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COMMUNIST STRATEGY AND TACTICS

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
15 November 1960

by

Professor Warren B. Walsh

Broadly speaking, printed and oral information on Communist strategy and tactics falls into four categories. First are the pronouncements of the chief makers and implementers of Communist strategy and tactics—Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Frunze, Shaposhnikov, Stalin, Bukharin, Khrushchev and Mao. The second category comprises elaborations on and derivations from the prime pronouncements, that is, the works of lower echelon Communists. Third are the argumentations within the Communist leadership such as those that once took place between Kautsky and Lenin, or like those now in progress between Moscow and Peking. Finally, there are summaries, analyses, and descriptions by non-Communists.

A preponderance of these share a common characteristic. There are notable exceptions, but most of the millions of words uttered on this subject make Communist strategy and tactics seem more mysterious, more occult, and more difficult to understand than they really are. Here are three examples to enable you to form your own judgments. The first is a primary source; the second is a derivation; and the third is a non-Communist analysis.

Tactics, guiding itself by the directive of strategy and by the experience of the revolutionary movement . . . calculating at every given moment the state of forces inside the proletariat and its allies (greater or less cultivation, greater or

less degree of organization and class consciousness, presence of particular traditions, presence of particular forms of movement, forms of organization, basic and secondary) as well as in the camp of the adversary, profiting by discord and every kind of confusion in the camp of the adversary—marks out those concrete courses for winning the broad masses to the proletarian side and leading them to battle stations on the social front—which most surely pave the way for strategic success.

That, believe it or not, is an abridgement of a single sentence written by Stalin. The source is entitled, *Political Strategy and Tactics of Russian Communists*.

The second quotation is from a treatise entitled, *About the Principles of the Strategies and Tactics of Leninism*, by a lower echelon Communist theoretician.

The strategy and tactics of Leninism, firmly rejecting any kind of subjectivism, start from the growing necessities of the developing materialistic life of society, from the fundamental interests of the toiling masses; leans on the Marxist-Leninist theory as a science of the development of public life, of the ways of destroying capitalism, of the revolution of the oppressed and exploited masses, of the victory of socialism in the whole world, of the construction of a Communist society.

My third exhibit is another single-sentence quotation—this time from a non-Communist, American scholar.

This pliability in tactical modes of achieving the planned aim imparts a realistic

implementation to Soviet strategy; and it is essential to realize that their ethic opposes "adventuristic" moves not corresponding to the potentialities offered by their estimation of the relation of forces at least as strongly as it requires "advance" where the objective estimation permits.

Professional jargon like that always leaves me feeling as if I had come out exactly where I went in. It also reminds me of a conversation overheard in a railroad station in Portland, Maine back in the days when railroads would carry passengers in Maine. The scene was the ticket window, and the would-be traveler opened the conversation.

"I want to buy a round-trip ticket."

"Where to?"

"Why back here, ye durn fool."

Despite the voluminous evidence to the contrary, the problem doesn't seem to me to require such involved thought processes nor such complicated language. Maybe all this proves is not that the subject is simple but that I am. "If you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs—it probably means that you haven't understood the problem."

Be that as it may, my general thesis is as follows: Communist strategy and tactics often become devious, richly varied, and highly complex in implementation, but both are basically simple in rationale and concept.

It is easy to grasp the rationale which underlies Communist strategy and tactics as soon as one realizes that present-day Communism has jettisoned most of its analytical and philosophical doctrines. All that

remains is a series of assertions. Because these are unproven by experience and unprovable by reason they must be taken on faith alone. To say it differently, a man must will himself to accept these assertions as being his basic truth.

Some of these assertions are not exclusive to the Communists, but only a Communist accepts them all. It is, in fact, the unquestioning acceptance of all these assertions which makes a man a Communist. The first assertion is that human society lives, moves, and has its being under the direction of suprahuman forces. Communists call these forces "historic necessity," or "the laws of social development."

A further word on this subject may clear away possible misunderstandings. Although Communists believe fully in "historic necessity," they do not believe that this operates automatically. If it did, they would need no strategy and no tactics—only patience. They believe that human actions affect events. They also believe that masses of men can be led to act in accordance with "historic necessity." The second and third assertions concern the leadership required to achieve this end.

The second assertion is that "historic necessity," or the so-called laws are discoverable through what Communists refer to as "the science of Marxism-Leninism." The third assertion is in two parts: (a) only those who have completely mastered this so-called science can truly understand or make use of "historic necessity," and (b) the only true masters of the "science of Marxism-Leninism" are the top Communist bosses at any given moment. If Khrushchey is a stronger boss than Mao, this proves that he is a better master of the "science of Marxism-Leninism" than Mao.

Such circular reasoning is characteristic. Go back a bit to the Communist claim that men will follow

"historic necessity" only if properly led. Now add that proper leadership can only come from the masters of their so-called science. It adds up to: Communism makes it possible for Communists to lead others. Now project a step. If men can be forced or persuaded to behave in accordance with what Communists claim is "historic necessity," then men's actions will inevitably cause a great revolution which will destroy the old social order and establish Communism. In other words, Communists believe that their revolution and their victory will come to pass only if they can coax or compel people to do what the Communists want done.

This is like saying that if I can force you, or persuade you, or fool you into jumping overboard you will inevitably get wet. I have to take prior and planned action in order to get you to do something which has an inevitable result. So do the Communists. They believe that their actions, and a strategy to guide their actions are a prerequisite to the so-called inevitable result. We shall return to this in a moment after finishing our look at the basic Communist assertions.

The fourth assertion is that conflict and struggle are the only roads to progress. They phrase it more vividly: in every situation there is that which is rising and that which is falling, that which is growing and that which is dying. (Khrushchev explained his ouster of Marshal Zhukov by saying that a growing cell must crowd out a dying cell.) Conflict between the two is inescapable. It is also, in the Communist view, good because it leads to progress. Therefore, conflict and struggle should be sought, welcomed and exploited—not avoided or reduced.

The fifth assertion is that the key conflict of today is the conflict between the "forces of revolution and change" and the "forces of reaction." We often think of Russo-American relations in terms of a power struggle between two giant nations. They think

of it as a proper, inescapable (under their leadership) and ultimately beneficial conflict between the old (us) and the new (themselves). This is a significant distinction.

The final assertion is that the Communists will triumph, or, as Khrushchev said last week in Moscow, "Communism will eventually be in force all over the earth." These six, basic assertions are part of the rationale underlying Communist strategy and tactics. The remaining parts are even simpler. You must have power in order either to persuade or compel people to do your will. One other, almost equally self-evident fact needs to be added. The Communists—out of necessity at first, later by deliberate and sustained choice—have been, are and will continue to be a minority. They do not aim at mass conversions. They aim at manipulating people, not at making people into Communist Party members.

Therefore, Communist strategy—stated in broad terms—aims at enabling a minority to seize and to retain power. It is just that simple, and it requires neither gobledegook to explain nor genius to understand. The whole purpose of Communist strategy is to enable a minority to gain and to use power. We should, however, note that both words—minority and power—may refer to vastly different situations. A quick look at some of these variants reveals much about the scope and nature of Communist strategy.

It is a matter of historical record that the Communist minority may range from one or two men to a sizable group. It may mean a minority within a revolutionary movement or a minority of revolutionaries within a broader social group. Minority can apply to the Kadar regime, as opposed to the Hungarian people; to Communists within the Peasant Leagues of Brazil, or to the Leagues themselves as opposed to the remainder of Brazilian society. Minority also describes the Presidium of the CPSU in relation to its Central

Committee or to the whole Party or to the Soviet population. The minority might mean Lenin, bucking his closest associates and forcing them to accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; or it might mean Khrushchev in opposition to his colleagues on the Presidium in June, 1957. Minority might also, of course, refer to Harry Bridges and his henchmen in contrast to American union labor in general.

Power, as used in this context, has at least an equal range of applications. It varies in magnitude from one man's influence over a handful of revolutionary exiles to the formal, highly institutionalized domination of the USSR and its satellites by Khrushchev and his associates on the Presidium. It may refer, on a purely local level, to the domination of a plant union by its Communist business agent; or, on a national level, to the control of a coalition cabinet by its Communist members. The goal is the same no matter what type of minority or what power level is involved. The required strategy is one which will enable the Communist minority, whatever it is, to seize and to retain a monopoly of power. Moreover, the basic strategy is the same in all cases.

Such a strategy must be simultaneously broad and precise, rigid and flexible. It must be applicable at all levels of power, and in changing or even contrasting circumstances. It must be equally usable by the leader of an underground minority, which has power over itself alone; and by an open minority, such as the Soviet Presidium, which has formal authority over hundreds of millions.

Precision and rigidity have been achieved by always insisting upon an absolute centralization of power in the hands of a self-chosen, self-perpetuating elite which never loses sight of the ultimate objective. Breadth and flexibility are achieved by a willingness to use any and all means. Though Communists, like the rest of us, prefer big operations and big

gains to small operations and small gains, they are never too proud to work on a small scale until it is possible to expand. They do not, as my grandmother used to say, despise the day of small things. Their code of conduct, moreover, is totally lacking in what we think of as moral values. "Everything is moral," Lenin once said, which is necessary for the annihilation of the old . . . social order . . ."

The inability or unwillingness of many in the Free World to comprehend the sincerity and the implications of that statement is perhaps the greatest danger to freedom. People who understand intellectually that Communists are ruthless and deceitful often seem emotionally unable to grasp what their minds tell them. It is, indeed, hard for men of good will to believe that other men—men who outwardly resemble them in appearance, in ability, in many interests—can, by conviction be cheats, liars, betrayers, and murderers. It is precisely this emotional blindness which often enables the Communists to use our own virtues to destroy us.

The Communist's first strategic step in any situation is invariably the same; to introduce or to organize or to establish what they call the proletarian vanguard, that is, a CP. The CP, as a politically effective instrument, was created by Lenin, and he created it in his own image—disciplined, arrogant, single-minded, totally without scruples. It was also Lenin who gave the Party its distinctive dictatorial nature, not alone in relation to outsiders, but also within the Party itself.

The power structure of any CP can be accurately diagrammed as a series of concentric circles with the highest power concentration at the common center. Nomenclature may vary, but within every CP the common center is the big boss and his immediate associates—Khrushchev in the USSR, Mao in China, Tito in Yugoslavia, Togliatti in Italy, and so on. The first

circle is the Presidium of the Party's Central Committee; the second, that Committee itself; the third, lesser regional leaders; the fourth, local leaders; and finally—a long way from the true power center—the rank and file Party members.

While we are on the subject of organization, there is another aspect of it which is relevant to this morning's subject. In countries where CPs are legally in existence, but are not dominant—and this covers some 60-65 countries—the Party exists on three levels. It does so in the United States. The top level is openly acknowledged. It conducts meetings openly, campaigns in elections, publishes and distributes material under its own name, and its officials are publically identified. The second level is underground. Its meetings are unpublicized; if it campaigns in elections, it does so under cover; its publications do not identify their source; and its officials are not identified. (Ever since Lenin's time, CPs have simultaneously carried on legal, above-ground and illegal or underground activities.) The third level is completely clandestine. Its members are truly crypto-Communists—"sleepers," in the professional jargon—some of whom never reveal themselves. I am not sure that this group is ever really organized in any formal sense. Certainly they carry no Party cards, take no part in recognizable Party activities, and rarely, if ever, associate openly with Party members or fellow travelers. Some of them are expendable, and now and then one is expended, but mostly they are secret weapons, held in reserve for the favorable moment.

Returning more directly to strategy, it is possible for a minority to conquer a majority only by first splitting the majority into its component parts, and then by being quantitatively and qualitatively superior to each part in turn. This requires careful planning and much hard work, but it is not as difficult as might at first appear, especially to those who are not inhibited by scruples.

Majorities are rarely truly homogeneous. Usually they are more or less stable combinations of many, diverse elements temporarily held together by some common purpose or interest. Both centripetal and centrifugal forces are constantly at work in every majority—one set of forces tending to hold it together; the other, to disperse it. It is Communist strategy always to assist and exploit the latter. To do this, Communists must have allies and associates so the second strategic step is, in the words of a Party directive, "the attaining of the hegemony of the proletariat." Originally Communist strategists meant by this, getting control of the labor movement. Lenin, in a very revealing set of instructions to his Party, once said (in effect), "if we leave the workers alone and let them follow their own preferences, they will work out some form of co-operation with capital. We must not let this happen. We must capture control of the workers and lead them in the way we want them to go."

Communists still follow this directive, but one of the most significant developments in Communist strategy has been the broadening of this directive to include "the toiling peasants," as well as the toiling masses. Here is a prime case of making a virtue out of necessity. The revolution which Marx predicted for highly industrialized countries appeared in countries which were not highly industrialized—most importantly in Russia and, years later, in China. Lenin was forced to turn to the peasants for support, and did so, but always put his faith first in the city workers.

Mao, who began by thinking of the revolution in China as a movement of the industrial proletariat, quite early recognized and accepted the facts of Chinese life. Whereas he had once talked about depending primarily on the workers, he changed his mind in 1927. The revolution in China, he began to teach and to practice, must be a peasants' revolution, with the industrial proletariat ranking second. This is Mao's

major contribution to Communist strategic doctrine, and it is perhaps the most important development in that doctrine within the last generation. Its great importance lies in the simple fact that a peasant-based revolution is possible in Asia or Africa or Latin America—regions where the industrial proletariat is not sufficient to serve as a base.

There is also another aspect to this strategic development. Lenin taught that imperialism represented the final or dying stage of capitalism. According to Lenin's original version, ". . . the proletariat will be victorious first in those countries which are weak links in the imperialist chain." Today, this would be modified by placing the peasantry above the proletariat, but otherwise the strategic doctrine is the same. The reasoning goes like this. Imperialist nations are being sustained and their inevitable collapse is being delayed by reason of their exploitation of their colonial and quasi-colonial possessions. These colonial areas are the weakest links. By attacking through them, it is possible to strike down the imperialist powers. A recent Communist pronouncement on strategy stated this more formally, as follows.

Lenin . . . showed that the struggle for national liberation [by the colonial or quasi-colonial peoples] is part of the revolutionary struggle . . . and that these oppressed nations, having thrown off the yokes of colonialism and feudalism, can, with the aid of nations where the proletariat has already been victorious, start on the road of socialist reform, avoiding the capitalist stage of development.

Communist strategists anticipate a threefold triumph from this strategy. First, the defeat of the colonial powers within the colonies. Second, a weakening of the colonial power at home. Third, by diverting the movement for national independence into a

Communist revolution, gaining these new nations for the Communist camp. You have only to look at Africa or Asia or Latin America to see this Communist strategy being successfully implemented.

The first strategic step, to review the enumeration, is the creation or promotion of a CP. The second step is for this CP to gain control of as many peasants and workers as possible. At the risk of dipping from strategy into tactics, let's look at that for a minute. Let's say that the immediate goal is to attain a dominant influence within a local union. First, the Communists establish a beachhead by getting several CP members into the local where they form a Party cell. The comrades do not try to gain control by preaching Communism in the shop or at the meetings. The chances are that Communism will not even be mentioned, and that the Party boys will not reveal their membership. They will, however, try to get themselves into key positions—secretary, treasurer, business agent; and they will use several devices—including lots of hard work—to bring this about. They'll accept the dirty jobs and the unpopular assignments. They will actively promote picnics and social affairs. They'll give advice and loan money. They will, in short, try to win the confidence of their fellow-members, and they will try to place their fellows under obligation. They will cater to the needs and wishes of their fellows, manipulate their aspirations, fears and grievances, and stir them up over concrete, local issues. Once securely ensconced, their tactics will change.

Meanwhile, the third strategic step will have been initiated. This is the creation of what Communists call a united front. Its main components initially—I'm leaving, now, the tactical procedures in a local union—will be peasants and workers, but, as soon as possible, special efforts will be made to lure into the coalition, artists and intellectuals, students and other young people, teachers, writers,

editors, and other community leaders, and representatives of various minority groups. Reformers, pacifists, and do-gooders in general are favored targets partly because they make good front men, and partly because it is one of the Communist's tactical aims to destroy all genuine reform efforts. One must be a revolutionary, not a reformer as Stalin used to say.

Such a coalition is entirely acceptable to Communists under one indispensable condition, namely, that the leading role in it be reserved for the Communists. So many groups, ranging from governments to small private organizations, have been suckered by the coalition device that it is worth a closer look. I prefer to let the Communists speak for themselves rather than to try to describe their position in my words. The following quotation is from a contemporary Communist directive.

Compromises are of two kinds. There are compromises that have to be made in the interest of the development of the revolutionary movement, and there are treacherous compromises whose effect is to hamper the victory of the proletariat. Communists cannot afford to give up compromises of the first kind.

. . . Compromises with strong opponents are necessary, if made to avoid destruction and to preserve forces for a future attack on the adversary, provided that such compromises will increase the strength of the revolutionary proletariat and weaken the forces of reaction . . .

While recognizing the admissibility of the principle of compromises, CPs cannot accept any ideological compromises. There can be no compromises which do not reserve to the Party freedom of action, freedom for

Communist propaganda and agitation, and the right [of the Party] to criticize and to fight against its temporary allies . . .

I hope you realize that what the Soviets have taught us to call peaceful co-existence is, in their minds, a compromise of the acceptable kind. As *Pravda* said in January, 1960.

Peaceful co-existence with countries of different social structures does not lessen the ideological struggle. Our Party will continue to conduct an irreconcilable struggle for Communist ideology.

Whether peaceful co-existence is an acceptable and effective form of compromise appears to be the issue between the SovComs and the ChiComs, the latter holding that it is not. The SovComs stated their position in a book review printed in *Pravda* last June.

Some persons mistakenly consider the course of the achievement of peaceful co-existence among countries having different political systems, [and] the struggle to halt the arms race and to strengthen peace and friendship among peoples, and the talks between the leaders of socialist and of capitalist countries as some kind of a deviation from the Marxist-Leninist position.

The use of such means of disseminating instructions is a standard Communist technique. This sentence said to trained Communists: "Khrushchev's policies—disarmament, summitry, the soft sell—are still valid despite criticism from Peking." It also said, "You will get back in line and promote these policies." Incidentally, Peking was recalcitrant in June, and the top-level discussions now in progress in Moscow suggest that their recalcitrance may still exist.

The fourth strategic step—to return once again to our major theme—calls for the further extension of Communist influence and control over as many persons as possible. This is done primarily through propaganda and agitation. Lenin drew a clear distinction between the two, and Communists continue to do so. "The propagandist," to use Lenin's own words, "operates chiefly by means of the printed word; the agitator operates with the living word." Lenin also made another distinction between propaganda and agitation. The propagandist, dealing with the question of unemployment, must present many ideas. He must explain how and why capitalism always produces crises, he must expound on the nature of the crisis, he must, in short, deal with abstractions and intellectual concepts. These have meaning and appeal only to a few. The agitator deals not with abstractions but with concrete and specific illustrations. Instead of talking abstractly about the inevitability of economic crises, he tells how the family in the next block was evicted for non-payment of rent, or he ostentatiously does a favor for someone known to the group. Here is an example:

A few years ago there was a mass meeting in a slum section of an English industrial city. Its purpose was to discuss the possibility of getting a public housing development. The MP for the district, a Conservative, addressed the meeting. So did his Labour Party opponent. Both talked in the generalities so dear to politicians. Then a member of the audience asked and was given permission to make some remarks. He began by saying: "Most of you know that I am a member of the CP. In case you don't, I tell you so now. But I am not here tonight because I am a Communist. I am here because I am one of your neighbors. I know at firsthand why we must have new housing." He then discussed the situation knowledgeably and with abundant local illustrations. His speech was not, in substance, a Party speech. He never mentioned Communism after his first statement, but his performance

was the essence of Communist agitation. The Britisher who told me the story unwittingly summed it up very neatly by saying, "Although I'm lifelong Tory, I couldn't help being impressed by the quality of that chap's mind and by the effectiveness of his leadership. He made our man look futile."

Gentlemen, I have slipped from discussing strategy into describing tactics. I make no apologies for this, but I do offer a confession. Even after years of association with war colleges, I am never quite clear as to where strategy leaves off and tactics begin. What are often called the "ebbs and flows" or the "retreats" of Communist strategy usually appear to me to be tactical rather than strategic. Often the distinction seems to me to be no more than an arbitrary definition. Moreover, I think that the same rationale and the same basic concepts govern both Communist strategy and Communist tactics.

If you recall what was said about the various meanings of minority and power, you will realize that tactics range from the institutional and formal international level to a local and personal level. The variety is infinite, and a cataloguing would serve little purpose. Two months ago, the Central Committee of the CPSU devoted a special conference to this problem. One of the directives which came out of that session read as follows:

What is needed today is to avoid the cut-and-dried, to organize propaganda and agitation creatively, and to search persistently for the keys to the heart and mind of every person.

One of the questions invariably put to a lecturer on this subject is, "What can or must we do to meet the challenge you have described?" There is no quick easy answer, but I will presume to offer three clues.

First, the Communists are clear and steadfast about their purpose and their ultimate objective. We must clarify our own position, not just in terms of what we oppose, but also in terms of what we really want to achieve. Then we must be equally steadfast in pursuit of this objective.

Second, the Communists are imaginative and alert to operational opportunities at all levels, and in all fields. I recently selected at random from my private collection forty Communist publications and made a rough tabulation of the groups at whom they were aimed. The list includes Africans, artists, Asiatics, lawyers, miners, musicians, medical students, pacifists, poets, potential returnees or redefectors, students and other young groups, teachers, transport workers, union members, and women. The Communists operate politically, militarily, economically and culturally. We must be equally versatile and imaginative.

Third, the Communists rarely create the conditions they exploit, but they are alert to spot exploitable situations and vigorous in exploitation of them. Last week, for example, Khrushchev publicly pledged aid "to all colonial peoples fighting for their independence." They exploit national pride and national aspirations. They exploit traditional apprehension and rivalries. They exploit the universal human longing for peace and security. We must learn to make more effective use of such forces.

Finally, the Communists are fully aware that a state of war exists between them and us. "If war," said Shaposhnikov, "is the continuation of politics only by other means, then peace is the continuation of war only by other means." It suits their strategic and tactical purposes now to call the present situation "peaceful co-existence." Lenin was more accurate and more honest when, in forecasting this stage, he called it partial war. We must somehow bring ourselves to an

emotional as well as an intellectual understanding
of what Lenin meant.

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Commendation for Meritorious Civilian Service (with medal).

Selected, recent publications:

Russia and the Soviet Union, (U. of Michigan Press, 1958).

Readings in Russian History (3rd. ed., S.U. Press, 1959).

Some Notes on Mathematics and Mathematicians in the Soviet Union (1959).

Some Judgments on Soviet Science, The Russian Review, July 1960.