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The Brezhnev Doctrine and Communist Ideology

R. Judson Mitchell

ANNOUNCEMENT of the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine by Soviet spokesmen in 1968 has been widely regarded in the West as a development marking a new epoch in the evolution of the world communist system. The Doctrine has been commonly viewed as a Soviet response to the exigencies of Great Power politics in circumstances of continuing loss of revolutionary dynamism or as a reaction to the threat to Soviet hegemony in its inner bloc posed by uncontained polycentrism, or both.¹ Much attention has been devoted to the concept of "limited sovereignty," with this concept being treated as the heart of the Doctrine and as evidence of a major new departure in the Soviet approach to world politics. This assessment, interestingly enough, is generally favored both by Western analysts and by anti-Soviet spokesmen within the world communist system.²

Emphasis upon Soviet power interests in evaluation of the Brezhnev Doctrine need not necessarily lead to a downgrading of the ideological component since Marxist-Leninist ideology is, above all, an ideology of power. Nevertheless, it appears that most Western analyses of the Brezhnev Doctrine have buttressed the widespread tendency to regard the Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism as, at best, a function of the power interests of the ruling Soviet elite.³ While political power within the system presumably can be legitimized only by the ideology, any analysis that treats ideology exclusively as a variable dependent upon power relationships

¹ See Michel Tatu, "L'Invasion de la Tchécoslovaquie et la Détente en Europe," in Jerzy Lukaszewski (ed.), *Les Démocraties Populaires Après Prague* (Bruges, 1970), pp. 95-106. Cf. Edward Weisband and Thomas M. Franck, "The Brezhnev-Johnson Two-World Doctrine," *Trans-action*, VIII (October, 1971), 36-44.

² Ghita Ionescu, "Le Nationalisme en Europe de l'Est," in Lukaszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-250; cf. T. Davletshin, "Limited Sovereignty: The Soviet Claim to Intervene in the Defense of Socialism," *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*, XVI (August, 1969), 3-9.

³ For a contrary view, stressing the priority of the ideological component, written, however, before the Brezhnev Doctrine was fully elaborated, see Vera Pirozhkova, "The Recent Events in Czechoslovakia and the Fundamentals of Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*, XV (October, 1968), 5-13.

ignores the system's functional dependence upon ideology and the relationship between ideology and structural change.

Viewed from this standpoint, the ideological implications of the Brezhnev Doctrine appear as potentially much more significant than any short-run changes in power relationships that might have inspired the Doctrine.

Soviet application of coercion against other socialist states is certainly nothing new; moreover, "limited sovereignty" does not appear to be a real departure from actual Soviet behavior in the past. What is novel and rather startling about the Brezhnev Doctrine is the interpretation of the historical development of socialism contained therein. The concept of the "weakest link of socialism" is the harbinger of a profound crisis in the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism and is the first major Soviet addition to the theory since Khrushchev's reinterpretation of the doctrine of peaceful co-existence.

I. *What Is the Brezhnev Doctrine?*

The Soviet position that later became celebrated as the Brezhnev Doctrine was first provisionally advanced by S. Kovalev in an article in *Pravda*, September 26, 1968. Leonid Brezhnev completed the outline of the Doctrine in his speech at the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party in Warsaw, November 12, 1968. Thereafter, the Doctrine was further elaborated and clarified by Brezhnev and other Soviet spokesmen in speeches and articles in the Soviet press. This was accompanied by repeated denials that the Soviet Union had put forward a doctrine of "limited sovereignty."⁴

Kovalev's *Pravda* argument in support of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was organized around four basic concepts: (1) the class basis of law; (2) two camps or the struggle between sys-

⁴ See Brezhnev's speech to the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow, *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, p. 1; Sh. Sanakoyev, "Proletarian Internationalism: Theory and Practice," *International Affairs* (April, 1969), p. 9; Sh. Sanakoyev and N. Kapchenko, "Triumph of the Principles of Proletarian Internationalism," *International Affairs* (August, 1969), p. 35; O. Selyaninov, "Proletarian Internationalism and the Socialist State," *International Affairs* (November, 1969), p. 11; N. Lebedev, "Proletarian Internationalism and its Bankrupt Critics," *International Affairs* (August, 1970), p. 63; O. Selyaninov, "Internationalism of Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* (July, 1971), p. 14.

tems; (3) the indivisibility of the socialist commonwealth and of world socialism; (4) socialist self-determination and the socialist commonwealth as the guardian of sovereignty.

(1) Kovalev argued: charges that the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia had been violated were based upon an abstract, classless approach to questions of sovereignty and self-determination. In a class society there is no such thing as nonclass law and legal norms must be subordinated to the laws of class struggle and social development. To emphasize "legalistic considerations" at the expense of the socialist viewpoint is to use bourgeois law as a "measuring stick."

(2) Each Communist Party is free

in its application of Marxist-Leninist and socialist principles but it cannot deviate from these principles if it is to remain a Communist Party. This signifies concretely that each Communist Party must, above all, take cognizance of such a crucial fact of our time as the conflict between two antithetical social systems — capitalism and socialism. This conflict is an objective one not dependent upon the will of the people and is determined by the division of the world between two antithetical social systems.⁵

The other social system, that of world imperialism, was, according to Kovalev, seeking to export counterrevolution into Czechoslovakia and detach that country from the socialist commonwealth.

(3) Kovalev maintained that every Communist Party is responsible not only to its own people but to all socialist countries and to the entire movement of world socialism, which is "indivisible." The sovereignty of any particular socialist country cannot be placed above the interests of the world revolutionary movement. "The weakening of any link in the world socialist system" affects the entire system and this must be taken into account.

(4) Achievement of the imperialist goal of detachment of Czechoslovakia from the socialist commonwealth would have contradicted the right of the Czechoslovak people to "socialist self-determination"; the destruction of socialism would be followed by the loss of national independence. The intervention by the 5 socialist states was, said Kovalev, a fight for the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic's sovereignty against those "who would like to

⁵ *Prauda*, September 26, 1968, p. 1.

take away this sovereignty by handing over the country to the imperialists.”⁶

In a speech at Warsaw on November 12, 1968, Brezhnev developed a framework of 6 concepts complementary to those of Kovalev to justify the intervention in Czechoslovakia: (1) the weakest links of socialism; (2) the contradictions of socialism; (3) the possibility of the restoration of capitalism; (4) the vanguard role of the Communist Party; (5) the common natural laws of socialist development; (6) the revolutionary basis of sovereignty.

(1) According to Brezhnev, the imperialists are now resorting to “different and more insidious tactics”:

They are seeking out the weak links in the socialist front, pursuing a course of subversive ideological work inside the socialist countries, attempting to sow dissension, drive wedges between them and encourage and inflame nationalist feelings and tendencies, and are seeking to isolate individual socialist states so that they can seize them by the throat one by one. In short, imperialism is trying to undermine socialism’s solidarity precisely as a world system.⁷

(2) Here Brezhnev used the euphemism “difficulties” to describe social phenomena that are otherwise universally referred to by Marxist theoreticians as “contradictions”; this substitution was subsequently made by all Soviet spokesmen when referring to conditions pertaining to the Brezhnev Doctrine. Notably, Brezhnev referred to two types of contradictions, objective and subjective:

Some of them are of an objective nature, conditioned by historical, natural and other factors. Others are of a subjective nature, caused by the fact that particular problems of development failed to receive the most felicitous solutions, i.e., some miscalculations and mistakes were made — and by the fact that people have not yet learned how to make full use of all the potentialities that, objectively speaking, underlie the socialist system.⁸

Implied is the existence of conflicting social forces that concretely express these contradictions or “difficulties” in the system. Even more clearly implied is that, in the crisis situation of 1968, these contradictions were intensifying within the socialist system.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Pravda*, November 13, 1968, p. 1, quoted in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, XX, 46 (December 4, 1968), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

(3) Brezhnev urged Communists to “stand firm and refrain from giving the enemies of socialism one iota of what has already been won.” If the Communist Party were to yield its guiding position in society, that “would be very convenient for those who dream of turning development in all these areas backward — in the direction of capitalism.”⁹

(4) Intensification of the struggle between the two camps makes necessary a further strengthening of the vanguard role of the Communist Party and further development of the system’s coercive potential, despite the high level of socialist construction that has been attained:

Experience bears witness that in present conditions the triumph of the socialist system in a country can be regarded as final, but the restoration of capitalism can be considered ruled out only if the Communist Party, as the leading force in society, steadfastly pursues a Marxist-Leninist policy in the development of all spheres of society’s life; only if the party indefatigably strengthens the country’s defense and the protection of its revolutionary gains, and if it itself is vigilant and instills in the people vigilance with respect to the class enemy and implacability toward bourgeois ideology; only if the principle of socialist internationalism is held sacred and unity and fraternal solidarity with the other socialist countries are strengthened.¹⁰

(5) There are the common natural laws of socialist construction: “. . . it is well known, comrades, that there are common natural laws of socialist construction, deviation from which could lead to deviation from socialism as such.”¹¹

(6) Brezhnev emphasized to the class and revolutionary basis of the “socialist self-determination” that according to Kovalev, the socialist commonwealth was obliged to defend:

The forces of imperialism and reaction are seeking to deprive the people first in one, then another socialist country of the sovereign right they have earned to ensure prosperity for their country and well-being and happiness for the broad working masses by building a society free from all oppression and exploitation.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (*Pravda*, p. 2).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 3-4 (*Pravda*, p. 1).

What emerges from this framework of 10 linked concepts advanced by Kovalev and Brezhnev is a blend of well-established tenets of Marxism-Leninism and new theoretical openings for Soviet behavior in a time of crisis. Confronted with the view of the world contained in the Brezhnev Doctrine, one gains the unavoidable impression of a system legitimized by ideology that is no longer sure of its moorings and, veering from determinism to contingency, is awash in the no longer certain seas of history.

II. *The State, Sovereignty and the Class Basis of International Relations*

Western insistence that the Brezhnev Doctrine involves an innovation referred to as "limited sovereignty," which is seen as the central element of the Doctrine, has been met by vociferous Soviet denials of the existence of such a concept in Soviet theory and practice. Given the centrality of this point of conflict in the polemics, it seems advisable to deal with this matter at the outset of this exploration of the Doctrine. "Limited sovereignty" raises immediately certain interesting questions: Is there, indeed, such a new doctrine? If so, how is it related to the existing body of Marxist-Leninist theory? If so, what is its importance? Examination of these questions requires, first of all, a review of Marxist-Leninist thought on the state, sovereignty and international relations.

The general Marxist view of the state is well known. For Marx the state was part of the superstructure, determined by the material base of the substructure.¹³ In a class society, the state represented the interests of the dominant class and served as an agency of suppression against the exploited class or classes.¹⁴ Thus, in the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels proclaimed that "the working men have no country";¹⁵ national distinctions reflected in the existing states simply served to obscure the vital class interests of the proletariat. Marx and Engels did admit that in both the United States¹⁶ and in France¹⁷ the state structure had tended to become independent of

¹³ Lewis S. Feuer, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York, 1959), pp. 255-56.

¹⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II (Moscow, 1955), 262.

¹⁵ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1962), 51.

¹⁶ Elliot R. Goodman, *The Soviet Design for a World State* (New York, 1957), p. 14.

¹⁷ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, 333.

the material, social substructure. This raised several questions, notably the problem of bureaucracy which was particularly perplexing in the context of Oriental despotism, and Marx and Engels never fully came to grips with these developments apparently contradictory to their general theory.¹⁸

The general theory of the relationship between state and society, however, remained unrevised. The "contradictions of capitalism" and the "driving forces of history" were leading inexorably toward the collapse of the capitalistic form of social organization and with it the bourgeois state. Following the seizure of power by the proletariat, the centralized state created by the bourgeoisie would serve a useful purpose during the stage of "dictatorship of the proletariat" to make "despotic inroads upon existing rights"¹⁹ and destroy the last vestiges of capitalist power. The power of the capitalists having been broken, the state would rather quickly begin to "wither away," leading to the eventual cooperative, noncoercive utopia.²⁰

Lenin approached the matter of relationship between state and society in a context modified somewhat by the development of capitalism into a world-wide system and the intensification of nationalism, particularly in Russia. His answer to the latter was found in his formulation of "the right of nations to self-determination" and in the famous phrase "national in form, socialist in content."²¹ The approach was purely instrumental and tactical: the Bolsheviks should support demands for national self-determination in order to further the demise of the existing social power; with the achievement of socialism, the earlier national demands would become superfluous. Such demands came to be regarded as treasonable under Stalin: the purge trials demonstrated that, despite constitutional provisions, a republic that had joined the Soviet Union could not subsequently get out.²²

Like Marx, Lenin saw the centralized bourgeois state as a readily available vehicle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The tasks of administration, so he thought, had become so routinized under bourgeois bureaucracy that they could be performed easily

¹⁸ See Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 374-75.

¹⁹ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, 53.

²⁰ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 150-51.

²¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXII (Moscow, 1964), 143-156 and 321-325.

²² Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

by the ordinary working man,²³ a view that he rather quickly abandoned after the Bolshevik Revolution. This emphasis upon popularization of administration did not mean, even in the early period, that the vanguard would share its decision-making power; Lenin's attitudes and policies *vis-à-vis* the Soviets after 1917 made this abundantly clear.²⁴

Lenin did add to the theory an analysis of the political changes produced by the world-wide expansion of the capitalist system. The international development of capitalism had produced a world political system supporting capitalist interests. In the era of imperialism, however, the contradictions of capitalism made for inevitable conflicts among the capitalist states, providing an opening for world proletarian revolution.²⁵ But it was necessary for the internationalism of capital to be met by a supranationalism on the revolutionists' side:

Capital is an international force. To vanquish it, an international workers' alliance, an international workers' brotherhood, is needed.

We are opposed to national enmity and discord, to national exclusiveness. We are internationalists. We stand for the close union and the complete amalgamation of the workers and peasants of all nations in a single world Soviet republic.²⁶

Under Stalin, the emphasis shifted to a short-run stabilization of systems, as reflected in the concept of "socialism in one country." This was combined with a clearer elaboration of the basic idea of a duality of systems. The concepts of "two camps" and "capitalist encirclement" presented a picture of two distinct social systems, with their accompanying legal superstructures, existing competitively within the general framework of a world political system. This was expressed most clearly by Maxim Litvinov to the League of Nations in response to a British delegate's question as to whether "it would be possible to find a single impartial judge in the whole world." Litvinov replied: "It is necessary to face the fact that

²³ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXV (Moscow, 1964), 420.

²⁴ John S. Reshetar, *The Soviet Polity* (New York, 1971), pp. 189-94.

²⁵ Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York, 1939), pp. 119-122.

²⁶ Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXX (Moscow, 1965), 293.

there is not one world, but two, a Soviet world and a non-Soviet world."²⁷

By the mid-1930's, then, Soviet spokesmen had rounded out a comprehensive theory of the state, law and international politics. The state was regarded as, on one side, an agency for exploitation; on the other a provisional instrument for revolutionary politics. In both camps, the state represented class interests; in both camps, law was the formal expression of those class interests but bourgeois law represented the norms of a dying class, whereas socialist law was the manifestation of the underlying laws of history, which contained existential rather than normative judgments.²⁸ The only flaw in this theory of functionally dependent legal and historical development was that the socialist system was the product of the coercive power and revolutionary norms of the vanguard, not the outcome of the natural expansion of the capitalistic system, with its self-defeating contradictions; forced modernization did not fit the Marxist model of natural historical development.²⁹

Khrushchev made two notable additions to this theoretical framework. First, he revised the theory of "peaceful coexistence" to take into account the changed balance of forces in the world. A vastly enlarged and powerful socialist camp had emerged from World War II, to which had been added the anti-imperialist, newly liberated countries that formed a third camp favorable to socialism. The two together constituted the formidable "peace zone." Under these conditions, it would be madness for the imperialists to unleash war; "peaceful coexistence" was now not merely a matter of temporary respite and stabilization, but a quasi-permanent feature of international politics, pending the final collapse of capitalism.³⁰ Implied was a newly protected position for the socialist system, particularly for the Soviet Union. The implication was finally spelled out in 1959 when Khrushchev declared that the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union was both "complete and final," with no pos-

²⁷ T. A. Taracouzio, *The Soviet Union and International Law* (New York, 1935), p. 296.

²⁸ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York, 1966), p. 118.

²⁹ Richard Lowenthal, "Development versus Utopia in Communist Policy," *Survey*, No. 74175 (Winter-Spring 1970), 12.

³⁰ *Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York, 1961), pp. 60-66; W. W. Kulski, *Peaceful Coexistence* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 127-137.

sibility for the restoration of capitalism.³¹ In 1960, the Declaration of the 81 Parties included the statement that the restoration of capitalism had become "socially and economically impossible" in the "other socialist countries as well."³²

Secondly, Khrushchev defined the relationship among the socialist countries in terms of a developing "commonwealth of socialist states."³³ In accord with the basic tenets of Leninism mentioned above, this movement was seen as preliminary to the eventual emergence of a single global commonwealth.³⁴ Significantly, Khrushchev predicted at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that the East European members of this emerging commonwealth would all reach the state of communism at about the same time.³⁵ Implied was the assumption that, whatever the differences in political or socioeconomic development among these socialist states, these could be overcome through coordination of the commonwealth.

Kovalev's concept of "socialist self-determination" appears to be consistent with the framework of Marxist-Leninist thought on law and international relations outlined above. And this was the theoretical concept on the Soviet side that was translated into the Western descriptive concept of "limited sovereignty." "Socialist self-determination" simply refers to the "right" of the vanguard to make and maintain a socialist revolutionary regime; such regimes are legitimized not by popular sustenance but by the Marxist-Leninist formulation of the laws of historical development. Kovalev's initial defense of the intervention, moreover, was cast in terms of the long-held position on the duality of world legal systems: one could not use the "measuring stick" of bourgeois law; one must instead take into account the class basis of socialist law.

By July, 1970, however, a decisive change in interpretation had occurred. In *International Affairs* O. Khlestov stated: "The main principle determining the relations between socialist countries is

³¹ *Pravda*, January 28, 1959, p. 9.

³² Dan N. Jacobs, *The New Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1961), p. 19.

³³ See Marshall D. Shulman, "The Communist States and Western Integration," *Problems of Communism*, XII (September-October, 1963), 54.

³⁴ O. V. Kuusinen, *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 749-51. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Organization of the Communist Camp," *World Politics*, XIII (January, 1961), 208.

³⁵ See R. Judson Mitchell, "World Communist Community Building," *Stanford Studies of the Communist System* (August, 1965), p. 19.

the principle of socialist internationalism. This is now not only a political principle, but also a principle of international law."³⁶ Since this statement occurred in the context of a discussion of general international law, it seems clear that Khlestov was talking about something other than the heretofore orthodox view of a duality of legal systems. Indeed, Khlestov went on to describe the "new international law" regulating relations among socialist states as, in effect, an extension of the principles and rules of general international law.³⁷

While the Soviet Union has in the past accepted certain aspects of general international law and has, in fact, at various times used general international law to defend its own specific interests, the conceptual framework for such usage has always been a duality of systems and the class basis of law. It now appears, in the wake of the Brezhnev Doctrine, that the Soviets were moving away from the old conceptualization of a duality of legal systems and toward an incorporative view of international law, an international law that contains both bourgeois and socialist elements.

This incorporative tendency does not imply any extension of the concept of peaceful coexistence; rather, it appears within the general context of consistent Soviet argumentation concerning intensification of the struggle between the two major social systems. What it does suggest is, first, a certain fragility of the Soviet political position *vis-à-vis* general international law; and, secondly, an implication of questioning of the Marxist-Leninist view of the historical-developmental basis of law.

The initial attack upon the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was based primarily upon legal considerations and Kovalev's response, utilizing the conventional doctrine, was plainly inadequate. Khlestov's "incorporative" approach can thus be viewed as a search for stronger arguments concerning the legitimation of political action, but something far more important is involved. Behind Soviet theory of law, now as formerly, lies an analysis of social development. An incorporative approach to international law fits perfectly the analysis of social development underlying the Brezhnev Doctrine. That analysis of social development is the central concern of the remaining sections of this article.

³⁶ O. Khlestov, "New Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty," *International Affairs* (July, 1970), p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

III. *The Contradictions of Socialism and the "Weakest Link"*

The Moscow Declaration of the 81 Communist Parties, December, 1960, pointed toward a socialist system secure against contradictions:

In contrast to the laws of the capitalist system, which is characterized by antagonistic contradictions between classes, nations and states leading to armed conflicts, there are no objective causes in the nature of the socialist system for contradictions and conflicts between the peoples and states belonging to it. Its development leads to greater unity among the states and nations and to the consolidation of all forms of cooperation between them.³⁸

Earlier, in 1958, a Soviet spokesman had declared that:

The world camp of socialism is a monolithic commonwealth of free and sovereign states with common interests and purposes in which there is not and cannot be antagonism.³⁹

Khrushchev's speech at the 21st Party Congress, 1959, the Declaration of the 81 Parties, 1960, and the Comecon Declaration on the International Socialist Division of Labor, 1962, all acknowledged differences in levels of development of the productive forces within the socialist system but claimed that these differences were being rapidly eliminated to make possible the "more or less simultaneous transition to communism."⁴⁰

These apparently confident assertions of the Khrushchev era, which belied the realities of the socialist system even then, offer a striking contrast to the analysis of socialist development contained in Kovalev's and Brezhnev's 1968 pronouncements, particularly their references to the "weakest link of socialism." Although Brezhnev and other Soviet spokesmen have used the euphemism "difficulties" in referring to contradictions, they clearly recognize the existence and a rising intensity of antagonistic contradictions. Even if this were not the case, a rise in antagonistic contradictions is necessarily inherent in the concept of the "weakest links of social-

³⁸ Quoted in Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁹ Sh. Sanakoev, "The Basis of the Relations Between the Socialist Countries," *International Affairs* (July, 1958), p. 27.

⁴⁰ See Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 20 and Robert H. McNeal, *International Relations Among Communists* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), pp. 125-27.

ism": if the path of development were consistently unilinear, there would be no "weak links." The "weakening of links" is consistently viewed as a threat to the entire system; a danger of this magnitude also necessarily threatens the Marxist-Leninist belief system, specifically the ideology's doctrine of historically patterned social development.

Brezhnev and other Soviet spokesmen have identified 6 areas of contradictions or potential disruption that are associated with the "weakening of links": class antagonisms and bourgeois and imperialistic resistance;⁴¹ nationalism and national interests;⁴² levels of economic development;⁴³ organizational problems;⁴⁴ revisionist ideology;⁴⁵ and exposed positions and proximity to the capitalist camp.⁴⁶

This "weakening of links" provides the background for the formulation of imperialist strategy in the contemporary epoch. The balance of forces has shifted toward the socialist camp: the socialist camp grows stronger while the contradictions of capitalism increase in intensity. The weakening of imperialism, so the argument goes, engenders among the capitalists a desperation which augments their aggressiveness and inspires attempts to slow down the natural processes of socialist development and to reverse the unfavorable trend in the balance of forces. The strength of the socialist camp, however, as well as the strategic situation in the world deters the capitalists from overt warfare. Instead, they must adopt more subtle tactics of ideological subversion, variously described by Soviet spokesmen as "peaceful infiltration," "peaceful counterrevolution" and "creeping counterrevolution." These tactics are employed against the "weakest link of socialism" and are aimed toward bourgeois restoration. If successful this will result in "reversing the

⁴¹ Gustav Husak, "Lenin's Teaching on the Party and Czechoslovak Reality," *World Marxist Review*, XIII (January, 1970), 7.

⁴² *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, p. 6; Deszo Nemes, "Leninism and development of the socialist world system," *World Marxist Review*, XIII (January, 1970), 17.

⁴³ A. Sovetov, "The Present Stage in the Struggle Between Socialism and Imperialism," *International Affairs* (November, 1968), p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Pravda*, November 13, 1968, p. 1, quoted in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, XX (Dec. 4, 1968), 3; *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Miroslav Moc, "Czechoslovakia: out of the crisis," *World Marxist Review*, XIII (October, 1970), 28; A. Zalyotny, "F.R.G. and Developments in Czechoslovakia," *International Affairs* (November, 1968), 22.

course of history.”⁴⁷ Such a capitalist offensive is feasible, with the outcome presumably in doubt, “even after creation of the foundations of socialist society.”⁴⁸ Although the immediate aim is confined to detachment of the “weakest link,” the offensive is a threat to the entire system and is really aimed primarily at the Soviet Union:

Needless to say, the main blow and the main trend of the struggle are directed against the Soviet Union which has been, and remains, the decisive force of the Socialist community and the reliable mainstay of the world revolutionary and liberation movement.⁴⁹

Brezhnev’s prescription for the crisis produced by the “weakening of links” and the capitalist counterrevolutionary offensive is fourfold: (1) increasing coordination of the activities of the socialist countries in all fields or as Brezhnev put it, the “sharper the confrontation between the new and the old world” the greater becomes the importance of such coordination;⁵⁰ (2) strengthening of the role of the Communist Party throughout the system; (3) intensification of ideological warfare against bourgeois ideology, that is, increasing struggle against revisionism and emphasis upon ideological conformity; (4) application of coercion to meet immediate crises caused by “weakening of links”; this coercion is sanctioned by “socialist internationalism,” and is to be coordinated on an international or interparty basis within the socialist commonwealth; strengthening of the commonwealth’s primary coercive arm, the Warsaw Treaty Organization.⁵¹

A certain structural parallelism is at once apparent between the theoretical formulation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and Lenin’s analysis of capitalist development in *Imperialism; the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In both cases there is an analysis of a system driven by its own imperatives toward maximum development of the productive forces, physical expansion and centralization and concentra-

⁴⁷ See Brezhnev’s speech to the International Parties Conference, *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, pp. 1-4; Sovetov, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9; I. Oleinik, “Leninism and the International Significance of the Experience Gained in Socialist Construction,” *International Affairs* (February-March, 1970), pp. 27-34.

⁴⁸ Oleinik, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Sovetov, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Pravda*, June 8, 1969, p. 2.

⁵¹ “In Defense of Socialism and Peace,” *International Affairs* (September, 1968), p. 5.

tion of power. In both cases contradictions within the system, primarily a matter of uneven development, lead to conflict, requiring a coercive response. And in both cases the unevenness of development produces a "weakest link" (in the case of the doctrine of imperialism, this was an *addendum* of the early Comintern period, but was already clearly implied in Lenin's earlier analysis) whose existence threatens the overthrow of the system. The only basic difference appears to be that Lenin's doctrine of imperialism treated the contradictions of capitalism as inevitably leading to the downfall of imperialism whereas Brezhnev's analysis of socialist development leaves the future open-ended and ambiguous, the ambiguity relieved only slightly by ritualistic repetitions of slogans concerning the ultimate achievement of communism.

In terms of the plain language of Brezhnev and other Soviet spokesmen, one would be quite justified in retitling the Brezhnev Doctrine "Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Socialism" since developmental imperatives at an advanced stage of socialist development are now seen as requiring overt application of coercion across national boundaries among socialist subsystems. Viewed from this perspective, the Doctrine appears to reflect the venerable and continuing tension within Marxism between determinism and evolution on the one hand and contingency and revolution on the other. In revolutionary practice this has primarily involved the necessity of finding a theoretical justification for forced development.⁵² It will be recalled that the principal *post factum* justification for the occurrence of revolution in Russia in defiance of Marx's earlier analysis was the doctrine of the "weakest link of imperialism,"⁵³ that is, the analysis of mature capitalism provided a justification for the coercive role of the vanguard in the Soviet Union. If, indeed, the balance of forces in the world is turning decisively against capitalism, today's potential for legitimizing coercion by the doctrine of the "weakest link of imperialism" would appear to be minimal.

The doctrine of the "weakest link of socialism" provides a contemporary justification for the exercise of coercion and the forcing of development. This doctrine, however, raises the question: how can the completion of the construction of the foundations of socialism and the change in the world balance of forces be reconciled

⁵² Cf. Lowenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-27.

⁵³ *Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 15.

with the strengthening of state and party power? The initial answer offered by Soviet spokesmen is that capitalism becomes more aggressive and presumably more dangerous as it becomes progressively weaker. But to claim that a dying capitalist system could, on the basis of its own power, overthrow a progressively developing socialist system (and Khrushchev's 1959 assertion that capitalist encirclement is ended has not been disavowed) would be ludicrous, and no Soviet spokesman makes this claim. Rather, the real source of danger lies in what Brezhnev calls "difficulties," that is, the contradictions of socialism. Here, the principal threat lies in spontaneous development and the possibility of the restoration and triumph of bourgeois ideology.

Lenin maintained that "spontaneity," if not defeated, would lead directly to the victory of bourgeois ideology, since ideology was polarized, reflecting the polarization of society and "spontaneity" was antithetical to socialism.⁵⁴ Lenin's analysis here concerned the early stages of socialist struggle; in his view, the progressive development of socialism would lead to an internalization of norms antithetical to bourgeois ideology, as reflected in his concept of the "new man."⁵⁵ In Brezhnev's formulation, "spontaneity" becomes increasingly dangerous as the system moves closer to the achievement of the ideological goals.

The contrast between Brezhnev's and Lenin's long-range viewpoints on spontaneity is further heightened by recognition of the fact that Czechoslovakia had, in 1960, moved from the stage of People's Democracy into the stage of the Socialist Republic and had been consistently recognized by the Soviets as the most advanced member of the commonwealth other than the Soviet Union. Identification of Czechoslovakia as the "weakest link" could not then be attributed to primitiveness of development,⁵⁶ but Czechoslovakia as the "weakest link" was plausible in terms of the dangers of spontaneous development and the restoration of bourgeois ideology. A possible implication never admitted by Soviet spokesmen, is that the higher the level of development, the greater will be the susceptibility to spontaneity and hence the greater the vulnerability to

⁵⁴ Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?* (New York, 1929), p. 90.

⁵⁵ Lenin, "Toward the Seizure of Power," Vol. II (New York, 1939), p. 214.

⁵⁶ See Ota Sik, "The Economic Impact of Stalinism," *Problems of Communism*, XX (May-June, 1971), 2.

bourgeois ideology. Indeed, as Lowenthal⁵⁷ and Djilas⁵⁸ have pointed out, the functional devolution of the system inexorably leads to the creation of structures antithetical to ideological dynamism. Given the admitted differences of socialist countries in levels of development, it seems reasonable to assume that critical tensions between ideologically legitimized elites and structural elements of low ideological commitment would first appear in the more advanced countries. Designation of Czechoslovakia as the "weakest link of socialism" by the Soviet leadership appears to be a tacit admission of the existence of such a problem.

The concept of the "weakest link of socialism" involves the explicit admission of much more than this. The total picture of world politics underlying the Brezhnev Doctrine is that of two structurally similar but hostile systems engaged in a struggle for survival, with the outcome in doubt. This formulation differs both quantitatively and qualitatively from the old doctrines of "two camps" and "capitalist encirclement." While the balance of forces has changed drastically to favor the socialist camp, the inherent contradictions of capitalism, strangely enough, are no longer seen as the necessarily ultimate decisive element in the struggle. The contradictions of socialism now open up the possibility of capitalist victory. Since the objective factors of strength on neither side now guarantee victory and since overt direct military conflict between the systems is precluded by the realities of world politics that compel peaceful coexistence, the "driving forces of history" yield precedence to more subjective factors: organizational cohesion and ideological dynamism are now the crucial variables in historical development.

Operationally, the preservation of favorable conditions for the ideological struggle is dependent upon the application of coercion to inhibit the deleterious effects of the contradictions of socialism. And this is, of course, precisely the Soviet view of the other side: the contradictions of imperialism compel the capitalists to resort to force to maintain control over their camp as long as possible. What emerges, then, is a view of the world outlined as structural dualism: two camps imperialistic both in their essential behavior, coercive internally and ideologically militant both internally and externally. That much of the world lies outside the two structural frameworks

⁵⁷ Lowenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-24.

⁵⁸ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (New York, 1957), pp. 39-60.

is rather irrelevant given the Soviet viewpoint on the polarization of ideologies.

Thus, the subjectivism that was first openly introduced into Marxism by Lenin and was later brandished proudly by Mao now becomes the central element in the Soviet *apologia* for the politics of coercion. In the hands of Marx historical materialism was a tool for the liberation of man: man became free by obeying history. History now speaks with an uncertain voice and must be commanded. Brezhnev has renounced the teleology of liberation in favor of the politics of organizational survival.

IV. *Functionalism versus the Ideology of Power*

When one speaks of Marxism-Leninism, it is extremely misleading to posit a dichotomy between ideology and power. This is precisely the Leninist contribution to the ideology—the insertion of organizational power as a crucial variable into an ideological framework that was developmental, functionalist and teleological. The current Soviet leadership appears to have extended the Leninist approach to make organizational power the decisive variable. Movement in this direction is a response to the problems of the socialist system at a comparatively advanced level of development. Behind these problems lies a contradiction within the ideology pertaining to processes of development and this is the principle “contradiction of socialism” that has led the Soviet leadership, since 1968, to make the important theoretical departures I have discussed.

On the level of general world politics, the formulation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the subsequent Soviet discussion of it have indicated a narrowing of Soviet concerns from the “three camps” and “peace zone” analysis of the Krushchev era to a revised “two camps” doctrine. What is most interesting about this narrowing is its impact upon Marxist theory of development.

In the original Marxist analysis of social reality and development, structural diffusion in the material substructure was reflected in ideological diffusion in the superstructure of ideas and institutions. The dominant ideology of each epoch, however, was but a reflection of the dominant social force in the substructure. In the epoch of capitalism the processes of history were producing a simplification of elements in the substructure—the polarization of

classes—and would eventually lead to a monistic structure, when the proletariat had become the single surviving class. This substructural monism would then be reflected in the superstructure: for the first time in human history form and material substance would perfectly correspond and ideology would be at an end. Marxism, foreseeing this development, already qualified as a non-ideology, as a scientific formulation of development rising above the self-interested alienation inherent in all previous social thought.

Although the case is by no means closed on the question as to whether the contradictions identified by Marx are ultimately self-defeating for the capitalist system, capitalism has proved to have a staying power much greater than Marx and his successors had foreseen. Surely a major reason for this longevity is that the structural diversity and pluralism produced by capitalism proved stronger than the tendencies toward the polarization and ultimate monism predicted by Marx. Not surprisingly, then, where Marxism has come to power on the basis primarily of initiation by indigenous forces, it has done so in undeveloped countries, in precisely those areas lacking the structural diversity produced by capitalism. Additionally, in contrast to the Marxist model of natural development, the structural monism presupposed by Marxism was artificially induced by coercion. The efficacy of this process is obviously higher with low levels of previous infrastructural development, but even in Czechoslovakia, which had more capitalistic structural diversity than any other party-state at the outset, the process appeared to be spectacularly successful as late as 1960.

This process, however, produces a result antithetical to the original Marxist model of development: the achievement of economic modernization yields a new substructural diffusion. And, as any good Marxist knows, substructural diffusion is bound to produce ideological diffusion. This is the real contradiction of socialism underlying the danger of the “restoration of bourgeois ideology.”

Khrushchev made a halting practical attempt to deal with the problem of the relationship between substructure and superstructure through his various abortive decentralization schemes and also offered an oblique theoretical approach to it in his announcements concerning the “state of the entire people.”⁵⁹ On the theoretical level, Khrushchev saw the necessity for change in the superstructure

⁵⁹ *Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 103.

as the base changes, that is, as the substructural conditions for the achievement of communism are increasingly met, the coercive structures that have induced the social change must adapt to it and gradually phase out their coercive activities. But this theoretical approach was based on the assumption that the change in the substructure was moving in the desired direction, that antagonistic contradictions had been eliminated or virtually so under socialist regimes, and that the required substructural monism was at hand throughout the Socialist Commonwealth. In short, Khrushchev attempted to deal with the problem without giving any indication that he understood its true nature.

Brezhnev and his associates have renounced the overly optimistic viewpoint of Khrushchev, which was obviously inapplicable to the realities of the socialist system. Moreover, Brezhnev has been compelled to deal with the real problem: it is not simply a matter of a correlation between socioeconomic development and the achievement of ideological goals, for antagonistic contradictions are manifest at advanced levels of development. Brezhnev has correctly perceived that "socialism with a human face" is potentially a call for bourgeois democracy and, as such, involves a rejection of the required substructural monism.

Marx viewed the processes of modernization occurring under capitalism as inherently revolutionary and destructive both of the power of the ruling elite and of its ideological value system. The Brezhnev Doctrine appears to be an admission that results similar to those described by Marx in his analysis of bourgeois society are actually occurring under the forced modernization of the socialist system. Thus, the Doctrine questions more profoundly than ever before, from within the system, the efficacy of the process of construction of "socialism from above."

Faced with the basic contradiction between economic modernization and ideological goals, Brezhnev has taken a position of opposition to superstructural change. Such an approach does not solve the basic problem, which is probably insoluble within the Marxist-Leninist framework. That approach does, however, involve the acknowledgement of the separation of superstructure and substructure at advanced levels of socialist development. That, in itself, may well be a striking indication of change within the socialist system.