

JOHN S. RESHETAR, JR.

On Resolutions: Soviet Communist Party History and Politics as Reflected in Official Documents

RESOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION, 4 vols. *Robert H. McNeal*, general editor. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974. Vol. 1: THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY, 1898–OCTOBER 1917. Edited by *Ralph Carter Elwood*. xxxi, 306 pp. Vol. 2: THE EARLY SOVIET PERIOD, 1917–1929. Edited by *Richard Gregor*. xi, 382 pp. Vol. 3: THE STALIN YEARS, 1929–1953. Edited by *Robert H. McNeal*. x, 280 pp. Vol. 4: THE KHRUSHCHEV YEARS, 1953–1964. Edited by *Grey Hodnett*. x, 328 pp. \$75.00 for 4 vols.

Readers of the Soviet press regularly encounter the rubric “In the Central Committee of the CPSU” under which the Secretariat/Politburo publish policy pronouncements and directives affecting a wide range of issues and institutions. Robert McNeal’s *Guide to the Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917–1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) indexes 3,241 official party decisions adopted during fifty years of Soviet rule. The staggering volume of verbal output—without attribution of individual authorship—would appear to call for some Parkinsonian-type “law” regarding the inverse relationship of quantity to quality and the effects of anonymity of authorship. However, such a vital aspect of Soviet rule cannot be understood solely in terms of the literary quality (or lack thereof) reflected in official Soviet party documents or even in terms of how effective such documents actually are. Indeed, the Soviet preoccupation with resolutions and formal pronouncements might be said to serve as a surrogate incantation reminiscent of the naïve faith of some American liberals in the salutary effects of formal legislation. Assertion frequently assumes the form if not the substance of solution.

The four volumes of Soviet party resolutions and decisions made available in English translation contain 375 documents that comprise the core of the party’s ideological and policy pronouncements. While the collection contains the texts of the Struve Manifesto of 1898 and the party programs of 1903, 1919, and 1961, it does not include other statements of a quasi-theoretical nature. The general editor contends, with some validity, that Soviet leaders like Stalin and Khrushchev have come and gone and that only Lenin’s theoretical writings appear to have endured. Brezhnev’s doctrinal writings are nonexistent and his speeches hardly qualify as theoretical pronouncements. Thus, apart from Lenin’s writings—which are also a source of controversy (for example, the Sino-Soviet dispute or the disagreement

within the Soviet Union over what the “true Leninist” nationality policy was), the party’s decisions represent the sole, apparently unimpeachable, body of Soviet doctrinal and policy pronouncements.

The volumes under review are based on the standard Soviet collection of documents, the eighth edition of which was published in ten volumes.¹ However, there are important differences between the Soviet and Toronto editions. The Toronto collection, although comprising only four volumes, not only eliminates the trivia but includes documents that are not to be found in the Soviet collection. It contains materials from a number of Menshevik conferences (April and November 1905, the Bern Meeting of August 1911, and May 1917) and from their August 1917 Congress. The August 1912 Vienna Conference called by Trotsky is also included, as is the Menshevik response to the July Days—a futile plea for reason contrasted with Bolshevik slogans. The ills that befell menshevism in 1918 are fully portrayed in various documents reprinted from *Rabochaia gazeta*.

The Toronto edition also includes important Bolshevik documents which were omitted from the latest Soviet edition. Among these is the mendacious Bolshevik assertion of July 6, 1917 (document 1.171) denying that Lenin was receiving German money—but pointedly avoiding outright denial of the party’s receiving such funds, as well as a previously unpublished document from the captured Smolensk *obkom* archives (WKP 499) of July 29, 1936, “On the Terrorist Activities of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Counter-Revolutionary Bloc.” In addition, several previously published documents that do not appear in the Soviet collection are included in the Toronto collection—for example, resolutions on the establishment of Agitprop (November 22, 1921; no. 2.20) and policy regarding literature (June 18, 1925; no. 2.47), the two resolutions on V. Muradeli’s opera “The Great Friendship” (February 10, 1948 and May 28, 1958; nos. 3.41 and 4.24), and the resolution on the journal *Voprosy istorii* (March 9, 1957; no. 4.17). The inclusion of such documents corrects important lacunae in the Soviet collection.

On the other hand, certain significant documents are not to be found in the Toronto edition. Among these is the December 4, 1919 resolution on Soviet policy in the Ukraine adopted in the wake of the failure of the second Bolshevik military campaign against the anti-Communist Ukrainian People’s Republic. Other omissions are the resolutions on the teaching of civic history (May 15, 1934) and the dissolution of the Society of Old Bolsheviks (May 25, 1935), the resolution “On Pedagogical Perversions in the System of the People’s Commissariats of Education” (July 4, 1936), and the pronouncement “On the Criminal Anti-Party and Anti-State Activities of Beria” (July 7, 1953).

Yet such lacunae do not appreciably detract from the general worth of the Toronto edition. It is manifestly superior to the Soviet edition because of the editors’ extended introductions to each volume and the prefatory notes to each document or group of documents. The notes place each document in its historical context and, together with the introductions, provide an encapsulated account of the CPSU’s history. Explanatory addenda and notes have been provided in brackets. While the explanatory materials may not be as plentiful as the average lay reader would like, especially regarding references to individuals in various resolutions, they are adequate. The notes are far more informative than those found in the

1. *Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK (1898–1970)*, 8th ed., 10 vols. (Moscow, 1970–72).

Soviet edition. This reviewer found them to be highly accurate, marred by only a few minor lapses such as the assertion that the "normal interval between congresses was extended from three to five years" in 1939 (vol. 3, p. 200), or the two different dates given for Zhdanov's death (vol. 3, pp. 252 and 271).

One of the virtues of the Toronto edition is that all documents are numbered, thus enabling the editors to provide convenient cross-referencing. Unlike the Soviet edition, the Toronto edition is indexed—which greatly enhances its value as a reference work. Although the indexes are not always quite as complete as they might have been, their usefulness is evidenced by such entries as: agriculture, armed forces, Comintern, Duma elections, nationality policy, Politburo, press and propaganda, and trade unions. The user can readily locate all major decisions and provisions relevant to a particular topic—something that cannot be done when using the Soviet edition.

Although certain party decisions have remained classified and are not included in either the Toronto or Soviet editions, the volumes under review can be said to contain all available landmark decisions. Here one finds the various redactions of the party's rules (*ustav*), with editorial references to previous versions indicating which articles are new or have been revised or abrogated. The domestic policy portions of the important resolutions on the Report of the Central Committee adopted by each party congress since the Eleventh Congress in 1922 are included (with the exception of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth), along with abridged resolutions on the various economic plans. While more space has been devoted to resolutions on economic plans than may seem warranted, there are numerous resolutions "on the organizational question," "on current tasks," and on the various opposition groups. The collection contains important documents pertaining to the death of Stalin, the virgin lands program, the "cult of personality," the June 1957 plenum, the ouster of Marshal Zhukov, the removal of Stalin's corpse from the mausoleum, and the November 1962 plenum.

The Toronto edition, less ponderous than the official Soviet collection, still manages to convey all significant echoes of the past: the denunciations of the Bund and the Mensheviks, the Fifth Congress's condemnation of "the treacherous policy of bourgeois liberalism" (vol. 1, p. 113), the Bolshevik view of the Russian empire as "barbarous" (vol. 1, pp. 182 and 194), and the Thirteenth Conference (January 1924) resolution asserting that "freedom of discussion within the party in no way means freedom to undermine party discipline" (vol. 2, p. 211). We are also reminded that the party in February 1948 modestly declared "Russian opera [to be] the best in the world" (vol. 3, p. 249).

In addition to providing a record of Bolshevik rhetoric, the documents contain a number of ironies. Thus early Trotskyism is defined as a "petty bourgeois deviation" (vol. 2, p. 209) which by 1927 is characterized as "a form of menshevism" (vol. 2, pp. 318 and 335f). It is recorded that the Mensheviks at their November 1905 Conference adopted the "democratic centralism" formula without defining it, though they were to be among its first victims when Lenin provided its practical definition. We encounter the inevitable double standard as when "Kerensky and Co." are accused of wanting to "surrender Petrograd to the Germans" (vol. 1, p. 288) because of a cabinet decision to move the capital to Moscow—though precisely such a decision was subsequently taken by Lenin's government. The record has the party hailing the great success of collectivization while simultaneously declaring that class enemies had wormed their way into the collective farms (vol. 3,

pp. 117f). The crowning irony may lie in the use of the Bolshevik epithet "social-imperialist" at the Sixth Congress in 1917 to denounce socialist defensists (vol. 1, p. 253) in view of the fact that the Soviet leadership has since fallen victim to the same epithet at the hands of the Chinese Communists.

While such random examples of irony suggest the vast range of subject matter represented in these volumes, there are, nevertheless, limitations inherent in such a corpus of decisions. Certain developments are not reflected in official decisions. As a record of the party's history there are lacunae for such important events as the Philosophical Controversy (Lenin's belated response to Machism), the Capri School, the activities of Parvus, R. V. Malinovskii's resignation from the Duma, the assassination of S. M. Kirov, the Leningrad Affair (1949) and the "Doctors' Plot." Certain important documents are not resolutions or decisions. Examples include Lenin's "Testament" and the notes he dictated on the nationality problem and the Soviet bureaucracy on December 30 and 31, 1922, as well as Trotsky's "The New Course" (December 8, 1923). There are also vital speeches, such as the official reports of the Central Committee to party congresses (as distinct from resolutions approving them) and other pronouncements on policy.²

The editors, in keeping with the practice of the parent Soviet edition, have also omitted resolutions and decisions dealing with Soviet foreign policy. In that vital sector of Soviet decision-making it is still necessary to rely on the various Soviet collections of documents published under the auspices of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as on the three volumes edited by Jane Degras³ and the Hoover Institution series for 1920-34.⁴ One can also consult the foreign policy statements made by Soviet leaders.⁵ Soviet foreign policy decisions have, for the most part, been made by the Politburo and are not available as texts of formal decisions, but are reflected in speeches, reports of the Central Committee, official communiqués, editorials in the government and party press, diplomatic notes, treaties, and protocols.

Resolutions and decisions that are published on domestic policy are hardly entertaining reading but they do provide a record of official perceptions, tactical twists and turns, aborted efforts, and the plans and preoccupations of the times—all reflecting the cant that is characteristic of Communist rhetoric. They are declaratory and prescriptive statements indicating what should be or what is claimed to be. They contain pledges of resolve that can be honored in the breach as when it was declared that "the Orgburo directs all the party's organizational work" (vol. 2, p. 85) or, as in the 1919 Program, that "trade unions . . . must actually concentrate in their hands the entire administration of the whole public economy as a single

2. For a more eclectic compilation of documents see Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism* (New York: Random House, 1960).

3. Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951-53).

4. Xenia J. Eudin and Harold H. Fisher, eds., *Soviet Russia and the West, 1920-1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Xenia J. Eudin and Robert C. North, eds., *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Xenia J. Eudin and Robert M. Slusser, eds., *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1928-1934: Documents and Materials*, 2 vols. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967).

5. Myron Rush, ed., *The International Situation and Soviet Foreign Policy: Reports of Soviet Leaders* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1969).

economic unit" (vol. 2, p. 66). They include hortatory pronouncements designed to inspire, warn, reaffirm, and induce compliance. Resolutions, apart from being self-serving, can be used to conceal differences. They reveal only what the party's leaders do not wish to conceal. Thus we are confronted with a diverse record that may be said to reflect two examples of Russian folk wisdom: the proverbs "Paper endures what the pen writes" (*Bumaga terpit, pero pishet*) and "What is written with the pen cannot be hewed out with an ax" (*Napisano perom ne vyrubit' i toporom*).⁶ The record persists despite abuses and attempts at alteration.

It is reassuring to have such an important reference work as the Toronto edition appear at a time when instances of misspent academic grantsmanship have not been lacking. The project could not have been undertaken without the financial support of the Canada Council and the Canadian Social Science Research Council. It is a major accomplishment, although it cannot replace the parent Soviet work. The four editors and the principal translators, Harris Coulter and Robert Ehlers, are to be commended for having fulfilled their respective responsibilities so effectively. The general editor has stated that a fifth volume of documents on the Brezhnev period is already in preparation. It can only be hoped that the parent Soviet collection in its future ninth edition will benefit from the various attributes of the Toronto edition that are worthy of emulation.

6. Vladimir Dal', ed., *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda: Sbornik* (Moscow, 1957), p. 419.