

On the ground of history (1)

By Edwin Madunagu

Although there are several forms in which each extreme may be realised, there can be no *middle course*. And by a middle-course I mean Khrushchev or Brezhnev-type reforms.

The entire country now appears to be waiting for the 28th Congress of the ruling Communist Party of Soviet Union scheduled to open in the last days of June 1990. It is generally understood that the fate of the country now hangs critically on the outcome of the congress. For by adopting a particular platform, or a "synthesis" of the main platforms — as hinted to me by Helen Kalinina, the Lenigrad Party leader — the party will also be deciding which of the two transformations, earlier listed, will be consummated.

At present there are three *main* platforms, expressing three main tendencies or factions in the party — each of which may emerge as a separate political party after or during the Congress. There is, of course, a non-factional and revolutionary line, the "synthesis line," represented by communists like Kalinina and whose triumph alone, I believe, will save the party's leadership role, or even survival, in Soviet political scene. The triumph will be meaningful, I hasten to add, only if delegates to the congress actually represent the democratic wish and will not only of the 19 million members of the party but also of the nation as a whole.

The three platforms which will campaign for supremacy during the Congress of the organisation are the *Central Committee platform*, the *democratic platform* and the *marxist platform*. The last two platforms, as well as other minor platforms, are reactions to the Central Committee Platform, and not *full* platforms as such. I refer to them as amendments to the Central Committee Platform.

The main ideas in the Central Committee Platform can be summarised: First, the party declares that it is breaking with what it calls "the authoritarian-bureaucratic system which is incompatible with socialist principles." The party also renounces its political monopoly but commits itself to struggling to remain a vanguard democratically. "Our ideal" says the platform "is humane democratic socialism." Secondly, while reaffirming its faith in "the creative spirit of the materialistic world outlook and the dialectical methodology of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and being guided by it," the party declares its "resolute rejection" of ideological blinkers, dogmatism and intolerance of different views and ideas. While the party still claims to be adhering to the positions of the working class and all working people, it however announces the abandonment of what it calls the "simplified class

approach which is opposed to national and universal human values."

The Central Committee denounces "the complete hegemony of the state in public life and everything which brought about arbitrariness, lawlessness, unpunishable abuses of powers and underserved privileges, denounces what it calls the "primitive view of socialist ownership" and declared that it would henceforth support the diversification of forms of ownership and replace the *planned economy* with the *plan-market economy*. Also condemned is the neglect for the nation's "cultural and historical values and accumulated intellectual wealth."

The Central Committee commits itself to promoting relations with other parties of the working people, including Social Democratic Parties which contribute to the progressive development of states and nations. "On this sphere of external relation the Central Committee also commits itself to mankind's peaceful development, declaring that the cold war "has been stopped." The party commits itself to internal democratisation.

The party dedicates itself to socialism and invokes the revolutionary spirit of the past: "Our socialist option is immutable for us, as is our adherence to the ideas of October: All power to the Soviets, factories to the workers, land to the

peasants, peace to the peoples, freedom of self-determination to the nations... The party seeks to place man in the centre of social development, providing him with living and working conditions which are worthy of him, guaranteeing him social justice, political liberty and opportunities for comprehensive development and spiritual fulfilment, and regards this as its main goal..."

The Central Committee did not forget the main gains of socialism which not even the worst stage of stalinist deformation could remove: "The right to work, to pension, free education and medical care and other social benefits that first appeared on Soviet soil have now become wide-spread benefits in any civilised society. To forget this means to disrespect the truth, disrespect those who have displayed the highest form of heroism and self-sacrifice in their passionate striving for the socialist ideal."

Anyone who is a little familiar with Communist history will see that, its few silences and occasional evasiveness notwithstanding, this platform is both a powerful restatement of the principles of leninism and a definite rejection of stalinism which it describes as a "lawless regime." The authors of the platform believe that its adoption will save the party, its vanguard role, the socialist system and the unity of the Soviet Union.

• To be concluded next Thursday

• Continued from last Thursday

THE platform, summarised last Thursday, was the response of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the deep crises that have virtually torn the party and the nation apart, and now dangerously threaten the future of socialism in that country — at least in the short run. If the far-reaching reforms contained in that platform had been introduced 35 years ago, at the death of Joseph Stalin, it would have worked wonderfully. And the history of socialism, Eastern Europe and the world would have changed for better.

But the successors of Stalin only distanced themselves from the dead dictator, leaving the “military socialism” constructed under him essentially in place. Now, we have the bitter fruit and profound lessons for those still to embark on a road to socialism. For what has been constructed so far cannot be described as socialism.

The question now is not whether or not the Central Committee will be able to mobilise enough support at the coming Congress to ensure the adoption of its draft platform. The question is whether this victory, if it comes, will amount to anything more than the paper on which it will be recorded. So deep is the public cynicism in that country. One of my hosts, a clear-headed young writer merely dismissed the platform as: “Many words, but no deeds.”

Meanwhile two main platforms, among hundreds of others, have emerged as challenges to the Central Committee document. These are the

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“democratic platform” and the “marxist platform.” Incidentally both platforms base their amendments to the Central Committee platform on the same set of issues. They include: The character of the party as a proletarian party; the vanguard role of the party which distinguishes it sharply from the Western-type “parliamentary party”; the principle of democratic centralism which erects a hierarchy of authority; and the market economy which some people say is essentially capitalist. (But I disagree: The Yugoslav economy under Broz Tito was simultaneously a market economy and a socialist one).

The marxist platform would want the marxist-leninist positions on these key issues explicitly and unambiguously re-stated. On the other hand, the democratic platform would want the leninist formulations erased — also explicitly and unambiguously. In other words, the vanguard role of the party, its proletarian character as well as the principle of democratic centralism should be erased. And to be inscribed boldly is the principle of “market economy.”

From my discussions with Helen Kalinina and some other members of the Communist Party in Moscow, Leningrad and Alma Ata, I was convinced that the “synthesis line” will try as much as possible to reconcile the Central Committee platform and the marxist platform. This means incorporating some of the formulations in the latter into the former: Proleta-

rian character of the party and the principle of democratic centralism, in particular. Similarly the “synthesis line” will have no problem incorporating some of the democrats’ ideas on inner-party democracy. But on the vanguard role and market economy the “line” will have its severest test. And the party may actually break on these questions. But if the “synthesis line” manages to produce formulations that are simultaneously revolutionary and appreciative of the deep pain, cynicism and distrust engendered by stalinism, it will triumph.

Even then, the victory of the “synthesis line” will resolve into a mere paper victory, unable to generate the social forces that could check the drift in the country and retain the

Communist Party at the head of the country unless at least four interconnected conditions are met. In the first place, the elections of delegates to the forthcoming congress have to be open and democratic; and where a party organisation appears split down the middle, efforts must be made to get all the main platforms represented. Candidates for election as congress delegates must be made to present their positions before party and non-party member — the idea being to bring the weight of public opinion to influence the election as

much as possible.

In the second place, the congress itself, when constituted, must reflect the opinion of the most popular and strategic forces in the country. In the third place, the group supporting the “synthesis line” must be cohesive enough and must be credible and authoritative enough to check the growing cynicism in the country, and assume the moral leadership of the country at this critical time, this “season of anomie.” In the fourth place, the victorious “synthesis line” must have support of the Soviet armed forces. For a victory which alienates the armed forces will only accelerate the drift to a militarised regime — with its terrible consequences for the Soviet Union and the world.

These are strong conditions, but they only reflect the critical situation in the country as a whole. Fortunately the number of credible party activists working towards their realisation is growing across the country. One of such activists is *Helen Kalinina* the 40 year-old leader of the Leningrad regional party organisation and lecturer in philology at the Leningrad State Polytechnic.

This remarkable woman was one of the very few marxists that I met in the Soviet Union. Installed in the building from where Lenin and Trotsky directed and coordinated the armed uprising that brought the Bolshevik Party to power in November 7, 1917, Kalinina is the most visible and clear-

headed advocate of the “synthesis line.” In fact, she was the one who first made me aware of its existence. She was at home with dialectics when she insisted that the “synthesis line” must, by exploring the limits of *leninist* democratisation of party and state, lead the Soviet Union out of the present crisis and thus save the country and the world from the consequences of capitalist restoration, anarchy, disintegration, war or militarised regime.

And by the “limits of leninist democratisation” she meant democratisation that does not endanger the economic pillars of socialism and Lenin’s principles of party and state. These principles admit of multi-party system, multiple forms of property ownership, parliamentarism and human and democratic rights. But they insist on democratic centralism, the unity of the country, the vanguard role of the Communist Party, its proletarian character and the basic socio-economic rights: Employment, free health care, free education and cheap housing, in particular.

Alexander Dzasohov, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Supreme Soviet and a close adviser of President Mikhail Gorbachev, also identified himself with this line in my discussion with him in Kremlin, Moscow, on May 24. So did several professionals and academics with whom I spoke in Moscow, Leningrad and Alma Ata. I wish them luck. And the Soviet State. And socialism. But whatever happens, the Soviet Union must be assessed on the grounds of its own history.