

'The methods of Stalinism condemned at the Soviet Communist Party Congress' from *Il nuovo Corriere della Sera* (18 February 1956)

Caption: On 18 February 1956, the Italian newspaper *Il nuovo Corriere della Sera* speculates on the genuine desire for de-Stalinisation shown by Nikita Khrushchev, the new Soviet leader, on the occasion of his submission of the report on Stalin's crimes to the 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress in Moscow.

Source: *Il nuovo Corriere della Sera*. 18.02.1956, n° 42; anno 81. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Il congresso del P.C. sovietico condanna i metodi dello stalinismo", auteur:Ottone, Piero , p. 1.

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The methods of Stalinism condemned at the Soviet Communist Party Congress

‘The personality cult, widespread in the past,’ says Suslov, ‘has wrought serious damage’ — Malenkov confirms the principles of collective direction — In a speech, Togliatti endorses Khrushchev’s guidelines on tactics in the ‘capitalist’ countries

From our correspondent

Moscow 17 February, evening.

The Soviet Party Congress has reached its fourth day; mile-long speeches, stuffed with learned citations from Marx and Lenin, have followed one another without respite. Speakers are commenting on Khrushchev’s report or, to be more precise, are praising and paraphrasing it. Not a dissenting voice, not an original opinion: all the delegates, whatever their stature, think the same.

The general monotony and the surfeit of conformism are worrying the leaders. This is evident whenever the problem of the party direction, among those examined most extensively, is tackled. The principles of the past are now being openly condemned. Mikhail Suslov, one of the more authoritative leaders, denounced with great solemnity ‘the personality cult’ widespread, according to his words, ‘prior to the 19th Congress’. The 19th Congress took place in 1952: Stalin was alive. Foreign observers have been quick to identify him as the main focus of this cult. Suslov’s words are therefore taking on a special significance.

He said that the doctrine on the direction of the party, as formulated by Lenin, was subsequently debased. ‘The cult of the personality, alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, which was widespread before the 19th Congress, wrought serious damage. It lessened the importance of collective direction, threatened internal democracy, impeded members’ activity, their initiative and the independence of their work, resulted in a lack of control, irresponsibility and even autocratic action by individuals, prevented criticism and self-criticism, and led to unilateral and often mistaken decisions.’ No Westerner can ignore the condemnation of Stalinism in these phrases.

The Communists are therefore now being exhorted to show personal initiative, to be autonomous, to think with their heads. One of the guiding threads of this Congress is the fight ‘against dogmatism’, against ‘Talmudism’, against the idolatry of leaders. It is reported that Khrushchev has asked delegates not to applaud the leaders when they come into the room. The cult of the individual is to be replaced by ‘collective direction’. However, collective direction means (as Suslov himself recognises) the freedom to criticise and the freedom to discuss. Everyone is to have his own personal opinion on a particular issue: it is only from a confrontation of opinions that a joint decision can ultimately emerge. We do not know whether this is the procedure within the Praesidium, or the Central Committee, whose sessions are held in secret: we know, however, that no echo of their discussions is heard in public. During the Congress, every speaker has up to now taken up the various points of the Khrushchev report, expounded on them and illustrated them in depth: no one has criticised so much as a comma.

Georgy Malenkov spoke today. He also confirmed the policy on collective direction put forward by Khrushchev and others. He recognised that heavy industry had to take absolute precedence, and yet it was he who, when he was Prime Minister, had affirmed the need to develop the production of consumer goods. He went on to report on the electrification of the country, for which his Ministry is responsible: the USSR continued to lag behind the USA, he said, but was developing more quickly.

Relations with the capitalist world are another guiding thread in the work of the Congress. Everyone is of the view that ‘the Socialist camp’ is in the ascendancy and will triumph. Everyone considers the western system to be in its death throes. Dmitri Shepilov, one of the party secretaries and editor of *Pravda*, called capitalism ‘a rotten and decaying corpse’. He explained their co-existence merely as the ‘simultaneous existence’ of the two systems: East and West have to stop waging atomic war, but continue their ideological war. There are far more attacks on the West than calls for friendship in the various speeches.

Speakers have examined the various ways in which Communism can emerge victorious in foreign countries. Khrushchev has outlined a new theory: to align with the social democrats and attempt to gain power through parliamentary methods, so that the structure of the state can then be subverted. This does not mean that bloody revolution is being repudiated; merely that they are willing to do without it if the same objectives can be achieved by peaceful means.

Nothing untoward, as can be seen, but enough to cause Khrushchev to exclaim: 'The enemies of Communism paint Communists as partisans of armed revolution, violence and civil war, in every case and without exception. This is an absurd calumny. The Communists and the working classes obviously prefer less drastic forms of transition from one system to the other.' This depends, however, 'on the degree and type of resistance from the exploiting classes'. In other words, if those opposing Communism accept their overthrow in well-mannered fashion, the Communists will do without revolution. It is interesting to note that the Soviet Communist party is, in this way, openly discussing the conquest of power in the countries of the West: it is difficult to reconcile this discussion with the claimed 'non-interference' that the Russians vaunt over other countries.

Palmiro Togliatti, attending the Congress as a guest, also gave a short speech of greeting this morning and took up Khrushchev's guidelines on tactics to be used in the 'capitalist' countries. He praised the victories of the Soviet Communist party, to which so many millions of Italian non-Communist workers, he said, owed a debt of gratitude, he eulogised the new five-year plan, the USSR's economic progress, the decision to reduce the working day to seven hours (by 1960), thereby paving the way 'for the further development of the personality of the worker, and of his awareness as master of his own fate'; lastly, he said that the transition to socialism may take different forms.

'We understand,' he said, 'that other countries do not have to follow exactly the same path that you have taken to build a socialist society. Our task is to map an Italian path. This path has to take account of the historical development of our country, the attitudes and inspiration of the large masses of the people and their organisations. It has to make it possible to achieve, in ways specific to our country, an alliance of all the working classes, of peasants cultivating the land, and the middle classes, and to win over the vast majority of the people to the important cause of the social transformation of our community.' A perfect paraphrase of Khrushchev's principles.

Piero Ottone