

## Correspondence

EDITOR'S NOTE: Readers are welcome to send communications dealing with matters discussed in *Problems of Communism*. Letters should be addressed to the Editors, *Problems of Communism*, U.S. Information Agency, 1728 L St. N.W., Washington 25, D.C.

### THE SOVIET YOUTH PROBLEM

I have read with interest S. V. and P. Utechin's "Patterns of Nonconformity" (No. 3, May-June 1957). . . . As a student of Soviet youth organization and one who has had some recent contact with young people in the USSR, I should like to express the belief that the Utechins exaggerate . . . [youth unrest].

The Utechins base their argument of "widespread unrest" among Soviet youth on a number of Soviet press reports calling for more indoctrination of youth, on a far greater number of Western sources, including the French Foreign Minister speaking before the executive of a party locked in perpetual struggle with Communists, and on several equally "dispassionate" London dailies.

The cryptic Soviet press reports on the subject are of unquestionable importance. We must either take them to mean that political dissent is so rife among Soviet students that the matter can no longer be concealed, or that the party leaders desire to arrest an infection before it spreads. On the basis of my recent talks with Soviet students I am inclined to accept the latter interpretation. More than once I was told that only handfuls of students are taking part in the discussion groups, which work in the spirit of what the Utechins properly call "the Marxist tradition in its true 'Leninist' and social democratic varieties." The issue of a multi-party system, that fundamental and lone assurance against tyranny, was, according to my student acquaintances, "not a present day question" (*neaktualnyi vopros*).

I was left with the impression that the Soviet leaders have by no means lost their grip on the minds of the youthful populace of the USSR. It would be foolhardy to imagine that schematic textbooks, conformist professors and isolation from the outside world have not had a profound impact on this youth's thought, or rather its method of thinking. And if some of them should apply the crude analysis of capitalist society which they find in their textbooks to the economic processes in their own country, as was done by those noted in the *Forum* letter, they antagonize

to no small degree their chauvinist-minded colleagues. Indeed, we may presume that the *Forum* letter was attacked by *Komsomolskaia Pravda* in June 1957 so as to compromise "the demagogues" as handmaidens of "our foreign ill-wishers," to use a Khrushchevian expression. . . .

Brooklyn, New York

S. Ploss

**The Utechins reply:** . . . As far as our sources are concerned, we find on a rough count of the text that 33 references are taken from the Soviet press and 26 from Western sources: there is thus not "a far greater number of Western sources". Moreover, the Soviet sources quoted do not merely "call for more indoctrination of youth," but are reports of things that have been said, written or done by Soviet youth. In the case of the London dailies quoted, we know the original sources of almost all these reports, and they are reliable. As to Mr. Ploss' suggestion that Monsieur Pineau could have invented the incident referred to in order to score a political point within his own country, we find it outrageous.

For the rest, the difference between Mr. Ploss and ourselves rests simply on the conclusions he has drawn from his conversations with some Soviet citizens, and [those] we have drawn from studying the Soviet press and conversing with [other] Soviet citizens and reputable Westerners returned from Russia. It may be of interest that, in contradiction to Mr. Ploss' view, we were told by an Englishman recently returned from Russia—a knowledgeable student of Soviet affairs and an entirely trustworthy person—that in his opinion our article very much underestimated the situation.

Finally, nowhere did we state, or intend to give the impression, that a majority of students are taking part in the various discussion groups. And it is interesting but not surprising to hear that Mr. Ploss' acquaintances spoke of a multi-party system as "not a present-day question (the "present-day" is surely significant): there are a good many things to be achieved in Russia before a multi-party system can become a matter of practical politics—did we anywhere suggest that Soviet youth thinks otherwise? . . .