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.

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 “mystery”? 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 9 a.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 Platz 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 bowed 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 führer Ulbricht off a wall and “threw it derisively in the faces of Soviet tommy-gunners approaching in a troop carrier.”

At 2 p.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-guns, 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.

“Tear down the borders!” “We don’t want to be slaves!” “We want butter!” “We want free elections!” — these are all stirrers, upsetting the central government, the real power in the country.

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The working class responded with 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 inside. It will be a powerful force of encouragement and whetting demands.

The events in Germany have been learned in detail, and 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.

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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.

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Liberation Action, 22 June 1953.

Workers’ Liberty

Workers rise against Stalinist rule

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Liberation 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 rest 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 Goetting; the twenty-second was the CP mayor of Doebritz, in Saxony-Anhalt, H W Hartmann, 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 19th 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 its 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 re-awakened.” 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, Juterbog and Ludwigsfeld. 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, now meets the crisis of an enormous outburst 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 reduced rents; refugees — restoration of property; the churches — lifting up on anti-religious drives; plus a lightening of the penal code. At the same time the regime imposed the workers the decree for heavier work norms which was the immediate cause of the outbreak.

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 in deed 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 waging 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 unaided rejoicing at the events, the Allied powers muzzled the press, regardless of their formal statements, seem to betray the classic ruling-class reaction of fear and disconcernment 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] 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 put 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 right or not, to the real alternative to the war: the workers’ revolution, which will not fail to disturb Western capitalism too.

Workers’ Liberty 3

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


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


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: 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

Labor Action, 29 June 1953
The CP headquarters burned

The CP headquarters are sacked and burned. The party officials have vanished. Only one of them, Minister Selßmann, 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 comrades! You have betrayed us! We want freedom!” Selßmann quickly returns to his office, and a construction worker takes the floor to make a speech to the workers.

The CP headquarters, attacked the “irresponsible speakers — not “provocateurs” but workers well known to their comrades — pick up these words of the young socialists, 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.

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 Písek (Plzen).

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.

Under the 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 gas camp. In May–June 1954, prisoners at the Kengir labour camp, in Kazakhstan, took over the whole camp for some weeks.

All those labour-camp risings were bloody suppressed, but they also shocked Stalin’s successors into beginning, bit by bit, to run down the labour-camp system.
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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 social 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 budger, 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 politics of 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 through a breath of life into them.

As we said, the Stalinist rulers in Germany could not estabish 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 social 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 Eastern 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, on June 17, of the workers of Saxony and Thuringia: when two workers arrived from Stalinallee to bring the news to their steelworker comrades, if was sufficient for a single worker, a young socialist, to cry: "We are going there!" for 8000 workers to get 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 Pratéériaire] 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 have dared to shout: "down with the people's police or 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 evaluation of these events is not possible without knowledge of 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 waiting to know the reaction of the workers of the Western component of the French army. 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 all the cities of the Eastern zone. The workers are also simply listening to the broadcasts from the West. They want to hear that the West, the workers' movement, has not forgotten them. They have 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 out 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: "Reprinted with the permission of one of his interpretations — for example, the connection with theSocial-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 Résolution Pratéériaire. — Ed."
Workers rise against Stalinist rule

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 dynamic 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 regime, of the total collapse of society after the Second World War, and of the new totalitarian agricultural 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 productive forces is 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 white-collar workers.

The entire social class structure tended to become very simple compared with the old one. Only three social classes now survive in the Eastern zones. 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-bureaucratic bureaucracy. They are a tiny minority among the people, divorced from the rest of the population, without native or social influence among other sectors of the population, 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 productive 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. 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 production to the foreign imperialist overlords, have created a higher degree of economic anarchy and waste of the social produce than there ever existed under private capitalism.

4. The weaknesses of the regime are multiplied by the high degree of bureaucratisation 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.

5. 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.

6. 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 intelligentsia 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 pressures 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.

In Eastern 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 the old underground and also a new 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 revolution and also of the Western underground organisation.

The underground organisation of the labour opposition did not contain a significant element. Experienced underground workers in totalitarian countries will agree that a mass organisation or an organisation which is part of a mass organisation is not able to 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 people who establish personal contacts and 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
Workers rise against Stalinist rule

Continued on page 8
Workers rise against Stalinist rule

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.

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 work norms and wage cuts, Ubricht’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, that belonged to 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 talk 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 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, that belonged to 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 theSED 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 during the action itself, workers went on strike and local populations, especially women, mobilized to defend prisoners and set the prison buildings where political prisoners were kept or where the administration was located.

Overnight the net of underground organisations was multiplied and new organisations were born. There was a serious danger that local hot-heads would go too far and that the government would provoke a revolutionary uprising by an act of repression. The under current of fear 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 a decision 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 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 commanders 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 apparatus to power and will it risk the Western regime support such purges? The Russian leaders are experienced in administrative rule and oppression of oppositional movements.

Russia is 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 spoil the anti-aggressive role of the 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.
Workers' Liberty 9

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, atomized, 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 down by the high command and silent. Out of Russia there has been more than one case, dozens of cases in fact. The first big inspiring movement was that of the Ukrainian Peasants, 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 intellectual 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.

Similarly 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 foundation 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.

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 recognize — 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 socialist 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 flowered 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 Henningsdorf 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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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 skimpiness 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 black broad-brimmed 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 wariness. They were something to look at! 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 revolution, 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 socialists 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 old 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 appeared 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 is that the police, this Stalinist bludgeon of the state, clearly did not only organised but well organised, intelligently organised, wisely and cunningly organised, was the systematic and integrated action with which the whole crowd put forward their slogans. These slogans were all revolutionary political slogans.

The weakest ground upon which the building trades workers, in Berlin, really attacked, counter-attacked, the street in Stalinralbe, 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, and in which the slogan “Down with the Stalinist phernalia: all these speak of a prepared organised demonstration. Yet this had the appearance of an organised movement! Yet this was the case, the way it attacked and frustrated from attacking those whom it was pointless or inexpedient to attack, the lack of armament was never more clearly shown than in the method of the underdogs of that movement, the underground 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, this speaks of a prepared organised demonstration, all these things speak of the existence of an underground revolutionary organisation throughout the German Stalinist territory.

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Workers rise against Stalinist rule

The struggle against Stalinism.

Workers rise against Stalinist rule

since they took power in that country. It was a feeling out of working class and the Stalinist ruling class in the eight years and planning and preparing, their aim was accustomed to advancing not on the basis of some capricious the struggle against Stalinism.

Catholic Church, this is not the age of miracles, not even in everything — above all, their honour, their country, their dig-

Think only of this fact: The so-called native gov-

ernment 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 armed workers — with the arms at its disposal!

This isn’t an unarmed govern-

ment. Arms at its dis-

posal — by no means Russian arms; I mean its so-called Volk-

polizei.

Take 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 po-

lice; the police either stand and stare, or attack se-

cretly, or if they attack the demonstrators, are at-

tacked so fiercely in return that they are helpless. What is such a govern-

ment? It’s a sham, a sham-

bles; it is in reality non-existent; it is a pup-

pet; 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 pipes and steel bars, the pavement stones, the Russian troops with submachine guns, 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 instru-

ments used to overthrow the biggest military power on the Continent up to 1945: Russian tanks. Not as many were em-

ployed as against Hitler, but significantly — tanks! Cannon, machine guns set up on barricades, and Russian troops with submachine 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 up-

rising — was to discredit completely, as it deserved to be dis-

credited, the myth that so many melon-heads are swallowing whole, about a new policy of "liberalism" that is being in this the new Russian rulers show wisdom, in my judge-

ment. 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 Pravda on all the great po-

tical 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 ordi-

nary 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 m ade — 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 demonstra-

tion 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 upris-

ing.

That the organisers of this demonstration existed as a com-

 pact, planful group is further confirmed in my thinking by the fact that they seemed to realize — and so well, so wisely — that an unarmed workers’ revolt against the guar-

oured guns. If the government was somewhat frightened by that, it was more or less understandable. If the entire gov-

ernment 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 peo-

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rising — was to discredit completely, as it deserves to be dis-

credited, the myth that so many melon-heads are swallowing whole, about a new policy of “liberalism” that is being adopted by the new government to get the East German workers’ revolt, as transcribed from a tape recording made by friends”.

The R ussians wounded many, they killed dozens, a hun-

dred, 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 to the age of ours, when the law of survival dictates struggle first of all, when the smallest patrol action in the inaccessible and uninhabited hills of Korea brings far greater ordinary equipment of militant workers in a violent demon-

stration, 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 and marched against the armed guns. If the government was somewhat frightened by that, it was more or less understandable. If the entire govern-

ernment dressed up like a woman and fled in a motor car, it was entirely understandable.

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
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 A 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.

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. Despite a shock to the factories, they issued 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.
- 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.
- A 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 Politbüro — 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 15 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-
Workers rise against Stalinist rule

"Liberated" Europe!

MARSHALL PLAN

STALIN PLAN

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 Stalinism 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?

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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.

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The new Russian imperialism

By Max Shachtman

The line 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 crisis.

In March 1946 the Greek civil war restarted; there was British-USRR 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 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 awe-some shadow of the atomic bomb — and refuses to encompass it.

Yet the pattern that emerges out of every day’s news seems to be the terrible reality of World War II. It is not “a war like no other war in the world” for the first time. 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, when the “little man” faces 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 characterized 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 nonexistent. The man’s threat to “seek aid elsewhere” (i.e., in Russia), if the United States does not grant her the requested concessions, is mere hypocrisy, to test and prove her newly acquired strength vis-a-vis the United States.

And the Kremlin, with the history and economic theory of capitalist imperialism knows what motivates the obsessions 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 Asians 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. Any one 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 states.

But what about the Russians? What do they want? Here the most widespread illusions exist. We do not refer to the Stalinist apologists for Gomulka in Albania and for the Communists of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California.

It is this fact that gives to the emergence of the new Russian imperialism its tremendous source of cheap labour, markets and raw materials.

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 after 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 unamused.

For the 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 into two camps — between a pro-French combination and a pro-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 divided class of hostile and cuddled plasticizers — private capitalism versus bureaucratic collectivism.

It is this fact that gives to the emergence of the new Russian imperialism its tremendous source of cheap labour, markets and raw materials. 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?”

The new Russian imperialism occupies a strategic geographical position as a tremendous land mass that dominates Europe. 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 Africa and parts of the frontiers of Turkey and Iraq. Proceed east across Asia to include Sinkiang, Mongolia, parts of Manchuria, northern Korea, Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Chain. This expanding land mass pressures 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 Spain. 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-a-vis the United States.

And the Kremlin, with the history and economic theory of imperialist capitalism knows what motivates the obsessions 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 Asians 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 states.

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Workers rise against Stalinist rule

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

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

Russia carries through “agrarian reforms” which wipe out the large landowners and seeks to establish a small peasant property which would tie them to the new regime. (Poland and East Prussia.)

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

Russia maintains commercial outlets 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 Russian economic policy is marked by the same Addisonal 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 role 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 dominated half 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 Steppes and out to the shores of the Black Sea and the Caucasus.

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 of the vast expanses 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 imperialism 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 Russian system 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 does not resemble the exploitative conditions, 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 previous one.

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 outdated 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 for the Fourth International and led to the split in the American section.

Trotsky and the majority of the Socialist Workers Party decried the invasion 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 Mores 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' states" in 1939-40, particularly those which linked Russian policy with the military-strategic exigencies of the hour, still lack 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' states" 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-Stalin 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' states" which seek to iron out the contradictions between their theory and politics. We will comment on this phenomenon at another time.)

The "workers' states" 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 exploiting the workers. It is merely a trophy of the war that a lattice 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 cannons, 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 workers? The economic theory of the Russian bureaucracy is based on the following points of logic: "What odd language to describe the appropriation of the me 5:10:02:10 a most troublesome problem of theory for those who continue to cling to Trotsky's outdated 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 for the Fourth International and led to the split in the American section.

Trotsky and the majority of the Socialist Workers Party decried the invasion 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 Mores 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' states" in 1939-40, particularly those which linked Russian policy with the military-strategic exigencies of the hour, still lack 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' states" 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-Stalin 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' states" which seek to iron out the contradictions between their theory and politics. We will comment on this phenomenon at another time.)

The "workers' states" 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 exploiting the workers. It is merely a trophy of the war that a lattice 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 cannons, 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 workers? The economic theory of the Russian bureaucracy is based on the following points of logic: "What odd language to describe the appropriation of the me
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.” This was Kautsky’s critique of Lenin, though Kautsky left Lenin 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 of the wisp; we want only to build our economic and social structure within our own borders and to hell with conditions outside of it. Trotskyists don’t want an inch of any one else’s territory but let the capitalist countries keep their smut out of our Soviet garden.

The fierce drive of Stalinist expansionism that blossomed explosively 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 decried as not only in their own way and so much more effectivity? So it was said not only by the “authoritative” bourgeois commentators but even by the disoriented “official-Trotskysts” of the Fourth International, who have drifted in the direction of pro-Stalinism.

But the new post-war Stalinist imperialism expansionism was not a break with, but a logical development and continuation 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. And if it was a tendency much easier to understand: it represented the turning-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 sympathizers abroad was to be gauged by the extent to which their activities contributed to strengthening Russia; for this was Russia “socialist,” strengthening Russia meant strengthening this “socialism.” Thus the interests of the world’s workers were to be subordinated to the national interest 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 new imperialist.

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

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 but on a national-chauvinist exploitive system. It proceeds from a national-chauvinist economic structure, wherein the state has to obtain resources, surplus capital, and surplus labour from the other countries. By its very nature the Stalinist system is based on imperialism.

The Russian workers have fought every war which has been fought by the Russian people — and they have fought more wars for the Russian imperialist capitalist class than ever before. They have been fighting a “socialist” state for the benefit of the imperialist capitalist class. The workers rise against Stalinist rule.

Stalinism imperialism
Workers rise against Stalinist rule

rulers’ inherent inability to indefinitely continue to live in coexistence 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 dynamic fuse extending from the outside into the Stalinist Curtain. But an analogous need exists also for the capitalist world: to get rid of this rival 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 particularly to the Stalinist system itself, the basic one is the need to exploit more and more labour on an ever-widening scale. The needs of this system have driven the ruling class into a series of wars of invasion 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 glutts the market if not disposable through the pur- chasing 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 bu- reaucratic 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 confrontation between imperialism and revolution. Stalinism, for example, has demonstrated the interests of a new and rising class, the bourgeois, which was then progressive, standing for the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favor of the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favor of the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favor of the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favor of the needs of society as a whole.

When the armies of Napoleon, born out of the Great French (Bourgeois) Revolution swept over Europe in combat with a feudal continent.

Being anti-capitalist in reality, in the sense that it stands for a riven, disintegrating, decaying society, 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 revolutionaries and tyrants (as they are now described, like the Kai Shek or Syngman Rhee, fascists like Hitler’s friend Franco or the neo-Nazis who flood the administration of its pet Ger- man Chancellor A denauer — 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 the masses, thus 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 way to 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 the rival system and has cemented its mastery with its own cloven hoof, there the revolt against the bureaucratic-collectivist despotism grows fast. But the masses who turn against Stalinism can only do so in disarray. They do not, as the Stalinists do, throw their weapons at the state — 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 con- queror. 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 capitalist as rulers, the revolt preforged 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 only social form, by which the workers can strip 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 unless it taps 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 demo- cratic 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, not 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.

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

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 goals reached or saying. One is 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 and another.” It is that reason, however, that 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 bad 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 capitalism for its exploitation and oppression — it would not have the scientific character which gives it its fundamental power and progressive nature.

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 mentioned the name or the support of the working class.

Workers, enraged by capitalist exploitation, once unleashed their fury against the modern machines which were the basis of exploiting them. But the smashing of the machines which took the place of primitive handicap 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 advance the work of the socialist revolution.

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 establish itself mainly upon the working class. But only from the capitalist standpoint does this make Stalinism a “socialist” or a “working-class” movement.

Stalinism 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 it can control the working class 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 the product of the decay of capitalism. This tells us very little about it unless we understand that it is a product of a particular conjuncture 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 consequence 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, debasement and stifling of cultural life; etc.

The working class is that social force which is called upon to arrest the social decay produced by a system which has completely outlived its historical usefulness. The more acute the problems 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 conjunctive 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.

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 and organic 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 exploitative 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 the working class organises 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 anyone 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 dismash of 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, society becoms to capitalism has never promoted the interests of the working class, and the Stalinists, in turn, produce 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, which消灭s 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 compen-sating the working class and its political representatives, vassal or colonial states whose economic wealth and productive forces are ravaged so that the economic power and totalitarian rule of the Russian master class may be maintained and expanded.

Workers’ Liberty, 7 May 1951
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 re-adapt 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 “realignment”, 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 against capitalism as a blow for socialism, in its consequences. For socialism was the next social system scheduled and political power in its own hands, by exercising its own power.

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

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 organizing 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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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 over-abundance 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 “plan-ner”. 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-order 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 demagogy of the Stalinists, which speaks of the plants and factories as “the property of the people”, leads them to demand that this demagogy be made reality.

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 banner!

“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