THE 1961 PROGRAMME OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION BY PHIL SHARPE

INTRODUCTION

The 1961 programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was very optimistic because it proclaimed the prospect of the realisation of communism by 1980. This programme indicated that the role of ideology was very important to the CPSU in order to proclaim how socialism was superior to capitalism. Consequently, it was argued the USSR would overtake the USA in levels of industrial production by the 1970’s, and it was suggested that the historical future belonged to a dynamic social system which was expanding in global terms. The programme also defended traditional Marxist perspectives like the class struggle, but this was related to the contemporary situation of the cold war between the USA and the USSR and the threat of nuclear war. Therefore the revolutionary goal of socialism would be achieved by the strategy of peaceful co-existence and the promotion of the role of an anti-monopoly alliance in the West, and the formation of national democratic states in the former colonial countries. In relation to the Marxist goal of communism, the creation of a society without a state and money would be modified if not entirely rejected, and the continued leading role of the party would dilute the aim of a society based on self-administration.

In other words the programme was an expression of self-confident Stalinism. What was being suggested was that the social development of the USSR, and the realisation of the global overthrow of capitalism, could not be achieved without the leading role of the CPSU and the world communist movement. Only the Communist parties could provide a programme and perspective that ensures the workers and peasants would be able to overthrow capitalism and carry out the task of communist construction in a successful manner. The significance of the party was vital in relation to the development of the ability of subordinated classes to achieve world-historical tasks. Specifically, this meant the promise of world communism and the building of socialism was based on the acceptance of the leading role of the CPSU, and the unity of the world socialist camp. The central task of the 1961 programme of the CPSU was to provide the theoretical basis of this unity and an understanding of how socialism could be successful in the struggle with capitalism. Any criticism of the leading role of the USSR could only undermine the attempt to end the domination of world capitalism.

The programme is also a result of the criticism of Stalin that began at the 1956 20th party congress of the CPSU. This means the defence of personal dictatorship is replaced by an emphasis on the democratic relationship between the party and Soviet people. The building of socialism, and the aim of communism, is conceived as a process of democratic consultation but this does not mean the hegemonic role of the CPSU should be questioned. Furthermore, the very conception of democracy is based on the monolithic regime of the single party, and the alternative of multi-party democracy is implicitly rejected. Hence the system has been reformed since the period of Stalin, and the regime of terror has been ended, but the fundamentals of socialist construction under the auspices of the leading role of the Communist party is being continued. The limitations represented by the era of Stalinism does not mean that the tasks of developing socialism and communism should be rejected, and instead the party should correct its mistakes and become an improved instrument for the realisation of the historic tasks of society. Thus the horrors of the Stalin period should not lead people to conclude that capitalism is superior to socialism. Instead the rejection of the legacy of the Stalin period should make the party capable of providing guidance to society in relation to the successful accomplishment of the process of the construction of communism.

What does the 1961 programme of the CPSU imply about the social character of the USSR? We can conclude that what is being suggested is that society represents a type of bureaucratic socialism. The programme argues that the system is based on the leading role of the CPSU, and that this system cannot be changed if success is to be achieved in the process of advancing towards communism. Hence the character of society as socialist implies the hegemonic role of the CPSU, and only the opponents of this system can gain by criticism of the role of the party. Consequently, it is the task of the party to reform itself if any problems arise in the process of movement towards communism. Thus the programme would be compatible with the proponents of the view that the USSR is a type of degenerated workers state, or that it is ruled by a new bureaucratic class. However the programme would not be compatible with the view that the USSR is state capitalist. It would be absurd for a programme to proclaim the importance of socialist and communist tasks and yet be a form of capitalism. The contradiction between the arguments of ideology and the actual social character of society would be untenable. Indeed, what would be occurring is an ideological conspiracy in order to disguise the significance of the capitalist character of the USSR. This would be an unprecedented situation because we can assume that in the overwhelming majority of instances the ruling ideology of a society has some form of correspondence with its character. In other words the ideology of the CPSU does not have an intention to mislead, and instead expresses in an important manner the actual character of society, albeit in a distorted manner that is favourably inclined towards the interests and aspirations of the ruling party elite.

It has also been argued that the ideology of the CPSU was worthless because very few people believed it.(1) This may be true, but this observation does not necessarily undermine the importance of the ruling ideology in terms of understanding the aims of the elite. Furthermore, this programme was written when the self-confidence of the Stalinist bureaucracy was at its peak because of the launch of Sputnik and the increasing ability of the USSR to be genuine rivals of the USA. It is this reason that led to such optimistic predictions about overtaking the supremacy of America. With hindsight we could argue that these predictions were foolish and the USSR never had the opportunity or capacity to establish dominance over the USA. However, when they were written these predictions did display some level of confidence by the CPSU in the historic role of the USSR. This confidence had evaporated by the Gorbachev period when it was merely a question of the survival of the regime. In contrast the 1961 programme argued that socialism was a genuine rival of capitalism and that it was a system of expansion. This point could be empirically verified by the revolution in Cuba. But what was not tackled was the continued problem of the lack of revolution in the Western advanced capitalist countries. The programme glossed over this point by suggesting that the state monopoly capitalist character of the West was transitional to socialism. In actual fact the dynamism of global capitalism undermined the integrity and viability of the Soviet social formation. By the mid 1980’s the USSR was effectively disintegrating and creating the conditions for the restoration of capitalism.(2) The optimism of the 1961 programme was shown to be false, and instead capitalism was obviously historically superior to bureaucratic socialism.

The demise of the USSR does not indicate that the 1961 programme of the CPSU is merely an object of ridicule. Instead it was a programme that represented the very sense of confidence of a party-state regime that had triumphed in the terrible period of the Second World War, and which had rejected the legacy of Stalin’s despotic regime. Thus, despite the setback of the Hungarian revolution, the CPSU could argue that socialism was thriving and the process of world revolution was making advances. The balance of class forces had become favourable for establishing success in the tasks of the construction of communism and the realisation of world socialism. These perspectives seemed to have been vindicated by the defeat of the USA in the Vietnam War, and the fragility of the USA in the period of détente. However, the USSR became characterised by the condition of stagnation and the bureaucracy became cynical and rejected the optimism of the Khruschev era. The aim of realising communism in the USSR became replaced with that of ‘developed socialism’, and this aim was itself considered dogmatic in the period of the market reforms of Gorbachev. But what was revolutionary in the Gorbachev era was the increasing criticism of the role of the party and growing support for more principled democratic forms. But the promise of Glasnost was never realised, and instead by the 1990’s there was the creation of a reactionary form of market capitalism. The 1961 programme of the CPSU seems to have been an ideological promise that was never realised because of an increasing economic decline.

THE TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM

The 1961 programme begins with the contention that the October revolution of 1917 initiated a process that will culminate in the victory of world communism. The political situation has been characterised by the advance of socialism, despite temporary reverses, as expressed by the victory of socialist revolution in China and Eastern Europe. It was possible for the Russian revolution to be achieved under the leadership of Marxism-Leninism, and the result has been the construction of socialism and the realisation of the aims of the programmes of 1902 and 1919. The world socialist system has been established, which is the impetus for the future progress of international revolution. Socialism is a dynamic and contrasts with the decaying of capitalism: “The first contingents of the working class to shake off capitalist oppression are facilitating fresh victories for their class brothers. The socialist world is expanding; the capitalist world is shrinking. Socialism will inevitably succeed capitalism everywhere. Such is the objective law of social development. Imperialism is powerless to check the irresistible process of emancipation.”(3)

Hence the programme has a theoretical confidence that the expansion of socialism represents a historical law of progress that will result in the inevitable victory over capitalism. This means the latter is portrayed as a declining system that may be able to achieve temporary victories over socialism but is ultimately powerless to resist the triumph of the revolutionary alternative to capitalism. However, there is a conditional and implicit aspect to this expression of historical confidence. The ability of objective laws to unfold in terms of the victory of socialism depends on the continued role of the CPSU to provide leadership and its related ability to explain social development. If this function was questioned and undermined for any given reason the subjective basis for the advance of socialism could be put into doubt. The relationship between the Communist Party and the working class would be disrupted and instead the forces of reaction would benefit. Hence the historical confidence of the programme is dependent on the continuation of the importance and international leadership of the CPSU. The forces of reaction would only gain if this hegemonic role was effectively ended. The assumption is that the prospects of the victory of world socialism are dependent on the significance of the CPSU.

In this context the role of the CPSU, and the national communist parties, replaces the historical importance of the working class as the most important agency of the process of revolutionary transformation from capitalism to socialism. We are in a process of transition from capitalism to socialism, which only Marxist-Leninism can understand. This theoretical role has obvious practical implications in terms of the possibility of advances being made under the leadership of the CPSU and other Communist Parties: “The epoch making turn of mankind from capitalism to socialism, initiated by the October revolution, is a natural result of the development of society. Marxism-Leninism discovered the objective laws of social development and revealed the contradictions inherent in capitalism, the inevitability of bringing about a revolutionary explosion and of the transition of society to communism.”(4) It is interesting that the dynamic role of the working class, via the importance of the Soviets, is omitted from this conception of the October revolution and instead this development is conceived as a party-revolution because of ability of the Bolsheviks to understand social laws. Consequently the relationship of party and class in Russia prior to the revolution is described in terms of the subordination of the class to the party: “Her working class was the most revolutionary and best organised in the world and had considerable experience of class struggle. It was led by a Marxist-Leninist party armed with an advanced revolutionary theory and steeled in class battles.”(5) The significance of the interactive relationship between party and class is replaced by the omnipotence of the party to transform history and to inaugurate the process of constructing socialism. The programme does formally remark that the working class is a revolutionary class, but the implications of this are not articulated and instead the emphasis is upon the leading role of the party in relation to the triumph of the revolution and the beginning of the development of socialism. It is obvious that the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is based on the influence of the role of the party, and in this manner the party substitutes for the working class as the most active and dynamic social force in the construction of socialism. Hence the problems posed by the Stalin regime and the period of terror are ignored despite the fact that this development led to the widespread demoralisation of society. (6) Instead what is assumed in a complacent manner is that the party would overcome the limitations of the despotic character of Stalin’s regime and therefore resume in a more principled manner the construction of socialism.

Part of the historical confidence of the programme is related to its description of capitalism as moribund and decaying and so the prospect of world socialist revolution is imminent. This view is one-sided in that the hegemony of the USA over world capitalism is ignored, and so is the importance of the boom that has improved the standard of living of the population of the advanced capitalist countries. In this situation the marginalisation of the Communist parties of Western Europe is also ignored, and the influence of Social Democracy is glossed over. Thus the difficulties of promoting socialism in the conditions of an improving capitalism that does not seem to decaying, and is instead in its most dynamic period of growth and affluence, is not explained. Instead the programme resorts to an ideological portrayal of capitalism that does not correspond with empirical reality. However, it also assumes that the process of the building of socialism in one country will ultimately triumph over the present situation of the domination of world capitalism. This contention is not explained except in the dogmatic terms that the revolutionary process is uneven and will ultimately be victorious. This perspective does not provide any argument that the present world domination of the USA can be overcome, and instead of this important explanation we have the contention that world socialism will be triumphant outlined in terms of vague historical laws that amount to adherence to dogma. Hence it could just as easily be argued that the USA has realised its objective of containing the expansion of the USSR and its allies. The actual situation is one of stalemate rather than the advance of socialism.

In other words the programme cannot uphold its contention that imperialism is moribund and decaying and so is in a transitional process of change to socialism. The point is that the empirical facts do not support this claim, and the process of state nationalisation seems to be an expression of the creation of the welfare state rather than related to the influence of the monopolies within society. The programme also ignores the fact that the economic situation of capitalism is one of record levels of trade and production, and so the dynamics of society are not conducive to change towards socialism. A principled programme would attempt to explain this situation rather than resort to dogma based on the role of past theory. Thus the result of this false portrayal of Western capitalism is to provide hope that change will occur, but this hope is not based on empirical justification.

The programme supports the Stalinist view that socialism was constructed in one country on the basis of nationalisation and industrialisation, together with so-called voluntary collectivisation of agriculture. Thus the opponents of socialism in one country were refuted in practice. Therefore the programme glosses over the role of repression in the creation of the collectives and ignores the development of famine. Instead it perpetuates the myth that the creation of the collectives was a voluntary process, and concludes that socialism was constructed in the 1930’s. This meant society is based on the alliance of the workers and peasants, together with the role of the strata of the intelligentsia. It is argued that socialism is a society without exploitation and that people have a creative interest in the act of labour, and national oppression has been ended and genuine democracy has been realised. The programme hints at problems during the process of socialist construction but these are not elaborated, and instead the analysis of the development of socialism in the USSR has two major conclusions: “Soviet experience has shown that the socialist state is the main instrument for the socialist transformation of society. The state organises and unites the masses, exercises planned leadership of economic and cultural construction, and safeguards the revolutionary gains of the people.”(7) And: “Soviet experience has fully borne out the Marxist Leninist theory that the Communist Party plays a decisive role in the formation and development of socialist society. Only a party that steadfastly pursues a class, proletarian policy, and is equipped with progressive, revolutionary theory, only a party solidly united and closely linked with the masses, can organise the people and lead them to the victory of socialism.”(8)

In other words the programme upholds the view that the process of the building of socialism is primarily based on the significance and leadership of the party-state, and the role of the working class and peasantry is to follow the dictates of the revolutionary organisation. The actual significance of the working class for the creation of socialism is minimised by this elitist standpoint and instead the revolutionary role of this social force is personified by the leadership of the party. The party substitutes itself for the class, and so cannot act in a manner that would undermine the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed the role of the party is an expression of this dictatorship. Therefore, the excesses of the Stalin era cannot be considered as undermining the ability of the party to be the guardian of socialist construction. The period of despotism and terror did not result in the erosion of the capacity of the party to continue to build socialism. Hence the limitations of Stalinism did not end the ability of the party to supervise the process of socialist development. Thus the reactionary aspects of Stalinism did not justify a new proletarian revolution in order to end the despotism within the state and political superstructure.

This standpoint is not tenuous. If it is being admitted that Stalin created a regime of terror, then it is also being admitted that the party had degenerated to the point that it could no longer supervise the process of construction of socialism in a principled manner. The party is effectively considered as a despotic instrument that can no longer administer and lead the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, the programme cannot make this conclusion because it would bring into question the role of the party in the development of socialism, and instead the result is effective silence about the implications of Stalin’s regime. Stalin becomes written out of history, and instead the party as a collective organisation is considered the primary and essentially principled instrument for the building of socialism. The role of Stalin’s despotic regime is not considered to be an expression of the undermining of the ability of the party-state to provide the leading role in the creation of a socialist society. Instead in terms of the principles of peace, proletarian internationalism, and support for the ultimate aim of world socialism, the CPSU is considered to be an intransigent agency of the attempt to defeat the forces of capitalism.

The programme also contends that the since the Second World War there has been the development of a world socialist camp that is based on the principles of nationalisation of the economy, a similar political system and ideology, relations of cooperation, unity and solidarity and equality. The dominating role of the USSR is denied within this bloc, and any suggestion of exploitation by the USSR is replaced with the view that the development of any particular socialist country is in the interests of the whole bloc. The result is that: “A new type of international division of labour is taking shape in the process of the economic, scientific and technical co-operation of the socialist countries, the co-ordination of their economic plans, production specialisation and co-operation.”(9) The main problem in relation to the prospect of developing the unity of the world socialist camp is said to be nationalism, but an explanation of nationalism is not provided. This is significant because it is obviously the domination of the USSR that generates the influence of nationalism. Hence nationalism is primarily portrayed as an ideological viewpoint that is inherited from capitalism. The prospect that the USSR exploits Eastern Europe is not discussed as a reason for nationalism, instead the character of imperialism is connected exclusively with capitalism and the role of the traditional colonial powers.

The beginning of the general crisis of world capitalism is located with the First World War, and this was effectively continued with the Second World War, and the third period of crisis has been indicated by the victory of colonial revolution which has weakened the economic system. Measures of state regulation including nationalisation has not overcome the anarchic and contradictory character of capitalism, and the welfare state has not resolved the difference between effective demand and output. Unemployment is still a problem. Thus the Social Democrats are wrong to claim that the development of state monopoly capitalism is a prelude to socialism. This perspective of the CPSU is dogmatic and simplistic for the reasons already given, but the programme is more accurate when claiming that the USA is the bulwark of reaction. However the programme is also dogmatic when it asserts that inter-imperialist contradictions continue despite the hegemony of the USA, but the view that the monopolies dominate society is not inaccurate. However the conclusion that is made from the above analysis is both simplistic and dogmatic: “Thus, the world imperialist system is rent by deep-rooted and acute contradictions. The antagonism of labour and capital, the contradictions between the people and the monopolies, growing militarism, the break-up of the colonial system, the contradictions between the young national states and the old colonial powers, and most important of all – the rapid growth of world socialism, sapping and destroying imperialism, leading to its weakening and collapse.”(10)

This perspective implies that the capitalist system is not in a period of growth and boom and instead is being seriously undermined by important contradictions. However it could be argued that the antagonism of labour and capital is not intensifying because of improving standards of living and the introduction of the welfare state. The successes of reformism are modifying the pre-war tensions of capitalism. Whilst the demise of the colonial system is being replaced by the domination of semi-colonies by the imperialist powers, and the apparent expansion of socialism is undermined by the limitations of Stalinism and the generation of Soviet imperialism. In this situation of boom, the USA is able to promote itself and the capitalist system as an example of efficiency and prosperity, a land of plenty and ample consumer goods, which contrasts favourably with the shortages and waste of the USSR. Hence the presentation of the capitalist system as representing poverty is antiquated and ignores the post-war affluence and therefore tries to deny the ability of Western countries to create a system of plenty and real gains for working people. But the programme is realistic when it admits that the most important imperialist countries have achieved a certain unity in opposition to the USSR and the world socialist camp.

The programme attempts to indicate the progress of world socialism most strongly when it argues that the advances of the USSR and world socialism has enhanced the strength of the world working class. This implies that the strategy of insurrection can be replaced by the struggle for reforms, opposition to the monopolies and general democratic advance. There is the possibility that the working class led by the Communist party can promote a process of peaceful change in terms of obtaining a majority for socialism in Parliament. But this means the opposition of the ruling class is neutralised and the possibility of external imperialist counterrevolution is repelled. Thus revolution can occur without the prospect of world war. However it would be dogmatic to deny that ruling class opposition can occur without any prospect of violence: “Where the exploiting classes resort to violence against the people, the possibility of non-peaceful transition to socialism should be borne in mind.”(11) The question of the peaceful transition to socialism depends on the attitude of the ruling class and the level of its willingness to accept the will of the majority of the people in favour of socialism. Hence the success of the class struggle depends on the flexibility of the party and working people to prepare for peaceful, or non-peaceful forms of the revolutionary process, and it is necessary to allow for national peculiarities. It is also necessary to promote, where possible, unity with the forces of Social Democracy in order to develop common struggle for socialism. Despite the modification of strategy in relation to new political conditions the aim of revolution is not altered. This means that change within the limits of a bourgeois republic is not sufficient and instead the realisation of the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the only principled outcome of the revolutionary process.

In other words the aims of the revolutionary forces have not been altered despite important strategic modifications. The assumption is that the favourable changes in the balance of class forces brought about by the advance of the world socialist camp in the post-war period means that the old strategy of violent revolution can be revised. It is possible to develop a broad democratic anti-monopoly alliance that can promote change within Parliament, and this may mean the involvement of a united campaign involving both Communists and Social Democrats. The strength of the forces of world socialism can undermine the prospect of violent counterrevolution by discouraging the prospect of imperialist military intervention. But the question of a peaceful transition to socialism is not guaranteed and the working class and party should be prepared to oppose violent opposition. These changes to strategy do not mean that concessions to reformism or revisionism should be made, but it is also necessary to reject dogmatism and sectarianism which can result in adventurism. It is argued that the continuation of the unity of the world socialist camp is vital if the aims of world revolution are to be advanced.

It is interesting that despite the changes in strategy the conception of the revolutionary process remains based on the assumptions of the elitism and vanguardist role of the CPSU. There is no mention of the independent activity of the working class, which can be expressed in the creation of mass movements of opposition to capitalism. Thus the role of the popular democracy of workers in struggle is not articulated, and the importance of organs of proletarian power like the Soviets are not mentioned. Instead it is assumed that the working class will have a secondary role that is based on supporting the instructions of the local Communist party. The active role in the revolutionary process will be the party, and they will exclusively determine the relationship of tactics to strategy. What is not mentioned by the programme is that the ultimate permission for the possibility to overthrow capitalism will be provided by the CPSU. Hence it is entirely possible that the CPSU will reject a genuine revolution because of the apparent limitations of Trotskyism and other supposed counter-revolutionary forces. This is what happened in Spain in the 1930’s, and the programme provides no indications that this situation could not happen in the future. Indeed the Hungarian revolution of 1956 was suppressed by Soviet military forces because it was deemed to be counterrevolutionary and nationalist. However despite these elitist limitations the programme outlines important reasons why it is possible to have a peaceful revolutionary process. The programme is correct to argue that the character of the revolutionary process should aim to be peaceful, and this aim is feasible in relation to the constitutional character of Western Europe. But the programme also outlines how the objective of peaceful change should not be made into a dogma and the forces for revolution should be prepared for the unfortunate prospect of violence.

What is problematical about the new strategy is the emphasis on Parliamentary change, and the neglect of the mass organisations of the working class. This perspective implies that the process of transition to socialism can be reduced to a passive electorate voting for a majority of the Communist Party. The obvious implication is that the role of the world socialist camp will make this strategy feasible. This is a dogmatic premise based on an inflated sense of the importance of the world socialist bloc. In actuality the USA still has the power to interfere in the internal processes of other countries and the USSR for diplomatic reasons may be reluctant to support revolutionary developments, as occurred in relation to the situation in France in 1968. The focus on Parliamentary change may not be so controversial if it was connected to the mass struggle of the working class outside of Parliament. But the programme makes no reference to the significance of working class struggle, and instead limits its conception of revolutionary transformation to that which is strictly controlled by the role of the party. Thus the actual model for social change is the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism that occurred in Eastern Europe between 1947-48. The 1961 programme effectively considers this transformation to be its model for Western Europe. But what is problematical is that the changes within Eastern Europe were influenced by Soviet military intervention. This role will not be available in Western Europe, which is part of NATO. Therefore the strategy for change in Western Europe is incomplete and lacking key aspects. It is also dogmatic to believe that the strength of the USSR could ensure the export of counterrevolution from the USA did not occur in these circumstances. Ultimately the only feasible revolution is the genuine and authentic action of the working class engaged in mass struggle, but this is the very type of revolution not envisaged by the draft programme of 1961.

The programme outlines how the struggle against colonial oppression is increasing and has become an important aspect of social reality. The working class is described as the most reliable opponent of imperialism and its alliance with the peasantry is integral to the ending of colonial domination. However, the national bourgeoisie is described as being still capable of opposing imperialism. The most progressive aim of anti-imperialist struggle should be the establishment of national democracies which can advance the prospect of socialism: “The establishment and development of national democracies opens vast prospects for the peoples of the economically underdeveloped countries. The political basis of a national democracy is a bloc of all the progressive, patriotic forces fighting to win complete national independence and broad democracy, and to consummate the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic revolution.”(12) The suggestion is that these types of states will not be socialist because of unfavourable economic and political conditions, but will be friendly with the USSR and express the influence of the internal working class.

What is not addressed by this formulation is the problem that the continued capitalist character of the national democracy can ultimately mean support for world imperialism and opposition to the USSR. This is what happened with pro-Soviet countries like Egypt. Consequently the conception of national democracy, with the partial exception of Cuba, did not result in the transition to ‘socialism’. Thus Trotsky was still strategically principled to argue that only with working class hegemony will the prospect of socialism become feasible. Ultimately, the draft programme upholds illusions that the national bourgeoisie could acquire a socialist orientation and so promote the formation of a country like the USSR. Only the petty-bourgeois July 26th movement in Cuba promoted this type of process, and so became part of the socialist camp. In most instances under-developed countries were prepared to accept Soviet financial assistance but not prepared to overthrow capitalism. The logical result of this situation was that these countries became part of the capitalist system. The strategy of the USSR was a failure, and often led to the accommodation of the Communist party to the national bourgeoisie as in Latin America. These strategic mistakes may have been avoided if the CPSU had not had the illusion that the national democratic revolution could generate socialism. Instead the very success of the national democratic revolution led to support for the USA and acceptance of its generous financial assistance. The USSR was powerless to oppose this process of development, and as a result modified its policy and began to contemplate the possibility of non-capitalist development which seemed to be a rejection of the stage of national democracy. This approach was no more successful because of the greater economic power of the USA. But it did enable the limited growth of the socialist bloc with the incorporation of countries like Angola in the 1970’s.

The 1961 programme outlines how the advocates of capitalism utilised various ideological trends such as anti-communism and reformism in order to undermine the influence of revolutionary ideas. It argues that the welfare state has this reactionary manner, and therefore this development suggests that social improvement can be provided without the necessity of the overthrow of capitalism: “The advocates of a bourgeois state call it a “welfare state”. They propagate the illusion that the capitalist state oppose monopolies and can achieve social harmony and universal well-being. But the masses see from their own experience that the bourgeois state is an obedient tool of the monopolies and that the vaunted “welfare” is welfare for the magnates of fiancé capital, and suffering and torture for hundreds of millions of working men.”(13) This comment indicates that the CPSU recognised that the welfare state was the most important expression of opposition to the aim of socialism and it expressed the view that significant social changes could be realised without the necessity of revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. However, in order to criticise the welfare state, the programme conceives its character in terms of a caricature, or the tool of the monopolies, and so denies the role of the working class via the actions of Social Democracy in bringing about its creation. The negative views of the programme would suggest that the welfare state is not worth defending as an expression of the interests of the working class, and instead it should be rejected as merely being the ideological alternative to socialism. This view is dogmatic and denies the role that the working class had in the generation of the welfare state. Instead of the rigid standpoint of the CPSU, the welfare state should be defended as an integral part of the struggle for socialism. This approach has been shown to be principled in the period of the neoliberal offensive when the welfare state has been undermined in order to promote the interests of profit making.

The programme makes the point that the right-wing Social Democrats defend capitalism, but it makes no mention of the possibility that the left-wing of this trend can be an important part of the struggle for socialism. Hence the programme seems at this point to deny the principled possibility of a united front between the Communists and left-wing Social Democrats. This sectarian standpoint glosses over the importance of Social Democracy in the 1960’s and its connection to the working class. The reason for this view is the rigid party vanguardism of the CPSU which can only conceive of the role of Communism as being indispensable for the struggle for socialism. However, in other parts of the programme the prospect of a united front with left Social Democracy is upheld. This vacillation between sectarianism and flexibility indicates that the CPSU is uncertain about its attitude towards the most left-wing trend of Social Democracy. The 1961 programme does not know whether it wants to reject political unity in the name of principles, or whether a united front is necessary in order to promote the popular and mass base of the struggle for socialism.

The section of the programme on peaceful co-existence contends that the increasing strength of the socialist camp, the desire for peace of other countries, the role of the international working class and other progressive forces, can prevent the possibility of a new world war and nuclear war: “The growing superiority of the socialist forces over the forces of imperialism, of the forces of peace over those of war, will make it actually possible to banish world war from the life of society even before the complete victory of socialism on earth, with capitalism surviving in a part of the world.”(14) The programme is making the valid point that the expansion of the Soviet bloc is creating an important reason to prevent the generation of a new world war. It is possible to alter the tendencies towards inter-imperialist conflict because the reality of a large socialist camp implies that the development of a new world war can only result in the overthrow of capitalism in many countries and the further advance of socialism. However, it is also possible to argue that the hegemony of the USA has undermined the development of inter-imperialist antagonism and so this situation results in political unity and common opposition directed against the USSR. The cold war has replaced the prospect of inter-imperialist war. But, regardless of how the situation is understood the view that the interests of socialism are connected to the struggle for peace seems to be an expression of sound reasoning. The post-war period has led to the threat of nuclear war, and so the question of the relationship between the struggle for peace and socialism has become closely interconnected. It is not possible to improve the conditions of humanity, via the development of socialism, if the possibility of nuclear war is not reduced. This is the important truth outlined by the 1961 programme. Furthermore, it is also adventurist and an expression of antiquated thinking to continue the strategy of the Bolsheviks, and believe that revolution will be the result of inter-imperialist war. Not only is inter-imperialist war more unlikely in the present era, its actual development would mean a tremendous decline of human civilisation given the deadly character of modern weapons. (We can empirically recognise the truth of these comments in relation to the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.)

Indeed wars of any type have not promoted the cause of contemporary socialism, and it is this understanding that is recognised by the 1961 programme. Hence the aim of socialism has to be connected to the cause of peace, and therefore only the reactionary character of imperialism gains by wars, as shown by the recent military aggression. The draft programme contends that the international aim of socialism should be peaceful co-existence, which suggests that war should not be a means to settle international disputes, and instead there should be negotiation between countries in political dispute, and non-interference in the affairs of other countries should be the basis of diplomatic relations. However, if the forces of imperialism start wars the working class has the right to oppose them using force, but this is a last resort. This perspective does not mean the conciliation of the forces of imperialism, instead it expresses the continuation of the class struggle by means of the role of peaceful co-existence: “Peaceful coexistence serves as a basis for the peaceful competition between socialism and capitalism on an international scale and constitutes a specific form of class struggle between them. As they consistently pursue the policy of peaceful coexistence, the socialist countries are steadily strengthening the positions of the world socialist system in its competition with capitalism. Peaceful coexistence affords more favourable opportunities for the struggle of the working class in the capitalist countries and facilitates the struggle of the peoples of the colonial and dependent countries for their liberation.”(16)

Thus the strategic limitation is not with the standpoint of peaceful co-existence which can outline the principled basis for the development of the international class struggle in a world threatened with destructive wars that can only undermine the gains of human civilisation. Instead what is problematical is that the CPSU may defend its own national interests in a manner that is at the expense of the requirements of the international class struggle. It is not peaceful coexistence that results in the limitations of opportunism and unprincipled politics, instead the problem is the sacrificing of the aims of class struggle in order to make temporary gains. In a world of wars of terrible military destruction, the actual alternative is the unity of the aspiration for peace with that of socialism. Consequently the flaw with the perspective of peaceful coexistence was that it was being advocated by countries that were not genuinely socialist, and by parties that were not revolutionary and therefore did not consistently advocate the aims of class struggle. As a result of these contradictions, the CPSU under Khrushchev was prepared to engage with the USA in the possibility of nuclear war in order to make limited gains concerning Cuba and Berlin; and the French Communist Party rejected a revolutionary strategy in France 1968. A consistent advocacy of peaceful coexistence would have meant the struggle for world revolution by the CPSU and international communism. Instead the CPSU defended the reactionary and nationalist theory of socialism in one country and rejected the aspiration to strive for authentic international proletarian revolution. Hence there was a theory and practice contradiction that meant the approach of peaceful co-existence became degraded in order to mean accommodation with imperialism in most circumstances, and possible military brinkmanship in exceptional conditions. The theoretical relationship of peaceful coexistence to the class struggle was rejected in practice and instead the cold war meant the acceptance of the international status quo. Only in the détente period was limited Soviet expansionism supported.

One question that has become relevant in the recent period is the issue of humanitarian intervention in order to oppose genocide by reactionary regimes or the forces of terrorism. This action is not possible if we strictly adhere to the principle of non-intervention in the country suffering from terrible repression. It is also argued b the Marxist left that we should not support interventions by imperialist countries because this would represent a capitulation to national chauvinism. However, if we accept the need for humanitarian action that results in food distribution, or medical support, it could also be argued that it is principled to influence an imperialist power to act in order to oppose genocide. Just as we support the welfare state as a reform under capitalism, it is possible to argue for a type of diplomatic reformism. In order that this support does not justify imperialist expansionism, we would be precise about the aims of the military action. Thus it would not be possible to support any action that opposed the interests of genuine national liberation. Instead the only military action that could be supported was that which truly opposed the interests and actions of the genocidal forces. This standpoint does not mean critical advocacy of progressive imperialism, but rather we know that the repression of corrupt elites is more reactionary than imperialism. In order that this action is principled and genuinely humanitarian it would be preferable if the support of the UN is provided.

This standpoint is not national chauvinist because we are not supporting the given imperialist nation in a war with another imperialist nation, or in opposition to an oppressed nation state and the forces of national liberation. Instead the basis of intervention would be a falling state that is undermined by genocidal forces, or has itself become the instrument for vicious repression. In this sense the sympathy of the most progressive working class forces would favour progressive intervention, and international socialist solidarity would not have been undermined. This standpoint does not amount to the national chauvinist capitulation of the Second International or defence of the attitude that upholds ‘my country right or wrong’. Instead what is being expressed is the viewpoint of a progressive internationalism which is more progressive than indifference to the situation, and it is necessary to maintain that any action that became advantageous to the given imperialist power should be rejected. At the moment the Marxist left has little to constructively suggest about instances of genocide because of its dogmatic approach and reluctance to support the military action of imperialist powers. Without any progressive pressure on the imperialist powers they often do intervene when they consider their interests are being affected. For example, the imperialist powers intervened in order to help the overthrow of the Gadaffi regime in Libya. This action was justified in humanitarian terms, which was a false claim. Instead we would argue that only the political pressure of working class and progressive opinion can bring about a situation of genuine military intervention that truly ended the situation of genocide. Hence the bourgeois state would be acting in a reformist manner because of the influence of the working class. These situations would be strictly limited and we must ensure that the interests of imperialist hegemony are not being justified. Thus we should not support any illusions that American imperialism has a ‘progressive mission’ in global terms. Instead our criteria of support for intervention would be strictly specific and precise. In historical terms the forces of imperialism are still reactionary and opposed to the interests of world socialism. But what is being envisaged is that working class pressure would force imperialism to act in manner that was not intended by the military. The ultimate basis of the intervention would be the role of the working class and the forces of socialism. In contrast, wars of imperialist aggression are motivated by the interests of the ruling class and undermine the influence of the workers and labour movement. The point is that the state does not want to intervene in humanitarian terms, but this possibility will have been brought about by the influence of working class opinion.

THE CONCEPTION OF COMMUNISM OF THE 1961 PROGRAMME

The description of communism is effectively a combination of the approach of Marx combined with some innovations of the CPSU. What is emphasised is that under the economic system of public ownership there will be the development of the productive forces in terms of the utilisation of science and technology. This development is based on the highest levels of productivity because of the planned organisation of resources and the importance of the most sophisticated machinery. There will be no classes under communism and differences between town and country will be overcome. This means: “Under communism all people will have equal status in society, will stand in the same relation to the means of production, will enjoy equal conditions of work and distribution, and will actively participate in the management of public affairs. Harmonious relations will be established between the individual and society on the basis of the unity of public and personal interests. For all their diversity, the requirements of people will express sound, reasonable requirements of the full developed person.”(16) Hence the material progress of society will realise the individual and cultural tastes of the individual and people will be able to obtain the goods to realise their distinctive needs.

This seems to be an attractive description of a Communist society. However the important question that is not directly addressed, and cannot be because of the ideology of the CPSU, concerns how can a system based on the domination and hegemonic influence of the party-state elite become the classless society of Communism? The implicit answer of the programme is that the continued progress in the generation of material progress, and the related importance of the planned organisation of resources, will ensure the development of the economic basis for the creation of a classless society. This seems to be a plausible viewpoint but it does not tackle the uncomfortable fact that the party-elite may not want to dissolve itself into the classless society because of the privileges and power generated by its present situation of domination, and control of the surplus produced by the planned economy. Hence there is an uncomfortable tension between the party ideology when contrasted to the effective defence of the political domination of the significance of the bureaucratic elite. The ideological aim of a classless society of communism is in contradiction with the domination of the party over society. The problem which cannot be confronted is that the CPSU is the very bulwark undermining the process of movement towards communism. This creates the additional question: why should the working class aspire to realise communism if the party elite will be effectively acting to ensure that the classless society cannot be realised?

In other words there is an unresolvable tension between theory and practice. In theory the aim of communism is outlined in reasonable terms, and it is suggested that the planned economy and increasing participation of working people in the administration of the economy and society can bring about the realisation of communism, but in practice the CPSU acts as a privileged class that acts in manner that is opposed to the interests of the working class and therefore undermines the achievement of the objective of communism. The point is that the classless society cannot be realised if there are contradictory class tensions between the bureaucracy, who effectively own the means of production, and the workers located in a subordinate position within the relations of production. Thus the programme has to rely on the economistic logic that the development of the productive forces, via the progress of the planned economy, will overcome these class tensions and bring about the dissolution of social antagonisms. In this context the very economic advances will end exploitation and inequality within the process of production and in society in general. This means the programme is implicitly arguing that the working class should accept the promise of the CPSU that they are committed to the realisation of communism despite the present inequalities within society and the effective exploitation of the workers in the planned economy. But there are considerable reasons to doubt the validity of this promise because of the tenacious relationship of the bureaucracy to its privileges. There are no signs that the bureaucracy is prepared to reform both itself and society in order to make the objective of communism both feasible and practical.

Despite these ideological limitations the CPSU is trying to make communism seem as attractive as possible in order to convince working people that it is an aim worth aspiring to achieve. In this manner, communism is outlined in terms of the participation of the people in economics and politics, and the means to achieve this classless society is outlined in terms of material progress and increased productivity. The suggestion is that economic development and a situation of effective abundance will make the ruling elite superfluous. However, this perspective is not convincing because the suggestion that economic advance will make the bureaucracy redundant does not allow for the strong self-preservation of the party-state. The CPSU is content with the present situation because of its power and domination of society. This means that communism will represent the realisation of a situation that cannot correspond to the distinct interests of the bureaucracy. Instead the practical effect of the promise of communism is to rationalise ideological motivation for the working class to become more efficient because that would mean communism can be realised. However, the irony is that the working class refuses to work harder because of the very problem that it is dominated by the bureaucracy within the relations of production.(17) Furthermore, the character of planning means that the production of use values is often characterised by waste and the creation of defective and low quality goods.(18) Consequently the very limitations of the economy mean that the prospect of advance towards communism is not possible. Only the overthrow of the bureaucracy will facilitate the potential for advance being made towards higher levels of economic and social development. This situation of inefficient production means that the 1961 programme’s promise of communism can never be realised if the domination of the party-state is not ended. But this promise is not one of crude ideological deception of the people because it was entirely possible that the CPSU did believe that communism could be realised. What they could not admit is the historical truth that genuine communism could only be established by the demise of the domination of the bureaucracy. Thus the bureaucracy is unable to admit that it is historically superfluous, instead it defends the view that it is progressive because it conceives itself as a social force promoting the realisation of communism. In this manner, the bureaucracy is capable of justifying both its domination of existing society, despite economic stagnation and inefficiency, and upholding the distant objective of communism.

In order to try and overcome the contradictions of the ideology of the CPSU, the emphasis of the programme is placed on the willingness of the working class to strive to realise communism. It is argued that the role of discipline combined with increasingly creative labour will promote material development that will advance the prospect of communism. This effective instruction to the working class to become fully engaged with the construction of communism ignores the fact that labour is very alienating and that workers cannot produce efficiently because they lack the necessary raw materials, or use defective tools and the result is the creation of inferior goods. To claim that production represents the highest levels of organisation and the merits of the harmony introduced by the planned economy is false because planning is often replaced by the ad hoc methods of an autarkic factory, and the worker can only realise a semblance of control through atomised and individualised work.(19) Hence the following description of communist represents an ideal that lacks any connection to the inefficient forms of production of the present: “Communist production demands high standards of organisation, precision and discipline, which are ensured, not by compulsion, but through an understanding of public duty, and are determined by the whole pattern of life in communist society. Labour and discipline will not be a burden to people; labour will no longer be a mere source of livelihood – it will be a genuine creative process and a source of joy.”(20) This description of the future is utopian, or unreal, because it has no relationship to the present when the activity of labour is enforced by the role of an unaccountable management and various forms of compulsion are expressed by the coercive laws of society. This situation results in domination of the bureaucracy over labour within the relations of production, and therefore the manager is constantly trying to get the worker to be more productive despite the alienating character of the labour process. Consequently, if communism was a realistic prospect the present situation would be dramatically different and the worker would represent the practical dominant force within the relations of production. The actuality of industrial democracy would mean that genuine participation within the relations of production was effective, and therefore labour was creative and able to supervise the process of development towards the realisation of genuine communism. Instead the programme argues that the aim of communism requires the supervision of the role of the CPSU, and under its leadership the material and technical basis of communism will be established between 1961-1980. This process will be empirically expressed by the USSR overcoming the USA in certain areas of productivity. The ultimate expression of the realisation of communism is that it has generated the highest levels of the productive forces within the world. But this economic reductionism cannot disguise the situation in which alienated labour only reluctantly acts in accordance with the dictates of management. What would be really revolutionary would be a situation in which the party-state accepts that management is inefficient and that the only effective alternative is the introduction of genuine industrial democracy. But this policy would undermine the domination of the bureaucracy, and so will never happen. Ironically, it is this refusal of the bureaucracy to recognise the limitations of the existing economy which means communism cannot be realised. The bureaucracy is anti-communist because its control means that there is a stagnating society rather than one capable of realising communism. But the bureaucracy cannot accept this conclusion and instead instructs the working class to co-operate with the party in bringing about communism. This perspective is superficially made credible by introducing a time table for the guidance of the construction of communism.

The actual methods to promote productivity are still traditional. There is to be a concentration on the production of the means of production rather than consumption goods. Productivity is connected to technical progress, and no mention is made of the significance of industrial democracy. In agriculture the aim is to unify the collective farms with the state farms based on modernisation, but a monthly income for farmers will become the sole basis of remuneration, and so the rewards from private plots will be ended. Thus the farmers will be treated as workers and the ability to make earnings from individual farming will be administratively ended in the name of the process of the creation of the modern farms of communism. Aspects of the present situation are expressed when reference is made to realising more effective planning and better quality of output. But the issue of planning is conceived in terms of greater local management and promotion of its ability to implement state plans, and enterprises are encouraged to make a profit and prices should represent the costs of production. Wages will be increased, and hours of work reduced, and the amount of consumer goods will rise. More housing will be created, and the health service improved. There will be free transport and other public services. But the programme of what amounts to communism is still based on carrying out the instructions of the party to the people: “The Party calls on the Soviet people to work perseveringly, with inspiration. Every one of the working people of the Soviet Union must do his duty in building of a communist society and in the effort to fulfil the programme for the improvement of the people’s living standard.”(21)

Consequently, the issue of the realisation of communism is not defined in terms of the increasing capacity of the working people to take their own initiative and develop creative work. Instead the emphasis is on the willingness of the workers and farmers to carry out the instructions of the party concerning the objectives and tasks that are held to constitute the realisation of communism. The assumption is that if the people obey the party in a willing and enthusiastic manner the prospect of communism becomes obtainable. What this elitist standpoint ignores is the fact that it is the very economic situation defined as socialism which already creates serious questions about the ability of the system to realise communism. For example, the existing system is unable to produce high quality consumer goods that can met the needs of the people. Furthermore, the agricultural situation is based on inefficient farms, with low levels of mechanisation, and peasants who still resent the process of collectivisation. The inability to resolve these outstanding questions will make the objective of communism ludicrous. But there is nothing in the programme that suggests these issues can be resolved. On the one hand the increased autonomy of local management will not promote the development of better quality goods, and on the other hand, the merging of the collective and state farms will only increase the resentment of the peasants. The party is able to formulate neat demands that seem to suggest communism is feasible, but in actuality the major problem of the role of the bureaucracy is not resolved, and cannot be resolved by the ideological illusions of the programme.

In summary of the economic section of the programme, the CPSU is saying to the people that if they carry out its instructions and act to implement the tasks outlined then it will be possible to realise communism despite the economic difficulties of the present. Hence the economic limitations of the present are portrayed as episodic and not inherent to the system, and the application of enthusiasm will be sufficient to resolve problems like the low quality of consumer goods and the lack of efficiency of the collective farms. This standpoint means the programme is based on ideological illusions because what cannot be admitted is that it is bureaucratic inertia which is the primary cause of the economic problems. In this sense it would be the ending of the domination of the party-state elite which would facilitate most effectively the prospect of genuine advance towards communism. The CPSU dispute this conclusion and so implicitly suggest the lack of discipline of the population is the major problem undermining the realisation of communism. They reason ‘if you listen to the party, it is possible to resolve your social problems.’ This is false advice because the party is unable to recognise the only basis to improve economic efficiency is to introduce industrial democracy. However, this development would mean the end of the party-state, and so these progressive measures are not possible under the present political conditions of monolithic rule. Instead of listening to the false promises of the party, the true and principled criteria for historical progress would have been a revolution of the producers. But this did not happen because the people underestimated their own social power, and instead accepted the domination of the CPSU. This did not mean they had faith in the promise of communism, but they could not envisage an alternative to the domination of the party. The only popular oppositional doctrine was that of the market and liberal democracy.

By the 1980’s the promise of communism was ignored by the party, and instead the only policy was reconciliation of the existing economic system with the role of the market. But the ideology was still based on elitism because the party still assumed that they know what was ‘good for society’. Unfortunately there was not the development of a popular socialist trend that could argue for a revolutionary alternative. The result of this situation was that the party led the process of the restoration of capitalism. In this context the 1961 programme became a historical oddity, but it had expressed the illusion that the CPSU could lead the process of the introduction of communism. This ideological illusion was more progressive than the practical plans to return to the domination of the market. Tragically communism became to be considered a relic and part of a dogmatic past, but it actually was the only progressive alternative to the increasing development of the restoration of capitalism. Gorbachev tried to introduce capitalism under the supervision of the party, but this perspective was rejected by Yeltsin who wanted an end to the hegemony of the CPSU. The Yeltsin approach was successful, and the Soviet Union was dissolved in August 1991. This situation led to the creation of a bourgeois restorationist government dedicated to the introduction of capitalism.(22) But liberal democracy was not restored and instead there was a repressive political regime. Many of the economic problems of Stalinism were not resolved, and the new Russian society was an inefficient form of capitalism which ultimately became an imperialist rival to the USA. Russia is a society based on the production of raw materials and many of its industries have been dismantled. The false optimism of the 1961 CPSU programme almost appears progressive compared to the ruthless cynicism of the present regime.

The political section of the programme begins with an analysis of the role of the state in relation to the completion of the building of socialism and the realisation of communism. It is argued that the state is needed to supervise the process of transition from socialism to communism, but the state is no longer the dictatorship of the proletariat and is instead the state of the entire people. This state encourages discipline within society and the economy and organises the levels of production and consumption. However this activity is not considered to be imposed onto the people and is instead the expression of the role of a democratic state: “All round extension and perfection of socialist democracy, active participation of all citizens in the administration of the state, in the management of economic and cultural development, improvement of the government apparatus, and increased control over its activity by the people constitute the main direction in which socialist statehood develops in the building of communism.”(23)

It is interesting that in order to uphold the conception of a participatory and democratic state of all the people, the connection of the state to the party is not outlined. This means the conception of the state is effectively a myth. The actual state is based on the dominating role of the party, and the view that it is becoming increasingly an expression of self-administration is illusory. The programme is realistic in the sense that the importance of the state for the task of socialist construction is upheld, and the state of the whole people is not necessarily nonsensical and could be considered to be the logical outcome of the evolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat in relation to the ending of its coercion of reactionary class forces. However, in actuality the so-called state of the whole people is the state of the party and its domination of the people. This situation is not mitigated by the emphasis of the Programme on the role of elected Soviets, and their supposed control of the activity of the state. This is because the Soviets are effectively powerless and are controlled by the Party. Consequently, the conception of the accountability of the state to the people is a formal standpoint that is not realised in practice. Nor do the trade unions defend the interests of the workers within the factories, and instead are mainly organs for the imposition of work discipline, in relation to the requirements of the plan and the dictates of management. The role of the secret police in enforcing the discipline of the party is not mentioned in the programme.

In other words what would promote the potential to realise a democratic state would be the end of the domination of the single party over the state. For example, if the Soviets were based on multi-party democracy this would mean they could become effective organs of the expression of the popular will, and so would no longer be the passive tools of the party. However this does not happen because the state is not an expression of the will of the whole people and is instead the instrument of the monolithic party. This means the democratic self-administration of the state is not being developed, and instead the state is still a coercive organ which imposes its will onto society. However, the ideological illusion has to be perpetuated that the state is accountable to the people because only in this manner is it possible to provide a convincing conception that the state is promoting the formation of the classless society. Hence it is not possible for the programme to describe the actual relations of the party—state to the people because this would indicate that the actual state is a privileged administration that presides over the population in an unaccountable manner, and so cannot be an agency for the process of movement towards communism. Hence the programme describes a mythical democratic state that is acting to promote advance towards communism.

The section on the national question outlines the friendly relations between nations within the USSR. The principles of these relations are internationalism and the rejection of narrow national chauvinism. But it is significant that the right of secession or self-determination of the nations is not accepted, and instead it is assumed that the USSR is immutable: “Every soviet republic can continue to flourish and strengthen only in the great family of fraternal socialist nations of the USSR.”(24) This formulation could represent justification of the Russian nation domination of the other nations within the USSR. Thus it was significant that the end of the party-state regime in 1991 also led to the end of the USSR and the self-determination of the various nations of the Soviet empire. This development indicated that the USSR was not based on voluntary relations between various nations and instead was an imposition based on the role of coercion.

In terms of the relations of the world socialist system it is argued that the various countries will mutually cooperate in order to express the international development of the productive forces, and the material development of socialism, which will become the basis to promote communism. This does not mean ignoring national distinctions, but instead these specific aspects should be connected to the overall plan to generate the common basis of the realisation of communism. However, this standpoint was still illusory because the actual relations between the various nations and the USSR was that of specific agreements and the importance of an overall mutual plan was neglected. Furthermore, the very fact of Soviet military occupation meant the population of Eastern Europe did not conceive of economic relations in terms of the mutual development of socialism and instead resented the denial of their political independence. In other words it could be argued that the actuality of the Soviet empire meant the prospect for the common and cooperative generation of socialism did not occur. Instead there was a collection of autarkic countries with specific economic relations with the USSR, and each other. The increasing relations of these countries with the world economy created a dynamics for the restoration of capitalism.

The most truthful section of the programme is the last section which tackles the role of the party within Soviet society. This contends that the party has been the constant leadership of the people in the process and contends that this role will not be ended with the realisation of communism: “The period of full scale communist construction is characterised by a further enhancement of the role and importance of the Communist Party as the leading and guiding force of Soviet society.”(25) This continued importance of the party is because the creation of communism is not a spontaneous development but instead requires the importance of the CPSU in order to understand its complex scientific tasks. This leadership is also connected to the promotion of the creative activity of the people and the encouragement of democracy. In a sense this standpoint is illusory because it is not possible for a Stalinist type party to promote the realisation of communism which is a classless society. Instead the party effectively represents a bureaucratic class with a privileged relationship to working people. But, at the ideological level this approach is truthful because the programme cannot envisage the possibility of communism without the hegemonic role of the Communist Party. The realisation of communism will still represent a party-state like the previous periods of historical development. Only with the supervision of the party is it possible to conceive of communism. But it is admitted that this standpoint will only seem principled and tolerable if the party improves its inner-party democracy and standards of conduct. The bureaucratic party as it is presently constituted cannot be considered to be a valid agency for the supervision of communism. The programme admits that the party must improve its attitudes and behaviour if it is to be recognised as being suitable to supervise a communist society: “The development of inner party democracy must ensure greater activity among Communists and enhance their responsibility for the realisation of the noble ideals of Communism. It will promote the cultivation in them of an inner, organic need to act always and in all matters in full accordance with the principles of the Party and its lofty aims.”(26)

The dilemma for the party is that it knows that its domination of society is exercised by the methods of bureaucracy and the repression of dissent. How can it change in order to become an organ for the promotion and realisation of communism? The answer of the programme is the importance of inner party democracy and recognition of the significance of the aims of the party, but these aims cannot resolve existing political limitations of the state because the only principled resolution of these problems is the generation of multi-party democracy. But the bureaucracy cannot accept this prospect because it would mean the end of its regime. Instead the programme can only desperately plead with the party to improve its behaviour and so become a suitable leadership for the construction of communism. It is implicitly recognised by the programme that what most seriously undermines the realisation of communism is the very corrupt behaviour of the party-state. It is not plausible to call for an end to the domination of society by the party, and so instead a plan to improve inner-party democracy in order to improve the conduct of the CPSU is outlined. This approach is additionally justified in terms of the fact that the role of the party is needed to oppose the influence of bourgeois ideology within the population, and only the party can develop the theoretical awareness that facilitates the prospect of the successful realisation of communism: “The theoretical elaboration and timely practical solution of new problems raised by life are essential to the successful advance of society to communism. Theory must continue to illumine the road of practice, and help detect and eliminate obstacles and difficulties hindering successful communist construction. The party regards it as one of its most important duties to further elaborate Marxist-Leninist theory by studying and generalising new phenomena in the life of Soviet society and the experience of the world revolutionary working class and liberation movements, and creatively to combine the theory and practice of communist construction.”(27)

Consequently, even when it is admitted that the party is flawed, and is not yet suitable for supervising the realisation of communism, the programme does not admit that any other organisation or social force can act as an alternative to promote the prospect of the classless society. The party may be flawed by bureaucratic practices but it still represents the superior theoretical basis to resolve the practical problems of communist construction. The assumption is that the party is the most enlightened section of society and therefore is most concerned about the problems that have to be tackled in relation to realising communism. There is little confidence that the working class shares this concern, or has the ability, to tackle the questions generated by the process of developing a classless society. Hence the major problem in relation to whether communism can be built is the bureaucratic practices of sections of the party. However, the programme is adamant that this issue can be resolved by the development of inner party democracy. The transformation of the party will generate the political conditions to realise communism. Hence the practice of the party will as a result correspond with the Marxist theory of the creation of communism.

This section of the programme about the role of the party is a justification of socialism from above. The role of the workers and peasants is entirely secondary in the process of developing socialism and creating communism. It is true that the importance of self-administration is mentioned, and the role of the Soviets is outlined, but the emphasis is on the leading role of the party. Hence there is no mention of industrial democracy, and the activity of the economy is defined by the plans of the administrative centre and role of local management. The political system is considered to be democratic but this assumes the domination of the single party, and no opposition is allowed within the institutions or soviets. The programme is distinct from more recent programmes of the CPSU in that it has some confidence that the CPSU can lead the people to realise communism. The increasing economic problems of the USSR led to the influential view that the aim of communism was unrealistic and the only option was the introduction of the market as the prelude to capitalism. Thus we could argue that Khruschev was the last party bureaucrat who truly believed in the aim of communism. Ultimately this aim was unachievable because the bureaucracy was an unsuitable agency for the realisation of communism. The major lesson of the history of the USSR is that the working class is the only social force that bring about the possibility of communism. Khruschev’s illusion was that he believed he could outline in the 1961 programme how the party could realise communism. Instead the limitations of the social system meant this was not possible.

 FOOTNOTES:

(1)Hillel Ticktin: Origins of the Crisis in the USSR, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1992 p17-22

(2)ibid p154-181

(3)1961 Programme of the CPSU, in Editor, Leonard Schapiro The USSR and the Future, Frederick Praeger, New York, 1963 p259

(4)ibid: p261

(5)ibid: p262

(6)Robert C Tucker: Stalin in Power, W.W Norton, New York, p172-204

(7)Programme op cit p265

(8)ibid p265

(9)ibid p267

(10)ibid p271

(11)Ibid p273

(12)ibid p276

(13)ibid p278

(14)ibid p280

(15)ibid p280

(16)ibid p283

(17)Ticktin op cit p84-88

(18)ibid: p134-138

(19)ibid: p116-122

(20)Programme op cit p284

(21)ibid p296

(22)Workers Power: The Degenerated Revolution (Second Edition) Prinkipo, London, 2012 p389-416

(23)Programme op cit p297

(24)ibid p303

(25)ibid p310

(26)ibid p312

(27)ibid p303