

## Sources of Soviet Communist Construction Doctrine

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Communist construction was a central ideological issue in the Soviet epoch, which outlined the final goal of social development and powered the CPSU policies. In the final analysis, it was this “sacred goal” that exonerated the real mainstays of the then regime, to wit, the Party monopoly on power at home and the USSR’s foreign policy. The Communist Party offered itself as a special political force that had managed to produce a program of “ascension to the shining future” and was the first in the world to have launched its actual construction.

The 22nd CPSU Congress in 1961 accepted a new Party Program which proclaimed that communism would have been built by 1980. Since then the name of Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Government, and the course for full-scale communist construction were inseparable in historical science. In fact, however, the attribution of the “leap into communism” initiative is not so invariant. The present writer will attempt to introduce clarity to the perception of the nodal points in the Khrushchev epoch which is described in writings as the “thaw.”

The idea of a “leap” appeared long before the 22nd CPSU Congress. More precisely, it was the focal point at the 18th Congress as early as 1939, with a concept of full-scale communist construction looming large against the backdrop of triumphant reports. The entire atmosphere at the Congress was suggestive enough: speakers talked about communist construction as both a strategic goal and a direct practical task, leaving no doubt that the Party as a whole was coming to the conclusion that several five-year periods of shock work was all that was needed to complete the “successful process.” Lazar Kaganovich (deputy premier) was one such speaker, and he prophesied this: “Comrade Stalin’s report will become the great program of our glorious Party’s great achievements for the new historic period of transition from socialism to the highest phase of communism.” More than that, the forum even set the concrete timeframes: “Twenty years of our Party’s work at the construction site of socialism has produced results: we have built socialist society. Another twenty years of work will give us the highest phase, the communist society,” to quote Stalin’s aide A. Poskryobyshev, his closest associate and head of his chancellery since 1935.

Interestingly, Nikita Khrushchev, then 44 and leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party, proved the most enthusiastic supporter of the “leap into communism” at the 18th Congress. He sought to convince the audience that the first phase, socialism, had been successfully accomplished and that “socialism dominated completely and undividedly all branches of our economy.” He was visibly enamoured of the term “communism” and used it more often than other speakers. Occasionally he substituted it for the word “socialism,” as if wishing to make the coveted second phase draw within sight. Here are some excerpts from his address: “Year after year we climb higher to the final summit of our struggle—the communist society, the communist system;” “Let me tell you, how much success the Ukrainian people has achieved in the struggle for communism;” “The 18th Party Congress, the historic directive of our great Stalin are arming the working people of the Soviet Union, as for that matter the working people the world over, with a powerful weapon in the fight for communism.”

There is no doubt that Khrushchev and the entire Soviet elite carefully preserved the ideas and the impetus of the 18th Congress, “the congress that gave the locomotive of history the green light to the station ‘communism,’”<sup>1</sup> through the years of the Great Patriotic War. Pushed into the background, for objective reasons, in 1941-1945, the communist construction theme was immediately resuscitated after the war, popping up again in official addresses and publications. As early as 1945, the *Bolshevik*, the Party’s main scientific and theoretical journal, wrote editorially that “after the victorious ending of the Great Patriotic War the Soviet people continued to put into practice the majestic task of completing the construction of a classless society and making a gradual transition from socialism to communism.”<sup>2</sup> Reporting to the USSR Supreme Soviet on a four-year plan in March 1946, the State Planning Committee chairman N. Voznesensky proclaimed the above to be the Party’s guideline.

In the postwar years, the communist construction theme gained a firm foothold in everyday ideological practice, being talked about as a routine matter. The following idea was the central one: As early as the period marked by the acceptance of Stalin’s USSR Constitution prior to the 18th Party Congress, the Soviet Union embarked on a new stage in its development, connected with the completion of the building of socialist society and a gradual transition to communism. Addressing the 11th Young Communist League (*VLKSM*) Congress in spring 1949, First Secretary of the *VLKSM* Central Committee Mikhaylov made this enthusiastic statement: “It is great happiness that fell to our lot. Our generation will live under communism.”<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that the drafting of the communist construction course took place during the period preparatory to the 19th CPSU Congress. The practical advancement of so grandiose a task objectively required a serious scientific and theoretical mapping of the ways of communist construction. As is common knowledge, this point is only marginally covered in the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, and that dictated the necessity of specifying the tools of communist construction. The explanation clarifying those difficult matters was not long in coming. Stalin’s work *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* was pub-

lished in October 1952, in which the “coryphaeus of all sciences” proved that it was possible to build communism in the USSR even if the capitalist encirclement remained intact. He formulated these three preliminary conditions: 1) it is necessary to ensure not only a rational organization of the productive forces but also continuous growth of the entire public production with the prevalent development of the means of production, something that enables extended reproduction; 2) by way of gradual transitions it is necessary to raise the collective-farm property to the level of property of the whole people, and similarly to replace gradually the commodity turnover with a system of product exchanges for it to embrace the entire range of products of public production; 3) it is necessary to achieve so much cultural growth in society as would ensure to all its members the comprehensive development of their physical and intellectual faculties.<sup>4</sup> Apart from theoretical speculations, Stalin used metaphors. On February 15, 1952, while discussing issues of political economy, he said this: “There will be no particular ‘entry into communism.’ Step by step, without noticing it, we will ride into communism. It is not like an ‘entry into a city,’ when the ‘gates are open and, please, come in.’”<sup>5</sup>

Stalin’s theorizing on the ways of communist construction was immediately declared the guide to action and the program of great social transformation. In a concentrated form, this took place at the 19th CPSU Congress which was keynoted by the unfolding communist construction. Delivered by Georgy Malenkov, the Central Committee report said this: “The Party’s plans for the future, which determine the prospects and ways of our movement forward, are based on the knowledge of economic laws, are based on the science about the construction of communist society, developed by Comrade Stalin.”<sup>6</sup> Practically every speaker at the Congress in some way or other reproduced the idea. For example, Andrianov, Secretary of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the CPSU, declared that “charted by the great leader and teacher Comrade Stalin, the prospects for the building of communist society are illuminating the way to communism like a powerful searchlight, are inspiring the Party and the whole of the Soviet people to new feats of valor in the glory of our great Motherland.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the “leap into communism” doctrine, which had been put on the agenda by the 18th Congress as early as 1939, was brought to its logical conclusion 13 years later. The matter came to be grounded in theory, the main architect of communist construction was determined, and a decision was adopted on the ascension to the highest form of social development. Instead of approving a new Party program, the 19th CPSU Congress issued a recommendation for all to be guided by Stalin’s *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*.

However, Stalin’s death interfered with the planned course of events. The ensuing power struggle and a course for de-Stalinization made the declared project a less frequent and not quite so popular theme. More than that, some leaders of the nation even made an attempt to call into question the “leap into communism.” The case in point is Vyacheslav Molotov’s comment regarding the level of socialist construction the country achieved by the mid-1950s. Reporting about Soviet foreign policy activities to the USSR Supreme Soviet in February 1955, Vyacheslav Molotov said this: “Along with the Soviet Union, where the founda-

tions of socialist society have been built, there are also such people's democratic countries as have made only the first, though quite important, steps in the direction of socialism."<sup>8</sup>

The stumbling block was his mention of only the "foundations" of socialist society that had been built in the USSR. His comment ran counter to the 18th Congress' conclusion about the USSR entering a stage of completion of socialist construction and making a gradual transition to communism, as it did to the CPSU Rules accepted by the 19th Congress, which said that the Party had secured the construction of socialist society. Under these circumstances, Molotov's dissenting view on the level of social development achieved in the course of socialist construction in the USSR caused protests on the part of Central Committee Presidium members, particularly Khrushchev. In consequence, Molotov had to send a letter, seven months later, to *Kommunist*, the main scientific and theoretical journal of the CPSU Central Committee, which renounced his statement as "theoretically erroneous and politically harmful" and fully espoused the conclusions of the 18th and 19th CPSU Congresses.<sup>9</sup>

Conscious of how important the issue was, Khrushchev thought it necessary to go back to it in his report to the 20th CPSU Congress: "Addresses by certain officials allowed of erroneous formulas to the effect that we allegedly had created only the foundations of socialism, that is, the basis of socialism. It is common knowledge that the socialist system had won and asserted itself in all branches of the economy as early as the time when the new USSR Constitution was accepted (1936). This means that socialist society had been built in the main in our country as early as then, and that it had been developing since then on the firm basis of socialist production relations. Therefore, claiming that we have built only the foundations of socialism would mean disorienting the communists and all Soviet people in the most important question about the prospects for our country's development."<sup>10</sup>

One cannot help remarking at this point that ordinary people were much more sober-minded and realistic about these debates. Unlike the leadership, which plunged into theoretical discussions concerning the foundations, the basis, the prospects, etc., ordinary citizens used their own judgment that stemmed from their everyday life, not ideology. One Pashkov, an old-age pensioner from Kharkov, Ukraine, wrote this to the CPSU Central Committee: "When a working man in the city enjoys a better kind of living than a medium-skilled worker in any capitalist country, and when a worker in the countryside, or rather a land-tiller, enjoys a better life than an average US or, for example, Dutch farmer, only then will we have the right to say that socialism has been built at home, and after that the stage will begin of a gradual transition to communism."<sup>11</sup>

But, as is evident from the foregoing, Khrushchev was guided by different criteria. As he launched reforms in industry and agriculture, as he made his report to the secret meeting of the 20th Congress, he was firmly convinced that socialism *had* been built and that it was necessary to start full-scale communist construction. But the 20th CPSU Congress introduced serious corrections to the process. Its dismantling of Stalin's personality cult, in the first place as a theorist and classic of Marxism-Leninism, actually left vacant the pedestal of the chief

architect of the “shining future.” At the same time, the inner-Party rivalries, which raged up till the moment when Malenkov, Molotov and Kaganovich were dismissed from their posts, made it impossible for any of the opposing sides to climb it. After June 1957, however, a fundamentally different situation took shape at the top, where the First Secretary of the Central Committee established his unconditional lead. Seizing at the opportunity, Khrushchev immediately resuscitated the communist construction idea, pushed it to the forefront, and made it again the cornerstone of the Soviet ideology. The CPSU Central Committee theses for the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution emphasized with a new force that “the building of communist society at the present time is no longer a far-off goal; rather it is the direct, practical goal of the entire joint activities of Soviet people and their guiding force, the CPSU.”<sup>12</sup> A year and a half after the 20th Congress, Khrushchev sought to convince *The New York Times*’ 48-years-old James Reston that he would live long enough to see communist society built in the USSR.<sup>13</sup>

This was the setting, in which a new Party program, the program of the communist transformation to be accepted by the 22nd CPSU Congress, was being drafted. True enough, its approval was accompanied by certain commentaries about similar decisions by the 19th CPSU Congress. Anastas Mikoyan, for one, offered these explanations: “The Party was due to overcome a number of wrong ideas about the transition to communism. Suffice it to recall that shortly before the 19th Congress views were current that supposedly it was enough to assure a continued production growth, turn the collective-farm property into the property of the whole people, to replace the commodity turnover with a system of product exchanges between cities and the countryside, to achieve the doubling of pay, and to enhance the cultural level of workers and peasants so that then to make a transition to communism.”<sup>14</sup>

But the main thing invariably remained unchanged: the new national leadership with Khrushchev at the head retained, almost in full, the communist construction strategy formulated in the postwar period. Speaking at the 21st Congress, Khrushchev reiterated the conclusion about the complete and final victory of socialism (as interpreted by himself), and made a repeated declaration (in the wake of the 19th Congress) about the beginning of a period of full-scale communist construction. The new CPSU Program reproduced the timeframe of the endeavor—20 years—as outlined in Stalin’s lifetime. Thus, while leaving intact the doctrine of the “shining future,” Khrushchev replaced the main character—the architect of the project. Emerging, by the late 1950s, as the undivided ruler of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev stepped into Joseph Stalin’s shoes, taking over both his teaching and his heritage.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 18th VKP (B) Congress. Stenographic Report, Moscow, OGIZ, 1939, pp. 169, 170, 174, 187, 269, 639.

- 2 *Bolshevik*, 1945, No.17, p. 3 (in Russian).
- 3 11th VLKSM Congress. 29 March—7 April 1949. Stenographic Report, Moscow, Politizdat, 1949, p. 14 (in Russian).
- 4 J.V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Moscow, Politizdat, 1952, pp. 66-67 (in Russian).
- 5 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, f. 83, op. 1, d. 8, l. 111 (in Russian).
- 6 19th CPSU Congress. Bulletin No. 1, Moscow, 1952, p. 105 (in Russian).
- 7 19th CPSU Congress. Bulletin No. 3, Moscow, 1952, p. 38 (in Russian).
- 8 *Pravda*, February 9, 1955.
- 9 *Kommunist*, No. 14, 1955, p. 127.
- 10 20th CPSU Congress. Stenographic Report, Vol. 1, Moscow, Politizdat, 1956, p. 115 (in Russian).
- 11 RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, l.126 (in Russian).
- 12 *Pravda*, September 15, 1957.
- 13 *Pravda*, October 11, 1957.
- 14 22nd CPSU Congress. Stenographic Report, Vol. 1, Moscow Politizdat, 1962, p. 450 (in Russian).

*Translated by Aram Yavrumyan*