Peter Kapitsa

Peter Kapitsa is one of the leading Soviet physicists. He made the speech printed below at a meeting of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR on February 28 this year.

The article of Academician A. D. Sakharov to which he refers is a letter sent to L. Brezhnev and A. Kosygin in June 1968. This letter has been published by Andre Deutsch under the title Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom. A xerox version is available through ALR on application. (20 cents plus postage 5 cents. Post free to ALR subscribers.)

I LISTENED with interest to the report of Comrade Froloff about the perspective for work for the magazine Questions of Philosophy, because of his well timed question of the future development of the ideology underlying our socialist society. I think that we in the Academy of Sciences insufficiently value the significance of the philosophical questions of our era.

The future historian will, no doubt, examine our century as a struggle between two systems of organisation of society. This struggle is taking place in several fields; economic, political and ideological. The development of our state for half a century following the October revolution has shown that the socialist system of society is fully viable. Comparing it with the most highly developed capitalist system, the USA, one can affirm with complete objectivity, that in the basic fields of material and cultural development, for example, in public education, in the development of science and defence capacity, both countries have now achieved approximately identical levels. The only field in which we still lag behind is that of industrial-technical developments. Fundamentally, this is caused by the fact that the productivity of labour in the USSR has still not reached the level of the USA. In any case, in studying the direction towards higher levels of our industrial production, the similarity of the two systems — socialist and capitalist — as bases for the development of the material culture of society, now becomes obvious.

In such circumstances the question is now more and more a struggle between the ideological fundamentals on which these two systems are developed. Philosophy defines these ideological principles as they are expressed between the individual and society. As is known, at the foundation of the ideology of capitalist society lies, in the first place, the ambition of the individual for material welfare. At the foundation of socialist ideology is the aspiration
to develop all society in its entirety, and the all-sided development of the personality appears as a necessary condition for this. Therefore in socialist society, creative and aesthetic qualities of the personality are highly valued and society aspires to develop them. The contradictions in the attitude to the individual in both forms of society are the essence of the ideological struggle of these two systems. Thanks to the current scientific-technical revolution, both societies are now able to achieve full material welfare, irrespective of the principles on which public economy is developed. In these circumstances that social structure will be the more progressive where the spiritual qualities of the individual develop most fully; to the extent that this is the basis for man's fullest existence.

It is well known that in recent years a revolutionary movement of a mass character has grown up in capitalist countries, especially among young people.

This movement is developing in all the most advanced capitalist countries and students appear as its leaders. The forces giving rise to this movement are still not fully understood, but it is already established that this movement is not sparked by dissatisfaction with the material conditions of the individual in society. It is directed towards a change in those ideological conditions in capitalist society with which the individual has to contend in his life and work. By such means, the advanced forces in capitalist countries without any influence from outside, spontaneously pose the question of the need to re-examine the ideology on which capitalist society is based.

Along what path will this re-examination travel? Who will create that program of reconstruction which the advanced part of society will accept, and which will lead it correctly to the progress of humanity? Obviously, it will be decided in the process of ideological struggle between various philosophies — a struggle which has already begun and is quickly developing.

Must we take part openly in this struggle? What must be our role in this struggle? Doubtless the ideas and principles underlying the construction of communist society, as presented by Marxism, are the only ones which can direct this struggle in the right direction.

This is now admitted by the advanced section of humanity. At present a search is going on for the concrete ways to most effectively develop this revolutionary movement. This search occurs in the process of struggle between the ideologies of new formations, such as for example, Marcuse. Trotskyists take part in the struggle and Garaudy and others who are ideologically closer to us.

We must not be frightened to admit that we are ideologically isolated from this revolutionary process, and that in practice, our
influence is absent. This is not normal. It stands in contradiction to the fact of the very successful existence of our socialist society that the example of our society cannot influence this revolutionary movement.

How can we most effectively take part in these revolutionary processes, taking place in capitalist society? Why has this isolation occurred? Apparently, it happened because, during all these years, our fundamental efforts were concentrated only on the introduction of the principles of socialism through the development of our public economy and not also on the necessary development of our ideology. This has led to stagnation, which has already been discussed more than once. Now, in order not to lag behind in the development of advanced thought, and taking into account the repercussions of the current world-wide scientific-technical revolution, we must raise the level of our social sciences.

Therefore, we in the Academy of Sciences must value highly the aspirations of the editorial staff of the magazine *Questions of Philosophy* in promoting the development of philosophy, and in particular of having the aim to exert an influence on the development of the social thought of the now current revolutionary movement in capitalist countries.

But in order to exert this influence, we must take part in the ideological struggle occurring there. In this struggle, our philosophers will have to perform on an equal footing, the same as our sportsmen do. It is necessary to say that our ideologists will lose the privilege which they have in our country, where the censor preserves them with care from contrary views. In the impending struggle, this will not be so. There all will be judged by open criteria.

As is well known, the clash of views is the basis of development of any creative work. An example of the fear of our social scientists of this clash is their attitude to the well known article of academician A. D. Sakharov. One of the question raised in this article touches on those principles on which the mutual relations of capitalism and socialism must be founded in order that nuclear war, which would doubtless end in a world catastrophe, will be avoided.

This question is exceptionally important in present conditions, because its correct solution will determine the possibility of existence of all humanity. It is known that Sakharov's article was thoroughly analysed abroad in the most diverse strata of society when both supporters and opponents of his proposals made the question of the mutual relations of the two systems a matter of public discussion.

It is obvious that only in the process of discussion can a vital solution be found to the questions posed. In the circumstances it
is quite understandable why our ideologists, up to this time, have ignored an examination of the questions raised by Sakharov but only by having a clear-cut and well-grounded solution to these questions can we exert an ideological influence on the revolutionary development of society now beginning in the capitalist camp. Otherwise from being an advanced country we will return to the position of a backward one.

I therefore propose that the presidium support the program advanced by the new editorial staff of the magazine *Questions of Philosophy*, to the extent that this program has the aim of raising its international influence, and the presidium of the Academy of Sciences should make available more time for the consideration of philosophical questions central to the ideological basis of the building of socialist society.

At present, on the presidium, this theme is in practice absent from our scientific reports. It is necessary to change, and I consider it expedient to start with the examination of the basic questions posed in the article of Academician Sakharov.

**FROM THE SAKHAROV LETTER**

**THE DIVISION** of mankind threatens it with destruction. Civilisation is imperilled by: a universal thermonuclear war, catastrophic hunger for most of mankind, stupefaction from the narcotic of "mass culture," and bureaucratised dogmatism, a spreading of mass myths that put entire peoples and continents under the power of cruel and treacherous demagogues, and destruction or degeneration from the unforeseeable consequences of swift changes in the conditions of life on our planet.

**THE SECOND BASIC THESIS** is that intellectual freedom is essential to human society — freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and unfearing debate and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudices. Such a trinity of freedom of thought is the only guarantee against an infection of people by mass myths, which, in the hands of treacherous hypocrites and demagogues, can be transformed into bloody dictatorship. Freedom of thought is the only guarantee of the feasibility of a scientific democratic approach to politics, economy, and culture.

But freedom of thought is under a triple threat in modern society — from the opium of class culture, from cowardly, egotistic and narrow-minded ideologies, and from the ossified dogmatism of a bureaucratic oligarchy and its favorite weapon, ideological censorship. Therefore, freedom of thought requires the defence of all thinking and honest people. This is a mission not only for the intelligentsia but for all strata of society, particularly its most active and organised stratum, the working class. The worldwide dangers of war, famine, cults of personality, and bureaucracy — these are perils for all of mankind.