



Germany 1953

**Workers rise against
Stalinist rule**

The workers' revolt and Marxist responses

The articles collected here tell the story of the workers' revolt against Stalinist rule in East Germany sixty years ago, in June 1953, and the responses of the "Third Camp" Trotskyists of the Independent Socialist League. Three further articles, written between 1946 and 1954, set out

the theoretical framework by which the writers understood the imposition of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe after World War Two; and a final article, written just before the German events, sums up what socialists should learn from the experience of Stalinism.

Some articles have been abridged. Usages typical of the time, such as "working men" to mean "working people", and (sometimes) "communist" to mean official "communist", i.e. Stalinist, the very opposite of the communism of Marx and Engels, have not been changed.



"For Free Elections"

The first mass workers' revolts

By Hal Draper

Like a brilliant gleam of light in the gathering darkness of the post-war years, the rising of the German working class has already shattered myths and shamed despair. It has already answered a host of questions that had been posed by those who became panic-stricken before the seemingly invincible strength of Stalinist tyranny.

These June days may well go down in history as the beginning of the workers' revolution against Stalinism — the beginning, in the historical view, quite apart from any over-optimistic predictions about the immediate aftermath to be expected from this action itself.

Is the Iron Curtain empire monolithic? Have the workers of East Europe been so duped by Stalinism as to become cowed creatures, hypnotised, straitjacketed by the Stalinist "mystique"? Has the working class lost its revolutionary dynamism? Is the Russian power so solid, or all-intimidating, within that there is no hope of stopping its menace except by Western military might and the third world war? The German working class has given an answer, and it is the answer we Independent Socialists have looked to.

Beginning as a spontaneous, peaceful mass demonstration against the latest speed-up decree increasing work norms, in 24 hours it necessarily became a battle with the real power in the country, the Russian troops. Beginning as a movement for economic demands, it was at bottom, and quickly became overtly, a political demonstration.

Five hours after it began at 9a.m. on July 16, the regime had already capitulated on the immediate issue of the speed-up, withdrawing its ukase.

On the second day of the action, Russian tanks, armoured cars, artillery and soldiery had taken over from the East German police, who had refrained from blocking the riotous demonstrators.

In the vanguard of the march, and apparently its inspirers, were several hundred construction workers who had

downed tools, openly heading the demonstration under the banner "We Building Workers Demand the Lowering of Work Norms." Every report in the New York press emphasised the working-class character of the action.

According to the Associated Press (AP), workers from outside Berlin in nearby areas poured into the city to join the movement, 15,000 from Oranienburg and 3000 from the Hennigsdorf steel works. In the rain in Marx-Engels Plaza they shouted an old strike slogan of the German labour movement; "Wheels do not turn when our strong arms will it." Estimates of the mass turnout run from 10,000 to 100,000.

A general strike called by loudspeaker trucks was solidly shutting down the city.

The political slogans appeared immediately: "Ivan [Russians], go home!" "We want to be free!" "We don't want a people's army, we want butter!" "We want free elections!" "Tear down the borders!" "We don't want to be slaves!"

Here, in this Eastern zone of the country where American occupation officials in West Germany were burning books and wondering what colleagues were safe to talk to, for fear of the knout wielded by a man named McCarthy, here workers under the Moscow heel booed the police and Russian troops, and gathered before the government buildings to throw bricks and stones with bare hands.

A cabinet minister who tried to talk to them, Fritz Selbmann, was shouted down; and a nameless bricklayer stepped forward to shout the workers' demands at him and threaten a general strike. The AP reports that a group of workers tore a portrait of fuehrer Ulbricht off a wall and "threw it derisively in the faces of Soviet tommy-gunners approaching in a troop carrier."

At 2p.m., loudspeakers all over the streets blared the order of the Russian commandant banning all gatherings of more than three persons. Gaston Coblenz reports in the NY Herald Tribune: "The crowd muttered and even laughed and paid no further attention. The same reaction was witnessed by another reporter, who was in Stalinallee."

The Russians were deploying an entire armoured division

including T-34 tanks in addition to armoured cars and truckloads of machine-gunners, under martial law, but so far, seemed to take care to avoid a massacre, largely firing into the air or ricocheting bullets off building walls.

"At Potsdamer Platz on the western frontier, a leader told the milling throng to avoid clashes with the Communist German people's police. 'They may soon join us, he said ominously.' On countless street corners crowds of a dozen to several hundred listened while the dissidents and those loyal to the government argued it out." (*New York Times*)

The events in Germany have been learned in detail, and witnessed, because of the special situation of East Berlin, easily accessible from the West. Elsewhere in the satellites this transparency of the Iron Curtain does not obtain. A similar action in Poland or Bulgaria would be likely to filter through only in the form of rumours. In the case of Czechoslovakia, however, this same past week the Stalinist press itself confirmed previous reports of a mass workers' action in the city of Pilsen, where important armament works are located, on June 1.

In Germany, not a word in any report has indicated pro-US slogans or manifestations in the course of the agitation. According to the *New York Times*, Minister for All-German Affairs Jakob Kaiser, broadcasting over the American radio station in Berlin, counselled moderation to the East German workers, telling them not to "allow yourselves to be carried away by distress or provocation."

The event shows the imprint of the classic pattern of revolution in more than one respect. It may be debatable to what extent the explosion was brewing even before the last period of relaxation and concession on the part of the Russians following Stalin's death; but what is clear is that this policy of easing-up and concession inevitably had the effect of encouraging and whetting demands.

It is the classic dilemma of the hard-or-soft policy: the new masters are weak; they would be "soft" in order to appease and allay, in order to re-consolidate; but such appeasement betrays their weakness; with cracks showing on top, the masses below surge forward to take advantage of, their difficulties. Then, on a higher plane, the hard-or-soft dilemma is posed again: crush the movement with a hail of gunfire, with the reverberating impact that such a massacre must have — or buy it off, with the sure danger that this will encourage others? In the last analysis, no regime has succeeded in solving this contradiction.

The greatest likelihood is that the German rising, which is still going on as this is written, will be quelled by force or fraud or a combination of both, and a lull will follow. But shake the whole Russian empire it must, at least its European segment — shake it: that is, not overthrow it, not necessarily cause it to totter on last legs, but make it tremble from the Rhine to the Pacific. The workers of the other satellites will not remain in ignorance of what took place.

The question even arises of what effect it must have on the Russian troops which are called on to quash it, especially if it is true that these troops are not special GPU detachments but regulars.

These June days in Germany are, to us, the greatest blow against the third world war that has been struck in recent times. We are not thinking only of what it should mean to those renegades who have deserted the socialist banner out of panicky despair in the ability of the working class to deal with the Stalinist menace itself, and have therefore decided to "save civilisation" under the banner of the U. S.'s atom bomb; who ask "Where is your Third Camp?" and "Where is your working class?"

More basic is the perspective, of which the German workers' action is the earnest, that the power which can blow up the Russian juggernaut is the workers' revolution, and it will not do so merely in order to prop up the old system of capitalism in the world.

Labor Action, 22 June 1953.

Fight in Germany is nationwide

By Hal Draper

While the sharpest struggles in East Berlin have been lulled, resistance action in the whole of the East German zone, which followed hard in the wake of the Berlin rising, is still continuing with at least sporadic strikes and riots.

The Russian occupation authorities have formally executed 22 so far.

The first was a West Berliner, Willi Goettling; the twenty-second was the CP mayor of Doebnitz, in Saxony-Anhalt, H W Hartmami, who was accused of knocking down a Volkspolizei cop who had fired or was about to fire into a crowd of demonstrators.

Beginning Saturday, completely authenticated details became scarcer as the Russian forces tried to wall off East Berlin and the rest of the country. But admissions in the Stalinist press itself verified reports of spreading action throughout the zone.

Neues Deutschland conceded that work stoppages and “disorders” had reached the furthest corners of the country, as it attempted to explain why Russian troops had had to intervene. (“Of course, it would have been better if the German workers had repelled the provocations themselves in time,” it said, “but the workers did not have the necessary high sense of responsibility.”)

All over East Germany, cities were under Russian martial law, including Potsdam, the headquarters of the Russian army, up to Magdeburg on the Elbe, up to the Polish frontier, up to the uranium mine region bordering Czechoslovakia. By Thursday 18th rail transportation through East Germany was at a standstill.

After a special meeting of the central committee of the Stalinist party (SED), official admissions came out on the extent of the movement. It admitted that the resistance “had the character of an uprising,” citing “attacks on food warehouses,” etc., as well as “murderous assaults on functionaries of the party, of mass organisations [front organisations] and of the state apparatus.” “A large number of provocateurs have been arrested,” it stated. “The remaining part does not dare to appear. But quiet has by no means been fully assured. The enemy continues his insidious agitation.”

ADMISSION

Very significant was its admission of widespread implication of CP members in the movement.

“Tens of thousands of them sit in their offices, write some papers or other and simply wait. The whole party must be mobilised.” East Berlin was still paralysed by the general strike.

There has been no definite word since if or to what extent the Russian forces have succeeded in breaking it.

At Magdeburg (West German truck drivers reported) there was a pitched battle between a thousands-strong mass of workers and the police. According to this report, 13,000 workers mainly from the Thaelmann heavy machinery works were involved; they stormed the jail, containing political prisoners, and 22 were shot, after which Russian tanks rolled in under martial law.

According to the AP on the 22nd, the regime admitted “sabotage” — i.e., strikes, riots and demonstrations — in the Russian-managed uranium mines of Saxony.

Other cities reported as caught up by the revolt were Dresden, Chemnitz, Dessau, Brandenburg, Leipzig, Luckenwalde, Halle, Erfurt.

The West Berlin press declared that the movement had spread to the peasants of the countryside in many areas — a very significant development. The sections pointed to were around Mecklenburg, Luckenwalde, Forst, Juterborf and Ludwigsfelde. The AP had it that peasants were withholding their produce from the state’s collection stations and supplying food to distressed workers’ areas.

Side by side with its brutal display of violence and armed terror, the Stalinist regime, backed by its Moscow masters, moved to meet the crisis with further announcements of concessions, directed specifically to woo the working class.

It is important to note that the concessions of June 10, easing up certain aspects of the regime, had had not a single item of special interest to the workers. In this announcement, the

week before the outbreak of the revolt, the peasants had been promised easier crop quotas; private enterprise had been promised loans; refugees — restoration of property; the churches — letting up on anti-religious drives; plus a lightening of the penal code. At the same time the regime imposed on the workers the decree for heavier work norms which was the immediate cause of the outburst.

What did it mean? Seeking to strengthen its popular support, the government had turned to wooing the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements. Either it felt that the workers were “in the bag” and did not need sops — which can be believed only with difficulty, in view of what happened and indeed of previous evidences of discontent, although incredible pieces of stupidity are always possible — or else the government felt that it needed more support or at least toleration from the “former people” precisely in view of waning working-class support.

Using both the carrot and the club, the Stalinists hope to recoup. Rallies of “loyalist” workers have been called, the first one in Berlin being held in the Comic Opera House.

Not least interesting among the consequences of the East German workers’ mobilisation has been the outbreak of jitters among the Allies in Western Berlin. At the same time that the Allied commandants sent a note calling on the Stalinist regime to restore free travel in Berlin, the Western powers themselves indicated they considered the Berlin situation to have dangerous potentialities. They advised Dr. Ernst Reuter, West Berlin mayor, that no public meetings were to be held without the authority of the Allied Kommandatura.

Western officials had expressed fears lest the action in the East spill over, across the sector lines. They could have in mind only a possible effect of the anti-Stalinist revolt in stimulating also West German sentiment for national unity and independence.

Instead of reacting with unalloyed rejoicing at the events, the Allied powers on the spot, regardless of their formal statements, seem to betray the classic ruling-class reaction of fear and disconcertment before a massive self-mobilisation of a revolutionary working class independent of their control.

The *New York Times* (June 20) asserted that the revolt was the work of “a nameless and faceless workers’ underground organisation in East Germany” — a thesis which we would

be very glad to believe, and which has been cropping up elsewhere. Its confirmation would be second only in importance to the fact of the revolt itself, and in the longer run more important.

But aside from this, in the course of his analysis, the [N. Y. *Times*] correspondent keeps stressing: “... the underground is indigenous to the East German working class without any middle-class affiliations... [it is] beyond the reach of the intelligence services of the Western powers and immune to the political combat organisations of the middle-class Bonn government... [it] has no connection with the West... [it] probably will continue to function as an independent organisation preferring to follow its own line in pursuit of its own aims.”

An echo of Western uneasiness before the spectacle of working-class self-movement appears in the editorial columns of the *New York Times* (June 18) after a hail-and-well-done to the East German people: The Stalinist police state cannot be overthrown by the people, it cautions them, fortified by all its wisdom on the nature of revolutionary power. “Such regimes can only be destroyed by conquest from the outside, as the German, Italian and Japanese, governments were in the Second World War, or by palace revolutions which *may or may not* pave the way for democracy.” (Our italics.) Clearly and crudely it is saying: “We hereby pat you on the head, but you’ll have to wait for the third world war when we, your American saviours, with our atom bombs, liberate you all over again.

So it was a wonderful try, but now run along and don’t make trouble...

The *Times*’ Arthur Krock reveals that “When the disorders broke out in Pilsen [Czechoslovakia] some days ago this government [the U. S.] looked at the event suspiciously....” And the point of his piece turns out to be worry lest the anti-Stalinist action of the people behind the Iron Curtain stimulate sentiment in this country to cut armaments.

This is the authentic bourgeois mind at work. But the European people, and also the militant workers under the Kremlin heel, do not want to wait for the third world war. And their heroic struggle points the way, whether they are now conscious of it or not, to the real alternative to the war: the workers’ revolution, which will not fail to disturb Western capitalism too.

Labor Action, 29 June 1953

Timeline

From early 1944: Russian forces start advancing and taking territory from the Germans; eventually control all Eastern Europe.

April-May 1945: Russian troops take Berlin

June 1945: Germany put under “Four Power Occupation”. USSR controls East Germany and East Berlin; Britain, France, and the USA, collaborating with each other, control West Germany and West Berlin. There is also an umbrella four-power “control council”.

February 1948: Stalinists consolidate control in Czechoslovakia, where until then there was some autonomous political life.

March 1948: USSR withdraws from four-power “council” overseeing Germany

April 1948: US starts “Marshall Plan” aid to bolster its allies in Europe.

May-June 1948: Open breach between USSR and Yugoslavia, where Stalinists have won power autonomously.

June 1948 to May 1949: USSR blockades Berlin. Britain and the USA airlift supplies to West Berlin.

May-October 1949: Germany de facto divided into two states, the “Federal Republic” (declared May 1949, with elections in August 1949 for a government), and the “Democratic Republic” (declared October 1949). West Berlin becomes an enclave within East Germany, closely linked to but not formally part of the Federal Republic. However, movement between East and West Berlin was still relatively fluid in 1953, and until the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. (East Germany built a barrier along its main border with West Germany in May 1952).

1949-52: Tightening of Stalinist control in Eastern Europe. Show trials of Stalinist party leaders deemed unreliable, such as Slansky in Czechoslovakia and Rajk in Hungary.

1950-53: Height of “McCarthyite” witch-hunting in the USA

June 1950: Start of Korean war. The war reaches stalemate in mid-51, and then armistice in July 1953.

March 1953: Death of Stalin. This is followed, eventually, by a slow and limited “thaw” — though also by the military suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956.



Berlin Wall comes tumbling down, 1989

How workers launched the June Days

By **Gustave Stern**

The unthinkable took place in East Berlin and East Germany: the working class of a totalitarian country, where 30 Russian divisions are stationed, where the Communist Party disposes of all the levers of control, revolted against an implacable dictatorship, left the plants and building-yards, invaded the streets and public places, to cry out their anger and demand — what? Higher wages? No: to demand freedom.

This exploit was accomplished by a working class which suffered through 12 years of the Hitler regime, war, and eight years of the “People’s” regime and the Soviet occupation.

The June events were, of course (as we are going to explain) an elementary, spontaneous explosion. Yet small, almost imperceptible signs heralded the revolt.

During the first days of June, *Neues Deutschland*, the central organ of the Communist Party, and *Tagliche Rundschau*, the paper put out by the Soviet occupation authorities, were filled with reports on discussions inside the factories, always on the question of the “work norms.” The working class’s discontent over the inhuman exploitation, over the Soviet-model Stakhanovism, over the overtime work, had become so strong that the Communist party was obliged to take note of it at meetings and in the press.

First, grumbles. Thus one could read in every paper of the Eastern Zone that the workers were “grumbling” in Leipzig and Halle, in Magdeburg and Jena, working-class centres where the old Social-Democracy had formerly been entrenched in impregnable bastions, where Rosa Luxemburg had exercised a dominating influence. One could read that the workers of a plant in Leipzig had declared: “It is a shame that 70 years after the death of Karl Marx we are forced to demand decent living conditions!”

These words, which were taken up everywhere to some degree, were uttered at a time when the most elementary food necessities were lacking, because of the collectivisation policy, because of the frantic pace of industrialisation, and also because everything was being subordinated to rearmament.

The Leipzig workers were told by responsible Communists — “Don’t you understand that these factories are your own, that for the first time in your lives, you are working for your own interests and for the well-being of your children?” At the beginning of June, when the Communist authorities, following Soviet orders, decreed the end of “bolshevisation” in the Eastern Zone, the workers seized the pretext of the apparent relaxation of the pressure to protest more boldly against the “infernal speed-up.”

Thus the “June days” began. On June 14 the paper of the Communist party, *Neues Deutschland*, attacked the “irresponsible” who were trying “to force the building-trades men in Stalinallee to increase the work norms,” in spite of the measures that had been decreed. The paper declared that this was a typical example “of a false policy which has to be brought to an end!” At the same time, *Neues Deutschland* pointed to “some partial strikes” among the workers of Stalinallee, an immense artery where gigantic buildings were being constructed in the purest Soviet neo-classic style.

On the morning of June 16, the norms having been once again raised, the workers of a small building-yard, consisting of 100 men, met to protect against “this new intolerable measure.” The responsible officials of the building “union,” frightened by the turn that events were taking, ran up to preach “calm.” One of the secretaries of the “union” suggested a “friendly approach” to the authorities in order to “get satisfaction.” But the reaction of the workers was unexpected: “We are all going there!” was the unanimous cry of the workers at this building, and immediately they set out to march to the central office of the Ministry of Reconstruction.

En route they were joined by all the workers of Stalinallee. It was the beginning of the revolt.

Here we must stress this point: the demonstration in Stalinallee took shape on the morrow of governmental measures decreeing the end of forced “bolshevisation”; it was directed, at bottom, against measures (increase in the work norms) which no longer corresponded to the “line” and which were due to the initiative of some “backward” elements who, dazzled by “bolshevisation”, had not yet mentally grasped that

the “turn” was to be made with dizzying rapidity. The demonstration was directed against a government which was already in retreat but which yet engaged in provocations through a part of the apparatus.

The curious thing about 16 June was this: The Stalinallee workers down tools, imitated here and there by some steel plants which set up strike committees, following the example of the construction workers. Significant fact: the responsible leaders of the strike committees are for the most part workers known as social-democrats.

The demonstration, which has begun as a demonstration against the “infernal speed-up,” soon takes on a political character. The Stalinallee workers dare to shout: “Down with the Ulbricht-Grotewohl government!” On the other hand, not a word against the Russians.

The “people’s” police are bewildered and let things go: no one opposes the workers’ march, now numbering 4000, which arrives before the central construction office. A delegation is received by the “director” who promises everything: “Go back to work; you will get satisfaction!”

A “curious day,” we said. The workers, in fact, go back to work. But back in the building yards they start to discuss; the discussion rapidly takes a political turn and ends with the conclusion: “Tomorrow we will see!” And on June 17 — memorable date — the Stalinallee workers assemble before their building yards. Everywhere, in front of groups of 100 and 200, workers, mostly youth, well-known to their fellow workers, get up on ladders and boxes and make speeches: “Comrades!” says a young socialist, respected by his comrades, well known for his courage, “it is time to make an end of it. The government of the Grotewohls and Ulbrichts has betrayed the working class. We demand the unification of Germany, the end of slavery, and free elections!”

WORDS

Thunder of applause! All over Stalinallee, innumerable speakers — not “provocateurs” but workers well known to their comrades — pick up these words of the young socialist.

Suddenly thousands of workers, dressed in their working clothes, sally out in a march toward Leipzigerstrasse, where the “People’s” government buildings are located. All along, wherever they pass construction workers, they are joined by other working men who quit work.

The women and youth begin to make placards and flags — black, red, gold: the emblem of the old Weimar Republic and of the federal republic at Bonn. Need one be surprised? The workers do not want to be confused with those who “under the reign of the red flag” have imposed the regime of slavery. But here and there are seen on the flags the “three arrows,” under whose sign the Social-Democracy of the Weimar Republic conducted its fight against the Nazi hordes.

By the time the workers get to the government buildings, they number tens of thousands.

The “people’s” police fall back; some of the policemen openly take flight and quickly get rid of their uniforms: it is a stampede. But some detachments remain loyal; they prevent the workers from getting into the government buildings to get hold of the Ulbrichts and the Grotewohls.

Meantime, the workers of the steel plants, especially those of Henningsdorf in the Soviet zone, have heard the news and downed tools.

Henningsdorf, in the suburbs of Berlin, is traditionally “red.” There it is that in 1931-32 the Communist Party had its most solid fortress.

These were the workers who had chased the Nazis out of the factories and daily fought against the brown-shirt hordes. The sons of these workers, rich in the experience of eight years, went out on strike, but now against the Communists: And there it is: a fantastic march by 8,000 workers, in their working clothes, across the French sector of Berlin, chanting slogans: “Freedom! Free elections! We don’t want to be slaves!” A fact to be noted: the responsible officials of the Communist “cells” in the plants have disappeared, and the majority of the members of the “party” are marching at the side of their comrades, carried along by the revolutionary élan of the crowd.

On Leipzigerstrasse, in Potsdamerplatz, on the Wilhelm-

strasse, there are now 40,000 chanting the old chants of the working-class movement: “Bruder, zur Sonne, zur Freiheit!” — Brothers! toward the sun, toward freedom! It is revolution; it is the revolt of a whole people known for their sense of discipline; it is the most amazing manifestation of human dignity; it is open struggle against the Communist power.

The People’s Police are incapable of standing in the way of their will; they are powerless against this human sea which swirls about them, against these demonstrators who carry their placards high (“Down with the Grotewohl government! We want freedom!”), enthusiastic and determined. The police call for reinforcement; they have lost the battle. They begin to fire on the crowd, who draw back at first, only to advance again.

All the streets of East Berlin are black with people, workers who are on strike, merchants who feed the demonstrators. Isn’t this the way that Lenin defined a “revolutionary situation”? The Communist government no longer exists.

CP HEADQUARTERS BURNED

The CP headquarters are sacked and burned. The party officials have vanished. Only one of them, Minister Selbmann, dares to leave a government building.

He gets up on a platform to speak to the workers: “Comrades — ” But before he can go on, he is interrupted by the cry, repeated from a thousand throats: “You are not our comrade! You have betrayed us! We want freedom!” Selbmann quickly returns to his office, and a construction worker takes the floor to make a speech to the workers.

There was only one thing to do to meet this situation: the call to arms. The Russians did not hesitate. Suddenly tanks roll up, menacing, and the crowd falls back step by step. Young workers, courageous and determined, begin to bombard them with stones and pieces of metal. The Soviet soldiers fire, cries ring out, men fall.

Up to now (we are writing this article on June 23), the number of dead and wounded in East Berlin is not known exactly; but in West Berlin alone, where the demonstrators dragged them, 16 workers lie dead of their wounds; and hundreds of people were wounded. The Soviet leaders immediately understood the scope of the events: if they had not intervened, it would have been the end of the regime, the fall of the Communist government, whose leaders were isolated from the masses and whose determined people could have liberated themselves from their chains by their own strength, given no outside intervention.

On June 17 and 18, in spite of the tanks, in spite of the dead and wounded, the battle continues: everywhere photos of the “well-beloved leaders” are torn down, everywhere the files of the “party” are burned; the SED [Stalinist party] offices are burned; it is the end of the “Sedistan Republic,” an end made symbolic by the courageous action of two young

The other risings in 1953

Workers in Czechoslovakia also rebelled against Stalinist rule in 1953. Economic measures, including a devaluation of savings and an increase in work norms, sparked a strike on the night of 31 May 1953 among night shift workers at the Skoda Works in Pizeň (Pilsen),

The next morning they marched to the city centre, joined by others, and started a local uprising which was put down by troops sent into the city only on 2 June. Meanwhile, some 360,000 workers, in 19 large factories around the country, struck.

After restoring its rule the Stalinist government reversed some of its economic measures and made a political purge.

Labour-camp prisoners in Norilsk, in the USSR, struck from 26 May to 4 August 1953. From 19 July to 1 August there was an even larger strike in the Vorkuta labour camp. In May-June 1954, prisoners at the Kengir labour camp, in Kazakstan, took over the whole camp for some weeks.

All those labour-camp risings were bloodily suppressed, but they also shocked Stalin’s successors into beginning, bit by bit, to run down the labour-camp system.

Workers rise against Stalinist rule



workers who climb up the Brandenburg Gate, on the border of the Western and Eastern sectors, to tear down the Soviet flag, symbol of slavery.

And the whole city is on strike. In all the factories, strike committees have been named and formed, for the most part, of socialist workers and comrades known to be determined enemies of the Stalinists.

While the Berlin events were played, so to speak, on a public stage, before the eyes of all the Berliners of the Western sectors, the revolt over the whole Eastern zone can be reconstructed only from information that came to Berlin. We will note only that part of the reports which could be checked and whose authenticity cannot be contested.

In Magdeburg, a working-class city, an old fortress of trade-unionism and the Social-Democracy, all the workers downed tools about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, when, alerted no one knows how, they learned of the events in Berlin. Here again: election of strike committees in the factories, hurried manufacture of placards ("Down with the government! We want freedom!"), and — a march by ten thousand workers on the party headquarters, which is taken by storm. The leaders of the Communist Party are given a thrashing and abused, the station is occupied, and then suddenly comes the cry: "To the jails!" Then, a memorable liberation of the political prisoners who, carried on the crowd's shoulders, join the demonstration! The Soviet troops, having received no instructions, do not budge, at least at this time.

In Halle, the city where the "Leuna" plants are located, where in 1920-21 revolutionary movements were touched off: street demonstrations, general downing of tools, liberation of political prisoners. At this time we cannot get confirmation of the rumour that the "Leuna" factories were burnt down.

The *Leipziger Volksstimme*, the Communist party's paper, admitted, "The building workers and workers of other branches of industry have gone on strike!" And the Communist paper wrote that on June 20!

"In Halle," writes the *Neues Deutschland*, central organ of the CP, "fascist hooligans attacked the headquarters of the Communist Party!" The minister of railroads of the Soviet zone, Roman Chwalek, admits: "There were acts of sabotage pretty much everywhere in Thuringia!" We learn from him, besides, that "the management of the railroads in Magdeburg was taken by storm and sacked!" What this minister does not say, but what can now be affirmed with complete certainty, is that on June 17, 18 and 19 there was a general strike on the railroads throughout the Soviet zone.

At Stralsund the leaders of the Communist Party were jailed; at Gera (Thuringia) the police offices were taken by storm; at Gorlitz the railroad station was seized by the strikers; at Leipzig 15,000 workers demonstrated in the streets and sacked the party headquarters; over "the whole Democratic Republic," we read in a proclamation of the Communist party on the 21st, "workers' clubs, apprenticeship houses and workers' canteens have been burned down!" It is a likely story, isn't it, that the demonstrators took to the "workers' canteens"? At Chemnitz and Erfurt, the demonstrators occupied the Communist Party headquarters (Chemnitz was bap-

tised "Karl Marx City" recently...)

Let us not continue the enumeration of details: future historians, possessing all the details of this popular explosion, will doubtless give us precious information which will permit us to get a better picture than we have at present of the ups and downs of this proletarian revolution.

From today on we must draw conclusions from the June days.

This first of all: it is not necessary to take into serious consideration the Stalinist "argument" that "a gang of conspirators" succeeded in inciting hundreds of thousands of workers to revolt. If that were true, it would in any case be a confession that the Stalinist regime is rotted through to an unheard-of extent! Then too, the "explanation" that the workers were encouraged "from the top," that is, by the Soviet leaders, to demonstrate and even to get rid of the Communist leaders is also not deserving of consideration: the events themselves constitute a very clear refutation.

And we know that "over the whole Democratic Republic," the people hunted down the Communist loaders, liberated the political prisoners, organised a general strike.

What is amazing about this workers' revolt is that the picture is extremely simple — one is tempted to say, simplistic: it is the kind of situation described by Lenin where "the governments confess themselves incapable of going on in the same way and the people no longer stand for being ruled in the same way."

When the "people's" regime announced on June 12 that "bolshevism" was ending, that forced collectivisation had ceased, that the work norms would be lowered, the working class immediately and instinctively understood that these steps, although they were dictated by Soviet foreign-policy considerations, were a confession of the bankruptcy of a regime which rested solely on Russian tanks. It was after the publication of these measures that the first open demands were heard, that the first localised strikes broke out.

The question has been raised, legitimately: "Why didn't these workers revolt against the Hitler regime, since they have just proved that they were capable of it?" The answer seems to us very simple: the Hitler regime had solid bases in the population, even in a part of the working class; its mass organisations were something real; on the contrary, the Stalinist regime in East Germany always was, and is, a bluff, and only that.

Politically the workers of the Eastern zone lived their own lives during these eight years of the "people's" regime; the slogans touched them only very superficially; the "mass organisations" of course had adherents (forced adherents), but only some thousands of Stalinist functionaries sought to put a breath of life into them.

As we said, the Stalinist rulers in Germany could not establish that monopoly on information and news that the Communists possess in the other satellite countries of Soviet Russia: West Berlin is there, a Berlin that courageously resisted the Soviet blockade [of 1948-9], which nourishes a strong socialist and free trade-union movement, and which has shown itself capable, in spite of the Iron Curtain, of sending a message of hope and fraternity to the workers of the East-

ern zone.

But this explanation, however important, is still insufficient. The course of events in East Berlin and in the Eastern zone proved that no illegal organisation was at the head of the demonstrations and strikes. Those who took the initiative, in the outbreak of the strikes as well as the demonstrations, were trade-unionists and socialists, without any material support other than the will of the workers to free themselves of the slave-drivers.

The revolt in Berlin and East Germany is the spontaneous uprising of hundreds of thousands of workers. Take the example of the steel workers of Henningsdorf: when two workers arrived from Stalinallee to bring the news to their steelworker comrades, it was sufficient for a single worker, a young socialist, to cry: "We are going there!" for 8000 workers to set out on the march!

Everywhere, in all the cities of the Eastern zone, things happened in the same way: in Leipzig, in Halle, in Jena, among the "Leuna" workers. Monatte and Rosmer [the editors of the *Revolution Proletarienne*] know that it was practically in these cities that the German workers' movement was forged. And the June days supplied proof that in Berlin, in Saxony and Thuringia the workers' movement remains alive, beyond all expectations.

And that is the hope that remains, in spite of the summary executions, in spite of the draconic sentences imposed on those who feared neither the "people's" police nor the Soviet tanks. Another hope inspires us: isn't it certain that the bases of the "popular democracies" in all the satellite countries is hardly more solid than in Germany?

The events in Czechoslovakia prove this, from all the evidence. And doesn't this fact open up perspectives which could hardly have been believed before the June days? Has it not been proved that the "liberation" of the satellite countries is possible otherwise than by war? Has it not been proved that a firm policy by the Western powers, joined with moral and material solidarity with the oppressed people, can hasten the process of dissolution in the Soviet camp? This is one side, an important side of the problem.

FREEDOM

But what is more important, meanwhile, for the free workers' movement as a whole is the fact that Stalinism, modern totalitarianism, has not succeeded in destroying the workers' movement and its traditions.

The cry of "Freedom" was accompanied during the memorable days of June 17-18 by the cry of "Solidarity!"

The workers were in solidarity: that was what was fundamental, while the totalitarian regime had striven for eight years to destroy their class-consciousness, to erase every feeling of solidarity, to atomise the will of the working class. All of us hang over the radio, anxiously awaiting news. We are likewise anxious to know the reaction of the workers' movement of France. Don't say "nothing can be done for them," that the repression will in any case follow its own course.

While we write these lines, on June 23, there are still strikers in various cities of the Eastern zone. The workers are also listening to the broadcasts from the West. They want to hear that the West, the workers' movement, has not forgotten them. They have had to learn that up to now the weighty apparatus of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions has scarcely gotten into motion, that up to now there has not even been any results in taking care of the families of those who are dead, of the hundreds and thousands who were wounded, of the others who were executed without a trial, of those who were given heavy jail sentences.

Right now, all the cities of the Soviet zone are surrounded by Soviet troops. Soon "peace" will reign in all these cities. For how long? That will depend to a great extent on the West and its workers' movement. The "June days" are a message sent to us not only by the workers of Berlin and Magdeburg, but likewise by the workers of Prague, Warsaw, Budapest and Bucharest.

The Stalinallee workers, trade-unionists, socialists and free men, have perhaps changed the destiny of the world.

• From *Labor Action* 27 July 1953, where it was introduced with the following note: "Reservation can be held on some of his interpretations — for example, the connection with the Social-Democrats which he sees, and the completely spontaneous and unorganised character of the actions — but the picture he presents adds much to our knowledge. The article is translated from the current issue of *Révolution Proletarienne*. — Ed."

The East German workers' revolt

By H F Stille

The June uprising of the workers in East Germany is one of the great events in modern history. The uprising in Germany will open up new historical opportunities which seemed to have vanished with the defeat of the European labour movements during the last twenty years and the emergence of the Stalinist state.

Two world wars, a defeated proletarian revolution in Germany and a "successful" proletarian revolution that failed in Russia, finally the victory of fascism in Germany, coincided with the decay and destruction of the old traditional labour movement in Europe. It seemed to be impossible to escape from new wars and the rise of totalitarian states. The hopes which the Russian revolution of 1917 had raised among the radical wing of European labour movements after the first world war had faded away. The uprising in East Germany is a historical warning that a new era of revolutionary liberation movements is possible. The June 1953 struggle of the East German proletarians may turn out to be a necessary introduction to a greater revolutionary struggle which will be political and social dynamite for similar societies all over the world.

Eastern Germany has become one of the most proletarianised areas in the world. The percentage of industrial labour is relatively great, and most industrial workers are concentrated in a few areas. Furthermore, the workers still are affected by the old traditions of the Western labour movement. They consist largely of skilled and intelligent workers. Advanced elements of these workers had opportunities to absorb the lessons of the most advanced labour movements of the nineteenth century in the course of the experiences of the great social revolutions at the beginning of this century, of

the totalitarian Nazi regime, of the final collapse of society after the Second World War, and finally of the new totalitarian colonial regime.

The new German bureaucratic hierarchy has to rely on an apparatus which is very costly, which intervenes and interferes with productive efforts to such an extent that an effective control of production becomes impossible. Absolute scarcity of many kinds of goods and materials or man-power coincide with large-scale economic waste. The economic costs of mistakes of the planners must be paid with sweated labour, wage cuts and the hanging of "saboteurs."

We may summarise the social and political conditions which were basic for the emergence of a new type of social revolutionary liberation movement as follows:

1. High degree of proletarianisation of the people. Most members of the middle classes had either vanished or had become mere proletarians. As proletarians they were not working for a private capitalist but for the state which had become a more fierce and more brutal exploiter than the worst type of private capitalist at the time of early capitalism. A similar experience was undergone by the old type of industrial worker, and also by the white-collar workers.

The entire social class structure tended to become very simple compared with the old one. Only three social classes now survive.

At the bottom of the social ladder there are the slave labourers who work for the state without monetary compensation. Then there is the rest of the population, most of whom belong to the completely proletarianised type of working class, controlled, oppressed and exploited by the state-capitalist bureaucracy. They are a tiny minority among the people, divorced from the rest of the population, without native or social roots among other sectors of the people, relying directly on the bayonets of their police forces and those of a foreign power.

2. Thus a real native ruling class has been missing. There were — and there are — new rulers and a new social hierarchy which tends to become a new ruling class. But it lacks basic elements of a ruling class. It is too small in number. It has not been able to create a sufficient stratum of members of the party or of the state-bureaucrats who may be considered as "reliable" for the regime. The social produce which the new rulers have at their disposal does not make it possible for them to extend the rise of a new social hierarchy into a new social class which has real national roots.

3. The weakness of the social and political structure is greatly increased by the foreign imperialist enslavement.

4. The methods of centralised state bureaucratic planning under the guidance of a totalitarian bureaucracy, together with the delivery of a large percentage of the industrial produce to the foreign imperialist overlord, have created a higher degree of economic anarchy and waste of the social produce than there ever existed under private capitalism.

5. The weaknesses of the regime are multiplied by the high degree of centralisation of industrial labour and by the fact that the tradition of the German labour movement — a high degree of social consciousness among individual workers, and of social class discipline and solidarity — has not yet been eliminated by the experiences of the Nazi regime nor by the new pseudo-communist dictatorship.

6. The new regime of totalitarian isolation of the individual could not be organised effectively. The neighbouring West German areas are populated by people of the same nation, living under relative personal freedom.

7. Finally, the upper crust of the new ruling hierarchy in the Eastern zones is not a firm unified mass following one specific direction. It consists of "leaders" and underlings who belong to cliques which are in an acute stage of confusion and of personal rivalries. At the centre, i.e., in Moscow itself, since the death of Stalin — and before — leading bureaucrats were purged or were in disfavour. The nature of the Russian regime and the prospects of liberation movements in the Eastern German areas have been discussed by small intellectual circles, former students and ex-officers, and in particular by former members of the labour movement.

But a genuine underground movement able to withstand the pressure of a totalitarian regime could be built up only by the industrial workers.

What helped them was the fact that they had daily contact with each other through their work and their working and living conditions. Furthermore, there were many workers experienced in underground work.

Finally they were unwilling to become the tool of another power and declined advice and in most cases even contact with circles or parties outside of their own area. Members of foreign intelligence organisations were carefully ignored as far as possible.

The situation was different for members of the old middle classes and members of academic professions.

They had lost their old social status and had declined to the bottom level of social stratification. There were no comrades and no social milieu where they felt that they were members of a group or of a circle to which they felt responsible and which may have helped them in an emergency. In 1951-52, when the East-German satellite regime had the task of restoring industrial production and the industrial capacities of East Germany, it had to increase the social and political weight of the industrial workers.

East Germany includes areas with highly concentrated industrial labour, where masses of industrial workers have been concentrated for several generations, with proud traditions of social-revolutionary struggle and socialist-communist organisational influence. We refer in particular to the industrial centres in Saxony, Thuringia, the area of Halle-Merseburg (incl. Leuna). The old political and organisational split between socialist and communist workers seemed to play a minor role at the end of the Nazi regime, at the end of the second world war. There was a spontaneous movement to overcome the old division. At first, the new Communist (and SED) party apparatus tried to exploit this spontaneous drive for unity among the workers.

PROCESS

But the new experience under the Russian-controlled regime completed the process of unification of the workers.

"Old Communists" among workers who would support the new regime were almost non-existent. The same applied to former members of the Social-Democratic party. At the beginning some success was recorded by the appeal of the new SED (Socialist Unity Party or official State Party) among young workers. But this appeal virtually vanished after several years of practical experience with the Stalinist Ulbricht apparatus.

A new kind of underground has emerged. It is a combination of loosely and also tightly knit organisation.

Only a minority of politically experienced workers, mainly former communists who had already been disillusioned by their experiences with the German CP, had realised the nature of the transformation of the Russian revolution when the second world war ended and the Russian armies marched into Germany. Most social-democratic workers and also ex-Communists who had joined the CP only a short time before the rise of Hitler to power sincerely believed, until the end of the war, that Moscow would become some kind of social liberator. But these hopes faded away with the Russian occupation. Thereafter a personal struggle for survival started. Such conditions were extremely unfavourable to any political thinking and movement.

The Ulbricht clique sought to copy the pattern of the Russian state in Germany. They had to build up their totalitarian party under the protection of a foreign army. The fate of Ulbricht and Co. depended on the foreign policies of Moscow.

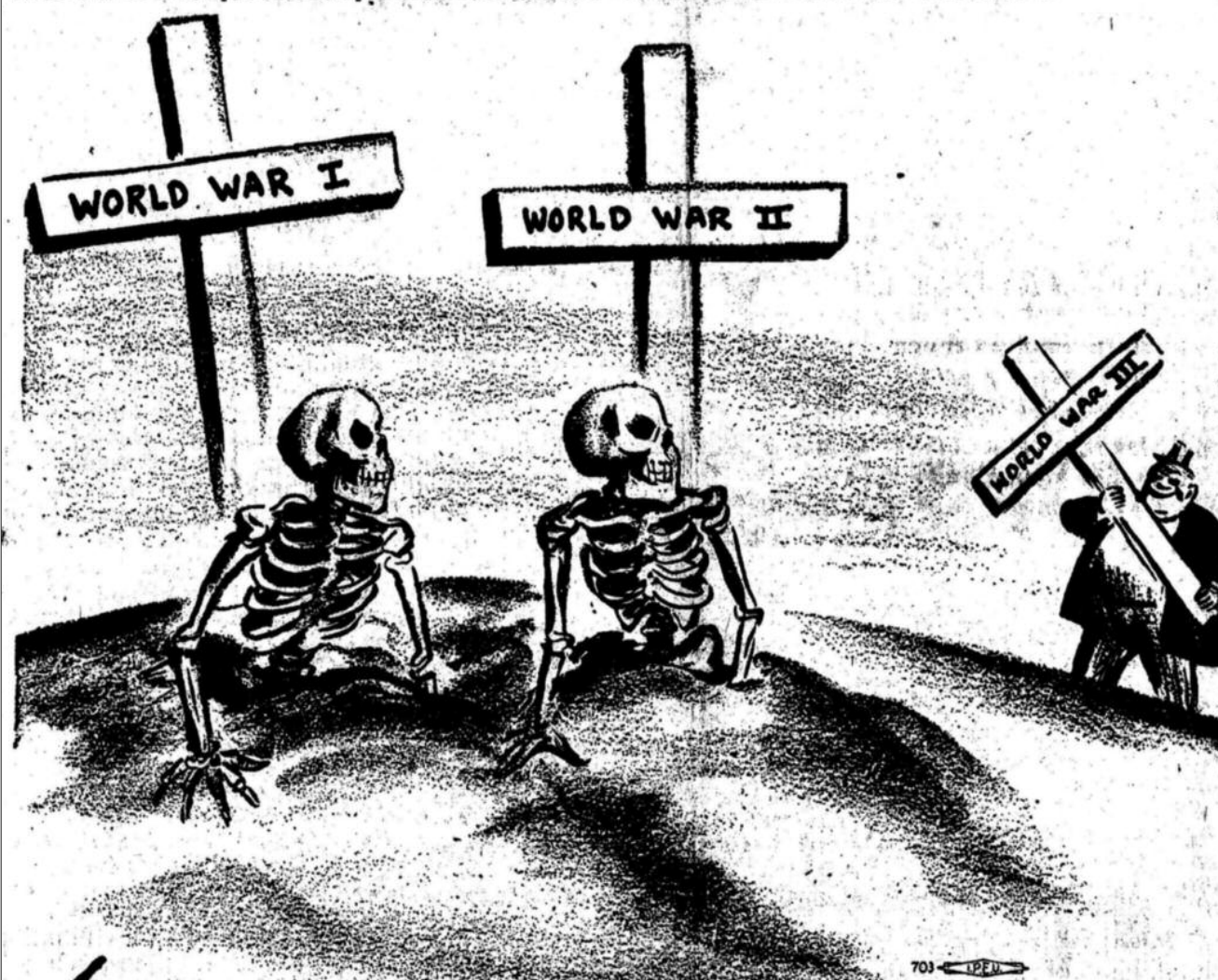
The underground organisation of the labour opposition does not consist of a real mass organisation. Experienced underground workers in totalitarian countries will agree that a mass organisation or an organisation which is part of a mass organisation — perhaps organised from abroad — will not survive for any length of time. What is possible in countries or areas which cannot be shut off air-tight from the rest of the world is the emergence of underground circles of a small number of oppositional workers. They may establish a few personal contacts with men who belong to key sectors of labour and who are a major influence among them. Such groups of workers who, because of their position, are able to act more independently than other workers, will be able to



The cartoons in this pull-out are taken from the US Trotskyist press of the time. Most from *Labor Action* (but not the one above) were by Carlo; all from *The Militant* (the paper of the "orthodox" Trotskyists) were by Laura Gray

Workers rise against Stalinist rule

MOVE OVER, BUDDY, DEMOCRACY IS BEING SAVED AGAIN!



use their particular group of workers as a kind of advance guard which at a critical moment will be followed by other sectors of labour.

The government spy system was not able to penetrate the underground of industrial and skilled workers effective. The underground was made up to a great extent of a net of contacts which were not a closely knit organisation but which relied on personal experiences with those who were willing to resist the new regime.

What helped was the fact that the government has superseded the old private capitalist boss. The government does not appear as a physical person.

Essential and helpful for a real underground centre was the fact that it had the cooperation and more or less active support of numerous sympathisers, and active helpers among members of the bureaucracy, within the SED hierarchy and even among the highest ranks of the SED hierarchy. Through them, a few contacts also existed with old-time members of foreign Communist Parties in Eastern countries, and also with a few Russian bureaucrats. As a result there was not one single decision of the government which did not become known to the underground opposition.

Warnings of planned arrests of old-time communists or socialists were sometimes given in time. This was done on the highest levels, as well as for rank-and-file members and through contacts with the Administration.

Something should be said about the special status of Berlin and the new role of the Berlin labour movement.

This applies to West Berlin as well as to East Berlin. In spite of the Iron Curtain which goes straight through Berlin, there are, of course, many contacts between both sectors of Berlin which do not exist in other East-West border areas. These special ties have been very important for the struggle in Eastern Germany. At the same time, East and West Berlin represent two different worlds.

In West Berlin the Social Democratic Party dominates the political life of the city. The West Berlin Social Democrats are under the leadership of highly experienced members of the old pre-Hitler labour movement.

West Berlin is the only part of West Germany where the local organisation of the Social-Democratic Party is under the leadership of a political group which derives from a real fusion of former left-wing young socialists ("Jung-Sozialisten") and anti-Stalinist ex-Communists. Some of them once played

a prominent role in the Communist Youth Movement during the Twenties and joined various oppositional Communist groups thereafter.

Leaders of the West Berlin SPD are used to considering their own situation as different from the situation in any other part of Germany and as directly related to foreign big-power politics. Nowhere in the world are foreign policies and world-wide political shifts of so much immediate concern to the local leaders and to the population as in West Berlin.

The labour movement in East Berlin is also unique. East Berlin is the only area in the Behind-the-Iron-Curtain world where an anti-Communist party is officially permitted and actually tolerated. At the beginning of the East Berlin regime, attempts were made to liquidate the Social-Democratic Party in East Berlin, too, and to terrorise individual party members.

But the West Berlin Social Democrats answered with effective counter-measures and threats of retaliation. As a result, some kind of unofficial *modus vivendi* developed.

The underground organisation in East Berlin relies more or less on former trade unionists, largely ex-Communists (sometimes still official members of the SED) and former members of the SPD. Contacts exist between the SPD organisation in West Berlin and the labour underground in East Berlin. But such contacts rely on a few personal ties. A distinctive feature of the underground in East Berlin and East Germany is that it relies on groups of workers who have common traditional ties and who do not acknowledge any centre "abroad," not even in Western Germany, including the SPD, as their leadership.

During the 12 months which preceded the uprising, the living standard of the workers in particular had fallen off. Consumer goods had been de-rationed.

Practically all consumer goods had to be purchased at "free" prices. The latter had declined but they still were higher than prices for rationed goods had been before. Thus items which could be bought only by the small privileged new aristocracy had become cheaper while bread, margarine, potatoes, etc., had become more expensive.

In the early Spring, practically already in March, near-famine conditions developed in many areas of the Eastern zone. In most towns, even in Berlin, rationed meat, fats, butter, sugar and vegetables could not be supplied. Many people waiting in queues wasted their time and had to go home empty-handed and hungry. At the same time, it became

known that the government was building up huge stocks of foodstuffs, apparently for political reasons and "on orders from Moscow."

The complete record of the historical events of the uprisings cannot be written now. There were no "central leaders" who directed or organised the uprisings in such a way that they were able to anticipate the events and to keep themselves informed about the actual situation at all major industrial or population centres.

But an underground centre in Berlin does exist. It relies on groups of workers who have unchallenged authority among new colleagues. They followed a wait-and-see policy and resisted the temptation of heroic actions which would not make sense, or which would expose them, their families and "innocent" oppositionists, to the new super-Gestapo.

Then, in early Spring, something happened that stirred all oppositional workers and that was much discussed among the underground circles: Ulbricht and his personal adherents were no longer in favour with Moscow.

[The "thaw" began in Russia, with the death of Stalin, and in Eastern Europe.] Experienced former Communist Party members were sceptical about the change. Would the new party line only be a short-term, temporary affair? What would happen afterwards, after having revealed the identity of the members of the opposition? Would the party bosses provoke the oppositional or potentially oppositional workers to reveal themselves only in order to purge them thereafter? Experienced former Communist Party members also suggested that an attempt should be made to turn the semi-legal movement for improved work and wage conditions into a political struggle which would spread among all industries and also other social classes in East Germany.

There was much reluctance among former active Communist party members and among socialists to appear openly as leaders of the movement or to take the initiative for the call for strikes and demonstrations.

OPEN

Much thought had to be given to the aftermath, and to the need of survival during the terror period which could be anticipated as a sequel to any attempt at open resistance against the regime.

Everybody, the underground leaders as well as the leading members of the SED, or of the East German government, and in particular the Russian representatives, were surprised at the scope and intensity of the oppositional movement which soon gained the character of mass uprisings, though there was not one single underground leadership which believed that the situation was "ripe" for a real revolution.

The underground leaders of the opposition had often talked about the risks of open opposition. The participants of any movement which defies the Party or the Party leaders and therefore also the entire regime, could not protect themselves against the terror regime. A small-scale group action for improved living conditions exposed the participants to almost the same risks as an open political action against the regime. The workers themselves were fearful of isolated small-scale actions of resistance. "If all workers of all industries would rebel..." This "if" was repeatedly talked about by the workers, as an excuse for not being able to act themselves, but also as a ray of hope.

It was easy for the building workers and the workers of the Hennigsdorf Steelworks to convince themselves that their resentment over the higher work norms and lower wage schedules would be useless and even dangerous if they merely launched a small-scale group struggle for better economic conditions for themselves.

They had to get out the workers of other factories, the women and men of the working class districts, in one big mass movement against the government, against the entire regime.

What was secretly discussed and expected as the only chance, had to become true. The professional pride of the building and steel workers turned into a political pride to be at the helm of a movement which was acclaimed by practically the entire population, except the Party elite and the new aristocracy.

Working and foodstuff conditions became so desperate that many acts of spontaneous resistance occurred in many industrial towns. But the Party leadership somehow welcomed the justification for intensified terror. The old anti-labour instructions and orders for 10 per cent more work without more pay could not be cancelled because of the

Continued on page 8

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shaky economic foundation of the state economy, and because of Moscow's unwillingness to give up the claims for large tribute or preferential supplies from the exhausted economy.

Many rationed goods were not distributed at all, or they were replaced with inferior goods which were offered at greatly increased prices.

Under such conditions the workers felt encouraged to discuss their grievances openly. It was obvious that the top leaders of the regime were unable or unwilling to act ruthlessly and with totalitarian terror methods against the critics of the regime.

Then the leading members of the underground had to deal with the issue: "What to do next?" The decision to call the workers out for strikes and open demonstrations against the regime was made in view of the following factors:

1. The people were hungry and desperate but the regime had imposed new additional burdens, including new increased work norms without extra pay.

2. The peasants were desperate and would support any action against the government in the towns.

3. The terror apparatus of the regime was not fully effective, for the government was dependent on a foreign overlord who was dissatisfied with the government. Its members were confused about the further course of action.

4. Important international behind-the-scene negotiations were being held in Eastern and Western capitals where the fate of Germany was to be decided. These negotiations could be favourably effected by an open act of defiance of the regime.

5. The political parties and the government in Western Germany were to be aroused about the urgency of the problem of unity and liberation of East Germany from the Eastern totalitarian state and the unbearable conditions imposed by it on the people.

On 7 June, the building workers of the Stalin-Allee project in East Berlin for the first time received their weekly wage on the basis of the newly-introduced work norms, i.e., at greatly reduced rates. The bureaucrats of the trade unions and of other official agencies refused to listen to the complaints of the workers and threatened police action against "sabotage" and "resistance" against the state authorities. Then, on 9 and 10 June, the official decrees about a change of the party line were made known.

Now there seemed to be confirmation of what had been said in the whisper campaigns: The Ulbricht apparatus will find it difficult to use methods of physical terror in order to suppress open mass resistance. The workers will have a chance if they express their dissatisfaction with the bureaucrats. Moscow will hesitate to appear in the role of the mass liquidator of the industrial workers of East Germany.

On 15 and 16 June, the building workers of the Stalin-Allee project openly demanded withdrawal of the new work-norms and wage cuts. Ulbricht's apparatus still refused to give in. Then the workers stopped working, left their jobs and marched into other workers' quarters, especially to other plants, in order to spread the movement. Many thousands of workers marched to the East German government and Party headquarters.

This action was still relatively peaceful. Two members of the government, Rau and Selbmann, who had the reputation of not being especially close to Ulbricht, personally tried to pacify the masses. They were frequently interrupted when they talked to the workers but they were not personally attacked. Then, on 17 June, the order for new work norms and wage cuts was withdrawn. It was too late. In the evening, the slogan spread among the workers in all East Berlin districts.

The next morning, all workers of East Berlin would go on strike and march against the government. The next morning, the workers of the municipal utilities (gas, water and electrical power plants) joined the strike and marched against the government headquarters, too. In a matter of minutes Russian tanks intervened and saved the SED and government headquarters from destruction by the infuriated workers. Without the last-minute intervention of the Russian tank division, the workers would have seized party and government headquarters with little chance of escape for the SED leaders.

The workers did not run away when the guns of the Russian tanks were turning against them. They faced them with desperate courage and iron discipline. Politically conscious workers advised their colleagues not to engage in an open and unequal fight with the Russian forces.

One step further, and the tanks would have been used against the unarmed workers. It was too early to attempt a revolution against the government and against the Russian



The "New Democracy" at Work



NEWS ITEM: Stalinist Government's Single Slate Polls Over 80 Per Cent of Czechoslovakia Vote armed forces.

The action had started under the leadership of workers who were especially reliable and courageous in their defiance of the regime. They were skilled workers traditionally known for their personal willingness to take risks in the struggle against oppressive authorities. The building workers of Berlin and the steel workers of Hennigsdorf were known for their support of revolutionary actions during the pre-Nazi era 1918-1933.

They were strongholds of the Communist movement in Berlin during that period. Under the Nazis they defied the regime wherever possible.

They certainly did not become adherents of Nazism. These workers were called out for an open act of defiance of the regime, but under slogans which at first concerned their own economic interests: against the new work norms and for better living conditions. The economic demands were fulfilled by the regime almost within a few hours after the start of the strike.

But an immediate "transition of the economic into a political struggle" took place in the best tradition of the old tactical experiences of revolutionary action. The advance guard of the Berlin working class had called out the other workers and the entire working class population to defy the regime and to march to the centres of the administration with the demand: immediate resignation of the government.

Spontaneously, in towns and villages where the underground did not have direct contacts but where local underground leaders existed, too, or where such leaders arose

during the action itself, workers went on strike and local populations, often openly supported by peasants, marched to the prison buildings where political prisoners were kept or where the administration was located.

Overnight the net of underground organisations was multiplied and a new revolutionary organisation was born.

There was a serious danger that local hot-heads would go too far and that the government would provoke a revolutionary uprising or an all-out struggle under conditions which spelled defeat for the movement. An underground leadership which existed in nucleus-form intervened.

The spontaneous demand for a general strike was declined. For such an extension of the action would have been an attempt to seize political power and would have involved the movement in an open premature struggle against the foreign occupational power. There was no chance to win against the Russian tanks and machine guns, while open support from the West was not available.

The local leaders of the movement were warned to avoid any clash with the representatives of the Russian occupational powers. When Russian tanks and guns controlled the streets and further mass action would have resulted in an open clash with the Russian forces the action as such was called off.

But in many towns and industrial centres open mass resistance still continued. The leaders of the underground discovered that they had unknown sympathisers and active supporters. The basic weakness of the police machine of the regime became apparent: it was acting on behalf of a foreign power and it relied on "security forces" recruited largely from young workers who did not want to act against their own people. Many acts were seen of heroism and evidence of disintegration of the regime.

The only elements who were really reliable from the viewpoint of the Ulbricht clique and of the Russian commander were the former S. S. members or Nazis who had joined the SED and the new Security Forces of the regime. But the old Communist party members who had joined the new administration were in most cases "unreliable" and except for a few top leaders bore within themselves the germs of disintegration.

In one town, the mayor, an old-time Communist, personally knocked down with his fists the policeman, a former Nazi, who was shooting at the anti-government people. The Communist mayor was later arrested and condemned to death.

The uprising improved the bargaining position of the Western powers. But the desperate masses would have to pay the price. Any underground leader and active member of the resistance movement had to be aware of the possibility that the regime would take vengeance on him if it could ever gain absolute power. But does Moscow want to return the Ulbricht clique to absolute power and will the Russian regime support such purges? The Russian leaders are experienced in administrative rule and oppression of oppositional movements.

But they are not too experienced with such movements in satellite countries especially in areas forming the border line between East and West, and especially not in highly industrialised countries with proletarian leaders who are trained in the tradition of the old labour movements and with workers who also have a tradition of defiance against their exploiters and oppressors.

A violent suppression of the anti-totalitarian national and social liberation movement in East Germany and other Russian satellite countries, with the silent or indirect consent of the Western powers, would liquidate the only force which makes it possible to avoid a third world war. For the Russian overlord will see to it that the suppression of such movements will be used in order to propagate the idea of betrayal of any progressive movements by the Western powers and in order to build up a stronger police and military machine than ever existed before. It would be used in order to wage war against the Western powers at a later stage, under conditions where the Western powers would be unable to use the means of political warfare effectively in Europe.

This is the international background to the events in East Germany. They are either the beginning of a new era of revolutionary national and social liberation movements, or they will seal the fate of any social liberation movement in our time.

The Western powers are in greater danger of being defeated in Germany if they refuse to support such movements because the final consequences of such a struggle are much more far-reaching than it may appear to the casual observer.

Who were the leaders?

By Max Shachtman

There have been anti-Stalinist actions before, both outside of Russia and even inside of it. But yet they are not the same thing as the rising that occurred in Berlin.

Inside of Russia it has happened any number of times, before, during and since the Second World War. There have been many cases of small isolated strikes, long strikes, by desperate, atomised leaderless workers who would almost rather die than continue to submit any longer to the depredations and abuses of their masters. Invariably, according to all the reports about them, they were blown to bits by the platoons of the GPU. And the heroism of the workers involved left an imprint on the minds of only a tiny handful of people. The world at large, outside of Russia, heard very little of these struggles.

Similarly in the cases of the multitude of peasant actions that occur almost all the time in one place of the Russian empire or another — actions against the bureaucratic bandits sent to keep them subjugated and silent.

Outside of Russia there has been more than one case, dozens of cases in fact. The first big inspiring movement was that of the Ukrainian Partisans, the so-called UPA which arose in the Ukraine, both parts of it, in the course of the Second World War, with the cry "Against Hitler! Against Stalin!"

This movement displayed a heroism and a tenacity that is almost incredible under conditions that are almost impossible to believe could exist, and it had the honour, of lighting up the first dawn of the new day after the many gloomy years of ineffectual calls to resistance issued in Russia by the revolutionary movement, in particular by the Trotskyist movement, the old Trotskyist movement.

But in the first place the UPA was essentially a guerrilla movement, arising directly out of the conditions of the war in that particular part of Europe at the time, and limited by these conditions. And secondly, it was primarily a peasant movement, moreover a peasant movement constantly on the move. And for these two reasons it was doomed to instability, to insecurity, to a gradual wearing-down and unfortunately to obscurity.

Similar and analogous movements have been known in Poland ever since the Stalinists took power there, but they had the same or greater natural and military handicaps.

Of greater importance and of sounder foundations have been the spontaneous movements in Czechoslovakia. Like the working classes in all the Stalinist countries — it is a feature of them all — the Czech workers, almost from the beginning, starting only shortly after the Stalinists took complete power in the country, have been on a more or less permanent general strike, inside the industries, inside the plants, inside the factories, inside the mills, on the railroads, even on the farms. It is a characteristic means whereby the working class of these countries, starting with Russia herself, carry on the class struggle against the totalitarian regime.

But with the new developments in the Stalinist regimes which have come into the open since the death of Stalin, this peculiar durable general strike has already broken out into open demonstrations in the plants and in the streets in various cities of Czechoslovakia, particularly in connection recently with the vicious so called currency reform.

But all of these tokens together, and certainly any one of them, fail to have the scope and significance of the Berlin events of the middle of June.

It is true, as all the more or less bewildered reports in the newspapers agree, that the movement in Eastern Berlin and thereafter in Eastern Germany was a spontaneous movement. It was indeed a spontaneous movement, as are all genuine mass movements. Genuine mass movements cannot simply be commandeered from above, no matter how widespread is the support enjoyed among the population by those whom the "above" represent. They have to conform to a sentiment in the masses; they have to represent it — truly, or not quite so truly as the case might be.

In that sense the outpouring of the mass, whether on order or request from above or by the mysterious movement which often sets masses in motion without anybody — the masses themselves included — knowing who it was, is nevertheless



an authentic popular movement.

But in this case what was undoubtedly a spontaneous movement was at the same time, I am convinced by everything that has appeared about it, also an *organised* movement. In that respect I think it is fundamentally different from virtually all the movements we have known under Stalinism in the past — and by movements in this respect I mean movements that have appeared openly in the streets, in direct combat with Stalinism.

All sorts of people — and this is a second feature of the Eastern Berlin affair — were in the demonstration. It was perhaps the broadest mass movement against Stalinism that has been witnessed. Many of the correspondents who were on the scene were somewhat puzzled by the variegated class character of the demonstration.

They saw people who were obviously workers — building trades workers in particular, who, in Germany, are very easy to recognise — and they saw people with briefcases. People with briefcases in a country like Germany means middle-class people — employees, government people, civil-service people, etc. They saw housewives with big shopping baskets — which shows, already, not a proletarian housewife. They saw moderately well-dressed people in the demonstration.

But however true and gratifying it is that everybody, so to speak, plunged into the demonstration, the outstanding fact about it is that it was initiated by organised working people. They were the moving spirit of it, they were its spinal column, they were its heart, and above all they were its mind.

And when we speak of organised working people we're speaking of the Berlin proletariat. And comrades and friends, there has never been a proletariat, certainly not over a long period of time, like the Berlin proletariat — never.

Almost throughout the history of one century of the social-

ist proletarian movement it has been unique. Always strongly organised; always permeated to the marrow of its bones with the spirit of solidarity and organisation; always permeated with the spirit of discipline — very often too good for it — but nevertheless discipline. And courage!

Berlin is a strongly industrial centre. This tradition of organisation, of class consciousness, of socialist class consciousness, of discipline and courage, was manifested in East Berlin two weeks ago as though it had never gone through the purgatory of fascism and the exhausting paralysis of the division that made it possible for fascism to come to power 20 years ago.

So while it was an authentically popular demonstration and uprising, it was initiated, carried on and dominated from start to finish by the Berlin socialist proletariat — the old proletariat who existed and flourished and thought and acted before Hitler, and the young proletarians who, in the multifarious ways known to the working class, were trained by their older working class brothers.

You must have read the reports in all the newspapers: that it was started by the workers of the Berlin construction industry, the building-trades workers; and that it got its most weighty support, once it got started, from the workers in Henningsdorf, a suburb 12-15 miles from the centre of Berlin, which is industrial through and through and the seat of the famous Henningsdorfer Stahlwerke, the steel works famous in the class struggles of Germany for years and of Berlin in particular.

Now what is very interesting about both of these groups of workers is their past. They share a common past, and for some reason they are almost exactly the opposite in politics

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Workers rise against Stalinist rule

and tradition from their similars in the US. The steelworkers of Henningsdorf and the building-trades workers of Berlin have in common a Communist past.

And not by accident — the case was not that somebody pretended he was a member of the city committee of the Democratic Party and got elected to the building trades council in Berlin, or something of the sort. Year in and year out both of them — both unions — both industries — from almost the beginning of the post-World War I period, almost from the beginning of the creation of a Communist Party in Germany, regularly elected Communist shop-council stewards. They were known as fortresses of the Communist Party, and not by skimpy majorities — they were really fortresses of the Communist Party!

The Berlin building-trades industry, the Henningsdorf steel works — to mention the two that were involved in this case, there were others of course — were among the proletarian sectors where the Nazis could never penetrate. Social-Democrats in these industries inclined to the left rather than to the right. That gives you some idea of the political past of the workers who were primarily involved in these demonstrations.

When the Communist Party in the old days before Hitler called its big demonstrations, its big parades, outstanding among them were the Berlin building trades workers, dressed in the heritage of the old guild costumes that they affected on those occasions: great big broad-brimmed black hats, and great big broad breeched black pants. And that seemed to enhance their brawn.

I can almost see them walking down the streets now in Stalinist Berlin and infusing into the Stalinist Volkspolizei, into the Stalinist soldier, not an impression of contempt but an impression of worryment. They were something to look at! And if some have died since the old days — Hitler took power 20 years ago, people have died, many of them murdered — those who replaced them have, no doubt, been brought up in the same fundamental tradition of revolutionary, militant, uncompromising socialism.

Because I have to add to that story of their tradition the fact that there has been a complete break with Stalinism both in the building trades industry and in the steel works, among these workers who participated. Nowhere else is there a deeper, sturdier hatred of Stalinism and of the so-called Communist Party of Germany than among these workers. These places are no longer fortresses of Stalinism; they are fortresses of the proletarian socialist enemies of Stalinism.

These former Communists are unquestionably united today with the Social-Democratic workers, the members of the SPD, the socialist party of Germany, in those industries and enterprises. One need not have any inside information to come to that absolutely firm and sound conclusion. What could possibly divide the former Communist Party workers of those areas and industries from the former Social-Democratic Party workers? Nothing, absolutely nothing. And that was perfectly clear from the slogans that were chanted with such organised and prepared firmness by those who ap-

peared in the demonstration. The differences of the past no longer relate to anything in the world to day. There cannot be a division between them — that's in the past.

The fourth thing that was interesting about the East Berlin affair and which justified the conclusion that this was not only organised but well organised, intelligently organised, wisely and cunningly organised, was the systematic and integrated character with which the crowd put forward their slogans. These slogans were all revolutionary political slogans.

The ostensible ground upon which the building trades workers left their jobs on the first "socialist" street in Berlin, Stalinallee, was lost sight of in the demonstration, in the uprising. It was as if they were ready to acknowledge, publicly, that this was only a pretext for manifesting their opposition to the regime.

You know, surely, how it started. The Stalinist rulers, or sub-rulers, of what is referred to as the "workers' state" of East Germany — by many people, none of whom is a worker in East Germany — issued a decree that the production norm in the building-trades industry would be lifted 10 per cent. And although in this mighty totalitarian state these workers had but to lift their finger in protest to get the decree withdrawn by the rulers of the German more-or-less "degenerated workers' state," that did not prevent them from going out into this demonstration which was half uprising and half demonstration. On the contrary, it only stimulated them.

And the minute they went out — although they came from different parts of the city and converged upon one key point where their employers who rule them, the employers' state, the government offices, are located — they said virtually nothing of the 10 per cent increase in the production norm.

SLOGANS

All their slogans were political, all their slogans related to the question of rule, of politics, and because they were directed against the regime and violently against it, uncompromisingly against it, demanding nothing from the regime, except its demise, they were revolutionary political slogans.

"Ivan Go Home" was the one heard most often.

"Down with the Volkspolizei!" This is an old and, in its original form, beloved slogan of all German workers, above all, of the Berlin workers. They have had "Po's" before.

There was the hated Sipo of the Weimar republic — the Sicherheitspolizei — the security police; and the word Sipo on the lips of a Berlin worker was not pleasant to hear, if you were a member of the Sipo! There was likewise the Schupo — the Schutzpolizei, the "protective police," and on the lips of the Berlin workers it had no less hateful a significance. And after these representatives of the democratic Weimar republic were transmogrified into the police of the Hitler regime there were added to them also the Gestapo — the Geheime Staatspolizei, secret police of the late Goering, and that only deepened the hatred of the German workers.

And to them all — and you might say summing them all up — was now added by the Stalinists the Vopo, the Volkspolizei, which added insult to injury by calling itself a people's police. And it is interesting that among the slogans most popular on the streets two weeks ago was "Down with the Vopo!" — down with the armed agents of the Stalinist regime in Germany.

"Down with Ulbricht" was the third of the popular slogans. Ulbricht is the principal Stalinist quisling in Germany, together with front man Grotewohl, who is kept there only because he was a former minor functionary in the Social-Democratic Party of Germany and who is a handy man for the Russians to have around because nature deprived him of the elementary lime deposits to make up a backbone. They are known, nevertheless, by all the workers for what they really are.

The workers demanded nothing of Ulbricht and Grotewohl — no "give us this or that." No: Vacate! Disappear! Or as they say in vulgar Berlinese: Verrecke! (croak).

What they demanded positively — not of Grotewohl and not of the Russian tanks, but as an assembling slogan for all the people — were two things: Unite Germany, and free elections. To demand free elections in the U. S. is to demand something very serious, but not revolutionary. In a Stalinist country free elections is a revolutionary demand — revolutionary from every point of view. And the slogan for the national unification of Germany is a revolutionary and democratic slogan which quickens the heartbeat of every authentic German today.

It is impossible to believe that these were merely the spontaneous utterances of so many atomised individuals in East

Berlin. These were slogans drawn up not artificially, not to be "injected" into the Germans or the Berliners but drawn up because they so pregnantly summarised the most passionate feelings of the Berliners. They were drawn up by people who were accustomed to summarise pithily that which is in the heart of people.

To make no bones about it, no people in our time have shown themselves to be more skilled, more thoughtful, more experienced, taking it all in all, at doing precisely that than those trained in the Communist or the Stalinist movement. I do not hesitate for a moment to acknowledge their skill and experience in this respect. The demonstration was not organised by anybody who never had had anything to do with demonstrations, let alone demonstrations that are uprisings. It was organised by experts, by experienced people, skilled people, people with know-how in these matters.

Among Social-Democrats, including good ones, how many of them have experience in organising uprisings? at least, lately, that is, since 1848? Not so with one who has been in the Communist movement, above all in the Communist movement of Germany and the Communist movement of Berlin, where the organising of demonstrations (and insurrections) was publicly taught in detail, in technical detail, by the CP of Germany up to the day that Hitler took power, which openly published a magazine devoted to the art of insurrection.

The way in which they went to the places where they went; the way in which they converged upon the strategically located centres; the way in which they attacked those who were to be attacked and refrained from attacking those whom it was pointless or inexpedient to attack; the lack of aimless wandering which is the special characteristic of spontaneous demonstrations that have no organisation, preparation and leadership; the immediacy of their assault on the prisons to liberate all political prisoners: the speed with which they reached government buildings in order to try to take them, with which they reached buildings of the Stalinist party and did take them — for the time required to destroy the paraphernalia: all these speak of a prepared organised demonstration, all these things speak of the existence of an underground revolutionary organisation throughout the German Stalinist territory.

Read the serious correspondents who wrote about the Berlin uprising two weeks ago, not the sensation mongers but those who tried to understand the spectacular, bewildering event that was occurring before their very eyes. Some of them had seen uprisings before, evidently. They knew their features, their characteristics, what leads up to them, what follows them. This one was a mystery.

There was no organisation. (Otherwise they'd have heard of it, wouldn't they? The first thing an underground movement does naturally is tell an American correspondent!) And yet this had the appearance of an organised movement! Yet they knew of no leaders; they knew of no headquarters; no newspapers; no dues payments; no meetings; no constitution, above all. It was interesting to read the reports — that's what puzzled them all.

But we can say with utter certainty: there is such a movement. There is such an organisation. It must embrace thousands in the sense that thousands follow it, almost unquestionably, but it contains as its actual staff only few. These people learned not only in the hard school of the Stalinists in the old days but they learned in the even harder and more unrelenting school of life under the Gestapo.

You may ask yourself: Is it possible to have an underground illegal organisation in a country dominated by that most experienced and most all-persuasive spy organisation in the world, that most skilful and powerful underground apparatus that history has ever known, the GPU? Would it not penetrate it? Would it not expose it and explode it?

In Russia, perhaps; or at least, in Russia with less difficulty, for reasons which I believe will occur to you yourselves if you reflect but a moment. In Germany, no.

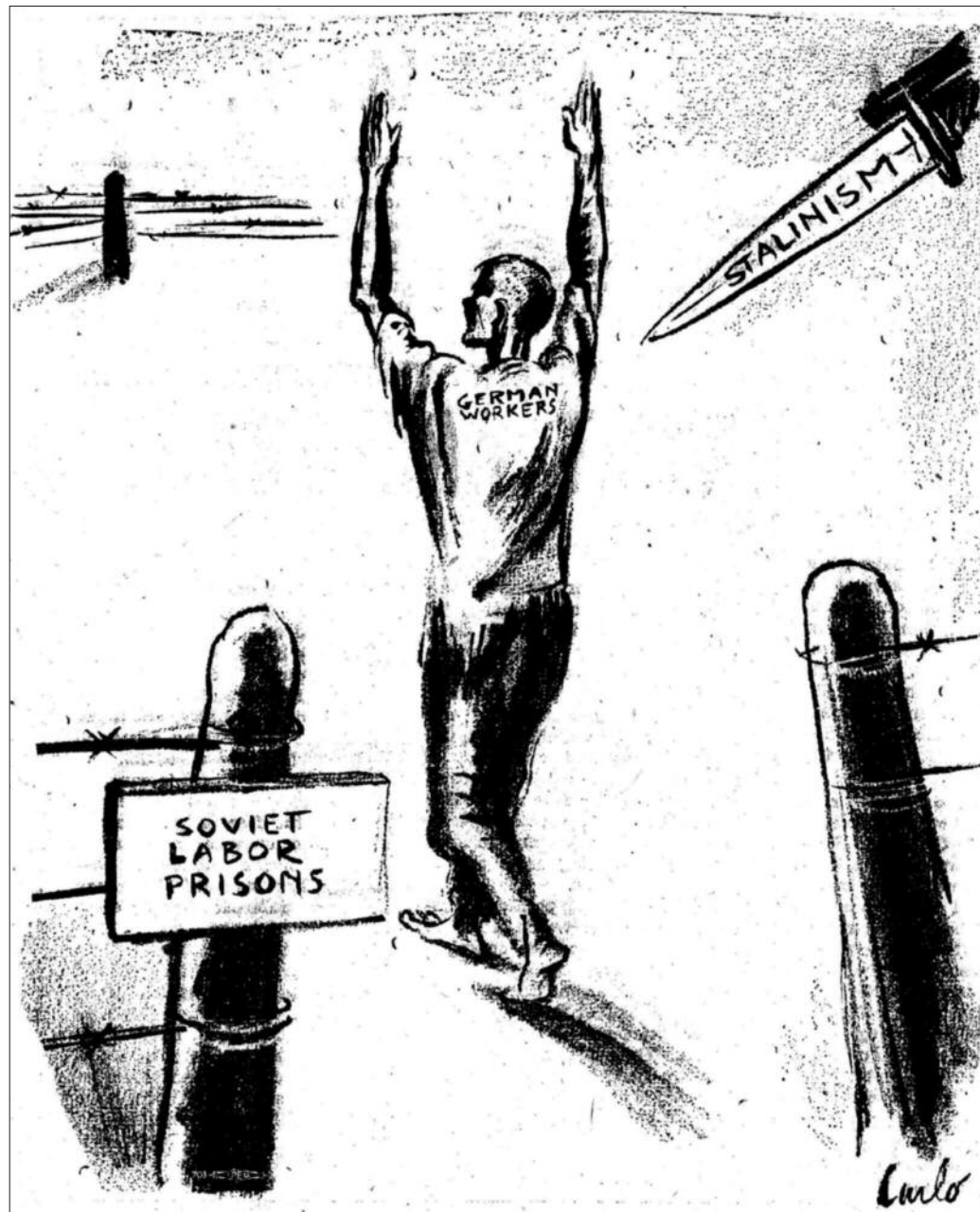
In the first place, there is no reason to doubt that among those who have taken the courageous responsibility of organising this revolutionary underground movement, this nameless and faceless movement for which nobody in the West speaks or can speak, there are those who at one or another time were in the service of the GPU or got their training in it, know its methods and know how to avoid the consequences of these methods to themselves. That's in the first place.

But more important than that is the social and political environments of this movement. The militants of such a movement live among a people that almost uniformly hate the Stalinist regime.

We have forgotten, we who hardly know very much what



Workers rise against Stalinist rule



happened only a few years ago. They have not. They know what happened when these Stalinist "liberators" came to their country; they know the shame and the shambles that came with the cannon of the so-called Red Army. They know its hideous record. Nothing has happened to appease that deep national hatred for a country that has deprived them of everything — above all, their honour, their country, their dignity as people of it; and that has submitted them to a degradation which in one respect is deeper than that which they suffered under Hitler.

In such an atmosphere an illegal underground anti-Stalinist movement is doubly and trebly protected by the population, protected from infiltration, protected from espionage, protected from harassment of all kinds. In any case, that it exists is to me incontestable, for to contest it makes a miracle out of what happened in Berlin and the rest of the cities of Germany a couple of weeks ago; and in spite of the Roman Catholic Church, this is not the age of miracles, not even in the struggle against Stalinism.

Who was the aim of this half-demonstration, half uprising? To judge this is at the same time to judge: Was it a success or a failure, was it a victory or a defeat?

If we proceed from what is apparent to the naked eye, if we proceed secondly from what seems like a reasonable analysis of what was behind the demonstration, it seems clear that insofar as it represented conscious thinking people accustomed to advancing not on the basis of some capricious whim of emotion of the moment but on the basis of thinking and planning and preparing, their aim was *not* to take power now from the Stalinists. That's not possible. Rather, what seems to me to be the aims are the following.

It was a test of arms, the first one between the German working class and the Stalinist ruling class in the eight years since they took power in that country. It was a feeling out of the enemy, a feeling for the enemy's soft spots, for the enemy's reaction. It was, as it were, a patrol in mass.

I cannot believe that this represented the total strength that

can be mustered by the German working class against the Stalinists. There is much, very much, in reserve.

Their aim was, if possible, to disgrace completely the quisling government of Grotewohl and Ulbricht, and in this aim they were brilliantly successful. In this they achieved a complete and unalloyed victory,

Think only of this fact: The so-called native government of East Germany, of the Democratic People's Republic, as it is called, the "German" government of the Russians cannot cope with a demonstration of unarmed workers! — with the arms at its disposal! This isn't an unarmed government. Arms at its disposal — by that I do not mean Russian arms; I mean its so called Volkspolizei.

Like any more or less normal government, it sees a demonstration in the streets which seems to be somewhat critical of the regime; it calls out its police; the police either stand and stare, or cheer secretly, or if they attack the demonstrators, are attacked so fiercely in return that they are helpless. What is such a government? It's a sham, a sham; it is in reality non-existent; it is a puppet; it is powerless; it cannot cope with so elementary a situation.

Bear in mind these weren't 10,000 workers with rifles. These were workers with trowels, with mallets, with iron pipes and steel bars, with paving stones from the street, the ordinary equipment of militant workers in a violent demonstration, but not in a revolution by armed people — like, let us say, Russia in March 1917 or in July or in November. There the workers bristled with rifles, with machine guns, armoured guns. If the government was somewhat frightened by that, it was more or less understandable. If the entire government dressed up like a woman and fled in a motor car, it was entirely understandable.

But here: paving stones, a mason's trowel, and young people's with matches — the government cannot cope with that. It collapsed. And the only way in which this demonstration could be curbed was by wheeling into position the instruments used to overthrow the biggest military power on the Continent up to 1945: Russian tanks. Not as many were employed as against Hitler, but significantly — tanks! Cannon, machine guns set up on barricades, and Russian troops with sub machine guns.

At one stroke this brilliant demonstration revealed what to you and other refined political people was obvious all the time, but which had not been quite so obvious to the entire world, and now is. The government of the Democratic People's Republic of Eastern Germany is a puppet, an impotent puppet, a helpless tool in the hands of the Russian occupants. And to the German people above all, this means much.

Then, another aim — I cannot conceive of its not having been in the minds of the organisers and initiators of the uprising — was to discredit completely, as it deserves to be discredited, the myth that so many melon-heads are swallowing whole, about a new policy of "liberalism" that is being adopted by the new government in Russia.

It is true — say certain intellectual vacuums who direct newspapers, who are even congressmen, though that is not saying much, and senators and people in various chancel-

eries of the world — it is true that the new Muscovite regime is not entirely free of the narrow-minded and oppressive and essentially oriental government of Stalin; but it has shown a genuine desire to liberalise its regime and, given a favourable reaction in the West, the regime may organically develop into a democracy, or anyway, as much of a democracy as Russians can ever have, given their particular type of soul.

This is seriously listened to by statesmen; books are written to explain it — one has just been written which is applauded by no less a statesman than George F. Kennan.

But the organisers of the demonstration know better. They know what Stalinism is, and their timing was exceptionally shrewd, if you agree with me that the 10 per cent increase in the production norm was not and could not have been more than a pretext for so extensive and violent a reaction.

They set out to prove, among other things, what may not need proving to you and me but which needs proving to many millions: that the Stalinists, especially the present breed which has taken over in the interregnum between one Stalin and another, will if necessary make all the concessions you can think of, all the concessions you can ask for, *except* to give up the power, or one fraction of the power, to rule over, exploit, oppress, dominate the peoples under their heel.

In this the new Russian rulers show wisdom, in my judgement. It is altogether intelligent on the part of the present Moscow regime to make concessions. It is altogether wise on their part to talk like editors of *The Nation* on all the great political questions of the day. It is altogether wise to make the concessions they have made and the many more they will make. But to create the myth that they will, little by little, as soon as they gather their wits about them, fully give up power and be like ordinary citizens along with other ordinary citizens, to accept that — what phrase can I use that will be least offensive to everybody? To accept that is not to have a full understanding of the Stalinists. In a lower voice I add: it is to have no understanding whatsoever of the Stalinist regime or anything else. But in a loud voice I say merely: it is to lack a full understanding of Stalinism.

The Berlin uprising showed that the minute the Kremlin gang feels that one ounce, one millimetre, or a fraction of it, of their power to rule, to dictate, to determine whether or not or when concessions shall be made — is endangered, then it acts like the most reactionary, crassest, most sadistic regime we have ever known — with tanks, bayonets, machine guns, martial law, drumhead trials, executions, shootings on the spot, mass prisoners, and shooting of their own troops if they fail to carry out the orders to shoot those who are fighting for freedom.

And even if the organisers of this magnificent demonstration did not have that in mind, if it was only a by-product, it is a rich and wonderful by-product of the East Berlin uprising.

That the organisers of this demonstration existed as a compact, planful group is further confirmed in my thinking by the fact that they seemed to realize — and so well, so wisely — that an out-and-out old-style blood bath against the demonstrators by the Russians was impossible now. And in that they were right. The Russian Stalinists were ready for it — what else do tanks mean? They were ready for it if they had to, as an absolutely last resort. But as we read what happened, carefully, we see that they were reluctant to fire.

The demonstrators took this into account. They did not go too far. They went as far as the specific aims they had in mind required, but they did not go so far as to produce merely martyrs.

The Russians wounded many, they killed dozens, a hundred, all over East Germany. We mourn for everyone who died, we grieve for everyone who was so much as hurt by the barbarian Stalinist regime. And we exult in the victory that the demonstrators achieved.

But in this cruel age of ours, when the law of survival dictates struggle first of all, when the smallest patrol action in the inaccessible and unimportant hills of Korea brings far more casualties than occurred in East Berlin, we can say, in our mourning, that the price paid for all that was achieved was small, and this is a tribute, I think, to the sense of responsibility in the minds and hearts of the militants who had the responsibility for this demonstration.

• From *Labor Action*, 13 July 1953, where it was prefaced by this note: "We publish here a part of the lecture given by Max Shachtman on July 2 on the subject of the East German workers' revolt, as transcribed from a tape recording made by friends".

Since the uprising

By A Stein

The June uprising of the East German workers demonstrated to the world — and to Moscow — that the Grotewohl-Ulbricht regime was built of sand and rested on water. Since it could no longer pretend to represent anyone but its Russian masters, its usefulness as a pawn in Moscow's game to draw Western Germany out of the American orbit seemed at an end.

Nevertheless, Moscow did not sweep the wreckage of the discredited regime aside and attempt to install a new government that could bid for some degree of popular support. Instead, the Kremlin began to do everything within its power to rehabilitate and prop up the old ruling Stalinist party, called the Socialist Unity Party (SED).

At the same time, the policy of economic concessions was reaffirmed. However, to the East German workers the combination of the old Grotewohl-Ulbricht gang and the new policy, especially after the June revolt, must have seemed as monstrous and unbelievable as the unfortunate character of Bottom in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* — a reasonable body crowned by the absurdity of a donkey's head that brayed when it thought it was speaking.

In the course of the last three months, Moscow's line has been symbolised by the growing power of Walter Ulbricht, deputy premier of the regime and first secretary of the SED. It is he who has been given the power and the responsibility for rebuilding the shattered party-police-state apparatus. Today, Ulbricht's most important task is the creation of a party within the party, a hard core of party faithful who are to supervise the activities of the ordinary run of party members.

This corps of party elite, according to Ulbricht, is to number 150,000 to 200,000 out of a total membership of 1,230,000.

The members of this praetorian guard will receive special political training and have periodic conventions separate and aside from the regular party congresses, at which they will discuss the most important problems facing the regime.

Members of this select group will be chosen, says Ulbricht, on the basis of their behaviour during June 17. Only those will be so "honoured," and receive of course the corresponding material privileges, who neither "faltered" nor "gave in" to the demands of the "provocateurs," that is, the workers, during the uprising.

Behind the political shock troops will stand the newly rebuilt Volkspolizei ("People's Police") and the East Germany army which is poorly concealed under the name of Bereitschaften (alert units). The factories are being combed for those who refused to join the strikers or actually resisted when the workers spontaneously rose up against the regime. Ulbricht is even dreaming of creating factory militias by arming "loyal" workers who are not recruited into the police or army. Truly, Ulbricht is taking-upon himself the labours of a Sisyphus!

When the Russian occupation troops intervened on June 17, they saved the satellite empire from being broken at its weakest link by preventing the strike demonstrations from turning into the first stages of a revolution. They could not and did not, however, crush the spirit of the workers, who retreated and shifted the scene of the struggle from the streets to the factories.

The slogans underwent a corresponding change: from the most general political demands to more limited ones which could serve as a point of departure for undermining the regime within the given framework, i.e., the presence of the occupation troops. And in those first weeks the workers won some notable victories.

On June 17 the workers, supported by the rest of the population, called for the liquidation of the Grotewohl-Ulbricht

government, the unification of Germany, and the election of an all-German government by universal secret balloting. Driven back to the factories, they raised a new set of slogans which they backed up with strikes and slowdowns in production.

Among the demands they raised, the most notable were:

- The release of all arrested July 17 demonstrators and the promise of no further reprisals.
- The political "neutrality" of the trade unions, their independence from state control.
- Election of new non-party trade-union officials from the shop upwards on the basis of genuine secret balloting.
- The immediate reduction of work-norms and their subsequent abolition altogether.
- The 46 hour work-week at the same rate of pay as the 48-hour week.
- The lowering of prices by 40 per cent in the state commercial stores.

First and foremost the workers demanded the immediate and unconditional release of their comrades who had been arrested, and they struck to enforce, their demand. One example out of many will suffice to demonstrate their courageous actions and class solidarity.

The workers of the Zeiss Works in Jena demanded the release of their strike leaders, and when it was learned that the chairman of the strike committee, Norkus, had been sentenced to three years in jail, the workers delivered an ultimatum to the factory directors: Norkus was to be released by July 10 or there would be another strike.

It is difficult to adequately describe the panic which took possession of a good part of the bureaucracy in the face of this militancy, but the actions of the regime itself are testimony to the powerful pressure from below.

The minister of justice, Fechner (deposed by Ulbricht in the middle of July) capitulated to the demands of the workers when he wrote in the official party paper *Neues Deutschland* of June 30 and July 2nd that "only those persons will be punished who are guilty of major crimes. Other people will not be punished. This holds true of the strike leaders. The right to strike is guaranteed by the constitution. The strike leaders will not be punished for their participation in such an action."

That Fechner kept his word to a degree was shown not only by his subsequent disgrace, but by the actions of his successor as minister of justice, Hilde Benjamin, who has earned for herself the description "Hilde, keine milde." The news service of the West Berlin Social Democratic Party reported that in the last two weeks of July, 562 participants in the June 17 events, who had been released from jail by Fechner's orders, were rearrested.

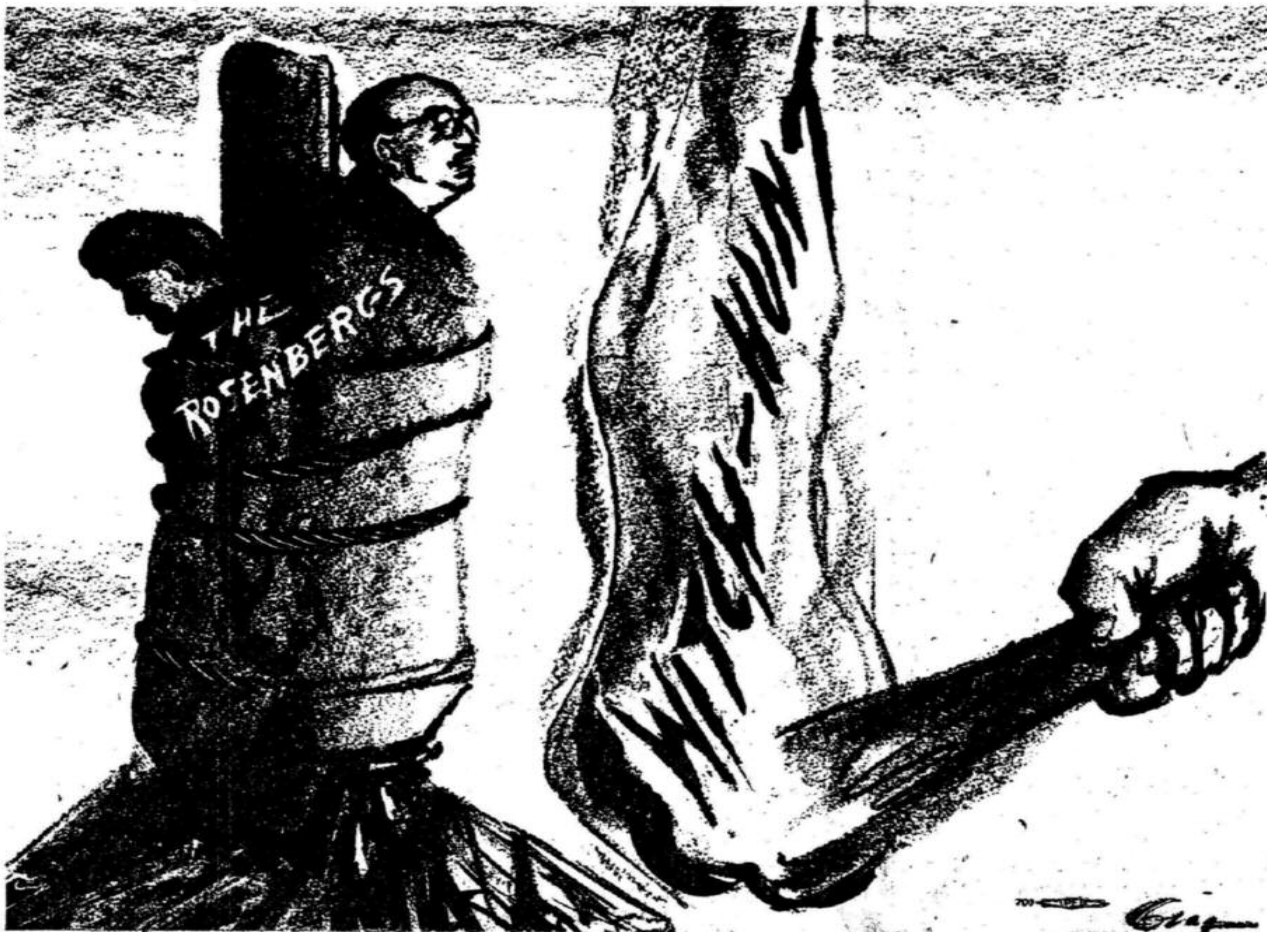
In factory after factory, the workers drew up their list of demands and presented them to the factory directors and the trade-union bureaucracy. In the great Buna chemical works near Merseburg, the factory personnel drew up a list of 29 demands and presented them to the management (in this case Russian, since the works are controlled by the Russian holding corporation, SAG). On July 15 they went on strike to enforce their demands.

In the Heavy Machine Building Works, ABUS, in Nordhausen, the workers elaborated a 16-point program to be submitted to the factory administration. In the clothing, textile and leather union, the workers demanded and won a 46-hour work-week with the same pay for the previous 48-hour week.

The intense struggle waged by the workers by means of slowdowns and sitdown strikes exerted a tremendous pressure on the entire state apparatus, and created a profound split that spread to the very top — a split that was quite distinct from the personal struggle for power between Zaisser, minister of internal security (Beria's man), and Ulbricht which reflected the fight in Moscow. The "moderate faction" in the SED Politburo — consisting of Grotewohl, the premier, Fechner, the minister of justice, and Herrnstadt, the editor of the official party organ *Neues Deutschland* — wanted the program of concessions that had been publicly set in motion on June 13 to include the workers, but it was just on this point that Ulbricht continued to resist bitterly, after as well as before June 17.

The resolution of the struggle in Moscow with Beria's fall permitted Ulbricht to eliminate not only Zaisser, who repre-

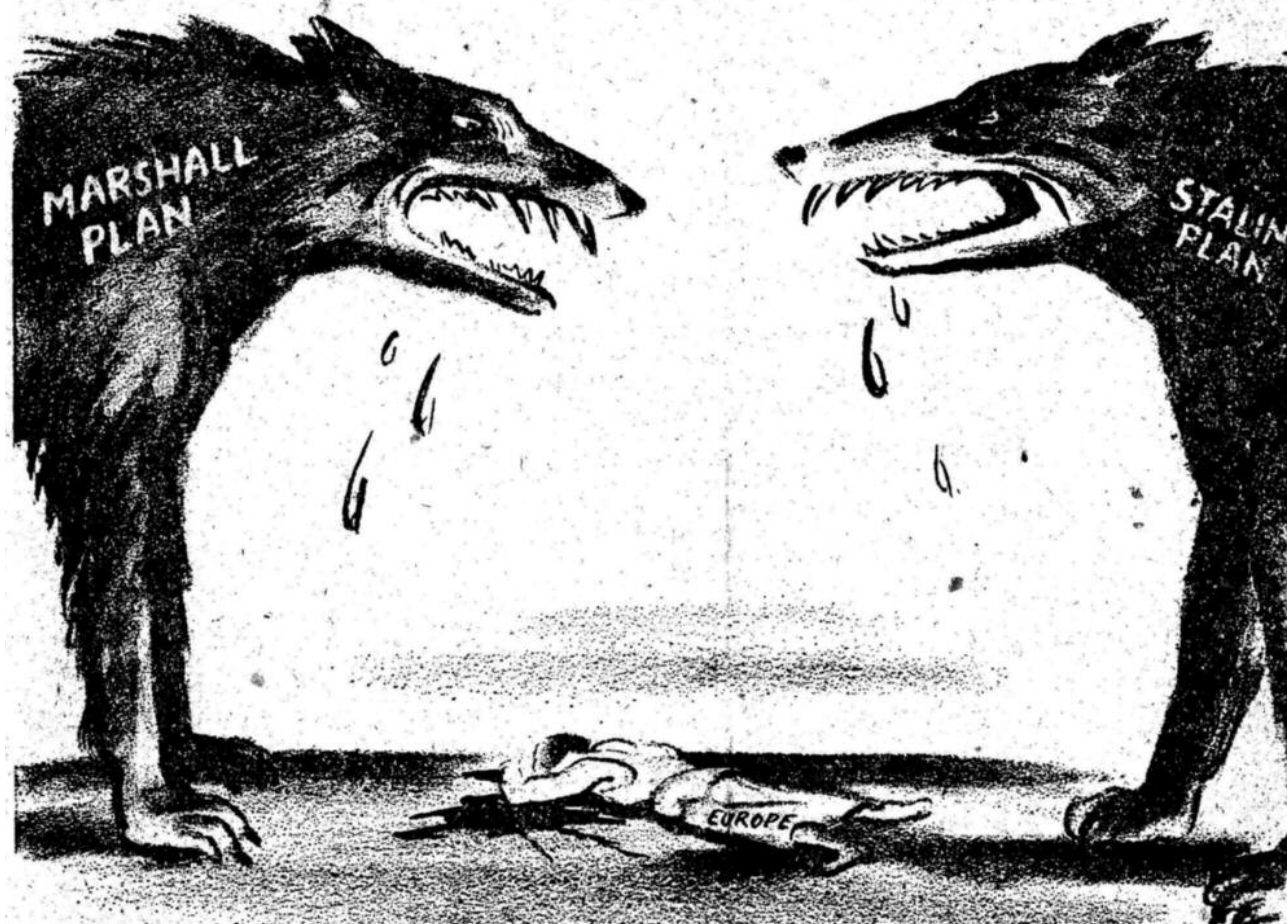
Stop This Political Witch-Burning



Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were US Stalinists put to death on 19 June 1953 on charges of spying for the USSR

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"Liberated" Europe!



sented Beria, but also the majority of the independent "moderate faction" from the Politburo and their jobs. This was accomplished officially at the plenum of the SED Central Committee held on July 24-26. Nevertheless, although Ulbricht had triumphed, it was impossible for him to set the New Line of June 13 in motion again with the bureaucratic apparatus in its current state, of demoralisation. Particularly was this so since the essence of this program of concessions was its anti-working-class nature.

Not only did the organised underground groups have their adherents strategically located in the trade-union and party apparatus, but in addition sections of the bureaucracy had simply succumbed under the intense pressure and gone over to the side of the workers. At a plenary session of the official trade-union organisation (FDGB) on August 13-15. Herbert Warneke, its head, cited the activities of some top-ranking trade-union officials during and after June 17.

The district president of the Postal Workers' Union of Magdeburg, for example, had collected all the demands he could from the workers — 55 in all — and presented them to the government. The recently dismissed chairman of the Metal Industrial Union (IG Metal), Hans Schmidt, had carried on an "anti-trade-union and anti-working-class activity" in the secretariat of the union's executive committee, which had been condoned by the members of the secretariat. The second president of the Power Workers' Union, Sturm, had "failed to take suitable countermeasures at certain critical moments," and therefore Sturm had been dismissed from office.

On September 7, the official trade-union federation newspaper *Tribune* published a list of over a hundred trade-union officials and factory administrators who had been fired from their jobs. Of this number 82 alone had been dismissed from the great Buna Chemical Works, the heart of the workers' resistance movement in the Merseburg-Bytze area.

Inside the party Ulbricht has been personally carrying through the purge of the infected cadres. On August 11 Ulbricht fired the SED party chiefs in four of the large industrial centres: Magdeburg, Dresden, Halle and Chemnitz. In each case he accused the deposed bureaucrats of treason in connection with the June 17 revolt. But there is more to it than this. It so happens that in each of these areas the workers have been carrying on a vigorous struggle since June 17.

For example, the railway repair shop workers in Halle have been conducting a slowdown that is apparently still in progress, for planned output in these shops was kept down

to half of the quota in September. In Chemnitz, the SED paper *Volkstimme* complained bitterly in its issue of August 12 that the coal mines in the area were consistently failing to meet their daily quotas of output. The paper further noted that the failure to restore production was directly due to "poorly organised party work." In brief, the local SED party groups from top to bottom were either passive in the face of the workers' resistance or secretly sympathized with it.

The purge of the old cadres and the creation of the new party elite have apparently progressed to the point where Ulbricht feels secure enough to renew the offensive against the workers. As mentioned, the distinctive feature of the New Line of June 13, with its concessions, was its anti-working-class character. And it is to this point of attack that Ulbricht has returned, apparently intent on proving to his masters in Moscow that he is in full control of the situation.

On September 24, the official press quoted Ulbricht to the effect that the demand for a general 46-hour work-week in industry could not be accepted because it involved a "reduction of production and hence a cut in goods for the population." And where the 46-hour week had been wrested from the trade-union bureaucracy by the workers, as in the leather, textile and clothing union, it was to be cancelled.

But this declaration was only a trifle compared to the news that the campaign to raise the work-norms was being resumed!

Again the press has begun to carry officially inspired stories, as in the early June days, of workers "voluntarily" demanding that their production quotas be raised. Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. For this is the same inflammable issue that ignited the explosion of June.

To be sure, the regime is prepared for mass strikes and demonstrations. But the resistance of the workers is taking forms that do not and will not permit the regime to succeed in its provocations.

The workers have raised the "peaceful" but extremely effective demand for the "political neutrality" of the trade unions, their independence from state control. Specifically, this means they want genuine secret elections of trade-union officials from the factory up.

Furthermore, these officials must be chosen from the ranks of the workers themselves, and not from the party apparatus.

And as we have seen earlier, the workers are maintaining a persistent pressure on the regime by means of the slowdown of production. Against such forms of struggle the regime is helpless, because it cannot jail every worker who engages in such acts of defiance. Nor can it call on the Russian occupation authorities to put a soldier behind every worker's back.

The workers understand very well that they can engage in defensive actions only within the given framework, i.e., the presence of the Russian occupation troops, and it would be irresponsible to call it by any other name. But at the same time, the Ulbricht regime rests on nothing else but the tanks and machine guns of these same foreign troops. And just this is its Achilles' heel.

For if the uprising of June 17 revealed how profound and unbridgeable the gap between the regime and the masses, the days and weeks that followed revealed how complete was the demoralisation of the bureaucratic apparatus.

This is what Ulbricht means when he inveighs against the mood of "depression and scepticism" that persists among party members. The regime can no longer convince its own party members, as it could to some degree before June 17, that the ruling SED represented and had the support of the advanced class-conscious workers. Its ability to perpetuate this illusion for so long rested on the historical fact that in the post-war beginnings of the regime, Stalinism did have such support to a considerable degree.

The Russians were able to force the creation of the SED in 1946 only because a considerable number of Social-Democratic workers as well as Stalinists genuinely desired the unity of the working class, expressed in the formation of a single workers' party. The tragic experience of the division in class ranks in the pre-1933 days had, after all, etched a bitter lesson in their hearts and minds.

These workers in the Eastern zone hoped the SED would serve this function. June 17 marked the end of this road forever.

The creation of the new "elite" party is the response of Germany to this new historic situation. For the chief characteristic of the SED today is that it hangs suspended in mid-air.

It has no support below and it must be severely and increasingly policed from above. The mass of the party no longer have any stomach for their jobs and stay only because of the material privileges which result from membership, and the danger of persecution if they leave. When called upon to execute the anti-working-class directives from above, they recoil. Not only do they lack faith, but they confronted by the open hostility of a united working class.

To combat this situation, Ulbricht has created an elite, an inner party to keep watch over the ordinary party member. But who will exercise vigilance to see that in its turn this inner party "elite," this new praetorian guard, does not succumb to the pressure of the working class?

Labor Action 19 October 1953



The new Russian imperialism

By Max Shachtman

The bad blood in Big Three relations that came to public view during the London Conference of Foreign Ministers in September, 1945, reached its boiling point last month as the world lived through a war of nerves reminiscent of the Munich days.

[In March 1946 the Greek civil war restarted; there was British-USSR tension in Iran; and Winston Churchill made a speech putting the term "Iron Curtain" into currency].

If the man in the street did not react with the frenzy of fear that swept the world during the Munich crisis, it was only because humanity is still too numb with the pain of six years' torture in total war to be sensitive to the new danger. A new world war less than a year after the end of the last one seems too monstrous to be possible. Man's mind, which has recorded almost limitless human misery for the last decade, rebels at the prospect of a new war — above all in the awesome shadow of the atomic bomb — and refuses to encompass it.

Yet the pattern that emerges out of every day's news shapes the terrible reality that World War Two was not the last and drives it into man's consciousness. Russian troops march and counter-march in Iran. The American General Staff demands an extension of conscription. The American State Department supports Chinese efforts to force the Russians out of Manchuria. Russia announces a new Five-Year Plan which features tremendous outlays for armaments. The Americans proceed with "Operation Crossroads," the first realistic manoeuvres for the age of atomic warfare.

With such concrete developments as the background, the war danger cannot remain vague and ill-defined. It is not "a war" but "the war" which looms. For the first twenty years following World War One the actual line-ups remained uncertain and Russia switched sides at the very outbreak of the war and then again during the course of it. However, today when the "little man" whispers the fear that will not be suppressed he does not ask about war in general but says, "Will we fight Russia?"

The relentless struggle for survival through destruction of rivals that has characterised the monopoly capitalist epoch has produced a world which contains but two real powers. The second, third, tenth and eleventh rate powers find themselves tied to one or the other sphere. The lines are sharply drawn and the elbow-room for manoeuvring between the power combinations that prevailed in the past is almost non-existent. France's threat to "seek aid elsewhere" (i.e., in Russia), if the United States does not grant her the requested loan, is harmless bluster and will be treated as such by Washington.

How could it be otherwise when even Britain, which still does have an empire, finds it has neither the economic nor the diplomatic chips with which to bid against the American colossus? Some antiquated Lords who still see the world through Victorian spectacles may rise from their seats in the House to fume about "Yankee greed" that dictates a hard bargain in making a loan to Britain, but even they will be gently informed by solicitous friends any day now that "Britannia Rules the Waves" is merely a sentimental song that no longer corresponds to the facts.

The key to understanding the change which World War II has wrought in balance-of-power politics is to be found in the fact that, if the socialist revolution were set aside for the moment, the main question before the war was "Which of the capitalist powers will survive?" whereas today the question is "Will the world of capitalism or the world of bureaucratic collectivism survive?" Laval could journey to the Moscow of 1935 to sign a defence pact with Stalin against Hitler and achieve a diplomatic coup for France. But when the impetuous de Gaulle journeys to the Moscow of 1945 to sign a pact, he makes a meaningless gesture which leaves London and Washington unmoved.

For in his less dramatic moments even the new Joan of Arc had to realize soberly that the fate of France was in the last analysis tied to the fate of the capitalist world of America and the British Empire. The capitalist class of France could be divided in the pre-war period between a pro-Axis orientation and a pro-Anglo-American orientation. But today the French capitalists cannot think twice when the choice is Moscow or Washington. The international line-up is not merely one of

power combinations arising from the most advantageous economic and military alignments but basically one of a division into two hostile social orders — private capitalism versus bureaucratic collectivism.

It is this fact that gives to the emergence of the new Russian empire a significance much more fundamental than merely the recrudescence of Russian power. Bureaucratic collectivism is Russian just as early capitalism was English. And, conversely, bureaucratic collectivism is the source of the new Russian imperialist power as early capitalism was the source of British imperialist power.

The new Russian empire occupies a strategic geographical position as a tremendous land mass that dominates Eurasia. No combination of European and Asiatic powers can counterbalance her. Beginning on the Arctic at the Finnish-Norwegian border, its boundaries run south to include Finland and the Baltic states, bisect Germany and Austria, encompass Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Albania, turn east along the northern frontier of Greece to include Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, cross the Black Sea and dip south to include northern Iran and press upon the frontiers of Turkey and Iraq, proceed east across Asia to include Sinkiang, Mongolia, parts of Manchuria, northern Korea, Sakhalin Island and the Kurilias chain.

This expanding land mass presses upon the world of Anglo-American imperialism in Central Europe, the Near and Middle East and the Orient. Specifically it gives rise to three exceedingly sensitive trouble zones — Manchuria, Iran and Germany. Russia chose these three spots, Germany by way of covert political machinations to gain control through a fusion of the Communist and Social Democratic parties and Manchuria and Iran through open military and diplomatic pressure, to test and prove her newly acquired strength vis-à-vis the United States.

Anyone acquainted with the history and economic theory of capitalist imperialism knows what motivates the obstinacy with which the British and Americans hold fast in Iran, the fabled kingdom of the "black gold" out of which Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil erect even more fabled kingdoms of the pound sterling and the dollar. Anyone acquainted with the "Manifest Destiny" of American imperialism to convert a billion Asiatics and the resources of a continent into a tremendous source of cheap labour, markets and raw materials knows what motivates the American State Department in giving such firm support to its Chinese vassal state in demanding that the Russians withdraw from Manchuria. Anyone who knows what Europe means to world capitalism will understand why the British and Americans play such a sharp game in the internal politics of the Central and Eastern European nations.

But what about the Russians? What do they want?

Here the most widespread illusions exist. We do not refer to the illusions that blind the devout and faithful adherents of the Kremlin Church. This malady is not new and we have dealt with it before. However, the war has unloosed a tremendous pro-Russian sentiment among the masses everywhere which is not to be accounted for on the basis of direct Stalinist influence. In part it rests upon the role which Russia played in helping defeat Germany.

But it finds its supplement in the vague feeling that "Russia is different," a feeling born out of the loss of confidence in the statesmen and diplomats of the old powers who continue to reveal their total impotence before the task of organising a peaceful world. Just as humanity finds it hard to force itself to regard a Third World War as a real possibility despite all the alarming symptoms, so it cannot force itself to believe that millions of lives were sacrificed to strike down the German "aggressor" only to be confronted with a Russian "aggressor." Having shed their last tear in the prolonged nightmare that has not yet ended for most of the war-weary peoples, many cling to the desperate hope that somehow "Russia is really different."

Out of this hope against hope arise rationalizations about Russia's aims, efforts to construe them in the best possible terms and attitudes of withholding judgement because "it's all so unclear." Yet, once the facts are faced objectively, without fear or prejudice, Russia's actions leave no room for rationalization; they leave no grounds for construing in the best possible terms, nor are they even unclear.

The best way of facing the facts and, thereby, answering

the question "What do the Russians want in the occupied countries" is to ask "What do the Russians do in the occupied countries?"

Enough data has now been collected to establish the following outline of Russian economic policy in the occupied countries:

1. Russia strips the industries of machinery and other equipment and transports it to Russia. (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Korea and Manchuria.)

2. Russia imports large masses of slave labourers to add to the slave labour armies of Russians who make up a sizeable percentage of her labour force. (Germans, Poles and political opponents from every nation in which the GPU has a free hand.)

3. Russia expropriates the capitalists to varying degrees and establishes a state-owned industry operated by native satraps of the Russian rulers. (Poland, German zone, Czechoslovakia, Baltic states.)

4. Russia carries through "agrarian reforms" which wipe out the large landowners and seeks to establish a small peasantry whose property stake ties them to the new regime. (Poland and East Prussia.)

5. Russia forces economic concessions and spheres of influence from states that remain politically independent of her. (Oil concessions in Iran.)

6. Russia maintains commercial outposts for purposes of trade in countries less developed economically than herself. (Manchuria.)

This listing of economic phenomena related to Russian occupation policy poses a formidable task of analysis and codification before we can definitively describe the general laws that regulate Russian economic policy beyond her own borders. However, a mere listing of these bare summations of policy permit us to conclude that in the over-all and basic aim Russia is not "different," i.e., Russian policy is motivated by the same aim of economic aggrandisement that has characterised every past exploiting class in history in its relations with subject peoples and which has come to be known as imperialism.

An analysis of the specific policies of Russian occupation will reveal, it is true, a considerable difference from the policies which Marxists have associated with the rule of finance capitalist imperialism. The basic economic needs out of which the imperialist policy of bureaucratic collectivism and the imperialist policy of finance capitalism spring are radically different.

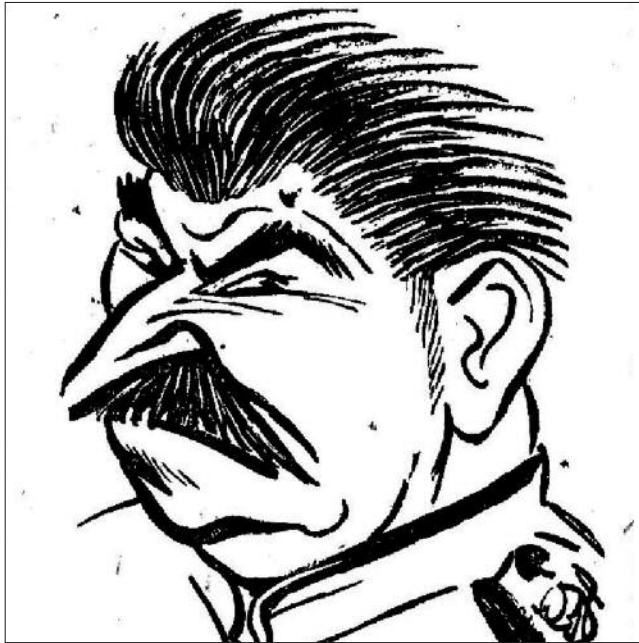
However, imperialism did not begin with finance capitalism. The British Empire spread from Hudson Bay to the Ganges during the period of mercantile capitalism. Feudal Spain appropriated half of the new world and ruled the Lowlands. The imperialism of the Czarist state carried the Russian flag over the vast expanse of Siberia, across Manchuria, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, contested their hegemony over the Balkans. It swallowed up the major part of Poland and drove Sweden out of Finland. Ancient times have known the imperialism of Rome and Carthage, based upon a slave economy.

The most active imperialist force in the United States in the several decades preceding the Civil War was the land-hungry slaveocracy, constantly pressing for annexation at the expense of Mexico. In the light of these many historical forms of imperialism, how ridiculous is the injunction that we refrain from describing Russian economic expansion as imperialist because it is different from finance capitalist imperialism!

The imperialist policy of the bureaucratic collectivist state, for all that it has in common with all historical imperialisms, is one that is peculiar to its own social order. However, what is distinctive is not the emergence of imperialist methods never before known to history but rather the combination by the Russians of phases of imperialist policy associated with all previous forms of imperialism, from that of ancient Rome to Wall Street. In this sense the exploitation of foreign resources by Russia reflects the exploitive societies, i.e., slave labour, serfdom and wage labour, yet combines them in such a manner upon the basis of a nationalised economy as to create an economic system qualitatively different than any previously known.

The fact of Russian economic aggrandisement has created

Workers rise against Stalinist rule



a most troublesome problem of theory for those who continue to cling to Trotsky's outlived theory that Russia is a "degenerated workers' state" merely by virtue of the existence of nationalised economy. Russian expansion into Poland and the Baltic states in 1939-40 raised this problem in the Fourth International and led to the split in the American section.

Trotsky and the majority of the Socialist Workers Party denounced the invasions by the Russians but supported Russia's role in the war as progressive because it represented the "superior" economic order. This was an extension of the theory that the "regime" was reactionary but that the "economic order" was progressive. Consequently, the invasions were a reactionary method of serving the needs of a progressive economy; consequently, the simultaneous denouncing of the method and support of the aim. (To comment on how this division between means and ends contradicts Trotsky's well-argued case for the interrelation of means and ends in his articles on *Their Morals and Ours* would carry us too far afield.)

In 1940, the outline of Russian economic policy in the conquered territories was still too indefinite to generalize upon the nature of Russian imperialism. Its reactionary consequences in the political sphere were sufficient for the minority tendency, later to organise the Workers Party, to renounce the policy of "unconditional defence" and characterize Russia's role in the war as reactionary.

However, today we have the imposing evidence of Russian economic policy accumulated in a dozen countries under varying circumstances. The arguments of the "workers' staters" in 1939-40, particularly those which linked Russian policy to the military-strategic exigencies of the war, still had some degree of plausibility. Today, however, in the light of the vast evidence of Russian economic policy in a dozen countries under varying circumstances, the arguments of the "workers' staters" have not only been robbed of any shred of plausibility but have emerged in full flower as a thoroughly reactionary political line. It is only the internal contradictions of the theory that permit its adherents, by means of bad logic, to save themselves from being swept openly into the position of defenders and apologists of Stalinism. (The emergence of the pro-Stalinist faction of defenders of the "bureaucratic social revolution" theory among the French Trotskyists, led by an old militant, is a warning of what happens to "workers' staters" who seek to iron out the contradictions between their theory and politics. We will comment on this phenomenon at another time.)

The "workers' staters" have denied the existence of a class of exploiters in Russia by describing the bureaucracy as a "privileged stratum" which lives a parasitic existence by "cheating and robbing" the workers. Stories of looting and robbing still had an incidental character. But how explain the systematic appropriation of the means of production by the Russians in every country they have entered, that feature of Russian occupation policy that has been most consistently applied, whether in Berlin, Vienna, Bucharest or Harbin?

If this is mere looting carried on by the bureaucracy in the same manner in which it "cheats and robs" the Russian workers, to what use do the bureaucrats intend to put this equipment? Is it merely as a trophy of the war that a lathe or forge is transported from Berlin to Moscow? Perhaps it will be placed in his cellar or his garage by some bureaucrat to be

admired by his friends along with such other booty as cameras, pianos, or billiard tables? Of course not. It will be installed in a factory and used in production. How does the bureaucracy benefit from such "cheating and robbing" of the occupied countries? It is not the mere possession of the lathe from which he benefits but rather that which is produced on the lathe. But who produces it? The Russian worker. So, you see, the lathe is a means for the added "cheating and robbing" of the Russian working class by the "privileged stratum"! What odd language to describe the appropriation of means of production for the purpose of exploiting labour! Logic has ever taken its revenge upon those who sought to do it violence.

The ludicrous end of the attempt to describe Russian imperialism in terms of "looting" (just like they "rob and cheat" at home) has forced the "workers' staters" to seek a more basic explanation. They have now discovered that the economic basis of the Russian expropriations abroad is rooted in the attempt to carry through the fourth Five-Year Plan.

"The regime sees no way out in the economic field save through the realization of the fourth Five-Year Plan, which cannot be achieved by the devastated country without the resources of the 'buffer zones.'" (*Fourth International*, March, 1946, page 103.)

If the regime sees no way out except through the fourth Five-Year Plan and if the fourth Five-Year Plan can only be achieved with the resources of the "buffer zones" (how delicate!), is this not saying that that regime sees no way out except through the resources of the "buffer zones"? The economic policy of the Russians in the occupied countries is not, therefore, merely the "excesses" of the bureaucracy, not mere "looting," not the "cheating" and "robbing" by a "privileged stratum," but something which is fundamental and necessary to Russian economic operation and survival.

Yet this very fourth Five-Year Plan was hailed by the same magazine in September as evidence that Russia is... a workers' state! ("The very projection of the fourth Five-Year Plan constitutes the latest corroboration of the correctness of our analysis of the class nature of the USSR as a workers' state, although badly degenerated under Stalinist rule.") It is a workers' state because it needs a plan which requires the economic exploitation of its subject nations! How those who swallowed the "counter-revolutionary workers' state" gag over the "imperialist workers' state"!

THEORY

The dilemma in the realm of theory always appears, in one form or another, sooner or later, in the realm of politics. A theory which serves no political ends, which is not a guide in politics, is pretty much of academic interest at best; at worst, it is a substitute for politics.

In the long run — it may even be said — the dispute over the class character of the Stalinist state (workers' state, degenerated workers' state, badly degenerated workers' state, workers' state which has degenerated to the point where it is no longer a workers' state, capitalist state, bureaucratic-collectivist state) can thin down to an extremely ethereal business unless it is linked up with politics — the political program and the political struggle that follows from it. Indeed, what other real test is there of theory except "praxis," the political struggle?

Let us take an example, and it is anything but an unimportant one: What political line do the "workers' staters" propose for the occupied countries? They say, with a notable lack of vigour, that they condemn the Russian occupation and looting of the means of production which leaves workers jobless and hungry and without any perspective of economic rehabilitation. From which it follows? From which — so far as they are concerned — nothing follows.

What should follow, it would be thought by anyone moderately well acquainted with Marxian politics, is the demand for the ousting of the Russian troops (as well as the Anglo-American, it goes without saying) or at least for the withdrawal of the Russian troops, and the demand that the looted machinery and the kidnapped workers be returned to their homeland.

Right here is the dilemma, however. Not only don't they make these demands, which are the elementary duty of every revolutionary socialist, but they can't make them. Give up the "buffer zones" that guarantee the success of the fourth Five Year Plan (in English: that guarantee the further exploitation of the masses and the economic consolidation of the bureaucracy)? Give back the means of production that have become part of the property of the workers' state (in English: the workers' prison)?

Impossible! If it is a workers' state (of any kind), then the newly-acquired means of production, including the slave labourers, have become the chattels of the workers' state and thus enhanced its economic strength; and how can "we" demand that anything be done to weaken the economic strength of the workers' state? Obviously, "we" cannot. If we make these demands upon the Stalinist bureaucracy, we may — God forbid — be implying that it is the state and that the property belongs to it and not in any sense to the Russian workers. Just as obviously, we cannot do that either. It conflicts, as it were, with our theory of Russia as a workers' state. And if the means of production belong to the workers in Russia, it is after all, pretty difficult to work up a lot of steam over the workers finding some property before it has been lost.

The "workers' staters" are tied by a long rope to the chariot of the "bureaucratic counter-revolutionary socialist revolution," and the faster that chariot moves the shorter the rope becomes.

Bureaucratic-collectivist imperialism, or Stalinist imperialism for short, can no longer be considered an accidental or incidental phenomenon. It is rooted in the needs of the Russian economy. It springs from Stalinist Russia's irrepressible need to remake the world in its own image as the only means of establishing security for its own social form; the need to satisfy the pressing requirements of the state economy by extending the "primitive accumulation" from the "internal" field to the "external," from the expropriation, first, of the Russian proletariat and, then, of the large "remnants" of the bourgeoisie (kulaks), to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie of other nations (Germany, Hungary, Romania) and of whole nations in the period of the Second World War and now of the fourth Five-Year Plan.

The existence of Stalinist imperialism, its rapacious and utterly reactionary character, are indisputable. Anyone who requires more evidence than has been supplied by the last few years, and most recently in the Baltic and Balkan countries, in Poland and Germany, in Iran and Manchuria, will probably be satisfied only if he himself is converted into a slave-labourer under the lash of the Stalinist empire.

It does not follow, in our view, that the future of this empire is in any way assured. Far from it. There has been such overwhelming evidence in our own days that this is the period of the agony and collapse of empire, that there is no warrant for the view that the Stalinist empire, based upon what is still one of the backward countries among the big powers, has the prospect of either consolidating its expansion or even of maintaining itself for long. The long overdue crisis inside Russia — broad hints of which are reluctantly revealed in Stalin's own recent speech — cannot be repressed by state force for very much longer.

Not only that. The peoples conquered by Stalinism, and they now number tens of millions, suffer under a multiplication of class oppression and exploitation by national oppression. Far from strengthening the oppressor class and nation, the establishment of this condition only serves to undermine it and in good time to destroy it. What the bureaucracy may look upon as a conqueror's wreath around its brow will not be long in slipping down to a noose around its neck. The "national question" — that is, the rebellion of the millions of peoples enslaved by the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo after the German conquest of Europe — proved to be just such a tightening noose around the neck of all the Hitlers. The neck of the Stalinist bureaucracy will not prove to be any stouter. The mortal blow may very well be delivered first from the outer periphery of the Stalinist empire, for substantially the same reasons that Marx so many decades ago declared that capitalism would be struck fatally from its extremities, where it is weakest.

To wait passively for this to happen is to guarantee that it will at the very least be delayed. The interests of the working class and of socialist internationalism demand an active policy of political struggle against Stalinist imperialism. To "condemn" Stalinist "expansion" without a program of demands and struggle against it, is Gandhism. To "condemn" the annexations without actively fighting for the national freedom of the subjugated lands is, as Lenin said of Luxemburg and Pyatakoff in another connection, "inconsistent annexationism." That at best; at worst, it is Stalinist apologetics.

The struggle for the victory of socialism is inseparably and increasingly bound up with the struggle for national freedom in the advanced countries, as we have repeatedly argued. This profoundly important truth is no less valid in the fight against Stalinist imperialism today than it was and remains in the fight against the imperialism of finance capital.

New International, April 1946

Stalinist imperialism

By Hal Draper

There is a paradox — only an apparent one — in the development of Stalinist imperialism. Stalinism arose out of the counter-revolution in Russia under the slogan of building “socialism in one country” as against the perspective of “world revolution” represented by the Bolshevik left wing under Trotsky. An historic internal struggle took place within the party under these different banners, in which, as everybody knows, the Stalinist wing won out.

To the Stalinists, the theory of “socialism in one country” which they put forward meant: Let’s keep our eyes fixed on our problems at home; let’s not worry about extending our influence or winning support abroad; that is a will o’ the wisp; we want only to build our economic and social strength within our own borders and to hell with conditions outside of it. And (as Stalin put it later): We don’t want an inch of anyone else’s territory but let the capitalist countries keep their snout out of our Soviet garden. . .

The fierce drive of Stalinist expansionism that blossomed especially after the Second World War seemed like a sharp reversal of this home-bound ideology. To many of the latter-day “Russian experts” (the numbers of whom also blossomed after the war) this new policy seemed like the adoption by Stalin of the Trotskyist “world-revolutionary” perspective.

For were they not militantly pressing their power beyond their own borders? Weren’t they doing what Trotsky had demanded, only in their own way and so much more effectively? So it was said not only by the “authoritative” bourgeois commentators but even by the disoriented “official-Trotskyists” of the Fourth International, who have drifted in the direction of pro-Stalinism.

But the new post-war Stalinist imperialist expansionism was not a break with, but a logical development and continuation out of, the theory of “socialism in one country”; and by the same token it was still the antithesis of a working-class revolutionary policy.

For that famous dispute of the Stalin-Trotsky struggle was never really based on the mostly-academic question of whether it was actually possible to “build socialism” within the borders of a single country (and a backward one at that). This was mainly the ideological form that the clash took between the social forces of the counter-revolution and the movement which stood for the liberating ideas of the 1917 revolution.

Behind it was a tendency much easier to understand: it represented the turn-away of Stalinism from internationalism to a Russian national-chauvinist outlook. Russia first, they said, and the usefulness of the Communist Parties and pro-Soviet sympathisers abroad was to be gauged by the extent to which their activities contributed to strengthening Russia; for since this Russia was “socialist,” strengthening Russia meant strengthening this “socialism.” Thus the interests of the world’s workers were to be subordinated to the national interests of the “one country” where socialism was being “built.”

It is this conception which is the fundamental link between the early Stalinism of the counter-revolution and the Stalinist imperialism of the present day. We have seen in the course of our generation two related truths exemplified: that in trying to build something called “socialism” on the ruins of workers’ democracy and all democracy, the Stalinists in actuality built a new system of exploitation which is the enemy of socialism; and in trying to build “socialism” on a national-chauvinist basis, they likewise built a new exploitive system which today has all the features of a virulent imperialism.

The chauvinist ideology of the Stalinists led to imperialism, once this reactionary regime was strong enough to assert itself as a competitor for world power.

There is a point here which has to be cleared up for many people. For this new oppressive and exploitive class society which developed in Stalinist Russia is not based on a capitalist form of exploitation. Well then, isn’t it true that modern imperialism is an outgrowth of the drives of capitalism? Wasn’t it Lenin who defined imperialism as a stage of capitalism? Isn’t one of the fundamental drives of modern imperialism, for example, the need of capitalist economies to export their surplus capital; and where do you see this as an economic basis of what we call Russian imperialism? Is it “imperialism”?

If it were not for the widespread character of this “deduc-

tion” from a formal acquaintance with Marxist writings on imperialism, it would not even be worthwhile mentioning. For it is a useless play on words. For people who need quotations, the same Lenin who spoke of imperialism as a stage of capitalism also time and again referred (like all other educated people) to the imperialism of the pre-capitalist societies, the Roman empire for instance.

Capitalism is not the only social system which has given birth to its peculiar form of imperialism; on the contrary, there was such a thing as imperialism based on the ancient slave-states, as well as the type of imperialism which developed under feudalism. Lenin was analysing the specific imperialism of the then-dominant social system, capitalism, and laying bare how it generated its own need to mobilise the nation-state for the conquest and domination and exploitation of peoples abroad.

The imperialism of Stalinist Russia is not the capitalist imperialism which Lenin brilliantly analysed in a famous work; but that is simply saying that Stalinist Russia is not capitalist, and that we already know.

But in many cases, when objection is made to even using the term “imperialism” in connection with Stalinism (by Fritz Sternberg, for example, and others), there is more than word-juggling or ignorance behind it. There is a political idea involved which suggests to them their otherwise-sterile play on words. They are often willing to speak of Russian “expansionism,” but “imperialism” no.

The thought that is often behind this fine distinction is the following: Moscow may indeed be following an expansionist-adventurist policy, deplorably, and this is a bad thing; but this policy which is being followed by the men in the Kremlin is simply a *policy* of bad or mistaken men, and is not rooted in the “Soviet” social system; it is not inherent in the economy, which must be considered “progressive” because it is not capitalist; it is simply a more-or-less accidental excrescence of the system, or a very temporary and dispensable stage of it, or the fortuitous result of Stalin the man’s personal predilections, etc. It is only under capitalism that imperialism is *rooted* in the social system as such; under Stalinism it is something that wiser rulers will dispense with, especially if capitalism ceases to threaten the country.

This notion of such an important difference between capitalist imperialism on the one hand and of Russian imperialism on the other is a notable stock-in-trade of Stalinoids the world over, but not only of Stalinoids! All of the powerful “neutralist” currents of Europe and Asia — anti-Stalinist elements included — are shot through with it, including even the Bevanites of England. It represents a very dangerous illusion about Stalinism even among many of its would-be opponents, who succumb to its lies.

Well then, how is Stalinist imperialism rooted in its exploitive social system? First of all, there is an important though simple generalisation to be made about the connection between imperialism and a social system, any social system. It is true, as we said, that each class society (ancient slavery, feudalism, capitalism) has had its specific drives to imperialism; but there is obviously something common to all of these imperialisms too, with regard to societal origin.

That which is common to the root of all imperialism, in spite of vast differences in the social-system, is this: The ruling class is driven by inexorable necessity to foreign conquest, exploitation in one form or another in order to make up for the inevitable deficiencies of its social system itself — shot through as that system is by its gangrenous contradictions; the exploiters of the society are pushed in this direction as a matter of life-and-death for their system because of their inability to create a harmonious economy capable of satisfying the needs of the people and, most especially, capable of solving the fatal diseases which arise out of the system of exploitation itself.

For every class society generates its own self-poisons, which, as they accumulate, threaten to bring down the whole economic structure, unless a transfusion of fresh blood is obtained; and it is on the cards that a ruling class will be impelled to seek this new supply of economic blood in the squeezing of wider and wider circles of people, first inside its own borders (where the process is perhaps easiest or the victims at least more accessible) and then outside.

Now, designedly this presents very generally the economic root of imperialism in all class societies which have been known, but it is enough to raise the basic question about the

roots of Stalinist imperialism.

Only those can see Stalinist imperialism as merely a regrettable excrescence, which is not inherent in the system, which is unrooted, who also see in the Stalinist system itself the basis for (at least an eventual) harmonious and progressive development of the forces of production and social relations; that is, who see no inherent deficiencies and contradictions which imperialism has to compensate for; that is, who look on the Stalinist system as being genuinely on the road to socialism in some real sense; that is, in short, who regard the Stalinist system as genuinely socialist in nature, even if still pockmarked with defects.

This view of Stalinist imperialism as a dispensable policy of bad men in the Kremlin is tied up with a basic illusion about the whole nature of the Stalinist economy: Since the economy is state-owned and planned, there are no limits to its possible increase in productive level. Since it is not rent by the contradictions of capitalism which Karl Marx expounded in *Capital*, there is no inherent bar to the attainment of such a level of wealth that plenty-for-all becomes possible at last. Since here is a society, whatever its other distasteful features, which is not held back from economic advance by capitalist-type crises, it is possible for increasing productiveness to lead to the abolition of the bureaucratic dictatorship which was necessary for a time in order to attain this wonderful aim: the bureaucratic distortions of this “socialism” will be able to disappear, etc... Such is the illusion.

It is bound up with the rosy view that this Stalinist regime will be — indeed; must be — reformed from above, democratized from above, if only the present rulers are not kept scared to death by outside opponents. This is the basis for the pro-Stalinism of a man like Isaac Deutscher, on the theoretical side, and of anti-Stalinists like Aneurin Bevan, on the less-than-theoretical side.

This whole structure very largely depends on the overwhelming demonstration that this Stalinist system is not beset by the contradictions that bedevil capitalism — and sure enough that is true, just as capitalism is not being strangled by the poisons which put the Roman Empire to death. The contradictions of Stalinism are of its own kind.

At bottom what the Stalinist illusion ignores is the fundamental contradiction peculiar to a completely statified economy under the rule of an uncontrolled bureaucratic master class: the contradiction between 1. the absolute need of the economy to be *planned*, since in a statified economy only the plan can perform the role in the society which under capitalism is the function of the market and market relations; and 2. the impossibility of workably planning a modern complex society from the top down under conditions of bureaucratic totalitarianism.

It is this contradiction between Planning and Totalitarianism which is the most basic factor in making for chaos and anarchy in the Russian economy, enormous inherent wastes and inefficiencies, which are in part compensated for by the gigantic expenditure of human labour in the slave camps as well as in the mercilessly driven factories — and which was also in part compensated for by the wholesale looting of the conquered territories of East Europe after the war, a looting which still goes on in forms of exploitation subtler than open rapine.

This opens a much broader subject than the limited topic of this article, but enough has been said to indicate the line of analysis which we propose for one’s thinking on this matter. When one asks the question, “What are the roots of imperialism in the Stalinist social system?” one is really asking the question: “What are the inherent contradictions of Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism which lead to its downfall?” In a more immediate way, then, the motive drives of Stalinist imperialism stem from the need of this fiercely exploitive system, which drives its own workers like cattle, to plug the gaping holes in its economic and social armour.

Of course, certain drives it shares with its rival imperialisms on the capitalist side: the impulsion to corner raw materials, especially raw materials for war industry; the usual imperialist need to grab “buffer” lands and military-strategic points of vantage; the need to grab territories if only to prevent others from grabbing them first, to use against oneself. All these come into play once an imperialist tug-of-war is under way, and in turn they intensify and sharpen the struggle.

One other drive is held in common in a sense: the Russian

Workers rise against Stalinist rule



rulers' inherent inability to indefinitely continue to live in co-existence with a system where, in any way at all, a free labour movement exists just across a border. This is a permanent political danger to them. It cannot go on forever. As long as free labour exists in the world, there is a dynamite fuse extending from the outside to inside the Iron Curtain. But an analogous need exists also for the capitalist world: to get rid of this rival upstart system, which, in its own way, is a living, threat to capitalism; which shows a whole social world living without capitalism — contrary to the professors who have conclusively proved time and again that capitalism is so rooted in human nature that even the pre-Neanderthal ape-ancestors of man lived under capitalism...

But of the drives more particular to the Stalinist system itself, the basic one is the need to exploit more and more labour on an over-widening scale. The needs of this system have driven its ruling class into methods and forms of exploitation of the workers at home which are matched in brutality and violence by few pages in the history even of capitalism; and this same ravaging need drives it to the exploitation of peoples abroad. Just as within its own state, the ruling bureaucracy sucks its class privileges and revenue out of the surplus labour which it extracts from its slaves and semi-slaves, so also it needs more human labourers to milk; the more workers controlled, the more the surplus labour extracted, and the greater the wealth available both for the ruling class and for the state-girding-for-war.

Moreover, precisely because it is not a capitalist-type exploiting system, it has available a method of foreign exploitation which is excluded for capitalist imperialism: direct looting of goods and products. This phenomenon took place on a very large scale for a whole period in all the lands overrun by the Russian army after the Second World War: whole factories and their machinery were dismantled and moved bodily to Russia, etc.

This would not make economic sense for the capitalist economies of the West, the US for example, whose chronic problem under normal circumstances is a surplus of production which gluts the market if not disposable through the purchasing power of the masses. The chronic problem of capitalism is not how to get production up, but what to do with the products if it gets too high up! — and Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism suffers from no such embarrassment. Therefore, its capacity for direct looting and robbery of production wholesale.

Thirdly, it is worth mentioning also that, in a social system which dispenses bureaucratic privileges as the reward for its ruling class and aspirants thereto, imperialism creates a wider base for bureaucratic posts, an extension of the numerical basis of the "atoms" of the ruling class through the bureaucratic structures in far-flung stations of an empire.

And so this Stalinist world confronts its rival in the world, capitalism, not merely as a contender in an imperialist struggle but as a contender in a struggle of rival systems over which, if either, shall exploit the earth.

This is a distinctive feature of the present-day war crisis and its cold war which is decisively new, as compared with the First and Second World Wars which were fought primarily between imperialist rivals within the capitalist camp. An analogous situation has not obtained since, the days long ago when the armies of Napoleon, born out of the Great French (bourgeois) Revolution swept over Europe in combat with a feudal continent.

But two great differences exist today as against that historic conjuncture; 1. In those days one of the camps objectively represented, the interests of a new and rising class, the bourgeoisie, which was then progressive, standing for the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favour of the social system which was destined to raise the productive forces to the level required for further progress, for the development of the technological forces that could finally provide plenty for all and lay the economic groundwork for the classless socialist society.

This has now been done. The economic prerequisites for socialism exist. Modern industry has reached the point where it is entirely feasible to put an end to all systems based on enforced scarcity, where man can produce an abundance of goods if industry is run for use and not for profit.

The Stalinist tyranny is not a progressive alternative to the moribund system of capitalism, but a neo-barbaric relapse which feeds on the decay of capitalism as long as the working class has not unleashed its own forces to abolish it in favour of a real workers' democracy.

2. In those days when, the rising bourgeoisie stood arrayed against the old order, there was not yet any other social class fully developed which offered a force for effective social leadership as against the two locked in conflict. Today the working class offers the social alternative, the third corner of the triangle of forces that the picture presents. It has the need and the power to build its own world, and it faces only intensified oppression and misery from the continuation of either the Stalinist or capitalist orders.

In this struggle of the two war blocs today, we socialists are enemies of both camps of exploiters and imperialists. That is the basic fact about our "Third Camp" policy.

Our opposition to capitalism does not drive us into support of the monstrous alternative represented by Stalinist totalitarianism or into illusions about it. That way lies no exit, no hope, no liveable future.

CRUSHED

We say that Stalinism must be crushed, defeated, overthrown everywhere before the working class can achieve its democratic socialist future.

We are not for conciliation with it, or appeasement of it. We do not share in one iota the common "neutralist" notion that the interests of peace and democracy can be served by trying to convince the rival camps to live in "harmony"; we know that "peaceful coexistence" of these dog-eat-dog exploiters is a mirage; we do not take a stand that is "in-between" them.

Stalinism must be crushed! But it is an integral part of our indictment of capitalism that this *cannot* be done by the capitalist world in any progressive way or with any progressive consequences. The Western bloc can possibly defeat the Russian power in a military Armageddon, if indeed victory and defeat will retain any meaning in World War Three even for the imperialists, but this can be done only at the expense of the downslide of a militarised, bureaucratised capitalism itself toward the same type of tyranny of which Moscow represents the acme.

This degenerate capitalism of our world today is the very ground on which Stalinism feeds. If Stalinism is a dynamic force in much of the world, it is because — and only insofar as — it can take advantage of the justified hatred which millions of masses feel, for the system which has exploited them so long, and which they refuse to support against a demagogic Stalinist appeal which at least seems to offer something different.

As long as, and in proportion that, the enemies of Stalinism base themselves on support of the capitalist alternative, Stalinism is bound to grow strong and stronger.

Wherever Stalinism can pose as primarily the enemy of capitalism (which it is in truth, in its own interests), and not as an equal and even more deadly enemy of the working class and the masses who aspire to freedom, it can ride the revolutionary energies that capitalism's crimes have, unleashed in the world. This is the "secret" of its strength and its dynamic appeal.

This is why it still can count on the active or apathetic support of millions in France and Italy and other West European countries; on millions among the colonial masses of Asia; on strategic points of support in US imperialism's backyard, Latin America. This is why the Western capitalist statesmen are at the end of their rope in Indochina, where they are fighting in the name of French colonialism against a Stalinist-controlled Vietminh which is able to clothe itself in the garb of a national-liberation movement. This is why Korea was a trap for thousands of American dead.

Being anti-capitalist in reality, in the sense that it stands for a rival system of oppression and exploitation, Stalinism can hope to and seek to use a disoriented working class wherever it finds one, as its battering ram against the old system. Where the US can find only the most discredited of reactionaries and tyrants to be its semi-reliable allies — a butcher like Chiang Kai Shek or Syngman Rhee, fascists like Hitler's friend Franco or the neo-Nazis who flood the administration of its pet German, Chancellor Adenauer — the Stalinists are not tied to the old discredited classes and cliques in the countries of the Near or Far East, or in Europe.

They can stage the act of offering a fundamental social transformation to throw out the landlords who oppress the peasant masses, whereas the US, bound by its capitalist status-quo ideology, cannot even find a demagogic word to say.

No one who stands for, or who is suspected of standing for, the retention of mastery by the capitalist imperialism — even if he apologetically explains that he supports the capitalist bloc only because it is a "lesser evil" — can hope to stem the expansionist dynamic of Stalinism.

That is why we look to the gathering of the forces of the "Third Camp" — those who wish to fight in the name of an independent struggle against both camps of exploiters — as the only road to defeat both war and Stalinism, both the old and the new imperialism.

But that works the other way too. Wherever it is Stalinism that has established itself as the master, where it has already overthrown capitalism and had time to show its own hand, its own cloven foot, there the revolt against the bureaucratic-collectivist despotism grows fast. But the masses who turn against Stalinist power in disillusionment do not want to go back; they want to go forward. The most dramatic proof of this was given in the great June 1953 revolt of the East German workers, in their heroic first assault against the Eastern conqueror. No pro-West or pro-U. S. or even pro-Adenauer slogans appeared among them; that on the one hand; and on the other, the representatives of the Western camp in Berlin showed themselves as leery of the aroused workers in revolt as the Stalinist masters.

The next stage of the revolt within the Stalinist empire is augured by the masses' aspiration for freedom against their new bureaucratic magnates who have replaced the capitalists as rulers, the revolt prefigured by the East German rising.

It is the revolt of the workers in the name of a democratic government which will overthrow the Stalinist horror. Revolt for democracy under Stalinism — what does it mean? In a completely statified society, where the means of production are already in the hands of the state (while the state is in the hands of a tyrannical bureaucratic class), the road to genuine socialism lies in winning the state power for the democratic rule of the people. In this kind, of society, democracy is not merely a political form (as it is under capitalism at the best); it is the sole instrument whereby the workers can really build their own society, and convert the statified economy from the preserve of a privileged class to the foundations of socialism. Democracy is a revolutionary goal.

Capitalism cannot unleash the revolutionary energies of the people behind the Iron Curtain any more than it can do so with the colonial masses of Asia. That will take a struggle which offers an anti-capitalist alternative to these people who have had their bellyful of both the old system and the new tyranny, and this is a struggle which can blow the Stalinist power up from within.

This is the "secret weapon" which can defeat Stalinism without plunging the world into a world slaughter to a bitter atomic end, to the greater glory of capitalism.

This is the political weapon which the Stalinists fear. It can be swung into action only by a consistent and fearless democratic foreign policy which has broken with the limitations imposed by capitalist class interests and alliances. We are for the war against Stalinism to the death — not appeasement, deals, compromise or partitions of the world with it — but we are not for capitalism's war against Stalinism.

Our allies are not Franco and Bao Dai, but our comrade-workers of the British Labour Party who are trying to find an independent road for their movement that stands against both war camps, and who are therefore smeared as "anti-American." Our allies are not Rhee or Chiang, but the lion-hearted East German workers in revolt. Our political blood brothers are not the Stalinoid neutralists who want to appease Stalinism but the workers who want to find the way to fight both blocs.

Our aim is not the peaceful coexistence of two varieties of exploiters but a socialist world where all people can be free.

Labor Action, 10 May 1954

Roots of Stalinist imperialism

By Max Shachtman

When the defenders and journalists of capitalism speak of Stalinist Russia as a "socialist state" they have, from their standpoint, two good reasons for saying so. One reason, the product of ignorance if not malice, is to discredit the cause of socialism in the mind of workers by identifying it with the oppressive police rule of the Stalinist state.

The other reason results from their sound class instinct. They have never concerned themselves with the positive aspect of socialism, which is the liberation of the working class from all forms of oppression and exploitation and the assurance of abundance and freedom for all. Their idea of what socialism is, is simple enough. It is the threat to the profits and privileges they derive from their ownership of the means of production and exchange which socialism would abolish. And since Stalinism also abolishes capitalist private ownership wherever it establishes its rule, it does no less to the foundations on which the capitalist class rests than socialism would do.

That is reason enough for the capitalist class to equate Stalinism with "socialism," or at least with "socialism of some kind or another." It does not follow, however, that this is reason enough for the working man or the socialist to adopt the same view of Stalinism.

Socialism is uncompromisingly opposed to capitalism. But if it were merely an anti-capitalist movement and nothing else, it would be exceedingly primitive, simple-minded and even subject to all sorts of reactionary perversions. If it simply took the view that what is good for the capitalist class is had for the working class; that what hurts the capitalist class automatically promotes the interest of the working class; or that the aim of the working-class movement is to take revenge against capitalists for their exploitation and oppression — it would not have the scientific character which gives it its fundamental power and progressiveness.

Feudalism, for example, is opposed to capitalism and stands in the way of its development. But the feudal opposition to capitalism has never promoted the interests of the working class and it never merited the name or the support of socialism.

Workers, enraged by capitalist exploitation, once unleashed their fury against the modern machines which were the means of exploiting them. But the smashing of the machines which took the place of primitive handwork was, at bottom, futile and reactionary; and even if it was painful to the capitalist, it did not advance the interests of the working class or receive the support of the socialist.

Stalinism is not feudalism and it does not favour smashing machinery. It is, indeed, opposed to capitalism; it does aim to abolish capitalist private property; and it does endeavour to base itself mainly upon the working class. But only from the capitalist standpoint does this make Stalinism a "socialist" or a "working-class" movement.

Socialism opposes capitalism only from the standpoint of promoting the interests of the working class, only from the standpoint of speeding the working class to control of the economic and political power in every country, only from the standpoint that this control alone will enable society as a whole to dispense with all forms of class rule and therewith develop in full freedom from all social fetters.

From this standpoint, Stalinism is not progressive, and has nothing in common with the working class or socialism; it is a reactionary force.

Stalinism is a product of the decay of capitalism. This tells us very little about it, unless we understand that it is a product of a particular conjunction point in the decaying process of capitalism.

The decay of capitalism simply means that the ruling class is less and less capable of resolving the ever acuter problems of society by the traditional methods at its disposal, that is, by capitalist methods.

The result is: a stagnation of economic life which is "overcome" only by preparing for wars which cause a stupendous destruction of wealth and which are futile in that they solve no significant social or political problem and open up no progressive road to mankind; the growth of political reaction in the form of the enormously increased bureaucratisation and militarisation of public life, the growth of "garrison states", police states, totalitarian states; the disintegration, debase-



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ment and stifling of cultural life; and so on. The working class is that social force which is called upon to arrest the social decay produced by a capitalist system which has completely outlived its historical usefulness. The more acute the problems of society become, the more urgently the working class is called upon to

break all its ties with capitalism and to resolve these problems in a socialist — that is, in a democratic and progressive — way. Now, if the working class fails — whatever may be the reason for the failure at any given moment — to resolve the burning social problems in a socialist way at the time when the capitalist class reveals its inherent inability to resolve them in a capitalist way, we get that conjunction point in the decay of society which makes possible the rise of Stalinism.

There we have the key to understanding this new force which baffles and bewilders the capitalist class and the prisoners of the capitalist mode of thinking, and throws them into the panic in which they find themselves today.

Stalinism fills the social vacuum created under these conditions. It seeks to solve the problems which the main classes of society are either unable to solve or fail to solve, each in its own way.

And where it establishes its power, it does solve the problems. To be sure, it solves them in its way; it solves them in a reactionary way; in solving them, it creates a multitude of new problems or the old problems in new forms; but it does solve the old problems as they appeared in their capitalist form. It proceeds to destroy the foundations of capitalism, and to crush the capitalist class, with which the new masters have not the slightest desire to share their power.

It is that which, from the capitalist standpoint, gives it the appearance of a "revolutionary," or a "working class" or a "socialist" force. But that is only appearance.

The reality is that the new masters, composed of the riff-raff of the old society, the uprooted and the demoralised elements of all social layers, especially of the bureaucracy of the labour movement — these new masters also crush the working class at the same time, deprive it of all traces of economic and political rights, and subjugate it to a despotic exploitation unparalleled in modern times.

If the working class fails to destroy capitalism, wrote the co-founder of the modern socialist movement decades ago, it will suffer the penalty of its own destruction. We can see today the heavy penalty the working class pays when it fails in its task. Stalinism destroys it by transforming it into a class of modern state-slaves.

Where Stalinism triumphs, it transfers sooner or later all the means of production and exchange to the ownership of the state. And the collective ownership and organisation of the means of production by the state is a long step forward for society; it is a milestone in human progress; it is the necessary preliminary to a state-less social order, a socialist society of abundance and freedom.

But this is so only on the absolutely indispensable condition that the state which concentrates all economic power in its hands is in turn in the hands of the working class — is a democratic state, a state whose democratic character widens constantly to the point where it ceases to be a state at all, that is, an instrument of coercion of the few against the many or even of the many against the few.

Omit this condition, or substitute anything else for it, and the state which now has all economic power centralised within it will inevitably be the most powerful exploitive and

oppressive machine ever directed against a working class. That is what the Stalinist state is, in every country where it is established.

The working class is the most important productive force in society. Where the state owns all the means of production, it also "owns" the working class.

If this state is the organised working class itself, then and only then is it a workers' state capable of ushering in socialism. Then and only then does the working class, collectively, own and control the productive forces, including itself — and the working class does not exploit and oppress itself because in its very nature it cannot do so. But where this state is in the hands of another class, as is the case under Stalinism, it is a disfranchised slave class completely dominated by an uncontrolled bureaucracy.

The totalitarian Stalinist bureaucracy is unique among ruling classes, and so is its mode of production. Under capitalism, the market is the regulator of production. Under socialism, production and distribution will be determined by democratic social planning. In a workers' state which leads to socialism, production and distribution must be determined democratically by the working class through its state machinery; and the only assurance this class has that production and distribution will be planned for its use and benefit is by exercising its democratic control of the state machinery.

Under Stalinism, however, production and distribution are regulated neither by the market nor by the democratic decisions of the working class — let alone society as a whole. They are determined arbitrarily by a vast network of self-perpetuating, uncontrolled bureaucrats who monopolise all political and therefore all economic power, for their own use.

In the absence of the more-or-less automatic economic controls which the market provides for capitalism, and of the democratic economic controls which a workers' state or a socialist society would provide, the Stalinist state is left with no other means of organising and controlling the economy save the police means which are at the disposal of this super-totalitarian regime.

It is this ingrained characteristic of Stalinist rule which stamps it as reactionary not only from a political but also from an economic standpoint and dooms it to permanent economic crisis.

To maintain itself, its power and its privileges, over the masses of the people, it must maintain an unprecedentedly huge and parasitical human (or rather, inhuman!) machine of surveillance and oppression.

In the nature of the regime itself, this machine is directed not only against the masses — although primarily against them — but also against the lower ranks of the bureaucracy itself, from which it must continually draw for scapegoats its economic deficiencies and disasters.

The whole manner of its organisation of economic life is such that it exceeds capitalism by far in the degree to which it wears out, wastes, devours and destroys outright the productive forces which are developed under its rule.

A social order is progressive to the extent that the productive forces developed in any period of its existence are socially useful; it is or becomes reactionary — as has for so long been the case with capitalism — to the extent that the productive forces developed under its rule are socially useless, are wasted and exhausted, are converted, in the words of Karl Marx, into means of destruction.

From this standpoint, Stalinist society is reactionary through and through. It does not represent progress as against capitalism. It is a product of the decay of capitalism, which in turn produces a deeper decay of society, the new barbarism of which it is at once the carrier and beneficiary.

The vast destruction of the productive forces under Stalinism not only crushes the people it rules, but undermines the rule of the bureaucracy itself. It knows no other way of maintaining itself than by intensifying its police rule and compensating for its economic destruction by conquering, enslaving and looting countries not yet under its dominion.

That is the basis of the Stalinist imperialism which has already succeeded in reducing so many countries of Europe and Asia to the degradation of satellite, vassal or colonial states whose economic wealth and working classes are ravaged so that the economic power and totalitarian rule of the Russian master class may be maintained and expanded.

Labor Action, 7 May 1951

What to learn from Stalinism

By Hal Draper

Whoever cannot learn from history is doomed to repeat it. We Independent Socialists of today have only two advantages over the great socialist leaders and thinkers of the past: we stand on their shoulders, and we have lived longer. In our generation the colossal event which has tested all socialists' ideas — shattering some and affecting all — has been the rise of a completely new social phenomenon, Stalinism.

Whoever has not been able to learn lessons of the greatest importance from this, whatever movement has not been able to assimilate and readapt its conceptions to this, is doomed to impotence and worse — but to impotence only at the very best.

What our independent Socialist movement has learned from the rise of Stalinism would take much more than this page to present. We select only five of the most important lessons here. They are basic to "our kind of socialism", that is, to a genuinely socialist re-adaptation of Marxist policy for our era — not a mere "reaffirmation", not a parroting of biblical formulas, but a re-adaptation such as Marxism itself demands if its spirit is to be observed.

Most of the real lessons to be learned naturally cluster around the question of socialism and democracy. But the first is prior to it.

1. There is a reactionary social alternative to the system of capitalism in the world today.

To the socialist generations before us, anti-capitalism and the fight for socialism meant the same thing, or at least were part of the same process. Anything which struck a blow against capitalism was a blow for socialism, in its consequences. For socialism was the next social system scheduled by history, and, whatever pulled the capitalist order down, socialism would replace it because there was nothing else.

This is not true in the modern world. There never was, indeed, any principle of Marxism which predestined that decrepit social orders could be succeeded only by progressive heirs. There were only pseudo-Marxist formulas which made a principle of history out of the pattern of capitalism's own development from its feudal predecessor. The world has known societies which crumbled into retrogressive throwbacks of civilisation itself. Which is the pattern that is "scheduled" by history will be decided not by moods of either despair or blind faith in some mechanical schema, but it will be decided only by the struggle in society itself.

This struggle for the world is not the duel described in the Communist Manifesto a century ago — bourgeoisie versus proletariat. It is a three-cornered battle for power, in which both basic classes of the capitalist system faces a new contender, the ruling class of the new type of exploiting system which we prefer to call "bureaucratic collectivism" but which is better known as simply Stalinism.

This triangle of forces is not a mere freak of history. It is

the outcome of two facts: the old system of world capitalism is indeed crumbling and disintegrating, as was foretold, but the only class which can bring a new world of progress and plenty to birth, the working class which incubated under capitalism, has not yet reached out for its birthright. But the forces which inexorably pull the old system apart cannot wait for the working class to catch up with its tasks: as the socialist proletariat hangs back, while the old social order dissolves here and there, weakens there and here, to that extent the new social force of Stalinist bureaucratic-statism steps in to take over. Out of the most reactionary elements of the decaying world, an even more hideous ersatz exploiter grows. Stalinism is the punishment visited upon the workers for as yet failing to overthrow capitalism themselves.

Stalinism steps in, not to hold capitalism together, for it grows where that can no longer be done, but to hold society together in the only way exploiters know how in a world that is falling apart at the seams — by brute force and tyranny.

It seeks power by appealing to the anti-capitalist aspirations and needs of the masses. It gains in power where the people know that they can no longer stand the old system of exploitation which they know on their own backs and in their own bellies, and where they are not presented with a progressive alternative that challenges both the old and the new masters.

With regard to the fight for democracy, what is the importance of understanding that there is a reactionary alternative to capitalism in the modern world? What is the importance of understanding that anti-capitalism is not enough? If, to previous socialist generations, the socialism that was to replace capitalism would also naturally be democratic, to us the socialism that replaces the old system must be democratic — or it is not socialism, as we shall see in Lesson 2. If to them democracy was the expected and desired companion of socialism, to us it is a condition for socialism.

In no other era than this does the fight for democracy rise to such a pinnacle of importance for the forces of progress. No other movement in the history of the world is so driven to place the democratic goal so close to everything it strives for.

But also, more than it has ever been, this driving need for democracy is directed against both systems of domination, capitalist and Stalinist.

Today, in the capitalist-Stalinist struggle, not only the latter but also the capitalist powers turn increasingly toward bureaucratisation and militarisation to save themselves against the threatening rival. There is no other fight, except the fight for socialist democracy, which so unifies the struggle against both systems, which so sums up the tasks of progress.

2. Nationalisation of industry is not equivalent to socialism.

Stalinism presents us with a society in which all the means



of production and distribution are "nationalised", or better, "statified", and which is yet the antithesis of socialism. This is the aspect of Stalinism which has been the source of its ability to spread confusion, bewilderment and disorientation in the ranks of the socialists themselves.

But this Stalinist-nationalised economy is not a socialised economy, it is not the property of the people. The question we have learned to ask is simply this: Yes, the state owns everything, but who "owns" the state?

It is a question which only has to be asked to cut through to the heart of the nature of Stalinism. The working class is not by its nature, and never can be, an owning class like previous ruling classes. It can "take over" the economy only in one way: collectively, through its own institutions. It can exercise economic power only through its political power. The expression of this proletarian political power can be given in two words: workers' democracy.

Stalinism has fused the economic and political power by the very fact that the political organ, the state, is also the economic owner. It has fused this power in the hands of those who hold this power, those who exercise the totalitarian control over this state: the new ruling bureaucracy, which becomes the new ruling class.

The victorious working class also will fuse the economic and political power in its own hands, by exercising its own control over its own state. But the working people, as the great majority at the population, can control its state only in one way — through its democratic institutions.

Nationalisation of the economy under a state which is the "property" of a new minority class of overlords is Stalinism. Socialisation of the economy under a state which is the democratic expression of the majority of the people is socialism.

The socialist revolution in Russia was made by overthrowing the bourgeoisie. The Stalinist counter-revolution had to be made by destroying the workers' democracy.

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Workers rise against Stalinist rule

Now More Than Ever!



Stalinism itself cannot be understood without understanding the new lessons of the relation between socialism and democracy.

3. Democracy is an economic essential for socialism, not merely a desirable "moral value".

Let us make plain immediately that we agree entirely with the view that democracy is to be desired and defended because it is a vital moral value for humanity. But if that were its claim for the allegiance of the people, the case for it would go hard. People who are hungry, people who are ill-housed and ill-clothed, are difficult to interest in moral values, much as this fact disgusts professors of ethics, especially after a good meal, with the "stupidity" of the human race.

The socialist striving for democracy has a more solid base than that. It is Stalinism more than anything else that has made that clear to us.

For the Stalinist economy's mortal contradiction is not the same as that of capitalism. It is a different system. It is immune to the specific capitalist form of crisis, as were the pre-capitalist systems. A crisis associated with "overproduction", a crisis of glut in the midst of poverty and want, unemployment because of an overabundance of goods, such as the US saw in the '30s, is unthinkable for it. In replacing capitalism, it has truly abolished the capitalist source of crisis and the capitalist type of crisis, as the Stalinists boast. But like every exploiting society it does so only in order to develop its own specific forms of crisis.

The crisis of the Stalinist economy is chronic. In eliminating capitalism it has also eliminated that which regulates and orders the capitalist system: the market and its laws. In the unplanned and economically anarchic system of capitalism, it is this "blind" behind-the-scenes regulator of the economy which keeps it working, which acts as its impersonal "planner". There is only one thing which can replace the operation of the market in a system of state-owned economy: conscious planning. Without a system of planning which can keep to-

gether the jigsaw-puzzle of the modern tremendously complex society, there can be only chaos.

The Stalinist state has an economic plan. Like everything else in this totalitarian structure, it is a plan devised, imposed and enforced from above, bureaucratically. But no bureaucratic commission can itself plan such a labyrinth of social processes. Such a plan must be constantly checked from below, corrected from below; it must depend on initiative and responsibility below; it must be self-correcting through the give-and-take of democratic planning between the lower and upper echelons on every level.

This is what is impossible under Stalinism. This is the basic reason for the fantastic botches, snarls, snags, wastes, and snafus which are angrily denounced in every issue of the Stalinist press. Under the system of totalitarian terror, no factory manager can afford to take responsibility for decisions, when mistakes are evidences of "sabotage". No continuity can exist when personnel vanish and appear regularly in accordance with the chronic purge which is the very mode of life of Stalinism.

The fatal contradiction of Stalinist economy is the basic contradiction between planning and totalitarianism. It must plan and it cannot plan. Like the contradictions of capitalism, this galloping disease which eats away at its vitals is not guaranteed to be fatal in any given number of years. The regime continually tightens against the disease of bureau-

cratism — by more bureaucratic controls. It still keeps up vast production by fantastic expenditures of human labour power, enslaved or virtually enslaved. It loots and robs its dependent satellites more brutally than most capitalisms, as far as it can.

For a planned economy, democracy is an economic necessity. That means democracy is not merely a political good but an economic necessity for socialism.

We have only one doubt about those ideologists who tout the virtues of democracy on moral grounds. We have seen too many men who, sincerely convinced as they may be about their moral ideals, are willing to cast them aside when faced with an inextricable dilemma. When mere "moral ideals" clash, or seem to clash, with economic and social reality, it is not usually the reality which comes off sec-

ond best. For us socialists, democracy is not a valuable adjunct to, or dressing on, the society for which we fight: it is an integral element of its economic system, as profit-making and cut-throat rivalry is an integral element of capitalism.

4. Under Stalinism; the fight for democracy is the fight for socialism.

The victory of Stalinism over a people does not mean the end of the socialist struggle. It means only its re-appearance in a new form.

Every evidence shows that in the Stalinist states, the mass of working people do not yearn to return to the old system of capitalism, much as they hate their new bureaucratic exploiters. Rather, the very demagoguery of the Stalinists, which speaks of the plants and factories as "the property of the people", leads them to demand that this demagoguery be made reality.

What the masses of the peoples of the USSR aspire to is the democratisation of the regime, their democratic control over the state-which-owns-everything. And in such a state, this aspiration to democratic control of the economy is — exactly equals — identical with — the aspiration for socialism.

The fight for socialism cannot be downed, by Stalinism or any other reaction. It can be abolished only by the blowing-up of civilisation. The nature of Stalinism is such that for the first time in the history of the world, the fight for democracy is not merely "bound up with" or "a part of" the fight for socialism; the fight for democracy is the fight for socialism, wherever Stalinism holds sway.

5. Democracy means a social program or it means nothing.

The advances made by Stalinism in the modern world should be a staggering portent for those philosophers who think that ideals have a power of their own, just as virtue is its own reward. Here we see the most dynamically appealing movement in the world which is also the most totalitarian and tyrannous force in the world. Yet masses flock to its banners!

"Cannot the American democratic ideal be made just as dynamic, just as appealing?" anxiously ask the most sincere ideologists of capitalism, including its liberals. "How can this murderous system be so attractive?" They make myths about its propaganda machine, its "brain-washing techniques".

The truth is that Stalinism's appeal is that of a social program — anti-capitalism — while American capitalism flutters the rags of its democracy in vain because it can give it no meaningful social content. The fight for democracy is a power, but only if it englobes a social goal.

For us socialists the fight for democracy is no abstraction divorced from the real struggle of classes and interests. The concrete fight for democracy today is a fight for a new social order, it is a fight against both capitalism and Stalinism, it is a banner on which is written: "The socialist alternative to capitalism, the democratic alternative to Stalinism".

Labor Action, 4 May 1953

