26.8 “The Victory of Communism Is Inevitable!”: Speech to the 22nd Communist Party Congress (1962): Nikita Khrushchev

After Stalin's death in 1953, the power vacuum was eventually filled by Sergeyevich (Nikita) Khrushchev. At the 20th Communist Party Congress, Khrushchev quite unexpectedly attacked Stalin and his legacy of fear. The Soviets were looking for a new beginning. Although there may have been hope that the fears of the Cold War would be reduced, the decade from 1955 to 1966 was especially intense in its rhetoric and ideological conflict. As Khrushchev menacingly said of capitalist states in 1956, “Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!” This was the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who played on the fears of Americans with his deceitful rantings that communists had infiltrated the highest echelons of government. It was during this time (1961) that the Berlin Wall was built, sealing off the city into communist and democratic sectors—a symbolic as well as practical measure. And finally, in 1962, the two superpowers nearly went to nuclear war as President Kennedy demanded the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. The following excerpt is from Khrushchev’s speech to the 22nd Congress of the Communist party. Note the argument carefully.


The most rabid imperialists, acting on the principle of “after us the deluge,” openly voice their desire to undertake a new war venture. The ideologists of imperialism, intimidating the peoples, try to instill a kind of philosophy of hopelessness and desperation. Hysterically they cry: “Better death under capitalism than life under communism.” They do not like free peoples to flourish, you see. They fear that the peoples in their countries too will take the path of socialism. Blinded by class hatred, our enemies are ready to doom all mankind to the catastrophe of war. The imperialists’ opportunities to carry out their aggressive designs, however, are becoming smaller and smaller. They behave like a feeble and greedy old man whose powers have been exhausted, whose physical capacity has weakened, but whose avid desires remain. . . .

As long as the imperialist aggressors exist, we must be on guard, keep our powder dry, improve the defense of the socialist countries, their armed forces and the state security agencies. If, in the face of common sense, the imperialists dare attack the socialist countries and plunge mankind into the abyss of a world war of annihilation, this mad act of theirs would be their last, it would be the end of the whole system of capitalism. (Applause.)

Our party clearly understands its tasks, its responsibility, and will do everything in its power to see to it that the world socialist system continues to grow stronger, gathers fresh strength and develops. We believe that in the competition with capitalism socialism will win. (Prolonged applause.) We believe that this victory will be won in peaceful competition and not by way of unleashing a war. We have stood, we stand and we will stand by the positions of peaceful competition of states with different social systems; we will do everything to strengthen world peace. (Prolonged applause.)

The most important component of our party’s foreign policy activities is the struggle for general and complete disarmament. The Soviet Union has been waging this struggle for many years now, and doing so firmly and perseveringly. We have always been resolutely opposed to the arms race, since rivalry in this sphere in the past not only saddled the peoples with a terrible burden but inevitably led to world wars. We are even more resolutely opposed to the arms race now that there has been a colossal technical revolution in the art of war and the use of today’s weapons would inevitably entail the deaths of hundreds of millions of people.

The stockpiling of these weapons, proceeding as it is in a setting of cold war and war hysteria, is fraught with disastrous consequences. All that has to happen is for the nerves of some fellow in uniform to crack while he is on duty at a “push-button” somewhere in the West, and things may happen that will bring more than a little misfortune upon the peoples of the whole world.

Naturally, when we put forward a program of general and complete disarmament, we are talking not about the unilateral disarmament of socialism in the face of imperialism or vice versa, but about universal renunciation of arms as a means of solving problems at issue among states. . . .

The example of the Soviet Union inspires all progressive mankind. Never has the great vital force of Marxist-Leninist teaching been so clearly evident as in our days, now that socialism has triumphed fully and finally in the Soviet Union, the cause of socialism is winning new victories in the countries of the world socialist commonwealth, and the international Communist and workers’ movement and the national liberation struggle of peoples are growing and expanding tempestuously.

The revolution awakened the great energy of peoples, which is transforming the world on the principles of socialism and communism. Colossal changes are taking place and will take place throughout the world under the influence of the successes of communism.
Part 26: The Cold War

The victory of communism is inevitable! (Stormy applause.)
The great army of Communists and of Marxist-Leninists acts as the vanguard of the peoples in the struggle for peace, for social progress and for communism, the bright future of mankind. New and ever newer millions of people will assemble and rally under the great banner of communism. The cause of progress, the cause of communism will triumph! (Stormy applause.)
Long live the great and heroic Soviet people, the builders of communism! (Stormy applause.)
Long live the indestructible unity and fraternal friendship of the peoples of the world socialist camp! (Stormy applause.)
Long live the heroic party of the Communists of the Soviet Union, created and tempered in struggle by the great Lenin! (Stormy applause.)
Long live the indestructible unity of the international Communist and workers’ movement and the fraternal solidarity of the proletarians of all countries! (Stormy applause.)
Long live peace the world over! (Stormy applause.)
Under the all-conquering banner of Marxism-Leninism, under the leadership of the Communist Party, forward to the victory of communism! (Stormy, prolonged applause, turning into an ovation. All rise.)

Question:
1. What are the main points about capitalism and communism that Khrushchev stressed in his speech to the 22nd Communist Party Congress?