In Search of a Communist Development Model: The Soviets’ Political Economy of India

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In Pursuit of a Communist Model

WHEN THE COLD war was turning Western scholars’ attention toward the political future of Africa, Asia and Latin America, one could scarcely read an article on the position of the developing countries in international affairs without encountering some reference to the communist model that threatened, like some international pied piper, to attract the elites of the Afro-Asian nations into the socialist bloc. Just what constituted this model, however, was not quite so clear as one first thought. Was it the historical experience of development in the Soviet bloc? If so, there would be not one but a multiplicity of models, one for each sacred father – Lenin’s or Novotny’s, Tito’s or Mao’s. Worse, in the case of the more long-lived, such as Stalin, there would be a model for each stage of communist construction over which he had presided: that of forced industrialization and collectivization, of the patriotic war, of post-war reconstruction. Each aspect of each model was presumably in some way appropriate to the national conditions obtaining in each particular communist regime, but which part of which model was relevant to a given developing country? And who was to decide what was relevant and what was not? If the leadership in each country was to choose, our communist model would vary in addition with the needs and ambitions of each national leader: for Nehru it was above all the magic of five-year planning, for Nkrumah it was the single party system; for others the lesson might be the nationalization of foreign companies.

A more obvious, though less familiar, sense in which there has always been an identifiable communist model specifically relevant for each developing country is the analysis of its problems by the scholars from a particular communist country. By dissecting their writings one should be able to extract their “model” for development, at least on those problems they are most concerned about.

The Soviet analysis of India offers one of the best cases for applying this approach, for among marxist-leninists the Soviets have devoted the most re-
sources to studying the developing countries and their writings on India over the past two decades are abundant enough to permit satisfactory generalizations concerning their analysis.\(^1\) Even when considering the Soviet marxist-leninist publications on a major third-world country like India, it is not obvious \emph{a priori} whether there is a model defined as a coherent diagnosis of India's problems and a prescription for their solution. There is certainly no single development strategy which has been deduced from the economic and historical experience of the USSR. There is much analysis varying not just in quality from author to author but varying also dramatically over time. As official Soviet ideology has gone through several distinct phases since the October revolution influenced by changes in the internal economic or political situation as by the external international position of the Soviet Union, so have Soviet analysts seen India as a highly developed capitalist economy on the brink of a socialist revolution (1921-28), a colonial economy in the hands of a reactionary bourgeoisie (1928-41), an important economic and industrial base for the British, their war-time allies (1941-45), a continuing colony in the British-American Empire (1947-53) and a truly independent and progressive third-world power (1955-present). Despite the wild fluctuations in these phases of Soviet Indology, these variations are best seen as politically inspired interpretations within a generally stable analytical paradigm, the marxist-leninist political economy. In any case since Krushchev's de-stalinization of Soviet marxism and his positive reorientation of Soviet foreign policy towards independent third world countries invalidated the major theses of the stalinist analysis, Moscow's orientalists were forced to recast their interpretation to allow for the possibility of progressive social and economic development within non-communist, ex-colonial countries. The resulting post-stalinist school of thought presented a development model centred round the concept of state capitalism. This was more than an economic model. It was a political economy paradigm based on three major postulates: the historical position maintained that the emergence of a powerful socialist bloc enabled third world countries to pass from a feudal to a socialist stage through an accelerated state capitalist stage; the economic proposition asserted that a gradual transition to socialism was possible through the expansion of the state sector under long-term planning; the class analysis held that the national bourgeoisie could direct this transition with internal support from progressive proletarian and peasant forces. Whatever industry or sector of the economy was under discussion, a common analytical framework was applied. What was the size of the private sector and which class interests were served by it: the foreign monopolies, the local monopoly bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat or the peasantry? What was the relative size of the public sector and the means used to stimulate its growth (nationalization, joint ventures or new investment)? What instruments does the state have for controlling this industry or sector?

\(^1\) See the classified bibliography of selected Soviet writings on the developing countries in general and India in particular in my \textit{L'analyse soviétique des problèmes indiens du sous-développement (1955-1964)} Mouton, Paris and the Hague, 1971, pp. 163-252.