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TOTALITARIAN IMPERIALISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

HANNAH ARENDT

AS I WRITE THIS, one year has passed since the flames of the Hungarian revolution illuminated the immense landscape of post-war totalitarianism for twelve long days. This was a true event whose stature will not depend upon victory or defeat; its greatness is secure in the tragedy it enacted. For who can forget the silent procession of black-clad women in the streets of Russian-occupied Budapest, mourning their dead in public, the last political gesture of the revolution? And who can doubt the solidity of this remembrance when one year after the revolution the defeated and terrorized people have still enough strength of action left to commemorate once more in public the death of their freedom by shunning spontaneously and unanimously all places of public entertainment, theaters, movies, coffee houses and restaurants?

The context of circumstances within which the revolution happened was of great significance, but it was not compelling enough to release one of those automatic processes that seem almost always to imprison history and which actually are not even historical, if we understand by historical whatever is worthy of being remembered. What happened in Hungary happened nowhere else, and the twelve days of the revolution contained more history than the twelve years since the Red Army had "liberated" the country from Nazi domination.

For twelve years everything had happened according to expectations—the long dreary story of deceit and broken promises, of hopes against hope and final disillusionment: from the first stage of popular front tactics and a sham parliamentary system, to open establishment of a one-party dictatorship which quickly liquidated the leaders and members of the formerly tolerated parties, until the next stage when the native communist leaders, whom Moscow rightly or wrongly mistrusted, were no less brutally framed, humiliated in show trials, tortured and killed while power passed into the hands of the most despicable and most corrupt elements among the Moscow-trained communists. All this and much more was predictable, not because there were any social or historical forces press-

ing in one direction, but because this was the automatic result of Russian hegemony. It was as though the Russian rulers repeated in great haste all the stages of the October revolution up to the emergence of totalitarian dictatorship; the story, therefore, while unspeakably terrible, is without much interest of its own and varies very little; what happened in one satellite country happened at almost the same moment in all others from the Baltic Sea down to the Adriatic.

The only exceptions to this rule were the Baltic States on the one hand, and Eastern Germany on the other. The former were unhappy enough to be directly incorporated into the Soviet Union, with the consequence that the ceremonious repetition of the whole development had to be dispensed with and their status immediately assimilated to that enjoyed by other Soviet nationalities. When up to fifty per cent of the population was deported and the loss made good by forced random immigration, it became clear that they had been assimilated to the status of the Tartars, the Kalmyks or the Volga Germans, that is, to those who had been found untrustworthy during the war against Hitler. The case of Eastern Germany is an exception in the opposite direction. It never became even a satellite country but remained occupied territory with a Quisling government despite the zeal of German Moscow agents, with the result that the country, though still miserable enough when compared with the *Bundesrepublik*, fared much better economically as well as politically than the satellites. But these regions are exceptions only because they, too, fall into the orbit of Russian power; they are not exceptions to the satellite system because they did not belong to it.

Not even the difficulties which began shortly after Stalin's death can be called unexpected, because they reflected so faithfully the difficulties, or rather the controversies, within the top Russian leadership. Here, too, there seemed to be a repetition of conditions in the Twenties, before the streamlining of the international communist movement into its eventual totalitarian shape had been completed, when every Communist party split into factions which faithfully mirrored the faction-ridden Russian party and each splinter looked up to its respective Russian protector as to a patron saint—which indeed he was since the destinies of his protégés all over the world depended utterly upon his own fate. It certainly was interest-

ing, and gave food for thought about certain unchanging structures of this movement, that Stalin's death was not only followed by the same succession crisis as Lenin's thirty years ago (which, after all, in the absence of any law of succession is rather a matter of course), but that the crisis was met again by the temporary solution of "collective leadership," a term coined by Stalin in 1925, and that the result in the Communist Parties abroad was again a desperate struggle to line up with one of the leaders and form a faction around him. Thus, Kadar is as much a protégé of Khrushchev as Nagy was a protégé of Malenkov. Even in the atmosphere of stark and sometimes sublime tragedy which the Hungarian revolution created, this repetitiveness frequently bordered upon the comical, as when one of the last broadcasts of the communist Free Radio Rajk from Hungary urged "the comrades to join the pseudo-Communist Party of Kadar" and turn it into a "true Hungarian Communist party." For in the same vein the early opposition to Stalin had urged the comrades not to leave the party but to use the Trojan-horse tactic, until Stalin himself ordered the same tactics for the German Communists with respect to the Nazi movement. Each time the result was the same: the joiners became true and good Stalinists and Nazis for all practical purposes.

The Hungarian revolution interrupted these types of automatic occurrences and conscious or unconscious repetitions just when the student of totalitarianism had grown accustomed to them, and public opinion apathetic. This event was not prepared at all by developments in Poland. It was totally unexpected and took everybody by surprise—those who did and suffered, no less than those who watched in furious impotence from the outside, or those in Moscow who prepared to invade and conquer the country like enemy territory.¹ For what happened here was something in which nobody any longer believed, if he ever had believed in it—neither the communists nor the anti-communists, and least of all those who, either

¹Boris I. Nicolaevsky, whose "Battle in the Kremlin"—a series of six articles published by *The New Leader*, XL (July 29 - September 2, 1957)—is the most comprehensive and the soundest analysis of developments in Russia after Stalin's death, finds "that the United Nations' report on the Hungarian Revolution has established that the outbreak of violence in Budapest was the result of *deliberate provocation*." I am not convinced; but even if he is right, the result of the Russian provocation was certainly unexpected and went far beyond the original intentions.

without knowing or without caring about the price other people would have to pay, were talking about possibilities and duties of people to rebel against totalitarian terror. If there was ever such a thing as Rosa Luxemburg's "spontaneous revolution"—this sudden uprising of an oppressed people for the sake of freedom and hardly anything else, without the demoralizing chaos of military defeat preceding it, without coup d'état techniques, without a closely knit apparatus of organizers and conspirators, without the undermining propaganda of a revolutionary party, something, that is, which everybody, conservatives and liberals, radicals and revolutionists, had discarded as a noble dream—then we had the privilege to witness it. Perhaps the Hungarian professor was right when he told the United Nations Commission: "It was unique in history, that the Hungarian revolution had no leaders. It was not organized; it was not centrally directed. The will for freedom was the moving force in every action."

Events, past and present,—not social forces and historical trends, nor questionnaires and motivation research, nor any other gadgets in the arsenal of the social sciences—are the true, the only reliable teachers of political scientists, as they are the most trustworthy source of information for those engaged in politics. Once such an event as the spontaneous uprising in Hungary has happened, every policy, theory and forecast of future potentialities needs re-examination. In its light we must check and enlarge our understanding of the totalitarian form of government as well as of the nature of the totalitarian version of imperialism.

I. RUSSIA AFTER STALIN'S DEATH

Spontaneous as the Hungarian revolution was, it cannot be understood outside the context of developments after Stalin's death. As we know today, this death occurred on the eve of a gigantic new purge, so that whether he died a natural death or was killed, the atmosphere in the party's higher echelons must have been one of intense fear. Since no successor existed, no one appointed by Stalin and no one quick enough or who felt up to the task, a struggle for succession among the top leadership followed immediately and caused the crisis in Soviet Russia and the satellite countries. Its outcome even now, five years after the death of Stalin, may not

yet be decided. But one thing is sure: one of the most serious flaws in totalitarian dictatorship is its apparent inability to find a solution to this problem.

The attitude of totalitarian dictators in this matter we knew before: Stalin's carelessness in occasionally appointing his successor only to kill or demote him a few years later was matched and supplemented by a few scattered remarks of Hitler on the subject; everything we knew suggested strongly that they were convinced that the question was of minor importance because almost anybody would do as long as the apparatus remained intact. To understand this carelessness, one must bear in mind that the choice obviously was limited to a small circle of people who by the very fact that they were on top *and* alive had proven their superiority under totalitarian conditions, with everything that such superiority implies. From the totalitarian viewpoint, moreover, a binding regulation of succession would introduce an element of stability, alien to and possibly in the way of the needs of the "movement" and its extreme flexibility. If a succession law existed, it would indeed be the only stable, unalterable law in the whole structure and therefore possibly a first step in the direction of some kind of legality.

However that may be and whatever we may have known, we could not possibly know what would happen in the case of the dictator's death. We know now that succession is an unsolved problem and causes a serious crisis in which the relations among the potential successors themselves, between them and the masses, and the relationship among the various apparatuses on whose support they can count are involved. Totalitarian leaders, being mass leaders, need popularity, which is no less effective if, under totalitarian conditions, it is fabricated by propaganda and supported by terror. The first stage in the succession struggle was a competition for popularity, because none of the competitors was well known, let alone popular—with the exception, perhaps, of Zhukov, who, being an army man, was the least likely to succeed in rising to power. Khrushchev borrowed tested American devices, travelled around, shook hands and even learned how to kiss babies. Beria engaged in an anti-war, appeasement policy whose very extremes were oddly reminiscent of Himmler's efforts during the last months of the war to succeed Hitler by becoming the man the Allied powers would trust enough to conclude peace with. Malenkov preached a greater

emphasis on consumer goods and promised to raise the standard of living. All of them together eventually liquidated Beria, not only because his foreign policy had become dangerous but also because he was of course the very symbol of popular hatred in Russia as well as abroad—which, again as in the case of Himmler, apparently everybody knew except himself.

This competition for mass popularity should not be mistaken for a genuine fear of the masses. Fear, to be sure, was a potent motive for the establishment of the collective leadership but unlike the triumvirate after Lenin's death, which was indeed a mutual security pact against the "counter-revolution," the collective leadership after Stalin's death was a mutual security pact of the concerned gentlemen against each other. And anyone who troubles to look up their past—all of them staunch Stalinists, educated and tested only in the Stalin era—will have to admit that their fear of each other was entirely justified.

Fear of the masses, on the other hand, would hardly have been justified. At the moment of Stalin's death, the police apparatus was still intact, and even now, when the police empire has been broken up and the terror loosened for years, there is some evidence of boomerang effects from the unrest in the satellite countries—a few student disturbances, one strike in a Moscow plant, some very cautious demands for more leeway in "self-criticism," though hardly any demands for freedom among the intellectuals²—but there has never been any evidence of open revolt or of the regime's being afraid of it. Moreover, the little show of opposition among intellectuals was highly encouraged from above, and such an encouragement, far from being a genuine concession, was one of Stalin's tested devices of domination. Appeals for "self-criticism" have served for decades as deliberate provocation by which to bring opponents into the open and test public opinion, whereupon the situation is dealt with appropriately. As far as Russia proper is concerned, Khrushchev's recent speech informing the intellectuals that they had indulged in "incorrect understanding of the essence of the party's criticism of the Stalin personality cult," underestimated

²Those who harbor illusions in this matter should read the exchange of letters between Ivan Anissimov, editor of the Soviet magazine *Foreign Literature*, and Ignazio Silone, which took place during the last months of 1956 and has been published by *Tempo Presente* in Italy and *The New Leader*, XL (July 15, 1957), under the title "A Troubled Dialogue."

"the positive role of Stalin" and should go back to "Socialist realism . . . [with its] unlimited opportunities" in developing "their talents to glorify," is not much more than a routine performance.

Another aspect of the same speech is more interesting. For in it Khrushchev announces the establishment of "creative unions" through which "the creative growth of every writer, artist, sculptor, etc." would be subject "to constant comradely concern." Here we find a clue to how he intends to replace the restriction of police terror and to the meaning of his insistence on decentralization. He seems to plan a surveillance exerted not only by an outside (police) body but recruited from the midst of the people, in this case the writers and artists themselves. This would be institutionalization of, possibly an improvement upon, the mutual spying principle which permeates totalitarian societies, whose effectiveness Stalin had achieved by making information and denunciation of others the only test of loyalty. It is noteworthy that another recently announced innovation of Soviet rule points in the same direction. This is the new decree about "social parasites," who will also be selected for punishment in concentration camps by the populace itself. It is a kind of highly organized mob rule with which Khrushchev proposes to replace certain functions of the secret police, as though the people by now can be trusted to be their own policemen and to take the initiative in the selection of victims.

Similar new developments in the techniques of domination can be discovered in the much discussed decentralization projects. For, far from indicating a democratization of Soviet society or a rationalization of Soviet economy, they are obviously aimed at breaking the power of the managerial class through the establishment of new economic regions with new men to run them.³ The redeployment of Moscow-centralized personnel to the provinces will assure their atomization, while from now on they will be subject to the surveillance of local party authorities, who surely will not fail to exert the same "constant comradely concern with the creative growth" of every plant and every branch of production. This aim is not

³Nicolaevsky, *loc. cit.*, brings valuable material for "Khrushchev's fight against the Soviet managerial class . . . (which) goes far back into the past." Compare also the article by Richard Lowenthal in *Problems of Communism*, September-October, 1957, "New Purge in the Kremlin," which comes to the conclusion: "What had started as a drive for more economic rationality had turned into a drive for more direct party rule in the economic field."

new; Khrushchev learned from Stalin that every group of people who begin to show signs of class identity and solidarity must be broken up, ideologically for the sake of the classless society and practically for the sake of an atomized society which alone can be totally dominated.⁴ But what Stalin achieved by means of a permanent revolution and periodic gigantic purges, Khrushchev hopes to achieve by new devices, built into, so to speak, the social structure itself and meant to assure atomization from within.

This difference in method and approach is important enough, especially as it is not restricted to the period of the "thaw." It was quite striking, though it has been hardly noticed, that the bloody crushing of the Hungarian revolution, terrible and effective as it was, did not represent a typically Stalinist solution. Stalin most probably would have preferred a police action to a military operation, and he would certainly have carried it through, not merely by execution of leaders and imprisonment of thousands, but by wholesale deportation and by consciously depopulating the country. Nothing finally would have been further from his mind than to send enough aid to prevent a complete collapse of the Hungarian economy and to stave off mass starvation, as the Soviet Union has done during the last year.

It may be too early to tell how permanent this change in methods will turn out to be. It may be a temporary phenomenon, a hangover, as it were, from the time of collective leadership, of unsolved conflicts within the inner circle of the regime with the concomitant relaxation of terror and ideological rigidity. Moreover, these methods are as yet untried and their effects could be quite different from those expected. Yet, as it is certain that the relative relaxation of the post-Stalin era was not caused by pressure from below, it seems plausible that certain objective factors strongly favor an abandonment of some features and devices which we have come to identify with totalitarian rule.

⁴Milovan Djilas, like many former communists, is less outraged by the loss of freedom under a communist dictatorship than by the loss of equality. High salaries, the possession of mink coats, automobiles and villas by the ruling bureaucracy must of course be very annoying to those who joined the movement for the sake of social justice. But they are not the sign of a "new class." If, on the other hand, it should be true that such a new class is forming in Yugoslavia, this alone would demonstrate that Tito's dictatorship is not totalitarian, which, indeed, it is not. See Djilas' *The New Class* (New York, 1957).

First among them is the fact that the Soviet Union for the first time suffers from a very real shortage of labor. In this situation, chiefly due to severe losses during the war but also to the country's progressing industrialization, the institution of slave labor, concentration—and extermination—camps which, among their other functions, also had to solve the acute unemployment problem of the thirties, caused partly by the enforced collectivization of the peasants, are not only obsolete but positively dangerous. It is quite possible that the younger generation objected to Stalin's plans for a new super-purge not only on the grounds of personal security, but because they felt that Russia was no longer in a position to afford the prohibitively high cost in "human material" involved. This seems to be the most plausible explanation of why the liquidation of Beria and his clique was followed by an apparently serious and successful liquidation of the police slave-empire, the transformation of some camps into forced settlements, and the release of a number of inmates.

A second factor, closely connected with the first, is the emergence of Communist China, which because of its threefold superiority in population—600 against 200 million—puts Russia at a serious disadvantage in the half-hidden, but very real struggle for ultimate supremacy. Even more important, China, its adherence to the Soviet bloc notwithstanding, has thus far refused to follow the Russian depopulation policy; for great as the number of victims in the first years of dictatorial rule may appear—15 million seems a plausible guess—it is insignificant in proportion to the population when compared with the losses Stalin used to inflict on his subjects.⁵ These considerations of sheer numerical force, while they do not preclude the establishment of a police state or necessitate the abolition of rule through terror, definitely stand in the way of the type of mass liquidation of "innocents" or "objective enemies" which was so highly characteristic of both the Hitler and the Stalin regimes.

⁵The best proof of the difference between Mao's and Stalin's rule may be found in a comparison of the population censuses in China and Russia. The last Chinese census, counting close to 600 million people, was higher than statistical expectations, while Russian censuses for decades have been considerably lower than what statistically was expected. In the absence of reliable figures for population losses through extermination, one could guess the figure of those who were murdered in Russia from these millions of people who were "statistically lost."

These factors seem to impel Russia herself to the inner-communist heresy of national communism which obviously has become the ruling regime in Yugoslavia and in China. It is not surprising that communists of smaller countries like Gomulka, Rajk and Nagy, and Tito himself, should incline to this deviation. Communists who were more than simple agents of Moscow, willing to become ruling bureaucrats anywhere in the world when, for some higher reason of world revolutionary strategy, the country of their birth should cease to exist, had no other choice. The case is different in China, which could have afforded the price of totalitarian terror even more easily than Russia. The fact, however, is that Mao has deliberately chosen the national alternative and formulated a number of theories in his recent speech which are in accordance with it and in flagrant contradiction to the official Russian ideology. No doubt, the text of "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" constitutes the first piece of serious writing which has come out of the communist orbit since Lenin's death,⁶ and with it the ideological initiative has shifted from Moscow to Peiping. This, it is true, may harbor momentous consequences for the future; it may even change the totalitarian nature of the Russian regime. But at this moment all such hopes are, to say the least, premature. By now Zhukov's demotion should have convinced those who had any doubts in this matter, for one reason for his dismissal is certainly that he was guilty of "nationalist deviations," that, in other words, he started to speak about the "Soviet people" in much the same sense in which Mao tries to reintroduce *le peuple*, word and concept, into communist ideology. Still, it may be that fear of Chinese competition constituted an important factor in the liquidation of the police empire, and in this case it would indeed be more than a mere maneuver or temporary concession; but in view of the fact that no similar change in ideology has taken place, so that the ultimate goal

⁶The complete text of this important speech was published by *The New Leader*, XL (September 9, 1957; Section 2), in a supplementary pamphlet with a valuable commentary by G. F. Hudson. Reading the speech, one quickly realizes that the usual title "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" is quite misleading. The chief new theoretical elements are the recognition of contradictions between classes, on the one hand, and between the people and the government on the other, even under a Communist dictatorship. Of even greater importance is the strong populist note in the speech. On the matter of freedom, on the other hand, Mao is quite orthodox. Freedom to him is a means to an end as is democracy; both "are relative, not absolute, they come into being and develop under specific historical circumstances."

of world domination through war and revolution has remained unchanged, it is considerably less than a strategic change. It is a tactical retreat, and there are indications that Khrushchev quite deliberately has left the door wide open for the reestablishment of full-fledged terror as well as the recurrence of super-purges.

One of these indications I have mentioned already. It is the law against "social parasites" (a term only too familiar to the student of Nazi totalitarianism) by which at any moment any number of people can again disappear into the concentration camps without having committed any crime against the regime. The totalitarian character of the decree is illustrated by the careful omission of criminal acts which remain subject to prosecution in court, by the failure to define what constitutes a "social crime," and by the extra-legal way of its punishment: deportation to places which are not indentified. As a matter of fact, the issuance of this law should be enough to show that all the talk about a new Soviet legality is sheer hypocrisy.

Another indication appears in Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress. The speech was originally not meant for public consumption; it addressed the higher echelons of the Russian party, and particularly those who were involved in the gamble of "collective leadership." This audience probably understood immediately that the speech could be interpreted in two altogether different ways. Either Stalin's mental sickness was the cause of all crimes, and then nobody was to blame, neither those who heard Mr. Khrushchev nor Mr. Khrushchev himself; moreover, and even more important, in this case the mutual fear from which the collective leadership emerged was unjustified, because only an unbalanced mind would plot murder. Or, because of his mental condition and insane suspiciousness, Stalin had been susceptible to evil influences, and in this case not Stalin was to blame but whoever used his diseased power for his own ends. The first alternative remained the official interpretation until last summer when Khrushchev, with the help of the army, seized power. The second reading became official policy when Khrushchev justified his coup d'état by stressing Malenkov's role in the Leningrad affair, alluding implicitly to Malenkov's job as head of Stalin's personal secretariat, which had made him the unofficial head of the NKVD. It is common knowledge that the techniques of Khrushchev's coup d'état followed

closely the pattern set by Stalin in the late twenties for the liquidation of the triumvirate and the right and left wing factions in the party, and it therefore seemed only proper that Khrushchev immediately rehabilitate his late master and curtail certain intellectual liberties.

No one, least of all probably Mr. Khrushchev himself, can know what the course of his future actions will be. One thing is certain: on the basis of his coup d'état speech, he can not only liquidate his exiled colleagues from the collective leadership at any moment, he can also let loose a new purge of Stalin collaborators in the higher echelons of the party, governmental and managerial bureaucracies. The law against social parasites, on the other hand, makes possible the reintroduction of mass-deportations and the re-establishment of slave labor on a large scale, should this prove desirable. As yet, nothing has been decided; but if one reads certain recent statements of the Kadar group in Hungary, which mirrors Khrushchev very closely (Kadar's denunciation of Rakosi was modelled after the pattern of Khrushchev's earlier denunciation of Stalin), and which held that "the old Stalinist group had not been severe enough in crushing the enemies of socialism," that its mistake was "an insufficient application of the dictatorship of the proletariat,"⁷ one wonders if the hopes of some Western observers for the emergence of some "enlightened totalitarianism" will not turn out to be wishful thinking.

The last of the post-Stalin changes in the USSR to be mentioned in our context concerns the temporary shift of the party's emphasis from the police to the army. In recent years, Western observers placed their greatest hope for a change within the totalitarian system on the sudden ascendancy of the army and especially on the rise of Marshal Zhukov in the Soviet hierarchy. These hopes were not entirely unfounded, for it has thus far been an outstanding characteristic of totalitarian government that the army played a subordinate role and could not compete with the police cadres either in power or in prestige. They were, however, exaggerated because another prominent feature of totalitarian government was left out of account. It was forgotten that no other form of government is so flexible in its institutions, can so easily shift power from

⁷See Paul Landy, "Hungary since the Revolution," in *Problems of Communism*, September-October, 1957.

one apparatus to the other or create new ones without even having to liquidate the old. If we call totalitarian government monolithic, we must be aware that the term applies only to its all-pervading ideological rigidity and that this rigidity is matched and contrasted by an extraordinary opportunism in policies and an even more extraordinary multiplication of offices and institutions.

Moreover, ascendancy of the police over the military apparatus is the hallmark of all, and not only of totalitarian tyrannies; in the latter case, it not so much answered the need to suppress the population at home as it fitted the ideological claim to global rule. For it is evident that those who regard the whole earth as their future territory will stress the organ of domestic violence and rule conquered territory with police methods and personnel rather than with the army. Thus, the Nazis used their SS troops, essentially a police force, for the rule and even conquest of foreign territories with the ultimate aim of amalgamation of the army and police under the leadership of the SS. In view of the flexibility of totalitarianism, we should be prepared for the possibility of the opposite process, the transformation of the army and the military into a police organ, or for an amalgamation of military and police troops under the command of the higher officer corps of the army; as long as the party remains the uncontested highest authority, this does not necessarily preclude police methods of rule. This would have been impossible in Germany because of the strong military traditions of the *Reichswehr* which could be broken only from the outside. But this reason, if it ever had the same force in Russia, certainly is valid only so long as the officer corps is not exclusively chosen from the ranks of the party and is not so reliable and pliable as the elite cadres of the police. It is quite possible that Khrushchev will replace the political commissars in the army by the same control from within—exerted by trusted officers—and supplement it with the same organized mob rule—the mob in this instance being the soldiers—by which he is trying to replace police control in cultural and economic matters. If this should succeed, the decisive difference between army and police would cease to exist.

When, in the decisive moment of the succession crisis, Khrushchev appealed to Zhukov for support, the army's ascendancy over the police was an accomplished fact. This had been one of the automatic consequences of the breaking up of the police empire, the

other being a temporary strengthening of the managerial group who were rid of their most serious economic competitor and, at the same time, inherited the huge police share in Soviet industries, mines and real estate. It speaks for Khrushchev's shrewdness that he grasped these consequences more quickly than his colleagues and acted accordingly. Of the two beneficiaries of the partial liquidation of the police apparatus, the army was by far the stronger for the simple reason that the only instrument of violence left with which to decide inner-party conflicts was the army. And, indeed, Khrushchev used Zhukov exactly the same way Stalin had used his relationships to the secret police in the succession struggle of thirty years ago. Yet, just as in the case of Stalin the supreme power continued to reside in the party, not in the police, so in this case it was never the army but again the party apparatus which retained the highest power. And just as Stalin never hesitated to purge his police cadres and liquidate their chiefs, so Khrushchev has followed up his inner-party maneuvers by removing Zhukov from the highest command. But even in the days of his highest prestige, Zhukov did not obtain more than minor concessions such as a new party directive affirming the supreme authority of military commands against interference by political commissars, and they bore an ominous resemblance to conditions during the war when military considerations together with nationalist propaganda overruled party indoctrination for a few years.

This last point is decisive. Unfortunately, there hardly ever was anything to substantiate hopes for a peaceful transformation of totalitarian domination into a military dictatorship. The latter, curiously enough, has come to be currently identified with a determinedly peaceful disposition. But the observation that generals are among the most peace-loving and least dangerous creatures in the world, though quite correct in the Western hemisphere of the last forty years, does not necessarily hold true for those who by definition are aggressors. Zhukov certainly is not another Eisenhower, and throughout the period of rising army prestige, there have been signs that Russia prepared herself for war. This has little to do with the launching of satellites and the development of an intercontinental rocket, although these successes gave the policy its material basis. What we should not forget is that Malenkov's statement in 1954: that a third world war under the conditions of nuclear warfare

would spell doom to mankind as a whole was immediately followed by his defeat. The trouble was that he probably meant what he said, for his program of non-military industrial development and greater production of consumer goods was in line with this statement—together they most likely cost him the support of the army and helped Khrushchev in the inner-party struggle. One year later, at any rate, Molotov expressed the opposite conviction: that nuclear war would be disastrous only for the imperialist and capitalist powers, whereas the communist bloc would profit by it no less than it had profited by the two previous wars. Khrushchev uttered the same opinion in 1956 and confirmed it officially in 1957 prior to Zhukov's fall: "A new world war could only end in collapse for capitalism . . . Socialism will live on while capitalism will not remain. For despite great losses mankind will not only survive, but will continue to develop." So emphatic was this statement in an interview for foreign consumption about peaceful coexistence, that he felt himself that "some may think Communists are interested in war, since it would lead to the victory of socialism,"⁸ This, to be sure, never meant that Russia actually was on the point of starting a war. Totalitarian leaders can change their minds like everyone else, and it stands to reason that they are wavering not only between the hope for victory and the fear of defeat, but between the hope that victory may make them the uncontested masters over the globe and fear lest, exhausted by a too costly victory, they be left alone to face the growing power colossus of China. The latter considerations, which we assume hypothetically, are along national lines; if they prevail, Russia may indeed be interested in coming to a temporary arrangement with the United States to freeze the present constellation in which the two super-powers are bound to recognize and respect the existing spheres of influence.

The demotion of Zhukov may be the most dramatic manifestation of this change of mind. From the little we know at this moment, it seems likely that Zhukov, accused of "adventurism," the inner-party equivalent for war-mongering, wanted war and that Khrushchev, after a moment's hesitation, decided to follow once more the "wisdom" of his dead master whose ruthlessness in domestic policies always was matched by an extreme caution in foreign af-

⁸See the text of James Reston's interview with Khrushchev in the *New York Times*, October 10, 1957.

fairs. It could also be that Khrushchev accused Zhukov of war preparations because he himself is toying with the idea—as Stalin accused Tukhachevski of plotting with Nazi Germany when he himself prepared an alliance with Hitler. These zig-zags of policy, so disturbing and confusing for outside observers, lie in the very nature of this form of government, and we should not forget that the new changes in the Soviet power apparatus again are, and are meant to be, of a temporary nature. In Khrushchev's own words: "In life one cell dies and another takes its place but life goes on." At any event, it was only proper that Zhukov's dismissal should have been followed by the strongest affirmation of peacefulness that has come out of Soviet Russia since the end of the war, a toast hailing the wartime alliance against Hitler accompanied by a veritable curse on the warmongers—who in Khrushchev's mind just then were not the "capitalist and imperialist powers" but rather his generals at home: "Let him be damned who thinks of war! Let him be damned who wants war!" Unfortunately, and much as we are tempted to put our faith into a sincere change of Mr. Khrushchev's heart, it is only too likely that his words are for public consumption in Russia and the satellite countries, where Zhukov's popularity perhaps makes a denunciation of him as a warmonger necessary. They probably do not indicate a change in the party's inner evaluation of war under the conditions of nuclear weapons.

It is in the terrible nature of these things that there would be such expressions of reassurance precisely at a time when the situation would again become considerably worse for the Russian people as well as for those in the satellite countries, who recently have enjoyed a comparatively easier and more plentiful life. It was already a mainstay of Stalin's politics to combine an aggressive foreign policy with concessions at home, and vice versa, and it is probable that here, too, Khrushchev will show himself a faithful disciple of his dead master.

This is bad enough, but it is not the worst. The worst is that under these circumstances the most important political issue of the nuclear age, the war question, cannot be raised, let alone solved. As far as the nontotalitarian world is concerned, it is a matter of fact that another world war will harbor a threat of destruction to the existence of mankind, even to the existence of organic life on earth. This, obviously, makes all past political thought about war,

its possible justification for the sake of freedom, its role as an *ultima ratio* in foreign affairs, perfectly obsolete. But what is a matter of fact for us, is a matter of ideology for the totalitarian mind. The point is not in differences of opinion and basic convictions nor the concomitant difficulties in coming to an agreement, but in the much more terrifying impossibility of agreeing about facts.⁹ Mr. Khrushchev's recent off-the-record contribution to the war discussion, "poor men do not mind fire," is truly appalling, not merely because such popular verities of yesterday have become dangerous irrelevancies today, but because it shows with rare precision that, no matter how vulgar his expressions may be, he actually thinks and operates within the closed framework of his ideology and will not permit new facts to penetrate it.

It has always been an error to measure the threat of totalitarianism by the yardstick of the relatively harmless conflict between a communist and a capitalist society and to overlook the explosive contradiction between the totalitarian fiction and the everyday world of factuality in which we live. But it was never more dangerously wrong than today when the same technical discoveries, which taken together constitute for us a factually changed world, are at the disposition of those who in dead seriousness regard them as mere means, that is, as devices with which to make real a purely fictitious world built of lies and based on denials of facts. Not even the freedom of mankind, let alone its survival, depends upon a free market economy; yet freedom as well as survival may well depend upon our success or failure to persuade the other part of the world to recognize facts as they are and to come to terms with the factuality of the world as it is.

II. THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

Perhaps nothing illustrates better the present difference in mentality between the Soviet Union and her satellites than the fact that Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress could at the

⁹This basic difference comes out most clearly in dialogues between Westerners and totalitarian-trained people. Both Mr. Reston's interview and the correspondence between Silone and Anissimov, *loc. cit.*, read like object lessons in this peculiarity of the totalitarian mentality with its horrifying capacity to avoid all real issues and dissolve all facts in ideological talk.

time end the thaw in Russia¹⁰ and release the unrest, finally the uprising, in the newly bolshevized territories. Here, the sinister ambiguity we mentioned above obviously was lost on the average reader who must have read the speech with pretty much the same understanding as the average reader in the free world. In this naive reading it could not but cause a tremendous relief, because it sounded as though a normal human being were talking about normal human occurrences—insanity and crimes creeping into politics; Marxian phraseology and historical necessity were conspicuous by their absence. Had this been the “correct understanding” of the speech, the Twentieth Party Congress would have been an event of enormous significance. It would have indicated a break with totalitarian methods, though with neither socialist nor dictatorial procedures, and healed the breach between the two world powers. For Khrushchev had only confirmed the charge of the free world that this was not so much a communist as a crime-ridden government which lacked not only the democratic type of legality but any restriction of power through law whatsoever. If from now on the Soviet government intended to operate a socialist economy on the same level as the western world operated a free-market economy, then there was no reason why the two main powers, together with their respective allies, should not be able to coexist and cooperate peacefully and in good faith.

Several months elapsed before the secret party speech reached first the western world through the *New York Times* and then the communist-ruled countries. Its immediate consequence was something unheard of—open rebellions in Poland and Hungary which had not happened through all the preceding years when Stalin was silently and most efficiently downgraded, when a number of Stalinists like Rakosi in Hungary had been removed from power and a gradual relaxation of controls had taken place, nor had it happened when these controls, already prior to the publication of the secret speech, were gradually retightened and some Stalinists rehabilitated. The point is that the people were aroused only by open words, and not by silent maneuvers, no matter how telling they might have been for the observer of the totalitarian scene, and no amount of bad faith behind these words—and this bad faith was by no means in-

¹⁰This is the opinion of Boris I. Nicholaevsky, *loc. cit.*, which he amply supports by a careful compilation and analysis of all available information.

active—could alter their inflammatory power. Not acts, “mere words” had succeeded much against their intention in breaking the deadly spell of impotent apathy which totalitarian terror and ideology cast over the minds of men.

However, this did not happen everywhere. It happened only where some old-guard communists, like Nagy and Gomulka, had miraculously survived the meticulous care with which Stalin had purged not only the Russian party but the international movement of everybody who was not a mere agent. In the beginning, the Polish and Hungarian developments were quite similar. In both countries, an inner-party split had occurred between the “Muscovites” and these survivors, and the general mood, including the stress on national tradition, religious freedom and violent dissatisfaction among students, was similar. One is tempted to say that it was almost an accident that what happened in Hungary did not happen in Poland and vice versa. The fact, however, is that Gomulka, setting before the Polish people’s eyes the tragic fate of Hungary, could stop the rebellion in its initial stage, so that neither the exhilarating experience of power which comes from acting together nor the consequences resulting from boldly putting freedom on the market place could come to pass.

The third fact to remember is that the rebellion in both countries started with intellectuals and university students, and generally with the younger generation, that is, with those strata of the population whose material well-being and ideological indoctrination had been one of the prime concerns of the regime. Not the underprivileged, but the overprivileged of communist society took the initiative, and their motive was neither their own nor their fellow-citizens’ material misery, but exclusively Freedom and Truth.¹¹ This, especially, must have been as rude a lesson for Moscow as it was heartwarming for the free world. Not only that bribes did not work, but the rise of totalitarian ideologies and movements has thus far always attracted the intelligentsia, and experience has shown that nobody can be so easily bribed and frightened into submission

¹¹The truly admirable United Nations’ *Report on the Problem of Hungary* quotes a young girl student as follows: “Even though we might lack bread and other necessities of life, we wanted freedom. We, the young people, were particularly hampered because we were brought up amidst lies. We continually had to lie. We could not have a healthy idea, because everything was choked in us. We wanted freedom of thought.”

to nonsense as scholars, writers and artists. The voice from Eastern Europe, speaking so plainly and simply of freedom and truth, sounded like an ultimate affirmation that human nature is unchangeable, that nihilism will be futile, that even in the absence of all teaching and the presence of overwhelming indoctrination a yearning for freedom and truth will rise out of man's heart and mind forever.

Unfortunately, such conclusions need qualification. First, the rebellions happened in countries whose experience with total domination had been quite short-lived. Not before 1949 were the satellite countries even superficially bolshevized, and the process was interrupted in 1953 by Stalin's death and the subsequent period of thaw. The succeeding struggle resulted in the formation of factions, and discussion became inevitable. The cry for freedom was born in the atmosphere of these inner-party discussions, but only in the recently conquered territories; for nothing comparable with these words and deeds could be witnessed in Russia proper. Ilya Ehrenburg, an old bohemian and habitué of left-bank Paris bistros, may have nourished certain hopes when he coined the right metaphor 'thaw' for the new party line, but he is of course much more typical of those whom "the gods have failed" than of the Russian intelligentsia. Dudintsev's novel *Not by Bread Alone*, a product of the encouraged self-criticism mentioned above, is not concerned with freedom at all, but with the opening of careers to talent. The scarce evidence of some rebelliousness among Russian intellectuals points much rather to a yearning for the right to know factual truth than for any right to freedom. One such instance occurs also in Dudintsev's novel, where he recounts the early days of the Nazi invasion when he was watching from a trench a fight between German and Russian airplanes in which the messerschmitts proved victorious although they were outnumbered: "Something snapped in me because I had always been told that our planes were the fastest and the best." Here, indeed, the author tells of one long moment during which totalitarian disputing-away of facts did not prevail; experience of factual truth exploded the "historical truth" of the party's argument, whose "our planes are the fastest and the best" means: eventually we shall have the fastest and the best planes, perhaps at the cost of destroying all those who could compete with us.

In view of recent events, it is tempting to underestimate the effectiveness of total domination and the stability of the totalitarian mind in the midst of the fictitious world provided for it. Whatever our convictions and hopes concerning human nature may be, all our experiences with these regimes indicate that, once they are firmly established, factual reality is a much greater danger to them than an innate yearning for freedom. We know this from the Stalinist measure to deport the returning soldiers of the Russian occupation army *en masse* to concentration camps because they had been exposed to the impact of reality; as we know it from the curiously complete breakdown of Nazi indoctrination after Hitler's defeat and the automatic destruction of his fictitious world. The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself. Total domination succeeds to the extent that it succeeds in interrupting all channels of communication, those from person to person inside the four walls of privacy no less than the public ones which are safeguarded in democracies by freedom of speech and opinion. Whether this process of making every person incommunicado succeeds except in the extreme situations of solitary confinement and of torture is hard to say; in any event, it takes time, and it is obvious that it is far from completed in the satellite countries. So long as terror is not supplemented by the ideological compulsion from within, so hideously manifest in the self-denunciations of the show trials,¹² the ability of people to distinguish between truth and lies on the elementary factual level remains unimpaired; oppression, therefore, is felt for what it is and freedom is demanded.

¹²The collapse of the regime in Hungary has yielded one more beautiful example of motivation and technique of these self-denunciations by making public the preparation of Rajk for his show trial. Kadar was in charge and his conversation with Rajk was secretly recorded by Rakosi, presumably for future use against Kadar, and the record played back at the Central Committee's meeting which ousted Rakosi. What the comrades heard was the following: "Dear Laci, I come to you on behalf of Comrade Rakosi. He requested me to come and explain the situation to you. Of course, we all know that you are innocent. But Comrade Rakosi believes that you will understand. Only really great comrades are chosen for such roles. He asked me to tell you that by doing this you will render historic service to the Communist movement." (Quoted from E. M., "Janos Kadar: A Profile," in *Problems of Communism*.) What a combination of gross flattery and appeal to ideological convictions!

The Hungarian people, young and old, knew that they were "living amidst lies" and asked, unanimously and in all manifestos, for something the Russian intelligentsia apparently has even forgotten how to dream of, namely, for freedom of thought. It would probably be erroneous to conclude from this unanimity that the same concern for freedom of thought which gave rise to the rebellion among the intellectuals also turned the rebellion into a revolution of the whole people, an uprising which spread like wildfire until nobody was left outside its ranks except the members of the political police—the only Hungarians prepared to defend the regime. A similar error would be to conclude from the initiative taken by members of the Communist Party that the revolution was primarily an inner-party affair, a revolt of "true" against "false" communists. The facts speak an altogether different language. What are the facts?

An unarmed and essentially harmless student demonstration grew from a few thousand suddenly and spontaneously into a huge crowd which took it upon itself to carry out one of the students' demands, the overturning of Stalin's statue in one of the public squares in Budapest. The following day, some students went to the Radio Building to persuade the station to broadcast the sixteen points of their manifesto. A large crowd immediately gathered, as if from nowhere, and when the AVH, the police guarding the building, tried to disperse the crowd with a few shots, the revolution broke out. The masses attacked the police and acquired their first weapons. The workers, hearing of the situation, left the factories and joined the crowd. The army, called to defend the regime and help the armed police, sided with the revolution and armed the people. What had started as a student demonstration had become an armed uprising in less than twenty-four hours.

From this moment onward, no programs, points or manifestos played any role; what carried the revolution was the sheer momentum of acting-together of the whole people whose demands were so obvious that they hardly needed elaborate formulation: Russian troops should leave the territory and free elections should determine a new government. The question was no longer how much freedom to permit to action, speech and thought, but how to institutionalize a freedom which was already an accomplished fact. For if we leave aside the outside interventions of Russian troops—first of those stationed in the country and then of regular battalions com-

ing from Russia in full battle preparation—we may well say that never a revolution achieved its aims so quickly, so completely and with so few losses. The amazing thing about the Hungarian Revolution is that there was no civil war. For the Hungarian army disintegrated in hours and the dictatorship was stripped of all power in a couple of days. No group, no class in the nation opposed the will of the people once it had become known and its voice had been heard in the market place. For the members of the AVH, who remained loyal to the end, formed neither group nor class, the lower echelons having been recruited from the dregs of the population: criminals, Nazi agents, highly compromised members of the Hungarian fascist party, the higher ranks being composed of Moscow agents, Hungarians with Russian citizenship under the orders of NKVD officers.

The swift disintegration of the whole power structure—party, army and governmental offices—and the absence of internal strife in the developments that followed, are all the more remarkable when we consider that the uprising was clearly started by communists, who, however, did not retain the initiative, and still never became the object of wrath and vengeance for non-communists nor turned themselves against the people. The striking absence of ideological dispute, the concomitant lack of fanaticism and the ensuing atmosphere of fraternity which came into being with the first demonstration in the streets and lasted until the bitter end, can be explained only on the assumption that ideological indoctrination had disintegrated even more swiftly than the political structure. It was as though ideology, of whatever shade and brand, had simply been wiped out of existence and memory the moment the people, intellectuals and workers, communists and non-communists, found themselves together in the streets fighting for freedom.¹³ In this respect, the change in reality brought about by the revolution had much the same effect on the minds of the Hungarian people as the sudden breakdown of the Nazi world had on the minds of the German people.

¹³This aspect is especially striking when we learn that the insurgents were almost immediately joined by "800 cadets from the Petöfi Military Academy. These were mostly sons of high Government and Communist Party officials and AVH officers; they had led a privileged life in the Military Academy and had been indoctrinated for years." (*United Nations' Report.*)

Important as these aspects are, they tell us more about the nature of the regime the Hungarian Revolution rebelled against than about the revolution itself. In its positive significance, the outstanding feature of the uprising was that no chaos resulted from the actions of people without leadership and without previously formulated program. First, there was no looting, no trespassing of property, among a multitude whose standard of life had been miserable and whose hunger for merchandise notorious. There were no crimes against life either, for the few instances of public hanging of AVH officers were conducted with remarkable restraint and discrimination. Instead of the mob rule which might have been expected, there appeared immediately, almost simultaneously with the uprising itself, the Revolutionary and Workers' Councils, that is, the same organization which for more than a hundred years now has emerged whenever the people have been permitted for a few days, or a few weeks or months, to follow their own political devices without a government (or a party program) imposed from above.

For these councils made their first appearance in the revolution which swept Europe in 1848; they reappeared in the revolt of the Paris Commune in 1871, existed for a few weeks during the first Russian revolution of 1905, to reappear in full force in the October revolution in Russia and the November revolutions in Germany and Austria after the first World War. Until now, they have always been defeated, but by no means only by the "counter-revolution." The Bolshevik regime destroyed their power even under Lenin and attested to their popularity by stealing their name (*soviet* being the Russian word for council); when Soviet-Russian tanks crushed the revolution in Hungary, they actually destroyed the only free and revolutionary *soviets* in existence anywhere in the world.¹⁴ And in Germany, again, it was not the "reaction," but the Social Democrats who liquidated the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils in 1919.

In the case of the Hungarian Revolution, even more markedly than in the case of earlier ones, the establishment of the Councils represented "the first practical step to restore order and to reorganize the Hungarian economy on a socialist basis, but without rigid Party control or the apparatus of terror."¹⁵ The councils thus were

¹⁴The only writer, so far as I know, who made this point was Ignazio Silone in an article in *The New Leader*, XL (January 21, 1957).

¹⁵This is the evaluation of the United Nations' *Report*.

charged with two tasks, one political, the other economic, and though it would be wrong to believe that the dividing line between them was unblurred, we may assume that the Revolutionary Councils fulfilled mainly political functions while the Workers' Councils were supposed to handle economic life. In the following, we shall deal only with the Revolutionary Councils and the political aspect; their immediate task was to prevent chaos and the spreading of crime, and in this they were quite successful. The question whether economic, as distinguished from political, functions can be handled by councils, whether, in other words, it is possible to run factories under the management and ownership of the workers, we shall have to leave open. (As a matter of fact, it is quite doubtful whether the political principle of equality and self-rule can be applied to the economic sphere of life as well. It may be that ancient political theory, which held that economics, since it was bound up with the necessities of life, needed the rule of masters to function well, was not so wrong after all. For it is somehow, albeit paradoxically, supported by the fact that whenever the modern age has believed that history is primarily the result of economic forces, it has come to the conviction that man is not free and that history is subject to necessity.)

At any event, the Revolutionary and the Workers' Councils, though they emerged together, are better kept apart, because the former were primarily the answer to political tyranny, whereas the latter in the case of the Hungarian Revolution were the reaction against trade unions that did not represent the workers but the party's control over them. Not only the Workers' Councils, the program of the Revolutionary Councils too must be understood in the context of special conditions of the Hungarian Revolution. Thus the demand for free general elections belongs to the program inherent in the emergence of councils everywhere, whereas the demand to restore the multi-party system, as it had ruled Hungary and all European countries prior to the rise of tyranny, was the almost automatic reaction to the particularities of the situation, the shameful suppression and persecution of all parties which had preceded the one-party dictatorship.

In order to understand the council system, it is well to remember that it is as old as the party system itself; as such, it represents the only alternative to it, that is, the only alternative of democratic elec-

toral representation to the one presented by the Continental multi-party system with its insistence on class interests on the one hand and ideology, or *Weltanschauung*, on the other. But while the historical origin of the party system lies in Parliament, the councils were born exclusively out of the actions and spontaneous demands of the people, and they were not deduced from an ideology nor foreseen, let alone preconceived, by any theory about the best form of government. Wherever they appeared, they were met with utmost hostility from the party-bureaucracies and their leaders from right to left and with the unanimous neglect of political theorists and political scientists. The point is that the councils have always been undoubtedly democratic, but in a sense never seen before and never thought about. And since nobody, neither statesmen nor political scientists nor parties, has ever paid any serious attention to this new and wholly untried form of organization, its stubborn re-emergence for more than a century could not be more spontaneous and less influenced by outside interest or theory.

Under modern conditions, the councils are the only democratic alternative we know to the party system, and the principles on which they are based stand in sharp opposition to the principles of the party system in many respects. Thus, the men elected for the councils are chosen at the bottom, and not selected by the party machinery and proposed to the electorate either as individuals with alternate choices or as a slate of candidates. The choice, moreover, of the voter is not prompted by a program or a platform or an ideology, but exclusively by his estimation of a man, in whose personal integrity, courage and judgment he is supposed to have enough confidence to entrust him with his representation. The elected, therefore, is not bound by anything except trust in his personal qualities, and his pride is "to have been elected by the workers, and not by the government"¹⁶ or a party. Once such a body of trusted men is elected, it will of course again develop differences of opinion which in turn may lead into the formation of "parties." But these groups of men holding the same opinion within the councils would not be parties, strictly speaking; they would constitute those factions from which the parliamentary parties originally de-

¹⁶See *The Revolt in Hungary; A Documentary Chronology of Events*, which records the story of the Hungarian revolution in a compilation of the broadcasts of the Hungarian radio stations, official and unofficial. Published by the Free Europe Committee, New York, n.d.

veloped. The election of a candidate would not depend upon his adherence to a given faction, but still on his personal power of persuasion with which he could present his point of view. In other words, the councils would control the parties, they would not be their representatives. The strength of any given faction would not depend upon its bureaucratic apparatus and not even upon the appeal of its program or *Weltanschauung*, but on the number of trusted and trustworthy men it holds in its ranks. This was the reason, for instance, why Lenin felt he had to emasculate the *soviets* in the initial stages of the Russian Revolution; it turned out that the Social Revolutionaries counted more men trusted by the people than the Bolsheviks, so that the power of the Communist Party, which had been responsible for the revolution, was endangered by the council system which had grown out of the revolution.

Remarkable, finally, is the great inherent flexibility of the system, which seems to need no special conditions for its establishment except the coming together and acting together of a certain number of people on a non-temporary basis. In Hungary, we have seen the simultaneous setting-up of all kinds of councils—neighborhood councils which emerged from living together and grew into county and other territorial Councils, revolutionary councils which grew out of fighting together, councils of writers and artists which, one is tempted to think, were born in the *cafés*, students' and youths' councils at the university, military councils in the army, councils of civil servants in the ministries, workers' councils in the factories, and so on. The men elected were communists and non-communists; party lines seem to have played no role whatsoever, the criterion, in the words of a newspaper, being solely that there is "none among them who would misuse his power or think only of his personal position." And this is more a criterion of qualification than of morality. Whoever misuses power or perverts it into violence, or is only interested in his private affairs and without concern for the common world, is simply not fit to play a role in political life. The same principles were observed in the further stages of election; for the councils, elected directly at the base, were urged to elect representatives for the higher bodies "without regard for Party affiliation and with due regard to the confidence of the working people."¹⁷

¹⁷*Ibid.*

One of the most striking aspects of the Hungarian Revolution is that this principle of the council system not only reemerged, but that in twelve short days a good deal of its range of potentialities could emerge with it. The council-men were hardly elected in direct vote when these new councils began freely to coordinate among themselves to choose from their own midst the representatives for the higher councils up to the Supreme National Council, the counterpart of normal government,—and the initiative for this came from the just revived National Peasant Party, certainly the last group to be suspected of extreme ideas. While this Supreme Council remained in preparation, the necessary preliminary steps had been taken everywhere: workers' councils had set up coordinating committees and Central Workers' Councils were already functioning in many areas; revolutionary councils in the provinces were coordinated and planning to set up a National Revolutionary Committee with which to replace the National Assembly. Here, as in all other instances, when for the shortest historical moment the voice of the people has been heard, unaltered by the shouts of the mob and unstified by the bureaucracies of the parties, we can do no more than draw a very sketchy picture of the potentialities and physiognomy of the only democratic system which in Europe, where the party system was discredited almost as soon as it was born, was ever really popular. (There is, and always has been, a decisive difference between the Continental multi-party system and the Anglo-American two-party system which I cannot discuss here, but which the reader must keep in mind for a proper understanding of European events and revolutions.) The rise of the councils, not the restoration of parties, was the clear sign of a true upsurge of democracy against dictatorship, of freedom against tyranny.

When we ponder the lesson of the Hungarian Revolution, it may be well to take into consideration the steps taken by the restored regime. The Russian army in a full-fledged invasion needed three whole weeks to pacify the country—which indeed speaks well for the solidity of the organizational power of the councils. Not one of the demands of the people was recognized, with one very important exception. The peasants, who in Hungary as in Poland had spontaneously left the collectives, were not forced back, with the result that the whole experiment of collective farming practically collapsed in both countries and the agricultural output of these regions

fell far below the requirements for the national economy. The concession to the peasants, therefore, the only class which at least up to now has derived certain profits from the rebellions, was important materially as well as ideologically. The first blow of bloody oppression was directed against the Revolutionary Councils, the organ of action and representative for the people as a whole. After the nation had been once more reduced to impotence, freedom of thought was adamantly and without the slightest concession stamped out. This was followed by the dissolution of the workers' councils, which the regime regarded as a substitute for party and government-directed trade unions rather than as a political body.

If we translate this order of priority in crushing the revolution into theory, it follows that freedom of action was considered the most dangerous to total domination, that this was closely followed by freedom of thought; since interest representation clearly contains an element of action, it too must go, but it is considered of less immediate danger. The only sphere where temporary concessions were deemed possible and wise was the economic realm where nothing more was at stake than laboring and consuming, which obviously are the lowest and most compulsory of all human activities.

III. THE SATELLITE SYSTEM

The last words to come out of free Hungary were spoken over the Radio Station Kossuth and ended with the following sentence: "Today it is Hungary and tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, it will be the turn of other countries because the imperialism of Moscow does not know borders, and is only trying to play for time." A few days earlier, the Communist Free Radio (Rajk) had already declared that "it was not only Stalin who used Communism as a pretext to expand Russian imperialism" and that it had been among the goals of the Hungarian Revolution "to present a clear picture of Russia's brutal colonial rule."

We said in the beginning that the development and expansion of post-war Soviet totalitarianism must be seen in the flaming light of the Hungarian Revolution. This light—who would deny it?—is not steady, it flares and flickers; yet it is the only authentic light we have. The words spoken during the event by men acting in freedom and fighting for it carry more weight and, so we hope, are

heard by more people than theoretical reflections, precisely because they are spoken on the spur and in the excitement of the moment.¹⁸ If these people said that what they were fighting against was imperialism, political science must accept the term, although we might have preferred, for conceptual as well as historical reasons, to reserve the word 'imperialism' for the colonial expansion of Europe which began in the last third of the nineteenth century and ended with the liquidation of British rule over India. Our task then can only be to analyze what kind of imperialism developed out of the totalitarian form of government.

Imperialism, both word and phenomenon, was unknown until the ever-quickenning pace of industrial production forced open the territorial limitations of the nation-state.¹⁹ Its outstanding feature was expressed in the slogan of the time: expansion for expansion's sake, which meant expansion without regard to what traditionally had been regarded as national interests such as the defense of the territory and its limited aggrandizement through annexation of neighboring lands. Imperialist expansion was prompted not by political, but economic motives, and it followed the expanding economy wherever it happened to lead in the form of investment of capital, surplus money within the national economy, and of the emigration of unemployable people, who had also become superfluous to the life of the nation. Imperialism thus was the result of the nation state's attempt to survive under the circumstances of a new economy and in the presence of an emerging world market. Its dilemma was that economic interests of the nationals demanded an expansion which could not be justified on the grounds of traditional nationalism with its insistence on historical identity of people, state and territory.

From beginning to end and for better and worse, the destinies of imperialism, the fate that befell the ruling nations no less than the lot suffered by their "subject races," were determined by this origin. National consciousness was perverted into race conscious-

¹⁸To avoid misunderstandings: I do not mean to attribute the same high significance to reports or theories by victims or eye-witnesses. The presence of terror paralyzes and sterilizes thought even more effectively than action. If one does not mind risking one's life, it is easier to act under conditions of terror than to think. And the spell cast by terror over man's mind can be broken only by freedom, not by mere thought.

¹⁹A good summary of the historical background is now available in R. Koebner, "The Emergence of the Concept of Imperialism," in the *Cambridge Journal*, 1952.

ness, prompted by the natural solidarity of "white men" in alien lands, which, in turn, made the subject races color conscious. But together with racism, nationalism made its inroads into the ancient cultures of Asia and the tribal wilderness of Africa, and if the imperialist-minded colonial bureaucracy could turn a deaf ear to the national aspirations which they themselves had aroused, the nation-state could not without denying the very principle of its own existence. The colonial bureaucracies lived in a perennial conflict with their home governments, and while imperialism undermined nationalism by shifting the loyalties from the nation to the race, the nation-state with its still intact legal and political institutions always prevailed in preventing the worst excesses. The fear of boomerang effects of imperialism upon the mother country remained strong enough to make the national parliaments a bulwark of justice for the oppressed people and against the colonial administration.

Imperialism on the whole was a failure because of the dichotomy between the nation-state's legal principles and the methods needed to oppress other people permanently. This failure was neither necessary nor due to ignorance or incompetence. British imperialists knew very well that "administrative massacres" could keep India in bondage, but they also knew that public opinion at home would not stand for such measures. Imperialism could have been a success if the nation-state had been willing to pay the price, to commit suicide and transform itself into a tyranny. It is one of the glories of Europe, and especially of Great Britain, that she preferred to liquidate the empire.

Such recollections of the past may serve to remind us of how much greater the chances of success are for an imperialism directed by a totalitarian government. Moreover, Russia was never a nation-state, strictly speaking; even the Czars ruled a multi-national empire from the power center in Moscow. The principle of national self-determination, this nightmare of the old imperialists who had to deny to the subject people the very principle of their own political existence, poses not even a problem to the Moscow rulers today. They rule the satellites with essentially the same device they use for their empire at home; they make concessions to national culture on the folklore and linguistic level, imposing at the same time not only the Moscow-conceived and directed policy, but also Russian as the official language for all nationalities. Introduction of

obligatory study of Russian was one of the first demands by Moscow in the process of bolshevization, as the demand for its abolition figured prominently in all manifestos in Hungary and Poland.

No dichotomy of principle, therefore, between home rule and colonial rule will impose restraint on totalitarian imperialism, and if it, too, has to fear certain boomerang effects from its imperialist adventures, they have other causes. Thus, the fact that the Russian army had to be called in to crush the Hungarian uprising may have been one of the reasons why Zhukov could nourish certain hopes of winning an ascendancy over the party at home and, at any rate, for consolidating his newly-won ascendancy over the police. For the Hungarian events seemed to prove that police troops, though modelled after the Russian NKVD, were not sufficient to deal with a full-fledged rebellion. Of even greater importance, the swift disintegration of the Hungarian army, which alone had enabled an annoying but harmless show of dissatisfaction to grow into an armed uprising, demonstrated to what an extent the regime everywhere depended upon the loyalty of its soldiers and officers' corps. Khrushchev's quick reaction against such hopes and aspirations shows a concern with boomerang effects upon the home government similar to the concern of the older type of imperialism. But here the danger of boomerangs is temporary, because of the inevitable time lag in bolshevization between mother country and colony. Thus, the disaffection of satellite armies, their doubtful reliability in case of war, proves only that in these regions national military traditions are still intact and that bolshevization was slower in an institution which, after all, was inherited from the former regime and had not, like the political police, been built up from scratch.

Boomerang effects in totalitarian imperialism, naturally, are distinguished from those of national imperialism in that they work in the opposite direction—the few, faint-hearted stirrings of unrest in Russia probably were caused by events in Poland and Hungary—and so do the measures the government is forced to take to combat them. For just as European imperialism could never transgress certain limits of oppression even when the effectiveness of extreme measures was beyond doubt, because public opinion at home would not have supported them and a legal government could not have survived them, so Russian totalitarianism is forced to crush opposition and withhold all concessions, even when they may pacify

the oppressed countries for the time being and make them more reliable in case of war, because such "mildness" would endanger the government at home and place the conquered territories in a privileged position.

This last point was, indeed, of considerable importance in the initial stages of the satellite system, when the main concern of the ruling imperialist power was not how to maintain a distinction between national and colonial areas, but on the contrary how to equalize conditions in the newly conquered territories down to the level of Soviet Russia herself. Russia's post-war expansion was not caused, and her rule of the conquered territories is not determined, by economic considerations; the profit motive, so conspicuous in Europe's overseas imperialism, is replaced here by sheer power considerations. But these are not of a national character and not led by the interest of Russia herself, although it is true that for almost a decade the Moscow rulers seemed interested in nothing more than robbing their satellites of their industrial and other possessions and forcing them into grossly unfair trade agreements. Yet the very neglect with which the Russians used to treat their spoils from dismantled industries, which were frequently ruined even before shipped to Russia, indicates that their true aim was much rather to force the satellite standard of life down than to raise their own. This trend has now been reversed and large quantities of coal, iron ore, oil as well as agricultural products are shipped back into the subject regions whose needs have become a serious drain on Russian resources and have caused severe shortages in the USSR. The goal is again equalization of conditions.

However, these and other distinctions between Western national and Russian totalitarian imperialism do not go to the heart of the matter. For the immediate predecessor of totalitarian imperialism is not the British, Dutch or French version of overseas colonial rule, but the German, Austrian and Russian version of a continental imperialism which never actually succeeded, and therefore is neglected by students of imperialism, but which in the form of the so-called pan-movements—pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism—was a very potent political force in Central and Eastern Europe. Not only does totalitarianism, nazism no less than bolshevism, owe a heavy debt to pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism in matters of ideology and organization; their expansion program, though global

in scope and thereby distinguished from those of the pan-movements, follows the aims of continental imperialism. The main point here is that the strategy of expansion follows geographic continuity and extends from a power center to a widening periphery which then is supposed to gravitate "naturally" toward its center. This cohesive extension could of course never have tolerated a dichotomy between home government and colonial rule; and since continental imperialism intended to found its "empire" in Europe itself, it did not depend upon a color line to distinguish between "higher and lower breeds"; instead it proposed to treat European peoples as colonials under the rule of a master race of Germanic or Slavic origin.

The word 'satellite' is indeed a very appropriate metaphor for the Russian version of totalitarian imperialism. Cohesive extension, and neither far-flung possessions nor the engineering of communist revolutions in distant countries, spells the present bolshevist strategy for global conquest. (It is indeed quite likely that Russia would be almost as unhappy as America if, through some queer accident of chaotic conditions, the Communist Party should be able to seize power legally in France.) Since the expansion is continuous and starts from the national frontier, it can easily hide its ultimate aims behind traditional nationalist claims; thus, Stalin's demands at Yalta would hardly have been granted so easily if the allied statesmen had not felt that he demanded no more than what Russian foreign policy had traditionally aimed at. It was the same misunderstanding Hitler profited from at Munich when he claimed he wanted no more than the annexation of German territory in Austria and Czechoslovakia and the liberation of German minorities.

The satellite system itself, however, is neither the only nor the most natural version of totalitarian imperialism. It must be seen against the background of Nazi imperialism, with which the Russian model has only one thing in common, the insistence on cohesive expansion; Hitler's lack of interest in acquiring overseas possessions or pressing the nationalist German claim for restitution of former German colonies was notorious. Nazi Germany ruled Western Europe through Quislings, corrupt native politicians and collaborators, and carried out a policy of depopulation and extermination in the East with the aim of having these emptied lands colonized by elite troops after the war. Moscow's agents in the satellite countries are no Quislings, but old and tested members of the communist

movement, and as such they are in no worse a position in the face of their Moscow masters than any Ukrainian or White Russian bureaucrat, who, also, is supposed to sacrifice the national interests of his people to the demands of the international movement or Moscow. And not even Stalin, it seems, wanted to exterminate the populations of the satellite countries and to recolonize the territory. Another alternative for Russian imperialism would have been to rule this whole region like the Baltic countries, without the intermediary of local authorities, that is, to incorporate them directly into the Soviet Empire which claims to be the Union of federal republics.

The satellite system is clearly a compromise and perhaps a temporary one. It was born in the post-war constellation of two great powers agreeing between themselves about their spheres of influence, albeit in a hostile manner. As such, the satellite system is the Russian answer to the American system of alliances, and their sham independence is important to Russia as the reflection of the intact national sovereignty of America's allies. The metaphor, unfortunately, is again only too appropriate; for it corresponds to the fears every country must feel when it goes into an alliance with one of the super-powers, a fear, that is, not so much of losing its identity altogether as of becoming a "satellite" country gravitating in the orbit, and kept alive only by the force of attraction, of the central power. And certainly the danger of the coexistence of two hostile super-powers is that every system of alliances initiated by either will automatically degenerate into a satellite system until the whole world is sucked into their power orbits. It has been American policy to divide the world into communist, allied and neutral countries with the aim of preserving the balance between the two super-powers by recognizing in fact, if not *de jure*, the respective spheres of influence and by insisting on the neutrality of the rest.²⁰ No matter how uneasy this balance of power may be, the image of American foreign policy is essentially that of a stable structure. But Russian foreign policy is guided by a different image in which there are no neutral countries, but, as Khrushchev recently pointed out, "nationalist" ones, so that the important third part of the world

²⁰The sorry spectacle of the free world's strict non-intervention in Hungarian affairs and even toleration of a military invasion by Russian troops has shown to what a degree this recognition is a *fait accompli*.

consists of areas—in Asia and Africa—where, according to the communists, the national revolution is on the agenda of history and with it an automatic increase of Russia's sphere of influence. Insofar as recent Russian utterances about the possibilities of peaceful competition between the two super-powers are more than propaganda talk, it is not a competition in the production of cars, refrigerators and butter, but a competition in the gradual enlargement of the two respective spheres of influence that is at stake.

Although the satellite system may have been born as a compromise between the inherent tendencies of totalitarian domination and the need to maintain a facsimile of normal foreign policy with regard to the free world, the devices of rulership developed by Russian imperialism were quite in agreement with it. In every instance, the conquest by the might of the Soviet empire was enacted as though a seizure of power by a native party had taken place. The elaborate preparatory game in the forties when first, prior to full bolshevization, several parties were tolerated and then liquidated in favor of a one-party dictatorship, served to fortify the illusion of independent domestic developments. What Moscow did was to create exact replicas not only of its own form of government but of the developments which had led up to it. In order to make sure that the development would not lead in an "incorrect" direction, it took care even at the time of Popular Front tactics to reserve the Ministry of Interior for Communists, thus remaining in control of the police, which had been set up *in nucleo* by Soviet police units accompanying the occupation army. The police was organized in orthodox totalitarian fashion, an elite spy group within the police charged with informing on the ordinary members of the police who in turn informed on the party-members and the population at large. The bolshevization of the country was introduced through the same show trials of prominent party members we know from Russia, while here, too, the less prominent ones were deported to concentration camps, presumably in Russia. From the beginning, moreover, this police spy net was duplicated by a similar organization established by the Russian army, and the only distinction between the two competing bodies was "that they served different masters within one Soviet oligarchy." This duplication and multiplication of offices is also in line with orthodox totalitarian institutions. And like its model in Russia, the police in the satellite countries kept

"cadre-cards" for every citizen in the country, on which presumably not only compromising information was recorded, but information on associations, friends, family, and acquaintances which is much more valuable for totalitarian terror.

Yet, while the police was set up in strict accordance with the Russian model, the device of creating replicas and staffing them with native personnel was not followed. This was the only institution in which Russian advisers did not stay in the background but openly supervised the natives and even ran the show trials. Something similar seems now to be happening to the satellite armies, which after the Hungarian uprising are under the command of Russian officers, but while this military control is clearly a reaction against unforeseen developments, the control of the police was planned as though the Russian rulers thought that everything would follow automatically once this most important device of total domination had set the mechanism into motion. There is, however, another rather inconspicuous but not uninteresting difference between the Russian and the satellite system, which concerns the method of selecting rank and file members of the police. Here, too, the Russians had to fall back upon experiences in the early stages of totalitarian rule and rely upon criminal and otherwise compromised elements in the population. This stands in stark contrast to the system the Russians have been practicing for more than twenty-five years now, in which the police appoints its new members from the rank and file of the party and even from the population at large. The point is that members of the NKVD are drafted into police service in almost the same way as all citizens are drafted into military service. This flaw in reproduction obviously is caused by the time lag in totalitarian development we mentioned above; in the satellite countries the police is still an "elite" body in the original sense of the word, whose members are chosen according to characteristics which distinguish them not only from the ordinary citizen but also from the ordinary party member.

Up to now, this time element has thwarted Moscow's attempts to create exact replicas of the Russian government in the satellite countries. We do not know whether this time lag would have become so dangerously noticeable if the succession crisis after Stalin's death had not pushed all developments in uncalculated directions. At any event, it was at that moment that the facsimile character

of the satellite governments, with its slavish imitation of the Moscow masters, took its revenge. For the destalinization period and the succession crisis, which did not create major disturbances in Russia proper, had their most dangerous consequences in those countries, Poland and Hungary, which followed Russia once more most obediently, while Rumania and Albania and even Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, where the Stalinists had succeeded in keeping power against the Moscow trend, remained quiet and loyal.

It is chiefly this difference in reaction to developments in Russia which explains certain diversities of present conditions in the satellite countries, and this diversity is due to certain failures of totalitarian imperialism; it does not indicate a new, more promising stage in its development. The seriousness of these failures is best gauged by the number of Soviet divisions stationed in the satellite countries—28 garrisons are still needed to occupy Hungary while Hungarian soldiers, now commanded directly by Russian officers, can still not be trusted with weapons, and the situation is hardly much better elsewhere. The presence of Russian troops, though legalized by the Warsaw pact which could conveniently be modelled on NATO, may help to destroy the illusion of independence for the sake of which the whole system was devised and which in itself even disregarding all other atrocities, constitutes a worse hypocrisy than any committed by imperialist Europe in its colonial rule. Sitting on bayonets is not only an old-fashioned and rather uncomfortable device of domination, it is a serious setback to totalitarian aspirations which had hoped to be able to keep the satellites in the Moscow orbit by the sheer force of ideology and terror. It remains to be seen whether these setbacks will be able to break the spell of attraction this system exerts in Asia and Africa, that is, in all regions whose political and emotional life is still tuned to the reaction against an older imperialism where foreigners openly assumed power. Unfortunately, these people, without much experience in politics in general and in modern politics in particular, are only too easy to fool; they will conclude that whatever this is, it is not imperialism as they knew it, and whatever the faults of the regime may be, the principle of racial equality is not violated. This is not likely to change so long as the former colonial people are color conscious instead of freedom minded.

However that may be, the failures of totalitarian imperialism

should be taken no less seriously than the successes of Soviet technicians and engineers. But neither the failures of 1956 nor the successes of 1957 indicate a new development of this form of government within, either in the direction of enlightened despotism or some other form of dictatorship. If the dramatic events of the Hungarian Revolution demonstrate anything, it is at best the dangers which may grow out of the lawlessness and formlessness inherent in the very dynamics of this regime and so glaringly apparent in its inability to solve the succession problem. If these danger signs promise anything at all, it is much rather a sudden and dramatic collapse of the whole regime than a gradual normalization. Such a catastrophic development, as we learned from the Hungarian Revolution, need not necessarily entail chaos—though it certainly would be rather unwise to expect from the Russian people, after forty years of tyranny and thirty years of totalitarianism, the same spirit and the same political productivity which the Hungarian people showed in their most glorious hour.