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When the shrimps began to whistle

By Emanuel Litvinoff

IF the next President of the United States were to be Adlai Stevenson the nature of Western strategy would not be radically altered. America would counter the Russian challenge with more economic aid for Asia and Africa, negotiate the liquidation of the last vestiges of Western imperialism, strive for flexibility within the Western alliance, and persistently peg away at limiting the arms race. This emerges from Mr Stevenson's shrewd, level-headed report in **Friends and Enemies** (Rupert Hart-Davies, 16s) on his 7,000-mile tour of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1958, when he noted the swift pace of economic development, improvements in the depressed standard of living, a genuine anxiety about peace and, more sombrely, that the West was confronted by a prolonged, intelligently generalled battle for the minds of the world's poor.

In his conversation with Mr Khrushchev he encountered the usual ideological mendacity. The Soviet leader may be slick in debate but in this instance he was outclassed, and if only our affairs could be settled that way the world would be changed if Mr Stevenson sat at the President's elbow during the next critical weeks. As it is, Mr Khrushchev's inconsistencies must be lived with. He told his American visitor that there must be "no interference in the internal affairs of other countries," which, in terms of Soviet logic, meant that the West must stand aside while events in the Russian satrapies are "controlled," whereas the Soviet Union reserves the right to influence developments in the non-Communist world. Mr Khrushchev will, no doubt, be taking like that at the summit.

Whatever tactical manoeuvres he may perform, he appears to have a sincere belief that he is presiding over the liquidation of the capitalist system. In the meantime he will hold on to the gains of communism, if necessary "until the shrimps whistle," to quote one of his memorable aphorisms.

The way the shrimps tried to whistle and the methods employed by the Russian authorities to silence them is told by Miss Flora Lewis in **The Polish Volcano** (Secker and Warburg, 25s) and by Tibor Meray in **Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin** (Thames and Hudson, 21s). Mr Meray offers a great deal of little-known inside information about events in Hungary, but both authors expose the extremes to which the Soviet rulers were prepared to go when their power was threatened. Consistent with the example of Stalin, they lied, employed deceit, incited anti-Semitism, and, finally, resorted to naked terror.

By a fortunate coincidence, the two books are complementary in their method of reporting and analysis. Read together, they help to explain why the Polish rising was a partial success and the Hungarian revolt a total failure. In both instances the core of resistance was inside the party although events were set off by the unrest of students and intellectuals; Gomulka and Nagy were men of equal courage, integrity, and Marxist conviction, and equally anxious to re-establish comradely relations with the Soviet Union. Yet Nagy was denounced and executed as a criminal while Gomulka to-day enjoys the ambiguous public embraces of Khrushchev. One simple reason is that there were enough honest men among Polish Communist leaders to prevent the party being totally discredited. When Russian tanks invaded Warsaw and Mikoyan warned the Poles that they would be crushed by force. Gomulka could stand his ground knowing that he was surrounded by friends. Nagy, on the other hand, had to fight the tanks and, at the same time, guard against a comradely knife in the back. Most of the Hungarian Communist leaders were obsequious and corrupt. Although Nagy was one of the few top Communists who had retained integrity and the only man in Hungary who could save the regime from drowning in bloodshed, they kept him out of office until it was too late, and only accepted him then in the hope of making him the scapegoat for the crimes of the party.

Another reason for the failure of the Hungarian revolt was, of course, the change in the attitude of those Communist States which a year before had aligned themselves on the side of the Poles against Russian centrism. Gomulka had enjoyed the backing of Mao and Tito, but Tito, now briefly reconciled with Moscow, chose to snub Nagy by welcoming the Kadar Government as "the most honest force in Hungary," and China, its hundred flowers plucked out like weeds, demanded nothing less than the ferocious punishment of Nagy and his "counter-revolutionaries." Even Gomulka, anxious to protect his own precarious gains, behaved shiftily.

But the decisive consideration was the threat that Hungary posed to the entire Soviet system in Europe. Without a new geography Poland could not detach itself from the Russian orbit, whereas Hungary was wide open to the West, and if she went could the equally unpopular Communist regime in East Germany survive? And if Germany was lost, where would it end? At this critical moment the attack was launched on Suez, probably in the belief that with the Soviet Union embroiled in Hungary the time was opportune. The Kremlin knew exactly how to play that hand. Freed from the moral restraint of public opinion in the West it sent in General Serov and the tank divisions. The execution of Imre Nagy and his friends was the last act of a shabby betrayal in which the West, too, must share responsibility.