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By Chester Bowles, from Foreign Affairs, July 1962

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IS COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY BECOMING IRRELEVANT?

By CHESTER BOWLES

President Kennedy's Special Representative and Adviser
on African, Asian and Latin American Affairs

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IS COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY BECOMING IRRELEVANT?

By Chester Bowles

IS Communism gaining strength as a world ideology? Is it really destined to sweep new nations and old peoples before it with the force and inevitability that it still claims? Or has it unhinged itself from historical truth and modern reality, thus losing both relevance and momentum?

In my travels in the last few months in 40 or 50 countries on four continents, I have become convinced that Communism as an ideological force is ebbing. The mounting contradictions between Communist doctrine and the hard economic and political realities of today are beginning to be understood more widely. Even in the Soviet Union itself, changes in practice are being reflected in publicly avowed changes in dogma. The simple fact is that the world is refusing to act as Communist ideology said it should and would.

Before exploring the evidence of this and noting the results, let us define our terms. By Communist ideology I mean these three things:

First, Karl Marx's theory of history which assumes that certain "laws" impel a society to move through a series of economic stages to Communism. Communism is here presented as an economic system which in theory satisfies all of a society's needs without exploiting any of its members.

Second, Lenin's assumption that the pace of history can be accelerated by "political" means, principally by revolution.

Third, Lenin's belief in the Communist Party as the all-wise, all-powerful—indeed, the only—vehicle of this economic and political change.

Marx's thinking was powerful largely because it was based on shrewd observation of life around him; it was limited because he saw only those facts which time, place and inclination permitted him to see. What Marx saw were the grim realities of everyday life in the crudest years of the industrial revolution. He saw the London slum dwellers, crowded into hovels, working themselves to exhaustion under the insensitive impact of an ever-expanding economy. He saw their helplessness as individuals before the power of the men who owned the factories in which they worked

and who controlled the governments under which they lived. Similar conditions could be found in the urban areas of Tsarist Russia which Lenin saw a half century later.

Time has wrought a profound change in the "objective reality" which both Marx and Lenin observed. For two generations the power of indigenous forces, the pressure of events and the increasingly pragmatic response of Soviet leaders have been steadily eroding the ideological foundations of Communism.

What will finally emerge from this conflict between ideology and reality is unpredictable. The long-range result may be greater moderation among the Soviet leaders and a gradual easing of the roadblocks to communication between East and West; but the immediate result may be that Soviet leaders will return to highly risky political and military policies as an outgrowth of internal confusion and frustration. At the least the growing irrelevance of the Communist ideology may be expected to create major internal strains not only within the Soviet hierarchy but also within the Communist bloc and within Communist Parties everywhere. If these strains are ignored, our ability to shape events in a constructive manner will be severely diminished. On the other hand, through recognizing their nature and significance we will be in a favorable position, not only to protect our immediate national interests, but even to move the world gradually toward a peaceful and more rational future.

With these preliminary words let me proceed to test my argument that Communist ideology is gradually losing its relevance in three crucial respects: as a guide for the assumption and consolidation of power, as a program for economic development, and as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy.

II

Privately the Soviet leadership surely must harbor some serious doubts today about traditional Marxism-Leninism as a source of political ideas appropriate to current conditions and as a guide to the seizure and holding of power in the modern world.

Marx counted on the inevitable processes of "history" as such to bring the world to Communism. The industrialized nations would lead the parade toward the promised land of a classless society. In fact, Communism achieved power first in the backward society of Tsarist Russia and 32 years later in China, the least developed of all the major countries in the world. Not since

the Italian elections of 1948 has any industrialized state seriously considered opting for Communism.

This miscalculation grew from Marx's dogmatic assumption that capitalistic states were inherently incapable of adjusting to new situations. He reasoned that any capitalist government must be under the control of the privileged minority, that it could never modify that control or escape from it, and that this control would be used forever to exploit the masses. Competition among the capitalist nations—largely over markets and colonies—would lead to a series of wars and eventually to their collapse.

These assumptions have been disproved by events. Through the process of evolutionary development most capitalistic states have produced governments that are instruments not of a single class but, with varying degrees of perfection or imperfection, of the people as a whole. The development of the welfare state has blunted the edge of the class conflict that Marx assumed would ultimately move the world toward Communism.

Moreover, the capitalistic powers have not only failed to destroy each other in quest of greater profits, but on the contrary have increasingly engaged in political and economic coöperation. Instead of extending their colonial realms, they have been rapidly relinquishing them; indeed, only the poorest nation in Western Europe now clings to its "right" to an overseas empire.

Nor have the workers in modern capitalistic states coöperated with Marx by pressing either for Communist solutions to domestic economic problems or for "proletarian internationalism" as a vehicle with which to expand their influence in world affairs. Through the development of trade unions they have been able in most of the great industrialized states to secure an expanding share of the benefits of increasing production within the established order. Leftist energies have been continually channeled back toward development and reform.

This suggests that Marxist ideas are outdated as theoretical political guidelines, and a similar conclusion can be drawn about the efforts made to apply them in Soviet Russia and in the nations of Eastern Europe which have been under her control since 1945.

Lenin himself did not adhere to the teachings of Marx and wait for "history" to bless Russia with the inevitable revolution; instead he gave history a shove. Even so, without the First World War there would probably have been no Russian revolution. It was the war, with its hideous casualties, its frustrations and its

feeding of discontents, that gave Lenin his opportunity. He assumed that similar forces would create similar upheavals in those other nations which had been devastated by war. But after abortive outbursts in Hungary, Germany and Italy, the "proletariat" refused to rise, and in 1920 Trotsky's "liberating" Red Armies were stopped east of Warsaw.

Within Soviet Russia itself Lenin's most important source of strength was the vision of peace and plenty, land and bread, freedom and opportunity, which he held out to the exploited, embittered and war-weary people—and, perhaps most poignantly of all, to their children. The solutions which he advocated under the name of Communism were at that time unblemished by experience or failure.

Marx had left his picture of the future conveniently vague. He had been more concerned with the process of the struggle than with the structure of the Communist society that was to emerge. He was clear, however, on the need for a "proletarian dictatorship" in which the means of production would be owned by the state in the name of the workers. As the capitalistic élite and the bourgeoisie were destroyed there would emerge a single class, within which each individual would give according to his ability and receive according to his need. Since the state was itself an instrument of class rule which was no longer needed, it would, as Lenin later said, "wither away."

No Soviet citizen needs to be told, 45 years later, that the withering process has not taken place. On the contrary, conflicts within Communist society itself, and the planning failures resulting from impracticable or contradictory objectives, have forced the state to maintain its all-powerful role. Hundreds of examples could be cited. For instance, the Soviet need for well-educated men and women, capable of coping with the sophisticated demands of a modern industrial society, has collided with the need to control what people think. Crimes against state property, crimes that in theory should be nonexistent in a Communist society, have become so widespread that capital punishment has been introduced as a deterrent. Nor has Marxist ideology itself provided the Soviets with techniques necessary to increase the productivity of their industrial workers. The methods used to deal with this problem have been strikingly similar to those of capitalism; indeed, individual incentives to encourage high productivity have in many cases actually exceeded those in Western industrial nations.

Especially revealing has been the built-in conflict in Soviet agriculture. City-oriented Karl Marx had dismissed the peasants as "lost in the idiocy of rural life." The Communist Manifesto of 1848 alluded only casually to agriculture. But Lenin was a pragmatist and he was dealing with a country in which 85 percent of the people lived off the land. One of his first acts after seizing power, therefore, was to ratify a decree distributing all land to the peasants who tilled it. "This is the most important achievement of our revolution," Lenin said. "Today the Bolshevik revolution will occur and become irrevocable."

Here again, however, the revolution became entangled in a conflict between Communist ideology and economic and social realities. A disciplined Communist state requires a disciplined peasantry. But how can political discipline alone be used to persuade individualistic farmers to put in the extra hours of effort to boost food production for the state beyond their own needs? By 1938, less than a generation after the Bolshevik revolution, this question found its answer in the adoption of another capitalistic incentive: the official establishment of privately owned plots and a limited free market in farm produce to encourage the peasants to help fill the national food gap.

In 1962, the basic conflict between political control and adequate incentive for increased agricultural production remains unresolved, not only in the U.S.S.R. but in Communist China and in every East European country. As a result, inefficient agriculture continues to be a drag on Communism in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe and a threat to the future existence of the state in Communist China.

Finally, we see evidence of the failures of Marxist doctrine in the Soviet Union itself in the developing pattern of Soviet society. A presumably classless society is producing a series of new classes, the dominant one of which shows strikingly hereditary features.

These illustrations are not cited here as novel, but because taken together, and with many many more, they suggest why the ideological claims of Communism have begun to awaken questionings and doubts among the underdeveloped nations.

In most of the new and in many cases unaligned states, the situation has changed since the success of the anti-colonial independence movements in Asia and Africa. As European imperialism and colonialism disappear, the cries of "imperialism" and "colonial-

ism" become less persuasive. Indeed, where the Leninist slogan of "national liberation" now has its most legitimate appeal is in the East European countries still occupied by Soviet troops.

As colonialism loses its relevance as an issue, the most vulnerable targets for Communist activity, particularly in Asia and in Latin America, are the peasant majorities which have been the victims of feudal-minded landlords for generations. The squalor of the rural slums that has resulted from long injustice rivals that of the city slums which shocked Karl Marx more than a century ago. Yet even in this apparently promising area the Communist persuaders have been handicapped by what is gradually becoming known about the harsh experience of the Russian and Chinese peasants under Communism. Vigorous pressures and help by the United States and by United Nations agencies for the distribution of land on a more equitable basis are helping, too, to undermine the appeal of the Communist promise which, in Lenin's words 45 years ago, made the Russian revolution "irrevocable." Furthermore, when the distribution of land to individual peasant families turns 94 percent of them into landowners, as happened in Japan, we see what a formidable dilemma is posed for Soviet propagandists. If they support such reforms, the result will be to extinguish the sparks of discontent; if they obstruct them, they go against the interests of the people they have promised to help.

Nor is the "bourgeoisie" a hopeful revolutionary vehicle in underdeveloped nations. The middle class is often a strong nationalist element, and the Communists cannot afford to oppose nationalism. Usually, too, the local bourgeoisie in these countries is too small to be either an agent or a target of revolution. The search for a "proletariat" on which to base a revolution has been no more rewarding. Most of the developing nations in Asia and Africa do not have enough proletarians worth summoning to unite. Here again a Communist slogan is empty of content.

In Eastern Europe the Communist task has been to replace the Soviet military presence with an effective Communist political and economic structure based on an acceptable ideology. To do this, the local Communist Parties, maintained in power by Moscow, have been striving for 17 years to capture the loyalty of the new postwar generation. Yet with all the punishments and rewards that are at their disposal, they have been unable thus far to enlist the necessary competence or to arouse the necessary enthusiasm. Today the Communist leadership in Eastern Europe

consists largely of elderly or middle-aged opportunists cut off from a resentful or apathetic people. (In Czechoslovakia, for instance, the average age of the Party membership is about 45.)

The Hungarian uprising in 1956 was created by students educated in Communist schools under Communist teachers, and vigorously supported by the workers whom Marx had proclaimed to be the shock troops of the Communist revolution. The same elements led the anti-Communist protests in Poznan and in East Berlin. The Berlin Wall is a transparent effort to stem a mass exodus of the younger, more vigorous Communist-educated elements to Western Germany, which for years has been officially described as a cesspool of capitalistic exploitation. In Poland, in order to increase stability, Gomulka has had to strike a wary peace with the church and allow peasants to retain their land. It is a fair generalization to say that wherever in Eastern Europe Communist ideology has not become a strait jacket on the talents of the people it is today a body of doctrine honored primarily in the breach.

My conclusion is that neither Marxist theory nor the Soviet attempt to put it into practice, whether in simon-pure or adulterated form, has proved to be a reliable guide to power on Communist terms. This is true both in states now under Communist rule and in nations toward which the Soviet Union apparently harbors designs.

III

When we turn to a second aspect of Communist ideology, as prescribing unvarying rules for economic development, we again find substantial evidence that the ideology is irrelevant to the practical problems faced by nations in the modern world. This is particularly true where the Communists had assumed they would find their most promising targets—in the developing new countries recently emerged from European colonial rule. One difficulty has been that their ideological guidelines are not really clear, for neither Marx nor Lenin gave much thought to whether Asia and Africa would develop in the European pattern.

In two generations the Soviet Union has developed a modern nation, highly industrialized, with a powerful military machine, able leaders, brilliant scientists and an educated people. Communist spokesmen have, of course, credited these achievements to the techniques of Karl Marx and announced that these were now

available to any aspiring new nations that wanted to join the Communist club. In so doing they overlooked some crucial differences. The most important of these is that the Soviet Union is almost unbelievably rich in natural resources. In less well-endowed nations, it simply is not possible to squeeze the capital for rapid industrial development out of the "savings" of the impoverished peasant majority. Red China, acting ruthlessly on Stalinist principles and helped substantially by Moscow, made a bold attempt to do so. Since the average Chinese rural family has less than two acres of arable land, it is not surprising that the attempt has failed.

When such realities could no longer be hidden, the Soviet Union began to offer the developing nations economic aid, in competition with the West. But in terms of the political influence it has been able to buy, or the Marxian dogma it has been able to impose, the price must seem appallingly high. It is not surprising that the new nations have been unable or unwilling to apply the totalitarian discipline which Stalin found necessary even under the much more favorable physical conditions in the Soviet Union.

There simply is no rigid and dependable formula as yet for rapid economic development. Nowhere, certainly, has the original economic theory of Marx, or the adaptations of it which the Soviet Union has tried to export to underdeveloped nations, met with success.

IV

My third and final point concerns Marxism-Leninism as a Soviet instrument in the conduct of foreign affairs. By Marxian tenets, Communism should serve as an international beacon, around which the working classes of all nations would unite in a dedicated movement regardless of political boundaries. Thus Lenin had expected the Soviet revolution to bring an internationally minded proletariat to power in a succession of key countries in Western Europe; and he was bitterly disappointed that it did not happen.

When Stalin shifted his emphasis from world revolution to the doctrine of "socialism in one country," he was embarking on a primarily defensive gambit, designed to give the Soviet Union the time and means to prepare for whatever next step to world domination might prove practicable.

The time arrived following World War II when the Red Armies

overran Eastern Europe. The means had been developed by expanding the programs of education and industrial growth within the Soviet Union. Almost at once Communist pressure was felt in war-stricken Western Europe. When Soviet plans there were blocked by the rapid economic recovery of the European nations, first buttressed by the Marshall Plan and then shielded by NATO, they were turned toward Asia and Africa.

In 1948, six Communist-led revolutions were launched in Asia—in addition to the unique and long-developing Chinese Communist revolution—under what appeared to be extraordinarily favorable conditions. In newly independent India, Indonesia, Burma, Malaya and in the Philippines these revolutions failed; only in Indochina, where the French tried to maintain an impossible colonial position, was there substantial success.

Since then, the difficulties encountered by the Communist drive in Asia and Africa have multiplied. Evidence of this can be seen in the contradictions in Communist propaganda, in the disagreements between Moscow and various native Communist Parties, in the splits within the local Parties, and in the constant shifts and experimentation which mark Moscow's effort to establish satisfactory working relationships.

A striking aspect of this Communist drive is that its propagandists seem reluctant to cite Communism's supposed economic or social merits. Instead, they describe Communism as an ally of the forces of nationalism. The difficulties here are manifold, not only because of the Soviet Union's anti-national practices in its satellites but because in giving lip service to nationalism it is championing a force which not only is basically incompatible with Communist doctrine but also with long-run Soviet objectives. In South Viet Nam today, for example, Communist propaganda finds it more effective to warn against foreign intervention than to call in Marxist terms for an uprising of the "proletariat and the toiling masses."

In certain other nations, propaganda extolling the merits of Communism is apparently judged a positive handicap and has been abandoned in order more effectively to promote traditional Russian objectives. In Afghanistan, for example, no posters, no demonstrations, no slogans, no overt Communist propaganda can be seen or heard. Instead of acting in the Marxist tradition to stir up antagonism among students, workers or peasants against the Afghan royal family, the Soviet line, at least for the present, is to

persuade both the rulers and the ruled that economic aid and technical guidance from the neighborly U.S.S.R.—entirely free, moreover, from any ideological connotations—provide the best means of bringing Afghanistan rapidly into the twentieth century.

Contradictions between Soviet policy and the interests of Communist ideology are seen in many other places. In Algeria, for instance, Moscow was so anxious to please the de Gaulle government, for reasons strictly in Russia's nationalist interest, that it missed a promising ideological opportunity by not recognizing the Algerian Provisional Government until after the cease-fire. Similarly, the Soviet Union is now aggressively selling its own oil at cut rates anywhere it can find a market, regardless of the adverse impact on the Communist movement in the oil-producing states of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Communist Parties have been suppressed by either decree or statute in some 45 nations. This does not count the many new nations in Africa where the Communist Party has failed even to get a start. Indeed, it is now operating legally in only two African states: Tunisia, where it is unimportant, and Madagascar, where the Communists call themselves "Titoists." Even where Communists are tolerated in one of their many guises, their effectiveness is often limited. Where they have merged into the local political system they have lost their identity; where they have failed to merge they have often found themselves in jail. Guinea illustrates the difficulties which their ideology faces in the relatively classless and intensely nationalistic new African societies. In order to gain status within the one-party Guinean state, the Communists have had to subordinate their interests to the dynamic nationalist aims of the government. Last December, when they neglected to do so, the Soviet Ambassador was invited to leave the country.

In India, the Communist Party remains legal, but the disarray within the organization reflects the same sort of dilemma that besets the Communists in several other developing nations. In order to maintain their voting strength the Indian Communists have been forced to play down their doctrinaire appeal and to emphasize their support for such nationalist causes as Goa and Kashmir. And within the Party itself the pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions are waging fierce and destructive ideological warfare.

In almost none of the developing countries does one find the

local Communist leadership acting today as the primary and overt agent of Soviet aims. Where it has not been curbed or where it is not ignored as of no importance, it has been left to play an expendable role of diversion and trouble-making.

An exception is Indonesia, which has the largest Communist Party in any country outside the Soviet bloc. Yet a major explanation of the Communist Party's strength there lies in its identification with nationalist forces on the one remaining "colonialist" issue in Indonesian politics, the question of West New Guinea. If that issue can be resolved peacefully, and an intensified effort is made to achieve economic development, the present strength of Indonesian Communism may be expected to decline.

Since the Soviet Union found that Communist ideology was becoming less appealing in the newly developing nations, it has turned increasingly to two other instruments of political penetration: subversion and foreign aid.

In South Viet Nam and Laos the geographical conditions were ideal for Communist infiltration and subversion. But in situations less exposed to direct Communist pressure the attempts at subversion by both Moscow and Peking have usually aroused popular distaste or hostility and in many cases have led to effective official countermeasures. I found this particularly so on recent trips to Latin America. Either because or in spite of spending large sums and much effort on espionage, propaganda and agitation, Castro has thus far lost diplomatic representation in 14 Latin American nations. And it is significant that, partly at least in an effort to counter his political slippage outside Cuba, he has lately disavowed the more doctrinaire Communist elements in his own house.

In an effort to forward their political aims, the Communist governments have depended increasingly on programs of economic aid. From 1955 to 1961, the Sino-Soviet bloc extended about \$4.4 billion in economic grants and credits, mostly the latter, to 28 nations outside the Iron Curtain. The Soviet Union supplied about three-fourths of the total. At the end of 1961, some 8,500 bloc technicians were in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In many cases such assistance has gone to nations which have taken openly anti-Communist positions. Whatever may be the political effect of this effort to offset American and European foreign aid programs, no claim can be made that it bears any ideological relationship to the concepts of Marxism-Leninism.

On the crucial question of arms control, Communist ideology has come into conflict with the assumed interests of Russian nationalism. According to Marx, the capitalistic economies are sustained either by war or by the threat of war. If the present Soviet leadership really believed its own dogma, it would sponsor a vigorous and realistic program to reduce the armament load, confident that if the United States agreed to lower its defense budget it would face unmanageable unemployment and that if it refused it would face a unanimously indignant world opinion. Yet the traditional Russian obsession with secrecy has made the Kremlin unwilling to accept any practicable version of the principle of inspection which would make arms control a reality, Karl Marx notwithstanding.

The instances I have cited suggest that whether in Communist propaganda, political action, subversion or foreign aid, Communist ideology is often proving either an ineffective servant of Soviet foreign policy or an actual handicap to its operations; and that as Soviet experience has made this or that manoeuvre or adjustment to reality, the ideology itself has become increasingly twisted and confused or outright ignored.

Communist ideology has even failed to provide a reliable cement to bind together the nations which profess it. Indeed, one might say that the main importance of Communist doctrine today is found in disputes within the Communist bloc itself—above all, of course, in the ideological controversies between Moscow and Peking. These controversies damage the whole Marxist concept of a single orthodoxy and wreak havoc with Moscow's effort to interpret it to suit the Soviet Union's particular experience and national priorities. Nationalism runs counter to Marxist-Leninist concepts of a world structured by classes, for it switches the basis of change from the supposedly inevitable tides of economics and history to the interpretations and imperatives of a particular man or group of men. This is markedly present, of course, in the disagreements among Moscow, Peking, Belgrade, Tirana and the satellite capitals of Eastern Europe.

The fact that the Communist nations with so much at stake are unable to create and maintain a common front affects not only their political future as the "socialist camp" but the power which the Marxist concept is assumed to wield in the world as a result of its alleged unbreakable unity.

v

I have suggested that Communist ideology is declining in relevance to the tasks of the modern world and that the Communists themselves are finding it of declining value as a political tool, an economic panacea and an instrument of diplomacy. This tendency may work to our advantage in the long run; but I must point out with the greatest possible emphasis that it in no way lessens the short-range challenge that the Soviet Union poses to the American people and their policy makers. As Soviet leaders are increasingly liberated from their own dogma, they may be encouraged to apply their great powers more constructively. Or the result may be something of a crisis of faith within the Soviet Union itself, a confrontation of the "believers" and the "realists." This in turn might release frustrations and hostilities in the Communist world that could have dangerous results for world peace. We can only pray that the waning of doctrinaire zeal and the replacement of it by nationalist aims among the Communist countries will not have this result, but that on the contrary it may in time offer new grounds for successful negotiation and even peaceful accommodation with us and our friends.

The question remains: What of America itself? Even if it is true that Communism is gradually losing much of its significance as a global ideology, this will not be of great importance to our grandchildren unless the democratic faith as we aim to practice it can be made relevant to the world of the future. If this is to happen, the American people will have to adopt a role which no prosperous and powerful nation has ever undertaken to play in the long history of civilization. It will have to identify itself boldly with the social, economic and political revolution that is now beginning to transform the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings in all parts of the globe. The obstacles to our playing such a role are appallingly large. Yet the possibilities for us and for mankind are very nearly infinite.