of the masses for the projects of the régime, was very aware that under Stalinism its relationship to its audience had withered away. The pupils had learned all the standard responses but they were not really paying any attention to the teacher. It was to remedy this situation that the régimes very gingerly opened the door to criticism from below.

The leaders were from the beginning fearful that this criticism might get out of hand. They viewed it as a necessary evil - necessary if the "transmission belt" from the leadership down to the masses was to be repaired and put back in operation, but evil if through it pressures were exerted on the leadership to alter its fundamental policies. As Morawski (a leading Polish ideologist) explained it: "We want to encourage discussion of various topics from the fields of politics, culture, economic policy in order to clear the path of our ideology more effectively and spread understanding of our political line".

However, the "activists" became very active indeed when they understood that a measure of genuine criticism would be tolerated. Their complaints and Moscow's instructions converged on the local Party leaders. The reaction of these unhappy creatures has differed widely from one satellite to another. Judging by results one would suppose that the Polish Politburo almost welcomed the thaw, yet we have the testimony of a writer in a Polish journal last March that the thaw "has happened despite the fact that the leadership has not only not done all in its power to speed up this process but has often tried to restrain it." The régimes in the southern satellites have not merely tried to restrain it, they have nipped it in the bud.

Once the régimes began to give ground to the intellectuals the process fed on itself. Each concession made it more difficult to refuse the next demand. In order to halt the process a really serious effort became necessary. For example, in Poland throughout 1954 and 1955 the régime repeatedly set limits to criticism only to see them overstepped. In Hungary in 1955, the régime made a vigorous attempt to reverse the trend: it ended after 16 months in the fall of Rakosi. In Czechoslovakia, after making only the most minimal concessions to the new trends, the leadership in June roused itself to a general counter-attack whose outcome is not yet apparent.

It is interesting to examine the reasons why the course of the thaw has varied so widely from one satellite to another. One can, for example, distinguish the "northern tier" (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) from the southern group, with East Germany a rather special case.

It has been suggested above that the four "actors" in the drama are Moscow, the satellite leaders, the satellite intellectuals and the people. The rôle actually played by the first is the most difficult to analyse accurately. There is little doubt that some sort of general instructions have gone out from Moscow to "liberalise, democratise", with the concrete measures to implement this order being left to the local bosses. The Soviets then appear to have sat in judgment on the satellite performance, interposing their veto when a situation seemed to be developing dangerously (as in Hungary in early 1955), encouraging a shift when the old leadership seemed unduly conservative or hopelessly discredited (Chervenkov and Rakosi). The Russians thus have engaged in a "two-front" action. Having given the thaw a push originally, their influence now seems generally to be a restraining one. Soviet pressure, when a new leader had to be named, has clearly been in favour of the "hardest" candidate acceptable to the local machine (Ochab, Geroe, Yugov). There seems to be no basis for attributing the differences among the

various satellite thaws to differential handling by Moscow; simply the Soviets have allowed national differences to be reflected in the actions of the various régimes, perhaps pushing Bulgaria a bit and certainly holding back on Poland (vide Bulganin's speeches in Warsaw during August), but realistically refraining from forcing everyone into the same mould as Stalin used to do.

The satellite leaders probably have approached the thaw from slightly differing points of view. Even under Stalin the Poles managed to show a certain variation from the norm, for instance in never holding an anti-Tito show trial, so that Gomulka alone of the important "Titoists" could be rehabilitated alive. It has not, therefore, been surprising to find them in the lead in their de-Stalinisation process. Rakosi may be considered the other extreme. He made a good try over a period of more than a year at reimposing Stalinism (minus Stalin) on what is surely one of the most unruly nations in Europe. In general, it would seem to have been easier for the governments in the northern tier to make the shift (still very incomplete) away from compulsion toward persuasion in their relationship to the governed. The northern satellites all had Communist parties with a certain footing in the life of their countries. Marxism was once respectable among their intellectuals and trade unionists. In Czechoslovakia the Party had over a million members in 1946 and polled more than a third of the votes in the election of that year. Naturally the leaders who disposed of this sort of base (even though now compromised by the excesses of Communist rule) could afford to take chances, to permit a degree of liberalisation unthinkable to the tiny Albanian clique around Hoxha.

The rôle played by the third actor, the intellectual class, has also differed from one country to another. It is difficult to deal in any sound way with the complex question of national character. However, it does not seem unfair to say that in Poland and Hungary the national character has produced a very widespread ferment, often addressed at the most fundamental faults of the Communist system. In Czechoslovakia, the "activists" have been appreciably more cautious in their complaints, while in the southern satellites only isolated individuals have spoken up. Discontent in East Germany has been expressed chiefly through the continuing exodus.

The attitude of the people toward their régime is, of course, also affected by "national character" and history. It has been suggested that apathy, not active resistance, has been the principal force compelling the régimes to seek an improved relationship with their working classes. Yet this apathy is less effective when, as in Rumania and Bulgaria, it is the attitude the people have always had toward each of the succession of unpopular rulers which history has foisted on them. The development of this passive resistance will have been a greater cause for concern in Poland where even the Communist government was able, in the early post-war years, to harness considerable popular enthusiasm to its reconstruction and development projects, particularly among the youth. The Poznan riots must have been particularly frightening to the régime, not because their hegemony was threatened but because the riots made clear just how bad the relationship between the Party and the masses has become.

One factor cuts across the attitude of all three national groups, the leaders, the intellectuals and the people: the factor of nationalism. Its action is, however, not a uniform one. In

Poland and East Germany the historic hostility toward the Russians must be one of the most serious problems faced by the régimes. The thaw in Poland has even brought a surprising amount of it out into the open. In Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, nationalism plays a rather different rôle, being historically directed against other neighbours. In fact the Soviets have even benefited to some degree from the old pan-slavist sentiments. In Hungary the contemporary facts of a régime imposed from without and supported by Soviet troops, whose arrival in 1944 was not a pleasant experience, are probably of greater weight than historical attitudes. The Rumanians may be presumed to resent the loss of Bessarabia and the imposition of a government which can scarcely count any genuine Rumanians in its upper levels. This presumed resentment seems, however, to be expressed in a relatively passive attitude. The Albanians are perhaps the most interesting for their nationalism has tended to support the close relationship to Moscow. Territorially the Albanians have nothing to fear from the Russians, everything to lose to the Yugoslavs. This consideration was probably the determining factor in enabling Hoxha to purge his rival Xoxe and come down on Stalin's side in the Stalin-Tito feud. Fear of being swallowed up by Tito remains today an important factor inhibiting the development of a new look in Albania.

SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS

The thaw in the satellites has been seen as a process with its origin in the passive resistance of the people to further sacrifices on behalf of the projects of their unpopular régimes. The Soviet response, generalised in all the satellites in greater or lesser degree, has been to loosen the screws a few notches, especially those binding the intellectuals into Stalinist forms. This Soviet policy has, of course, fitted into the world-wide strategy of the détente. The satellite leaders, under attack from below as each concession generated fresh demands, have uniformly resisted the thaw. In some countries they have had considerable success, in others they have had to retreat to new lines of defence.

The picture today, as compared with that of three years ago, presents a relatively considerable movement in social, intellectual and even political factors in at least some of the satellites. Some powerful currents are at work, but it would be an over-optimistic and ultimately a "Marxist" interpretation, to suggest that the movement has become irresistible and that a radical transformation of the satellite societies has become inevitable in the near future. The régimes could still reverse it if they are willing to pay the price: rigorous repression on the old Stalinist lines.

The danger to the West is the tendency to substitute hope for reason and to assume that the "thaw" has gone considerably further than it has in fact. The interest of the West presumably lies in the future development of the "thaw": in any event the thaw cannot be other than welcomed by the West, with its traditions of freedom.

For the West, then, the question must be: what can we do to accelerate the thaw? Certainly we should not exaggerate our resources in this field. Fundamentally, the immediate future of Poland must be decided in Warsaw and Moscow and the West can play only a marginal rôle. Yet it can have some influence.

With the leaders of the Soviet bloc in Moscow and in the satellites the West has certain contacts: diplomatically, sometimes through visits of top personalities, and, of course, via the policy statements of Western leaders on developments within the bloc. The Communist leaders now feel a strong desire (coldly calculated but still real) for a more friendly attitude on the part of the West. Clearly, this fact can be a weapon if it is discriminatingly used. Either rigid hostility or fatuous amiability would deprive the West and the satellite peoples of whatever concessions can be extracted by this method.

The West also has certain contacts with the intellectuals and the common people of the satellites: exchanges of visits, radio broadcasts, the increasing circulation of Western publications within the bloc. These channels can be used to encourage the activists in their struggle with their own leaders. (They can, for example, spread word of developments in the leading satellites to the intellectuals in those countries where the thaw is slow in developing). The West must also use these channels to assure the captive peoples of its moral support in their efforts to free themselves. As we are not prepared to use force to liberate them, we should not encourage futile rebellions on their part. Rather, as the best guide for the future, we should point to the concessions already extracted from the régimes by the people through their patient, unspectacular withholding of support.

These general principles will raise many questions as they are translated into concrete policies. Some of these are:

What weight shall be given to the various criteria by which one can measure the progress of the satellites away from Stalinism?

- (a) Reduction of terror and revival of the rule of law;
- (b) Development of intellectual freedom and criticism;
- (c) Revival of parliamentary activity and other political forms;
- (d) Divergences from the Soviet pattern and Soviet policies;
- (e) Shifts in economic policies.

What concessions can and should the West make to the satellite drive for "better relations"? What principles should govern us in making such concessions in respect of:

- (a) Increased cultural contacts;
- (b) Exchanges of visits by political leaders;
- (c) Increased economic contacts;
- (d) Reduction in anti-régime propaganda from the West;
- (e) Renewal of suspended diplomatic relations.

To what extent should the West differentiate between one satellite and another or between them and the Soviet Union in pursuing the above policies?

On what points should NATO members strive for very close coordination of policy and where will a more individual approach be desirable?

Can the West take advantage of Yugoslavia's position to further the development of the thaw?

Some of these questions will no doubt be raised directly or indirectly in the study shortly to be conducted in the Committee on Information on Western policy regarding contacts with the satellites.