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Commentary

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COMMENTARY

Dr. Bernard Ramundo*

I'd like to speak about conformity and the manner in which conformity is institutionalized in the Soviet system. Before I start, let's understand that some degree of conformity is a necessary part of every system of societal organization. In the Soviet system, it's just a case of more so. I'd like to be remembered this morning as the "more so" speaker.

In the Soviet Union, conformity is exhorted and imposed as part and parcel of a program to build a new type of society — that is, of course, to build communism. We really don't have enough time this morning to talk about the goal, in terms of what is a communist society and the extent to which it can be realized, it is a real objective of the regime or it is merely a cover for the type of control that the leadership in the Soviet Union wants. The important thing is that there is a stated goal, and in the name of this goal, conformity is institutionalized.

You know, of course, that all the communist states are party states, which is to say that a single party, in effect, controls all governmental power and establishes the standards of conformity. This introduces a third dimension, if you will, into the question of conformity. We usually think in terms of a majority (we), and a minority (they); and the extent to which this minority behaves as the majority does. In the case of the Soviet party state, where the standards of conformity are established by the party, you might have a "we", "they", and "them" situation, with the party being able to establish standards of conformity which are not supported by either the majority, or the minority.

Now, let us look at some examples of how conformity is institutionalized in the Soviet Union.

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Some of the speakers have mentioned the manner in which criticism and self-criticism are used to produce conformity. This is a system of control, under which people ride herd on other people, through criticism and self-criticism. But free criticism and self-criticism cannot be permitted as this might produce unwarranted dissidence — they must be regulated to serve the needs of conformity. The concept of *principled* criticism and self-criticism has been developed for this purpose. Thus, not every type of criticism and self-criticism is tolerated, only that *principled* criticism or self-criticism which supports the objectives of the party. Euphemistically, it is said that *principled* criticism is that which serves the building of communism.

Patriotism is exhorted in the Soviet Union, which as you know is a multi-national state. However, that which is exhorted is not patriotism in general, but a special type of patriotism: *socialist* patriotism. Again, conformity is assured. Patriotism is not to take the form of ethnic egocentrism, which could produce disharmony; rather, it should be a conformity-oriented type of patriotism, and that is why it is denominated *socialist* patriotism.

There is also democracy in the Soviet Union. It's not the type of democracy, though, that we are used to, in the sense of people being able to do their thing, subject, of course, to certain societal controls and certain obligations to society. The Soviets go beyond this minimum level of conformity by insisting on *socialist* democracy which assures the desired conformity in the exercise of civil and other rights.

The Soviets have a highly developed legal system and extol legality. But, again, it's not legality in a vacuum. It's a special kind of legality which the Soviets call *socialist* legality. This is a purposeful approach to legality which serves the conformity orientation of the regime in the direction of "building a communist society," a euphemism for party policy and control. The effect of *socialist* legality is to subordinate the administration of law to party policy.

Some of our speakers have described Soviet controls in the area of the arts. Here, too, the Soviets have a special formulation in their concept of *socialist* realism. Soviet writers, artists and musicians must stress the positive truths, mentioned by Leon; excuse me — mentioned by Leon's friend.

Here, again, the Soviets make no bones about it. They're not speaking of realism *per se*, but a special kind of realism: *socialist* realism.

The Soviets have a similar technique for achieving conformity in the international relationships within the socialist bloc. It is said that there is internationalism within the bloc. Again, it is not internationalism in a vacuum; it's *socialist* internationalism, which means that all the members of the bloc must, in effect, conduct their foreign and domestic affairs in accordance with a general harmony, a harmony that is conducive to the achievement of the goals of the collective of states which make up the socialist camp. The Soviet Union, as the most experienced builder of communism, claims it knows best what is in the collective's interest.

What I have said is that conformity is at the very heart of the Soviet system. Even under the institutionalization of conformity in the Soviet Union, however, the individual is not necessarily stifled by conformity all the time. It depends on the needs of the regime. One important thing to note is that the system is geared to produce a high degree of conformity. Whether it produces this conformity in one area or another depends upon regime needs which change from time to time. Thus, you can have areas where, in effect, there is more nonconformity than in others, where, because of a special interest of the state, very little nonconformity is permitted. A compounding difficulty is that these areas of special state interest tend to change with resultant fluctuations in the degree of conformity or nonconformity permitted in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet system, as most other systems, operates by campaign, which is to say that conformity is enforced as needed, in the areas needed. When the need passes, the interest passes and, of course, the insistence on conformity subsides. The same is true of our society. Where special law and order needs arise, we tend to stress conformity. The basic difference is that in the Soviet Union there is a stated continuing need for a higher level of conformity than in most western societies. In short, conformity in the Soviet system, is a case of more so.