

Notes of the Month

CZECHOSLOVAKIA — LESSONS FOR US ALL

'The false thesis that the Party is the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat.'

Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, April 1968.

'The Party is the directly ruling vanguard of the proletariat, it is the leader.'

LENIN, 'Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Present Situation, and the Mistakes of Comrades Trotsky and Bucharin.' January 1921. *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 587.

'The abolition of classes requires a long, difficult and stubborn class struggle, which, after the overthrow of capitalist rule, after the destruction of the bourgeois state, after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, does not disappear (as the vulgar representatives of the old socialism and the old Social-Democracy imagined), but merely changes its form and in many respects becomes fiercer.'

LENIN, 'Greetings to the Hungarian Workers.' May 27, 1919. *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 233.

'The Bolshevik slogans and ideas on the whole have been confirmed by history; but concretely things have worked out differently, they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected. To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those "old Bolsheviks" who more than once have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality.'

LENIN, 'Letters on Tactics', April 1917. *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 44.

September 16, 1968

We have entered into a critical and dangerous period of the world situation. All the burning problems of the modern era have been brought into the forefront by the events in Czechoslovakia and their international repercussions. The questions of socialism and the protection of socialism; of socialist democracy and personal and civil liberty; of the relations of socialist states; of national sovereignty and proletarian internationalism; of the current imperialist technique of the cold war and penetration, and of the best forms of vigilance and defence against them; of open divisions and controversies

within the world communist movement: all these questions of our time have been brought to an extremely sharp point of confrontation over Czechoslovakia. Vitaly important as are the issues now arising in the Labour Party Conference, which are dealt with in the current number by D. N. Pritt in his Open Letter to a delegate, we believe that our readers will concur with our judgement that we have found it necessary to devote the whole of the Notes this month at some length to a consideration of some of these problems which have arisen in connection with Czechoslovakia.

Responsible Approach

The present dangerous situation in Europe is not yet settled; it may be only beginning. The problems which have arisen in relation to Czechoslovakia cannot be separated from the general European situation, the advance of neo-Nazism and openly expansionist revanchist forces (with the aims of expansion officially endorsed on maps and in textbooks) in West Germany, and the confrontation of Nato and the Warsaw Pact. These are the conditions which have turned an internal question into an international question. However much every supporter of socialism will desire the most rapid united and agreed settlement of the relations of Czechoslovakia and other Warsaw Pact countries, previously on the basis of the Bratislava Declaration, or now on the basis of the Moscow Agreement and its fulfilment, it would be blindness to exclude the possibility of new conflicts or unexpected developments, either in Czechoslovakia or internationally, which could make these comments outdated before they appear. For this reason, in the present explosive situation, any consideration of the problems involved requires the most responsible approach. First, the fullest sympathetic understanding of the desires of friends and comrades in Czechoslovakia to correct past evils and carry out necessary economic and democratic reforms. Second, serious recognition of the concern of the experienced political and military leaders of the Soviet Union and associated Warsaw Pact countries to check the menace of externally backed reaction taking advantage of a transitional phase of internal division or weakening of the regime in order to strike a blow. Third, support for every endeavour to reach a peaceful and agreed settlement of these parallel aims on the basis of the Moscow Agreement and its fulfilment on both sides. Fourth, the most consistent endeavour to prevent the present differences of tactical judgement and estimation on this question among various communist parties from weakening

the now more than ever indispensable international solidarity against the class enemy. Fifth, unbreakable opposition to the present hysterically fomented anti-Soviet offensive which is seeking to take advantage of the present difficulties.

Stormy Path of Revolution

The path of the world socialist revolution during now more than half a century has never been smooth and easy. There have been sharp turns, confrontations, agonising decisions, often critical divisions at given moments, and subsequent reappraisals. But the caravan has gone forward, where every other supposed alternative path for the achievement of socialism, whether through social-democracy, Labourism or the 'pure democracy' of the Weimar Republic, has ended in fiasco. At every sharp turn the enemy has triumphantly proclaimed the final defeat and collapse of the revolution, or alternatively the betrayal of the revolution. The Brest Peace with German imperialism, when Brailsford declared at the first approach to an armistice that the Bolsheviks had placed themselves 'outside the pale of our international socialist society' (*Daily Herald*, December 1, 1917). The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, which aroused horror among the champions of 'pure democracy' throughout the world, but not a ripple in Russia, where the masses had established their own power through their Soviets. Georgia, where the entry of the Red Army to assist the workers to overthrow the Menshevik Government backed by the Entente became the favourite theme song of hatred and denunciation by Ramsay MacDonald and the anti-Soviet chorus, and no socialist meeting would be complete without some lone heckler at the back of the hall shouting: 'What about Georgia?'—all forgotten now, so that younger people, still worked up to excitement over Hungary and Czechoslovakia no longer know what the outcry over Georgia was about. Kronstadt, hailed by the Western prophets as a great 'popular revolution' against Bolshevism, when Miliukov coined the slogan 'Soviets Without Communists!', and the delegates to the Tenth Congress went arms in hand to save the revolution. Nep, proclaimed by the Western wiseacres the final end of communism and surrender to capitalism. The First Five-Year Plan, when the Western commentators split their sides with laughter at the infantile idea that it could be possible to plan a nation's whole economy, and now there is no Government so weak and reactionary that does not boast of its so-called 'Five-Year Plans'. The German Soviet Non-Aggres-

sion Pact, which burst the blood-vessels of the authors of Munich in an apoplexy of execration, but which in fact was the master-stroke of diplomacy that shattered the Munich Four-Power conspiracy, and thereby prepared the way for the subsequent anti-Hitler alliance which the West had previously refused, and saved the world. Finland, where the winter war aroused an even higher hysteria of anti-Soviet denunciation, but which is now recognised to have laid the first indispensable strategic foundation for the future defeat of Hitler. All the lies and slanders of the cold war. Hungary, which raised a new fervour of denunciation. The line runs on and on.

Historical Testing

Thus in the past for over half a century the historical outcome by the stern test of practice has proved the justification of many actions of the Soviet Union which had been widely denounced at the time by enemies or sometimes criticised by friends, but which have since been widely recognised as indispensable parts of the strategy of the only leadership in the world which has proved its capacity for over half a century to carry through and maintain in all the storms and tempests of the modern world a victorious and ever stronger socialist revolution. Does this long-term vindication of the historical record of the defence of the socialist revolution mean that there have been no blots on the record? On the contrary. There have been plenty of defects, reviewed eventually, but sometimes, after long delay, with relentless self-criticism; black pages and bitter memories. In the period of the prolonged struggle against the conspiratorial offensive of Trotskism, with its doctrines of defeatism and disruption concealed under a cloak of pseudo-revolutionary phrases, and the still more arduous struggle against the apparatus of fascist penetration, which infiltrated leading circles in every other country in Europe, the security organs did indeed successfully accomplish their task, in that in the Soviet Union alone Hitler could establish no fifth column and find no quisling, but in the course of accomplishing this task struck down also many honest communists and caused great harm. Thus the long-term vindication of the historical record of triumphant socialist achievement and strategy does not prove that criticism of the present action must be dismissed as unjustified. Every situation is a new situation. Every action must be judged in its own character and context. Consciousness of the historical record only makes necessary a sense of proportion in approaching the present new problems. We must not be surprised

if the experienced Soviet leadership does not let itself be turned aside from a line of action which it has judged essential for the defence of the socialist revolution and peace, in the face of violent hostile denunciation from the representatives of Western imperialism, for they have always experienced this at every sharp turn and important decision, or even in the face of expressions of criticism from some friends, since it is possible that they may regard such criticism as based on inadequate appreciation of the real situation, or as coming from critics who are prepared to lecture them on how to run the revolution, but have not yet had the opportunity to prove in practice their own capacity to carry through and maintain successfully a socialist revolution. Of course, such a criticism of the critics would be unjust; and in reality Soviet comrades and comrades of socialist countries have shown the fullest readiness to discuss in the most comradely fashion the viewpoints of those who have not yet had the advantage of revolutionary experience. It may be that such discussion, and the further development of events, may help to resolve the differences which have arisen, and which, it should be emphasised, are in the sphere of tactics, not of basic aims. In the final analysis only the historical outcome by the test of practice will determine the correctness or incorrectness of the policies and viewpoints at present under discussion.

Tactical Problems

Tactical decisions, often involving issues which can determine the fate of the revolution and the future of many peoples, are seldom easy. Again and again they have been preceded by sharp discussions and divisions within the collective leadership, and in some cases have been followed by reappraisals and recognition of an error. The Brest Treaty was delayed by the opposition of Trotsky and the 'Left Communists', while Lenin was in a minority on the Central Committee; and the delay cost the loss of the Baltic peoples, who had been in the vanguard of the Bolshevik revolution, to imperialism for over two decades. The long-term success of Soviet strategy for over half a century does not mean that Soviet strategy has never made errors or is incapable of making an error. Lenin frankly described after the event the military advance on Warsaw, which he had supported, as a 'political miscalculation'; 'in the Red Army', he said, 'the Poles saw enemies, not brothers and liberators'. (Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, 1924.) Lenin sharply castigated Stalin and Dzerzhinsky for a too arrogant attitude to the repre-

sentatives of Georgian nationalism. The winter war against Finland in 1939-40 was a strategic necessity and in the outcome a masterpiece of military technique; but the accompanying political step expressed in the establishment of the Terijoki Government under the premiership of the veteran leader of the Finnish working-class movement, O. V. Kuusinen, proved in the outcome a tactical error, since it failed to win mass support. It was an understandable error, since Kuusinen had been the key leader in the old Finnish Social Democratic Party before 1917, the only social democratic party which won an absolute parliamentary majority, and the honoured leader of the Finnish working class in the civil war against the German-backed Mannerheim. But the estimation in class terms had failed to take adequate account of the national feeling. These examples of the dangers of under-estimation of national feeling in tactical decisions and actions based on the estimation of class forces have an important bearing on the present problem in Czechoslovakia.

Socialism and Democracy

The question of the situation in Czechoslovakia, of the justice or otherwise of the action of the Warsaw Pact countries, and of the attitude of the Czechoslovak party and people, has not only been complicated by the fact that the internal development in Czechoslovakia is inevitably bound up with the whole international situation and relation of forces. It has been further complicated by the fact that all the new questions and trends involved in the modern advancing development of socialist democracy have come to the forefront in the sharpest and most sudden form in the recent period in Czechoslovakia. A leaflet was reported in *The Times* of August 26 to have been smuggled out, containing the appeal of a Czech girl student of 22 years of age:

I am a Czech student, 22 years old. For six months this country was led by the people who are doing their best to prove, probably for the first time in history, that socialism and democracy can exist side by side.

Bless her virgin innocence. For her Lenin and the October Revolution, and its fight to achieve socialist democracy as a tremendous advance on the old hypocritical capitalist democracy has never existed. Lenin wrote:

'Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy; Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.'

(Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, 1918)

It is not her fault. It is evident that the pre-January routine-ridden bureaucratic regime in Czechoslovakia never taught her the elements of Marxist political understanding, and her new mentors have taught her to despise it. For her the October Revolution and its battle to establish working-class power and Soviet democracy as the new living democracy 'for the first time in human history' is only a date in a history textbook. She never knew Munich or the Nazi terror of a real military occupation. She was not there when 145,000 Soviet soldiers gave their lives in Czechoslovakia to win its freedom. Their graves litter the soil of Czechoslovakia, but her new mentors have taught her to lay wreaths on the graves of the anti-communists Masaryk and Benes. She was only two years old when the Dulles cold war plot to take over Czechoslovakia into the American capitalist orbit, in the same way as had already been done with the clearing out of the communist Ministers in France, Italy and other West European countries, was defeated by the united resistance of the Czechoslovak working people winning the victory for socialism. All that she has known in direct experience have been the restraints and negative features accompanying twenty years of tremendous advance of socialism; and so for her the January reforms to correct evils and strengthen socialist democracy have appeared as a new and heart-stirring leap into freedom, to combine socialism and democracy 'for the first time in human history'.

First Stage of the Battle for Socialist Democracy

Engels predicted long ago that in the era of the socialist revolution 'pure democracy' would become

the last sheet-anchor of the entire bourgeois and even feudal economy. At such a moment the entire reactionary mass steps behind it and strengthens it. Even what was reactionary behaves democratically. Our only opponent on the day of the crisis and the following day is the collective reaction which gather around pure democracy.

(Engels, letter to Bebel, December 11, 1884)

Engels's prediction was proved correct in the battles of the first era of the world socialist revolution which opened in 1917. The battle for Soviet power, for working-class power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the essential means for expropriating the capitalists and landlords and building socialism, which alone could end the slavery of the wage earner and propertyless man to the power of capital and the landowner, and thus establish the indispensable foundation for the real advance of human freedom, was fought

against the embattled forces of reaction (ranging from the White Guards and Monarchists to the Mensheviks and right-wing Social-Democrats) mobilised behind the hypocritical banner of 'democracy'. In philistine language the issue was presented as the choice between 'dictatorship' and 'democracy'. Lenin castigated without mercy 'philistine phrasemongering about liberty and equality in general'. Lenin fought the demands of the so-called 'Workers' Opposition' at the Tenth Congress and drew the lesson of the Kronstadt mutiny:

The danger . . . lies precisely in the fact that the change demanded was apparently very slight: 'The Bolsheviks must go . . . we will correct the regime a little.' That is what the Kronstadt rebels are demanding. But what actually happened was that Savinkov arrived in Reval, the Paris newspapers reported the events a fortnight before they actually occurred, and a White Guard appeared on the scene. . . .

They all came in demanding equality, freedom and a Constituent Assembly, and every time they proved to be nothing but a conduit for White Guard rule.

Such was the confrontation in the first era of the fight for socialist democracy. It was characteristic of that era that, with unconscious plagiarism of Engels, a smart-set comedy on the West End stage during those years won rapturous applause from the stalls with the witticism: 'Democracy has become the last refuge of every True Blue Tory.'

Creative Development of Socialist Democracy

An enormous and varied development has taken place since that era, creatively carrying forward the forms and conceptions of socialist democracy in relation to new conditions and new historical situations. The basic principles, the necessity of working-class power leading the broad alliance of social strata opposed to the ruling regime of big capital and its agents, the indispensable role of the Communist Party or working-class party based on Marxism-Leninism, and the leading role of the Communist Party: all these continue through all the variety of new forms and flexible adaptations. But with the victory of the peoples' liberation war over fascism new possibilities open out. Lenin had long ago predicted that the advance to socialism in other countries would reveal a variety of new forms, differing from the specific forms in Russia, while fulfilling the same basic principles. The People's Democracies which succeeded the overthrow of fascism in a number of European countries, and in some countries in Asia, demonstrated the truth of this prediction

of Lenin. At the same time, with the changed balance of the world, an extending array of newly independent states replaced former colonies and protectorates; and in the majority of these the peoples and governments have begun to seek, or proclaim the aim of seeking, the path to socialism; and in some cases they have been drawn to the influence of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Thus the paths towards socialism, and the condition of eventual fulfilment of socialist democracy, are revealing an increasingly rich flowering variety of forms, at the same time as the validity of the basic principles worked out by Marxism-Leninism continues to be demonstrated, equally by the successes achieved, and by the weaknesses where these principles are violated.

Broadening the Horizons of Socialist Democracy

The new conditions also broadened the possibilities in the advanced capitalist countries. The *British Road to Socialism*, adopted by the British Communist Party in 1951, was the first programme which set out these new possibilities specifically in relation to conditions in Britain, showing how a united labour movement, with the fulfilment of the role of the Communist Party within it, could utilise the traditional democratic institutions won by previous generations of popular struggle, in conjunction with the broadest mass activity throughout the country, to establish the political power of the working class and its allies and carry through the transition to socialism. Since some latter-day critics have sought to dismiss this programme as a specimen of 'post-Stalin revisionism', it may be worth noting that this programme was adopted in 1951, at a time when Stalin was still exercising his political leadership in the Soviet Union, and that its adoption in fact won his warmest personal concurrence, and was hailed in *Pravda* as a 'creative expression of Marxism-Leninism'. A further new stage opened when the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party ruthlessly corrected distortions which had developed in the course of maintaining Soviet power in a period of severe testing in the face of fascism, the war and the subsequent cold war. Active steps were taken to strengthen democratic functioning in every sphere of the Party and the socialist state. A similar democratic renewal had to take place in a number of other socialist states in Europe where there had been violations of democracy, unjust sentences and misuse of police powers. Following this democratic renewal came no less essential economic reform, begun in the Soviet Union in the recent

period, and also in the German Democratic Republic and Hungary, to advance from the initial stage of elementary quantitative socialist planning to new experimental techniques for extending decentralisation, the role of the market and independent factory initiative within the overall framework of socialist planning. All this essential process of democratic renewal and economic reform was retarded by the increasingly hidebound bureaucratic regime in Czechoslovakia, and only began very late, effectively with the Central Committee meetings of last December and January. So it came about that when this indispensable renewal at last began, it burst out with all the more sudden accumulated explosive force in a country in the most delicate and vulnerable international situation in Europe.

Czechoslovakia, Cockpit of Europe: 1918-1938-1948-1968

It is not for nothing that Czechoslovakia is once again at the centre of the situation in Europe and of the international situation. History and geography alike have fated these peoples, almost from the time of the arrival of the Czechs and the Slovaks to these regions in the Dark Ages and the introduction of Christianity (with characteristic rivalry even then between the less welcome representatives of Christian missionary zeal from the German side and the more welcome representatives from the Greek monks through Moravia) to be the central cockpit of every European conflict, through the wars of religion, the Thirty Years' War and the popular liberation struggles against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to the modern era of the foundation of the Republic as part of the Little Entente devised by French imperialism to yoke together Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania in the anti-Soviet *cordon sanitaire*; the subsequent sacrifice to Hitler as a further stage in the grand anti-Soviet plan; the rout of this policy and victory of Czechoslovak independence through Soviet arms; the defeat of the renewed cold war offensive in 1948; and now the present critical testing of 1968.

Old Munichites Return to Their Vomit

All the commentators of every political colour have quoted to weariness Bismarck's 'Whoever is master of Bohemia is master of Europe'. All the old Munichites have sought to make fantastic analogies between socialist action designed (whatever the dispute over the tactical judgement involved) to protect Socialist Czechoslovakia from Western imperialist penetration with their own

infamous Western imperialist partition and destruction of Czechoslovakia, when the ghoul Goebbels could yelp in triumph over the radio to his Czech hearers, after the completion of the Nazi carve-up, 'Czechoslovakia is no more!' Sir Alec Douglas Home, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Chamberlain at the time of Munich, has the effrontery to denounce what he is pleased to call a 'new Munich'. Of course, these gentlemen no more care a twopenny damn about Czechoslovakia today than they did thirty years ago, when they called it 'a faraway country of which we know little', and treated it as a choice piece of meat to give to Hitler in order to encourage him to direct his drive to the East. All that they are concerned about today, just as they were concerned thirty years ago, is to use any means to promote their campaign against Communism and the Soviet Union. The whole band of Front Bench political double-dealers and sapient press commentators, who today hold up their hands in holy horror to denounce the crime of Munich thirty years ago, played a very different tune at the time, when the Communist William Gallacher was the single MP to raise his voice in protest (Churchill was silent) in the midst of a Parliament applauding Chamberlain, and in the French Parliament of the 74 votes cast against Munich 73 were the Communist deputies. The anti-Communists who applauded Munich then, and now profess to deplore it are not really inconsistent; they are pursuing the same anti-Soviet drive as they did then, and find it now desirable to deplore their crime of thirty years ago as a convenient platform to continue the same basic policy. But in fact the retrospect to Munich to trace the roots of the present troubles is too short-sighted. It is necessary to go back to the conditions of the foundation of the Republic. 1918. 1938. 1948. 1968. These are the four crucial dates of the crisis of Western imperialist relations and Czechoslovakia.

1918: Foundation of Czechoslovakia—Two Trends

The foundation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, whose fiftieth anniversary we celebrate this month, reflected two trends. On the one hand, it represented a victory of the popular national liberation struggle of the Czechs and the Slovaks against Hapsburg rule. On the other hand, at the top it represented the installation in power of the anti-Marxist, anti-Communist, anti-Soviet leadership of the Czech bourgeoisie, headed by Masaryk and Benes, closely tied to Western imperialism. Masaryk had been a prominent opponent of Marxism from the beginning of the century; and Plechanov had

conducted a famous polemic against Masaryk's critique of Marxism. Previous to 1914 he had sought a deal with the Hapsburgs; 'we cannot be independent outside Austria', he wrote in 1909. In 1915 he sought to bank on a deal with Tsarism and sent a secret memorandum to the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, proposing the establishment of Czechoslovakia as 'a monarchial state' with 'a Russian dynasty. . . . The wishes and intentions of Russia will be of decisive importance' (quoted by Benes in Volume 3 of his *The World War and Our Revolution*). After the victory of the Bolshevik revolution Masaryk became a principal agent of anti-Soviet intervention at the head of the Czech Legion in Russia, financed from London and Paris. The Versailles Powers established the Republic of Czechoslovakia under Masaryk to become, as a satellite of French imperialism, the key base of the Little Entente of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania organised by French imperialism to provide an anti-Soviet bastion. In 1919 Masaryk as President of Czechoslovakia dispatched Czechoslovak troops, in association with Romanian troops, to invade Socialist Hungary, at the instigation of the Entente, in order to crush the socialist revolution in Hungary. That was one side of Czechoslovakia, the side of the Czech bourgeoisie, represented by Masaryk and Benes. But the other side was that of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, a great mass party inheriting the majority of the old Social Democracy, inspiring the devotion of the Czech and Slovak workers, and representing the true future of the country. This class contradiction at the heart of the record of Czechoslovakia still has its echo in the changed conditions of today; and the danger signal of the old bourgeois conservative tradition endeavouring to masquerade as part of a democratic renaissance became visible when, in the process of the really necessary democratic renewal, attempts were made in some quarters to carry through a resurrection and glorification of Masaryk and Benes and a denigration of the entire era of Communist leadership.

1938: Who Betrayed Whom at Munich?

The price of the Western imperialist orientation of Masaryk and Benes was paid at Munich. 1938 was the year of the betrayal of Czechoslovakia to Hitler. Who betrayed Czechoslovakia? Chamberlain and Daladier: Britain and France. But the complicity was bound up with the internal politics of the regime established by Masaryk and carried on by Benes. President Benes had succeeded

the elder Masaryk, while the latter's son Jan Masaryk was Minister in London. Subsequent memoirs have revealed that the Soviet forces and planes were poised and ready to act at once and decisively to stand by Czechoslovakia if Hitler should attack and Czechoslovakia resist, even though Britain and France should stand aside. This message was conveyed through Gottwald to Benes. But the Benes-Masaryk regime, tied by their links to Western Imperialism, preferred to surrender to the Anglo-French diktat rather than save Czechoslovak independence by the aid of the Soviet Union. The strategic gates of Europe were opened to Hitler without a struggle. The independence of Czechoslovakia had still to be won back in the end by the Soviet Union six years later—but at the cost of 145,000 Soviet soldiers having to give their lives in Czechoslovakia alone to win its freedom, at the cost of a second world war bringing death and destruction on the peoples of the world, at the cost of over twenty million Soviet dead in that war. No wonder the Soviet leaders, in common with all communists and socialists and supporters of peace everywhere, are concerned to ensure that this shall not happen again, and that Czechoslovakia shall not again prove the weak link in the chain. For this criminal complicity in the Munich betrayal history will never forgive the Benes-Masaryk regime.

1948: Victory of the Czechoslovak People

Then came the victorious opposite of Munich in 1948. Once again with the cold war Western imperialism delivered its first probing action, to penetrate the socialist world, into Czechoslovakia. Following the victory over fascism the foremost role of the Communists in the resistance in all the countries occupied by Nazism, together with the example of the Soviet Union, brought them a flowing tide of popular support and the formation of coalition governments, including the Communists in the leading countries of the European Continent liberated from Nazism, both East and West. The lords of the Pentagon and Wall Street, in close collusion with the Attlee-Bevin Government, set themselves to undermine these governments and reverse the tide of popular advance in Europe. They began in Western Europe, where the writ of the Anglo-American armies ran. By 1947 their penetration and the power of the dollar had ousted the Communists from the governments in France, Italy and other West European countries. Their next aim was to penetrate the socialist world, and for this purpose in 1948, just as ten years

previously, they chose Czechoslovakia as the first target for their offensive. In his article in February of this year, celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the popular victory in February, 1948, Dubcek described how in the post-war years the bourgeoisie based its strategy on

gradually robbing the Communist and Workers' Parties of their influence, first in some and then in other West or Central European countries, of ousting them from the positions they had won by their policy and active participation in the anti-fascist struggle, and resuming their undivided sway. This 'quiet counter-revolution' actually succeeded in a number of West European countries. Czechoslovakia was to be the next target.

Dubcek's formula last February of 'quiet counter-revolution' to describe the modern imperialist strategy for seeking to undermine the socialist regime in the socialist countries, beginning with Czechoslovakia, is a perceptive formula, and helps to throw light on the problems of the present year.

How the People Won

The resignation of the twelve bourgeois Ministers in February 1948, was intended to bring about the downfall of the Communist-led Government. But the resistance of the Czechoslovak working people, led by their Communist Party, defeated the Western-inspired offensive of counter-revolution. The democratically elected socialist-communist majority in Parliament maintained their Government, without the bourgeois Ministers, while the mass mobilisation of the workers in the factories and the streets barred the way to any attempt at a counter-revolutionary coup. A classic model of the success of a peaceful socialist revolution. There was not a single Soviet soldier in the country. So, of course, the grand mythology of all the Western textbooks and journalistic technique calls February 1948, the 'Russian rape of Czechoslovakia'. In his interview in *World Marxist Review* in June this year Dubcek defined the significance of February 1948:

For the workers and peasants, the middle strata and intellectuals, February 1948, was the culminating point and synthesis of the democratic and socialist gains of our two peoples.

This was the first stage of the victory of socialist democracy.

1968: New Testing Time for the Advance of Socialist Democracy

Imperialism never gives up. The victory of socialism and the working people in 1948 opened an era of tremendous advance in

industrialisation, productive output, living standards and social and cultural provision. But with further development the regime began to lose its basis of close-living contact with the people, and take on the character of a bureaucratic apparatus, ruling from above, with police abuses and violations of democratic functioning. With this clogging of democratic life, and obstruction of the kind of economic reforms in which the Soviet Union had led the way, the previous soaring rate of economic growth fell heavily during these recent years. It was clear that a big shake-up was necessary, both in the economic field and in the political field. This is what the Czechoslovak party undertook with abundant energy and determination, beginning from the Central Committee meetings of last December and January; and the new course won in general an enthusiastic response from the people. This turbulent upsurge brought at the same time new problems. It was inevitable that in such a process of drastic correction there should take part not only the masses of the people, but also hostile forces, deriving from the Benes-Masaryk traditional outlook or looking to the West as a model, that is, representing the enemy class standpoint, and trying to take advantage of the opportunity to press their aims. The leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party recognised this danger and warned against these hostile basically anti-socialist forces. It is evident that the victory of these forces would represent a danger to all the socialist countries. In this way the internal development in Czechoslovakia, which as a question of internal policy was entirely the affair and responsibility of the Czechoslovak leadership, to be settled by them alone without outside intervention, became inevitably entangled with questions of international relations affecting all the socialist countries, and giving rise to the various interchanges and consultations which culminated at this stage in the Cierna meeting and the Bratislava Agreement.

Cold War Speculators

A false picture has been spread wholesale by all the mass publicity organs of Western imperialism that this controversy among the socialist countries turned on opposition to the aims of democratic renewal expressed in the January decisions of the Czechoslovak Party. On the contrary. Even after the grave events of August 21, with the entry of allied troops and forced bringing of the Czechoslovak leaders to Moscow, the Moscow Agreement which was reached by both sides set out explicitly:

Soviet understanding and support for the position of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which intends to proceed from the decisions taken by the January and May plenary meetings of the central committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party with a view to improving the methods of guiding society, developing socialist democracy and strengthening the socialist system on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.

Thus this was not the question in dispute. The January and May decisions were agreed on both sides. The controversy turned on whether, in the desire to fulfil these aims of democratic renewal and extended democratic functioning, the Czechoslovak Party leadership was not in fact giving too many opportunities and points of vantage, including a considerable number of key positions in the press and television, as well as through the formation of new organisations, to spokesmen of the hostile right-wing elements against whom the party was in principle expressing warnings. It was inevitable that the cold war speculators of imperialism should look hopefully to the advance of these right-wing elements as offering a prospect of the weakening of the socialist regime.

Western Imperialist Calculations

Throughout the modern era of the advance of socialism and national liberation sweeping forward over the world, imperialism has never ceased to try to strike back, wherever it could find elements in a country to do its work, as in Indonesia or Ghana or the Nato coup against democracy in Greece. Above all, it has sought to find cracks in the socialist world, to take advantage of internal difficulties, with the aim to spread disruption. Nor is it particular what elements it seeks to exploit. In France in May and June hopes were built on the ultra-leftists (both innocently confused spokesmen and conscious agents), as the high-powered Western press and television glorification of these elements revealed, to provoke a counter-revolutionary bloodbath; but the strength of the French Communist Party defeated these manoeuvres. Baulked in France, hopes were next turned to the situation in Czechoslovakia. The *Daily Telegraph* described the new non-communist organisations (K231 and KANN) which had sprung up outside the National Front as 'an embryonic Opposition', and expressed the view, after the entry of the Warsaw Pact troops, that, if these troops had not arrived, the result of the process then going on would have been 'a non-communist regime':

'Can anyone doubt that the result, not perhaps soon, but inevitably in time, would have been a non-communist regime?'

(*Daily Telegraph*, 31.8.68)

Hostile Forces

How far were there such hostile forces, against which the Party warned as right-wing and basically anti-socialist, trying to take advantage of the necessary process of democratic renewal to push their way to the forefront and masquerade as ultra-democrats? The ostentatious glorification of Masaryk and Benes, the champions of anti-communism and anti-Soviet hostility, or the wholesale spreading of unchecked anti-Soviet slanders about the death of Jan Masaryk (when even the British Conservative press from diplomatic sources with close knowledge of him testified to the truth of his suicide) showed that such forces were busy and had established themselves in some considerable vantage points in key organs of the press and in television. The notorious 'Two Thousand Words' Manifesto, which was publicly condemned by the Party, was revealing, not merely with its obviously provocative calls for strikes, disorders and maintaining 'with weapons if need be' a Government carrying out the 'mandate' they proposed, but from its very first sentence unconsciously betraying the background outlook of those who drafted or were misled into signing it. The first sentence ran: 'The first threat to our national life was the war.' The first? The war began in 1939. Munich was in 1938. Munich does not exist in their record (incidentally, it does not appear either in the Action Programme's rather coyly worded historical account of the period). Munich for these signatories was not 'a threat to our national life'. The occupation of all Czechoslovakia by Hitler in the spring of 1939 was not 'a threat to our national life'. Their memory or picture of that period is cosy. The '*first* threat to our national life' was 'the war' which brought liberation by Soviet arms. Justly the Proclamation of the Czechoslovak CP warned on June 2:

We cannot conceal that some discredited political forces of the past, which think their opportunity has again come, are trying to use the democratisation and to return to the political scene. . . . Such tendencies conceal danger that would not only threaten the process embarked upon in January, but would also involve the risk of very serious consequences for the peaceful development of the country.

Class Issues

In a completed socialist economy the old antagonism of classes, exploiters and exploited, is replaced by the co-operation of the new type of classes in a socialist society, the working class, the collective farmers (or non-exploiting peasants) and the intelligentsia. But, as Lenin always insisted, the old bourgeois conceptions, traditions, and, above all, international connections do not disappear so

quickly, even after the establishment of socialism, and in certain circumstances this type of class struggle can even become fiercer, so long as the international bourgeoisie remains strong outside the socialist world. The dispossessed bourgeois elements, even though no longer able to function as exploiters, 'still have an international base in the form of international capital'. (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 115.) In the ferment in Czechoslovakia this year it was impossible to fail to recognise the class issues in this sense concealed behind abstract slogans of 'freedom' and 'democracy' in general. All those over fifty in Czechoslovakia today had their entire formative years in the bourgeois Masaryk-Benes regime; and in the case of the bourgeoisie such traditions might still be strong in many of their families; while many of their younger people, revolting against the restraints and defects of the socialist regime, might have begun to idealise the West as a model. The *New Statesman*, no friend of the Communist viewpoint, published on June 21 an elaborate three-page survey by its correspondent David Caute on the developing situation in Czechoslovakia under the title 'Can the Middle-Class Revolution Survive?'. He found that 'popular as the new course may be amongst the middle class', there was opposition 'within the ranks of a deeply suspicious working class'. For trends among the intelligentsia he found that:

Westernised modernist Czech art now holds almost total sway in Prague. . . .

The decadence stems not so much from the obscenity, the obsession with the grotesque, as from the indiscriminate absorption of American anti-art.

For the different trend among the working class he reported that a recent Public Opinion Research Institute poll on the democratisation process revealed that:

Twenty-one per cent thought it benefited the intelligentsia more than 'ordinary people'.

He reported as his observation:

The unskilled workers appear to be deeply suspicious of the new policy.

At the CKD works in Prague, the iron foundry workers are the most intransigent, the locomotive workers are less so, and the electrical engineers the most 'progressive'.

One of the cleverest tricks of the right-wing elements which had established a considerable hold on television during this period was to label this suspicion of many class-conscious workers against the right-wing trends of some of the intelligentsia trying to take advantage of the democratisation process as 'conservatism' and to project on the television screen pictures of big factories as 'hotbeds of the conservatives'.

Crucial Question of the Communist Party's Leading Role

In this difficult and dangerous situation everything turned on the effective fulfilment of the Communist Party's leading role. The Czechoslovak Party did indeed warn against the danger of this increasing advance of right-wing anti-socialist trends. But it took no measures, although it promised future measures. This dangerous compliance in practice with the advance of enemy forces arose from a conception which, in the desire to correct faults of the previous regime, began to blur and weaken the crucial leading role of the party. At the head of these Notes we have set out two formulations, one of the Action Programme, and one of Lenin, bearing on the role of the party. It should be borne in mind that both these formulations are referring to the pre-1960 era of the dictatorship of the proletariat, before the establishment of the socialist state of the whole people has brought the continuing crucial role of the party as the vanguard to a new stage. The Action Programme's repudiation of the 'false thesis' of the party as 'the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat' was justly concerned to rectify the wrong practice which developed in the later stages of the Novotny regime, when the party began to act as a ruler by command, by-passing the elected state organs, trade unions and mass organisations or treating them as rubber stamps. But Lenin's formulation always brought out the inter-relation of the party and the class, and more fully the triple unity of the party—class—mass, with the party, not as itself the basis of power, for the power is the power of the working class, but as 'the directly ruling vanguard of the proletariat'. Any weakening of any link in the correct relation of this triple unity, Lenin insisted, was fatal. Rosa Luxemburg's rejection of the Leninist theory of the party, which she criticised as the setting up of an elite over the working class, and her advocacy instead of the independent action of the working class as a class without a Leninist party, reached its fatal outcome in the events of December 1918.

Counter-Revolution Carries No Label

Similarly, from the other side, the bourgeois liberal Miliukov, at the moment of the Kronstadt mutiny, proclaimed the slogan of 'Soviet power without the Communists!' Lenin taught how the counter-revolution always tries to disguise itself in a left form close to the revolution, to appear as urging only a small change, a little improvement of the regime (ending of communist one-party domination) in order thereby to undermine the regime and ultimately overthrow it:

Propaganda must teach the lessons of preceding revolutions, in which the counter-revolution supported that opposition to the extreme revolutionary party which stood closest to the latter in order to undermine and overthrow the revolutionary dictatorship and thus pave the way for the subsequent complete victory of the counter-revolution.

(Lenin, Preliminary Draft of the Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party on Party Unity. *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 627.)

Counter-revolution never appears on the stage with the label 'COUNTER-REVOLUTION' to make it easy for fools to recognise. Unfortunately the Action Programme's further treatment of the vital question of the leading role of the Communist Party tended to dilute the conception into that of a kind of moral exhorter, 'arousing socialist initiative', 'showing ways and possibilities', 'winning over all workers', setting 'personal examples', 'suggesting solutions' and acting as 'a political force' among a host of others.

Bratislava Declaration

In his subsequent self-critical review of this period on September 9 Dr. Husak of the Czechoslovak Party leadership said:

Two problems had been under-estimated during the liberalisation period beginning in January. One was the influence and real weight of international factors on Czechoslovakia's internal situation, and the other certain inconsistencies in the attitude to the real anti-socialist forces such as certain clubs as well as some extremes in the field of press, radio and television (*The Times*, September 10).

This dangerous situation of the increasing offensive of reactionary forces in the name of slogans of 'democracy' and 'freedom of the press', and partial paralysis of the leadership from combating this offensive save with verbal appeals and warnings (and promises of a future press law, but the danger was the present practice) gave rise to serious concern to the leadership in the Soviet Union and a number of other socialist countries in the Warsaw Pact that this represented the familiar path towards the internal undermining of a socialist regime, as in Hungary, and therefore became a matter of international concern to prevent such collapse opening the whole socialist front to the enemy. A series of exchanges followed, which culminated in the Cierna negotiations and agreed Bratislava Declaration on August 4. The Western press at first loudly proclaimed this outcome 'a Czech victory' ('Czechs Win at Summit Talks', *Sunday Telegraph*; 'resounding Russian defeat', *Daily Telegraph* editorial; 'Czechoslovaks' victory', *The Times*), because they considered the reaffirmation of the principle of 'equality, respect for national

sovereignty and national independence' to be a new hitherto unheard of principle in the communist world. They missed the point.

National Sovereignty and International Responsibility

The Preamble of the Warsaw Pact long ago laid down from the beginning, nineteen years ago, 'agreement on the principles of respecting the independence and sovereignty of states and non-intervention in their domestic affairs'. The 1957 and 1960 declarations of the international meetings of Communist and Workers' Parties had laid down the same principle for relations between parties. What was new in the Bratislava Declaration was to register agreement on *parallel* principles:

(1) Agreement on 'consolidating the leading role of the working class and its vanguard, the Communist Parties . . . irreconcilable struggle against bourgeois ideology, against all anti-socialist forces . . . high vigilance against any efforts of imperialism and also all other anti-communist forces to weaken the leading role of the working class and Communist Parties'

and in this context, *after* registering agreement on these and other essential basic principles:

(2) Agreement on 'deepening the all-round co-operation of their countries on the basis of equality, respect for sovereignty and national independence, fraternal mutual assistance and solidarity.'

Of course, the sapient Western press contemptuously dismissed all the key-governing principles agreed at Bratislava as mere 'jargon' and 'a lot of turgid flim-flam' (*The Times*, August 5) in place of understanding their significance.

Warsaw Pact Five Take Action

After Bratislava everything turned on the effective fulfilment of the provisions of the agreement there reached. The Czechoslovak leadership did indeed make an appeal to editors to exercise some voluntary restraint, and went ahead with the preparation of the intended future press law. But meanwhile the offensive of the reactionary elements went forward with increasing openness and confidence, including the building up of previously illegal banned organisations. It is evident that, as Dubcek said in his speech to the Party's Central Committee on September 1, 'the Soviet Communist Party had lost its confidence in the ability of the Czech leadership to resolve internal problems and keep the situation under control'. Accordingly, the Warsaw Pact socialist countries which had been co-signatories with the Czechoslovak leadership of the Bratislava Agreement considered, as they made clear in their subse-

quent statement, that the 'assurances and commitments remained unfulfilled'; that the path of negotiation had thus been tried without effect; and that the urgency of the danger, to prevent another Hungary, made prompt action imperative. On the night of August 20 their troops entered Czechoslovakia ('in response to the appeal for assistance made to us by prominent Czechoslovak Party and state leaders', according to the official Message to the People of Czechoslovakia published by the governments concerned, though no names were given), 'not to interfere in your internal affairs, but to offer, side by side with you, a rebuff to counter-revolution, safeguarding socialism and removing the threat to your country's sovereignty, independence and security'.

Moscow Agreement

The Czechoslovak Party leadership and Government protested against the entry of the troops of their allies as a violation of sovereignty and illegal. Some of the main Party leaders, including First Secretary Dubcek, were taken by force to Moscow. Negotiations were opened with President Svoboda who of his own initiative went to Moscow, and on his insistence the other Czechoslovak leaders, including Dubcek, eventually participated in the negotiations. By August 26 the Moscow Agreement was reached, with unanimous accord of all concerned, to support the carrying forward by the Czechoslovak Party leadership and Government of the policies for developing socialist democracy as set out in the January and May decisions of the Czechoslovak CC; to combine this with 'effective measures which serve socialist power, the guiding role of the working class and the Communist Party' as well as solidarity and friendship with the peoples of the Soviet Union and entire socialist community; to fulfil the commitments of the Warsaw Treaty, strengthen the defensive effectiveness of the socialist states, and 'administer a resolute rebuff to the militaristic, revanchist and neo-Nazi forces' which threaten existing frontiers; and with the fulfilment of the measures agreed, to provide for the withdrawal of the allied troops from Czechoslovakia.

Controversy and Criticism

An intense controversy has followed this action of the five Warsaw Pact socialist states in relation to Czechoslovakia. We are not referring here to the hullabaloo raised by Western official quarters and their press; these always raise a hullabaloo whenever the Soviet Union takes an important step. But a grave controversy and differ-

ence of opinion has developed within the world Communist movement. Of the socialist states other than the Warsaw Pact states concerned, four—Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania and China—have expressed criticism; three—Vietnam, Korea and Cuba—have expressed support. Of the Communist parties in the non-socialist world, a number, including the parties of South Africa, Israel, USA and Canada, have expressed support; the majority, among them nearly all the West European parties, including the parties of France, Italy, Spain and Britain, have expressed criticism. The grounds of criticism have been serious. First, that the action involved a violation of national sovereignty, the Warsaw Pact and the agreed relations between parties. Second, that it struck at the basis of relations between socialist states, since the armed forces of a socialist state had no right to enter the territory of another socialist state without the consent of the party and government of that state. Third, that the alleged anonymous invitation could not carry conviction, since every member of the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Party, including those described by some as 'pro-Soviet', had denied participation in any invitation. Fourth, that the evidence of imminent danger of counter-revolution was insufficiently substantiated, and that in respect of the undoubted dangers of reactionary trends which did exist, and which the Czechoslovak Party had publicly recognised and warned against, it was for the Czechoslovak Party to deal with them. Fifth, if other parties considered that the Czechoslovak Party was failing to deal effectively with these dangers, this was a matter for discussion between parties, and not for the movement of troops. These were some of the weighty criticisms made by serious and experienced Communist parties.

Test of Practice

In these differences between Communist parties there is no umpire. Only the historical outcome, the test of practice, is the final arbiter. It may well be that the Warsaw Pact five would reply to the criticisms that the experience of Hungary had shown the harm of leaving a deteriorating situation to reach to the point of open counter-revolution before acting; that the Soviet tanks had already departed from Budapest for four days when the full flames of pogroms, White terror and book-burning compelled them to return; and that to act at once with adequate peaceful safeguarding of the socialist revolution before the flames were alight was the most far-sighted and humane course, preventing heavy suffering and loss of life later. We are still far from in full possession of all the facts

for a final judgement. On the question of external counter-revolutionary agencies of the CIA or West German type, how far they may have succeeded in inserting a finger in the situation, we can normally not expect to have fuller information (when the first British Labour Delegation to Soviet Russia in 1920 expressed scepticism on Lenin's accusation of British complicity in the Polish offensive and demanded documentary proof, Lenin recommended them to have a revolution and find the secret documents) until years later, when aged agents blow the gaff to boast how they organised this, financed that, or pulled off such and such a coup. It may well be that a future historical judgement, with fuller information and the advantage of hindsight, may reach the conclusion that there was indeed a real danger of the weakening of Party control playing into the hands of reactionary elements to undermine the socialist regime in the name of 'democracy' and put through the aim (openly hoped for by the former British Ambassador and Western commentators, including the *Daily Telegraph* editorial quoted earlier, which judged that it would have come off, if the Warsaw Pact troops had not arrived) to pull Czechoslovakia out of the socialist community and align it with the West; that the supreme strategic aim of taking in emergency any action essential for the defence of the socialist revolution against counter-revolution must in principle be recognised; but that there may have been some element of political miscalculation, not in the basic aim, but on detail aspects, on the estimation of the specific relation of forces in Czechoslovakia, in the apparent confusion over the invitation (though there may have been reason for this, subsequently to be disclosed), and in the possible expectation that the arrival of allied socialist troops would have helped to rally the healthy elements against the reactionaries, instead of, as it did, uniting the general body of the people, and all sections of the Party, behind the leaders who had been criticised for assisting the reactionaries.

Path to a Political Solution

In this potentially dangerous situation political credit attaches to both sides to have worked for a solution which would correspond to the interests of socialism and the unity of the socialist community. President Svoboda and the Czechoslovak leadership wisely gave instructions to the army against any military action to oppose socialist comrades. The Soviet leaders were quick to recognise the political reality that the people were united behind the leaders they had criticised, and therefore were ready to put their criticisms on

one side and reach a settlement with the leaders in whom the people had confidence. The Czechoslovak leaders on their side, while not withdrawing their protest, did not sit on their grievances or fulfil the role, as desired by the West, of defiant implacable champions of anti-Soviet resistance. Instead, they recognised the necessity of reaching the best settlement possible, to maintain the general line of advance of their January and May decisions for strengthening socialist democracy and their aim of establishing what they had spoken of as 'the human face of socialism', even if at a slower pace of advance and with some limitations for the safeguarding of socialism, and thus establishing the basis for the withdrawal of the allied troops (apart from whatever be eventually agreed on the frontier question). The Moscow Agreement was thus a defeat for Western hopes of either detaching Czechoslovakia from the socialist community or promoting a conflict between Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries. This does not mean that all problems are thereby solved. The Moscow Agreement is still a precarious achievement. New problems may arise, either through provocations by reactionary elements, or problems of leadership, or disputes over the interpretation of the fulfilment of the Agreement. But it is certainly the common interest of all, equally in Czechoslovakia and the socialist countries, and in the international working-class and progressive movement, that the path of a political settlement, as expressed in the Moscow Agreement, should succeed, to combine the vitally important advance of democratic renewal in Czechoslovakia with the safeguarding of socialism and maintenance of the unity of the socialist countries in the Warsaw Pact. It must equally be the concern of the international Communist movement that the differences of viewpoint on the tactical question involved, which have given rise to intense and understandable controversy, shall not be allowed to weaken the unity which is so vitally needed in the present dangerous international situation on all the common issues of the fight against imperialism. Above all, in connection with these complex, controversial and potentially explosive issues which have arisen over Czechoslovakia, it is necessary to warn all sections of the working class and popular movement to be on guard against the obvious moves of reaction to utilise these difficulties in order to stage a grandiose anti-Soviet offensive. It is necessary to awaken understanding among all sections that this offensive is not on behalf of Czechoslovakia or socialist democracy, but an offensive of the enemies of socialism.

R.P.D.