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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

**Revolution and
Counter Revolution**

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"We all know and, in particular, each worker knows that in practice the workers did not decide anything . . . While many workers thought that they ruled, the rule was executed in their name by a specially educated group of officials of the party and state apparatus. In effect, they took the place of the overthrown class and themselves became the new authority."

From "2000 Words," June, 1968

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All pictures in this pamphlet were taken in Prague by Czechoslovak participants in the Resistance.



October, 1968

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Revolution and Counter Revolution

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FOREWORD

In the stealth of the night, when most of Czechoslovakia slept, hundreds of thousands of Communist troops, in endless columns of Russian tanks, rolled into the country which had just completed the very first act of peaceful revolution—ousting the old Stalinist (Novotny) leadership and electing a new one, establishing a free press, radio, TV and, above all, letting the people find their own tongue. How well they spoke during those brief few months of freedom, how great were their discoveries, and what creative acts they envisioned for the future, the readers can see for themselves as they read the reports direct from Prague that we print here, by X. who is still in Czechoslovakia, and by Ivan Svitak, who is now in the United States but whose lecture we print was delivered by him in Czechoslovakia to the new group of non-Communist socialist humanists.

Russia provided the majority of the troops who took part in the counter-revolution, but they were supported by smaller forces from four puppet nations: East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary. The rulers of the five countries share in common a profound fear of the masses. It was the voice of freedom from a distance that caused alarm in the Kremlin and led to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by 660,000 soldiers—some thousands more than America has in Vietnam.

TOTAL OPPOSITION

Though the counter-revolution was armed up to its eyes and over its head, though the Czechoslovak people were caught off guard and were unarmed, the population, to a man, rose to oppose the invaders in as ingenious and quiet ways as they had achieved their first acts of revolution months before. Every man, woman, and child spontaneously blocked the forward movement of the invading army, be that by derailing troop trains, throwing rocks at tanks or facing them by sitting in front of the armed monsters; be it by painting swastikas on the tanks, changing street signs, or saying, in the five languages of the occupying troops, "Ivan, why are you here?" "Ivan, go home!" "Ivan, let us be!" "Ivan, your problem is at home!" "Ivan, go home!"

The ruling Russian bureaucracy had tried to justify their counter-revolutionary act by inventing a blatant two-fold lie, to the effect that "counter-revolutionary" forces were about to take over

Czechoslovakia from within, and that the Russian Communist Party and state leaders had been "invited" by persons, unspecified, in Czechoslovakia. Instead, what the invading troops found were a people never before so united in opposition to the occupiers—not from West Germany, as charged, but from the "fraternal Communist countries."

It transpired that the soldiers had been lied to, and the Czechoslovak people came face to face with no less than 660,000 shame-faced and bewildered soldiers, representatives of "the new Soviet man." As armies will, the Russians found their way to the army barracks and police stations, but how could they find their way to the radio and TV stations with all the street signs either removed or pointing in the wrong direction?

And so it happened that the radio for a time continued to broadcast, the TV stations to show pictures of the invasion, and the papers to come out regularly from the "underground." They were read openly by all the people in the street as they stood jeering the soldiers.*

The youth who were supposed to have been interested in nothing but "material things" were laying their lives down for the freedom of their country. "The little old ladies" who were supposed to have lived their lives, were taunting the troops as, by the thousands and tens of thousands, the people streamed into the streets to sit defiantly in the squares. Brief but effective strikes were carried out. No Czechoslovak collaborators were found anywhere.

DUBCEK: ILLUSION OR COMPROMISE?

Not only could the invaders not find a Quisling; they could not even find a Kadar. The defiance was total. When their leaders returned from Moscow, having there accepted the degrading conditions of the invading power, and showing they were becoming experts at speaking with two voices, the Resistance continued. So Dubcek is back in Moscow trying to see whether he can get the occupying forces out of his country. Is he subject to such vain illusion or only searching for a formula to make occupation acceptable?

More ominous still is that Russian imperialism is beginning to flirt with the possibility of a dismemberment of the country into three "autonomous" regions—Bohemia, Slovakia, Moravia. Should

*Pictures in this pamphlet were taken in Prague by participants in the Resistance.

Russia stoop to such low depths, it will surely choke trying to swallow the dismembered pieces! The Russians should have learned from history that even where a "Fifth Column" is found, it is impossible for that fifth column to inform on "agitators" when the entire people of the nation itself are the agitators for freedom. That's one thing Kremlin collaboration with Hitler should have taught them—that, in the end, the conquered become the grave-diggers of the conquerors.

The shock of the invasion did not exhaust itself in the non-Communist world, but penetrated to the Communist parties. Thus, the two biggest Communist parties in Western Europe—the Italian and the French—opposed, as did the British Communist Party and those of the smaller countries. The leaders of those parties, in 1956, gave support to the invasion of Hungary—and paid for it in loss of membership and prestige. It was an experience they could not endure a second time, but having declared their support for the policy of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party earlier in the year, they were forced to go further than they intended because of the world reaction to the invasion.

From the very outset, the Communists looked on the crisis as a matter that should and could be settled only by the two Communist parties immediately concerned. The British Communist Party, for example, did not have a single word to say about the people of Czechoslovakia in any one of its official statements. No reference was made to the real victims of the invasion by John Gollan, the general secretary of the British Communist Party, in his speech to his Executive Committee. This is in line with the aim of the Communists the world over—to "enforce the authority of the Party" regardless of the wishes of the masses. As for the few Communist Party leaders, like those of North Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba, who actually dared approve the invasion of Czechoslovakia, they live indeed in a fool's paradise if they think this will bring the Russian troops "to help Vietnam" or Latin America!

REVIVE NATO STRENGTH

What they have done is strengthen the hand of the NATO powers who have decided this is the time to expand war preparations. De Gaulle, too, despite loud opposition to NATO, has assured Kiesinger that France would "stand by" West Germany should Russian troops in Czechoslovakia threaten her borders.

What is far more important is that the brutal invasion of Czechoslovakia has made it necessary for the anti-Vietnam war movement to fight on two fronts since it has, of necessity, centered

attention of freedom fighters to the Russian, and not just American, danger. Surely, the Russian ruling bureaucracy visualized just such consequences. Why, then, did they embark on an action, the military success of which spelled out ideological failure?

There are some who think that it was Poland's Wladyslaw Gomulka, faced at home both from the Left and the extreme nationalist Right, who tipped the scales in favor of invasion. There are others who think the Russians have been led into the fatal decision by East Germany's Walter Ulbricht, who built an impregnable Berlin Wall to keep his workers from escaping to West Germany—only to find that the German workers could now make good their escape by a simple visit to a fraternal country, and from Czechoslovakia easily cross over into West Germany. There is, of course, no doubt that both of these situations were factors in the final decision. But anyone who believes in the fairy tale of the tail wagging the dog doesn't know the Russian bear.

DISCONTENT IN RUSSIA

No, to perceive the reasons for such a calamitous adventure one must look at Russia itself. Moreover, in looking at Russia, one cannot restrict himself to look only at repercussions in Russia of events abroad. Rather, one must keep eyes glued on what emanates from Russia. After all, Russia had, a half century back, achieved the greatest revolution in history and even after its transformation into opposite—from a workers state into a state-capitalist society—it still lives in mortal fear of proletarian revolution within its borders.

Nothing short of what Russian state-capitalism would consider a danger to the very existence of Communist dictatorship would have set Russian troops marching on such a perilous course.

It was, after all, the Czech Union's endorsement of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's appeal for an end to censorship, which he had addressed in vain to the Soviet Writers' Union, which set off a chain of events that culminated, on the one hand, in the democratization movement in Czechoslovakia and, on the other hand, in an anti-Semitic pogrom atmosphere furthered by Polish police reaction against student demonstrations in support of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, this was not the first sign of restlessness in Russia. Long before the Solzhenitsyn appeal in 1967, or the Sinyavsky and Daniel trial on literary freedom in 1966, there were, in 1965, arrests, trials, and restiveness in the Ukraine, that hotbed of opposition to Muscovite domination which had an actual underground operating right in the midst of World War II.

As against the Sinyavsky and Daniel trial in 1966, the 1967 trial of Ginsburg and others (who are not part of the inner core of the highly structured Moscow literary establishment) had expanded their "platform" from literary freedom to civil rights, including that of public demonstrations in which they had participated. While it is true that these are all still literary men, and they have not succeeded in establishing a relation with workers as had the Czechoslovak intellectuals, there is also no doubt that unofficial groupings exist underground that publish "literary essays," **including expressions of sympathy for Czechoslovakia, and demands for more freedom in Russia.** The ruling bureaucracy knows well that where there is that much discontent in the privileged strata of the population, the restlessness among the masses is deep indeed. As one inmate of the Vorkuta forced labor camp, where there was a revolt back in 1953, expressed it then: "Russia is more than ever full of revolutionaries."

Thus, two altogether new features characterize the latest trial—that of Pavel Litvinov, Larisa Daniel, Konstantin Babitsky, Vadim Delone, and Vladimir Dremlyuga. First and foremost, this group appeared the day after the invasion of Czechoslovakia with placards demanding "Hands Off Czechoslovakia!" Secondly, this group of young intellectuals included an unemployed worker, Vladimir Dremlyuga.

It is the fear of the movement from below, the fear of the masses, first of all in Russia, and then in Eastern Europe, that made the Russian ruling hierarchy, schism and all, decide upon the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In their eyes a NATO buildup is not as serious a threat as an internal challenge from below.

This fear of the masses of East Europe was the compulsive force which led to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. Having done so, the Russians do not intend to withdraw their troops, no matter what they promise Dubcek. They are not out to please public opinion, in Czechoslovakia or out of it, East or West. If they relax their military hold at all—and they will have to—it will be because they compel the kind of compliance which assures them there will be no free press or freedom in other mass media in Czechoslovakia.

STOPPING HISTORY'S CLOCK?

If the invaders then allow any economic reforms, it will not be to the point where even technocrats spoke of "new humanist variants," as the Czechoslovaks did. Rather the "liberalizers" will have become mere efficiency experts. If the Russians allow any

Czechoslovak border guards to return to their posts, it will not be to keep the borders open, but to seal them tight. If these counter-revolutionaries allow any "reforms" at all to remain, it will only be when they are convinced that **there will be no free flow of ideas. This is the one force that state-capitalism calling itself Communism cannot tolerate. Not even the closing of the borders was as crucial to the invaders as ending the free flow of ideas.** Hence the timing of the invasion **before** the scheduled Czechoslovak Party Congress for Sept. 9, though that was to be limited only to party members.

The distrust of Dubcek was that, though himself trained in Moscow, he had not been hardened in an outright internal counter-revolution as had they, Stalin's henchmen and heirs. They fear the new generation, even when these are Communists who in no way depart from the Party sacrosanct. It wasn't that Dubcek didn't consider the Party to be the fount of all wisdom, but that he had not stopped others from thinking differently, and thereby "liberalization" was not out of hand.

The extreme military act of violating the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia was not to meet military threats, but to stop history's clock signalling the creation of Communism's gravediggers. As Ivan Svitak put it the day of the invasion: "Authentic Marxism is the main enemy of the Soviet power elite, not the Americans or Chinese."

What delusion to think that such an "enemy" can be stopped by tanks. Nothing can divert the masses from the road to freedom, much less the idea of freedom. New ideas are spreading throughout the world more powerful than the struggle for power between Russia and America, or Russia and China, much less East and West Germany. Czechoslovakia itself is proof of the emergence of a new world movement as a **freedom movement**, the very existence of which corroborates the Marxist-Humanist approach.

SPECTRE OF MARXIST HUMANISM HAUNTS COMMUNISM

A spectre is haunting Communism as it has haunted private capitalism—the spectre of Marxist Humanism. It is this which has crossed over the boundaries between nationalities within a country and the borders between countries. It is this which transcended the boundaries that separate the generations and keeps workers and intellectuals apart; transcended, **not** as something super-human or supra-historical, but as the very stuff of which revolutions are made and remade. Its unifying vision of spontaneity and organization as a single force cannot be encapsulated in an elite party, but releases itself as a forward movement of the masses.

Czechoslovak Spring 1968 may not have reached the heights of Hungarian October 1956 with its Workers' Councils. But it has established new points of departure for unifying Marx's theory of liberation with its practice, and for this Czechoslovakia will forever remain enshrined in the hearts and minds of freedom fighters the world over. The Aug. 20 invasion by Russia and its satellites can no more erase the Czechoslovak experiment than it can stop history from dialectically developing to the end that something which is totally new: authentic Marxism, Marx's Humanism, which is no longer only what it was when Marx first proclaimed it in 1844, or even as recreated in 1956 in the Hungarian Revolution.

Czechoslovakia's greatest achievement is that it began anew the working out of a relationship between theory and practice, philosophy and revolution, freedom and reality. What it was prevented from completing remains our task. It begins with studying the Czechoslovak experience as told by its participants in the pages that follow. It does not end until, throughout the world, the philosophy of freedom has become reality.

October 4, 1968

Raya Dunayevskaya, Chairman
News & Letters Committees,
Detroit

Harry McShane, Chairman
The Marxist-Humanist Group,
Glasgow

"Would I go to jail for something I think is not right?"

—Vladimir Dremlyuga, unemployed worker sentenced to three years in a prison camp, upon being asked by the Russian court if he still considered that his protest was right.

"For three minutes on Red Square I felt free. I am glad to take your three years for that."

—Vadim Delone, 23 year old student, upon being sentenced to prison for protesting the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.

"I am fond of my freedom and value life . . . Feeling as I do about those who kept silent in a former period, I consider myself responsible . . . I thought a great deal before I went to Red Square . . ."

—Larisa Daniel, upon being sentenced to four years in exile for her protest against the invasion.

THE CURRENT CRISIS

By IVAN SVITAK

The three-months intermezzo between totalitarian dictatorship and socialist democracy ended with the adoption of the democratization programme by the communist party. Only now could the second stage of the democratization process start, a stage that is much more significant than the first one, a stage that will decide the character of the future political relations. The second stage will decisively be influenced by the central political question.

This question—formulated in different ways—is: Do six million non-party members, citizens of this country, have the same political rights as members of the communist party—or should they be given only a greater amount of freedom, not endangering the privileges of the party members? Are we going to have democratic, free and secret elections or are we going to play the old game with new people? Are we going to live in a sovereign European state with a polycentric political system or in a non-sovereign state formation, whose leading representatives fear most of all tank-divisions of their own allies?

PRAGUE SPRING

What happened in the first democratization stage that has been concluded in March? There were two types of changes: seemingly significant personnel changes, which are, however, structurally insignificant, and much more important structural changes carried out sometimes by people of the old political configuration. The first type of changes evoked mass excitement as they were accompanied by a well canalized demagoguery against the scapegoats that are to pay for the sins. The second type of changes brought about an unusual, unique, precisely carried out and improvised, but after all, an unwanted political turn.

The personnel, structurally insignificant changes were so far carried out in the supreme offices and represented the personnel exchange of the First Secretary of the Communist Party, the President, the Government, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Presidium and Secretariat of the Communist Party and some representatives of mass organizations. The totalitarian dictatorship carried out an exchange of persons, publicly proclaimed its crisis and the desire for a new form of political life.

At the same time it left untouched all its mechanisms and

did not rid one single representative of the old course of his mandate as deputy nor of his place as a member of the central committee of the communist party. The progressives and the conservatives made a temporary compromise which must soon fall apart, because it is impossible to continue in the demagogic search of the offenders in the person of the prosecutor Urvalek and such like, who are linked by absurd bonds with their own victims.

The personnel exchange of communists in leading positions is finished. Non-party members could not have their say in this matter, although the government also wants to be their government. If you want to hear our voice, then extend the government by the representatives of six million adults—non-party members. We have just as good candidates as those nominated by the communist party and perhaps even better ones.

* * *

BESIDES personnel changes there were also a number of fundamental structural changes, which are much more significant guarantees of democracy than the new persons:

1. an actual, although not legal freedom of press and a limited application of other freedoms, mainly the freedom of assembly.
2. a spontaneous wave of political demands, dominant among which is the demand for rehabilitation of political victims.
3. the coming into existence of the first associations, discussion clubs or bodies of existing institutions, where ipso facto an alternative of the existing policy is being created.

The value of these structural changes is exceedingly high, but it must be expected that pressure will be directed against them in the sense of their gradual limitation and regulation. We must, therefore, develop our civil rights, energetically and conscientiously, without demagoguery against the communists, but unyieldingly, quickly, in the masses of the non-party members, **hic et nuno**, here and now.

Besides these two types of changes one should also note those changes that did not take place. Besides people, nothing has so far been changed in the mechanism of totalitarian dictatorship and its heritage. Intelligent and able politicians at the head of a monopoly apparatus of power are much more dangerous than simple duds, who are not even able to choose for this coup d'état able generals.

The political structure did not change. The National Front

is being artificially revived only for the old game to continue in it. If anybody today represents the nation then, it is not the old political parties, which represent only institutionalized collaboration. The ideas of the National Front expressing wider, above-party interest is not foreign to us, but we must openly admit that in their present form the non-communist parties and organizations represent all kinds of things, only not the nation, ideas or democracy.

* * *

THE MODEL of democratic competition for power is not ideal, but it is the best that exists today. In the history of political theory and in the constitutions of states, theoretically better mechanisms of the execution of power have been proposed many times. They were either not put into practice, or they collapsed into worse systems endangering human freedom much more than the imperfect, vulnerable, but functioning democracy. We welcome and want to have a better democracy than the Western kind but we do not want a worse democracy and on this we firmly stand.

The contemporary state of the political life in Czechoslovakia requires a healthy opposition to the communist programme. Not an anti-communist party, which would have its aim in the change of the economic relations and the total re-orientation of the state, but a political party or parties which would strive for the possibility to rule together and in partnership with the communists as the rightful representatives of the electorate.

If the communists are really for the freedom of assembly then they must admit that even within the limits of the present constitution every party, which is in agreement with the Declaration of Human Rights, has its right to existence. For us the question can therefore not arise whether it is permissible to found such a political organization, but only the question whether to found it, when to found it, and with whom and with what programme. We want to participate in the life of the political institutions of this country. We shall consider which is the best road, and whether the question of an opposition is expedient. Realistic political opposition can also exist without these organizational forms and can appear elementally as an extra-parliamentary opposition, as a students' movement or in any other form.

Regardless of temporary complications that will be quickly solved under the conditions of an open exchange of opinions and points of view, the movement of clubs of committed non-party members is arising as an exceedingly significant phenomenon. The clubs are already today a political platform and represent by their

different points of view a realistic political force—an "opposition." The clubs of committed non-party members must be extended and linked so as to support by their polarization of opinions the natural tendency towards the origin of new political parties.

Regardless of the origin of other parties—to be more precise, regardless of the fact whether they will be permitted—the clubs have today already great possibilities. They can become a platform of political thinking and stimuli for public activity which in itself is more important than the elections themselves.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CLUB

The main question of the second phase of the democratization process are the elections, which must be secret with independent candidates and separate lists of candidates if the democratization process is not to become a swindle in the very bud. The nomination of independent candidates, proposed by non-political organizations, e.g. the clubs of non-party members, must be legalized in the election law.

The way the elections will be held and the wording of the election law are the most important questions of this spring.

We can have a president and a government forced on us, but we will not have the election law, the rules of the democratic game forced on us. The clubs should openly state that they want to have a realistic influence in the nomination of candidates on the course of the elections, that they want to put up independent deputies. We shall not vote for anyone who was a deputy in the present National Assembly. Not for anyone without any exception.

At present the clubs associate various political opinions of non-party members. They at the same time represent the basis for the activity of non-party members in special interest organizations, mainly the trade unions, and the youth movement. So far we can as yet not foresee the organizational form of the clubs and their future necessary politically more precise shape.

* * *

WE SHOULD soon submit to the broader public a certain political conception, with a kind of minimum programme of civil freedoms in Czechoslovakia. It is not necessary to put forward the most radical demands, but to pledge ourselves, the non-party member candidates and the future prospective representatives of state power to fulfill the principal demands on the basis of which we are willing to support certain deputies.

Clubs of non-party members should quickly arise in mass organizations, unions of artists, and should guarantee the basic programme of human rights. If democratization means the normalization of conditions leading towards democracy, then nothing can stand in the way of this activity. I openly state that we are not enemies of communism, that we will have nothing to do with the policy of anti-communism. We are fully responsible, adult, politically thinking citizens of a socialist country, who have outgrown the tutelage of the police-bureaucratic regime and want freedom and socialism.

We are striving for a parliamentary opposition as an alternative of the present execution of state power, because we fear that an extra-parliamentary opposition would be much more dangerous. If the political activity of the people will not be purposefully included in the creation of the socialist democracy, then it will necessarily take unto itself much more problematic forms, which it will be difficult to stop and which could endanger also the state and both its nations.

We know from an old fairy tale that the wolf had his voice changed to be able to get at the lambs. We know the voice of the wolves, the voice that was just as dangerous for communists as for non-party members. We shall not open the door, when he will try to convince us with a changed voice, because only fairy tales have a happy end. We do not, *a priori*, mistrust the communist, but in answer to any gentleman whose voice is breaking we clearly answer no.

The victory of little David over the giant Goliath is a myth. A reality on the other hand are the descendants of the people, whom Hitler's fascist dictatorship burned in millions in the gas chambers of the concentration camps, the young Israelis who tell us:

Never again like sheep! Never again like sheep!

—Ivan Svitak
Prague, April 18, 1968



By X . . .

Direct from Prague

Czechoslovak Challenge— Spring 1968

The last day of March saw the emergence of an organization unique in the entire East European bloc: thousands of people participated in the founding of "K 231", associating former political prisoners of the present Communist regime, (K for club, 231 denoting the law under which political enemies used to be sentenced to excessive penalties).

Also, an association calling itself "Club of the Engaged Non-Party Members" was founded for the purpose of uniting people not organized in any of the existing political parties. The Ministry of the Interior, responsible for authorizing new organizations refused to issue any license for any of these associations. The Communist Party refused to recognize any political grouping except the existing ones. The debates on this question, however, divided party members.

Young students and workers flocked to public gatherings at which high ranking party officials answered more questions which a few months before were frowned upon or prohibited altogether. There was a feeling of the birth of democracy. On March 4, the presidium of the Communist Party had abolished its 1964 resolution which had introduced sterner censorship measures. Since then Czechoslovakia has practically no censorship.

This freedom—"let a hundred flowers blossom"—became a thorn in the sides of Polish, Soviet and

East German Communists. Despite this and despite repeated attacks from some party quarters taken over by higher officials of the party apparatus, no restrictions were reimposed. Any regulation or party resolution containing restrictive measures, any official pronouncement that failed to respect the newly-won freedoms came under attack in the press and/or radio. Television was suddenly discovered to be of immense power if any personality or idea was to get a wide hearing. Thus politics got "democratized" anew after 20 years.

This first act of the democratization process drew slowly to a close without as yet exerting a real impact on life in Czechoslovakia. The changes seemed all to be merely at the top. At the beginning of April, the presidium of the Central Committee was newly elected, the National Front—comprising every existing political party and "social organization"—got a new chairman, Alexander Dubcek, who seemed to bring some fresh ideas about the cooperation between Communists and non-Communists; a new government was formed, the National Assembly chose a new chairman, the Supreme Court had a new president. Although these changes were only on the surface, they did seem to give people the assurance that the ruling party was actually throwing away both old methods and the people associated with these methods. Dubcek and many minor officials after him took every opportunity to stress the merits of the lower level officials.

Through the maze of speeches what could be seen clearly enough was the concern of the apparatus

that it be kept intact against the assaults of men like the philosopher Svitak and those who signed manifestoes like the "2,000 Words." In the case of the "2,000 Words" — a later development — the chorus of criticism from the Czech Communist Party was joined by quite vicious attacks by the leaders of the Russian, East German and Polish Communist Parties, who were beginning to issue ominous warnings about how "counter-revolutionary" elements were threatening "the socialist achievements."

What aroused their ire were these words: "We can assure the government that we will back it, if necessary, even with weapons, as long as the government does what we gave it the mandate to do." In the case of Ivan Svitak, who is a lecturer in philosophy at the Charles University and is attempting to establish a relationship not only with rebellious students but directly with miners, it was his description of the Czechoslovak system as one of "totalitarian dictatorship" that aroused them.

The greatest achievement of the Czechoslovak experiment in democratization, however, is that for the first time in 20 years (actually 40 years if you consider the theoretical void since the death of Lenin) Marxists are debating fundamental questions openly. Here is how Professor Svitak expressed it:

"Workers and intellectuals have a common enemy — the bureaucratic dictatorship of the apparatus . . . And it is for this reason that in the interests of socialist democracy we have to strengthen the unity of those working with their hands and those

who work with their brains against the apparatus of the elite which has been, is, and remains the main obstacle in the unique experiment of our nation with socialist democracy."

"There is a real danger that workers' self-management can become camouflage for the manipulation of the workers by the management. Our own experience has shown this (for example, what became of the unions!) as well as the experience of Yugoslavia and Poland. In order to prevent this from happening here, thought must be given right now not only to forms of workers' self-management but also to forms of workers' self-defense."

Zybnek Fiser, in *Nova Svoboda*,
June, 1968

"Profound thoughts arise only in debate, with a possibility of counterargument, only when there is a possibility of expressing not only correct but also dubious ideas."

—Prof. Andrei D. Sakharov,
in "Thoughts About Progress,
Peaceful Co-existence and
Intellectual Freedom"

Prelude to Spring

The prelude to the spring events actually began the year before. First, the economic conditions were very grave and there was all sort of talk in the ruling circles about the need for "economic reform." Then, the Writers' Congress, in June, 1967 came out with a cry for freedom. This reflected, not only their position, but the restlessness in the whole country among all strata of the population. Finally came the student demonstrations in the autumn, and the attacks on them brought home to every citizen an acute awareness of the Stalinist tinge of the Novotny clique. The scene was set for the meeting of the Party Central Committee, in October, 1967, to consider "the position and role of the party."

The economic and social crisis affected deeply the party as well. Wide-spread passivity of its rank and file had been a long-standing concern, very often mentioned in party newspapers. An undercurrent of dissatisfaction and criticism of the discrepancy between hollow claptrap of party officials and the reality was growing ever stronger.

At first sight the outcome of the October session seemed to be no more than one other lengthy document reaffirming the leading role of the Party. However, it was at this session that a point was made on a significant question which helps to illuminate the internal crisis of the Communist Party: Alexander Dubcek — who was to become First Secretary of the Party after January, 1968, the first Slovak to hold this crucial post — had come forward with a

strong criticism of the Party "solution" of the national question which Lenin had considered critical.

The clash of Dubcek with Novotny, the previous and long-standing First Secretary of the Party, was at first not altogether clear, especially since the October, 1967 session had to be broken off to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution which involved Novotny's going to Moscow. He promised, however, to allow the work of the "central authorities, above all of the government" to be analyzed at the next session to be called in December.

The presidium of the Central Committee that had to prepare the plenary session was called as late as December 11, just before this session had to begin. The clash with Novotny continued, the presidium being unable to unite on a proposal to be presented to the plenum. Some of its members pressed for the functions of the president of the republic and the party's first secretary to be separated. (Novotny combined both of them in his hands.) At the plenary session Novotny's report on a new division of governmental responsibilities was rejected. **This was something unheard of, it had never happened before and was a clear sign of mistrust towards the most powerful man in party and state.**

After stormy debates, some echo of which came to the knowledge of a wider public, individual members of the presidium as well as Central Committee secretaries, were called upon to report on their per-

sonal views. This quite unusual procedure made it impossible for them to hide behind a collectively accepted "resolution" and to ponder over their standpoint. The discussions dragged on too long for the sessions to end before Christmas and everyone was happy to agree to a woman member's proposal to break up and come again at the beginning of January, 1968.

The December plenum decided to constitute a consultative group that had to propose to the January session — in agreement with the presidium — how to solve the "cumulation of the highest functions" and, if need be, to put forward an alternative proposal as to who should be the first secretary. Two problems came into play here. The first was, of course, the economic crisis. The second was the national question.

The authoritarian regime had proved incapable of dealing with the economic crisis that had broken out as far back as 1963 when national production decreased and economic growth stagnated. A few figures for illustration: One crown of national income between 1956-1960 to two-and-a-half crowns of investments; during 1960-1965 the proportion rose to one crown to nine-and-a-half crowns. In 1938, a flat could have been bought for 1392 work hours, in 1964, for 1720 hours. While agricultural production in Western Europe increased roughly by half between 1961 and 1963, Czechoslovak agriculture reached only its pre-war level at this period.

Some half-hearted attempts were made at "industrial reorganization," but these were insufficient

to stop the downward trend of the economy. By 1967 the economists' demands for decentralization and the extreme political centralization exploded into the open. Still, some of the members of the presidium hesitated to stand up against Novotny. A few of them were linked to him by years of their "common" rule. And none of them had a clear concept of what was to be done if Novotny were overthrown. The older among them who had been party members since before the war had spent their lives in serving the idea of Stalinism. They were unable to develop any new idea: they might have sensed the need for a change, even a profound change, above all in the economy—but as subsequent events were to demonstrate, they simply could not follow the January developments once the latter quickened their pace.

Novotny had doubtless his own thoughts on the intended changes. During the days of the January session, People's Militia — special armed workers' units consisting entirely of Communists, with a tradition of dogmatic membership very loyal to the party — had maneuvers in Prague and around the capital where some extra police units were concentrated as well. Also, the most loyal follower of Novotny in the army command, General Sejna, tried to convince a group of officers of their duty to stand up against the intended change in the person of the first secretary — but the letter they sent came just one hour after the election had taken place.

Nor was there any consolation for Novotny in the visit of Brezhnev whom he had invited as early

as December, 1967. The Russian might later have felt very grieved for his earlier non-intervention, but by then the situation had changed more than all three of them, Brezhnev, Novotny and Dubcek, could have foreseen.

Now the second sequel of the December session followed, beginning with January 3. After three days of heated debates, with a great part of the Central Committee members rather hesitating and undecided for a long time, a majority of the Central Committee supported not only the proposal of the presidium to separate the functions of the first secretary and head of state but also elected four new members of the presidium, three of which at least belonged to those who had criticized Novotny since Autumn, 1967. The resolution approved on January 5 and published together with a short communique on January 6, still linked Novotny's "personality" with important successes of socialist construction.

The attempt to paper over the differences between the "economic reformers" and the majority of the Central Committee could not, however, hide the clash between Dubcek and Novotny on the national question, which had become one of the central issues in dispute between the two Communist leaders. In order to fully understand what is involved, we must here roll the film of history backwards to the period between the end of the Second World War and the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia in 1948. (For space considerations we must omit the question of other national minorities such as the Ukranians, Hungarians and Germans).

A Short Pre-History

1. 1944-1948

The Slovaks, for centuries oppressed and exploited by the Hungarian gentry, remained the least developed part of the Czechoslovak Republic, established in 1918. What made things still worse was the theory that there was but a single "Czechoslovak" nation. In spite of all evidence to the contrary, the "theory" kept maintaining that the Czechs and the Slovaks were not two different nations.

What may seem a play on words is, unfortunately, for Czechoslovakia and its working class, a vital question; denying the Slovaks their own nationality meant denying their self-determination. Together with the depression that hit Slovakia in the thirties far harder than the rest of the country, a strong nationalist movement developed there, entered into agreement with Hitler, thus helping to destroy Czechoslovakia in 1938. Whereas the western parts of Czechoslovakia became a German "protectorate," Slovakia emerged as a "free state" allied with Germany.

Though prospering relatively, the majority of the Slovaks detested the Nazis and after Hitler's assault on Soviet Russia, when the Slovak government sent its troops to help the Germans on the eastern front, the anti-German feeling came to a head. In collaboration with other national anti-German elements, the Slovak Communist Party organized a broad political union on the eve of 1943, and

counting on Soviet help and cooperation once the Red Army stood on Slovak borders, prepared an armed uprising. Let's note that most of the Slovak troops that were to fight along with the Germans crossed to the Soviets and became part of the Czechoslovak armed units fighting with the Red Army.

The uprising broke out in August, 1944. The Red Army helped as little as possible, for the Soviets had their own military plans. Thus, the uprising, in spite of heroic battle, was crushed. It is against this tragic background that one must see the heroism also of the Prague uprising in May, 1945.

Few in the world outside of Czechoslovakia know of either uprising and fewer still understand them. There are those who are all too ready to speak about the ease with which the Communists were able to take over in 1948, claiming that it proves the "passivity" of the working class in accepting Communist leadership in Slovakia in 1944 and in Prague in 1945. What they forget is that it was the Nazis, not the Communists, who held state power during the War; that the six years of Nazi occupation and terror had been preceded by a disastrous depression, caused by private capitalism not Communism; and that the Communists, once the Nazis invaded Soviet Russia, became the most militant resistance fighters.

It is true that, despite the fact that the proletariat played the leading role in the 1945 uprising, the workers let control slip from their hands, that the trade union organizations as well as the political

ones came under the rule of the **appartchiki** and were at no time subject to control from below. Moreover, the Communists promptly created an amalgam of bureaucracies. State capitalism, or what the Communists were pleased to call "a mixed economy," was established and established from above.

One important outcome of the 1944 uprising was the resolution of the Slovak political parties to unite with the Czechs and to build a common state again as soon as Germany was defeated. The only condition was to be an autonomy for Slovakia. This was solemnly promised in the first Czechoslovak post-war government declaration issued in the East Slovakian town of Kosice in April, 1945. Though it met with some resistance on the part of the adherents of the idea of a "Czechoslovak" Nation, the agreement was being carried out.

The political system of Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948 was that of a bourgeois democracy with civil liberties rather strictly observed and political parties united in a National Front. The Communists smashed it as soon as they took over: they made other parties mere puppets, first by purging them of "reactionary" elements, and then severely restricting their membership.

The Social Democratic Party that could have become the only contender of the Communists for the working class vote, preferred fusion with the Communist Party in June, 1948 by the very leadership that had closely cooperated with the Communists long before 1948; indeed, just as soon as the

Communists showed they could control state power. After the fusion the only political organizations allowed to exist in factories and in offices were the Communist cells. The trade unions that united in the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement in 1945 were then made a tool of the party. A consequence of this monolithic domination was that it became impossible for any genuine workers' leader to appear during twenty years of the Communist reign.

Needless to say, the behavior of the Communists was a perversion of Marxism, both in the political field and in the establishment of its command in the economy. It was not the means of production that were expropriated from the bourgeoisie in 1945, but only the so-called key industries. The bourgeoisie that collapsed was not removed but was driven into the position of a petty-bourgeoisie. The power and positions of the latter rose accordingly. It increased also by the recolonization of the border districts from where the Germans were expelled to Germany; by the land reform that made the rural proletariat petty-bourgeois as well; and by price increases of stocked goods which overnight added to the shopkeepers' wealth. Between 1945 and 1948, the reins of the economic power which the bourgeoisie lost, fell to the civil service apparatus, one more bureaucracy.

2. AFTER 1948

After the February coup of 1948, the civil service bureaucracy, soon "purged" by the party and re-filled from the party ranks, fused with the Communist Party apparatus. This amalgamation became the backbone of the Communist Party. In the short period between 1945 and 1948, the Communists based their public policy on the record of their resistance against the Nazis, their large intellectual following and stressed friendship to the Russian liberators. They presented the program for the first Czechoslovak post-war government. **Gottwald, the chairman of the Communist Party, summed up his party policy in the immediate post-war period in the slogan "No Soviets, no socialization."**

Naturally, this could easily be agreed upon also by other, even non-socialist parties. A mixed economy was established and a kind of planning was introduced. Full employment, achieved soon after the economy recovered from the worst war losses, prevented misery on a massive scale.

In this mixed economy it was the biggest trusts — in spite of their nationalization — which could retain their significant role and bear upon the economic policy. After the Communist take-over, this tendency gained strength since the Communist planning put an ever-increasing emphasis on the production of production means. One of the arguments put forward at the time — quite plausible at first sight — was the stepping up of the cold war, embargo on goods for Czechoslovakia and the soc-



ialist bloc, as well as the need for strengthening relations with the U.S.S.R.

Stalin's pressure for shipments of final products, above all of the engineering industry, met the "needs" of Czechoslovak steel and iron industry and heavy engineering. The basis of the vicious circle of Czechoslovak economy can be found here. Besides, these tendencies were intensified by a planning system since 1952 copied from Soviet example. An advanced industrial country, Czechoslovakia was gradually falling behind both in industry and agriculture and increasing production for the sake of production.

For the first few years, the immense waves of investment seemed to bring growing welfare. Social security, so dear to the generation which had in mind the dreadful years of unemployment, was assured. Living standards rose partly—not by rising wages, however, which were far less than in the neighboring capitalist states of Austria and Western Germany, but by employing more members of the same family.

Under this surface, economic problems and contradictions accumulated and moral disintegration set in. Czechoslovak society as it has emerged from the war had a strong sense of national values, since solidarity had been a weapon against the Nazis. Soon after the February coup, however, leading Communists in Prague, helped by some Slovak Communists planted in the offices of the Slovak party branch, ousted the resistance leaders, accusing them of "bourgeois nationalism". The constitu-

tion of 1960 then sealed the fate of Slovakia, making it a mere province of the central government whatever might have been the outward signs of autonomy. Novotny only made things worse by openly offending the Slovaks during his visits to Slovakia as head of state.

The Communists pretended to give the working class a leading role and systematically denigrated all other social groups. The contradictions between demagogical, pompous words and the oft-repeated but never fulfilled promises, the contradiction between the rosy picture of would-be socialism and the drab and ever-worsening reality of day-to-day life led to a deep seated scepticism and distrust towards "intellectuals". A very special role in the corrosion of moral values was played by the trials.

The first of them took place at the beginning of June, 1950. In the dock stood the woman, M. P. Horakova, a former socialist, with twelve co-defendants. Horakova and three others were sentenced to death. Included was Z. Malandra, eminent Marxist, whose actual "guilt" was that he had strongly opposed the Moscow frame-up trials. The biggest of these frame-up trials—prepared with the assistance of Soviet "specialists"—was that of Rudolf Slansky (former Communist Party secretary general) in November, 1952. Eleven of the fourteen accused were executed.

In the two-month period between January 1 and March 1, 1951, recent research points out there were 391 public trials in Bohemia alone. Of these cases, 14.8 percent concerned charges of "anti-state" activ-

ities, 27 percent “economic criminal offenses”. Workers represented 39.1 percent of the defendants.

At the same time, the party forced tens of thousands of “white-collars” — artisans, shop keepers and what they called “bourgeois elements”—to go into production. A single campaign in 1951 was organized under the slogan of “77,000”; it took that many to replace those driven to the plants. The pretense that the Slansky trial was needed to stop “the nationalistic road” was belied, by the frame-up character of the trials not only against the leaders, but above all against the thousands of workers.

It was all part and parcel of what has since become known, during de-Stalinization, as “the crimes of Stalin.” Fraudulent lies and vulgar insults spread wildly, were accompanied by hate campaigns with a strong pogromistic flavor. **Far from clearing the road, as the officials then claimed, for “history-making social layers” — resistance members, soldiers who had fought abroad during the war, the proletariat — the distinctly anti-Semitic line pursued in connection with Slansky’s trial and the terror in the country, reached its height for all layers of the population in that period.**

“Marxism is a program of human freedom, and if it is not this it is not Marxism.”

—Ivan Svitak, in *Socialist Humanism*, 1965

Point, Counterpoint: Back to the Main Drama

The irony of the situation in 1967-68, as the “economic reformers” and those who were fighting for a certain amount of self-determination for Slovakia were continuing their behind-the-scenes struggle, was the coincidence that it was triggered by the anti-Semitism which flowed from the Communist position during the Arab-Israeli War. The rebelliousness at the Writers’ Congress in June 1967 and the totally different debate in the Central Committee of the Party in October which was climaxed by the replacement of Novotny by Dubcek, suddenly seemed to be related not to a mere personality fight between top Communists. Instead, people rightly felt that this held special importance for everyone. Somehow, everyone felt that the change in personalities did signify a change in the operation of the system itself. A change in the composition of the presidium, quite surprisingly, put emphasis on the concept of “democratization”.

The lack of information was strongly criticized even afterwards. As a continuation of the old policy of not telling the membership the whole truth, the inauguration of a new policy of democratization seemed rather ominous. It was as much one of the convincing proofs of the power of the conservatives, as the men around Novotny came to be known, as it was a proof of the same attitude towards “lower” levels of membership both on the part of the old clique and new guard. It was a first confirmation

that the January changes were no experiment — as deeply as these might cut — but simply a change within the system.

The one important new phenomenon emerging in consequence was, however, the creation of a real public opinion. Press, radio and television seized the opportunity offered by the dismissal of their enemy, Novotny, and began to pound at particular features of the “previous” system. It took some time before the new leadership grasped the significance of these allies. For it was only with the assistance of the mass communications that the crack opened in January widened into a real breach. Their newly won freedom to report, their “daring” attitudes to controversial points of domestic policy got the public at large into a mood of expectant impatience and sustained an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the old methods and ways.

Gradually citizens began to understand that the change at the top might really mean more this time. It was not until the end of the month, however, that one of the new men who had been very instrumental in the fall of Novotny, Josef Smrkovsky, published a letter called “What is at Stake Today?” in the trade union paper and stressed democratic principles as the basis of decisions.

At the end of January, Dubcek, up to then also first secretary of the Slovak branch of the Communist party, ceded this post to Vasil Bilak. The latter had no clear “democratic” record and his advance was taken as a sign that in Slovakia the “democratization process” was not to become even as “radi-

cal” as in the western parts of the state. Only two or three of the most prominent representatives of the Novotny regime were changed in the Slovak capital. Not only were new men emerging in command posts there very slowly but some of the newcomers soon proved to have attitudes hardly distinguishable from those of their predecessors, merely shielding themselves with the magic word “federalization”, i.e. federal status for autonomous Slovakia.

Indeed, at the Congress of Agricultural Cooperatives that met on February 1, Dubcek stressed the limitations of the changes. “We do not change the general line, neither of the domestic nor in foreign policy. The starting base of a more rapid socialist development lies in the field of politics. In the development of socialist democracy . . . we have to make more room for the activities of all social groups of our society.”

Nevertheless, further personnel changes began to indicate some new developments: Mamula, the almighty head of the 8th department of the Communist Party Central Committee (to which army, security forces and intelligence services were subordinated) was replaced by the head of the army’s political administration, Lt. General Prchlik. Mamula was one of the most faithful followers of Novotny and almost as great an evil-doer as his master himself.

The second strong man pushed out of his post was Jiri Hendrych, for years the ruler of the ideological section of the party regimenting arts

and literature. His furious banging at the rebellious writers at their 1967 congress brought him into special disrepute at this time.

In the presence of Communist leaders of the neighboring "socialist" countries, assembled at the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the February coup, Dubcek stressed the wish of the workers and peasants: "by decisive actions to indeed radically change the state of affairs." "The discussion during our drawn-out sessions in December and January, for which we hardly could find any similarity in the last 20-30 years," he continued, "touched on every essential issue of our party's policy."

At this time the movement of hope seemed to be in full swing. Letters were pouring into the newspaper offices as well as to radio and television networks as the public grasped genuine democracy. At about the same time the president of the Union of Fighters against Fascism, which united resistance members and survivors of Nazi concentration camps, put out the winged word of "rehabilitation." **As far as resistance fighters alone were concerned, there were 40-50,000 men afflicted with unjust measures during the fifties, he estimated, and asked for an act rehabilitating these people as well as other victims of repressions and discriminations.**

The popular rage, roused every day by some fresh revelation of the crimes perpetrated in a Nazi-like style during the Novotny era, was climaxed in the first days of March by the Sejna affair.* Since Sejna had been a close friend of the president's son, and an intimate of the head of the state himself,

Novotny was rightly seen as the embodiment of all evils of the preceeding period. He belonged to the top hierarchy ever since 1951. By March 8, Communists from the Army GHQ demanded that all accomplices and protectors of Sejna, including the president of the republic and Mamula, be called to account. To the surprise of the Central Committee, the campaign against Novotny was so strong throughout the country that it led to his resignation on March 21 and to the election of General Svoboda for president on March 30.**

* This General's secretary of the head committee of the party organization at the Ministry of Defense — and, as such, independent (sic) of the Minister himself and subordinated to the 8th department of the Central Committee—and head of the Minister's secretariat, was involved in a swindle. But, due to the connivance of civil and military investigation officers as well as members of the presidium of the national assembly, he was able to flee with his son and mistress. The details of the affair known so far reminds one of "the good times" of any bourgeois society.

** Svoboda had organized the Czechoslovak army in exile in the U.S.S.R. and had been something of a popular hero since his victorious return in 1945. As Minister of Defense, his support of the Communist coup in 1948 had been one of the main conditions of its success. Dismissed soon afterwards, he was sent to an agricultural cooperative as accountant clerk and was also otherwise a victim of the regime.

The manner of the election was, however, fresh proof that the old practices were continuing. The problem, in this case, was that, though a majority of the public approved of it, the candidate was imposed on the country, since no other candidate was put forward, and the preparations and the procedure were all carried through in a single week.

The dramatic March developments would not be stilled by this concession. The cry for the representatives of the old order to leave the scene became so loud and was supported by mass communications to such an extent that heads began to fall at last: on March 12, the chairman of the Trade Union Congress resigned, the National Assembly gave a vote of no confidence both to the Minister of Interior and Prosecutor-General. Also, throughout February and March the pressure for postponing the general election due to take place in May, grew and found some support at the party district conferences so that the presidium of the Communist Party Central Committee "recommended" at the end of March to postpone the election to the end of June.

On April 5, the first day of its session, the Central Committee of the Communist Party accepted an Action Program. On 27 closely printed pages — in chapters called: Czechoslovakia's Road to Socialism; For the Development of Socialist Democracy; For a New System of Political Management of Society; National Economy and Living Standards; Development of Science, Education and Culture—it presents a program the Communist Party has not known for many decades. The program proclaims that: **"The party cannot enforce its authority, but has to obtain**

"... any large scale strike action cannot but transform itself into political conflict with the bureaucracy. For the working class, it is the only way to change its situation. Today, at a time when the system is going through a general crisis, the interest of the working class lies in revolution; the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the present relations of production goals—the introduction of an economic, social and political system based on workers' democracy."

—**Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski,**
An Open Letter to the Party,
(written in a Polish prison)

"It was high time for these boring monologues of unending self-praise to end; it was high time for those who had been ruled, and who were and still are the weaker ones, to speak. I believe it's essential in a democracy that the greatest possible variety of society, associations, and clubs whose origins are free and spontaneous be permitted to exist, allowing every interest its natural representation and an unrestricted right to be heard."

—**J. Jesenski, in Kulturny Zivot, April, 1968**

it anew by its deeds. It cannot enforce its line by ordering, but by the works of its members, by the veracity of its ideals."

As we see, the Communist Party has no intention of resigning its "leading role" — all it wants is to change the form in which it would carry on with its leadership. It is, however, changing its methods of operation and even proposing the establishment of "Workers' Councils". A careful reading of the "Development of Socialist Democracy" will show, however, that what they mean by Worker Councils is not workers' control, but workers' discipline. Here is how the program reads:

"The economic reform will make more and more the whole labor collectives of socialist enterprises face a situation in which they will directly perceive the consequences of either good or bad management of these enterprises. The party considers it, therefore, inevitable for the whole labor collective that bears the consequences also to influence the management of the enterprise. A need for democratic authorities in the enterprises arises which would have limited power towards the management. It is to these authorities that the directors and leading officials of the enterprises would be responsible. They would be appointed to their functions by these authorities. These authorities must be an immediate part of the managing mechanism of enterprises; they cannot be a social organization (for this reason they cannot be identified with trade unions). These authorities would be formed partly by election of representatives of the labor collective, partly by representation of some organizations from outside

of the enterprise that would assure an influence of the interests of the entire society at an expert, qualified decision level. It is necessary for the representation of these organizations to be also subject to democratic forms of control."

Further discussion showed there might be several interpretations of the proposed formula, one of them tending to emphasize more the need of "managerial experts" because of the economic misery that has to be overcome, the other one stressing the necessity for the workers to decide as much as possible on what they have to produce and how their product is to be distributed. For the present, it seems that the more "practical" point of view prevails, and the composition of the workers' councils will represent only partly the workers: a third of the council will probably be elected directly by the workers, a third might be nominated or elected from among "outside experts", the last third may be chosen otherwise.

We see here that there are plenty of loopholes in this to permit the same ordering from above which killed the trade unions as independent organs of the working class. At best, they point the way to the Yugoslav example of "Workers' Councils" which bears little resemblance to factory committees controlled by the workers themselves. And behind it all there is the ubiquitous Communist Party. Yet, to the extent that it is breaking away from the Russian model, and is resisting Russian, Polish and East German pressures to return to the old methods of Novotny, it has the popular support of the overwhelming majority of the people of Czechoslovakia.

The first phase of what is called "democratization" may be assumed to have ended by the end of April. The Communist Party tried very hard at this time not only to take the lead (highest officials kept repeating that the party would not renounce its leading role) but emphasized its wish to "enlarge and deepen" democracy and to offer "real partnership" to other political parties in the National Front; it therefore had to turn — no matter how hesitantly — against its most conservative wing.

Thus, at the end of April, when the first leaflets appeared denouncing the new leadership as "revisionists" and slandering the more progressive elements, the Dubcek leadership had to rely on public opinion. Ironically, the authors of these leaflets made their appeal to the workers, asking them to defend "their achievements" — in spite of the obvious facts, known to everybody, and in spite, too, of what the press was now revealing. These revelations concerned not only the bureaucratic methods of the old guard, but also showed that the relative standards of living of the working class, even in the neighboring capitalist states (which had to start from scratch after World War II) was far higher than those in "socialist Czechoslovakia."

There has been much talk throughout the years about a "workers' policy" and this slogan appeared again during the past few months. Yet those who used it most often were, in practice, the workers' worst enemies. We have seen where they have brought the working class: working and living conditions, wages, living standards, basic freedoms are not only below those of the capitalist countries,

but, as we have shown, the whole economy has been stagnating since 1963.

Yet, the old-guard leaflets with the brand new slogans intensified their campaign. These leaflets appeared at every railway station, were released by time bombs, scattered by planes in the surroundings of the capital, and so forth. Moreover, this was done without any visible effort on the part of the police to identify the offenders. All this pointed to the continuing strength of the Novotny wing of the party, and followed the line set by the Russian, East German, and Polish press attacks upon the democratization in Czechoslovakia.

Obviously, the joint "ideological struggle" was backed up by the Soviet troops remaining in the country after the maneuvers of the Warsaw Pact nations were over. At the same time, a campaign was unleashed in *Pravda* about "counter-revolutionary elements", not stopping even at Stalinist-type of inventing amalgams, such as suggesting that the democratization movement is infiltrated by "CIA agents". Finally they demanded a confrontation between the Czech leadership and the Russian Politbureau, as well as with the Warsaw Pact nations. In this they succeeded after compromising with the Dubcek leadership that these be held, not in Russia, but on Czech soil.

Even before this, the Communist Party Central Committee, on May 29 to June 1, struck up a compromise between the "progressives" and "conservatives." All that the progressives achieved was a temporary expulsion of Novotny and some of his

worst companions who took part in the organization of the political trials during the fifties (all of them have been expelled "until final results of the inquiry commission are known").

The same session decided to call the extraordinary party congress for September 9. A real battle preceded this decision since the progressives called for it against the resistance of Dubcek himself (who, at the moment, is very popular among the population in spite of the evidence of his being rather a middle-of-the-road man). But, as the conservatives were becoming an acute danger in view of their positions of power which they retained, Dubcek understood that his own position, and that of the progressives, could be held only if the Party Congress gave its consent.

Essential freedoms are guaranteed for the time being: freedom of speech, freedom of the press. With the free flowing of ideas, the Communist spell is being broken. There are difficult struggles ahead which the workers will have to fight. There may be two fronts on which particular dangers loom: one is concealed in the words of a high official, a member of the Ministry of Economic Planning, to a French journalist: "Full employment is a fiction we have created, to which we are accustomed and which has become an obstacle today for a solution of our problems."* The second front is the danger to freedom just now very intensely demonstrated by the Soviets and their allies.

* L'Express. No. 881.

The manoeuvres announced as "command and headquarters manoeuvres" might, indeed, have been planned months before. However, though Premier Cernik told the public that all foreign troops would go by June 30, they did not do so. Contradictory explanations by the Minister of Defense and his speakers could not calm public opinion. Gradually the public learned the true facts of the situation — that the High Command of the Warsaw Pact consisted exclusively of Soviet officers, and that commanders of other bloc countries were mere liaison officers. So the Czechoslovak army command had no power to tell the Soviets when they had to leave. When the troops did begin to move it was done in a curious manner; some of the units that crossed into Czechoslovakia from East Germany were now to move east, across the whole of the country, to cross into the Soviet Union.

The troops were still in the country when the "Warsaw letter" of the five Communist parties arrived in Prague. The Bulgarian, East German, Hungarian, Polish, and Soviet Communists told the Czechoslovak Communist Party "hostile forces" were "threatening to break Czechoslovakia away from the socialist community." "A situation has arisen that is absolutely unacceptable to the socialist countries," the letter declared, and it issued an ultimatum to Czechoslovak Communists: either follow our line or we will unloose a campaign about "counter-revolutionary forces."

All these threats had the opposite effect than that intended. The overwhelming majority of the Czechoslovak people came out in support of the leader-

ship in its resistance to the Russian threats. At the same time, the West European Communist Parties, as against those from East Europe, rallied behind the Czechoslovak Communist Party, as they saw the intransigent Soviet gesture as a threat to any Communist Party outside the Soviet or Chinese blocs. If the Soviets feel so imperilled by these modest changes—and, indeed, what they keep stressing is the fear that the Communist Party might lose its dominant role—then they make it clear to everyone that Russian Communists are the worst enemies of freedom. They have demonstrated this more than once. The case of Czechoslovakia underlines this lesson. There was, after all, no armed uprising here.

The Czechoslovak experiment, therefore, is merely testing the Russian willingness to allow its most obedient disciple to make a few variations in the Russian type of Communism. Why then, should Russia feel that Communism is doomed? Why should the Polish order feel that it means the disintegration of Communism? Why should the East German regime, seemingly the most stable, feel itself endangered as if it meant the break-up of the whole East European system?

What the Czech and Slovak Communists are trying is, after all, only a change **within** the system. Let's have no illusions on that score. Whatever freedom the "democratization" movement may have brought about, no basic structure has, so far, been changed. There has been no fundamental change in the life or role of the producers—the working class.

What Now?

As these lines are being written, only the first act seems to have ended. The second act has hardly begun, and the third act is not yet in sight. We are told very little about the compromise worked out with the Russians and the East European hard-liners at their confrontation. Supposedly, the latter will not interfere in the "internal affairs" of Czechoslovakia. But will the great new force — public opinion — be allowed to develop without any interference? The mass media — radio and TV — more even than the press itself, are thus far keeping up their criticisms of individual politicians, discussing each one's share in the crimes of the past, and dissecting the present windy rhetoric. The non-Communist newspapers of the Czech Socialist Party and the People's Party — **Svobodne Slovo** and **Lidova Demokracie**, respectively—published letters from their readers pointing out the guilt of the Communist Party, not only that of its individual members.

We have found our tongue, none more so than the youth. Two student weeklies, **Student** in Prague and **Echo** in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, appear to be the most consistent critics of the regime. They offer their pages most readily to Rudi Dutschke or Svitak and go far in their criticism of the Soviet Union.

The most crucial issue, however, remains — the condition of the working class and its role in production. The workers themselves complain that they have been de-politicalized: though it is constantly

hammered into their heads that they are "the masters" of the country, only their self-styled "representatives" speak for them. There has been no possibility for a non-Communist to become anything like a leader, whatever his capacities. Genuine workers' organizations have been destroyed; the trade union movement changed into a government-supporting body whose only function was to whip up and intensify labor efficiency. They neglected entirely workers' and employees' interest. Only Communist Party cells could exist in plants and offices.

Yet there are those who now give the Communist Party credit for initiating the process of change, as if it did so from the goodness of its heart, rather than because it was forced to do something by the economic crisis, the restlessness in all strata of the population, as well as by the rebellions the world over. Some workers, no doubt, had been corrupted by being included in the state or party apparatus. And, no doubt, there is "apathy" among the workers regarding the "workers' councils". There are those who see in this lack of enthusiasm for the councils only apathy, and not a justified distrust of them because they were initiated by the very forces that have kept the lid down on workers' initiative. Indeed, the Communists themselves almost admit as much. Thus, Vaclav Velek from the Modrany Engineering Works said in a group interview with the trade union paper *Prace*: "I think the self-government will fulfill what we expect from it; as regards production democracy, self-government seems to put it at the right place and make it effective. It

will no doubt be useful for the workers to have a maximum of influence on who will manage the plant and who will guide the work at their place."

That is the whole point. The working class is yet to have its say. This drama will not be completed until it does.

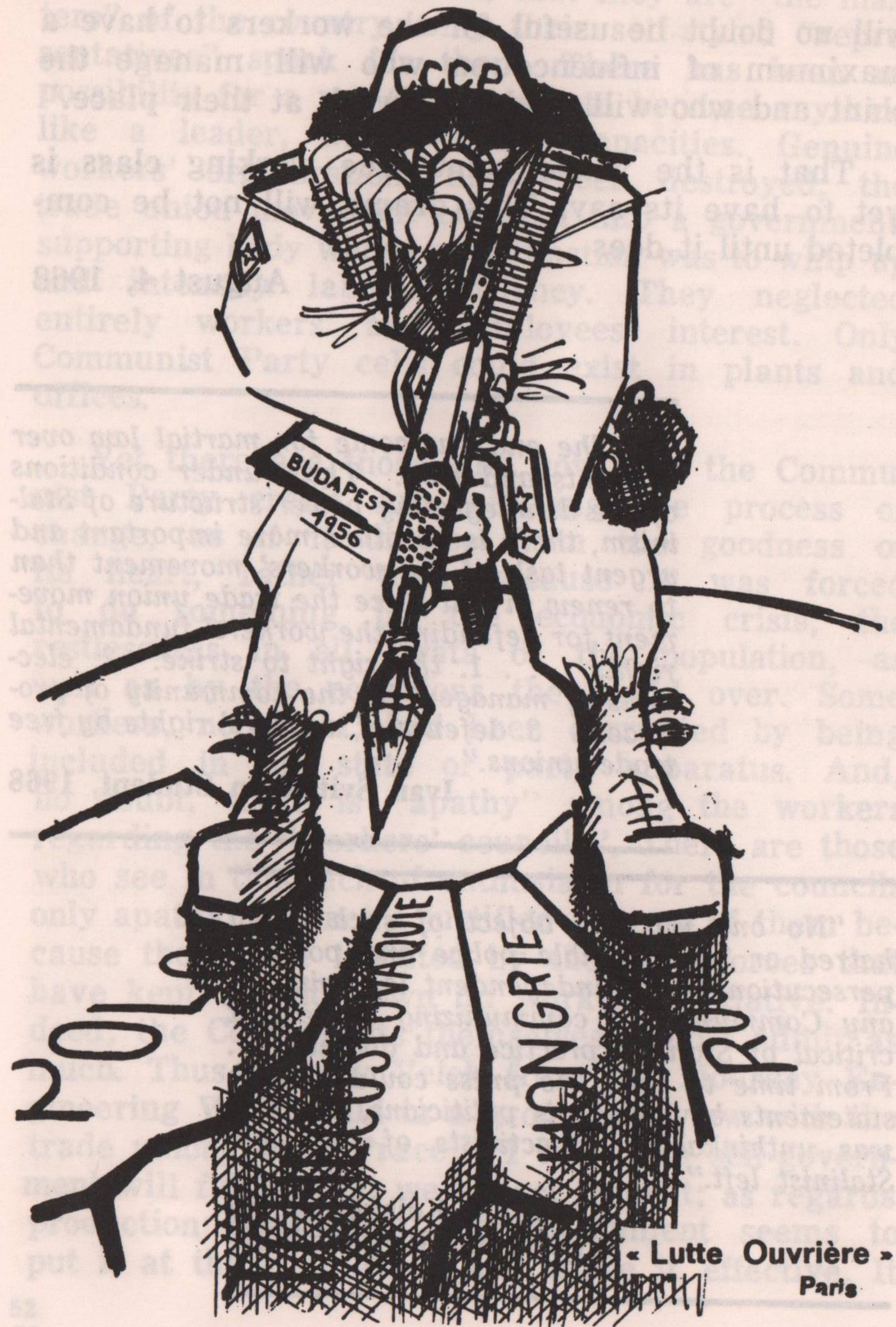
August 4, 1968

"The end has come for martial law over thoughts and men. Thus, under conditions of the disintegrating power structure of Stalinism, there is no other more important and urgent task of the workers' movement than to renew in full force the trade union movement for defending the workers' fundamental rights. . . . 1. the right to strike. 2. elections of managers by the community of producers. 3. defense of workers' rights by free trade unions."

Ivan Svitak, in *Student*, 1968

"No one was the object of such lethal hatred or such terrible police and political persecution as the independent left wing or any Communist or communizing movement critical of Stalinist practice and dogma . . . From time to time the press could publish statements by bourgeois politicians, but this was unthinkable for activists of the non-Stalinist left."

—Leszek Kolakowski, in
History and Responsibility



« Lutte Ouvrière »
Paris

Editorial Statement

All Eyes on Czechoslovakia, All Hands Off!

A new page in the history of freedom is being written in Czechoslovakia. It is vividly described in the report, **At the Crossroads of Two Worlds**, (center supplement) by a participant in the dramatic events. We ask all our readers, here and in Europe, in Latin America and in the Middle East, in Asia as well as in Africa, to spread this analysis of events far and wide.

This is not just a report of what the Czechoslovak press calls "democratization," and the New Left here would describe as "participatory democracy." This is not only a description of the sudden birth of a genuine public opinion (expressed almost totally without censorship in the mass media) in a Communist land which is situated strategically at the crossroads of two worlds. Nor is it only an exciting drama of a people striving for national independence while the "fraternal Communist nations" of the Warsaw Pact are engaged in a game of Russian roulette as they conduct their military maneuvers all along the Czech frontier. This is also, and above all, the depiction of a flood of ideas emanating from a people who have "found their tongues."

Workers are openly questioning their conditions of labor and life. The student youth are expressing their solidarity with East European youth like the Polish, against whom the Communist rulers have struck out with slanders interlaced with a strong anti-Semitic flavor, with firings and outright arrests. And the youth are also expressing their solidarity with the rebels in West Germany and the revolutionaries in France. The intellectuals are demanding not only freedom of the press, but freedom to act, to create, to build opposition parties.

Should anyone in the United States be so obtuse as to imagine that this applies only to lands bound by a single party system, let him take a second look not only at the Tweedledum-Tweedledee character of the American two-party system, which is obvious enough, but at the not so obvious—and when it comes to the field of ideas, far more important—fenced-in pragmatism and arrogance that is summed up in the American intellectual concept of "the end of ideology."

Now compare this ideological barrenness with the concepts of of the Czech historian, Milan Hubel, to whom a demand for a plurality of parties signifies a demand for "a plurality which grants freedom to a flow of ideas, competition of concepts, and an outline to get out of quagmire . . ."

We are in two different worlds.

It is all the more necessary, therefore, to emphasize that, in expressing our solidarity with the Czechoslovak people, we are not doing something "for" them; we have a lot to learn from them.

In calling for all eyes to be on Czechoslovakia, and all hands off, Marxist-Humanists have in mind not only Russian state-capitalism calling itself Communism that had dominated Czechoslovakia for the past 20 years. **We are also expressing our total distrust of and opposition to American capitalism which has seen fit to nurture the most notorious Czech Stalinist general who fled the country the moment of birth of democratization.**

It is not, however, the escape of one general with secrets of the Warsaw Pact that throws fear into the heart of the Russian ruling class. On the whole, they know how to play those kinds of games better than "the West," as is evident from all the secrets they pried loose from NATO. What they fear most of all are masses in motion.

MASSES IN MOTION

The Russians, for example, have learned well enough how to get along with Rumania. Yet Rumania has officially questioned the whole concept of the Warsaw Pact, which Czechoslovakia has not. Rumania is also flirting with China, which again, is not the way of the Czechoslovak leaders. Rumania displayed its dissidence before Czechoslovakia embarked on her democratization experiment. Yet none of the threats against the latter have ever been pronounced against the Rumanians. **Therein lies the true tale which illuminates the capitalist class nature of present-day Communism.**

The Rumanian "deviations" have all been handed down from above. No freedom has been allowed the masses. The lid is kept firmly down on any free expression. Though the Rumanian nationalists, like the Russians themselves, no longer bow to the name of Stalin, as China does, Rumania remains completely totalitarian. Hence, the Russians and the Rumanians understand each other perfectly. They can horse trade in capitalistic fashion, practice class compromise and can turn the full state-military fury against intellectuals who would demand freedom of expression and workers

who would demand control of production.

Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, though it is a long distance from allowing the exercise of workers' control of production, has released public opinion from censorship. The result has been that not only are intellectuals raising existential questions, and returning to their origin in the Humanism of Marxism, **but masses also are in motion.** The Russian and East European hard-liners' attacks on the Czechoslovak leadership have only solidified the nation, including those far to the left of the Dubcek leadership.

TWO DECADES: PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION

East Germany is vying with Russia as to who can be most Stalinist in its vitriolic attacks on Czechoslovakia. With its Berlin Wall and unchanged Stalinist leaders, it has reason to fear the fresh air of Czechoslovak democracy. By contrast, Yugoslavia, which was the first to break from Stalin's empire in East Europe, seems the model of "democracy" and that, indeed, is the most the present moderate Czechoslovak leadership plans to allow.

It is all the more essential to remember the true facts. One is that Yugoslavia remains a single party system that continues to jail Left opponents. The other relevant fact is that it was not the nationalist breakaway of Yugoslavia in 1948 which inspired serious rebellions against Stalin's Russia. **Rather it was the proletarian revolt in East Germany in 1953, shortly after Stalin's death. The general strike on June 17, 1953, against speedup and low wages, and for "Bread and Freedom," put an end to the twin myths of the invincibility of Stalinist totalitarianism and the alleged incapacity of the working class to rise in revolution in a Communist land. At the same time it inspired the revolt in the Vorkuta forced labor camps in Russia itself.**

It is against similar inspiration emanating from Czechoslovakia today that Russia and East Germany are trying to insulate the masses. All in vain. Already there is clandestinely circulating in Russia a 10,000 word essay by the Nobel prize-winning Russian physicist, Prof. Andrei D. Sakharov, which states: "We must, without doubt, support their (Czechoslovak) bold initiative, which is very important for the fate of socialism and the whole of mankind." Furthermore, Prof. Sakharov condemns the imprisonment of Russian writers who oppose the regime, Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniels, and others. The latest group of rebellious writers who were sentenced to labor camps include Yuri Galanskov, Alexander Ginzburg, Aleksei Dobrovolsky and Vera Lashkova.

No wonder the Russian ruling clique worries about the con-

sequences, for Russia, of Czechoslovak democratization. No doubt Brezhnev and Kosygin remember that deStalinization did not begin in Russia from above, but in East Germany, from below. Moreover, Bertolt Brecht's winged phrase, "to think is to change" notwithstanding, the intellectuals did not lead, and at first were in no hurry to follow, the spontaneous revolt of the East German proletariat. For the most part, the intellectuals then stood on the sidelines.

It took another three years plus Khrushchev's open declaration for deStalinization before the intellectuals in Communist lands would rebel in such massive numbers as to bring about not only a revolution in philosophy, but a philosophy of revolution. But once the intellectuals and workers did finally unite in a struggle against repressive Communism, they did indeed initiate the beginning of the end of the Russian empire in East Europe. What the Polish intellectuals and youth pioneered in 1956 as they turned from purely economic to existential questions—and with it the humanist character of genuine Marxism—the Hungarian Freedom Fighters brought onto the historic stage in open revolution.

THE PARTY, THE PARTY

Without engaging in revolution, the Czechoslovak New Left did touch the raw nerve of Communism—in this case, Czechoslovakian as well as Russian Communism. They did this by questioning the concept of the vanguard, not to mention omniscient, role of the Communist Party. Here Dubcek refused to budge. On the contrary. He was not only adamant about the "leading role" of the Party. He not only claimed total credit for the new road of "democratization." And he not only opposed the creation of new opposition parties. He also staked out the claim that "the greatest majority of the best creative minds in the country is in the Party."

This, then, defines the next battleground of ideas. Hence, the importance of the fact that the philosopher, Ivan Svitak, and others, who raised the question of opposition parties, the role of the Communist Party, raised them as inseparable from their philosophic foundation, on the one hand, and the needed unity of worker and intellectual, on the other hand.

In raising the fundamental question of philosophy and revolution, the party and spontaneity, the unity of worker and intellectual, they have indeed laid the foundation of a new relationship of theory to practice. Thereby they have gone far beyond anything raised by the New Left in "the West."

The reporter from Prague whom we print in this special issue of **News & Letters** rightly stresses that the events he describes are but the first act of a live drama whose ending cannot possibly be known in advance. Show your solidarity with Czechoslovakia!

August 4, 1968

Raya Dunayevskaya

CZECHOSLOVAKIA INVADED!

As we go to press it is reported that, in the stealth of the night, when most of the Czechoslovak people were asleep, Russian troops invaded Czechoslovakia. In tow were the client states of East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary, which itself had been invaded by Russia 12 years ago. These are not the actions of "socialists." They are the actions of dehumanized brutes! They must be stopped!

The struggle of Czechoslovakia for independence, democracy and freedom, described in our special supplement, brought about the Communist counter-revolution.

Freedom Fighters throughout the world must show their support for the Czechoslovak Resistance! Demonstrate your protest at all Russian Embassies and Consulates! Demand the release of all those arrested! Demand the withdrawal of all invading troops!



"Dunayevskaya's book goes beyond the previous interpretations. It shows not only that Marxian economics and politics are throughout philosophy, but that the latter is from the beginning economics and politics."

*—From Herbert Marcuse's preface to
Marxism and Freedom*

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