Russian outlook for the Sixties

Khrushchev Calls a Turn

by **HAIG BABIAN**

■ PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE has been a recurrent theme in Soviet tactics with the non-Communist world since the earliest days of the Russian Revolution. Lenin used it to win time while the Revolution was fighting for its life at home. Stalin used it to win elbow room for the expected final drive toward victory against the capitalists. But both Lenin and Stalin remained intellectually committed to Marx's theory that war is inevitable so long as capitalism persists anywhere in the world. Peaceful coexistence, then, has been an on-again, off-again thing, apparently a temporary phase of Soviet long-range policy.

All this, however, was before Khrushchev. The current leader of the Communist world has sustained an almost six-year drive to alter the position of peaceful coexistence within the structure of Communist theory. In this he has met with considerable success. The West must now seriously consider the possibility that Khrushchev's brand of peaceful coexistence is exactly as labeled—not an expedient, not a trick, but a complete departure from the tactics of his predecessors. And if this is true, the West is automatically presented with a whole new set of dilemmas.

When I arrived in the Soviet Union late last spring, the question of whether war is inevitable between the Communist and capitalist spheres was definitely overshadowed by less theoretical problems. All the news was about Francis Powers and his U-2 flight. Gorki Park in Moscow had long lines of Russians waiting to see the wreckage of the plane put on display in a simple pavilion. Still, talk of a possible war was nonexistent, at least among the Russians I met. This was confirmed for me by the more practiced Western observers on the scene.

I concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the lack of bellicose talk by the man in the street must be due as much to prompting from above as to a general abhorrence of war's devastation. But if this was true, certainly a high degree of official commitment to a policy of peaceful coexistence, at home as well as abroad, was indicated. Such a commitment is actually reflected in the attitudes and opinions of Soviet citizens from various walks of life.

Voices from the past

It was in the *casbah* section of Tashkent, capital of the central Asian Uzbek Soviet Republic, that I heard a remarkable expression of the common man's opinions of Khrushchev's policies. I was taking an unscheduled walk through the "old city" with a Russian-speaking French tourist when I noticed a photogenic old Uzbek sitting cross-legged in the shade of a wall. We wanted to take his picture, but he demurred. It was only after I remarked that the people of Timur-i-lenk (Tamerlane) had always interested me that the Uzbek warmed up. He started boldly by telling us that he himself was thought to be a direct descendant of the great conqueror. When we accepted that without apparent doubts, he answered questions as rapidly as we could ask them.

Did he remember the Tsarist days? Yes, they were bad days. The Russian officials under the Tsar had been cruel to the Uzbek people.

Had the Revolution brought him a better life? Yes, he had learned to write his name in Russian.

Was that good? Certainly. One should know how to write his name.

Was he living more comfortably now? (Shrug) He lived in the same house his father had built with his father. No one had taken that away from him.

Did he work? No, he was too old to work. He was on a pension. There were no pensions before the Revolution.

How did he account for the barefooted, ragged children in the "old city" and their well-dressed counterparts in the Russian-dominated new Tashkent? Some people preferred old ways for themselves and their children, so the government left them alone. Others wanted to change, to get ahead, and they were the first to be moved to new quarters. Soon everyone would be moved whether he liked it or not.

What did he really think of the Russian Revolution? It had brought about many changes.

Did he approve of what the Revolution was doing? That depended on who was running things.

What about Lenin? He had called attention to the Tsar's dirty linen and collected them for a washing.

And Stalin? He had done most of the washing.

And Khrushchev? He hung out the wash on the tail of Sputnik so everyone could see how the Revolution had cleaned things up.

What about the future? The wash still needed pressing and folding. Khrushchev would see to that next, *if war did not come.*

Where did he learn so much about laundering? You should have seen

him all dressed up when his grandson married.

Did he think Khrushchev could stay on top long enough to iron out the wrinkles in Russia's clean laundry? Yes, of course. Nikita had the footing of a goat. He could get to wherever he wanted to go.

Setting a new line

This talk with a Uzbek septuagenarian was in many ways the most interesting interview I had in the Soviet Union. It was remarkable that the old man, illiterate as he was, coupled peace with the future progress of the U.S.S.R. It was also interesting that he referred to Khrushchev by his first name, which speaks volumes for the kind of image the Soviet leader has projected among the people.

Certainly the old Uzbek was right about "Nikita's" sure footing. The November 4 reports of Khrushchev's eclipse were, to say the least, premature. More important, an earlier telegram from the Chinese leaders pledging "eternal, inviolable, fraternal friendship" was capped during the week of November 7 by a public show of acceptance by all Communists, *including the Chinese,* of Khrushchev's personal turn in the theory of coexistence. Thus, what had threatened to be a major ideological quarrel between the two great Communist powers was resolved in favor of the top man of the Kremlin. "War is not inevitable" is now the official doctrine of the Communist world.

None of this could be foretold last June when I was in Moscow. During my brief stay in the Russian capital, I had the opportunity to exchange views on peaceful coexistence with a professor of history from Moscow University. Prof. G was a pleasant man of retiring disposition, but he had the annoying habit of nodding, as I spoke, in the way a professor nods when he listens to an eager student. My point was that *indefinite* peaceful coexistence had to be contrary to Soviet theory as enunciated by Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and therefore the West was justified in not taking at face value Khrushchev's coexistence proposals. Prof. G's response, which I set down with reasonable accuracy as he spoke, was as enlightening as it proved prophetic.

"I am surprised and happy," he said, "to see that you are so well informed about the theoretical base of our past progress. But you are *too* literal, *too* inflexible in your interpretation. Remember one thing, please. Soviet society was meant to be dynamic. We have reached a stage of development where we can become even more dynamic. You should not look upon the teachings of our inspirers as a beacon from the past revealing our present and lighting the way to our future. We

can and will change whatever needs changing. Only progress is a constant measure of truth in our dialectic. This is what I try to teach my students. But this is not what I was taught. Times change."

Two weeks later, on June 21, Khrushchev appeared before the Congress of the Rumanian Workers Party in Bucharest and repeated in more forceful terms what I had already heard from Prof. G. As reported in the press, Premier Khrushchev had this to say:

"We live at a time when Marx, Engels and Lenin are no longer with us. If we act like children learning their ABC's and spelling out words, we shall not go very far. . . . Based on Marxist-Leninist teaching, we must think for ourselves. . . . All this entitles us to assert with certainty that under present conditions war is not inevitable."

In essence, Khrushchev was calling for a reinterpretation of the holy books of communism to fit new circumstances. He was content to grant that the works of Lenin, Marx and Engels would live forever because they "pointed the way." But beyond that, Khrushchev made a bold bid to have peaceful coexistence accepted as a new doctrine. His performance was all the more remarkable because it came barely six weeks after his wrathful foreclosure of the Paris Summit meeting.

As I think back now of my talk with the quiet professor in Moscow, I am constrained to conclude that a rather surprising development must be taking place in Soviet life today. Since we can safely assume that Khrushchev was not taking his cue from Prof. G, it must be that the Soviet leader was putting his stamp of approval on that which had already become an intellectually plausible, satisfying and fairly widespread credo among the Soviet new class of bureaucrats, managers and opinion molders. And while it would be dangerous to assume that another sudden ideological reversal is unlikely, there is considerable evidence to support the view that Khrushchev's call for peaceful coexistence is more closely sewn to the fabric of Russian society than any other ideological pronouncement of the past generation.

Still, one inevitably wonders how safe it is to assume that Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence is a stable aspect of Soviet policy. In order to seek an answer to that question, one must attempt to test peaceful coexistence against the metal of the most profound and enduring interests of the Soviet Union.

Test of a theory

There are three related areas of concern that can be said to encompass everything that ever has been, or will be, important to the Soviets. The first of these involves a theoretical justification for the Communist revolution—a need to define exactly what role the revolution is supposed to play in the course of the world's history. The second involves the relations of the Soviet Union with the

other nations of the world—capitalist, neutral, and socialist-communist. The third area of concern involves the economy of the Soviet Union iteslf, the robust growth of which is considered essential for the attainment of all the goals that needed 40 years of subsistence living to bring within sight.

The West, in my opinion, has not correctly assessed the role of theory in the pattern of Soviet behavior. It is true enough that since the entire basis for revolution was set on the platform of Marxian dialectics, the formulation of theory has become an intellectual habit among the hierarchy of the Communist party. In practice, however, the theoretical mechanisms for action enjoy considerable leeway.

I was surprised to learn that though most people in the Soviet Union, as in the United States, talk about Marx a great deal, few actually read him. In fact, Marx *and* Lenin are now accorded such an exalted place on the tree of human life, as depicted on the wall of Moscow University's main lobby, that no one dares to understand these geniuses except through official interpretation.

Response to needs

All this leads to an interesting and inevitable conclusion. Theory in Soviet ideology has a long history of adaptability to current needs. Lenin subverted the theory of "permanent revolution" to institute his New Economic Policy, a return to capitalism. Stalin interrupted the theory of world revolution to accommodate his own theory of socialism in one country first. There is no evidence that the doctrine of immutability of original aims has ever gained precedence over the crying needs of a current situation.

Lenin and Stalin were able to revert to original aims once an expedient departure had served its purpose. It was Khrushchev's lot to encounter a development of world-shaking impact that required an accommodation to a *permanent new need.*

Stalin was a dictator in the era of atom bombs. The three years after he died saw the Soviet Union rival the United States as a hydrogen bomb power. The stakes were too

high to keep on the books Lenin's belief that "wars are inevitable so long as imperialism (capitalism) exists. . ." Khrushchev started the long and laborious process of changing all that on February 14, 1956, before the Twentieth Party Congress. His declaration that capitalism no longer meant the inevitability of war (as far as the Soviet Union was concerned) was the first step in the painful process of revising one of the most reiterated tenets of the Communist liturgy. He justified his pronouncement on the grounds that the "peace-loving, socialist forces" were now too strong to be attacked by capitalists.

Then, before the Twenty-first Party Congress on January 28, 1959, Khrushchev extended his new theory. "Two world social systems are in existence: capitalism, living out its last days, and the ever-growing, vital forces of socialism. . . . The danger of a capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union is ruled out. This means that the victory of socialism is not only complete but final."

Thus in one blow Khrushchev eliminated the last chance of capitalism in the Soviet Union, thereby eliminating the need to do anything *about* capitalism. The Revolution had completed all its goals, save increasing its fruits at home for the people. History would take care of the progress of socialism in the rest of the world.

This decision to let history instead of bombs decide the fate of capitalism ran counter to the orthodoxy of Chinese Communist theoreticians. The much-publicized rift of the past year was in very real measure an argument over war or no war, although at times it took on the guise of a debate over who had the better blueprint for communism. Khrushchev sounded as though he wanted to live and let live ("The very concept of capitalist encirclement of our country is in need of serious clarification. . . . It is not now known who encircles whom. . . . It is impossible to regard the socialist states as some kind of island in a seething capitalist ocean."). The Chinese, for their part, denounced those who "exaggerate the consequences of the destructiveness of nuclear war" and predicted that a Communist Utopia would flourish "on the debris of dead imperialism. . ."

Stakes are high

To say that the Russian people have more to lose than the Chinese from a world blasted by hydrogen bombs is to state the obvious. For that matter, the non-Communist world also has a very large stake in Khrushchev's differences with the Chinese. Whether the recent meetings in Moscow really and finally settled the ideological tug-of-war between Moscow and Peiping remains to be seen.

That there has been a breakdown in people-to-people diplomacy between Russians and Chinese was made apparent to me on two separate occasions. A young engineering student expressed this surprising sentiment: "They are all over the place," he said, referring to the Chinese students at Moscow University, "taking up precious space that we could use. Some day they will thank us, I am sure, by overrunning us completely." Another time at the Moscow airport I ran into a large Chinese delegation waiting to board a flight to Peiping. "Don't get lost in that group," a Russian woman warned me half-seriously. "They are a hardheaded bunch. You will never be heard from again, and we will be blamed."

Whatever the future of Russo-Chinese relations, the problem remains that we in the West must correctly assess Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence policy. If it is an inescapably permanent policy (so long as we do not let down our military guard) and if it has real roots of

conviction among the Russian people (as I believe it does), what is its meaning to the future of East-West relations?

Clearly the economic race is on. So long as the military capabilities for mutual destruction remain constant, the economic arena becomes the place for competitive, peaceful coexistence. Khrushchev is apparently not afraid to place the Soviet Union in this arena against the United States. He is unafraid, not because he expects to catch up with the U. S. standard of living within the next 10 years, but because he expects to show the world that under socialist techniques of state planning the Soviet Union will *catch up enough* to demonstrate its potential superiority.

By 1963 the Soviets hope to produce as much milk, meat and butter, on a per capita basis, as the United States. What would that prove? According to Khrushchev, the Soviet Union will have "shot a highly powerful torpedo at the underpinnings of capitalism."

In the industrial sector, the Soviet target is to attain 85 per cent of U.S. production figures by 1965, and then forge 14 per cent ahead by 1970. It is more likely that by 1970 the Soviets will reach the current U.S. capacity in steel, electric power and petroleum, and exceed by a considerable margin our likely output of coal, cement and machine tools. The current annual Soviet investment in producer goods industries, mining and electric power is already on a par with that of the United States.

Considerable quantitative progress is expected in consumer durables as well, although the qualitative factor is bound to be incidental for a long time to come. The Soviet targets concede nothing to the United States except a clear-cut superiority in automobile production. Sales of washing machines, for example, are expected to reach 4,600,000 units by 1965, exceeding 1959 sales in the United States by 600,000. This would represent a sevenfold increase between actual 1959 sales and those projected for 1965, not an unlikely performance when one considers that only 3,600 units were sold in 1953. Similar breakthroughs are expected in refrigerators, TV sets, shoes, vacuum cleaners, and wool and cotton cloth. A 40 per cent increase in the production of consumer goods within the next three years is definitely within sight.

Peace without blessing

Everywhere I went in the Soviet Union there were high hopes for the future. A doctor in Leningrad was sure that in five years he and his family would be living in a new and more spacious apartment. A Moscow taxi driver lamented that in a few years he would have to fight traffic all the way to the Bolshoi Theater. An official of the Foreign Trade Ministry pounded his thigh and exclaimed that in five years he would be able to afford the best marine paints Denmark had to offer. All such hopes hang on the expectation that the current Seven-Year Plan will fulfill its goals, *if there is no war.*

Thus, peaceful coexistence meets the test of serving all of the important goals of the Soviet Union. The victory of socialism in the Soviet Union is complete, according to Khrushchev. It can be left to peaceful competition, therefore, to bring the final triumph of communism throughout the world. In the meantime, the socialist Utopia is to be improved at home and encouraged in other "friendly states."

If the costs of conventional arms can be safely reduced, so much the better; this would add another $6 billion to the $20 billion a year more the Soviets will have available by 1965 for investment in, or purchases of, heavy industry, consumer goods, foreign assistance, and research and development programs. Moreover, by 1965, if peace prevails, the Soviet Union expects to decrease the proportion of its annual investment going into basic industry and to increase (perhaps double) the portion going into the production of consumer goods.

It is now most probable that the well-studied Western techniques of linear programing and input-output analysis will be put to the greatest use by 1965 in the production and marketing of consumer goods.

Thus, from ideological rationalization to practical economic necessity, Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence covers the gamut of Soviet needs. In substance, the West is faced with a unique challenge. Although nuclear warfare may be eliminated, conventional turmoil and revolutions are not. And though the clear-cut economic victory of the Soviet Union is not yet in sight, her successes to date are dramatic and her methods increasingly attractive to the world's underdeveloped economies. If nothing else, peaceful coexistence certifies the co-star status of communism's role in the world theater. It will take the best and most modern techniques of self-projection by the West to keep from being upstaged. ■