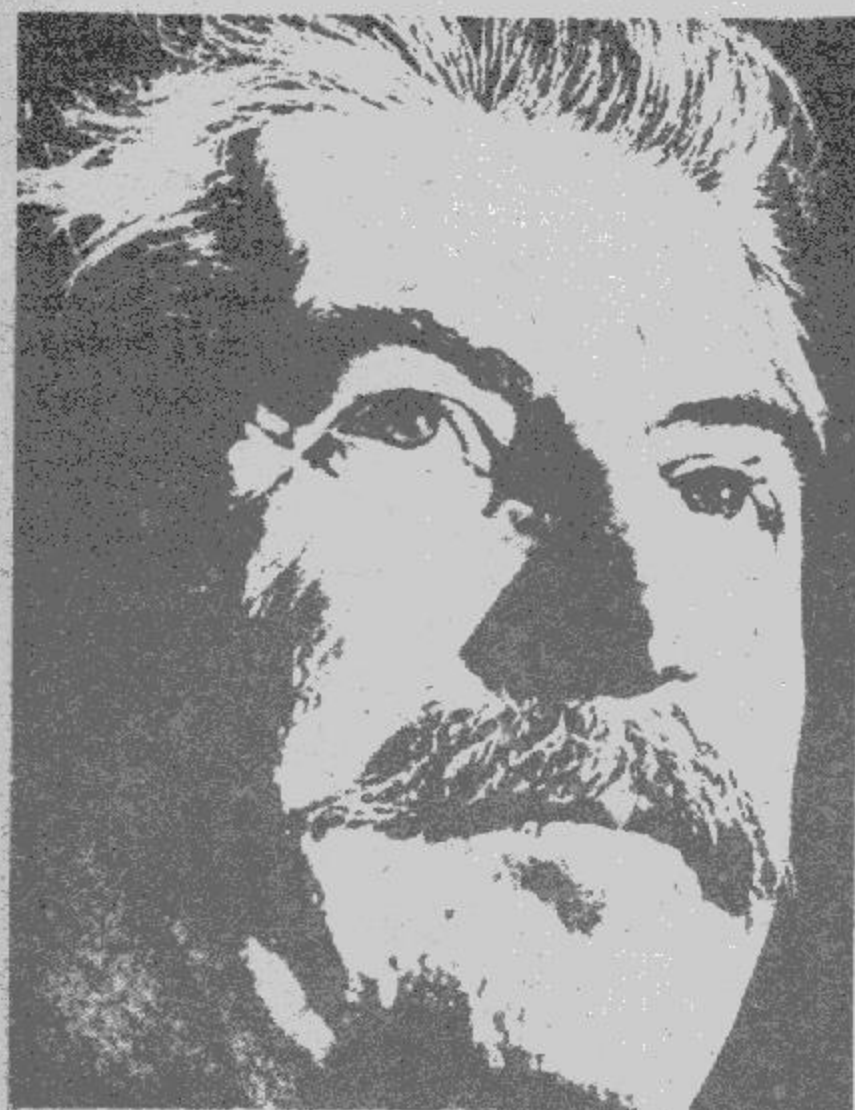


TROTSKYISM TODAY ★

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THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENT TO SOCIALIST PRESS



(Top) Stalin (above) Khrushchev



Hungary 1956 - armed workers in the streets.

POLITICAL REVOLUTION 1956

Almost exactly 20 years ago today, at dawn on the 4th November 1956, Soviet tanks started their savage bombardment of Budapest. During the second Russian 'intervention' in Hungary over twenty thousand died. The man who ordered it was Nikita Khrushchev, symbol of the 'liberal' turn of Moscow Stalinism. In February 1956 his 'secret speech' selectively denounced Stalin's crimes. In October, he agreed to a 'new style' leadership, under Gomulka, in Poland. But in Hungary he confirmed to the hilt the Trotskyist analysis that, behind the changing facades, Stalinism remained a regime of brutal counter-revolution.

We publish here an article by ADAM WESTOBY which draws heavily on material dealing with the post-war history of Stalinism, to be published in book form next year by the Workers Socialist League.

1956 forms a turning point in post-war history and particularly in the development of Stalinism. In the events which exploded in Hungary and Poland — though in quite different forms — during the autumn of that year one can see the main antagonistic social forces which produce the crisis of post-war Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe.

A major part of the background to them was the changes in Moscow. Malenkov headed the 'collective' leadership which stepped uncertainly into Stalin's shoes in 1953, but which could in no sense succeed him.

Malenkov never held a secure grip. Before Khrushchev definitively ousted him in early 1955 it is clear that the Stalinist leaders of Eastern European states were often interceding not with a unified leadership in Moscow, but with leaders of opposing currents.

The Korean armistice (on July 1953) was not a sufficient easing of the Cold War to secure Malenkov's position; it was Khrushchev who was to lead the steps in 'detente' of the late 1950's.

But Khrushchev removed Malenkov with the aid of Stalin's Foreign Minister, Molotov, the

'hard' representative of Stalinism.

What Khrushchev's rise to power in 1954-5 showed was the way in which the internal mechanics of Stalinism reflected its overall position as a regime of balance.

Khrushchev used Molotov's support to rid himself of Malenkov, then Molotov himself was removed in the drive to provide a new face.

Khrushchev's Kremlin had to perform its balancing act in the post-war period, not on a single platform, but on a set of adjacent national platforms in Europe, platforms which had to be held in step, but needed at the same time some freedom to diverge in answering their own immediate pressures and crises.

INSULATION

Each state moved, though primarily in relation to Moscow; for several years after Stalin's death contact between the Stalinist heads of different Eastern European states was at a minimum, and the insulation also took such forms, for instance, as banning certain public statements of 'fraternal' parties in the press of their next door neighbours.(1)

The contrast between Hungary and Poland in 1956 sharply illustrates the pragmatic fashion in which Khrushchev tried to secure his rule within the immediate local situation.

Nagy in Budapest was deposed (and later executed) when he found himself the figure-head of a revolutionary movement he could not control; Gomulka was tolerated in Warsaw

because he promised, while allowing reforms, to ensure that anti-Moscow movements were held in check and that Poland remained within the overall military and economic framework — most important of all Gomulka undertook to isolate the struggles of Polish workers from the Hungarian revolution.

The tangled machinations which led to the Hungarian 'October' of October-November 1956 really began in the summer of 1953 when Moscow installed Imre Nagy as replacement to the hard-line Stalinist Rakosi as number one in Budapest, but left Rakosi with an intact opposition, based on his leadership of the Party and the support of the Party apparatchiks.

Nagy's qualifications as the Prime Minister to announce the 'New Course', intended to defuse the growing tension in Hungary, were those of political ambiguity. He had opposed the forced march to collectivisation in 1949, and been demoted for it.

MOSCOW-TRAINED

But he was a long-standing Stalinist, trained in Moscow, and it was he who delivered the obituary eulogy in the Hungarian Parliament the day after Stalin's death.

He had, also, the relatively rare 'advantage' among top Hungarian Stalinists of not being Jewish.

But Nagy's first period in office lasted only up to the fall of Malenkov at the end of 1954. By Spring 1955 Rakosi had ousted him not only as Prime Minister but even from the position he had retained as Professor of Agriculture!

During the whole of Nagy's period in office Rakosi had conducted an energetic, if veiled, campaign to obstruct and sabotage his policies. In effect the 'collective' leadership in Moscow, covertly warring among themselves, played one string against another in Budapest.

But although Rakosi was back in office, he was not firmly there. He was unable simply to strangle the forces released during the Nagy interlude. Not the least of these were the tens of thousands of political prisoners released from internment camps, many of them Communists, purged before Stalin's death, whom Nagy had restored to responsible state and Party jobs.

EXPULSED

Nagy himself was expelled from the Party (November 1955) but he went on immediately to organise a loose opposition, including many Party members, around the positions on 'national communism' he was preparing. (His

In Hungary Khrushchev used tanks, and



Mass meeting in Budapest 1956.

Kadar, in Poland, Gomulka. (4) But the purpose was the same. And among those who recognised it were Cardinal Wyszyński and the CIA-controlled Radio Free Europe, both of whom urged support for Gomulka in the elections of January 1957.

History lasts a long time, but it is made in weeks or hours. The 1956 events form a crucible in which can be seen crystallising many of the basic political elements of post-war Stalinism.

Every post-war eruption of the political revolution has demonstrated that to break the Stalinist dictatorship, their police and their monopoly of all the essential organs of state power, nothing short of a revolutionary party will serve.

Yet in every serious struggle — Germany in 1953, Poland and Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1968, Poland again in 1970-71 and in 1976 — the working class has found itself tied, by the absence of its own independent party, to the bureaucracy's offers of reforms, or to one section of a divided bureaucracy which promised reforms and 'democratisation'.

'SPLITS'

And as far as the growing 'splits' within the world Stalinist movement are concerned, there is not a single 'opposition' leader who has fought for mass, independent, working class support, or to draw clearly the political divide between the workers' movement and the bureaucracy.

This is true of Tito, of Nagy and of Gomulka. And, more recently and in very different situations, it is equally true of Castro, of Dubček and of Ceausescu.

The common factor in the political roads they have travelled is their attempts to achieve a new, particular, national balance of forces more favourable or feasible to the bureaucracy and the social strata which support it within their own nation state.

Nowhere is the principle of 'non-interference' in the internal affairs of other states more rigorously observed than by the native bureaucracies of Eastern Europe when the essentials of the state power of Soviet Stalinism are involved.

Neither Tito, Gomulka, Nagy or Dubček ever came near to appealing to the workers of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for support against the Kremlin — on the contrary one of their first concerns was to reassure Moscow that a compromise would be feasible since they would do no such thing.

TITO'S BACKING

Tito's mild disapproval of the first Soviet invasion of Hungary gave way to unambiguous backing for the Soviet Army's artillery on November 4th. (5)

The first great division in the Stalinist 'monolith' was healed with the blood of Budapest's proletariat.

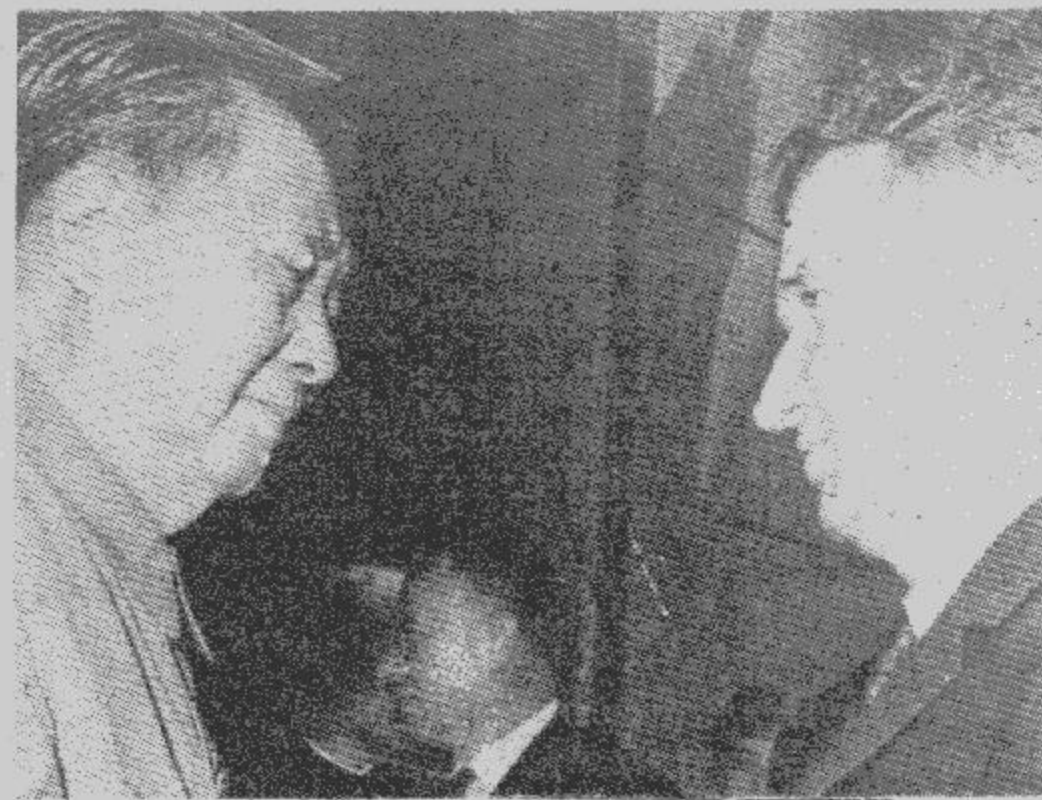
The Chinese leadership seems to have pursued — though even less publicly — a line similar to Tito's.

Gomulka reportedly appealed to Mao during Khrushchev's visit to Warsaw on October 19th-20th, and Mao replied that China would not agree to a Soviet military intervention in Poland.

A Chinese broadcast of November 1st contained a veiled warning against 'chauvinism by a big country' (6). But the Chinese Communist Party leadership gave full backing to the shelling of Budapest on November 4th. (7)

Nonetheless, the ascension of Khrushchev (in which the 'settlement' of Hungary and Poland formed a decisive step just as much as the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the ousting of his rivals) marks a qualitative state in the development of post-war Stalinism, and it is important to define its character.

'Khrushchevism' signified the recognition by Soviet Stalinism that state power in the post-war workers' states could not be exercised direct from Moscow and that — depending on national circumstances — they would have to act in alliance with the new national bureaucracies, rather than simply treating them as their puppets.



Mao with Rumania's Ceausescu

Soviet military and political power was to set the limits and the general lines rather than the detail of national policies. But underpinning the growing 'independence' of the national bureaucracies was the Soviet Army, protecting them from imperialism and, more directly, their own working class.

This 'devolution' of Soviet state power resulted partly from the pressure to find a general working relationship which kept the 'Soviet bloc' intact but also embraced the two most independent bureaucracies — the Yugoslav and the Chinese.

LIMITS

And on a more fundamental level it reflected — like the autarchic pattern of 'socialist' economic development after 1947-8 — the reactionary political limits within which the European workers states had been formed — on the mould of the capitalist states which preceded them, and with the aim of serving the interests of a narrow bureaucratic caste, utterly opposed to those of the masses of Eastern Europe.

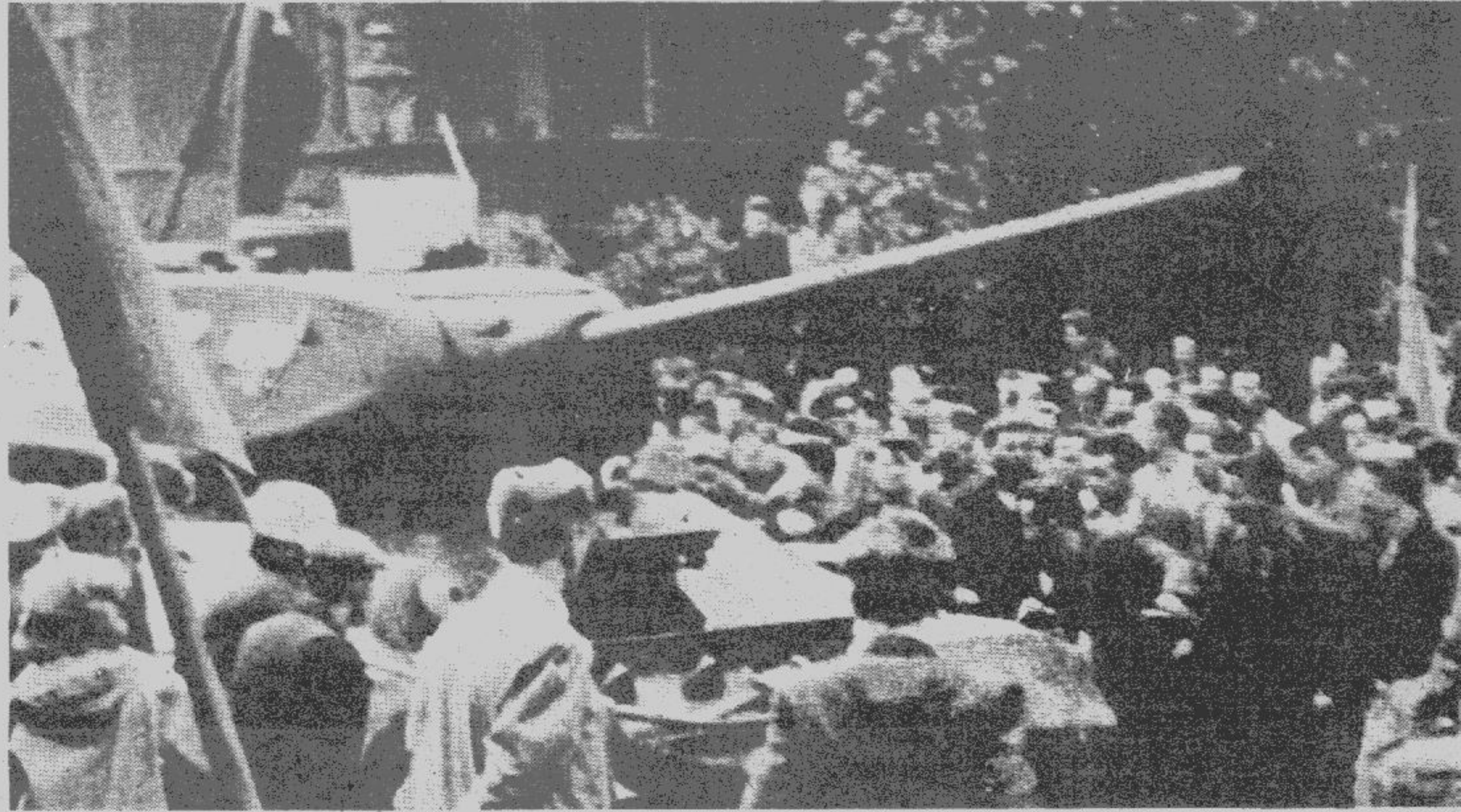
The Hungarian revolution was the breaking point of this antagonism. For twenty years it has been slandered by the paid liars of international Stalinism as a conspiracy organised by the CIA, the Vatican and Horthyites.

The workers of Hungary replied to these slanders almost before they were uttered. As Khrushchev poured shells on Budapest, posters appeared on the walls of its main industrial suburb: "The forty thousand aristocrats and fascists of the Czepeľ works strike on."

The spectre of their hatred and contempt haunts every bureaucrat in Eastern Europe to this day.



Budapest after the Stalinist bombardment



Tanks in Poznań 1956

FOOTNOTES

1) See Nagy, Imre *On Communism*, page 240 for examples.

2) To be exact Tito approved Rakosi's removal, but withheld his open approval of Gero until October, on the very eve of the first fighting in Budapest. Given the inflammable state of Eastern Europe during the summer of 1956 Tito was in a position to drive a hard bargain over 'reconciliation' with the Kremlin.

3) Among many accounts perhaps the best are *Hungarian Tragedy* by Peter Fryer (*Daily Worker* correspondent in Budapest at the time, who broke with the CP and joined the Trotskyist movement), *Pologne-Hongrie 1956* by (eds.) Jean-Jacques Marie and Balázs Nagy (1966) both then supporters of the OCI. Among liberal accounts: F. Fejtő *Budapest 1956* (1966), T. Meray *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*, (1959) and P. Zinner *Revolution in Hungary 1962*. Chris Harman's *Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe* (1974) written from the standpoint of state capitalism, contains many interesting quotations.

4) A subordinate reason which may well have reduced support in the top echelons of the Polish Communist Party for Soviet

military action is the exceptionally deadly character of Stalin's purges in that party. In 1938 the Polish CP was dissolved on the pretext of being ridden with police agents and 'Trotskyites'. Almost all its leading members were called to Moscow and killed; virtually the only ones to escape were those who were in the jails of the Polish dictatorship.

5) Tito provided the first demonstration that those Stalinists who have organised the revolutionary destruction of capitalism in their own right find no difficulty in crossing class lines in the interests of intra-Stalinist 'diplomacy'. [See Tito's speech at Pula on November 11th, (quoted in Zinner *op cit.* p. 527) where he condemned Nagy and backed Kadar as 'that which is most honest in Hungary']. Twelve years later Ho Chi-Minh and Castro gave belated — but definite — support to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

6) Radio Peking, November 1st., 1956.

7) *People's Daily*, 4th November, 1956. In December the Chinese leadership linked — accurately — justification of the Hungarian intervention to a cautious defence of Stalin's record (see *More on the Historical Expression of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (29th December 1956)).

AN OLD BOLSHEVIK RESIGNS

We reprint below an Open Letter of resignation from the Soviet Communist Party from veteran member Arnosht Kolman (58 years' membership) to Party leader Leonid Brezhnev. While we do not necessarily endorse everything in the letter, and it stops a long way short of attempting a full political analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union (remaining conspicuously silent on the period of the 1930s), the letter is particularly interesting in that it attacks the bureaucracy *not* as a 'new ruling class' - as the state capitalists in the International Socialists would have us believe - but, in line with Trotsky's analysis, as "the privileged castes of the Party".

Kolman has broken from the bureaucracy but not from socialism, and at no point attacks the gains of the October Revolution. For these reasons his principled statement (which must reflect also the unspoken feelings of considerable numbers of dissidents still in the Soviet Union) is worthy of serious study by Trotskyists.

in the Soviet Union: dissidents are harshly persecuted, tens of thousands of them are languishing in jails, concentration camps and psychiatric jail hospitals, many being punished for their religious beliefs only.

In the sixtieth year of Soviet power there are no elementary intellectual freedoms and there is no freedom for the creative artists...

As far as the nationalities policy is concerned, the history of the Soviet Union is nothing but an uninterrupted chain of territorial annexations, forced 'unification' of foreign lands, subjection and discrimination against many nationalities in the country,

ship...

It is perfectly logical that under such circumstances and as a result of the colossal expenditure on arms, the sustenance of the vast KGB network and of the party and state apparatus, the country's economic situation grows worse and worse.

Inflation and rising prices, officially denied, are accelerating.

Productivity in industry is extremely low, industrial production is of poor quality and, judged by its technical parameters, it falls way behind similar production in the West.

And is it not a tragedy that 60 years after the Revolution the agriculture of Europe's former granary is unable to produce enough bread, meat, fish and even potatoes to satisfy the needs of its own population?

Can one simply ignore all these facts without drawing conclusion from them?

I am not going to deny the successes achieved by the Soviet Union in ending illiteracy, in the fields of education, science, technology and in securing a better living standard for a considerable section of the population. But man does not live by bread alone.

A human being must be able to say aloud what he thinks, write down what he thinks, read what takes his fancy, choose his place of abode freely, and go wherever he wants.

AFRAID

But we are once again afraid; just as under



To:

L.I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Kremlin, Moscow.

I wish to inform you that I am leaving the Soviet Communist Party. I am 84 and have been a party member for 58 years.

I joined its ranks in order to fight for social justice, for a happy future for mankind. Now, after long and painful reflection, I have come to this difficult decision.

I was born in Prague and came to Russia as a prisoner of war during the First World War. During Kerensky's rule I was held in solitary confinement for six months for anti-war propaganda, and I was freed by the October Revolution.

As a Red Army soldier, I fought on four fronts for the establishment of Soviet power.

In the 1920's I worked illegally in Germany, was a member of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party. I was sentenced to five years' hard labour, but after half a year's solitary I was freed in exchange [with the Soviet Union].

COMINTERN

Afterwards I held responsible ideological posts in the Comintern, in the Central Committee, in the Moscow party committee and in the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

I was also elected member of the Moscow party control commission and the Moscow party district commission. I knew Lenin personally, worked with Krupskaya, Krushchev and many others.

During the Second World War I worked in the Political Command of the Soviet Army in charge of units fomenting disaffection in the ranks of enemy troops.

It was at this very time that my sister was burnt in a gas oven in one of Hitler's concentration camps, while my brother, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Communist Youth League, was murdered by Stalin.

In 1945, I was appointed head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's propaganda department in Prague, but after three years I was arrested and shipped back to Moscow, where I spent three and a half years without trial - three of them in solitary confinement - in the Lubyanka jail.

EXILED

During this stretch, my wife and small daughter were exiled to Ulyanovsk, where they lived in appalling conditions.

After my rehabilitation, I was appointed director of the Institute of Philosophy in Prague. Since my retirement in 1963 I have

been living in Moscow as a pensioner.

After Krushchev's revelations about the bloody crimes of Stalin, euphemistically described as the 'personality cult', I began to understand how deeply distorted the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet power had become, and that I, as a party member must bear my share of responsibility for this.

TURNING POINT

However, 1968 was the real turning point for me, when I had occasion to observe the 'Prague Spring' and see with my own eyes with what enthusiasm the united people of Czechoslovakia backed the strivings of the party to rekindle socialist ideals and the fight for socialism with a human face.

When your tanks and armies occupied Czechoslovakia subjecting it to your political Diktat and merciless economic exploitation - in short turning it into your colony - I lost any illusions I may have had about the nature of your regime.

I understood that the Soviet Communist Party had long since ceased to be a political party, that it had been transformed into a mutual society for the early fulfilment of the Five Year Plan.

Its members, the congresses, even the Central Committee, have virtually no influence over the shaping of the party's policies, which are determined from your high ruling perch.

And in any case, about what sort of socialism can one talk in the Soviet Union when the place of the former capitalist and landowner exploiting classes has been taken by the privileged castes of the party?

WEALTH

They are drowning in wealth, live isolated from the people, above them and contemptuous of ordinary folk, not wishing to and incapable of understanding their needs and sufferings.

Of what sort of socialism can one talk when you are continuing Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship within the country and a great power policy abroad?

The Soviet Union lacks the most elementary democratic rights: instead of free elections there is voting for candidates imposed from above: there is no public political life; strikes are forbidden and the trade unions are subservient to state interests; political discussions are forbidden and everything is covered by universal censorship; information is subject to the interests of lying propaganda.

Basic human rights are crudely trampled on

among them the Crimean Tatars, the Volga Germans, Jews, the Baltic nations, the people of the Caucasus and Central Asia, etc. This makes the Soviet Union no less 'a prison of the nations' than Tsarist Russia was.

While preaching about 'international detente' and 'peaceful coexistence' the Soviet Union is in fact amassing at an increasingly fast rate nuclear weapons and rockets, is preparing new generations of mass destruction weapons and is preparing for aggressive wars.

It keeps vast armies outside its frontiers, builds more and more military bases in Europe, Asia and Africa, and is preparing for the occupation of Romania and Yugoslavia.

Under the guise of 'selfless aid' to the national liberation movements and developing countries, the Soviet Union is carrying out ceaseless attempts to infiltrate their ranks and establish its military and political overlordship in various corners of the earth; it is also supplying arms and providing military support for most reactionary regimes and international terrorists.

The political and social structures of the country are in a state of acute stagnation. The Soviet Union has one of the most conservative regimes in the world, with an aging leader-

The Russian Revolution - betrayed by Stalinism.

Stalin, we hide our manuscripts, stop trusting one another, write meaningless letters for fear of the censors and sever links with friends...

Isn't it inhuman to take away children from parents, block the reunion of families, deny exit visas to visit relations abroad and to deny the families of political prisoners the right to see their loved ones for years and even to write to each other? Can one live amid such conditions?

And how long can one live like this? I can no longer go on living like this.

My decision to leave the Communist Party does in no way mean that I will be abandoning the ideals of socialism with which I became acquainted in 1910 and which have since constituted the main substance of my long life.

On the contrary I have come to the firm conclusion that my staying in the ranks of the Soviet Communist Party would amount to a betrayal of the ideals of social justice, humanism and the building of a new and more human society, for the attainment of which I have strived despite my mistakes and the errors of my ways, and shall go on striving to the end of my days.

Academician Arnhost (Ernest) Kolman.

