

MARXIST VERSUS NON-MARXIST IDEAS IN SOVIET POLICY

The first text below is an edited transcript of an extempore talk delivered to ‘a Russian study group of qualified students and faculty members’ by Isaiah Berlin on 20 February 1952 at Haverford College, Pennsylvania, as part of a series on ‘Continuity and Change in Russian Life’, itself part of a ‘Three-College Russian Program’ run by Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Swarthmore Colleges,¹ and of the succeeding discussion. The original transcript, made from a lost recording, is seriously garbled at many points, and sometimes incomprehensible. So the conjectural editorial restorations are often uncertain, and there are some passages of which no reliable sense can be made. For this reason the raw transcript follows the edited text, and suggestions from readers for improving the edited version will be gratefully received.

THE CHIEF DIFFICULTY in understanding Russian policy has arisen from the attempt by those who write on these matters to assess it in terms of Western policy, and there has been a consistent effort on the part of Western statesmen to interpret Russian policy along the traditional lines of Western statesmanship. The Churches and other groups have contributed to the confusion by supposing that Russia is an imperial country governed by a tough, ruthless gang of roughnecks and opportunists with no fixed ideology; that Marxism has spent itself; and that what remains is simply a residue consisting of the self-interest of ordinary people working under the various requirements of the Russian economy, and the permanent general exigencies of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union.

I must agree with this point of view in some respects. For one thing, I wouldn’t say the Russians are very sophisticated Marxists. However, I do think there is an irreducible Marxist deposit which the years haven’t rubbed out.

¹ Letter to Berlin of 6 December 1951 from Bettina Linn of the Bryn Mawr Russian Dept for the Three-College Russian Committee, MSB 129/12–13 at 12.

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Because of this lack of understanding, this misinterpretation, their foreign policy becomes unintelligible. I shall start with a few rash remarks about Russian policy in general. Ordinarily it is dangerous to speak of national character, but in this case there are certain characteristics which are recognisable.

Their susceptibility to ideas, for one thing, is astonishing. The nineteenth-century Russians were a rather confused, mystical nation in the sense that they were leading chaotic lives, indulging in gloomy introspection, and liable to blame their ills on all kinds of curious metaphysical factors. But that would be a false conclusion to draw of the Russians today. One of the basic characteristics of the Russians is the extreme rigour of their logic, greater than that of other nations, though it is true that they are sometimes apt to start with peculiar premisses, and argue them through to a weird conclusion. But what they haven't much of is common-sense control. That is to say, when they are faced with facts, they simply ignore the facts. It is different in the West.

Russia was a large country after the Napoleonic Wars, and the Russians had a literature of their own, yet they have not originated a single political idea. They absorb ideas from others and believe in them with a degree of passion nobody has begun to approach, and they always try to realise them in practice. When the facts prove obdurate, they simply try to bend the facts.

Marxism came to Russia twice, in the 1850s and again in the 1880s. It influenced Russian thought profoundly. There are certain aspects of Marxism that are not ordinarily noted: peculiarities of the Marxist view which make it different from other interpretations of history. All previous views presuppose the possibility of a communion between human beings and human action. That is to say, you try to persuade another to your way of thinking, to your view of something. Or you try to use force, though force is primarily intended to make other people come to understand your point of view. It assumes a purpose, namely that I am trying to convince you that the means I suggest are better than the means you suggest; that the things I believe in – social organisation and so on – are the best for you.

Marxism was the first philosophy that abandoned this presupposition. According to Marxism, history follows the principles of class conflict, which make certain classes rise and other classes fall. All the ideas you possess, all your opinions, including your religious beliefs, rest on an outlook determined by

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the particular position you occupy in the progress, in the development, of the productive forces of the country. At any given moment there is a sort of escalator – one class going downhill, the other going uphill. This is an objective fact of history. The people moving up, the rising class, can afford to look the facts in the face fearlessly, in a true light, because whatever is going to happen is in their favour, just so much grist to their mill. But the people going downwards can't afford to look the facts in the face. They are facing an abyss, a precipice; they are about to be exterminated by history, and nobody wants such a fate. So they try to interpret the facts in a certain way, try to 'rationalise' the facts, and persuade themselves that the facts are not as they see them. They don't want to see what they see, or face the horrible fact that they are about to go down into the horrible gulf.

So you have the two classes – the class that can afford to see the truth in an objective sense; and the other class trying to interpret a downward movement as an upward movement, or at least as sitting still. The people going down aren't worth looking at, because, after all, they are not in any position to tell what is going on. What's the use? They are going down. People that are drowning are not the best judges of or experts on the geographical conformation of the neighbourhood. They are only trying to stave off a horrible fate.

The Marxists, in preaching this historical philosophy, said that there was no need to produce arguments. Everything that the other side said was false in principle – not because they deliberately wanted to tell falsehoods, necessarily, but because the historical situation was such that they were prevented from seeing the truth, and they had to conceal the facts from themselves in order to hide their approaching doom. This, then, gives the political movement the strength to say to the workers, 'You are going to emerge victorious; you are going to become the winners in the end.' Not only that, but also that you can stop your ears to what the other side is saying, because, whether they are sincere or not, they are in no position to judge.

This leads to a position which Lenin adopted, and others thereafter, whereby the Russians regard other ideas rather as the psychiatrist regards the patient. If you are armed with Marxist philosophy you can tell what is happening, but the bourgeois world is in no position to know this. Like the psychiatrist, you *do* know. The patient will go on producing words, but the words

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aren't worth listening to as a description of the facts, only for the sake of a diagnosis. In this case, the patient is a homicidal lunatic, because the bourgeois world is doomed; it doesn't know it, but nevertheless it tries to save itself. But just as the homicidal patient can be a danger, so can the bourgeois world. Of course, if only they were 'rational' they would realise they were done for, and they wouldn't try to resist. But although the 'beast' is doomed, it may struggle for life. And if it does, then the psychiatrist is in some danger, because the patient may hit the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist may know all about the patient; he may not listen to what the patient is babbling about; nevertheless, the patient may do something fatal. So protection is absolutely necessary. In terms of another metaphor, the policeman is aware of the coming doom of the prisoner, and therefore has to protect himself against the death throes that may occur.

Sometimes people ask whether the Russians contemplate war. I think they do, though they think of war as defensive. Why defensive? Because they think the capitalist system is doomed. Regardless of contradictions in that supposition which might be apparent to others, they think that the system has been driven mad, and is therefore in no position to control itself, but in the course of its death throes it may, in a war, hurt the Soviet Union. It will finally have to surrender to the facts, but in its last desperate effort it may attack the Soviet Union because of its own inherent weakness, its own innate desperation. It says in the book² that the workers – the proletariat – will march into the promised land: but it doesn't say the Soviet Union will. And one of the inevitable stages may be the destruction of the Soviet Union by the maddened bourgeoisie. The Soviets wouldn't be human if they didn't try to get to the promised land themselves; hence the defensive operations, which are but an attempt to get into such a position that, if the final explosion comes, they won't be too weak as a country to survive.

² Presumably the Communist Manifesto viewed as the Marxist bible or handbook. Its second section ends 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (London, 1975–2005), vi 506. Berlin puts the point more colourfully.

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You say, ‘But even so, why do they think war is inevitable?’ First of all, because they regard all the discussion about the possibility of a two-world existence as just so much claptrap. Their whole conception rests upon their view of themselves as a kind of psychiatrist, to return to our analogy, watching the patient. And therefore, when we talk softly to them, they take the view that we have mistaken the inevitable course of history, that we think it is possible to have two worlds, so that we can both exist, and that we are trying to appease the unappeasable, to ward off with soft words the inevitable course of history. When we scream at them, or denounce or bully them, again they think, ‘Your internal contradictions are getting the better of you; you are becoming maddened; you are saying things which stimulate us to anger, which is but further proof that you are in a bad way.’ So you see how it is with them: whatever we do, we are never taken seriously as saying anything that is true, because of our ‘historical position’; and so the question of believing or not believing us does not arise. That is the mental territory of Russian foreign policy.

The leaders genuinely believe that they have the key to building a solid structure. They believe that there are two sorts of historical period – the revolutionary period and the laissez-faire period. In the revolutionary era the capitalist system boils up to a crisis, and in the laissez-faire era it is quiescent. And when it is quiescent the first step is to provoke a crisis – above all, not to allay it – a ploy used on the Germans when the Russians were allies of the Nazis and got them into power. This was the result of the mechanical application of the Marxist scheme, according to which a war is only the prelude to revolution. There was a vast upheaval, a worldwide conflict, and the next thing that was going to happen was a national break-up. To avert this break-up, the German social democrats³ tried to allay unemployment and make the working-class position less acute. But if you were a Communist, oil must be poured on the flames, not water; and so orders were given to make things worse in Germany, in order to precipitate a crisis which might lead to the great moment when enemy forces would break up.

After the war the Soviet Union again behaved mysteriously. They had made the mistake of letting the Nazis into power. They never thought anything like National Socialism would come to be.

³ i.e. Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD).

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But after the war a mass of good will existed towards the USSR. A lot of ‘biased’ capitalist writers believed that they had been misled by the Soviet Union, as they had, to some extent. But there was a counter-movement of sympathy, which held that the Soviet Union was just an ordinary imperialist power which had been humiliated by years of neglect and just wanted to acquire status again. But they didn’t cash in on this. Instead of practising what we might designate the ‘normal hypocrisy’ of talking fair and doing foul – trying to ‘exploit’ the good will flowing towards them – the Soviet Union instead proceeded to dissipate the good will, with very little political cunning. They could have done better just from the standpoint of pure opportunism, if they had chosen.

Why then did they do as they did? For no reason, again, other than the anticipation of a world slump. And there was good reason for supposing that it would occur: without the Marshall Plan it would have done. So they anticipated various economic crises, and in times of crisis you don’t retreat, you attack. You don’t draw in your horns or allay suspicions or become friendly or peaceful. Nor do you pour water on the flames. You pour oil on the flames. That was the reason for their astonishing jettisoning of all that good will.

Their internal policy, too, is due to the way they think of things. Consider the nationalistic factors governing Soviet behaviour. It is quite true that when Stalin declared ‘socialism in one country’,⁴ this could not have been done without announcing the five-year plans. That is why there was always a playing down of the Comintern and a playing up of Russian national interest, because it led to the successful control of internal affairs, and was at the same time an example to other countries.

Every country has to pursue a minimum of political requirements. Molotov’s ‘shopping’ with Hitler in 1939⁵ was similar to that of the Allies in 1935. Many of the requirements were inherited from previous regimes, other eras. Russia needs so

⁴ A principle endorsed by Stalin in December 1924 in the preface to his *On the Road to October* (Moscow, 1925), and turned into a slogan by his 18 December 1925 speech at the 14th Party Congress: industry and military power were to be built up in the USSR before the attempt was made to spread Communism elsewhere.

⁵ The reference is to the commercial clauses of the 1939 Nazi–Soviet Pact and the disagreements over the later amendments to these clauses.

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much oil, it needs safe frontiers. That may be taken for granted. But what makes Russia mysterious and peculiar can't be found in the logic of normal national requirements.

If you look at the history of the Soviet Union, you find it is a heterogeneous mix of many nations. Russian patriotism can't be pushed too far by pointing at the Buryat Mongol or the Tadjik who in his writings tells how Suvorov was a great commander, or the Tatars who say that Peter the Great was a great tsar. Particularly in Asia, there are certain questions the people are bound to ask themselves. Why are the Russians particularly excited about these special leaders? In Russia everybody is a Russian or he is crucified, and it is a glorious thing to be a subject of the tsar. But if you are going to feed the public the idea of equal status, there is something eccentric about pushing the Asiatics to the Russians as national heroes. The Russians had to play up Russian nationalism during the war. It stimulated the war effort. It was one of the few human feelings which made them fight with extraordinary courage or excited them with violent patriotic urges. It was one of the few national sentiments that came to the surface and produced good literature, which hadn't happened in fifteen years or more, in the writings of the historian Evgeny Tarlé and others. This, however, is not an expression of Marxist devotion, Marxist ideology, but something heterogeneous. That is why the Russians began to distance themselves from nationalist historians, and played up Marxist idealism. It is a sort of see-saw: when they want nationalism, to get things done, they play it up; otherwise they play it down.

For example, a Tatar historian started to write a work of Tatar history.⁶ At last the Tatars were beginning to understand their own

⁶ It has been exceptionally hard to unravel the events that underlie Berlin's remarks here, but to the best of my current understanding they are as follows. Idegey (1352–1419; very variously spelt), leader of the Golden Horde when it invaded Muscovy in 1408, is the subject of an eponymous Tatar folk epic, *Idegey*, a reconstructed edition of which was published in two issues of a Tatar periodical in 1940, and in 1941 as a book, by the Tatar folklorist Naki Isanbet (1899–1992), with a patriotic commentary open to the strictures Berlin mentions. Isanbet prepared a revised version of his edition, whose publication was delayed by the war and then banned by the Soviet authorities. A Russian translation of Isanbet's text of the epic was made by Semen Isailevich Lipkin in 1944, the year of Stalin's deportation of the Crimean Tatars, but publication

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history, which, under the wing of the Soviet Union, was beginning to bear fruit. Then this book was looked into and found to be a biography of a fifteenth-century Tatar chieftain called Idegey who attacked the Russians, and told of his victories and that of other chieftains. Finally somebody realised that this would tend to start a nationalist movement, and it was then said that Tatar history glorified Tatar attacks on the Russian people, and that the underlying Soviet institutions were undermined by subnationalities with ideas that were distinctly prejudicial to the Soviet Union, and the book was taken out of circulation and the writer ‘eliminated’.

In the early 1940s Tarlé wrote an interesting book about the Crimean War.⁷ It was a variation on the theme of the Crimean War as a great national war, and said that, although the Russians and the tsars were weak, nevertheless the war was a vast outburst of Russian sentiment which unified the Russian people. True or false, it was an extremely popular point of view. But in 1945, when I was in Russia, the *Historical Journal*⁸ said that Tarlé observes two things: first, that it was the Russian people who lost the war, and secondly that they took part in a war they could not afford – the Russian people were said never to be able to afford war. Moreover, Lenin said in one of his books that there was an economic collapse in the Crimean War.⁹

was again banned, and finally occurred only in 1990, without any acknowledgement of Isanbet. In addition, a collection of essays that was in preparation in 1944, ‘Ocherki po istorii TASSR’ [‘Essays on the History of Tatarstan’], contained a treatment of Idegey as a folk hero by Khairi Gimadeevich Gimadi, who drew on Isanbet’s work. This collection too was banned, after much critical coverage in the Party journal *Bolshevik*, and the version of Tatar history it contained had to be replaced by an interpretation that toed the official line. For more details see e.g. <http://tatfrontu.ru/tt/node/829330>. If, as seems likely, Berlin was referring to the controversy surrounding the collection, either there is a mistranscription or he was unaware (or had forgotten) that it was a work by several authors.

⁷ *Krymskaya voyna* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1941–3).

⁸ See N. M. Druzhinin, ‘Spornye voprosi Krymskoi voiny’, *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 1945 no. 4, 113–20, and N. N. Yakovlev, ‘O knige E. V. Tarlé *Krymskaya voyna*’, *ibid.* no. 13, 63–72.

⁹ In ‘The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Fall of Serfdom’ Lenin wrote: ‘The abolition of serfdom was effected, not by an insurrectionary people, but by the government, which realised after its defeat in the Crimean

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It was made clear that, no matter what the Russian tsars did, Tarlé's analysis was a deviation from the true line of interpretation, and that grave errors had been committed and should be corrected as soon as possible. Tarlé did correct them, and a second edition appeared, correcting the 'major errors', but not all; then a third edition was published, and the book is now in its fourth edition, awaiting a review, after three successive 'corrected editions'.¹⁰ I am telling this story only to show why Tarlé was 'sat' on.

The underlying fact is that, at this particular time in the movement, it was necessary to 'cool down' the nationalistic front. Not that they were fanatical believers in ideology. Even I don't think that. The pure-hearted Marxists were no more concerned with Marxism than with doing the other things that would bring them power. They did what they did because the see-saw just works that way – because at the point where there is too much nationalism there is great danger of internal disintegration brought about by Soviet nationalists, so that you need to have an increased emphasis on the Soviet Union, which is the only link connecting all the peoples. When you have no national symbols, you have to have something else in their place. And the only thing they have, apart from Stalin-worship, is the fact that all the peoples are supposed to achieve some cosmopolitan ideological structure.

There is one thing I should like to add about the interplay of nationalistic and non-nationalistic factors, balanced at every point

War that it was no longer possible to maintain the system of serfdom.' *Rabochaya gazeta* no. 3 (8/21 February 1911); trans. Dora Cox, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1972) xvii 87–91 at 88. And in "The Peasant Reform" and the Proletarian-Peasant Revolution: 'The feudal landowners could not prevent the growth of trade between Russia and Europe; they could not bolster up the old, tottering forms of economic life. The Crimean War demonstrated the rottenness and impotence of feudal Russia.' *Sotsial-demokrat* no. 21–2, March 19/April 1, 1911; *Collected Works* xvii 119–28 at 121.

¹⁰ There were only three editions of Tarlé's 2-volume work, published in 1941–3, 1944 and 1950, the last reprinted as vols 8 and 9 of Tarlé's *Sochineniya* (Moscow, 1957–62). Cf. Michael E. Shaw, 'E. V. Tarlé's *Krymskaia Voina*: Visions and Revisions', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 7 no. 2 (Summer 1973), 188–208. If he is not simply mistaken, or exaggerating, Berlin may have had in mind an earlier article by Tarlé, 'Anglo-Frantsuskaya diplomatiya i Krymskaya voina', *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 1940 no. 4, 98–112.

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in Soviet policy, whether it be the spontaneous or the artificial that is dominant at any given time. This balancing might be called a conscious instrument, as during the first French Republic. Instead of having a State religion they have a State philosophy. It is an unusual thing for a country to have, and it is more than lip-service: the categories of this philosophy make the leaders feel 'great'.

My next point emerges in particular from an internal problem, solved by ideological means. These are not so much Marxist factors – police or political power – but what might be called 'theoretical ideological factors', factors founded upon a theory of how history advances, or how things are done – a theory of a kind held more consciously in the Soviet Union than anywhere else.

One of the chief problems of the Soviet Union was the maintenance of what might be called tight conditions, the extremely low standard of living necessary if they were to acquire capital goods and the armaments that they thought necessary to meet the inevitable explosion in the world which would expose them to attack from the West. The people wanted a little respite. They got this, but not for long.

Much of the problem in any revolution is how to avoid one of two extremes. One extreme is, at the end of a revolution, too much zeal, and the other extreme is *Schlummerei*,¹¹ a quick lapse into what might be called an 'uninspired' condition of life. You have a revolution and an overthrow of the 'tyrant'. A new world is about to dawn. The new world doesn't dawn, because the Revolution doesn't eliminate the ills against which it was directed. So a scapegoat is found. Nobody is to blame – it is just how things work. The Revolution is a failure, so you have to find something to blame. You then use your scapegoat to make up for the progressive failure of the Revolution – and the Soviets proceed to attribute this failure to lack of sufficient intensity and zeal in the Revolution. They are looking for backsliders, who have to be eliminated. Then the zealots increasingly come to be the leaders of the Revolution themselves. Next there comes the time when they, in turn, have to be stopped. Then you have a kind of collapse, and everybody suddenly sits back, and the Revolution is partially forgotten, and the older people say, 'Was this the ideal for which we have made the Revolution? How mean and awful and squalid

¹¹ Torpor.

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life has become, and how sad it is not to live through the glorious days of the Revolution once again!'

That is what results from revolution. You need an abnormal system to offset the excitement of revolution, but the two extremes must always be avoided. And Stalin has done this, in a way, by creating a zigzag movement – never going in one direction too far. His soldiers came back from Romania, and they had liked Romania and Bucharest, and they came back from Germany and they had liked it there. So the soldiers are re indoctrinated, and a lot of newspapers suddenly start saying: 'The purity of the Party is forgotten; our soldiers have become soft. We must re indoctrinate the people.' And you have a Party purge – which means things have been drifting too far away from the directorate. And then, when you have tightened things up enough and the purges are purged (and of course you have to be sincere as to the effectiveness of the purge), the witch-hunt stops. And when it becomes obvious that the new zealots, the people doing the purging, are departing from the Party line, they are denounced and executed. And the populace is very pleased, and people say: 'At last the Kremlin has heard our prayers and we will have a breathing spell.' And that means that the artists are again permitted to produce a little art, and the writers can write a certain amount of literature, and a certain amount of 'nationalism' is permitted, and some foreigners are admitted into the Soviet Union, and there is a general softening of the line. And that goes on for a while, until it is noticed that there is too much comfort, and there is no work being done in the factories. Everything is too loose. People are leading lives too ordinary for the purpose of a 'tight' system. And the important thing then is to screw it up tighter and tighter, to keep people on the run – otherwise people may enjoy themselves so much that they won't obey within the proper safety margin. So then you say once more, 'We are being too patriotic, too nationalistic – we have forgotten Marxist principles. We are forgetting that we are trying to reform the world.'

So there is another purge. And once more you have the 'zig' of the line – a 'zag' and then a 'zig'. And once more people start fighting, and a lot of people are sent to Siberia, and people 'stop breathing', until you get to the point at which the people stop even talking. And when the people stop talking they stop working. And so they have to be tickled into consciousness once again, and given more liberty to express themselves, and once again you have a

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softening of the line – and so it has been since 1930, the beginning of the Stalin regime. A systematic zigzagging going on periodically – now tight, now loose; now a certain amount of ordinary opportunism and now a certain amount of Marxism. That is the way to keep an artificial situation going. Keep people on the run, never let them go too far in any direction. When they are hard, you try to make them soft; when they are soft, you try to make them harder. And because they are never left static, never left settled, never left in the status quo, the cycle goes on and on.

So the position of the Russian is rather like leading a perpetual military life. And people who are outside the Soviet Union wonder how such a regime is possible. Well, when people are in a position like that they go from day to day without great problems if they are reasonably ‘conformist’. The Party line is the central factor in Soviet control, because it keeps things from over-developing in any direction, through the very unnatural discipline imposed upon them. That is the theory I should like to offer you, at any rate.

Finally, the question arises about relations with foreign powers. Although some of the leaders are enthusiastic, and the actions of others are characterised by opportunism, their information about the outside world is muddled and confused, partly because they are victims of the interpretative Marxist system, which tends to pervert their informative material from the start. There are Soviet diplomats, and Communist Party agents and workers, all over the place, all reporting information to the Soviet Union. This information always has two interesting characteristics. One is that it is almost uniformly friendly to the Party. They are afraid of saying anything unfriendly; they are even afraid of reporting the favourable views of other countries, because they may be accused of misrepresentation, or at least of presenting the facts in too rosy a light. All Soviet diplomats are in danger of the accusation of trying to whitewash the facts for those in authority. Hence, if you report all the unfriendly and unfavourable things that you hear, you can't very well be suspected of that. So it may be that this is the reason why so many of the facts are distorted in such a peculiar manner. The agents are terrified of being suspected of being too much in tune with, acclimatised to, the thinking and colour of the people among whom they live.

Secondly, they are not allowed to interpret the foreign countries, because, again, there is a danger that if they explain they may be distorting facts, or producing facts favourable to the

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foreign nation and unfavourable to the Party. Therefore, if they supply the facts in a raw state, they cannot be accused of any prejudice or bias. And so it is that huge masses of information come in unweighted, unanalysed, and some very peculiar little things emerge, since the conferees in the Kremlin don't know what sort of weight to attach to a given set of raw facts.

For example, a conversation occurred between Byrnes¹² and Molotov, in Potsdam, in the course of which Byrnes said something, and then Molotov said something that seemed very odd – he said that something very unfriendly and unfactual, and unlikely, had been said about the Soviet Union by the *Rocky Mountain News*.¹³ And then Molotov said, 'I don't understand your press. Is the American government more important than the press, or is the press in your country more important than the government?' And Byrnes tried to explain that the press in the United States was free, and it said what it liked. And Molotov said, 'But look here, if the government is more powerful than the press, they could stop the press from saying unfriendly things about the Soviet Union. But you say they can't do that, that the *Rocky Mountain News* is a free newspaper. If it is a free newspaper and the government can't interfere, then the press is more powerful than the government. And in that case why have a government? Why shouldn't the people just talk straight to the press?' This is why AP and UP¹⁴ correspondents in Russia have to go straight to Stalin, because they have this odd, simple view of how things work abroad; and this view is due to the fact that the information that comes in is boiled up by little 'experts' in accordance with the rigid rules of the leaders. And therefore they feel that the government of the United States is controlled by the press. And the representatives of the AP and UP just listen, at present, in Moscow. It is a peculiar trend of thought: a sort of inverted logic. Yet the Russians cannot be accused of ignoring logic. The facts may not be true, but never, never accuse the Russians of lack of logic.

An example of Soviet thinking is provided by their attitude to England: 'How did the British Empire become so great? It's just a

¹² James Francis ('Jimmy') Byrnes (1882–1972), US Secretary of State 1945–7.

¹³ Daily newspaper published in Denver, Colorado.

¹⁴ Associated Press and United Press news agencies.

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little island.' Well, in the first place by the presence on its shores of a lot of ruthless Machiavellian thinkers with unscrupulous policies. That is how that small island kingdom could come to exert control abroad. They really believe that. Consequently, whenever the English make a move, it is inevitable that the Russians feel that it is part of a deep and dark and far-flung scheme – which, I assure you, is less true of the British Foreign Office than anything can be. Telegrams and correspondence of the simplest kind produce sinister and vague interpretations in the Russian mind: every act is formulated by sinister, Machiavellian thinkers, to serve a long-term policy of some kind.

What used to happen is this. The British made a move; the Russians made a counter-move against what they conceived to be the British 'scheme'. As the British, however, couldn't and didn't know about this scheme, the Russian counter-move appeared to be irrational, and there was a certain amount of indignation over what the Russians did. The indignation only went to prove to the Russians that they had touched the right spot. They had struck home, to the heart of the 'conspiracy'. And so, whatever happened, there was nothing you could do about it: nothing you could do was right. If you have a hypothesis that every fact is suspicious, and the opposite of every fact is equally suspicious, it is hard to shake that hypothesis. That is why discussing or arguing with the Russians is difficult.

Take their interpretation of the visit to Britain by Rudolf Hess.¹⁵ This came from three or four sources in Russia. They said that Hess had come to England in order to ask the British to stop the war with the Germans. Well, that is exactly what Hess did do. But they then said that the English accepted Hess's plan and signed a secret treaty whereby the Germans would stop the war immediately they attacked the Russians – but that when the Germans attacked the Russians, the English attacked the Germans and stabbed the Russians in the back. That idea of the English plans was entirely characteristic of their way of thinking. And the Russians thought it was a clever move. They thought, in the first

¹⁵ Rudolf Walter Richard Hess (1894–1987), Hitler's deputy in the Nazi Party, parachuted into Scotland on 10 May 1941 in an apparently unauthorised attempt to broker peace between England and Germany, so that they could join forces against the USSR. He was held captive for the rest of his life.

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place, that they were right to trust the Germans, and, secondly, that the English were more hostile to them than the Germans, and that they were responsible for the German attack. And all the diplomats in Russia say that, when America was neutral, one thing that astonished the Russians was the fact that, when the Germans attacked, there was not a British ship anywhere around Russia.

These stories just go to show the degree of blindness of the Russians about what actually goes on in the outside world. It is not attributable to a stupid or blind people, or a people that doesn't understand material interests, but to the kind of blindness that affects people who are the victims of a fanatical system. Because of the British behaviour they thought the British had more interest in supporting the Nazis than they did, and therefore had to side with the Germans at that particular moment, because the opposite course of action would be contradictory to solidarity in the capitalist world. And then the Russians were faced with the danger of such solidarity, and when faced with the choice between observing facts and acting upon hypotheses, they act on hypotheses. Or so it seems to me. And all the blindnesses of the Russians in the Korean War are not the consequence of stupidity or defective thinking on their part, because during the nineteenth century, while they didn't show themselves to be particularly brilliant, their policies led to their being on an intelligent footing with the rest of the world. But they do show a peculiar addiction to ideas, to ideological structures, at the expense of the normal national interest of a large State.

You hear people say, 'Russia is an imperial country, simply a continuation of the tsarist empire.' This I should like to deny. An imperialist country acquires countries and territory for glory or for strength. But the Russians are not doing it for either glory or strength. They are always afraid of new populations, which entail going through a long process of communisation. It's a nuisance suddenly to have a group of new Europeans on your hands; it is expensive and precarious when you set out to convert great masses of people to a doctrine or religion or formula that they never quite come to believe. They do it, I think, because they genuinely believe that inevitably, sooner or later, there will be an attack upon them by the 'beast at bay', because of the logic of history, and they must therefore defend themselves against the inevitable. It is a logic based on extremely misleading foundations.

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Question and answer period

QUESTION Considering your hypothesis or analogy of the psychologist and his patient, what should the Western world's stand be?

ISAIAH BERLIN I think they are mistaken, the Russians, and since they are mistaken, there is nothing to be done. If you are going to accept the assumption that that is their interpretation of how history moves, then I think you want to protect yourself militarily against their interpretation of your moves, and yet in some manner not induce them to do something unwise, and avoid war yourself. If there is no war for a long period, there may be no war at all. So the only advice I can think of is: Keep going, and do not make wars. Continual containment may not be a utopian policy. You can't communicate rationally with people who listen to your words simply in order to discover the symptoms of a psychological condition. But you can maintain an insulated state of affairs until matters improve somewhat, and after all one can never tell what the future holds.

And so, it is a modus vivendi – or rather modus non vivendi – and what we have at the moment is a perpetual and irritating state of non-war. But what else can you do? If you know that somebody is a psychiatrist and that he wants to confine you in a straitjacket, and you know you are not mad, and you think he is mad, you may want to kill him, but there is no use in killing him, because things don't remain the same in history for very long. So what do you do? You take adequate steps to avoid seeing him or being treated by him.

QUESTION I wonder if there is any noticeable conception in their thinking that the action of the psychiatrist might actually help to cure the patient – in the sense that if they frighten us they will maintain a high level of prosperity?

BERLIN No, I think not. The question is: Why do the Russians force us to rearm? Would it not be wiser on their part to move softly and purr, and not roar and bellow? Well, that would be a sensible thing to say, no doubt, of any country that behaves in a sane manner, any country which is aware it should not terrify other

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countries into something. Unless you want war, the last thing you want to do is shout loudly. If you believe that the capitalistic system forces us to behave in a manner that sooner or later causes a conflict, then we will probably arm, and what is the good of soft tactics? People advised them, as Litvinov did, to be tactful. Why should they force us to rearm? But that made no sense, because they think of us as a wild animal that can't be stopped, and since it can't be stopped, the idea of saying 'You can manage to deceive them by talking softly, and appease and cajole them' means you have gone or are going against the course of history. It is one of the things we just can't help doing, they think – that is, prepare ourselves for the great conflict that is coming. Their policy is to work out our objective position on the map, whether it is known to us or not, and proceeding accordingly. They can't help but feel that they are our strongest natural enemy, and, being in such a position, and being such an enemy, they must arm. They feel that this is the only course for a people driven into a conflict – one they themselves have 'rationalised' themselves into. They must get us to cave in so that they can better meet the historically inevitable conflict.

This problem arose about the atomic bomb in 1945. It humiliated them terribly. If they had been told about it they would not have been humiliated so much. The atomic bomb frightened them and made them rearm and made them hostile to us. If they had not been frightened, they would perhaps have proceeded softly in Europe. It was at that moment that they started to be really aggressive, though they had started to be aggressive before the atomic bomb.

Whatever you do as a Marxist, you are in a dilemma. If you talk softly it is interpreted as a delusion of the possibility of peace, and if you talk loudly it is interpreted as the neurotic scream of a victim. When the leaders of capitalism are beginning to make themselves felt in the West, it is a sign of advancing disease on our part, making it profitable for them to accelerate our doom. Not necessarily to attack us – no: they might lose; they don't want that – but to give history a little push here and there and irritate us into achieving our inevitable destruction a little faster. But what is never any good is trying to deceive us into not doing something they want to prevent us from doing. It is like trying to deceive a drowning man into supposing he is on dry land and is not

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drowning at all. You can't. There is no point in telling him things in the hope that he will stop doing what he is doing.

That is what puzzles observers of Russia. They see their conduct as suicidal. Why are they frightening us? The argument is: 'Whether we frighten them or not, they will do the same.'

QUESTION It would follow, then, that it didn't make things worse for us to publish that *Collier's* article last fall.

BERLIN Nothing makes it worse, from the point of view of the Russians. If you are thinking in terms of how the Russians react, it may of course put a few extra arrows into their quiver, and they are all the more capable of using it as propaganda for the people outside and those within, but to the leaders it doesn't make a particle of difference.

QUESTION If there should be no war and countries like England should pass gradually into a state of socialism, how would it affect Russia, do you think?

BERLIN As a monstrous betrayal of the Russian nation itself. Self-perpetuation is one of the extreme requirements of the Russian. It would be 'typical bourgeois deception', whereby the workers, instead of being collectivised, were putting themselves in the position of the petite bourgeoisie, as they would interpret it. It wouldn't make much difference. They would rather the British didn't become socialist, on the whole, because if you believe in Marxist stereotypes you would rather see the capitalist system. They would rather see Churchill as Prime Minister, because they conceive of him as a capitalist, and it would make the teaching of political theory in schools so much easier. To that extent they would prefer the black to be blacker, rather than masquerading in various tones of grey or pink.

QUESTION Do you think of Stalin as personally responsible for the zig-zag policy?

BERLIN Yes, I think it is his one great contribution to Soviet government.

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QUESTION Do you think of Stalin, then, as having taught people that technique?

BERLIN I think people have worked with him so long that they have come to learn it and believe it. Lenin never believed in acquiring techniques. That is, he thought any clerk or laundress or peasant could be taught anything in three days, and his economic policy wasn't zig-zag, it was direct, and it was a disappointment. Stalin's move was popular, therefore, because it helped Russia survive. Stalin wants to see what is in the mind of the populace. And the Politburo is indoctrinated with this policy. You must not impede the policy, and yet you can't keep it tight all the time; you have to stop pushing at times. And that is a delicate question, a question of balance.

QUESTION Doesn't this zig-zag policy mostly affect the intellectual thought of the country? How far does it really affect the common man in the Soviet Union?

BERLIN He feels it to the extent that he is a Party member. He wouldn't feel it if he were not, but if he is a Party member, he would. True, it would affect the intelligentsia, but it goes further than that, because the purpose of the zig-zag is to keep the whole thing tight. It affects the common man in that he has been perpetually taught the lesson of orthodoxy. That affects the common man in that this idea of oscillating, now a zig and now a zag, never quite puts him out of court, and he finally accepts the idea that you must think in terms of a 'directive'. If it was always the same directive, then the idea would become dull and grey. But if the party keeps them up to the mark, well, it's a shrewd strategy and I take my hat off to him.

QUESTION Then that would definitely disagree with Kennan's point of view as to the cyclical nature of things – that is, that there is a rise and fall in the system of the Western powers?

BERLIN You mean that there are times when it is possible to live peacefully with them?

QUESTION Yes.

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BERLIN Well, on the one hand you have to keep the Revolution going inside Russia, and on the other hand there is a Marxist principle or theory that there are revolutionary and quiescent situations; and in the revolutionary situation you make things worse, and in the quiescent situation you agree with other parties and you cool off and are peaceful and gentle, and you identify yourself, if you can, with other causes, and you talk peacefully.

QUESTION Then they don't coincide, you say?

BERLIN No, I say they coincide. The rhythm inside Russia has nothing to do with the outside system.

QUESTION Then you mean you can 'zig' inside and 'zag' outside, is that it?

BERLIN You can indeed. You have many cases of that, in which conformity is expected from the parties outside, and inside you have comparative relaxation after the extreme tightness of a year ago, say. The two things are illustrations of a belief that you operate as you do a machine. You have to co-ordinate a little bit for the benefit of the Communist Party, but the Comintern is the first thing to go if inconsistencies have to be admitted.

At the end of the war in Russia you had a lot of internationalist sentiment, and over here too a lot of stuff went on about the Two Worlds idea of peaceful co-existence being possible and about Communism being only an exaggerated system of liberalism. It was precisely at that time, however, that inside the Soviet Union, in 1944, many things were going on that were quite at odds with this internationalist sentiment – a lot of Tatars were being punished, representatives of small nationalist groups were being abolished, and a general tightening was observed. So I don't think the two are tied up at all.

QUESTION You mentioned Litvinov. Do you think he had a different outlook?

BERLIN Yes, I think he did have, but he was never a man of much importance: he was far less important than anybody thought. He was not a member of the Politburo, but a sort of agent. I think he was a rather dull-minded professional negotiator, and just given

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directions by the Politburo, which he tried to carry through; and over many years of sheer diplomatic activity he achieved something, and believed that you could manage to postpone the inevitable disaster. But inside the Politburo there is a genuine belief that it is no good, that peaceful existence of any kind is a chimera. And Litvinov, I think, half believed in co-existence, but never expressed his view to them, or at least never stressed it.

QUESTION Do you think this idea of the Comintern's was in a way sincere, or do you think it was just opportunist?

BERLIN I think it was sincere in that they thought they had to have a peaceful period. At Dumbarton Oaks they believed in international security, although never for one moment did they feel it was important. They believed in the Security Conference because they thought they wanted peace in the world – not a lot of small wars going on from time to time and the resulting insecurities. And they respect force – armies and navies and air forces. Therefore they thought that if they could come to accept the sphere of influence idea, which the British believed in, and I think Roosevelt believed in, some arrangement binding together the air forces and armies and navies of the world, that would be a good thing to do. That was a tough step, but one which in 1944 I think they believed in. I know diplomats were surprised at the time by the size of the step forward the Russians made. But the idea was that three big bosses – the three leaders of the world, with their armies and navies and air forces – could arrange the whole thing, and could easily sit on unruly countries. But they felt genuinely doubled-crossed when Mr Byrnes started tampering with elections in Bulgaria, and as to Romania, their belief that some arrangement had been come to between the other parties was genuine, I think. And they abolished the Comintern as a sheer nuisance. The Comintern had been exceedingly useless in the 1930s, and it was a small price to pay.

QUESTION Despite their belief that the bourgeoisie of the West are becoming more desperate, isn't it possible that they believed that the anticipation of the vast consequences of atomic warfare would act as a deterrent?

BERLIN To whom? I don't understand.

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QUESTION To the West.

BERLIN The atomic bomb dropped on the Russians you mean?

QUESTION No, that the West would in any case resort to warfare.

BERLIN I don't understand. What do they think would be acting as a deterrent to whom?

QUESTION To the extent to which they ignore policies and judgements by the West, I wondered what their judgement is concerning the desires of the West to become involved in atomic warfare.

BERLIN I don't think they think in terms of desires. They think sooner or later there is to be a war. The West may not wish it, but they can't help it. The atomic bomb doesn't make much difference to them. If there is going to be war, atomic bombs will be used. The presence or absence of atomic bombs may make things come sooner or later, but that is a matter of little details. They feel, 'We in the Soviet Union must be powerful enough to survive it or possibly win it.'

QUESTION It is only a matter of detail to them, then?

BERLIN Why shouldn't it be? If you really believe in the mystical and metaphysical hour, which they believe inevitably must come, a new weapon is not going to abolish that. It may precipitate things, just as the invention of gunpowder made conquest by certain European countries, and thereby the development of larger States, come faster, that's all. But if you believe in Marxist philosophy, this is going to happen anyway. If atomic bombs were not invented now, some other horrible weapon would be invented by the Peruvians, perhaps fifty years hence. And so they have to have atomic bombs, too. That's all it comes to. But it can't make a difference. In fact, I have never understood why all the fuss is made by historians over the atomic bomb. Somehow they felt all the mores and politics and so on were going to be changed. It is more destructive, to be sure, but weapons were terribly destructive before that. But remember what people once thought of poison

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gas: the terror couldn't be much greater than that was conceived to be.

QUESTION I would like to push the first question regarding our own policies. It would seem your analysis would suggest the wisdom of playing up the development of sound economic structures in the countries of the free world. And to follow up the analogy of the psychiatrist, I should think that if I were the doctor in Russia and saw the patient doing the things we are doing – looking at the European patient and seeing the policy of containment – I should feel completely insecure and driven to do something drastic.

BERLIN It depends on what you mean by 'containment'. Do you mean by that sitting on the porch and doing nothing?

QUESTION I mean, don't you have the power to impress Russia? A show of bellicosity, of power?

BERLIN Any display of power on the part of the Western world is going to frighten them to some extent, yes. But you mustn't go too far, or take steps for the purpose of frustrating them. Such a move would precipitate them on to your neck. Secondly, if we allow the state of *Lebensraum* to exist here, then you progressively weaken yourself. But whichever you do, it must be a kind of utilitarian balance – ordinary statecraft, the old-fashioned balancing factors, balance of power and so forth. I would agree that if we denude ourselves we will ruin ourselves, internally – it's the lion on one side of the river and the crocodile on the other. It has to be a sort of step-by-step policy. If things look bad economically we curtail our weapons. If not we get more. It is just the ordinary requirement of countries balancing their various departments.

QUESTION My question really is whether the balance we are now seeking is appropriate.

BERLIN It is too precarious a foray. It can't be anything else. The opposite idea is a substantial freezing-up of the existing arrangement. I don't think the Russians will let us do that. I think we have to have strong nerves, and adopt a frontier-guard position whereby we avoid major conflict by having powerful nerves,

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indeed by not being provoked any more than the minimum, but in the meantime we have to pay.

QUESTION You said, I think, that whether there was a war or not, things would go on. Does that mean the extreme idea of anticipating that the Marxist idea might be replaced by something else – and what else?

BERLIN No telling. The hope is that when people are building a pseudo-scientific hypothesis which they believe is founded on evidence, and it goes on being unverified, it melts. But it may not melt if you insist on holding the theory in the face of facts, just as the belief in astrology went on in spite of Ptolomean astronomy. So if you say ‘What happens next?’, I don’t know what happens when theories weaken. Other theories replace them, I guess, and unless there is a mass production of a new kind of religion, there is no telling, as far as I can see.

QUESTION If, as you say, no matter what we do their hypothesis is validated, I don’t see how you can answer the question.

BERLIN For the moment that is true – I mean so far, as it has been since the 1930s. By the year 2000 we may have been able to tip things over. The only analogy I can think of is the Turks. They did get to the gates of Vienna, and were repulsed, and then were contained. There had been the Crusades, when people felt strongly about the ‘Infidels’, and then as the Turks became a potential ally they became a close member of the European system. Yet the Turks had been ‘theoretically wicked’ – all sorts of sinister stories were told about the Turkish system. But apart from certain differences in Amsterdam and Potsdam and so forth, there is a certain crumb of comfort to be afforded by sitting tight and eventually getting somewhere. One must not move ahead too fast in chess. It is more the muddling-through policy of the British. History changes so much and so quickly that people who think with a certain fixity invariably frustrate themselves.

QUESTION Do you think that Stalin’s genius for that sort of thing has a great deal to do with the present success and stability of the regime? That is, do you think that after his death things might change?

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BERLIN Oh dear – after his death! I think he is an extremely good keeper-in-being of systems, an extremely good tightener of a very abnormal system, and extremely good at how far to go and not go. I think he has a great deal of talent in the art of management. He is not a Western statesman: he is more like an extremely shrewd oriental tyrant, or people in Mexico, or the Turks and so forth. And one of the things that keeps the Russian system stable is that in the late 1920s he assembled people who would stick to him; or at least I think that at some stage they must have decided, the members of the Politburo, that it was safer to stick to one man. It is the usual thing one finds in conspiracies. People will say, ‘If we don’t agree with Stalin, nobody here is safe.’ It is a kind of fetish. Everybody has accepted the dogma that he is wise and right. It keeps the Politburo in a state of stability, so long as they are loyal to the same man. Everyone gives up rights to a single security-producer. After his death – well, I don’t think you will get a lot of upheaval there. I am sure they have arranged for that. I think that among the satellites there may be ferment, and once Stalin is gone nobody will be quite sure who is in power, and ‘Whom shall we listen to?’ and ‘Whom shall we cultivate?’ may be questions that will arise, and little Titos will spring up here and there. And once the satellites begin to ferment a bit, then they may get frightened, and get very fussed and rattled. And if that happens they may do something rash. Then I think something awful might happen. That is the kind of danger that might potentially be present. But not in Russia itself, I think – it is all very much laid out. But the first Premier of the Georgian Republic, Zhordania, he is in Paris now, and Prince Tsereteli is a nice distinguished person – he is well over eighty-five, and is now in New York, I think. So I think the problem won’t arise too soon.

QUESTION Thinking of the present boundaries remaining where they are unless somebody in the West makes a mistake in the policy so as to fulfil the Russian hypothesis ...

BERLIN Which would mean what? War?

QUESTION Not necessarily war ...

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BERLIN I agree about the frontiers because I think the Russian policy is set and fixed and nothing we say is going to alter that.

QUESTION Supposing, though, there is, say, economic chaos in Italy. It becomes a satellite country, say. Then their hypothesis with respect to Italy would be fulfilled.

BERLIN Now I see what you mean. I didn't follow your point. I think it is true. As far as frontiers are concerned, it seems to me impossible to wrest countries from the hands of fanatics that believe in undemonstrable hypotheses, except by force.

QUESTION Then would you go on to say that nothing we can do will actually change that policy?

BERLIN Facts would. Facts alter action, or action alters facts, yes.

QUESTION Coming back to your point of Marxist ideology in Russian policy. Do you think that has changed a bit? I think some factor of apparent strength has been an ideological factor in the Russian past, but, aside from the ideological or the intellectual condition, would you say that the generation of Stalin had a feeling different from that of the younger people that are coming up?

BERLIN On the matter of the younger people, that is a consideration, yes. I don't know that I can answer the question at all. One doesn't ever meet younger people over there who give any evidence of having any ideas at all. You see, the whole educational process of the Soviet Union is designed to produce a lot of healthy, extroverted Boy Scouts. The general tendency of the Stalin regime since, say, 1935 is extreme hostility to ideas of any kind, particularly Marxist ideas, because ideas create ferment and ferment stops work, and there is no time for chattering about ideas. The boys are there to work. So you see there is a perpetual indoctrination with simple principles. Few of his contemporaries are men of power. Beria and Voroshilov and Molotov are, I suppose, in power now, but I should think that the younger people are more just tough executives engaged purely in the task of executing a programme which is laid down for them in a black and white way by the Politburo, which is indoctrinated by Stalin. So you will have an army of executives, rather tough and shrewd

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executives, brought up in this rigorous manner, just functioning away, rather more inflexible, possibly not so subtle, possibly not so cautious or war-fearing. Because I think Stalin is a little afraid of war. He has a catholic personality and likes to do things by catholic steps. So, as to the coming generation, it is technological and barbarian at the same time, but not very ideological, no. They have got an idea of the capitalist world: they hate us, we are two worlds, and they are doing one thing and we are doing another. They believe all that, but that is about all the ideology and belief there is.

QUESTION Is it fallacious to suppose that their heavy industry really will make their life easier?

BERLIN That isn't fallacious, no, but life would not become easier while they are surrounded by enemies. That is what they teach: So long as there are a great many people determined upon our destruction, life can't be expected to become much easier. It does become easier from time to time, when the 'zag' occurs after the 'zig', if you remember. I guess you all know the old joke about the ship's steward – the 'zig-zagging' joke, the story about the man who had been an ordinary waiter on land who was asked if he wished to become a steward on board a ship. He took the job and he was perturbed by the way the ship rolled in storms. The Chief Steward told him, 'You'll get used to that. When you carry plates and the ship starts to roll, you just zig when it zigs and zag when it zags.' One day when the steward was carrying dishes and the ship started to roll there was a terrible crash and the Chief Steward came running over to him and said, 'Didn't you do what I told you? Didn't you zig-zag?' The waiter said, 'I tried to, sir, but whenever I zigged the ship *would* zag, and whenever I zagged, the ship *would* zig.'

So that is essentially the position in which Communism in the Soviet Union finds itself, and there isn't a member of the Communist Party who doesn't catch the moment to zig or to zag.

QUESTION You mentioned some time ago in your talk that the Russians do take a certain interest in various conferences on the outside, and so forth. What is the interest of the Russians in taking part in all these conferences? Haven't they a certain genuine interest in being at every conference, and in being recognised as a great power, and not being left out?

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BERLIN They have. I am not denying it. They have a lot of feeling about being left out of anything. That is the old Russian inferiority complex coming to the fore, and I think they felt it in 1945. But I think they have got over it. I think they feel it wasn't worth it. But they feel they have not been treated so well themselves, and when they saw all these things being engaged in against them, they felt it was a piece of suppression of the Soviet Union by capitalistic and hypocritical means, and they felt that being a part of that 'club' meant an equal control. But now I think they have got over that.

QUESTION Why did they go to San Francisco?

BERLIN I suppose they still thought they could get something out of the Security Council.

QUESTION I mean now, the last time?

BERLIN I think they never could quite tell. I feel they may have had two reasons, in fact. One, they felt they might get away with something, and secondly, I think they are afraid of war and think that if they provoke us too much something might happen, so they must keep their hand in things, or we may attack them or something. The great thing is to go to the 'party' that is given by the enemy and keep on speaking terms. Then you have your hand on the pulse of your enemy. They are certainly afraid of what we are going to do.

QUESTION Mr Gerschenkron, our last speaker, seemed to give a different interpretation of Marxist policy in the Soviet Union. He seemed to feel that there was not a question of Marxism at all; that it was more a question of expediency, and that rapid Soviet industrialisation and the continued high rate of investment was merely a method of keeping the Soviet Union in high tension, to give the regime a *raison d'être*, to keep continuous high pressure on the people.

BERLIN There is something in that. I am a great admirer of Professor Gerschenkron. We have always had arguments about this. But I think he is absolutely wrong – well, not absolutely wrong, but three-quarters or 80 per cent, wrong, let's say. It is

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perfectly true that self-perpetuation is a strong factor in the case of a regime that is very 'tight'. Once you loosen it, there is such a thing as holding the bear by the tail. On the other hand, this leads to paradoxical conclusions. It means they are producing a lot of capital goods in order to exist. It is like the way you treat people in the workhouse, make them make ropes from oakum although you don't need the ropes – it is giving them something to do. So you must give the people something to do, otherwise they might begin thinking. There is a lot in that, but I don't believe they are producing a lot of unnecessary goods, just out of pure political expediency or as a political measure. They need the goods desperately, and because of some view they have of the future. And if you consider all the blunders they make in foreign policy ...

QUESTION But Professor Gerschenkron explained the reason for the blunders in the foreign policy. He said they are not really blunders at all; they estranged themselves from the West so that they would have continued reasons for industrialisation; otherwise they would be able to import steel from the West, which would reduce privation on the part of their population.

BERLIN The reason, you mean, for cutting themselves off from the West is to keep the populace in poverty.

QUESTION Or in tension.

BERLIN Tension is all right, but I don't believe they deny themselves or deprive themselves of goods in order to give themselves adversaries.

QUESTION He explained that by saying it was necessary to keep the 'bears' outside Russia. That is to say, if all the rest of the world was their friend, it would mean Russia would have no bugaboo outside.

BERLIN I think it is true that they use the outside world as a sort of bugbear. On the other hand, I think it is a very expensive bugbear to frighten their little children with, and it would be an extreme blunder to hold that you have to have an enemy in order to keep yourself going, to keep up your credit and internal economy. I think that is pretty far-fetched. It would make them

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utterly mad. It would be saying, 'We can have a vital country only if we have an enemy.' That is the argument, you know, that Cato used in Rome, holding that if they were to destroy Carthage there would be nobody left to fight, or contemplate as an enemy, and therefore everybody would become soft. But I can't quite believe the Russian people do that. But I see it is all hypothesis, and all hypotheses are possibilities.

RAW TRANSCRIPT

Raw transcript

(*) enclose IB's MS annotation
Yellow highlight = queried by IB

I am afraid I haven't an idea of what I am going to talk about as regards this subject, "Marxist versus Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy", but I will try to put a few sketches ideas down before you in the order in which they come to my mind.

The chief difficulty with understanding Russian policy has been partly in the attempt by those who write on these matters to compare assess it in terms of Western policy, and there has been a fixed effort made on the part of Western statesmen to interpret this policy along the traditional lines of Western statesmanship. Certainly the Churches and other groups of people have contributed to the confusion in supposing that really the Russians are an imperial people, that Russia is an imperial country, governed by a tough, ruthless gang of roughnecks and opportunists, with no fixed ideologies among them; that even the Marxist¹⁶ Regime has spent itself, and that what remains is simply a residue of the self-interest of ordinary people working under the various factors which the Russian economy requires, and the general exigencies of what you might call the permanent factors of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Well, I must agree with that point of view in some of the things. For one thing, I wouldn't say they were frightfully sophisticated Marxists – I think they are looked upon as sophisticated Marxists. However, I do think there is at the same time an irreducible Marxist 'product' there that has been more or less rubbed out.

I think, therefore, that because of this lack of understanding, this misinterpretation, foreign policy becomes unintelligible. I would lead off with a few rash remarks as to the Russian policy in general. Ordinarily this it is dangerous to speak of national characteristics – polities, and so on, but I think there are certain characteristics which are recognisable. Their susceptibility to ideas, for one thing, is astonishing, in this European culture.

The nineteenth-century Russians were not a rather confused, mystical nation in the sense that they were leading chaotic lives,

¹⁶ 'Marxist' is possibly changed to 'Marxism'.

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indulging in gloomy introspection and liable to blame their ills on all kinds of curious and metaphysical factors, and so forth. That would be a false conclusion to draw of the Russians today. One of the basic characteristics of the Russians is the extreme rigour of their logic, more than with the other nations. True, they are apt to start with peculiar premisses sometimes, and argue them through to a weird conclusion. But what they haven't much of is a certain common-sense control. That is to say, when they are faced with facts, they simply ignore the facts. I think you do different in the West.

Russia was a large country after the Napoleonic Wars, for example, and the Russians had a literature of their own, yet they have not contributed a single political idea. They absorb ideas from others and believe in them with a degree of passion nobody has begun to approach, and they always try to realise them in practice – and when the facts prove obdurate, they simply try to bend the facts.

Marxism came to Russia in the 1850s and it came again in the 1880s. It came twice, and it controlled Russian thought profoundly. It influenced them profoundly, that is.

I will if I may briefly say certain things about certain aspects of Marxism that I think are not ordinarily noted – about the peculiarities of the Marxist view which make it different from other interpretations of history. All previous views presuppose the possibility of a communion between human beings and human action. That is to say, you try to persuade another to your way of thinking, to your view of something, or you try to use force – but really the use of force is primarily intended to make other people come to understand your point of view. Broadly speaking it assumes a purpose, that I am trying to convince you that the means I suggest are better than the means you suggest; that the things I believe in – social organisation, and so on – are the best for you.

Marxism was really the first philosophy in this sense: according to Marxism you have in history the principles of class-conflict – making certain classes rise and other classes fall. All the ideas you possess, all your ideas and opinions and religion and so on, rest on your outlook in terms of the particular position you occupy in the progress, in the development, of the productive forces of the country. At a given moment you have a sort of escalator – one class going downhill, the other going uphill. It is a kind of

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objective fact – it is an actual fact of history. So now the people moving up can afford to look the facts in the face fearlessly because whatever is going to happen is just so much grist to their mill. The rising class are moving up and so those people can afford to look at the facts in a true light, because, as I say, whatever is happening is in their favour. But the people going downward can't afford to look facts in the face. They are facing an abyss, a precipice, and they are about to be exterminated by history – and nobody wants to be 'done in'. So they, in turn, try to interpret the facts in a certain way, or try to 'rationalise' the facts, and persuade themselves that the facts are not as they see them – they don't want to see what they see, or face the horrible fact that they are about to go down into the horrible gulf. And so you have the two classes – the class that can't¹⁷ afford to see the truth in an objective sense; the other class trying to interpret a downward movement as an upward movement, or at least sitting still. The people going down aren't worth looking at, because, after all, they are not in any position to tell what is going on: what's the use? – they are going down. People that are drowning are not the best judges of or experts on the geographical conformation of the neighbourhood, and so on. They are really trying only to stave off a horrible factor that is happening.

The Marxists, by preaching this historical philosophy, said that there is no need to **argue anything**. Everything that the other side said was false in principle – not because they deliberately wanted to tell falsehoods, necessarily, but because the historical situation was such that they were prevented from seeing the truth and they had to conceal the facts **from themselves** in order to hide their approaching doom. This, then, gives strength to the **politics movement** to say to the workers, 'You are going to emerge victorious, you are going to become the winners in the end.' Not only that, but also that you can stop your ears to what the other side is saying, because whether they are sincere or not, they are in no position to judge.

This leads to a position which Lenin adopted, and others thereafter, and the Russians regard other ideas rather in the way, as an analogy, that the psychiatrist regards the patient. If you are armed with Marxist philosophy you can tell what is happening, but the bourgeois world is in no position to tell what is going on. You

¹⁷ ['can?']

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are in a position, like the psychiatrist, to know what is going on. The patient will go on producing words but the words aren't worth listening to, ~~save for only~~ as a description of the facts, but only ~~and~~ for diagnosis. Here, the patient is a homicidal lunatic, because the bourgeois world is doomed; it doesn't know it, but nevertheless it tries to save itself. But the homicidal patient can be a danger and the bourgeois world can be a hazard. Of course, if only they were 'rational' they would realise they were done for, and they wouldn't try to resist. Nevertheless, therefore, although the 'beast' is doomed, it may struggle for life. And if it does, then the psychiatrist is in some danger, because the patient may hit the psychiatrist. He may know all about the patient; he may not listen to what the patient is babbling about – but, nevertheless, the patient may do something fatal. So protection is absolutely necessary. So, in terms of another metaphor, the policeman is aware of the doom of the prisoner, and therefore has to protect himself against the death throes that may occur.

Sometimes people ask whether the Russians contemplate the idea of war. My answer is, I think they do; and they certainly think of war as defensive. And why do ~~I think that~~ they think war is defensive? Well, they think the capitalist system is doomed; regardless of contradictions which might be apparent to others in that supposition they think that it is driven mad and therefore in no position to control itself, but in the course of its death throes it may, in a war, hurt the Soviet Union. It will finally have to surrender to the ~~truth~~ facts, but certainly in its last desperate effort it may attack the Soviet Union through its own inherent weakness, its own innate desperation. It ~~does not~~ says in the book that the ~~Soviet~~ workers – proletariat – will march into the promised land: but it doesn't say the Soviet Union will. And one of the inevitable stages may be a destruction of the Soviet Union by the maddened bourgeoisie. And therefore they wouldn't be human if they didn't try to get to the promised land themselves, and hence the defensive operations are but an attempt to get into such a position that, if the final blow-up comes, they won't be too weak as a country to survive.

You say, 'But even so, why do they think war is inevitable?' Well, first of all, I think all of this talk and writing about the possibilities of two-world existence is just so much claptrap. And about that I would like to say a few words later. But the whole thing rests upon their view of themselves as a kind of psychiatrist,

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to return to our analogy – a psychologist watching the patient. And therefore when we talk softly to them, they take the view that we have mistaken the inevitable course of history and really think it is possible to have two worlds in which we both could exist, and that we are trying a course of action to appease the unappeasable, or are trying to ward off with soft words the inevitable course of history. When we scream or denounce or bully them, again they think ‘Your internal contradictions are getting the better of you; you are becoming maddened, you are saying things which stimulate us to anger, which is but further proof of the fact that you are in a bad way.’ So you see how it is with them – whatever we do we are never taken seriously as ever saying anything that is true, in the light of our ‘historical position’, and so believing or not believing us does not arise. And that is the mental category of Russian foreign policy, I should say.

Another point is that, I think, the leaders genuinely do believe that in some sense they have the key to building a solid structure. They really believe that there are two sorts of period – the revolutionary period and the *laissez-faire* or quiescent period. The revolutionary era is when the capitalistic system boils up to a crisis, and the quiescent era is when the capitalist system is quiescent. And when it is quiescent the stake is to exasperate a crisis, – above all, not to allay it – a favourite conduct with the Germans, when the Russians were with the Nazis and got them into power. This was the result of the mechanical application of the Marxist scheme in which they say a war is only the prelude to revolution. There was a vast upheaval, for example, in the world-wide conflict, and the next thing that was going to happen was a national break-up. But before a break-up, try to allay things – allay unemployment and make the working-class position less acute. «Soc-Dem» But if you are a Communist, oil must be poured on the flames – not water – and so the order was to make things worse in Germany, and you then precipitate a crisis, and it may then lead to the great moment when the enemy forces will break up.

And again, after this war, there was mysterious conduct on the part of the Soviet Union. They made the mistake of letting the Nazis in. They never thought anything like National Socialism would ever come to be. But after the war a mass of goodwill existed. People thought they had been deceived by the Soviet Union, and there was the point of view of a lot of writers and ‘biased’ capitalist writers that they had misled the Soviet Union. Of

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course, they had to some extent – and there was a counter-movement of sympathy, which held that the Soviet Union was just an ordinary imperialist power which had been humiliated by years of neglect and just wanted to acquire status again. But on this they didn't cash in. Instead of practising what I might designate the 'normal hypocrisy' of talking fair and doing foul – trying to 'exploit' the goodwill flowing toward them – they did not do that. The Soviet Union instead proceeded to dissipate all the goodwill felt toward them with very little political cunning. They could have done better just from the standpoint of pure opportunism, if they had chosen.

Why then did they do as they did? No reason, again, other than to anticipate a world slump. And I might say there was good reason for supposing it – without the Marshall Plan it would have been. They anticipated various economic crises, and in times of crisis you don't retreat – you attack. You don't draw in your horns or allay suspicions or become friendly or peaceful, nor pour water on the flames. You pour oil on the flames, to be sure. That was the reason for their astonishing action in throwing away all of that goodwill.

And certainly their internal policy is due also to the way they tend to think of things. Let me say another thing apropos of that. In a way there are nationalistic factors governing Soviet behaviour. It is quite true, when Stalin declared the socialism of one country it could not have been done without expressing the five-year plans. That is why there was always a playing down of the Cominterns and a playing up of Russian national interest, because it led to the successful control of internal affairs and was at the same time an example to the other countries. Of course, every country has to have a minimum of police [political] requirements which a country should pursue. Molotov's 'shopping' with Hitler was similar to that of the Allies in 1935. Of course, many of the things were inherent from other regimes, other eras. It needs so much oil, it needs certain **countries** as frontiers. That may be taken for granted. But what makes Russia mysterious and peculiar can't be found in the reasoning of normal national requirements.

If you look at the history of Russia, of the Soviet Union, you find it is a homogeneity of many nations. Russian patriotism is ultimately something that can't be pushed too rigorously or too far, with the Buriat Mongol and the Tadjik, who in his writings told how Suvorov was a great commander, or the Tartars, who say

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that Peter the Great was a great tsar. Maybe that doesn't mean much to you, but particularly in Asia there are certain questions the people are bound to ask themselves. We say: Why are the Russians particularly excited about these special leaders? In Russia everybody is a Russian or be crucified. And it is a glorious thing to be a subject of the tsar, and so on – but if you are going to feed the public the idea of equal status, there is then really something eccentric about pushing the Asiatics to the Russians as national heroes. They had to play up this Russian nationalism during the war. It stimulated war effort. It was one of the few human feelings which really made them fight with extraordinary courage or made them exited with violent patriotic urges. It was one of the few national sentiments that came to the surface and produced good literature, which hadn't happened in fifteen years or more in the writings of Tarle and others. This however is not an abstract to[?] Marxist devotion, to Marxist ideologies, but it is a heterogeneous expression. That is why they began to pull back on nationalist historians, such as and played up Marxist idealism. It is a sort of see-saw – when they want nationalism, to get things done, they play it up; otherwise they play it down. **For example, the historian Tarle started to write a Tartar history.** At last the Tartars were beginning to understand their own history – and under cover of the Soviet Union it is beginning to bear fruit. Then this book was looked into and found to be a biography of a Tartar chieftain called Idigai in the fifteenth century, who attacked the Russians, and told of his victories and that of other chieftains. Finally somebody realised that that would tend to start a nationalist movement, and it was said that Tartar history really glorified Tartar attacks on the Russian people, and undermined the underlying institutions of the Soviet by sub-nationalities with ideas that were distinctly prejudicial to the Soviet Union, and the book was taken out of circulation and the writer (historian?) 'eliminated'. Another historian wrote a book in '43 about the Crimean War – an interesting book. It was really a variation on the theme of the Crimean War as a great national war, and although the Russians and the tsars were weak, nevertheless it was a vast outburst of Russian sentiment which unified the Russian people. True or false, it was a frightfully popular point of view. But in 1945, when I was there, the *European Review* said that Tartov¹⁸

¹⁸ [Queried by IB.]

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observes two things: he says the Russian people won the war, and secondly the Russians took part in a war they could not afford. The Russian peoples were said never to be able to afford war.

Moreover, Lenin said in one of his books that there was an economic collapse in the Crimean War. But no matter what the Russian tsars did, it is true and clear that this is a deviation from what is the true line of interpretation, and that grave errors had been committed and should be corrected as soon as possible. Tartov[?] did correct them, and a second book appeared, correcting the 'major errors', but not all, and a second and a third edition were put out, and the book is now in its fourth edition, awaiting a review, after three series of successive 'corrections'. I am telling the story only to show why he was 'sat' on.

But the underlying fact there is that, at this particular time in the movement, it was necessary to 'cool down' the national front. Not that they are fanatical believers in ideology. Even I don't think that. I don't think the pure-hearted Marxists are any more concerned with Marxism than with doing the other things that are for power. They did it because the see-saw just works that way – because at the point where there is too much nationalism there is great danger of internal disintegration on the part of Soviet nationalists, and you need to have an 'upping' of the Soviet Union, which is the only link with the people at all. You have to have something – when you haven't the national symbols, you have to have something else. The only thing they have, apart from Stalin-worship, is the fact that all the peoples are supposed to achieve some cosmopolitan ideological structure.

One more thing, if I have the time. There is one thing I would like to add to this. You see the whole subject is a fascinating one, as to the interplay of national and non-nationalistic factors, this balancing at every point in Soviet policy of certain factors, whether it be the spontaneous or the artificial in possession at the moment. It might be called a 'conscious' instrument. It is like during the First French Republic – instead of having a state religion they have a state philosophy. It is an unusual thing for the country to have. And it is more than lip-service. I think the leaders feel 'great' in certain categories of this philosophy.

Now, let me make this last point, which is this – and this particularly emerges in the internal problem. The problem with which they deal is solved by ideological means. It is not so much the presence of Marxist factors, police or political power, but the

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presence of what might be called ‘theoretical ideological factors’, factors founded upon a theory of how history advances or how things are done – a theory of a kind held more consciously there than anywhere else.

For example, one of the chief problems of the Soviet Union was the keeping up of what might be called the tightness of conditions, the extremely low standard of living necessary for the purpose of diverting the losses towards capital goods and the acquiring of armaments that they thought necessary to meet the inevitable blow-out in the world which would certainly expose them to attack from the West. And the people wanted a little let-up. They got a little let-up, but not for long.

You see, much of the problem in any revolution is how to avoid one of two extremes. One extreme is, at the end of a revolution, too much zeal, and the other extreme is (*schumurarai*)¹⁹ or a quick lapse into what might be called an ‘uninspired’ condition in life. You see, you have a revolution and an overthrow of the ‘tyrant’. A new world is about to dawn. Well, the new world doesn’t dawn, because it doesn’t really eliminate the ills against which the revolution was pointed. So a scapegoat is found. Nobody is in effect to blame – it is just how things work. It is a failure, so you have to find something to blame. You then use your scapegoat and to make up for the progressive failure of the revolution – and they proceed to attribute the failure to lack of sufficient intensity and zeal about the revolution. And so they are looking for backsliders. They have to be eliminated, of course. Then more and more the zealots get to be leaders of the revolution themselves. Then there comes the time when they, in turn, have to be stopped. And then you have a kind of collapse and everybody suddenly sits back and the revolution is partially forgotten and the older people say ‘Was this the ideal for which we have made the revolution? How mean and awful and squalid life has become, and how sad it is not to live through the glorious days of the revolution once again!'

¹⁹ (Perhaps ‘slumberai’ – to slumber is here meant.) [This note by the transcriber is off the mark. One possible conjecture is *Schummererei*, which does not appear in German dictionaries, but would mean a ‘twilight condition’, from ‘Schummer’, a dialect term meaning ‘twilight’, and the suffix ‘-erei’ as in ‘Schwärmerei’. But it seems more likely that Berlin said ‘Schlummerei’, which would mean a state of torpor.]

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That is a result of revolution. Somehow you need an abnormal system to offset the excitement of revolution, but the two extremes must always be avoided. And Stalin has in a way done this by creating a zig-zag movement – never going in the one direction too far. His soldiers came back from Romania, and they liked Romania and Bucharest, and they came back from Germany and they had liked it there. So the soldiers are re indoctrinated, and a lot of newspapers suddenly start saying: ‘The purity of the Party is forgotten; our soldiers have become soft. We must re indoctrinate the people.’ And you have a Party purge – which means things are looking too far away from the Directorate. And then, when you have tightened up enough and the purges are purged – and of course you have to be sincere as to the effectiveness of the purge – the ‘witch-hunt’ has stopped. And when it becomes obvious that the new zealots, the people doing the purging, are departing from the Party line, they are denounced and executed. And the populace is very pleased and the people say: At last the Kremlin has heard our prayers and we will have a breathing-spell. And that means that the artists are again permitted to produce a little art and the writers can write a certain amount of literature, and a certain amount of ‘nationalism’ is permitted, and some foreigners are admitted into the Soviet Union, and there is a general softening of the line. And that goes on for a while – until it is noticed that there is too much comfort and there is no work being done in the factories. Everything is too loose. People are leading lives too ordinary for the purpose of a ‘tight’ system. And the important thing is that, in order to make it very tight, you need to screw it up tighter and tighter, to keep people on the run – otherwise people may enjoy themselves so much that they won’t obey with the proper degree of safety. So then you say once more, ‘We are being too patriotic; too nationalistic – we have forgotten Marxist principles. We are forgetting that we are trying to reform the world.’

And there is another purge. And once more you have the ‘zig’ of the line – a ‘zag’ and then a ‘zig’. And once more people start fighting and a lot of people are sent to Siberia, and people ‘stop breathing’, until you get to the point where the people even stop talking. And when the people stop talking they stop working. And so they have to be tickled into consciousness once again, and given more liberty in which to express themselves, and once again you have a softening of the line – and so it has been since 1930, the

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beginning of the Stalin regime. A systematic zig-zagging going on periodically – now tight; now loose; now a certain amount of ordinary opportunism and now a certain amount of Marxism. And that is the way to keep an artificial situation going. Keep people on the run, never let them go too far in any direction. When they are hard, you try to make them soft; when they are soft, you try to make them harder. And because they are never left static, never left settled, never left in the status quo, the condition goes on and on.

So the position of the Russian is rather like leading a perpetual military life. And people who are outside the Soviet Union wonder how such a regime is possible.

Well, when people are in a position like that they go from day to day without great problems if they are reasonably ‘conformist’. But the Party line is really the central factor in Soviet control, because it keeps the thing from over-developing in any direction, so far as to promise[?] the very unnatural discipline imposed upon them. That is the theory I would like to offer you, at any rate.

One more thing, and I shall complete this. The question arises about relations to foreign powers. One of the things to remember is that although some of the leaders are enthusiastic, and the actions of others are characterised by opportunism, their information is bad. Their information about the outside world is muddled and confused, partly because they are victims of the interpretative Marxist system, which tends to pervert their informative material from the start. You have a lot of Soviet diplomats and party agents and Communist Party workers all over the place and they are all reporting information to the Soviet Union. The information always has two interesting characteristics about it. One is that it is almost uniformly friendly to the Party. They are afraid of saying anything unfriendly; they are even afraid of reporting the favourable views of other countries, because they may be accused of misrepresentation, or at least representing the facts in too rosy a light. All Soviet diplomats are in danger of the accusation of trying to whitewash the facts to those in authority. Hence, if you report all the unfriendly and unfavourable things that you hear said, well, you can't very well be suspected of that. And so it may be that is the reason that so many of the facts are distorted in such a peculiar manner – for that very reason. They are terrified, these agents, of being suspected of being too much in tune with, acclimatised to, the thinking and colour of the people

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among whom they sit. And as far as I know they are not allowed to interpret the foreign countries, because there, again, is a danger – that if they explain they may be distorting facts, or producing facts favourable to the foreign nation and unfavourable to the Party. Therefore, if they send in the facts in a raw state, they certainly cannot be accused of any prejudice or bias at all. And so it is that huge masses of information comes in unweighted, unanalysed – and some very peculiar little things emerge. For one thing, the conferees in the Kremlin really don't know what sort of weight to attach to a given set of raw facts.

For example, a conversation occurred between Byrnes and Molotov, in Potsdam, in the course of which Byrnes said something, and then Molotov said something that seemed very odd – he said that something very unfriendly and unfactual, and unlikely, had been said about the Soviet Union by the *Rocky Mountain News*. And then Molotov said, 'I don't understand your press. Is the American government more important than the press, or is the press in this country more important than the government?' And Byrnes tried to explain that the press in the United States was free, and it said what it liked. And Molotov said, 'But, look here, if the government is more powerful than the press they could stop the press, from saying unfriendly things about the Soviet Union. But you say they can't do that, that the *Rocky Mountain News* is a free newspaper. If it is a free newspaper and the government can't interfere, then in a certain sense the press is more powerful than the government. And in that case why have a government? Why shouldn't the people just talk straight to the press?' And therefore, you see, AP and UP correspondents in Russia have to go straight to Stalin, because they have this simple formulation of how things work abroad; and this odd view of how things happen abroad is due to the fact that the information that comes in is boiled up by little 'experts' in accordance with the rigid rules of the leaders. And therefore they feel that the government of the United States is controlled by the Press. And the representatives of the AP and UP just listen, at present, in Moscow. It is a peculiar trend of thought – a sort of inverted logic. Yet the Russians cannot be accused of ignoring logic. The facts may not be true, but never, never accuse the Russians of lack of logic!

In respect to England, for instance – there is an example of Soviet thinking for you. The first story is along these lines: 'How

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did the British Empire become so great? It's just a little island.' Well, in the first place by the presence on its shores of a lot of Machiavellian thinkers – ruthless, and with unscrupulous policies. And that is how that small island kingdom could come to control things abroad. And they really believe that. Consequently, whenever the English make a move, it is inevitable that the Russians feel that it is a deep and dark and far-flung scheme – which, incidentally, I assure you, in the British Foreign Office is less the truth than anything can be! Telegrams and correspondence of the simplest kind produce sinister and vague interpretation in the Russian mind. The Russian interpretation is that every act is formulated by sinister, Machiavellian thinkers, for a long-term policy of some kind.

Now, what used to happen is this. The British make a move; the Russians make a counter-move to what they conceived was the British 'scheme'. As the British, however, couldn't and didn't know about this scheme, the Russian counter-move appeared to be irrational, and there was a certain amount of indignation over what the Russians did. The indignation only went to prove to the Russians that they had touched on the right spot. They had really struck home, to the heart of the 'conspiracy'. And so whatever happened, well, it just happened – there was nothing you could do about it, nothing you can do is right. You see, if you have a hypothesis to the effect that every fact is **ridiculous** and the opposite of every fact is equally ridiculous, it is hard to shake that hypothesis. That is why discussing or arguing with the Russians is difficult.

For example, take their interpretation of Hess. This came from three or four sources in Russia. They said that Hess had arrived in England, and he had arrived in England in order to ask the British to stop the war with the Germans. Well, that is exactly what Hess did do. But they then said that the English accepted Hess's plan and signed a secret treaty whereby the Germans would stop the war immediately they attacked the Russians – but that when the Germans attacked the Russians the English attacked the Germans and cut the Russians in the back. That was right along their line of thinking and was their idea of the English plans. And, as a matter of fact, the Russians thought it was a clever move. (Laughter) They thought they were right to trust the Germans in the first place, and, secondly, that the English were more hostile to them than the Germans, and that they were responsible for the German attack.

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And all the diplomats in Russia say that, when America was neutral, one thing that astonished the Russians was the fact that, when the Germans attacked, there was not a British ship anywhere around Russia.

Those stories just go to show the degree of blindness of the Russians about what actually goes on in the outside world. It is not attributable to stupidity, to a stupid or blind people or a people that didn't understand material interests, but to the kind of blindness, let us say, that affects people who are the victims of a fanatical structure. Because of the British behaviour they thought the British had more interest in the Nazis, and therefore they had to go with the Germans at that particular moment, and that if they didn't do that the opposite would be contradictory to solidarity in the capitalist world, and they were then faced with the danger of such solidarity, and when faced with the choice of observing facts and acting upon hypotheses, they act on hypotheses. Or so it seems to me – and all their blindnesses in the Korean War, are not the consequences of stupidity or defective thinking on the part of the Russians, because during the nineteenth century, while they didn't show themselves to be particularly brilliant, their policies led to an intelligent footing with the rest of the world. But it does show a peculiar addiction to ideas, to ideological structures, and at the expense of what might be called the normal national interest of a large State.

You hear people say, 'Russia is an imperial country and it is simply a continuation of the tsarist empire.' This I would like to deny. An imperialist country acquires countries and territory for glory or for strength. I think as a matter of actual fact the Russians are not doing it for either glory or strength. They are always afraid of new populations, where you have to go through a long process of communisation. It's a nuisance suddenly to have a group of new Europeans on your hands; it is expensive and it is precarious when you set out to try to convert great masses of people to a doctrine or religion or formula that they never quite come to believe. They do it, I think, because they genuinely believe that inevitably, sooner or later, there will come an attack upon them by the 'beast at bay', because of the logic of history, and they must therefore defend themselves against the inevitable. It is a logic directed by or based on extremely misleading foundations.

And there I think perhaps I should stop, and perhaps you will have questions which we shall try to answer.

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Question and answer period

QUESTION Considering your hypothesis or analogy of the psychologist and his patient, what should the Western world's stand be?

ISAIAH BERLIN I think they are mistaken, the Russians, and since they are mistaken, there is nothing to do. If you are going to accept the assumption that that is their interpretation of how history moves, then I think you want to protect yourself militarily against their interpretation of your moves, and yet in some manner not induce them to do something unwise, and, well, continually don't get in war yourself. You see, after all, if there is no war, and still no war, and so on, there may be no war. So the only advice I can think of is: Keep on, and do not make wars. Not that I think continual containment is a Utopian policy. You can't obtain rational communion with people that listen to your words simply to seek to discover the symptoms of a psychological condition. But you can have an insulated state of affairs until matters perhaps improve somewhat, and after all one can never tell what the future holds.

And so, it is a *modus vivendi* – *modus non vivendi* – and it is a perpetual and irritating state of non-war which we have at the moment. But what else can you do? If you know that somebody is a psychiatrist and he wants to confine you in a strait-jacket, and you know you are not mad, and you think he is mad, and may want to kill him, there is no use in killing him, because things don't remain the same in history for a long time. Well, then, what do you do? You take adequate steps to avoid seeing him or being treated by him. What else can you do?

QUESTION I wonder if there is any noticeable conception in their thinking that the action of the psychiatrist might actually help to cure the patient – in the sense that if they frighten us they will maintain a high level of prosperity?

BERLIN No, I think not. The question is: Why do the Russians force us to rearm? Would it not be wiser on their part to move softly and purr, and not roar and bellow? Well, I'll tell you: that

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would be a sensible thing to say, no doubt, of any country that behaves in a sane manner. Any country is aware it should not terrify other countries into something. The last thing you want to do is shout so loudly, without wanting war. If you believe that the capitalistic system forces us to behave in a manner that sooner or later causes a conflict, then we will probably arm, and – don't you see? – what is the good? All the people advise them, as Litvinov did, to be tactful. Why should they force us to re-arm? But that made no sense, because it was like saying – well, they think of us as a wild animal that can't be stopped, and since it can't be stopped, the idea of saying 'You can manage to deceive them by talking softly, and appease and cajole them' means you have gone or are going against the course of history. It is one of the things we just can't help doing, they think, that is, prepare ourselves for the great conflict that is coming. You see, their policy of power politics is working out our objective position on the map, whether it be known to us or not, and proceeding accordingly. They can't help but feel they are the strongest natural enemy, and being in such a position and being such an enemy the people must arm. They feel that is the only course for a people put in the position of being driven into a conflict – and which they themselves have 'rationalised' themselves into. They must get us to cave in so that they can better meet the fact that it is historically inevitable does occur.

The problem arose about the atomic bomb in 1945. It made them frightfully humiliated. If they had been told about it they would not have been humiliated so much. It is true, the atomic bomb made them frightened and made them rearm and made them hostile to us. If they had not been frightened, they would perhaps have proceeded softly in Europe. It was at that moment they started to be aggressive, although they really did start to be slightly aggressive before the atomic bomb.

But whatever you do, it is a dilemma. If you talk softly it is interpreted as a delusion of the possibility of peace, and if you talk loudly it is interpreted as the neurotic scream of a victim. When the leaders of capitalism are beginning to make themselves felt inside the country, it is a sign of advancing disease on our part, making it profitable for them to accelerate our doom – not necessarily to attack us. No, they might lose, they don't want that. But certainly to give history a little push here and there and irritate us to achieve 'your inevitable destruction' a little faster. But what is

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never any good is trying to deceive us into something they want to prevent us from doing. It is like trying to deceive a drowning man into supposing he is on dry land and is not drowning at all. You can't. There is no telling him things in the hope that he will do something to keep him from doing that which he is doing.

That is what puzzles the observers of Russia. They see it is suicidal. Why are they frightening us? The argument is, 'Whether we frighten them or not, they will do the same.'

QUESTION It would follow, then, that it didn't make things worse for us to publish that Collier's article last fall.

BERLIN Nothing makes it worse, from the point of view of the Russians. If you are thinking in terms of how the Russians react, it may of course put a few extra arrows into their quiver, and they are all the more capable of using it as propaganda to the people outside and those within, but to the leaders it doesn't make a particle of difference.

QUESTION If there should be no war and countries like England should pass gradually into a state of socialism, how would it affect Russia, do you think?

BERLIN As a monstrous betrayal of the Russian nation itself. Self-perpetuation is one of the extreme requirements of the Russian. It would be 'typical bourgeois deception', whereby the workers, instead of being collectivised or putting them in the position of 'petty bourgeoisie', as they would interpret it. It wouldn't make much difference. They would rather the British didn't become socialistic on the whole, because if you believe in Marxist stereotypes you would rather see the capitalistic system. They would rather see Churchill as the Prime Minister, because, you see, they conceive of him as a capitalist, and it would make the teaching of political theories in schools so much easier. (*laughter*) To that extent I think they would prefer the black blacker, rather than masquerading in various tones of gray or pink, you see.

QUESTION Do you think of Stalin, personally, as being responsible for the 'zig-zag' policy?

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BERLIN Yes, I think it is his one great contribution to the Soviet government.

QUESTION Do you think of Stalin, then, as having taught people the technique of it?

BERLIN Well, I think people have worked with him so long that they have come to learn it and believe it. Lenin never believed in acquiring techniques, that is, he thought any clerk or laundress or peasant could be taught anything in three days, and his economic policy wasn't zig-zag, it was direct and it was a disappointment. Stalin's was a popular move, therefore, to let Russia survive. Stalin wants to see what is in the mind of the populace. And the Politburo is indoctrinated with this policy. You have to have no impeding; yet you can't keep it tight all the time; you have to stop pushing at times. And that is a delicate question, a question of balance.

QUESTION About this zig-zag policy, doesn't that mostly affect the intellectual thought of the country, and how far does it really affect the common man in the Soviet Union?

BERLIN He feels it to the extent that he is a Party member. He wouldn't feel it if he were not. I think if he is a Party member, though, he would. True, it would affect the intelligentsia, but it goes further than that, because, you see, the purpose of the zig-zag is to keep the whole thing tight. It affects the common man in that he has been perpetually taught the lesson of orthodoxy. That affects the common man in that this idea of oscillating, now a zig and now a zag, never quite puts him out of court, so to speak, and he comes finally to get the idea that you must think in terms of a 'directive'. If it was always the same directive, however, then the idea, you see, would become dull and grey. But if the party keeps them up to the mark, well, it's a shrewd thing to do and I take my hat off to him. (*laughter*)

QUESTION Then definitely that would disagree with Kenyon's (?)²⁰ point of view as to the cyclical nature of things. That is, that there is a rise and fall to the system of the Western powers?

²⁰ [The query is in the transcript. 'Kennan's'? 'Keynes's'?]

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BERLIN You mean that there are times when it is possible to live peacefully with them?

QUESTION Yes.

BERLIN Sorry. Well, you see, on the one hand you have to keep the revolution going inside Russia, and on the other hand there is a Marxist principle or theory that there are revolutionary and quiescent situations; and in the revolutionary situation you make things worse, and in the quiescent situation you agree with other parties and you cool off and are peaceful and gentle, and you identify yourself, if you can, with other causes, and you talk peacefully.

QUESTION Then they don't coincide, you say?

BERLIN No, I say they coincide. The rhythm inside Russia has nothing to do with the outside system.

QUESTION Then you mean you can 'zig' inside and 'zag' outside, is that it?

BERLIN You can indeed. You have many cases of that, in which conformity is expected from the parties outside, and inside you have comparative relaxation after the extreme tightness of a year ago, say. The two things are illustrations of a belief that you operate as you operate a machine. You have to co-ordinate a little bit for the benefit of the Communist Party, but the Communist Party is the first to go if inconsistencies have to be admitted.

Oh, yes, certainly at the end of the war in Russia you had a lot of internationalist sentiment, and over here too a lot of stuff went on about the Two Worlds idea of peaceful co-existence being possible and that Communism was only an exaggerated system of liberalism. It was precisely at that time, however, that inside the Soviet Union, in 1944, many things were going on in Russia quite at odds with this internationalist sentiment – a lot of Tartars were being punished, representatives of small nationalist groups were being abolished, and a general tightening was observed. So I don't think the two are tied up at all.

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QUESTION You mentioned Litvinov. Do you think he had a different outlook?

BERLIN Yes, I think he did have, but he was never a man of much importance – far less important than anybody thought. He was not a member of the Politburo, but a sort of agent. I think he was a rather dull-minded professional negotiator, and just given directions by the Politburo, which he tried to carry through; and over many years of sheer diplomatic activity he acquired something, and on the whole believed that you could manage to stave off the inevitable disaster. And I think inside the Politburo there is a kind of genuine belief that it is no good, that peaceful existence of any kind is a chimera. And Litvinov, I think, half believed in it, but never expressed it to them, or at least never stressed it.

QUESTION Do you think this idea of the Comintern was in a way sincere or do you think it was just?

BERLIN I feel this way about it: Yes, I think it was sincere in that they thought they had to have a sort of peaceful period. At Dumbarton Oaks I think they believed in international security, although never for one moment did they feel it was important. They believed in the Security Conference because they thought they wanted peace in the world – not a lot of small wars going on from time to time and resultant insecurities. And they have got respect for force – for armies and navies and air forces. Therefore they thought that if they could come to accept the sphere of influence idea, which the British believed in, and I think Roosevelt believed in, some arrangement of binding the air forces and armies and navies of the world, that would be a good thing to do. That was a tough sort of step, but one which in 1944 I think they believed in. I know diplomats were surprised at the time by the size of the step forward the Russians made at the time. But the idea of having three big bosses arrange the whole thing, you see – the three leaders of the world, with their armies and navies and air forces – they could easily sit on unruly countries. But they felt genuinely doubled-crossed when Mr Byrnes started tampering with elections in Bulgaria, and as to Romania, their belief that some arrangement had been come to between the other parties was a genuine belief, I think. And they abolished the Comintern as a

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sheer nuisance. The Comintern had been exceedingly useless in the 1930s, and it was a small price to pay, I think.

QUESTION Despite their belief that the bourgeoisie of the West are becoming more desperate in their position, isn't it possible that they believed that the anticipation of the vast consequences of atomic warfare would act as a deterrent?

BERLIN To whom? I don't understand.

QUESTION To the West.

BERLIN The atomic bomb dropped on the Russians you mean?

QUESTION No, that the West would in any case resort to warfare.

BERLIN I don't understand. What do they think would be acting as a deterrent, for whom?

QUESTION To the extent to which they ignore policies and judgements by the West, I wondered what their judgement is concerning the desires of the West to become involved in atomic warfare.

BERLIN I don't think they think in terms of desires. They think sooner or later there is to be a war. The West may not wish it, but they can't help it. The atomic bomb doesn't make much difference to them. If there is going to be war the atomic bombs will be used. The presence or absence of atomic bombs may make things come sooner or come later but that is a matter of little details. They feel, 'We of the Soviet Union must be powerful enough to survive it or possibly win it.'

QUESTION It is only a matter of detail to them, then?

BERLIN Why shouldn't it be? If you really believe in the mystical and metaphysical hour, which they believe inevitably must come, a new weapon is not going to abolish that. It may precipitate things, just as the invention of gunpowder made conquest by certain European countries, and thereby the development of larger States, come faster, that's all. But if you believe in Marxist philosophy,

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this is going to happen anyway. If atomic bombs were not invented now, some other horrible weapon would be invented by the Peruvians, perhaps fifty years hence. And so they have to have atomic bombs, too. That's all it comes to. But it can't make a difference. In fact, I never understood why all the fuss is made by the historians over the atomic bomb. Somehow they felt all the mores and politics and so on were going to be changed. It is more destructive, to be sure, but weapons were frightfully destructive before that. But if you think what people once thought of poison gas – the terror couldn't be much greater than that was conceived to be.

QUESTION I would like to push the first question regarding our own policies. It would seem your analysis would suggest the wisdom of playing up the development of sound economic structures in the countries of the free world. And to follow up the analogy of the psychiatrist, I should think that if I were the doctor in Russia and saw the patient doing the things we are doing – looking at the European patient and seeing the policy of containment – I should feel completely insecure and driven to do something drastic.

BERLIN It depends on what you mean by 'containment'. Do you mean by that sitting on the porch and doing nothing?

QUESTION I mean, don't you have the power to impress Russia? A show of bellicosity, of power?

BERLIN Any display of power on the part of the Western world is going to frighten them to some extent, yes. But you mustn't go too far, or take steps for the purpose of frustrating them. Such a move would precipitate them on your neck. Secondly, if we allow the state of *Lebensraum* to exist here, then you progressively weaken yourself. But whichever you do, it must be a kind of utilitarian balance – ordinary statecraft, the old-fashioned balancing factors, balance of power and so forth. I would agree that if we denude ourselves we will ruin ourselves, internally – it's the lion on one side of the river and the crocodile on the other. It has to be a sort of step-by-step policy. If it looks bad economically we curtail our weapons. If not we get more. It is just the ordinary requirement of countries balancing their various departments.

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QUESTION My question really is: whether the balance we are now seeking is appropriate.

BERLIN It is too precarious a foray. It can't be anything else. The opposite idea is a substantial freezing-up of the existing arrangement. I don't think the Russians will let us do that. I think we have to have strong nerves, and have a frontier guard action with which we avoid major conflict by having powerful nerves, indeed by not being provoked any more than the minimum, but in the meantime we have to pay.

QUESTION You said, I think, that so long as there was a war or wasn't a war, things would go on. Does that mean the extreme ideal of anticipating that the Marxist idea might be replaced by something else – and what else?

BERLIN No telling. On the whole the hope is that when people are building a hypothesis which is a pseudo-scientific hypothesis which people believe is founded on evidence, and it goes on being unverified, it melts. But it may not melt if you insist on holding the theory in the face of facts, just as the belief in astrology went on in spite of Ptolomean astronomy. So if you say 'What happens next?' I don't know what happens when theories weaken. Other theories replace them, I guess, and unless there is a mass-production of a new kind of religion, there is no telling, as far as I can see.

QUESTION If, as you say, no matter what we do their hypothesis is validated, I don't see how you can answer the question.

BERLIN For the moment that is true, I mean so far, as it has been since the 1930s. By the year 2,000 we may have been able to tip it over. The only analogy I can think of is the Turks. They did get to the gates of Vienna, and were repulsed, and then were contained. You know, there had been the Crusades, when people felt strongly about the 'Infidels', and so on, and then as the Turks became a potential ally they became a close member of the European system. Yet the Turks had been 'theoretically wicked' – all sorts of sinister stories went about in the back of the Turkish system. But apart from certain differences in Amsterdam and Potsdam and so forth, there is a certain crumb to be afforded by sitting tight and

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eventually getting somewhere. One must not move ahead too fast in chess. It is more the muddling-through policy of the British. History changes so much and so quickly that people who think with a certain fixity invariably frustrate themselves.

QUESTION Do you think that Stalin's genius for that sort of thing has a great deal to do with the present, well, success or stability of the regime? That is, do you think that after his death things might change?

BERLIN Oh dear – after his death! I think he is a frightfully good keeper-in-being of systems, a frightfully good tightener of an extremely abnormal system, and frightfully good at how far to go and not go. I think he has a great deal of talent in the actual art of management. He is not a Western statesman, he is more like an extremely shrewd oriental tyrant, or people in Mexico, or the Turks and so forth. And I think that one of the things which keeps the Russian system stable is that in the late 1920s he assembled people who would stick to him; or at least I think at some stage they must have decided, the members of the Politburo, that it was safer to stick to one man. It is the usual thing one finds in conspiracies. People will say, 'If we don't agree with Stalin, nobody here is safe.' It is a kind of fetish. Everybody has accepted the dogma that he is wise and right. It keeps the Politburo in a state of stability, so long as they are loyal to the same man. Everyone gives up rights to a single security-producer. After his death, I think – well, I don't think you will get a lot of upheaval there. I am sure they have arranged for that. I think that among the satellites there may be ferment, and once Stalin is gone nobody will be quite sure who is in power, and 'Whom shall we listen to?' and 'Whom shall we cultivate?' may be questions that will arise, and little Titos will spring up here and there. And once the satellites begin to ferment a bit, then they may get frightened, and get frightfully fussed and rattled. And if that happens they may do something rash. Then I think something awful might happen. But that is the kind of danger that might be potentially present. But not in Russia itself, I think – it is all frightfully laid out. But the first Premier of the Georgian Republic, Zhordaniia, he is in Paris now, and Prince Tseretelli is a nice distinguished person – he is well over eighty-five, and is now in New York, I think. So I think the problem won't arise too soon.

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QUESTION Thinking of the present boundaries remaining where they are unless somebody in the West makes a mistake in the policy so as to fulfill the Russian hypothesis ...

BERLIN Which would mean what? War?

QUESTION Not necessarily war ...

BERLIN I agree about the frontiers because I think the Russian policy is set and fixed and nothing we say is going to alter that.

QUESTION Supposing, though, there is, say, economic chaos in Italy. It becomes a satellite country, say, then their hypothesis with respect to Italy would be fulfilled.

BERLIN Now I see what you mean. I didn't follow your point. I think it is true. As far as frontiers are concerned, it seems to me it is certainly impossible to wrest countries from the hands of fanatics that believe in undemonstrable hypotheses except by force.

QUESTION Then would you go on to say that nothing we can do will actually change that policy?

BERLIN Facts would. Facts alter action, or action alters facts, yes.

QUESTION Coming back to your point of Marxist ideology in Russian policy. Do you think that has changed a bit? I want to say I really think some factor – or let me ask this: I really think some factor of seeming strength in the past has been an ideological factor in the Russian past, but, aside from the ideological or the intellectual condition, would you say that the generation of Stalin had a different feeling than the younger people that are coming up?

BERLIN On the matter of the younger people, that is a consideration, yes. I don't know that I can answer the question at all. One doesn't meet younger people over there who ever give any evidence of having any ideas at all. You see, the whole educational process of the Soviet Union is designed to produce a lot of

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healthful, extroverted Boy Scouts. The general tendency of the Stalin regime since, say, 1935 is extreme hostility to ideas of any kind, particularly Marxist ideas, because ideas create ferment and ferment stops work and there is no time for chattering about ideas. The boys are there to work. So you see there is a perpetual indoctrination with simple principles. Few of his contemporaries with power are men of power – Beria and Voroshilov and Molotov, who are, I suppose, in power now – I suppose they are in power now, but I should think that the younger people were more just tough executives engaged purely in the task of executing a programme which is laid down for them in a black and white way by the Politburo and that is indoctrinated by Stalin. So you will have an army of executives, rather tough and shrewd executives, brought up in this rigorous manner, just functioning away, rather more inflexible, possibly not so subtle, possibly not so cautious or war-fearing. Because I think Stalin is a little afraid of war. He has a catholic personality and likes to do things by catholic steps. So, as to the coming generation, it is sort of technological and barbarian at the same time, but not very ideological, no. They have got the ideas of the capitalist world; they hate us, we are two worlds, and they are doing one thing and we are doing another. They believe all that, but that is about all the ideology and belief there is.

QUESTION Is it fallacious to suppose that their heavy industry really will make their life easier?

BERLIN That isn't fallacious, no, but life would not become easier while we are being surrounded by enemies. That is what they teach. So long as there are a great many people determined upon our destruction, life can't be expected to become much easier. It does become easier from time to time, when the 'zag' occurs from the 'zig', if you remember, and I guess you all know the old joke about the ship's steward – the 'zig-zagging' joke, the story about the man who had been an ordinary waiter on land who was asked if he wished to become a steward on board a ship. He took the job and he was perturbed by the way the ship rolled in storms. The Chief Steward told him, 'You'll get used to that. When you carry plates and the ship starts to roll, you just zig when it zigs and zag when it zags.' One day when the steward was carrying dishes and the ship started to roll there was a terrible crash and the Chief

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Steward came running over to him and said, 'Didn't you do what I told you? didn't you zig-zag?' The waiter said, 'I tried to, sir, but whenever I zipped the ship *would* zag, and whenever I zagged, the ship *would* zip.'

So that is essentially the position in which Communism in the Soviet Union finds itself, and there isn't a member of the Communist Party who doesn't catch the moment to zig or to zag.

QUESTION You mentioned some time ago in your talk that the Russians do take a certain interest in various conferences on the outside, and so forth. What is the interest of the Russians in taking part in all the conferences? Haven't they a certain genuine interest in being in every conference and in being recognised as a great power, and not being left out?

BERLIN They have. I am not denying it. They have a lot of feeling about being left out of anything. That is the old Russian inferiority complex coming to the fore and I think they felt it in 1945. But I think they have got over it. I think they feel it wasn't worth it. But they feel they have not been treated so well themselves, and when they saw all these things being engaged in against them, they felt it was a piece of suppression of the Soviet Union by capitalistic and hypocritical means, and they felt that being a part of that 'club' meant an equal control. But now I think they have got over that.

QUESTION Why did they go to San Francisco?

BERLIN I suppose they still thought they could get something out of the Security Council.

QUESTION I mean now, the last time?

BERLIN I think they never could quite tell. I feel they may have had two reasons, in fact. One, they felt they might get away with something, and secondly, I think they are afraid of war and think if they provoke us too much something might happen, so they must keep their hand in things, or we may attack them or something. The great thing, you see, is to go to the 'party' that is given by the enemy and keep on speaking terms. Then you have your hand on the pulse of your enemy. They are certainly afraid of what we are going to do.

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QUESTION Mr Gerschenkron, our last speaker, seemed to give a different interpretation to the question of Marxist policy in the Soviet Union. He seemed to feel, I think, that there was not a question of Marxism at all; that it was more a question of expediency, and that actually the question of Soviet rapid industrialisation and the continued high rate of investment was merely a method of keeping the Soviet Union in high tension, to give the regime a *raison d'être*, to keep continual high pressure on the people.

BERLIN There is something in that. I am a great admirer of Professor Gerschenkron. We have always had arguments about this. But the point is, I think, he is absolutely wrong, because I think what follows – well, not absolutely wrong, but three-quarters or 80 per cent, wrong, let's say, because I think, you see, it is perfectly true that self-perpetuation is a strong factor in the case of the regime that is very 'tight'. Once you loosen, I mean, there is such a thing as holding the bear by the tail. But, on the other hand, you see, it leads to paradoxical conclusions. It means they are producing a lot of capital goods in order to exist. It is like the way you treat people in the workhouse, make them make ropes from oakum although you don't need the ropes – it is giving them something to do. So you must give the people something to do, otherwise they might begin thinking. There is a lot in that, but I don't believe they are producing a lot of unnecessary goods, just for the pure political expediency or as a political measure purely. What I mean is, I think they need the goods desperately, and because of some view they have of the future. And if you consider all the blunders they make in foreign policy ...

QUESTION But Professor Gerschenkron explained the reason for the blunders in the foreign policy. He said they are not really blunders at all; they estrange themselves from the West so they would have continued reasons for industrialisation; otherwise they would be able to import steel from the West, which would not mean privation on the part of their population.

BERLIN The reason, you mean, for cutting themselves off from the West is to keep the populace in poverty.

RAW TRANSCRIPT

QUESTION Or in tension.

BERLIN Tension is all right, but I don't believe they deny themselves or deprive themselves of goods in order to give themselves adversities.

QUESTION He explained that by saying it was necessary to sort of keep the 'bears' outside of Russia. That is to say, if all the rest of the world was their friend, it would mean Russia would have no bugaboo outside.

BERLIN I think it is true that they use the outside world as a sort of bugbear. On the other hand, I think it is a very expensive bugbear to frighten their little children, but it would be an extreme blunder to hold that you have to have an enemy in order to keep yourself going, to keep up your credit and internal economy. I think that is pretty far-fetched. It would make them utterly 'mad'. It would be saying, 'We can have a vital country only if we have an enemy.' That is the argument, you know, that Cato used in Rome, holding that if they are going to destroy Carthage there would be nobody left to fight, or contemplate as an enemy, and therefore everybody would become soft. But I can't quite believe the Russian people do that. But I see it is all hypothesis, and all hypotheses are possibilities.

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