

Spotlight on Moscow: Facts and Outlook

By A. B. MAGIL

IT WAS our Fourth of July. But the big explosion was in Moscow. And it wasn't a fire-cracker.

The ousting of Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Shepilov from the Presidium and Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and from their government posts has been described as the biggest shakeup in the leadership of the Soviet Union since the twenties.

The commercial press has spared no ink in conjuring up visions of new "bloody purges" and making it appear that nothing has changed. On the contrary, it's because a great deal has changed and is changing in the first socialist country, and because the ousted men sought to block the indispensable transformations of the post-Stalin era that they were removed.

And the contrast between the methods used in eliminating these men after a full discussion and by unanimous vote (Molotov alone abstaining) of the Central Committee, and the summary removal and execution of Beria four years ago is underscored by so conservative a source as the Paris *Le Monde* (July 5).

WHY WERE THEY ousted? Not for their ideas, but for their ACTIONS. They are accused of having organized a factional group in violation of the principles and constitution of the Communist Party, of having intrigued to reverse the decisions of the 20th Par-

ty Congress, held in February 1956. Nicolai M. Shvernik, one of the new members of the Presidium, in a speech in Leningrad gave details of the ousted men's factional activity. He charged that they were "intending to seize in their own hands power in the party and the country."

What were the political differences? Their general character is indicated in the communique of the Soviet Party and in the Leningrad speeches of Nikita Khrushchev and Shvernik. The communique states that these differences existed three or four years—in other words since shortly after the death of Stalin in March 1953.

In foreign policy the group's position, as described in the communique, meant:

Hampering "the implementation of the new pressing measures intended to ease international tension and promote universal peace." In the words of Khrushchev, they were pursuing "a policy of tightening all screws."

Molotov, who was Foreign Minister until a year ago, is especially singled out for fighting against the reconciliation with Yugoslavia; creating obstacles to the conclusion of the treaty with Austria; opposing "normalization of relations with Japan"; denying "the advisability of establishing personal contacts between the Soviet leaders and the statesmen of other countries."

IN DOMESTIC policy the key differences centered around: a) Khrushchev's industrial decentralization program announced in

March and later enacted by the Supreme Soviet, b) the agricultural expansion program, especially the dramatic effort launched in 1954 to cultivate huge tracts of virgin land in Siberia and the more recent proposals for catching up with the United States in per capita production of meat, milk and butter within the next few years.

In addition, the communique charges that the ousted men were against extending the rights of the national republics of the Soviet Union, against shrinking down the bureaucratic government apparatus, against further democratization.

A significant paragraph in the communique states:

"Comrades Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov put up a stubborn resistance to the measures which the Central Committee and the whole of our party were carrying out to do away with the consequences of the personality cult, to eliminate the violations of revolutionary law that had been committed, and provide such conditions as would preclude their recurrence."

When it is recalled that no members of the Presidium were as close to Stalin as these three, the meaning of this paragraph becomes even clearer.

Khrushchev in his Leningrad speech went further and described Malenkov as "one of the most important organizers of the so-called Leningrad case"—the 1949 frameup and execution of a number of leading Leningrad Com-

munist.

And Shvernik spoke of "breaches of revolutionary legality committed by Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov during the period of mass repressions."

THE ROLE of ex-Foreign Minister Shepilov is not clear since no specific charges are made against him except that at some point he joined the other three. Whether this was due to criticism by the majority of the leadership of his direction of foreign affairs is not known. He was Foreign Minister for only a few months, but long enough to encounter such volcanic problems as the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt and the Hungarian crisis. Shepilov, characterized by Khrushchev as "most shamelessly two-faced," evidently made a last-minute switch that turned out badly.

Moscow correspondents of two Communist papers, the Polish *Trybuna Ludu* and the Italian *L'Unita*, have given what appear to be authentic accounts of how the struggle in the Soviet leadership came to a head. In the absence of three members of the 11-man Presidium from Moscow (two, Khrushchev and Premier Bulganin, were in Finland), Molotov and Malenkov moved on June 18 or 19 to have a Presidium meeting called.

By means of a temporary majority they attempted to execute a coup that would have ousted Khrushchev as the party's First Secretary and given them control. The three absent members of the Presidium

rushed back before a vote could be taken. The real majority then insisted that the big questions raised by Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich and Shepilov could only be decided by a meeting of the Central Committee.

The Central Committee — 133 members plus nearly 100 alternates and other party leaders—met from June 22 to 29. It completely rejected the views of the opposition group, condemned their factionalism and voted to expel them from the Presidium and the Central Committee. They remain members of the Communist Party.

IN HIS SYNDICATED Washington column Stewart Alsop quotes two former U.S. ambassadors to the Soviet Union, George Kennan and Charles Bohlen, as agreeing that the attempted coup caught Khrushchev by surprise.

"It was natural to suspect, of course," writes Alsop, "that Malenkov, Kaganovich, Molotov and company were ousted as the result of an elaborately rigged plot, in the Stalinist manner, but all the evidence points in precisely the opposite direction."

"Bohlen repeatedly reported from Moscow that the 'collective system' was real in that issues were heatedly debated in the Kremlin and decided by majority vote. The Khrushchev faction maintained the upper hand simply because Khrushchev commanded a majority." (New York Herald Tribune, July 10.)

Moreover, the action taken
(Continued on Page 4)

Moscow: Facts and Outlook

(Continued from Page 2)

against the factional group was strictly in accordance with the rules (constitution) of the Soviet Communist Party, which requires action by a party congress or a two-thirds vote of a full meeting of the Central Committee for the expulsion or demotion of a Central Committee member.

HOWEVER this writer—taking advantage of the prerogative of every back-seat driver—feels that where such basic, sharp differences are involved, their public airing or at least their discussion by the membership of the Communist Party would have helped resolve them in a more constructive and democratic way.

To say this is not to minimize the fact that the methods employed represent an advance over the one-man decisions of Stalin.

On the other hand, it can be argued that in failing to open a public discussion long before matters reached a crisis, the Soviet leadership had certain dangers in mind and were exercising that discretion which the party's constitution empowers them to exercise.

The section in the constitution entitled "Structure of the Party, Inner-Party Democracy," states:

"But wide discussion, especially discussion on a national scale of questions of Party policy must be so organized as to prevent its

leading to attempts by an insignificant minority to impose their will upon the majority of the Party, or to attempt to form factional groupings which may break the unity of the party, attempts to cause splits, which may shake the strength and stability of the socialist system."

It then states the conditions which would justify national discussion. The Soviet leadership can claim that none of these conditions existed and they hewed to the letter of the law.

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THE DANGERS mentioned in the constitution are real. But in the context of the Soviet Union's present strength and world role, the emphasis on dangers seems to me exaggerated. This emphasis and the lack of similar concern for direct participation by the membership in policy-making are a heritage of the last phase of the Stalin leadership when gross crimes against socialist democracy occurred.

All this, however, should not obscure the substance of what happened. The ousting of those Soviet leaders who resisted change and sought to restore the evils of the past means a step forward toward greater democratization. And as the Daily Worker pointed out editorially (July 9), "the central feature of the historic Soviet events

is that they strengthen the tide to peaceful coexistence and a durable peace."

This is something that the American people have every reason to welcome. And Prime Minister Nehru of India spoke for the peace-hungry peoples of the world when he greeted the latest Soviet developments and said this was "the psychological moment" for easing East-West tensions.

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There are in our country those who want to "tighten all screws"—the Dulles' and Radfords—and prevent any agreement with the Soviet Union on suspending H-bomb tests and other disarmament measures. It is the pressure of these ultra-imperialists and their big business sponsors that is obstructing the London disarmament negotiations and causing the Eisenhower Administration to make even its proposed 10-month ban on tests conditional on an agreement on other aspects of disarmament and even on a political settlement regarding Germany.

But millions of Americans agree with the 84 prominent individuals who are the latest to raise their voices for a simple common sense ban not dependent on other agreements.

The American people will have to do some pushing to get Ike off that dime.