

SOVIET  
STRATEGIES  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  
*An Exploration of Eastern Policy  
under Lenin and Stalin*

BY CHARLES B. McLANE



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

1966

Copyright © 1966 by Princeton University Press

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

L.C. Card 65-17151

SBN 691-03060-X

Second Printing, 1969

*To Carol*

Faculty of Political Science Library
Date <i>6.11.69</i>
Book No. <i>8840</i>
Class No. <i>327.47059 Ms.</i>

Printed in the United States of America  
by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

Western Europe, past the farthest limits reached by the Red Army (behind which Soviet influence and Communist consolidation were assured); or Soviet sponsorship of revolutions in the East, which, according to the formulation of the early post-Revolutionary years, could be expected to hasten revolution in Europe. Stalin chose the first alternative for what must by now be obvious reasons: the prize of a Communist France or Italy or Germany—not inconceivable goals in 1945—too far outweighed the prize of a Communist Indonesia, Indochina, or even China to encourage a vigorous activity in the East; the Communist parties in Europe, especially in France and Italy, were more disciplined and far better equipped to rule should they be called upon to do so—through victory at the polls or carefully staged coup d'état; moreover, nothing had changed since Lenin's time to alter the persistent notion of Marxism-Leninism that revolutions are best able to occur successfully in advanced industrialized countries. All rational arguments, then, led Stalin once again to look westward after World War II; a parallel effort in the colonial East was out of the question until Russia had recovered from the exhaustion of war and until the United States stood less prepared, through demobilization, to thwart his designs.

Having made his decision to face west, Stalin hardly paused to take a backward glance until the autumn of 1947. His policy was at least consistent in this respect, if fruitless. Even the Chinese Communists were left to shift for themselves; what Mao did, he did himself, once Russian troops had facilitated the establishment of a Chinese Communist base in Manchuria (the very least Stalin could do, we must conclude in retrospect). Communists in the East, in short, were obliged to await the outcome of Stalin's venture in Europe.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Engagement and Disengagement in Southeast Asia: 1948-1954*

TO MOST students of Soviet foreign policy, Andrei Zhdanov's speech on the occasion of the founding of the Cominform in September 1947 marks a watershed in Moscow's post-war strategies. In the following months the speech was widely reproduced and translated into many foreign languages;<sup>1</sup> its significance was pondered in Communist as well as in non-Communist journals throughout the world. It also inaugurated an era of increased tension in Soviet relations with the West which lasted without appreciable let-up for the next four or five years.

It may be questioned whether Zhdanov's speech and the establishment of the Cominform marked as much of a "watershed" in Soviet foreign policy as other episodes before and since—the turn from preoccupation with revolutionary "troughs" and "crests" to the tactics of the United Front in the mid-1930's, for instance; the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939; or the gradual shift to "peaceful co-existence" which spanned the years immediately before and after Stalin's death. These latter episodes (if they may be so designated) *redirected* the course of Soviet policy. Zhdanov in 1947 *affirmed* a course already set. He did, it is true, put Communist activity throughout the world into a steeper incline, but did not fundamentally alter the direction Stalin's foreign policy had taken since shortly after the wartime conference at Yalta.

Be that as it may, Zhdanov's speech in September 1947, more than any other single event, set the tone of international relations during the era known as the Cold War. It is therefore a suitable point of departure for the present chapter, which con-

<sup>1</sup> The official English translation of the speech, from which the excerpts quoted below are taken, was published in the first issue of the Cominform Journal, *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!* (November 10, 1947), and later issued in Moscow as a separate pamphlet: Andrei Zhdanov, *The International Situation*, 1947.

cerns Soviet strategies in Southeast Asia during a period of engagement, then of disengagement.

MOSCOW AGAIN FACES EAST

Zhdanov's famous speech at Wiliza Gora (Poland) on September 22, 1947, would have attracted world-wide attention whatever his message. Few comparable statements covering the entire range of world affairs had been made by leading Soviet spokesmen since the war. Stalin's only significant public comment on the international situation, which accented growing rivalry among capitalist states, had been made in February 1946, twenty months earlier.<sup>2</sup> Official statements by Foreign Minister Molotov had been frequent enough but were normally confined to events of contemporary interest; he had not attempted to render a comprehensive prospectus of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> No Party congress or Central Committee plenum, occasions when significant pronouncements on foreign policy might have been expected, had been held since the war. Accordingly, the observations of a Soviet spokesman as highly placed as Zhdanov—he was widely considered, until his death in 1948, to have been Stalin's heir-apparent—were certain to be studied with interest. Their significance was heightened by the fact that they were made on the occasion of what was generally believed to be the re-incarnation of the Communist International.

Zhdanov opened his speech by noting the changes in international affairs brought on by the war, notably the increased importance of the Soviet Union and the virtual elimination of three of the six major capitalist powers in the pre-war world (Germany, Italy, and Japan). He also remarked—although he did not dwell on the question at length—the intense aggravation of the “crisis of the colonial system” since 1945. This, he said, relying on a formulation that went back many years, “has placed the rear of the capitalist system in jeopardy.” He con-

<sup>2</sup> This was a “campaign” speech delivered on February 9, 1946; an English text is in Rubinstein, *The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union*, pp. 221-3.

<sup>3</sup> See V. N. Molotov, *Problems of Foreign Policy: Speeches and Statements, April 1945-November 1948* (Moscow, 1949).

tinued: “The peoples of the colonies no longer wish to live in the old way. The ruling classes of the metropolitan countries can no longer govern the colonies on the old lines.” Two camps, Zhdanov went on, increasingly emerged as the war receded into the past: an “imperialist and anti-democratic” camp, headed by the United States and including the capitalist world; and a “democratic and anti-imperialist” camp led by Russia and including the people's democracies of Eastern Europe, countries which “have broken with imperialism” (such as Finland) and certain colonies well on their way to independence; he singled out Vietnam and Indonesia as former colonies “associated” with the anti-imperialist camp and noted the “sympathy” toward it of India, Egypt, and Syria. In theory, Zhdanov asserted, the two camps could co-exist and Soviet policy, indeed, was founded on this assumption. He left no doubt, however, that in Moscow's view the likelihood of an amicable co-existence was negligible due to the course of Western policies, and American policies in particular, since 1945. It was this consideration which led him to the point of his address and to the purpose of the gathering at Wiliza Gora: the Communist parties, which had everywhere grown in size and influence since the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, must now reunite in their own interests and in the interests of a new international solidarity. He concluded:

The chief danger to the working class at this present juncture lies in underrating its own strength and overrating the strength of the enemy. Just as in the past the Munich policy untied the hands of the Nazi aggressors, so today concessions to the new course of the United States and the imperialist camp may encourage its inspirers to be even more insolent and aggressive. The Communist parties must therefore head the resistance to the plans of imperialist expansion and aggression along every line—state, economic and ideological; they must rally their ranks and unite their efforts on the basis of a common anti-imperialist and democratic platform, and gather around them all the democratic and patriotic forces of the people.

If Zhdanov's speech is read as one of ten or a dozen critical statements on Soviet foreign policy, spanning a period of forty-odd years, its militancy will of course stand forth. If, on the

other hand, it is read in the context of authoritative, but less publicized, statements concerning Soviet foreign policy during the preceding five or six months—for instance, E. Zhukov's article in *Pravda* on August 7 (see above, pp. 256-57)—the message is less remarkable. Much of what he said could have been predicted by an alert student of Soviet affairs. What could not perhaps have been predicted, on the basis of official Soviet discussion of international affairs prior to September 1947, was Zhdanov's candid appeal to foreign Communists to assume a larger role in world affairs and in developments within their respective countries. Stalin had for various reasons been reluctant to speak directly to the foreign parties or to allow Moscow openly to assume leadership of the world Communist movement. Now this caution was set aside. Communists abroad were explicitly encouraged to devise more energetic ways of advancing the common goal.

The East—that is, the colonial and recently colonial world—was not represented at the founding of the Cominform.<sup>4</sup> Since Zhdanov's message, however, was clearly intended for Communists everywhere, ways had to be discovered to project it to the Eastern peoples. This was not accomplished overnight. Old habits linger. An Orientalist conference held in mid-November, although reflecting certain features of the new line (Zhukov, for instance, acknowledged in his keynote address the need for a more vigorous role for Communist parties in the colonies), was characterized more by pre-Zhdanov than by post-Zhdanov thinking on the Eastern question. Possibly this was because the topic of the conference, the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution in the East, was too contrived and too remote from present realities to stimulate new formulations. The fragmentary record of the conference, at any event, does not suggest a vigorous new approach to the colonial world, and the fact that the papers prepared for the occasion were never published, as orig-

<sup>4</sup> The nine signatories of the declaration establishing the Communist Information Bureau were the USSR, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, France, Czechoslovakia, and Italy; other European parties were later associated with the Cominform but none formally from Asia, Africa, or the Americas.

inally intended, suggests that Soviet authorities were quite aware of this.<sup>5</sup>

Zhukov, in an article which appeared in *Bol'shevik* in December, made a more systematic effort to apply Zhdanov's theses to the East and in the course of his analysis touched on a number of issues which had clouded Soviet policies in recent years.<sup>6</sup> An alliance with "parts of the bourgeoisie, mainly the petty and middle sectors," for instance, is authorized so long as it is understood that Communists constitute the "main force of the anti-imperialist struggle." He appears to draw some guidance in this matter from the Chinese Communists, whose recent program he cites approvingly: the first tactical objective, according to the program, was "a union of workers, peasants, soldiers, students, commercial elements, all democratic parties and organizations, and all national minorities for the establishment of a united national front." Since, however, Zhukov uses interchangeably during the greater part of his article "bourgeoisie," "national bourgeoisie," and "big national bourgeoisie"—condemning them all—it is apparent that the precise line to be drawn between acceptable and non-acceptable bourgeois elements had still not been fixed; nor does his linking of Indonesia with China, Vietnam, and North Korea as countries where Communists have properly taken over leadership of the "united national front" clarify Moscow's intent. The lack of clarity on this point was to trouble many colonial parties in the years ahead—perhaps none as intensely as the Communist Party of India.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The two accounts of the conference seen by this writer are: "Velikaia oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i strany Vostoka," *Akademiia nauk SSSR, Vestnik*, No. 1, January 1948, pp. 39-46 (translated in *Soviet Press Translations*, III, 9, pp. 272-7) and B. Kremortat, "Sessiiia Tikhookeanskogo instituta Akademii nauk SSSR," *Voprosy istorii*, No. 4, April 1958, pp. 151-7. Both articles summarized Zhukov's opening address and the dozen papers read at the conference, which dealt with China, India, Korea, Japan, Outer Mongolia, South America, and—in Southeast Asia—Indonesia and the Philippines. It was stated that many more papers than could be heard had been prepared and that all reports would be published in the Pacific Institute's *Uchenye zapiski*; subsequent issues of this irregular periodical contain no such reports.

<sup>6</sup> E. Zhukov, "Obostrenie krizisa kolonial'noi sistemy," *Bol'shevik*, No. 23, December 15, 1947, pp. 51-64; the issue went to press on December 29.

<sup>7</sup> The CPI's dilemma over this question is discussed in some detail in Kautsky,

Zhukov is less ambiguous on the question of neutralism in the colonial world, the "so-called theory of a third force." "According to this 'theory,'" Zhukov writes, "the countries of the East are to preserve a strict 'neutrality' in the struggle between Communism and imperialism." This is an "imperialist device," he argues, "to slander the USSR by placing it on the same level with American imperialism." The device should of course be exposed since the Soviet Union is not a force separate from the national liberation movements but in the same camp with them. This position, which grew directly from Zhdanov's two-camp thesis several months earlier, although not explicitly stated by him, was to remain a hallmark of Soviet policy in the colonial world during Stalin's lifetime.

Zhukov was again ambiguous, however, on a third tactical question, one which was soon to be of critical importance in the East: the question of armed struggle. He acknowledged the success of armed struggle in China and Vietnam, and included non-Communist Indonesia in the anti-imperialist camp because of the armed struggle there, yet nowhere did he imply that Communists elsewhere in the East should rise in arms against either foreign imperialism or a local bourgeois regime. Zealots in the colonies were left to draw what conclusions they could from the curious mixture of doctrine, folklore, and faith with which Zhukov closes his article: "The old mole of history burrows well. And inasmuch as an objective scientific analysis of the development of society leads to the irrefutable conclusion that 'all roads lead to Communism,' these roads will not be blocked; nor will the half of mankind in the colonial world, which imperialism has shackled and deprived of its most elementary rights, be checked in its efforts to achieve liberation."

Despite its ambiguities and inconsistencies, Zhukov's article

---

*Moscow and the Communist Party of India*, pp. 29ff. Kautsky considers that Zhukov's article in *Bol'shevik* was "neo-Maoist" with respect to the issue of alliance with the lower and middle bourgeoisie—that is, condoning such an alliance, in contrast to the "Leftist" line adopted by the CPI at this juncture and maintained until 1949.

represents a significant departure in Moscow's formulations on the colonial question. The implications of Zhdanovism in the East had not yet been fully analyzed, but an imminent change in Soviet views is forecast here.

If Zhukov's article in *Bol'shevik* was an effort to apply the doctrines of Zhdanovism to the East, a more active projection of these doctrines into the strategies of colonial parties occurred at the Southeast Asian Youth Conference in Calcutta in February 1948. Because of the Communist insurrections that broke out in Southeast Asia following this conference, a special significance has always attached to it. We need now to relate the Calcutta conference to Moscow's emerging strategies both in the colonial world at large and in Southeast Asia in particular.<sup>8</sup>

The conference, which was conceived as early as March 1947 (at an informal gathering of Communists and non-Communists in New Delhi), was originally to have been held in Indonesia in November but had to be postponed because of the first Dutch "police action." It was then rescheduled for Calcutta and met there from February 19 to 25, 1948, immediately preceding the <sup>Second</sup> Third Congress of the CPI. Invitations were issued by the co-sponsors of the conference, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS), to youth groups in each of the Southeast Asian countries as well as in India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Nepal. Thirty-nine organizations are reported to have sent delegations, representing all of the countries to which invitations had been sent except Thailand. A six-man Chinese Communist delegation was given full voting status at the opening of the conference. Observers and guests were present from Korea, Mongolia, Australia, Yugoslavia,

<sup>8</sup> The present writer, like all students of Communism in Southeast Asia, is much indebted to Ruth McVey for her detailed analysis of the meeting in Calcutta in *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings* (1958). Miss McVey had access in her research to two accounts of the conference which are unfortunately not widely available: *Hands Off Southeast Asia* (a Special Bulletin of the Colonial Bureau of the International Union of Students, published in Prague in April 1948) and *La jeunesse combat le colonialisme*, No. 1, 1948 (organ of the Colonial Bureau of the WFDY).

France, Canada, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR—the latter consisting solely of Central Asians.<sup>9</sup>

The records of the Calcutta conference reveal the militancy which had spread through the world Communist movement since Zhdanov's address at Wiliza Gora five months earlier. The "two-camp" doctrine penetrated all discussion. Asian regimes were judged by the vigor of their resistance to the "imperialist, anti-democratic" camp: thus Burma and India were criticized for having negotiated their independence from England and for maintaining allegedly cordial relations with London; Indochina and Indonesia, by contrast, were praised for their resistance, respectively, to the French and Dutch. The principal resolutions adopted by the conference violently attacked foreign imperialism of all sorts, especially American. The question of whether a resort to arms against imperialism was now appropriate was handled obliquely. No general endorsement of the tactics of "armed struggle" was given, yet the persistent praise of military successes in China, Indochina, and Indonesia must surely have suggested to the conferees the virtue of this course. The twin question of alliance with portions of the national bourgeoisie, meanwhile, was treated more forthrightly and resolved in favor of non-alliance. The national bourgeoisie, as an entity, was assigned to the "imperialist, anti-democratic camp"; the only united front condoned was "from below." The fact that deference was paid throughout the conference to the Chinese delegates, who were known to hold more moderate views on this subject, underscores the still tentative nature of Zhdanovist formulations as they applied to the East. The resolutions are a reminder that the natural tendency of Communists during a period of militancy, in the absence of directives to the contrary, is to adopt tactics traditionally identified as Leftist; alliance with any portion of the bourgeoisie is not such a tactic.

<sup>9</sup> Reports of the composition of the conference vary slightly; see McVey, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-9. The representatives from Southeast Asia appear to have included the following: seven from Vietnam (all Army officers); six from Indonesia; twelve from Burma (representing different organizations and including five observers); and two from Malaya. The size and status of the Philippine delegation are unclear.

Moscow's relationship to the Calcutta conference has been much discussed by students of world Communism. Some have felt that the conference conveyed an "instruction" to the Southeast Asian parties. The coincidence of so many Communist-led uprisings, it is argued, cannot otherwise be explained. If we assume that this argument refers to Moscow's *use* of the Calcutta meeting to pass on some general directive regarding armed insurrection—since the initial planning for the conference predated by many months Moscow's change of line—there are still objections to the hypothesis. For one, the composition of the conference did not make it a suitable vehicle for a revolutionary instruction. The delegates were for the most part non-Communist, nor was it ever intended they should be otherwise. The special role of the IUS and the WFDY in Soviet foreign policy after the war was to project Moscow's ideas on world affairs to Communist sympathizers and Leftists, but not necessarily to Communists themselves, precisely through such meetings as the Southeast Asian Youth Conference; they were not entrusted with a revolutionary function comparable to that formerly held by the Comintern and now, presumably, by the Cominform. Meanwhile, among the known Communists from Southeast Asia who did attend the conference only one—Than Tun of Burma—was a recognized party leader at the time. There is also the question of who might reasonably be supposed to have been the bearer of the alleged Soviet "instruction." Certainly not Vladimir Dedijer of Yugoslavia, at the moment of rupture between the Russian and Yugoslav parties;<sup>10</sup> nor, in all likelihood, Lawrence Sharkey of Australia, a controversial figure in the international movement engaged at this juncture in a bitter feud with the British Communist Party.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet Central Asians, in the meantime, none of whom held high rank in

<sup>10</sup> The first serious confrontation of Russian and Yugoslav party officials had taken place in Moscow in January 1948, a month and a half before the Calcutta conference; see Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962), pp. 133ff.

<sup>11</sup> A British Communist account of this dispute, which evidently dated back at least to the beginning of 1948, may be found in *World News and Views*, August 7, 1948, pp. 332ff.

the CPSU, appear to have played a negligible part in the proceedings of the conference. If weight is given to the thesis that the Calcutta conference was the occasion for passing some "instruction" to the Southeast Asians, the question of who might have carried it and to whom it might safely have been revealed remains puzzling. It will also become clear that the insurrections in Southeast Asia had their own logic and need not be explained solely in terms of Moscow's strategies or of some secret Soviet "instruction."

Denying that Moscow used the Calcutta conference to pass on a specific directive to the Southeast Asian parties, however, does not mean that the conference failed to serve a useful purpose in Soviet strategies. Zhdanovism was actively projected into Asia at Calcutta. If the conference was more agitational than operational, stressing "action rather than method," as Ruth McVey puts it,<sup>12</sup> it nonetheless quickened perceptibly the tempo of all revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia. Moscow cannot but have been pleased by the militant anti-imperialism of speaker after speaker at Calcutta (although the Soviet press, for reasons that are not clear, gave no coverage of the conference). It is another question, however, whether the course taken by Southeast Asian Communists after Calcutta, in part because of what transpired there, was the one Moscow intended. Certainly Moscow assumed that any aggressive instincts unleashed at Calcutta would be directed primarily against imperialism, and only incidentally against local bourgeois regimes—yet of the four major Communist uprisings subsequently to break out in Southeast Asia (in Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines) only one, the Malayan, fitted this description.

Soviet response to the ensuing rebellions in Southeast Asia followed no fixed pattern. Nor was there at the outset any effort to draw significant conclusions from Communist experience there which might be applied to the rest of the colonial world. The strategy of "armed struggle," for instance, was not proclaimed as the proper course for colonial parties, although the

<sup>12</sup> McVey, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

resort to arms by Communists was general throughout most of Southeast Asia by the autumn of 1948; nor was there a clearer formulation on the question of alliance with the national bourgeoisie, or any portion of it, than Zhukov had given in his article in *Bol'shevik* the preceding December. A leading editorial which appeared in August 1948 in *New Times* (the Soviet journal most likely to come to the attention of colonial peoples) may be considered typical of Moscow's views during the period when the Southeast Asian parties were everywhere turning to violence to achieve their goals: the tendency of the world to divide itself into two camps is reaffirmed; the inevitable failure of the imperialists' maneuvers is foreseen with the usual optimism of Soviet commentators; Russia is said to serve as "a majestic beacon . . . [which] illumines the path of oppressed humanity." But the "illumination" Russia provides is no more explicit than before Zhdanov's speech and Calcutta, as the next sentence indicates: "The sympathy displayed by the Soviet Union and by the entire democratic camp inspires the enslaved peoples staunchly to resist all plans to perpetuate the moribund colonial system of violence and oppression."<sup>13</sup> Moscow, despite its more truculent pose in world affairs, still had only "sympathy" to offer to colonial revolutionaries; at least the Russian press would reveal no more.

Soviet Orientalists, stung by charges of "bourgeois cosmopolitanism" in their studies,<sup>14</sup> made a more serious effort during a conference in June 1949 to translate Moscow's obvious "sympathy" toward the colonial world into certain broad formulas

<sup>13</sup> "The Struggle of the Colonial Peoples," *New Times*, August 4, 1948, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> The charges—current in all fields of Soviet scholarship during this era—were made at a joint meeting of the Pacific Institute and the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences in March and were amplified in an editorial in the April issue of *Voprosy istorii*. The editorial called attention to the "major part played by the East in the current struggle between the forces of socialism and democracy and the forces of imperialism and reaction" and asked why it was that so few studies of the contemporary East were available; the leading Orientalist journal, *Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie*, it was said, "has yet to discover the Twentieth Century." See *Voprosy istorii*, No. 4, April 1949, pp. 3-8; a note on the March meeting, when the charges were initially made, may be found in the same journal, No. 3, March 1949, p. 155.

for action. Zhukov, evidently untouched by the recent criticism, was once again the keynote speaker. He touched on many of the topics he had treated in his article in *Bol'shevik* a year and a half earlier, but with a noticeably firmer hand. The armed struggle in a growing number of Eastern countries, he asserted, attests "not only to the increased scope of the national liberation struggle but also to a heightening of its qualitative level." He considered the armed risings specifically in China, Vietnam, Burma, Malaya, India, and Indonesia as "vivid testimony to the fact that the national liberation movement has entered upon a new higher stage of its development."<sup>15</sup> Another principal speaker at the conference, V. Maslennikov, referring to the same armed uprisings, noted that they "are not fortuitous, spontaneous outbursts but an organized class conscious struggle of the masses . . . led by the Communist Party [and directed] against the imperialists and internal reaction."<sup>16</sup> If such observations did not quite constitute a general instruction to all colonial Communist parties to proceed to armed insurrection, they came closer to it than any previously published commentaries on the colonial crisis.

A somewhat clearer distinction was made between the "national bourgeoisie" and the "petty and middle bourgeoisie" than had previously been drawn. The former was roundly condemned in its entirety and to its ranks were now added—along with all Kemalists, Gandhists, pan-Arabists, and Zionists—such colonial leaders as Nehru and U Nu, who until this time had not incurred Moscow's full wrath. Zhukov's attack on Nehru, for instance, shows the distance Moscow had traveled since the Orientalist conference two years earlier when the projected alliance of the CPI with the Indian Congress had first been questioned; the defection of the national bourgeoisie, Zhukov asserts, is no-

<sup>15</sup> E. Zhukov, "Voprosy, natsional'no-kolonial'naia bor'ba posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny," *Voprosy ekonomiki*, No. 9, September 1949, p. 54; an English translation of the article (from which the excerpts here are taken) may be found in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 1, 49, pp. 3-6.

<sup>16</sup> V. Maslennikov, "O rukovodiashchei roli rabochego klassa v natsional'no-osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii kolonial'nykh narodov," *Voprosy ekonomiki*, No. 9, September 1949, p. 75; see also *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 1, 49, pp. 6-7.

where more clearly seen than in the "metamorphosis of Nehru, who has turned from a Left-wing Congressite and exposé of imperialism into a nimble servant of two masters, Britain and the USA, and an ally of the Indian princes and landowners, a bloody strangler of the progressive forces of India." The "urban petty bourgeoisie," on the other hand, and "even a certain section of the middle bourgeoisie interested in being delivered from the imperialist yoke" are capable, it is said, of uniting with workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia in the struggle for national liberation. New categories, then, are added to differentiate between acceptable and non-acceptable bourgeois colonials, but the margin for error, we may imagine, was not significantly reduced.

Zhukov reaffirms, meanwhile, his earlier views on the "rotten little idea" of a third course between Communism and imperialism. He states: "The national reformists in the colonial and semi-colonial countries mendaciously insist upon their desire to 'remain aside' from the struggle of the two camps, upon their 'neutrality' in the 'ideological conflict,' as they put it, between the USSR and the USA, while in reality, acting in bloc with the reactionary bourgeoisie, they slander the USSR and actively aid the imperialists." Neutralism, which within three or four years was to become the hallmark of Soviet policy in the East, was still buried far beneath the Zhdanovist strategies.

One new theme is introduced in Zhukov's address to the Orientalists—the character of "people's democracy" in the colonies, which he sees as the ultimate objective of the national liberation movements. In the new "people's democracies" of the East, when they are formed, "the timing of the transition to the solution of socialist tasks, to building a socialist economy," Zhukov cautions, "may prove more protracted than in other countries of people's democracy which were not colonies." In respects other than the "tempo" of transition to socialism, however, the "people's democracies" in the East are (or will be) no different from those in Eastern Europe. It is clear from this linking of national liberation in the East to "people's democracy" in the Soviet sphere that Zhukov was groping toward a more explicit formu-

lation of the relationship of colonial revolution to the world revolution than had heretofore been attempted. Meanwhile, Zhukov's discussion of the rebellions in the East less as instruments of anti-imperialism than as vehicles for bringing "people's democracies" into existence indicates a shift in Moscow's attitude toward the colonial world. The Russians were at last taking an interest in the East for itself, not merely as a stepping-stone to revolution in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

The Orientalist conference of June 1949 in Moscow was the last occasion—or very nearly the last occasion—when Russians could speak forth as the unchallenged interpreters of revolutions in the East. As the Chinese Communists neared their goal of driving the nationalist government from the mainland, inevitably their voice in colonial affairs carried more and more weight; this was especially true in neighboring Southeast Asia, where the colonial struggle continued to be fiercest.

As early as November 1948 Liu Shao-chi had delivered the Chinese Communist view on the colonial question. The subject is not treated systematically in Liu's article—which was prompted by Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform the previous June, an episode Liu treats much as Soviet commentators were treating it at the time—but his scattered references to the colonial question reveal at least one departure from views then current in Moscow. This concerned the tactical use to be made of a broad anti-imperialist front, a major feature of Chinese strategy at this juncture and now emphatically urged on neigh-

<sup>17</sup> A summary of other papers prepared for the Orientalist conference of June 1949 (including reports by Vasil'eva on Indochina, Guber on Indonesia, Zabozaeva on the Philippines, and Bondarevskii on Malaya) may be found in *Voprosy ekonomiki*, No. 10, October 1949, pp. 74-93. An Indian volume, *Colonial People's Struggle for Liberation* (Bombay, 1949), also summarizes most of the reports read at the conference. Revised texts of eight reports, in most cases updated to include developments in China through October 1949, were published at the end of the year (with a new introductory chapter by Zhukov) in *Krizis kolonial'noi sistemy: natsional'no-osvoboditel'naia bor'ba narodov Vostochnoi Azii*; this volume was later published in English as *Crisis of the Colonial System: National-Liberation Struggle of the Peoples of East Asia* (Bombay, 1951). Papers read at the conference dealing with Southeast Asian countries are discussed later in the chapter.

boring colonial movements. Referring specifically to India, Burma, Siam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and South Korea, Liu wrote: "The Communists must establish anti-imperialist collaboration with the national bourgeoisie which is still opposing imperialism and which is not opposing the anti-imperialist struggle of the masses. If the Communists do not take such collaboration seriously and, on the contrary, oppose it or reject it, they are committing an exceptionally great mistake. Such collaboration must be established, even though it is temporary, unstable, and unreliable."<sup>18</sup>

Liu's view on this question and the view, say, of Zhukov (both in his December 1947 article in *Bol'shevik* and in his address to the Orientalist conference in June 1949) are not necessarily irreconcilable; in the context of doctrinal formulations on such matters, however, where a change of phrasing can imply profound distinctions, the difference between the two views is striking.

After the Chinese Communists had come to power, Liu Shao-chi spoke again on the colonial question in no less equivocal language. "The path chosen by the Chinese people," he told delegates attending a WFTU conference in Peking in November 1949, "is the path which must be followed by the peoples of many colonial and semi-colonial countries in their struggle to win national independence and a people's democracy." This path was expressed in four terms, Liu said. The first was a union of the working class "with all those classes, parties, groups, organizations, and individuals who wish to oppose the oppression of imperialism and its minions and to create a broad united front on a nation-wide scale"—a front, then, considerably broader than any proposed by Soviet spokesmen since 1947 and even than that indicated by Liu himself a year earlier. The second and third points concerned the dominant role of the working class in the united front and the need for a strong Communist Party to lead the masses—traditional strategies. The fourth, and most

<sup>18</sup> "Internationalism and Nationalism," *Pravda*, June 7-9, 1949; an English translation, from which this excerpt is quoted, may be found in *Soviet Press Translations*, IV, 14, pp. 423-39.

crucial, was the need "to create, wherever and whenever possible, strong people's armies of liberation . . . and supporting bases for the operation of these armies." Liu continued: "Armed struggle is the main form of struggle in the national liberation struggle in many colonies and semi-colonies. This is the main path followed in China by the Chinese people in winning their victory. This path is the path of Mao Tse-tung. It can also become the main path of the peoples of other colonial and semi-colonial countries for winning emancipation where similar conditions prevail."<sup>19</sup>

This was not, to be sure, the first time Chinese Communist spokesmen had spoken of armed struggle so unambiguously as the "main form" of struggle in the colonies.<sup>20</sup> Liu's statement of the new formula at the WFTU conference, however—a formula more compelling than Zhukov's and Maslennikov's in June—gave added weight to the virtue of armed struggle and made it virtually mandatory in the colonial world where conditions allowed it. The fact that Liu's speech was printed in the Cominform journal at the end of December and in *Pravda* several days later (January 4, 1950) indicates Moscow's acceptance of the Chinese formulation. A lead editorial in the Cominform journal on January 27, 1950, gave further approval to Peking's views on the colonial question: calling attention to Liu's speech and to the relevance of the Chinese experience to all colonial parties, the editorial emphasized again the virtue of the broadest possible "nation-wide united front" and the importance of armed struggle, "the main form of the national liberation movement in many colonial and dependent countries."<sup>21</sup> The Chinese and Cominform statements remove all doubt that, except in a few colonies,

<sup>19</sup> *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!*, December 30, 1949, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Sha Ping, "The Lessons of Events in Indonesia," *World News and Views*, May 7, 1949, p. 228, translated from a Chinese Communist newspaper in "liberated China" in March; the author writes that "the main form of the national liberation struggle must be the armed struggle."

<sup>21</sup> "Mighty Advance of the National Liberation Movement in the Colonial and Dependent Countries," *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!*, January 27, 1950, p. 1. Many of the same points were reiterated in a lead editorial entitled "China's Revolution and the Struggle Against Colonialism" which appeared in *People's China* on February 16, 1950 (pp. 3-5).

the optimum form of struggle is henceforth to be the armed struggle, the ultimate goal is to be "people's democracy," and the tactics to be used include a united front with portions of the national bourgeoisie. These formulations remained officially in force until Stalin's death.

To place Soviet colonial strategies in perspective, it is useful to distinguish between two separate developments in Moscow's foreign policy during this period, from late 1947 to early 1950. The first, in point of time, was the shift from the relatively moderate strategies of 1945-1947—reflected, for instance, in the parliamentary struggle of the French and Italian Communist parties—to the more militant line articulated by Zhdanov in September 1947 and reaching a crescendo in Liu Shao-chi's address in Peking in November 1949 and Moscow's explicit endorsement of his views the following January. The second development was a shift of Moscow's focus from Europe to Asia, at least insofar as immediate revolutionary objectives were concerned; this began about the time of the Calcutta conference in February 1948 and grew more pronounced as the Southeast Asian rebellions gathered momentum and as the victory of the Chinese Communists neared. While the reasons underlying these two developments in Soviet foreign policy are not unrelated, it should be noted that a shift to more aggressive tactics did not necessarily imply a turn to the East, or vice versa. It is therefore appropriate to consider separately the causes of these two developments, especially since Soviet interest in the East was to remain undiminished when the militant line gave way to moderation in the 1950's.

The shift from moderation to militancy in 1947—which has been described as an affirmation and intensification of a course already decided upon rather than a fundamental turn in Moscow's policies—may best be explained by the frustrations the Kremlin encountered in Europe in applying a basically non-revolutionary line. These frustrations multiplied during the first half of 1947. In France and Italy the legal, parliamentary efforts by Communists to expand their influence came to an end with their exclusion from the post-war coalition cabinets in each

country. Another Foreign Ministers' Conference, this one in Moscow, collapsed over the question of Soviet claims for reparations. In March President Truman offered generous aid to Greece and Turkey to bolster their economies and make them less vulnerable to Communist threats, whether overt or covert. In June Secretary of State George C. Marshall proposed a plan for large-scale economic aid to all of Europe which ultimately was to serve the same purpose. It made no difference that these programs were designed to "contain" Communism, not necessarily to destroy it where it existed; to Moscow, intent on its own goals, the American policies were threatening and made obsolete tactics which for two years had held forth some promise of success. New strategies had to be devised if the forward momentum of Communism, which Stalin obviously believed in as well as desired, were to be sustained. It was this consideration which led to Zhdanov's speech at Wiliza Gora and to the creation of the Cominform. The significance of these events was soon manifested in a bitter sequence of Communist-led strikes in France and Italy at the end of the year and by the overthrow of the parliamentary regime in Czechoslovakia early in 1948.

The turn to the East also may be explained in part by Moscow's frustrations in Europe, especially by the singular failure of Communism to expand beyond the range of Russian armies. History repeated itself. In much the same way that Lenin had directed attention to the East following the setbacks to revolutionary movements in Europe after World War I, Stalin, following new setbacks in Europe after World War II, sought more fertile fields for revolution in Asia. The circumstances were of course different. Colonies were not in the same sense the "weakest links in the chain of imperialism," as they had been said to be after World War I; the "road to London" in 1947 did not as assuredly lie "through Hindustan" as Moscow professed to believe in 1920. There were, however, no less compelling reasons for Moscow's attention to the East in the late 1940's. For one, the restlessness of the colonial world was a reality. The national liberation struggles which Moscow was sup-

porting in Indochina and Indonesia, and had briefly supported in India and Burma, were inevitably due to extend during the next decade throughout the rest of Asia and Africa. To have delayed too long the formulation of a clear policy for Communists affiliated with these movements would have been to allow leadership of them to pass by default to non-Communist elements; to have remained too long detached from the colonial struggle would have been to yield an advantage to the United States in future relations with the emerging nations—for Stalin must have appreciated that whatever Soviet propaganda said of American "imperialism" the American claim of friendship towards these nations was no weaker than Moscow's.

The turn to the East from 1947 on, then, may be seen as the result of these considerations. Zhukov's elaboration of Zhdanov's Cominform address, in December 1947, was in this sense not simply an effort to apply Zhdanov's theses to the colonial world but a reminder that Moscow was not indifferent to developments in the East; the Calcutta conference provided a convenient forum at which to drive this point home to Asians. These early beginnings of a new attention to the East should not be obscured by the fact that it was several years before Moscow successfully divorced its interest in the colonial question from continuing goals in the West, nor by the fact that Soviet preoccupation with the East never matched (and still does not match) its concern with Europe and the West. In the very relative and sliding scale of Soviet priorities in foreign affairs, especially in foreign revolutionary movements, a significant post-war concern for the East may be dated from 1947. It was to prove a shift in Soviet policy more enduring and of far greater importance in the long run than the militant course indicated by Zhdanov in September 1947.

Before turning to the Southeast Asian rebellions proper, we should finally relate Moscow's developing interest in the colonial question during 1948 and 1949 to events in China during these years. It is not clear when the Russians became convinced that the Chinese Communists would succeed in gaining power in

China,<sup>22</sup> but when they did, two conclusions doubtless followed from their appraisal. First, a Communist victory in China would obviously enlarge the prospects of Communist victories elsewhere in Asia. Moscow could hardly ignore these prospects. If the initial interest in the East cannot, with any precision, be related to developments in China, as time passed Chinese Communist successes bore a particular relevance to Soviet strategies. The Russians accordingly devoted increasing attention to East Asia and in the process made much of Chinese Communist experience. For a number of years they held it conspicuously forth as the model for other Asians; there is nothing in official commentaries to suggest they did so with misgivings.

Yet we would be short-sighted to imagine that there were no misgivings—which suggests the second conclusion Moscow may have reached as the Chinese Communists neared success. A Communist regime in China would exercise a powerful, if not decisive, influence over other Communist movements in East Asia, and perhaps eventually in other parts of the colonial world. Moscow's supremacy in doctrinal matters could become blurred; the Kremlin's authority in revolutionary strategy could be weakened; the strategies themselves could be obscured by being filtered through Peking. If the Russians could hardly express these possibilities aloud in 1948 and 1949, they were still real enough to stimulate new thinking about Moscow's colonial strategies. The surest way for Moscow to assure its continued prestige in the revolutionary East was to assume for itself greater initiative in providing guidance to the colonial movements. This may, for instance, explain the charges of "bourgeois cosmopolitanism" leveled at Soviet Orientalists in the spring of 1949 and the more militant posture of the latter in June—at a time when Soviet policy in Europe was absorbed in the Peace Movement and in seeking alternatives to Zhdanovism. What, in short, is suggested

<sup>22</sup> The present writer, in another study, concluded that Soviet policy turned decisively in favor of Mao's effort to seize power by force, on the assumption that he would ultimately succeed, as early as mid-1946; *Soviet Policy and the Chinese Communists*, pp. 255ff. Other students of Soviet policy in China date Moscow's belief in Chinese Communist success as late as the spring of 1949; see Beloff, *Soviet Policy in the Far East*, p. 64.

here is that Moscow, having found reasons of its own to turn its attention to the East in 1947 and 1948, applied itself with special vigor to the Eastern question during 1949 (and thereafter) in order to avoid seeing Peking become sole arbiter of Communist strategies in East Asia.

If the foregoing policy pre-dates by some years a demonstrable Sino-Soviet hostility, the writer can only suggest that one need not assume rivalry between China and Russia, or even significant lack of good will, to understand why Soviet leaders would have wished to ensure the continuity of Moscow's control over all aspects of world Communism. If the hypothesis set forth here is valid, we must of course consider at the proper time why Moscow retreated from a militant line in colonial affairs in the first half of the 1950's when Chinese Communist capabilities of providing vigorous leadership of Asian revolutionary movements was, if anything, greater than in 1949. This question may be discussed more fruitfully after we have traced the course of the revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia after 1947 and Moscow's response to them.

#### COMMUNIST INSURRECTION IN BURMA

Early in 1948 a document prepared by the Indian H. N. Ghoshal, who, as we have seen, played a significant part in the founding of Marxist groups in Rangoon before the war, profoundly affected the future course of Burmese Communist strategies. The document, known as the "Ghoshal Thesis,"<sup>23</sup> was clearly inspired by two events: Zhdanov's speech at Wiliza Gora, which is quoted at several points in the lengthy text, and a plenary meeting of the CPI in December 1947, which, also under

<sup>23</sup> A mimeographed translation in the author's possession is entitled Ba Tin [Ghoshal], *On the Present Political Situation in Burma and Our Tasks* (27 pp.). It appears to this writer to be an authentic document, although some uncertainty naturally attaches to the question inasmuch as the Burmese Communists have never published the paper. There is, however, frequent enough reference to the Ghoshal Thesis in other studies of Burmese Communism to admit of little doubt that such a document existed: see, for instance, *Burma and the Insurrections*, p. 4 (which refers to the document as "The Revolutionary Possibilities for 1948"); Thuriya Than Maung, *Burma and the Red State*, p. 5; and Trager, *Marxism in Southeast Asia*, p. 38.

the influence of Zhdanovism, adopted a sharply Leftist policy that was to guide the Indians for the next two years. Ghoshal attended this meeting and shortly thereafter drafted the thesis, either immediately before or following his return to Rangoon.<sup>24</sup> It was discussed by the Burmese Central Committee in February and adopted.

The Ghoshal Thesis is essentially a denunciation of the moderate policy adopted by the BCP in its resolution of July 30, 1947 (see above, pp. 337-38), in the wake of Aung San's assassination. This policy was now considered "opportunist," "reformist," and "tailist": its supporters, Ghoshal argued, wholly misunderstood the tenor of the era. "We are in a period of acute revolutionary crisis in the colonies," the thesis proclaimed, "where the national revolutionary movements headed by the working class and Communist Parties which play a decisive role in them today stand on the threshold of overthrowing the imperialist feudal order." The strategy which this situation indicated for the Burmese is summed up in the new slogans Ghoshal proposed (cited here as he set them forth):

*No support to the present government*—but its exposure—as a government of collaborationists—carrying out the dictates of Anglo-American imperialists—Burmese capitalists and landlords—betraying the fighting traditions of AFPFL-CP unity—betraying the January 1946 program of the AFPFL.<sup>25</sup>

*National rising* to tear up the treaty of slavery and assert real independence—take over British monopolies—land to the tiller—repudiate debts—smash imperialists—bureaucratic machinery.

*Set up a people's government*—based on AFPFL-CP unity—to carry through the democratic revolution.

*Alliance and Co-operation* with democratic China, fighting Vietnam and Indonesia, and all democratic countries and movements which are resisting Anglo-American imperialist domination.

<sup>24</sup> A reference in the text to "six months" having lapsed since the assassination of Aung San (July 19, 1947) suggests that the document was prepared during the latter half of January 1948.

<sup>25</sup> The AFPFL resolution of January 1946, adopted before the Communists had been expelled from the organization, had taken a strong stand on Burmese independence without concessions to the British.

That Ghoshal considered the adoption of these slogans a matter of some urgency is indicated by another passage in the thesis:

The fate of the Burmese Revolution and also of the revolutionary movements in India and other Southeast Asiatic countries are closely linked together. *The present situation places great responsibility on our shoulders. We could be the initiators of a new revolutionary upsurge and an uprising which is bound to lead to similar developments in the neighboring countries.* Much therefore depends upon how quickly we uproot this disease of reformism which is eating away the vitals of our Party and *swing our forces into action in the coming months.*<sup>26</sup>

It may be questioned whether the Ghoshal Thesis called for armed rebellion against the Nu government itself or solely against British imperialism, represented by British forces still in Burma under the terms of the Nu-Attlee Treaty.<sup>27</sup> U Nu is roundly denounced throughout the document as a "collaborator," "compromiser," and "hypocrite." Ghoshal writes, in attacking the "reformist illusion" of the July 30 resolution that Communists could achieve power by isolating U Nu through collaboration with his government: "*We totally forgot the Leninist principle that the imperialist bureaucracy and State machine cannot be taken over and run in the interest of the people; on the contrary, it has to be smashed.*" Such remarks surely imply an intention to attack the government as well as British imperialism; a close reading of the Ghoshal Thesis, however, shows that the emphasis is predominantly on armed struggle against the latter and only incidentally against the former. It appears to have been Ghoshal's rather naïve idea that through leadership of a "national rising" against the Nu-Attlee Treaty the Communists would somehow come to power without having to undertake civil war. Circumstances, however, made civil war inevitable,

<sup>26</sup> The emphasis is as indicated in the copy of the Ghoshal Thesis in the author's possession.

<sup>27</sup> A military agreement, signed in August 1947 and included in the Nu-Attlee Treaty of October 17, provided that England would maintain certain bases and troops in Burma for the country's defense for a period of at least three years; see Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 567-8.

and the Communists were obliged from the outset to direct their attacks almost exclusively at the Nu government, which defended itself with vigor; British forces were involved in the civil struggle only peripherally.

Following the adoption of the Ghoshal Thesis, Than Tun led a Burmese delegation to the Southeast Asian Youth Conference and the Second Congress of the CPI in Calcutta. One need not doubt the impression made upon the Burmese leader by the two meetings, especially the latter, which reaffirmed the Leftist line adopted at the December plenum of the CPI.<sup>28</sup> In his greetings to the Indian congress, it is reported, Than Tun indicated the intention of the BCP to overthrow the Rangoon government, if possible without fighting; should it be necessary to resort to arms, Than Tun said, the Communists were prepared to do so in order to "smash the imperialist-feudal-bourgeois combine, establish real independence, a people's democracy, and lasting peace."<sup>29</sup>

The Burmese returned to Rangoon early in March, accompanied by foreign observers (including Vladimir Dedijer and other Yugoslavs) who had attended the two recent conferences in Calcutta. All, it appears in retrospect, were greatly exhilarated. Communist-led strikes were ordered in Rangoon. On March 18 a giant peasant rally took place in Pyinmina (in Central Burma) attended by 75,000, according to Burmese government sources. Speeches by Ghoshal, Than Tun, and others were warmly applauded. Resolutions passed by the rally acclaimed minority groups, such as the Arakanese, who had successively fought the Japanese, the British, and the AFPFL to secure their independence; approved forceful seizure of lands previously leased for peasant cultivation, "whether or not the landlords acquiesce"; supported strikes currently in progress in Rangoon;

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the critical Second Congress of the CPI, see Kautsky, *Moscow and the Communist Party of India*, pp. 46-52.

<sup>29</sup> Trager, *Marxism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 38-9, citing a mimeographed text of Than Tun's greetings to the CPI on February 28, 1948. A British Communist account of the CPI's Second Congress makes no mention of Than Tun's speech, but notes the presence of a ten-man Burmese delegation led by him; *World News and Views*, April 3, 1948, p. 135.

and vowed a determination to "smash Fascism (AFPFL) by all possible means."<sup>30</sup>

The unexpectedly enthusiastic response at Pyinmina, which appears to have impressed the foreign observers (especially the Yugoslavs) no less than the Burmese themselves, was a decisive factor in the future course of the BCP.<sup>31</sup> On March 27, eight days after the Pyinmina meeting, Than Tun is reported to have delivered an inflammatory speech at a public rally in Rangoon calling for an open revolt against the AFPFL and for "the blood of the socialists." The next day, according to official Burmese sources, the Communist leaders went underground and issued orders for a general uprising against the government.<sup>32</sup> At the time of writing (1965) the insurrection of the Burmese Communists has still not been formally called off.

A detailed chronology of the Communist insurrection in Burma (assuming one could be composed) is beyond the scope of the present study. It is useful, however, before analyzing Soviet and other foreign Communist reactions to the rebellion to make several observations concerning its origins and the way it developed.

No single episode brought the Burmese Communists to the point of openly defying the Nu government. It was rather a chain of circumstances and events, each adding a new dimension to the restlessness of the BCP leaders and contributing to their

<sup>30</sup> *Burma and the Insurrections*, p. 41; the identity of "Fascism" and the AFPFL is explicit, according to the text of the resolutions in this official government report. It should be noted that the government's explanation of the large attendance as well as of the expansive mood at Pyinmina was that the harvest had just been completed and the peasants, with ready cash in their pockets, were in a jubilant frame of mind; "they had not had such mass fun during all the five years preceding" (*ibid.*, p. 16).

<sup>31</sup> Several sources call attention to the part played by the Yugoslavs in goading the Burmese leaders on to more vigorous action after the Pyinmina meeting: e.g., Cady, *op. cit.*, p. 583, and Thuriya Than Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 6. The latter writer told the author that later in 1948 (after the Yugoslavs' break with Moscow) spokesmen in Belgrade acknowledged to visiting Burmese Socialists some measure of Yugoslav responsibility for the rebellion of the White Flag Communists; interview in Mandalay in January 1962.

<sup>32</sup> *Burma and the Insurrections*, pp. 17-8. U Than Maung, in his interview with the author, stated that the order for the rising was given only after the government had issued a warrant for the arrest of the BCP leaders on March 28.

resolution to take to arms: the adoption of a Leftist course by the Indians in December, Ghoshal's vigorous application of this policy to Burma in January, the two exuberant conferences at Calcutta in February, the successes of strikes in Rangoon and the peasant rally at Pinyin in March. Whether, if less congenial incidents had occurred to dampen the enthusiasm induced by these developments, there would still have been insurrection at the end of March, it is not possible to say. No exclusive significance, at any event, attaches to the Southeast Asian Youth Conference as the source of the Burmese rising—an argument made by those who look upon the Calcutta conference as the occasion for a Soviet "instruction" to the Southeast Asian parties; the Burmese Communists might well have taken to arms when they did had there been no Youth Conference at Calcutta, or no Burmese delegation present at it.

It should also be noted that the disorders in Burma in 1948 and thereafter were not solely of Communist origin. Although the first open revolt against the Rangoon government (other than the relatively inconsequential revolt of the Red Flag Communists under Thakin Soe, which had been in progress since 1946) was led by White Flag Communists, within four or five months the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO), Karen and Mon nationalist organizations, and even sections of the army had turned against the government and gone underground. Co-ordination between the activities of these various groups was irregular and temporary, a principal factor in the survival of the Nu regime. Personal rivalries and ambitions as much as, if not more than, significant ideological differences kept the rebels apart.<sup>83</sup> As a result, by the early 1950's the separate insurgent forces had been reduced to a state of little more than dacoity, a condition endemic in Burmese rural life.

The government, in addition to its military campaigns to isolate and wipe out the insurgent pockets, sought various peaceful means of bringing the insurrection under control. As early as July 1948, a conference of Communist and Socialist leaders

<sup>83</sup> See Trager, *op. cit.*, p. 40, and Cady, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

was called in Rangoon to unite the warring Marxists: the Socialists—all above ground—attended, as well as several Communist leaders released from jail for the occasion; but no guerrilla leaders appeared.<sup>84</sup> The government also issued periodic amnesty decrees, extending them frequently, and offered liberal terms to any who made use of them.<sup>85</sup> In 1950, in an effort to give the Communists an opportunity to express their views legally and thus, it was hoped, remove the necessity for their continuing the rebellion, the government authorized the formation of two pro-Communist organizations, the Burma Workers and Peasants Party (BWPP) and the Trade Union Council (Burma)—or TUC (B); both were affiliated with the WFTU.<sup>86</sup> Steps were also taken, as in Malaya and the Philippines, to rehabilitate captured Communists by teaching them useful trades and giving them indoctrination lectures. These measures blunted the impact of the Communist revolt but did not break the determination of the White Flag leaders to continue their insurgency.

Developments within the BCP are obscure during the early years of the insurrection. According to a former guerrilla who served as a regional leader for the Communists from 1949 to 1954, the party's strategies shifted erratically during this period. In 1948 and 1949 the strategy was said to be "total war," and such agrarian policies as the BCP pursued were directed against well-to-do peasants as much as against the landlords. In 1950, however, under the influence of the Chinese Communists, the military strategy shifted to "peace and unity"—unity, that is,

<sup>84</sup> Thein Pe Myint, who had left the BCP by this time, attended this conference and described it to the author during an interview in January 1962; the principal Communist representative was Aung Min, who rejoined the guerrillas after the failure of the conference and remained underground for a dozen years before making use of an amnesty offer in 1961.

<sup>85</sup> The first amnesty offer was made in July 1950 and was repeated at intervals during the next decade; see Cady, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

<sup>86</sup> Neither of these organizations were admitted into the AFPFL, however, and so were excluded from any effective role in the government. Within the AFPFL the most radical position was held by U Ba Swe, who acknowledged his Marxist views but denied the relevance of Soviet, Chinese, or other foreign Communist experience to Burmese Marxism; his speeches and writings during the early years of the insurrection are included in U Ba Swe, *The Burmese Revolution* (Rangoon, 1952).

with other insurgents, including the Red Flag Communists; the party's agrarian policies were similarly modified to secure an alliance with the rich peasants against the landlord class. By 1954, it is said, the BCP was calling for an end to the civil war; as in Malaya, however, the Communists were willing to negotiate only on the basis of the government's acknowledgment of their strength—a strength which was by then largely illusory.

Than Tun's leadership, in the meantime, was challenged on several occasions early in the 1950's. In 1953, for instance, it is reported that a meeting of guerrilla commanders at Pinyinmin adopted a resolution of "no confidence" in the Party Secretary; the resolution, however, did not reach the Central Committee, where Than Tun's control was firm (supported by Ghoshal, Ba Thein Tin, Thakin Zin, and others). A similar protest of regional leaders in Upper Burma in December 1954 also failed to weaken Than Tun's position. Thereafter the opposition gradually disintegrated, most of its leaders (including the author's informant for the foregoing information) taking advantage of the government's most recent offer of amnesty.<sup>37</sup>

If these scraps of information about the internal affairs of the BCP are too meager to allow us to reconstruct a reliable history of the Burmese movement during the early phase of the rebellion, they can at least remind us that a party organization continued to exist, facing its own leadership and policy problems—as do political formations everywhere.

There was no immediate response in the Soviet press to the uprising in Burma. Three months after it began, a brief commentary in *New Times* reviewed recent events in Burma and

<sup>37</sup> The ex-guerrilla in question is U Than Maung, now a journalist in Mandalay. The two published accounts of his experience with the BCP—in translation, *No Man, Lawyer or Doctor, Is Infallible* and *Burma and the Red Star* (see Bibliography)—are written in highly emotional vein, soon after his defection from the BCP, and would normally disqualify U Than Maung as a reliable informant for our purposes; the author's lengthy interviews with U Than Maung in Mandalay in January 1962, however, were reassuring and showed him capable of detached analysis of Burmese Communist developments. The evidence presented above is drawn from the interviews rather than the published works but still must be accepted with great caution.

criticized the government for its "draconic measures against the popular movement" and for outlawing the Communist Party on the grounds that the disorders were due to "'Communist incitement.'" The item did not, however, show unstinting approval of the rebellion and was surprisingly moderate with regard even to U Nu. Commenting on U Nu's recent announcement of a program for nationalization, the author stated: "The future will show whether the Premier of Burma really intends to satisfy the hopes and desires of the people, or whether the British press is right in estimating his statement as a 'propaganda stroke'—a reference to speculation in certain British newspapers that U Nu's threat of nationalization was merely to attract greater domestic support. In all of this there was little acknowledgment of a serious insurrection underway in Burma led by Communists."<sup>38</sup> A British Communist commentary about the same time was more attentive to the BCP and more critical of U Nu. He was attacked for having rejected a rapprochement with the Communists proposed by the PVO (this was before the PVO had joined the rebellion); his hypocrisy in November 1946 was recalled, when he had expelled the Communists from the AFPFL while shouting "Long Live Communism!" Burmese workers and peasants, the British Communist writer asserted, were more and more turning to the combined PVO-BCP leadership to combat "Nu-ism."<sup>39</sup>

By September the Soviet press indicated that U Nu had justified Moscow's worst fears. A Soviet commentator wrote in *Izvestiia* that the premier's promise of nationalization was rank deception "inasmuch as the provocative tone of this declaration merely helped the English and American press to open a slanderous campaign regarding the 'Communist menace' in Southeast Asia"; this, in turn, would hasten the dispatch of "imperialist" troops to Burma who would in the end support the Nu government—exactly as U Nu had foreseen. Further evidence of his betrayal of the country is seen in his declaration of martial law

<sup>38</sup> "Burma Unvanquished," *New Times*, July 7, 1948, pp. 17-8.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Parson, "What's Brewing in Burma?" *World News and Views*, July 10, 1948, p. 282; see above, p. 338n., for Thakin Nu's remarks on Communism in November 1946.



in August and his willingness to accept British assistance in crushing the national liberation movement. The Communists, meanwhile, are nowhere mentioned as such in the article; the insurrection is described as having begun, not as a result of any overt decision by the BCP or its allies, but in the wake of strikes in British-owned oil fields during March.<sup>40</sup> In October a more detailed review of Burmese developments in *New Times* implied, for the first time, that Communists were leading the insurgency; the uprising was said to have extended to nearly one-third of the country and to have resulted in the formation of "popular governments" which were already undertaking radical social and economic reforms.<sup>41</sup>

Soviet comment on Burma continued in this vein during 1949. Primary responsibility for the insurrection was now placed more squarely on the Nu government: repressive acts by the government dating from the end of 1947, it was said, had provoked the strikes in March 1948 which led to the uprising.<sup>42</sup> Soviet writers, it appears, wished at this juncture to conceal the initiative of Burmese Communists by arguing that their action was defensive, presumably to guard against the risk of failure; should they succeed, there would be time to place the decision to take up arms in a proper Communist perspective. The Soviet press also referred during this period to American support of the Nu regime, though with no evidence to sustain the claim.<sup>43</sup> The progress of the insurrection, meanwhile, is reported favorably. One-half of the country was said to be under rebel control by the spring of 1949 and popular governments were noted in the "liberated" areas. "A united committee representing all progressive forces

<sup>40</sup> I. Plyshevskii, "Polozhenie v Birme," *Izvestiia*, September 12, 1948; a translation of this article may be found in *Soviet Press Translations*, III, 19, pp. 586-8.

<sup>41</sup> I. Alexandrov, "Events in Burma," *New Times*, October 6, 1948, pp. 9-13.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., A. Leonidov, "Labour Imperialism's Colonial Strategy in Burma," *ibid.*, February 9, 1949, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., *Pravda*, May 21, 1949, p. 3, citing a report from Delhi. No formal offer of American aid, insofar as is known, was made to the Nu government until the spring of 1950; this led to a technical aid agreement in September 1950 which lasted for two years when, as we shall see, it was denounced in Rangoon.

in Burma," an observer wrote in May, "has taken over government functions," and he went on to enumerate them.<sup>44</sup>

The implication of Soviet references to a rival regime in Burma by mid-1949 is that Moscow was considering formal recognition of this regime, as it extended formal recognition to Ho Chi Minh's government in Vietnam early the following year. This was the moment of truth, we may imagine, in Moscow's relationship to the Burmese uprising, coinciding with the realization that Communist success in China was now virtually assured. Had the Russians recognized a clandestine government led by Than Tun, the course of the rebellion and certainly of future Soviet-Burmese relations would have been very different. Moscow did not recognize such a government. Indeed a perceptible decline in Soviet interest in the Burmese insurrection may be detected after the spring of 1949. No paper on Burma, for instance, was prepared for the important conference of Soviet Orientalists in June 1949, although reports were delivered on all other Southeast Asian countries. Nor was there a chapter on Burma in the critical volume *Krizis kolonial'noi sistemy* published at the end of 1949. The important editorial in *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!* on January 27, 1950, while it mentions the Burmese revolt in passing, singles out other rebellions—notably in China, Vietnam, and Malaya—to illustrate the success of the strategy of armed struggle.

A number of reasons may explain Moscow's declining interest in the Burmese rising; indeed, its interest from the outset had never matched that in Communist uprisings elsewhere in Southeast Asia. One perhaps obvious reason was a sense that the course of events in Burma could not affect Soviet interests as critically as events in Indochina, Indonesia, or India; Moscow seems not, in short, to have shared Ghoshal's view, expressed before the rebellion broke out, that the Burmese rising could be pivotal in the revolutionary course of Southeast Asia. The Burmese rebellion, meanwhile, was less satisfactory than the rising in Malaya, with

<sup>44</sup> N. Pakhomov, "Sobytiia v Birme," *Izvestiia*, June 25, 1949, p. 2; see also *Pravda*, May 27, 1949, p. 3.

which it is most readily compared, because it was directed less against imperialism than against the local nationalist leadership—however Soviet spokesmen sought to conceal this fact. So long as Soviet policy continued to emphasize the assault on imperialism, especially American, a colonial rebellion not directly serving this end must ultimately lose Moscow's attention. The Russians must also have had misgivings about the divided leadership of Burmese Communism and the undisciplined nature of what passed as Burmese Marxism. In this connection it is significant that the Soviet press rarely mentioned Than Tun by name, although his control over the brand of Burmese Communism most loyal to Moscow admits of little doubt.<sup>45</sup> With respect to the prospects of ultimate Communist success in Burma, Moscow would have had good grounds, despite gains reported in the Soviet press, for doubting the strength of the BCP—especially when compared with that of the Malayan party, with its strong roots in the labor movement, or of the Philippine and Vietnamese parties, with their armies still intact from World War II. Finally, there was an alternative to revolution in Burma that was not everywhere present in Southeast Asia, an alternative to which the Russians eventually turned, as we shall in due course discover.

The Burmese insurrection, then, seems to have been something of an ugly duckling in Soviet eyes. It deserved acknowledgment, and this was given, but it warranted no unusual enthusiasm. As time passed, though it is premature to speak of this as early as 1950, the Burmese rebellion was allowed to slip into obscurity and insignificance. Neither the errors of Burmese Communists nor their sacrifices were deemed worthy of notice.

Contacts between the Burmese Communists and foreign parties after the outbreak of the insurrection are, needless to say, difficult to trace. The British Communists appear to have lost interest in Burma after its independence and its decision to remain outside

<sup>45</sup> The only mention of Than Tun in the Soviet or Cominform press during the Burmese insurrection noted by this writer is in a letter from a Burmese Communist published in *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!* September 17, 1951, p. 4; the letter quotes from a speech Than Tun had recently made to members of the People's Army.

the Commonwealth. Far less attention was given in the British Communist press to the Burmese insurrection, for instance, than to the Malayan.<sup>46</sup> The British, moreover, appear to have been quite out of touch with the BCP by the spring of 1948, to judge from a reference in *World News and Views* to Thein Pe Myint, who by this time had broken with the party, as a "Communist member of the Provisional Government."<sup>47</sup> The Indian Communists, whose policies had influenced the BCP at most critical junctures in its history, also appear to have lost contact with the Burmese as the insurrection proceeded. A former Burmese Communist speaks of ties with the CPI through 1948 but states that thereafter they ended;<sup>48</sup> students of Indian Communism note no significant contacts between the Indian and Burmese parties after the Second Congress of the CPI in February 1948. Liaison with the Russians was impossible during an era of martial law in Burma and when Moscow would in any case have been circumspect in its behavior in order to counteract the wide-spread belief that the Burmese insurrection was part of a larger Soviet plot to subvert all of Southeast Asia. By the time the first Russian diplomatic mission reached Rangoon in 1951, Moscow's policies had shifted and any effort to contact the BCP was presumably out of the question.<sup>49</sup>

The Chinese Communists, it appears, maintained a closer relationship to the Burmese insurgents than British, Indian, or Russian. By the end of 1949, when the Chinese Red Army had overrun all of South China, direct liaison with the Burmese guerrillas

<sup>46</sup> The last item on the Burmese rebellion discovered in *World News and Views* is in the issue of September 25, 1948 (p. 414); coverage of the Malayan Emergency continued until 1950.

<sup>47</sup> *World News and Views*, April 3, 1948, pp. 133-5; the reference precedes the text of an address delivered by Thein Pe on January 1, 1948.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with U Than Maung.

<sup>49</sup> Some years later, according to a former Soviet diplomat who defected to the West in Rangoon in 1959, a secret meeting was held at the Soviet Embassy between a high Russian official and a representative of the BCP; this meeting, the purpose of which was allegedly to reassure the BCP of Soviet sympathy toward it despite Moscow's cordial relations with the Burmese government, was said to have been the first direct contact with the Burmese Communists in many years. Interview with Alexander Kaznacheev, March 1960; Kaznacheev served as interpreter at the meeting, which took place during 1958.

was possible, and there are numerous reports of intercourse between the two parties during the following years. Chinese military advisers are said to have been active with the insurgents and to have provided both arms and training to Communist units;<sup>50</sup> hundreds of Burmese guerrillas are reported to have received training in China from early 1950 on;<sup>51</sup> after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Burma and China in 1950, the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon is alleged to have been the principal channel for instructions to Burmese Communists both above ground and in the jungle.<sup>52</sup> While these reports, based on non-Communist sources, are obviously difficult to verify in Communist documentation, there is no good reason to doubt Chinese influence in the Burmese movement after 1949. Burma, it may be imagined, presented to the new regime in Peking a situation analogous to that in North Vietnam, a ready-made armed insurrection which could be used as a vehicle for extending Chinese Communist influence into Southeast Asia. It is worth noting in this connection that Liu Shao-chi, in his address at the WFTU conference in Peking in November 1949, gave a higher priority to the Burmese insurrection than Soviet publications did at this juncture: twice in his address he mentioned the Burmese rebellion immediately after the Vietnamese, and ahead of the anti-imperialist struggles in Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, and elsewhere. According to the former Burmese guerrilla cited previously, the purpose of Chinese strategy in 1950 and 1951 was to

<sup>50</sup> Declassified Intelligence reports in Malayan government files occasionally refer to interrogations of captured Burmese guerrillas who testify to the presence of Chinese officers in North Burma; U Than Maung, both in his published studies and to a lesser degree in his interviews with the author, also reports the activities of Chinese military advisers in the North.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed summary of these reports in the Burmese press, see Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp. 180-4.

<sup>52</sup> Burma was the first non-Communist nation to recognize the Peking government, in December 1949; ambassadors were exchanged, after some delay, in June 1950. Kaznacheev (the former Soviet diplomat in Rangoon) reports that the Chinese Embassy assumed responsibility for Burmese Communist strategies from the outset and, even after the establishment of the Soviet Embassy in Rangoon the following year, continued to guide the BCP without consultation with the Russians.

shift the base of guerrilla operations to North Burma, precisely in order to facilitate Chinese liaison.<sup>53</sup>

Peking's failure to press its advantage in Burma as vigorously as in Vietnam must be attributed to considerations other than the matter of access to the BCP and the latter's receptivity to Chinese aid. Many of the considerations which deterred Soviet interest in Burma deterred Peking less, we may imagine, but the Chinese like the Russians found an alternative in Burma which had the effect of muffling, if not extinguishing, their interest in the revolutionary course.

#### THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY

The Fourth Plenum of the Malayan Communist Party, which met in Singapore from March 17 to 21, 1948, marked a turning point in the strategies of Malayan Communism comparable to the adoption of the Ghoshal Thesis in Burma six weeks earlier. It met after the conferences in Calcutta at the end of February and was influenced by them more than any other local party meeting in Southeast Asia. The dominant figure at the Fourth Plenum was the Australian Communist leader Lawrence Sharkey, who had stopped over in Singapore en route home from Calcutta. He is said to have delivered a scathing criticism of the MCP's past policies, especially the decision to dissolve the MPAJA after the war, and to have conveyed to the Malaysians the significance of the new international line which had evolved since Zhdanov's Cominform speech six months earlier.<sup>54</sup> Sharkey, whose views on

<sup>53</sup> Interview with U Than Maung; the maneuver, according to U Than Maung, met some opposition within the BCP, which was reluctant to give up its base in central Burma, but was frustrated in the last analysis by the government's suspicion of just such a move and its tightening of the ring around the Pinyin area.

<sup>54</sup> "Basic Paper on the Malayan Communist Party," Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 43-4. Sharkey's activities in Singapore have never been fully detailed, insofar as this writer is aware, but are mentioned in several accounts of Malayan Communism: e.g., Brimmell, *Communism in Southeast Asia*, p. 255, and Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*, p. 84. The latter account cites as follows the evidence of a former Australian Communist: "Sharkey told us, too, how he had been commissioned by the Comintern [*sic*] representatives at the Indian Congress to convey decisions to the Malayan Communists"; *The Great Decision: The Autobiography of an Ex-Communist Leader* [Cecil H. Sharpley] (London, 1952), p.