



THE SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT

REVIEW ARTICLE
From a Correspondent

The Sino-Soviet Conflict 1956-61. By Donald S. Zagoria. Princeton University Press; London, Oxford University Press, 1962. Pp. 484. Notes. Appendices. Bibliog. Index. 50s.

The long, undulating, ramifying dispute between the Soviet Union and China is one of the important new things in world politics in the last few years, and not easy to describe. Mr. Zagoria guides us through the veiled statements which constitute our evidence of the dispute and offers sound judgment on the relationship between these statements and the successive crises on which the two Powers found themselves unable to agree. Following Mr. Zagoria we can see how Mao Tse-tung and Khrushchev differed on, for example, the Lebanon crisis in 1958, and how they argued their respective cases before their own followers and the world Communist movement. From this we gain a clearer picture of the later differences over Cuba, India and other crises which have strained the alliance in the last few months.

Mr. Zagoria takes the story back to 1956. Prior to that the Chinese had not felt obliged to challenge Soviet policies openly and any differences stayed beneath the surface and remain difficult to discern. In 1956 Khrushchev sprung his first surprise when he attacked Stalin in his famous "secret" speech. The Chinese did not join in the attack, and after two months of ominous silence published a statement "On the Historical Experience of the Proletariat" which offered an assessment of Stalin more favourable than that of Khrushchev and buttressed that assessment with a fuller explanation of the way in which the mistakes of Stalin might be avoided. This analysis was addressed to the Communist movement as a whole and cast in the theoretical language in which, within that movement, instruction is given *de haut en bas*. Later in the same year, when the bloc had been shaken by the Polish "October" and the rebellion in Hungary, the immediate cause of which was Khrushchev's destruction of the Stalin myth, the Chinese again offered a critical analysis, dwelling this time on Soviet interference in the affairs of other countries. 1956 was pregnant with future difficulties. How could Mao follow a leader whom he had publicly criticized? How could Khrushchev guide the bloc through de-Stalinization with this pontifical voice offering slightly different guidance from the back seat?

In 1957 the voice of Peking suddenly changed its tempo. Mao, who had supported Gomulka against Khrushchev and liberalized aspects of Party control in China, seemed to become obsessed with the need for more speed and harsher struggle. This change, studied in detail in a recent publication from Harvard,* has governed most of the subsequent intense dispute between the two capitals.

In 1958 Mao imposed the commune on China, a social form more advanced, in Marxist terms, than anything yet achieved in the Soviet Union, and drove the economy forward at a pace which ignored all the lessons which Russian Communists drew from thirty years of Soviet experience, and, as with the difference on Stalin, defended his policies with theoretical statements unacceptable to the Soviet Union. Thus Mao began to talk of "uninterrupted revolution," a term anathema in the Soviet Union since Stalin condemned it as a doctrine of Trotsky. Moreover, Chinese explanations of these radical changes suggested that these new forms were suited to under-developed countries with large peasant populations, and implied that such countries might follow Chinese leadership in preference to the more conservative Russian brand. The Russians ignored the Chinese claim and, without mentioning China, set out to demolish Chinese pretensions. This began the discreet

* *Communist China 1955-1959: Policy Documents With Analysis*. Foreword by Robert R. Bowie and John K. Fairbank.

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mode of disputing without naming names which enables the giants to strive against each other while preserving a formal state of friendship.

In the same year, 1958, the dispute was carried into a field of more direct interest to the West as Mao began to challenge Khrushchev's attempt to work out an approach to the United States more flexible than that of Stalin. At the heart of this difference lay an argument about the strength and nature of imperialism. Mao argued that imperialism, although fundamentally weak, was of such a nature that failing struggle so harsh as to carry the threat of war, it would grow more arrogant and bellicose; hence harsh struggle would lessen the risk of war. In practice, Mao wanted Khrushchev to use his nuclear threat aggressively, to scare the United States from intervening in the trouble spots of Asia and Africa. Against this, Khrushchev argued that nuclear weapons were so destructive as to make the risk of war unthinkable and that, capitalism being a decaying system, the Socialist camp could "bury" it by a more peaceful process of economic competition. He declined to use his nuclear threat except to deter attacks on the Soviet Union and, to set the stage for the relatively unviolent process of economic competition, he worked for a *détente* with the United States. To this basic disagreement on the nature of imperialism and strategy in the nuclear age can be added another, scarcely less fundamental, on the geography of the struggle. Khrushchev saw two fronts; one was in Europe, where the workers confront the reactionary *bourgeois* governments; the other was the anti-imperialist front in the tumultuous ex-colonial and underdeveloped countries. Mao, on the other hand, wished the Communist movement to concentrate every effort on the ex-colonial world to the exclusion of the European front which he assessed as static and relatively unimportant for the immediate future. These two disagreements combined to produce a classic dispute on the peace movement. Khrushchev, arguing that peace propaganda hampered the European *bourgeois* governments and reduced their capacity to adopt risky policies, wanted to put the peace campaign on a par with the campaign against imperialism. To which Mao countered that peace propaganda could only discourage the militants of Cuba, Algeria and the Congo and should be pigeon-holed until the main struggle against imperialism had been settled.

These somewhat sketchy generalizations were soon tested in action when in the summer of 1958 American and British troops landed in the Lebanon and Jordan after Kassim's *coup* in Iraq. Faced with a crisis on his doorstep Khrushchev threatened intervention and called for summit conferences. The Chinese ignored his summit proposals and proposed that the *bloc* should move its forces into Iraq to protect the infant revolution. And when the crisis was over, the Russian press was left arguing that Khrushchev's threats had prevented Western intervention in Iraq, while the Chinese scathingly rejected any ideas of "begging for peace" and suggested that the Anglo-American forces, having got away with one initiative in the Lebanon, would be eager for another chance to intervene in the anti-colonial struggle.

The next crisis was different. Instead of waiting on the uncertainties of revolt and intervention, Mao proceeded to create his own crisis and to show how a limited military operation could be arranged to yield political profit. In late August, 1958, the Chinese Communists launched an attack on the Nationalist held island of Quemoy, using a great force of artillery but no aircraft and no assault troops. They failed in their immediate military objective of forcing the garrison to surrender and relaxed their bombardment after about two weeks, possibly as a direct response to a threat from Dulles that the United States might intervene. For the story of the Sino-Soviet dispute, two conclusions seem significant. First, the Russian promises to support China should the United States intervene seemed to be vague and inadequate until after the crisis had passed its peak, when Khrushchev rattled his sabre with the best of them. Mao must have resented the initial weakness of the Soviet support, which indeed represented an attempt on Khrushchev's part to turn Mao from his adventurous course. Secondly, despite his military failure, Mao won a substantial political victory when Dulles obliged Chiang Kai-shek to renounce publicly his pretensions to regain the mainland by direct invasion. Chinese boldness, it would seem, had paid, despite the weakness of the Chinese armed forces.

In 1959 Khrushchev began putting into effect a central part of his new policy, *détente* with the U.S.A., and the conflict deepened as the Chinese restated their

theses more firmly and salted them with abusive criticism of Khrushchev's acts and arguments. Soviet propaganda began to picture American leaders as realistic—Herter's succession to Dulles as Secretary of State facilitated the change—and Soviet initiatives led to increased contacts between American and Soviet leaders. In August Khrushchev said that Eisenhower was a "man of peace" and in September, after his long visit to the United States, claimed to have achieved a substantial *détente*. To this the Chinese replied with mounting vehemence that the imperialist might change his spots, but not his treacherous and warlike nature, that Eisenhower's Government was no less imperialist than its predecessors and that only unrelenting struggle could serve to prevent imperialist war maniacs from unleashing war. Apart from giving the lie to Soviet assessments of the intentions of the rulers of the United States, and adducing arguments to discredit Khrushchev's *détente* policy, the Chinese began to hint that fear of imperialism and panic at the prospect of nuclear warfare was changing Khrushchev into a *bourgeois* democrat unfit to lead the Communist movement.

In 1959 India joined the U.S.A. as a country on which Soviet and Chinese leaders differed. In 1959 the Chinese began to object to Khrushchev's policy of giving massive aid to India, on the grounds that it would only serve to consolidate Nehru's essentially *bourgeois* government and thus postpone further progress in India. Earlier in the year Nehru's friendly reception of the Dalai Lama had exasperated the Chinese and had led to an incident on the border in which Indian personnel were killed. At this juncture Khrushchev, against all Communist precedent, expressed strict neutrality as between China and India. This shocked Mao to such an extent that a delegation of Polish Communists came away from Peking with the impression that the Chinese would stir up more trouble on the Indian frontier as a lesson to Khrushchev—a possible pointer to Chinese motives in the autumn of 1962.

By the end of 1959 Act I was over. The two disputants had taken different stands on matters fundamental in Communist strategy, argued their cases in terms of Communist theory and shown, by their actions in successive crises, that they meant what they said. And there the dispute remained, surprisingly static despite its increasing vehemence and publicity. In April 1960, as Khrushchev was again preparing to meet Eisenhower, the Chinese issued a series of vicious polemics in which they accused Khrushchev, still mentioning no names, of emasculating Marx-Leninism. The Russians gave as good as they got, describing Chinese variously as bigots and adventurers. Meetings held in Moscow in the autumn and winter did nothing to solve the dispute. A formal statement was issued (the Moscow Declaration of December 1960) and all Parties endorsed it, thus preserving the façade of unity, but this statement was itself a patchwork of discordant Soviet and Chinese themes and it seems that in the discussions which preceded its signature neither Russians nor Chinese yielded on any point of substance. It is indeed probable that the effect of arguing their cases before an international Communist audience was to harden both Parties in their respective positions.

At some time in 1960 the dialogue was interrupted by the shrill voice of a third party, to wit Albania. In 1958 the Chinese had begun to vent their disagreement with Khrushchev's revision of basic Leninism by attacking Tito, who had taken Khrushchev's revisions still further. The Albanians, keenly hostile to the Yugoslavs for other reasons, thus found themselves agreeing with China rather than the Soviet Union, and, when Soviet propaganda turned against China in the summer of 1960, Albania rallied to Peking. The Russians responded by applying economic and political sanctions to Albania, apparently calculating that the Chinese would be checked by pressure on their minute and distant ally. So far no such effect has been obtained. Neither Peking nor Tirana have budged from their radical positions, and Tirana, which has no inhibitions about naming Khrushchev as the villain since Khrushchev denounced Hoxha at the 22nd Party Congress in 1962, gives the Chinese another channel through which to attack Khrushchev without breaking the façade of Sino-Soviet friendship to which they purport to attach so much importance.

Mr. Zagoria rounds off his most skilled reconstruction of quasi-hidden aspects of *bloc* politics with a few general comments. He relates the Chinese and Soviet position to historical differences between Russia and China and between the C.P.S.U. and the C.C.P., and concludes that the dispute in one form or another is likely to

last indefinitely into the future. He also shows how the dispute between the giants enables the dwarves, from Poland on the right to North Korea on the left, to gain some independence by playing Moscow against Peking. In some respects, however, Mr. Zagoria seems reluctant to take his own arguments to their logical conclusion. Thus he argues that the Soviet Union and China will both wish to keep the dispute in bounds because of its tendency to split and weaken Asian Communist Parties. But if, as Mr. Zagoria has demonstrated, the Chinese are thinking in militant terms, they may well conclude that the relatively unmilitant Indian Communist Party is inadequate for the task of taking India rapidly towards a Communist revolution and that the best hope lies in splitting the Party so that the left faction can act without impediment and ultimately take over the leadership. Again, Mr. Zagoria hints that the economic crisis which has afflicted China might cause Mao to temper his intransigence. With advantage of hind sight, one can now say that the Chinese appear to have weathered the worst of the crisis without altering course; but, hind sight apart, was it at any time likely that the Mao who had led his Party to victory by sticking to his concept of good strategy would modify his concept for a mess of Russian pottage? To venture a generalization, westerners who are expert in the analysis of Communist documents are likely to be more accurate in their judgment on the Soviet Union than in their judgments on revolutionary China.

But such criticisms are trivial when set beside Mr. Zagoria's triumphant demonstration of sound method in the study of Communist documents and its application to one of the least comprehended relationships in world politics. It has been a pleasure to review one of the few books on China which can be recommended without hesitation.

