

"TRUTH" AND HUNGARY -- A REPLY TO APTHEKER

By Shane Mage

A revolution is a decisive event in the history of any society. It determines the fate, not merely of individuals, but of entire social classes. No one can stand apart from or above the battle. Like it or not, we are all participants, and our picture of the actual event is likely to be highly colored by what we expect and wish to see.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is one of the decisive events in the history of our times. For the ruling groups in the self-styled "Socialist" countries, Hungary posed no less a question than the continued existence of the system of rule developed by Stalin and perpetuated in modified form by Khrushchev and Company. For the capitalist classes of the world, the Hungarian revolution seemed to open up the grandiose possibility of restoring the capitalist system to its lost domains in Eastern Europe, and eventually even to China and the Soviet Union. And for all those socialists and Communists sincerely devoted to socialist democracy the Hungarian revolution raises the agonizing question -- how can the peoples of the "Soviet bloc" move forward to democratic socialism without falling into the snare of capitalist restoration?

We know how joyously all the leaders and spokesmen of Western capitalism greeted the Hungarian revolution. The entire American press portrayed the Hungarian uprising as a revolution to re-establish "Western-style Democracy" (i.e., capitalism) under the spiritual guidance of Cardinal Mindszenty and Radio Free Europe. Though only a few of the more exuberant used the word, all the commentators of press and government pictured the Hungarian revolution as a counter-revolution aimed at destroying a form of "socialism" and replacing it by a form of capitalism.

The picture of the Hungarian revolution given by the Russian government is essentially the same as that given by the "free world": a counter-revolutionary attempt to restore capitalism. The only important difference between the two is that the spokesmen of the West claim that the Hungarian "counter-revolution" would have led to a "democratic" or "people's" capitalism, while the Russians, and the official "Communists" with them, assert that Russian military intervention was necessary to avert a fascist and Horthyite form of capitalism.

There is a third version of the Hungarian uprising, accepted by most socialists: that of a basically socialist revolution made by the Hungarian working class, rejecting Stalinism as a perversion of socialism, refusing to return to capitalism, and seeking to establish a socialist democracy. Between this view and any variant of the idea that a counter-revolution took place in Hungary, there is an unbridgeable chasm.

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Herbert Aptheker, one of the leading intellectuals of the American Communist Party, has now published a book on the Hungarian uprising, "The Truth about Hungary." This book is an attempt at a full-scale defence of the Kremlin picture of a Hungarian "counter-revolution," the first effort of this sort to appear in this country. As such it is important, for no one can fully understand the real truth about the Hungarian revolution without coming to grips with the "counter-revolution" thesis which Aptheker presents.