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**THREE POINTS ON THE SOVIET C.P. CONGRESS —
THE TWENTIETH SOVIET C.P. CONGRESS
AND THE
HUNGARIAN UPRISING —
HUNGARY AND THE QUESTION OF NORMS
by M. BERNZ**

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THREE POINTS ON THE
SOVIET C P CONGRESS

by M. Bernz

1. To the typically reformist notion that the masses represent an infinitely malleable force, without a historic direction of their own, nor a means of attaining it; that they must consequently remain forever dependent upon the brains and benignity of their "betters", be they statesmanly reformers, or revolutionists like a Marx or Trotsky: this is not without its antipodal notion: that the masses are not only everywhere; but are manifest in every action; are forever investing these actions with their own content. This notion, pursued a bit farther by those who embrace it most warmly, will land them among the very devils of spontaneity, automatism, and liquidationism itself, which they otherwise exercise so hotly.

A whole succession of events, prior to, or associated with the repudiation of Stalin, have demanded explanation. Explaining them with the formula of "pressure of the masses", while not without its moral attractiveness, nevertheless falls short of the rational requirement.

How are the following explained thereby? The reversal of the post-war buffer zone and Soviet purges; the reversal of the Kremlin-Tito feud; the stepping-up-and-down of the "supreme arbiter", Malenkov: how are these, and others -- including the exhuming operation on Stalin, thus explainable, except as a succession of oddities? each with an explanatory bedtime tale appended?

The specific answer must evidently lie amid the intrabureaucratic relationships. That is where the pattern leads to. What these shifting forces further reflect, outside themselves, is here another matter; and if we must adduce the pressure of the masses, we must also take note of what is objectively absent, revolutionary-wise, no less than of what is present:

Heretofore, revolutions of any modern consequence, have come in the wake of wars; and generally, in those countries where the burdens of military defeat were added to those of war itself. Further: revolutions arose when living conditions sank to or below the absolute impoverishment which Marx deduced to be the ultimate fate of the working masses under capitalism; and this rules out, incidentally, any argument rooted in a condition of relative impoverishment.

One further point on the masses:

If the masses represent the constant out of which all events shape themselves, they also, because of this, become those "masses" out of which all radical demagoguery shapes itself. Whereas finding "the masses" where they are not may be something of an error, it can thus pass, at least, as something of a virtue.

This sort of thing is best met head-on. Here, we dispense with all ritual genuflections in the direction of "the masses".

2. The mass actions, from Vorkuta to Hungary, are clear on at least two points: (1), that there is considerable resistance to the bureaucracy; and (2), that this resistance tends to lie peripheral to the main body of the masses involved, the Soviet proletariat.

These, of course, would seem to have a more weighty persuasiveness than any who-done-it yarn about this or that gang of bureaucrats doing-in another. And the question of who killed Joe Djughashvili, like the tale of who killed Cock Robin, may not loom too importantly at this enlightened stage of the discussion. But the question of who killed Joe Djughashvili's ghost -- whose pressure compelled the

repudiation of the Stalin myth: the masses or the bureaucracy: this happens to be the nub of the question. If we fit this into the rest of the bizarre pattern of shifting bureaucratic weights, it too must symptomize some stage in this process. To then rush forward with a truism: "but all this only reflects mass pressure": is, inescapably, true; and also, irrelevant. For the mass pressure is always there. And Vorkuta, East Germany, Poland, Georgia -- right through to Hungary; plus the 20th Soviet CP Congress: mixes two lines of evidence, two arguments -- each with its own conclusions.

Moreover, dragging the repudiation of Stalin in to prove mass pressure, aside from being an instance of a who-did-it argumentation otherwise scorned, forgets that the whole burden of Khrushchev's revelations were: that Stalin was a scourge of the bureaucracy -- from the viewpoint of a bureaucrat addressing bureaucrats. For the workers who had felt Stalin's benevolence at their benches and at their tables, these revelations needed to be translated in order to be properly appreciated; and what sympathy this would gain the aggrieved bureaucrats, remains unclear.

However, this much is clear: to the masses of bureaucrats, in their millions, it all made sense. And for one section of the bureaucracy seeking mass support against another section, it also made sense.

3. Aside from a changed relationship to the masses, the intrabureaucratic relationships were shifted as a result of the war. The weight and importance of the military was increased; and with the reconstruction, the growing weight of the industrial bureaucracy was accelerated. Further: the war created a buffer zone bureaucracy, dependent less upon the police for its protection, than upon the military for its very existence.

These represented the main targets of Stalin's last purge. At the point where the purge had already devoured the buffer bureaucracy -- the "weakest link" in the bureaucratic chain, its decisive links inside the Soviet Union struck back.

The purge-pogrom character of this last purge, further, indicated a struggle too sharp to concern itself about appearances. Amid the creep-and-crawl of bureaucratic wildlife, anti-Semitism is as good a weapon as any for its divisive effect upon an opponent force. Thus, the buffer zone bureaucracy, with its disproportionate number of Jewish Stalinist figures, represented a logical first step in the purge. So too, the snuffing-out of the "doctors' plot", and with it the fuse that led to the rest of the bureaucracy, was a no less logical last step.

It was no small achievement for Soviet medical science, this mark of confidence -- after failing to save Stalin's life.

To those comrades quick to see concessions: to whom was the purge-pogrom a concession? Leaving aside its intrabureaucratic aspect: in what direction could, say, the Hungarian masses have been moving if this represented a concession to them?

(March 10, 1957)

THE TWENTIETH SOVIET CP CONGRESS AND THE HUNGARIAN UPRISING

by M. Bernz

1. The Party took the 20th Congress as evidence that a historically new Soviet proletariat had entered the initial stages of a revolution against the bureaucracy. The subsequent uprising in Hungary, consequently, was seen as a confirmation of this thesis. However, as such a confirmation, it was noteworthy on at least two counts: (1), it came with startling promptness; and (2), it came in the wrong place.

Political prognoses, whether explicit or implied, seldom meet with even such signal success. And when they do, we could do worse than reexamine them. Otherwise, we are left with the over-fine feeling that we had been wiser than we knew. In this instance: if the Soviet proletariat was seen as the force now preparing to settle accounts with the bureaucratic usurpation of its class power: why did the Hungarian proletariat, without even the experience of overthrowing its own bourgeoisie, suddenly leap into the forefront of the struggle?

The answer, at best, might be called an algebraic one. As materialists, and as determinists, we assume some connection. But what is it? References to "weakest links", by conferring a certain plausibility upon the main contention, only multiply the question marks.

2. The 20th Congress scarcely crowned a series of bull's-eyes for us. Starting only from the demise of Stalin, the developments caught us wide-eyed at practically every step. The immediate reversal of Stalin's last purge; the demotion of the political police, and amputation of its head; the elevation of what we held to be an indispensable supreme arbiter, and his subsequent retirement to the waistline of the bureaucratic summit: these and similar phenomena symptomized a profoundly mistaken conception on our part.

The demotion of the secret police, and evidently, the parallel promotion of the military, has been regarded by us as responsive to mass pressure. Wherein the net concession lies, taking both of these, it is difficult to see. For both are instruments of suppression. However, each specializes in suppressing different sectors and levels of resistance. The secret police attacks it at its molecular level; and the individual, rather than the mass, is its main preoccupation. Moreover, as a bonapartist formation rising above the bonapartist bureaucracy itself, a disproportionate amount of its energies are devoted to keeping the ruling stratum itself atomized.

The military, on the other hand, is fit mainly for the suppression of more or less large-scale resistance; where it has outgrown the capacities of the police; or where their mode of suppression is inapplicable in the first place.

This may lead some to deduce again, by this route, the revolution against the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy however, if reasonably sane, would, whatever else it did, scarcely boil down its police arm in the face of it; would scarcely set out to make a happier internal life for itself when its survival was at stake.

When the bureaucracy installed the military as its strong right arm, it was evidently because it saw, right after Stalin's death, what we have seen only recently: the Hungarian uprising; the revolt of the buffer zone. Here,

among variously alien peoples, conquered militarily; and torn from capitalism militarily; it needed the military. At home, it was sufficiently otherwise for it to decapitate and dissect its secret police; to expend an old supreme arbiter, and dispense with a new one.

3. Of the several possible interpretations of the 20th Congress, we have seized upon and emphasized one. The fact of a vastly increased Soviet working class seemed to point leftwards, in a revolutionary direction; and this not simply in the general historic sense, but also in the particular, the immediate sense. The error is not a new one; nor one devoid of distinguished precedents: Marx and Engels were not beyond making it.

However, the basic direction of the bureaucracy, and of the bureaucratized workers' state, has been rightwards, towards capitalism. Apparent lapses from that course, have been clarified by time; indeed, by Poland and Hungary today. For after, not only the smoke -- but after the discussion about the smoke has cleared away, at least this should be clear: that the revolution, bureaucratically extended, becomes infected with counterrevolution by that very extension.

To reason as though this were not so, is to reason Stalinistically; is to filch, as good coin, a bit of "socialism in one country" itself.

4. With Stalin's departure, the bureaucracy has set out to stabilize itself more extensively than ever before. It had, of course, already devised full-blown institutional supports for itself. From the various special services it extracted from the state properties, and from the state-employed working force; from its sundry embezzlements on an every-man-for-himself basis; it had further reached the stage where the ownership of state bonds was an accepted feature of Stalin's socialism.

But if something was still lacking, there was also something superfluous: the supreme arbiter; the supreme secret police. These leaned the whole caste too heavily upon and beneath the precarious props of infallibility and terror. Stalin's departure, whether wholly natural or bureaucratically expedited, is not, consequently, simply a who-done-it question. The subsequent fate of the corporeal Beria; and then of the mythical Stalin; points, if a bit shakily, to a similar fate for the corporeal Stalin. If they began dismantling him and his handiwork the morning after his demise, it is not unnatural to suspect that they had a hand in it the evening before. And if the old ruffian had outlived his usefulness to this extent: what inner antagonism of the bureaucracy's was thus resolved or relieved?

Further: Why were the secret police brought down with such ease after the supreme arbiter's departure? Could this have obtained without an already-existing balance of forces to facilitate it? If the supreme arbiter formerly rested upon the apex of a police pyramid, the police, it seems, were by now leaning on their apex. With the arbiter bodily removed; and with the police then clipped of head and wing; the mythical Stalin was then plucked in its proper order of succession. And with it went the beak and gizzards of the purge system which had terrorized the bureaucracy for so long.

But other novelties also presented themselves. The army became free of the so-called commissars; that is, the secret police. And the industries, the industrial bureaucracy also rid itself of them.

5. The Soviet bureaucracy, we know, is economically rooted in the sphere of distribution. Fulfilling no role in production in the historic sense, it is thus regarded by us as an unstable social formation, devoid of the necessity, and hence the viability history confers upon a true class.

The bureaucracy is nevertheless organically impelled towards production. Bourgeois norms already apply in distribution. And from here, they are forever seeking to invade the productive sphere. The trusts, one way or another, reach for similar norms to objectively and subjectively define both their inner and external relationships; to employ not only the measure of value ideally, in the books; but to verify each value empirically, through exchange and circulation.

But as long as the police reared above the rest of the caste, the law of value, and all that it meant, was held at bay by the frameup-and-firing squads. From the bureaucracy itself, no better safeguard for the proletarian character of the property forms could be forthcoming. With this malign guardian torn from them, they cannot but feel the difference.

Rightwards, at the other pole of the bureaucracy, stands the industrial hierarchy, the directors and the managers, the personages whose character most closely approaches that of a true ruling class. Whereas they too manipulate people, even as the other bureaucrats; they at least manipulate people who more directly manipulate things, who produce. In that sense, the industrial bureaucrat has an immediate if not a historic productive function. And as such, his powers tend to outstrip those of the police, who at best, represent the purest administrative overhead.

The power pyramid thus tends to center in the heavy industrial sector; and in industry as against agriculture. The pinnacle represents the greatest concentration of the surplus product, as of the highest organic composition of capital; that is, politically, the greatest concentration of power.

It must be noted that this points towards rather than to capitalism. The bureaucracy would probably rest content with its own natural clique formations, rather than with some Soviet "Sixty Families". The cliques would tend to be self-perpetuating; would assure a certain security of jobs and services, and of succession to them within the clique. The brutal unification enforced by the police and the supreme arbiter could be replaced by a greater autonomy between the bureaucratic sections, and between the sectors of the economy.

The domestic political stage, somewhat wearied of the infallible arbiter, could thus quite properly sport a "collective leadership". And internationally, it could seek some middle ground between Stalin's socialism and Eisenhower's private enterprise.

Needless to say, under these double-barreled auspices, eternal peace and prosperity could not but be assured.

6. A kind of revolution, consequently, did take place inside the Soviet Union; a political revolution, with ponderable social ramifications. The police, from a ruling stratum, was subordinated to the needs of the bureaucracy as a whole.

It is entirely true that the masses dealt themselves a hand in this game. But it is also true that they were invited into the struggle. The invitation, in broad demagogic gestures, was extended the day after Stalin's death; was variously channelized ever since; and can now, among several places, be found buzzing about those intellectual quarters so long nurtured upon the Djughashvillian wisdom.

From the chain of external evidences, this revolution began with the physical departure of Stalin; and was formally confirmed when the spirit was shuffled off to join the body; in the revelations of the 20th Congress.

The leading bureaucratic section in this development, at least objectively, had to be the industrial bureaucracy; which, standing at the hub of production, directs the activities of more people; hands out more jobs, free services, and the like; and which thus tends, in the long run, to outmatch the politicians and police in the acquisition of bureaucratic weight.

The caste, consequently, now more nearly reaches toward being a class; and the mode of production it directs more nearly approaches capitalism.

7. Proletarian production relations, as they apply in Soviet agriculture, preclude alike the advantages of capitalist or socialist production. The comparative figures of United States and Soviet agricultural productivity, amply illustrate this fact.

In another way, the fate of the cow in the Soviet Union -- with fewer under the bureaucracy than under the czar -- further illustrates the marginal character of Soviet agriculture. Because the raising of beef and dairy herds is a long-term proposition, expensive in terms of labor-time, the productive forces tend to be concentrated in those sectors where the most, in volume, can be gotten for the least, in labor-time; in grain production, for instance. And the pattern proceeds further. For the peasant, after laboring in the state-owned wheat field, and munching upon that part of it which he receives in the form of black bread; is then free to put what time he has left into his hobby: the backyard cultivation of potatoes and cabbages. As a hobby, it has a double recommendation: for not only do potatoes demand less spare-labor-time -- a new category -- than almost any vegetable, and cabbages practically none at all: but they also keep him from going hungry.

When bourgeois propagandists incur the class-conscious wrath of a comrade by depicting the Soviet woman as a "bovine female", we all understand that she owes none of this to an excessive consumption of dairy products. Rather has it come from an over-indulgence in cabbages and potatoes. And with such a diet, a burden which properly belongs to Soviet agriculture and animal husbandry, is thus thrust upon the digestive systems of the Soviet people. They must labor thrice as hard, internally, upon a mess of low-grade starches and fats, to extract some of the nutritive elements the American digestive tract takes for granted.

Inasmuch as labor-power is not renewed out of nothing, this difference, nutritionally, is also visible in terms of productivity. Further, the fact that the Soviet worker stands alongside equipment as good or better than its American counterpart, further highlights the direction in which the Soviet social product tends to flow; and wherein it tends to inhere and accumulate.

8. Each social system generates a body of hopes, aspirations, and illusions which variously expedite the processes constituting its mode of production. Capitalism, for instance, tapped human energies which the ancient and feudal societies could not begin to wrest from their respective producing classes.

The Soviet bureaucracy, from its transitional social framework, can do no better than filch production incentives from the systems beyond and behind it. And these it can only offer in vitiated forms, and with vitiated contents. Out of the socialist corner of its mouth, it exchanges heartwarming doses of rhetoric for sundry quantities of unpaid labor and sacrifice. Out of the other, it offers the cold cash propositions familiar to capitalism.

But not quite.

It can give the peasant certain of his products; and with them, the marketplace. And it can give him some land, with this or that limitation. But the full-blown proprietary right of capitalism: that is excluded. Otherwise, the kulack is raised up again. Otherwise, the "socialist" collectivizations would have been in vain.

So, just as the Soviet worker lacks the incentives of the American worker -- the auto, the television set, the porcelain sink; so too does the Soviet peasant lack the substance of the American farm entrepreneur's incentives. All the foresight, planning, and responsibility indispensable to successful agriculture, are meaningless to him.

Moreover, with the Soviet occupation, this condition has been extended over the entire buffer zone. Soviet agricultural productivity is demonstrated with a long erratic curve. Agriculture in the buffer zone, particularly since the collectivizations, is demonstrated with a short sharp dip.

The insolubility of this vicious circle gives rise to a curious piece of political atavism. The "tortoise pace to socialism", associated with the Rykov-Tomsky-Bukharin grouping in the early days of the bureaucracy, and which led to such disastrous consequences then, is now re-emerging as the true rode to buffer zone socialism.

The road to capitalism is scarcely paved with better intentions.

9. This organic crisis of Soviet agriculture, with all its consequences, now extended into the buffer countries, multiplies the impulses toward capitalist restoration. These are the impulses which, from the countryside -- from the bottom, reënforce the more measured drift of the bureaucracy toward capitalism. With the political police toppled, that bureaucratic force which kept the bureaucracy and its restorationist tendencies atomized, now stands removed. The buffer zone, most recently and most superficially withdrawn from capitalism, and experiencing these restorationist impulses most directly and acutely, was not unnaturally the first to respond to this new reality. And the Kremlin bureaucracy, not blind to the prospect, was ready with its military.

What clashed in Hungary, consequently, were two currents in this restorationist tide, each proceeding at its own tempo. When the distance between them approached the breaking-point, a forcible reunification was effected.

The Kremlin bureaucracy is thus thrust leftwards, back towards, though not necessarily behind a "man with a sword": the army; and if further beset: the police. As a caste staffing a regime of chronic crisis, this is its proper place, historically; even as its tendency is, as properly, in the opposite direction.

Because the whole complex is rooted in a revolution isolated in a backward country, since extended over other backward countries, no definitive solution resides within the Soviet area, itself. On these foundations, bureaucratism can not be overthrown. It can at best be shaken-up.

Or it can be replaced by capitalism.

The questions of a necessarily stagnant agriculture; and hence a condition of "generalized want", and hence bureaucratism; cannot be separated from the initial fact of revolutionary isolation.

(March 10, 1957)

HUNGARY AND THE QUESTION OF NORMS

by M. Bernz

The norms by which we judge historic events, are abstracted from the process of history. However, they are significantly different from norms in general in at least one respect: they are not directly based upon any extensive recurrences. Some, in fact, are based upon only a single occurrence.

Outside of political theory, norms are dependent upon frequency and number for their authority. Some inductive process, arriving at general propositions through the accumulation of particular instances, provides a selection from among these for use as norms.

Political theory, however, has to organize recurrences either out of elements brought together from different events; or from elements drawn from already-existing norms; or out of a single gross event, or certain of its aspects.

Because change permeates the historic process even as the natural process, recurrence arises as self-limitation — when the motion of one impedes the motion of the other; when the drives of nature impede the drives of man; the interests of one class impede those of another. This limitation change imposes upon itself, it expresses cyclically, or in various wave forms. And it is out of the pattern of these cycles, of the process brought to a kind of halt, that expectation and predictability are able to arise; and with them, all that we regard as rational.

However, inasmuch as this does no more than qualify what is prior and primary to it, all recurrences, then, are inexact; and all expectation and prediction based upon them is variously misplaced. And this, again, apart from the necessary limitations of knowledge. It resides in the objective process itself.

The well-known Humean view, incidentally, insofar as it is confined to the subjective side of causality, and is not taken as an idealist foundation for the whole, is entirely proper and instructive. Inevitability is what we attach to events — afterwards. Feeling and theorizing, thus render secure what, before the event, was somewhat less so; and thus render less insecure, it is hoped and thought, its aftermath. In each case, what is being made inevitably-secure, by a multiplication of its bonds with past and future, is the present.

Special difficulties, then, attach to the establishment of historical norms. And this, quite apart from the conflict of interests they further express. For they arise from only the grossest pattern of recurrence, from which only broad generalizations can be drawn. And these, by tempting more historically-limited occurrences into their framework, are more often a source of error than otherwise.

The very material for a recurrence-pattern, thus has to be provided synthetically: equivalents from different events have to be assembled; and then, from the synthetic wholes thus set up, the most representative general propositions have to be abstracted.

Aside from the fact that an imprecise causality is inherent from the very foundations of the process, its relation to the subjective agent also generates an imprecision. For each time a norm is applied to a necessarily unique event, a double deformation takes place: the norm deforms the perception of the event, and the event deforms the comprehension of the norm. And this is so not simply in some academic sense, but very practically, too. For, with an almost unordered raw material presented, and with most of the rationality of material and norms lodged in the head, it then becomes clear that only the infirmest of conclusions are at hand to guide what should be the most resolute of human actions.

Needless to say, if cold reason were called upon to make history, it would not get very far. Revolutionary politics is the most difficult of trades; and in order to be practiced, its rational element must have an appropriate setting in impulse and sentiment. The science and art of politics have to temper one another.

Because Marxism is a monistic system, its norms do not have a random or arbitrary relation to one another. Because they are born out of the real process of history, they should evolve with it; should arise and recede back into it. Whereas we have to tolerate a certain pluralism because of necessary limitations of knowledge, we nevertheless have to seek the main thread of their evolution, their order of precedence; separate the general from the particular, the more historic from the more episodic among them; their more phenomenal from their essential forms.

Norms, as an element in theory, are part of the compact and ordered congelation of past experience. As such, applied to present experience, they are supposed to provide guidance into the future. If however, the norms of the past survive this process, and survive it intact, unmodified; then, we can be sure, something is wrong. For each ponderable event, historically, turns its own contribution of norms not so much upon itself; but it turns them, variously refined and amplified, over to the future. It cannot evidence a norm without transforming, or at least deforming it.

Marx and Engels, in the Paris Commune, saw what they meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Theory and practice collaborated in forming this norm for socialists; and it demonstrated how bodies of armed men were its essence. And the clarity provided by hindsight, while inapplicable to the past, was nevertheless invaluable to the future.

The Russian Revolution, while unprovided for by the classic Marxian norms, nevertheless had its place, theoretically and before the event, in the concept of the permanent revolution. And the dictatorship found certain extensions: in the soviets; in the revolutionary party.

Whereas the Commune failed to answer certain questions, and came too early to raise certain others, the Russian Revolution, for us, raised and answered more than we knew what to do with. There was, at the very outset, a considerable hazard in raising this revolution in a backward country into a sovereign norm for us, here in the United States, or for the entire world working class.

Be that as it may, throughout the period up until the end of World War II, the norms of party and program ruled unchallenged on the world revolutionary scene. Those movements which failed to meet them, went down in an

unbroken succession of defeats.

With this kind of confirmation piled upon confirmation, it was difficult to examine them critically; it was difficult to discern their limits; to see if their negation lurked anywhere within them.

Then the post-war developments began to unfold. From that point, the classic Trotskyism, insofar as it was understood by those then alive, simply came apart. Efforts have been made, and continue to be made, to paint it otherwise. But let us leave these for the ceremonial occasions; and let us seek to profit from the opposite emphasis, here.

With the norms of the Russian Revolution, and of the inter-bellum period to guide us, we at first refused to concede that World War II was over; for the expected world revolution had not broken out. In the meantime, Soviet tanks were clanking across Eastern Europe; the Stalinist Tito was engaged in a civil war with an old royalist wardog, one Mikhailovich. We continued to look for the revolution.

Finally, we grew weary of insisting the war was still on; for the world had unmistakably settled into its typical post-bellum pattern of small wars and reshufflings. Then curiosity about what kind of terra firma, sociologically, lay under the Soviet tank treads, and the peasant boots of Tito's partisans: this began to stir uneasily among us.

But the hitherto unchallenged norms were not without spokesmen: Where are the masses — the proletariat? Where is the revolutionary party? Where the program? The soviets?

No answer came from the field: from Eastern Europe; or from Yugoslavia. So some sought to extend, or reformulate the classic norms. Some remembered the pre-war Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, of Eastern Poland; they sought to generalize from these. But none of this was easy. For Stalinism, the mortal antipode of Trotskyism, stood in the way; stood to gain credit from such extensions of the norms.

On these grounds, it became increasingly plain, we were trapped. Whereas Marx and Engels were necessarily unclear prior to the Commune, that event promptly clarified the main lines of their conception. Lenin and Trotsky were not especially unclear prior to, nor at all unprepared for clarification during the course of the Russian Revolution. We, however, remained invertedly clairvoyant almost throughout our post-war events; we have groped without avail since; and we now remain at a standstill, with empirically-obtained positions still devoid of any explicit theoretical foundation.

The cost: we have sunk deeper into an organizational conception of Trotskyism; and we have shrunk farther and farther from a political-methodological grasp of it.

What moved us over Eastern Europe, was not the wresting of this area from capitalism; but rather, the casting of Tito from the bosom of the Kremlin bureaucracy, the rulers and custodians of what we then regarded as the only workers' state.

With China, we operated not dissimilarly. With the assault of imperialism — at its initiative, China found itself flung into the bosom of deformed proletarianism. This counterrevolutionary intervention, upon whose heels came the revolution, is not the least among the novelties achieved

by otherwise overly-cautious theoreticians.

Or, more plainly: this intervention provided the cover from behind which an untenable position could be conveniently dumped.

Throughout a span of over a decade now, we have traced a certain pattern with our belatedness; another with our promptness. Wherever it meant extending credit to Stalinism, careful weighing and cautious appraisal was the watchword; that is, belatedness. And wherever withholding credit from them was concerned, promptness was the order of the day. This is Trotskyism out of organizational, not political considerations.

We will see how it shows itself in Hungary.

In China, moreover, our norms did not meet even the most elementary test. The proletariat, insofar as we understand this term, played no ponderable role in the transformation of the Chinese state. This is not a specifically Trotskyist, or Leninist norm. It is a Marxist norm. Consequently, unless this question is met, it is idle to worry about trifles like party and program; or of soviets; or of the necessity of mass action, and the like.

It should seem clear, that as concepts, the proletariat in its historic role, and in its specific role in a given action, do not necessarily coincide. If the peasantry can be the carrier of a proletarian revolution, and there are abundant cases where the proletariat cannot, or is not; then it is entirely possible for the proletariat to be the carrier of a counterrevolutionary action.

This, it must be repeated, is a specific proletariat; not the historic proletariat, from whom we need clearly differentiate it.

By similar reasoning, presumably, a particular bourgeoisie can be the carrier of a proletarian revolution. Perhaps that is what is meant, at least partly, when a role in the Chinese Revolution is claimed for Harry Truman.

In our writings during the post-war years, it was repeatedly argued that Eastern Europe could not be socially transformed without the masses' participation. However, it was; and, belatedly, the arguments faded away.

But actually, the proletarian masses were not absent from these transformations. They simply happened to be wearing Soviet hobnailed boots; or riding in Soviet tanks. What is essential in the norm is thus evidently complied with. If the norm is valid, all its other conditions, at that time and place, were qualitatively superfluous; and this would include all organizational-Trotskyist considerations interpreted into it. And insofar as it was not complied with, the precarious tenure of the proletariat in these countries corresponds to the degree of that non-compliance; and here too, irrespective of organizational-Trotskyist considerations now interpreted into it.

The only force in the post-war picture which binds together what was and remains essential in our pre-war norms, happens to be the Soviet bureaucracy. This is the social formation, a proletarian formation, which, by

its sheer reflexes, caromed the Chinese peasantry into a social framework no peasant leadership, no Social-Democratic leadership could ever have done. With its uniformed masses, it wrested Eastern Europe from its ruled and ruling class alike. It fulfilled the norms of party and program, not out of a positive consciousness for revolution; but out of its everyday molecular consciousness of self-preservation.

The narrowness of this base is what renders all Stalinist social transformations rare; and what renders them dubious and infirm, once made. The self-interest of a few million bureaucrats represents a precarious force as against the self-interest of the world's two-billion peasants and workers.

However, the latter is unorganized, and is variously unconscious of the direction of its self-interest; not does its everyday self-interest always point in the same direction, in its historic direction. It fights, and must fight, consequently, on various sides in various actions.

The bureaucracy, on the other hand, is an organized section of the proletariat, a conscious defender of its kind of proletarian self-interest; and this, with and against both bourgeoisie and the rest of the proletariat, and against a counterrevolutionary as well as a revolutionary proletariat.

Our traditional norms have probably erred in the weight attached to the respective factors in the revolutionary process: the objective; the subjective. We have several times underestimated the recuperative powers of capitalism, for instance; or of the concessions and compromises it is capable of making. By emphasizing the fact that capitalism is ripe and rotten-ripe for socialism, and the proletarian leadership rotten-green for the task of overthrowing it, we have created a gulf between the two that cannot be adequately bridged in a materialist way.

From whence does the rottenness of the proletarian leadership stem? Almost pietistic considerations prevent us from looking in the direction of the proletariat. Instead, we look for it as simply coming from the bourgeoisie.

This, if it is so, again confuses the concept of class in its historic meaning, and as it applies in a particular time and place.

The whole society is bourgeois, and the entire world is bourgeois; and all occupants of both, including the Soviet bureaucracy and the Soviet masses, are variously bourgeoisified as a consequence; and this not solely in their heads, but in their real day-to-day interests. It is only in certain instances that this day-to-day self-interest, and the historic self-interest coincide, and are made to coincide by revolutionary consciousness; and that is when things happen.

The inadequacy of the proletarian leadership, in both the bourgeois and Soviet worlds, then, stems from some inadequacy also transmitted to it from its base, the proletariat; which, in its turn, absorbs it from the daily round of its bourgeois existence.

We have tended to view it otherwise. This leads to an idealistic assumption that every proletarian leadership, saving our own, is inherently inadequate; and that the masses and the ranks, saving possibly our own, is wholly adequate; and hence, that all they need, is our leadership.

Here again, we encounter nothing better than an organizational conception of Trotskyism.

Our Hungarian position is buttressed with two notable arguments: One states that if the Hungarian events comprised a counter-revolution, then the overthrow of the bureaucracy is practically ruled out; and that we, consequently, might as well retire from Marxist politics.

It is doubtful if the full enormity of this argument can ever be made clear to anyone capable of offering or accepting it. For this is organizational-Trotskyism with the last bung removed.

Since it is not easy to argue with someone over his right to exist, it might be wise to dispose of this argument as quickly and as kindly as possible; and also, with as serious a countenance as possible.

Dear Comrade:

The validity of Trotskyism, and its right to existence, is not given beforehand as a self-evident article of faith; at least, not for some of us. We were brought to it by experience and reason, and presumably remain with it on the same grounds. Perhaps the bureaucracy cannot be removed independently of capitalism. That is not fatal to Trotskyism; or at least not to that Trotskyism which finds its primary purpose in the replacement of capitalism, and which believes that the bureaucracy cannot stand in the way of that event indefinitely.

Of course, if Stalinism stands in the way in some organizational sense, and if that fact hangs most heavily with some of us, a ready suggestion comes to mind: If you cannot beat them — then join them. And if the real thing is inaccessible to most of us, then there is the periphery, or its periphery, or the socialist movement in general.

The other argument is based upon the fact of the workers' councils, and almost precludes for them any but a revolutionary significance. The supplemental argument, that if these councils are not entirely revolutionary, they must at least be given the chance to become so — comes from the wrong comrades; for it was they who weighed so carefully, and who deliberated so interminably, when it was a question of whether a Stalinist-led action was revolutionary. Rather than take their sudden live-dangerously attitude seriously, we have to fit it into the promptness-belatedness pattern they have always exhibited.

Here again, the specific case is being invested with the historic content. Soviets are historically revolutionary. But in specific cases, they can be the opposite. Only by fitting this norm into its broader context, can its inner content be determined.

The schema of the already-begun revolution against the bureaucracy, of course, is offered as this broader context. As a schema, this Third Russian Revolution provides an admirable companion-piece for the Third American Revolution, which dominates the other slope of the Party's post-war theoretical output; thereby proving, at least, that a certain current of thought has gotten its second wind.

But if the norms of Marxism are taken seriously, as historically-defined, as having, consequently, some order of precedence: then it is impossible to seize upon any one, arbitrarily, simply because it is handy and on the scene. Of the Hungarian workers' councils, we could scarcely decide anything beyond their self-evident social composition; and hence, only their general historic significance.

On the other side, however, stood the Kremlin bureaucracy, with

a class character and mode of operation we have long been familiar with. At the very least, it behooved us to apply some of the careful and unhurried deliberation that served us so stoutly in China.

Now, if it was simply a case of counterposing the workers' power in its two forms: of the soviet against the bureaucratized state; then, the choice would not be difficult: the mass organ would take precedence over the bureaucratized state organ. This has always been done whenever the worker masses sought to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and the bureaucracy sought to prevent them.

But here, it is the bureaucracy itself being attacked; not the bourgeoisie. The Hungarian proletariat — if we must have weakest links, is the weakest link in the chain separating the degenerated proletarian dictatorship from capitalism, not socialism. This we know from what it does, and fails to; from what it says, and does not; and from whence it came, and how; and from the general movement it is now part of.

Even if a Third Russian Revolution were under way, the Hungarian proletariat, if not leading in the wrong direction, should at least have been lagging, not leading in the right direction.

The fact that our prevailing position is not fastidious on this point, is not incidental. For in its grasp and manipulation of norms, it proceeds somewhat as follows:

In counterposing the masses to the bureaucracy, it shifts, at will, from the specific to the general content of the norms; and thus it rids itself of the primary, the class norm. It is then free to raise the party to the sovereign position among them — albeit, with the councils for cover.

In plain language: Get rid of the Stalinists; accept, in exchange, the masses — even under the conditions of bourgeois democracy; which would provide an arena wherein the Party, and a Leninist program could take shape; which is just about what we need to get started, over here.

If this resembles a formula familiar in its domestic form, here in the United States, the resemblance is not a chance one. And, if it has receded somewhat, it is partly because, between Browder-Fosterism and ourselves, came — McCarthyism.

After Hitler — then us:

This Stalinist road to power, presumably, received its definitive test a couple decades ago. But perhaps the lesson of this experience is out of date. And with it, perhaps the defensist position on the Soviet Union is out of date; or needs to be reconsidered and reformulated.

If these traditional Trotskyist positions are to be reconsidered — and there is no reason why they should not be — then the meaning of the "crisis of the proletarian leadership" would be affected, and would have to be reconsidered along with them.

It would be imprudent to proclaim and charge into a resolution of this crisis with tools unchecked since the 30s.

There has been a growing temptation, among us, to view revolution as a process. This, of course, is no simple vagary of mind. In China, it served to dissolve away the actions of which revolutions are traditionally made, simply because these did not fit the needs and specifications

of organizational-Trotskyism.

Also, the revolutions in Hungary and the Soviet Union, as process-notions, will tend to deepen and broaden with time; until whatever content the term ever had, will have sunk completely out of sight, and anyone will be free to interpret it as he pleases.

The norm and norms of revolution thus come in for their share of vulgarization. The various historic and narrower usages of the term get well-confounded; and out of their confoundment is sucked whatever happens to be the need of "revolutionary socialism" at the moment.

Let us not forget: In one sense, the whole capitalist era is a revolutionary era; in another sense, the whole period from World War I and the October Revolution is an epoch of wars and revolutions; and in still another sense, the period from the second world war, on.

All these revolutions, within and superimposed upon one another, can be regarded as processes. And they have contained, and have had further imposed upon them, counterrevolutions and periods of reaction. But each is an action, or a complex of actions within a process; and is the discrete cause of which another process is a consequence. To swallow up the event in the process; to affirm that a revolution is a revolution; and then that revolution is evolution; is to argue that evolution is everything. It strips the very theory of permanent revolution itself of the very stuff whose necessary connections and succession it seeks to disclose.

Plekhanov had a name for such thinkers; and an explanation of their preference for this mode of thought.

Any unclarity on the nature of revolution, must extend into that of reform; for a reform, after all, is no more a quiet revolution, than is a revolution an energetic unquiet reform. The terms, while taken from everyday indiscriminate usage, gain a certain determiniteness in Marxist sociology. And where the Soviet bureaucracy is concerned, its removal, on one plane, would constitute a revolution; on another, a reform. And upon still another but intersecting plane, its regeneration from within would constitute a reform; from without, a revolution.

What, then, is the revolution against the bureaucracy?

Our arguments on this score are not altogether clear. For, if the material foundations for the bureaucracy are being undermined, will the means for its retaining its position be undermined along with them? and will not the bureaucracy — episodic eruptions notwithstanding, tend rather to wither away?

Or must the subjective and objective parts of this undermining process diverge? and thus make necessary that abrupt forcible readjustment which is revolution? And, if such is the case: to what antagonistic forces, within what objective current, is the diverging subjective current attached?

The increased size and culture of the Soviet proletariat; the industrial growth; the rising productivity: Why should these not lead to the complacent conclusions of presentday reformists? Or, instead of the bureaucracy withering away, why, in the manner of Bernstein, should not every Soviet worker become a bureaucrat of a sort? With technological progress, with the labor force tending to be drawn farther and farther away from direct production, towards the pushing of buttons or the reading of meters, or the pushing of pencils and shuffling of papers: would not the supervisory and productive functions tend to overlap and merge? And, remembering that the bureaucracy is not a stable social formation,

like a class; that it has no common denominator of self-interest as has a class: would this not further expedite this merging process?

The whole argument of increased production, of rising productivity, runs into these questions. To attribute to the bureaucracy, in the face of these, a consciousness for social self-preservation, is to invest it with a character appropriate to a class.

The bureaucracy must be overthrown, evidently, for only one reason: it represents capitalism, the bourgeoisie. Of its two faces, its more real face is turned backwards. Only thus can it express the objective factor which makes it an absolute brake upon production; and without which, it would simply be a variously tolerable relative brake.

Returning to our norms:

Whatever its class character in specific actions, the bureaucracy, historically, represents capitalism; administers a socialistic economy on a globally capitalist base; pursues proletarian politics within the framework of a global dual power, on a capitalist base; and, for the same reasons as the Social-Democracy on national bourgeois bases, tends to line up with the bourgeoisie historically — in the broad process, and in the decisive actions.

In narrower terms:

To find the absolute brake on Soviet production, we would have to look beyond an accumulation of relative brakes. For capitalism, also, is not without its secondary shortcomings, or of passable feats of mismanagement. Its fatal malady, however, lies beneath such trifles.

What, then, is the bureaucracy's absolute brake on production?

It is its need for the military-bureaucratic defense of "socialism in one country"; a need grounded in an insoluble contradiction for the bureaucracy; and ultimately grounded in the insoluble contradiction of encircling capitalism.

Leaving aside the more apparent consequences of a socialistic economy within an encompassing world capitalist economy:

We are prone to dub whatsoever excels in the Soviet economy as socialistic; and whatsoever is inferior as capitalistic, or bureaucratic. That is: the ability to more extensively generalize a process, because private proprietary considerations are absent, is regarded as an unqualified advantage.

This straightforward conclusion, however, has no equal recommendation in fact. For Soviet industry, when it pilfers some improvement from capitalist production, and then outdoes capitalism in applying it, does so at a certain cost: for the extensive generalization of a process tends to narrow the area of further innovation and improvement left open by it; and also, even though its productive equipment might be superior, its end product tends to be inferior.

A mode of production still based upon wage-labor, cannot escape the subjective consequences of that fact.

The vicious circle of which the bureaucracy is a part, and a consequence, is umbilically bound to capitalism. Here it began; here it is constantly being regenerated. And here, at its roots, its life-line

can alone be severed. From its Soviet base, its specific but not its historic base, it has derived only its secondary characteristics. Globally, its affinity with the Social-Democracy is primary; its difference, secondary. The world working class, upon whom it has levied its worst toll, could have pursued no less disastrous a course with the Social-Democracy alone on the scene.

Just as Stalinism is the breathing image of the bourgeoisie, projected into the workers' state, so too must it seem that it can be localized, and definitively laid to rest there, within the workers' state.

(March 10, 1957)