

SOCIALIST WORKER

FOR WORKERS' CONTROL & INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM

CZECH CRISIS

Special issue

Price one penny

RUSSIANS—GET OUT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Full support for Czech workers and students

THERE IS NO POSSIBLE defence for the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. It is a crude display of power politics and a complete denial of socialist principles.

What the Russians are attempting in Czechoslovakia is exactly the same as the Americans in Vietnam — preventing, by armed might, the people of these countries from controlling their own lives and destinies. It is imperialist politics at its most vicious.

Why have the Russians invaded?
They have spoken of the pers-

The isolation of the revolution and the rise of Stalin destroyed this. What the Russian ruling class fear most is the rebirth of the spirit of the revolution.

This freedom of discussion does not exist in the west. It is the preserve of a few millionaire press-owners. When they are threatened as de Gaulle was in France, they too resort to crude police measures. Their 'horror' at what the Russians are doing in Czechoslovakia is pure hypocrisy.

Real socialism will only come about when the regimes both East and West of the Iron Curtain



education of 99 workers in a factory who wrote a letter to Pravda – but Jiri Duben, the leader of the workers has denied any persecution.

Apart from this petty lie, the Russians have not attempted to give any justification for their barbarous actions.

The real reasons are clear. It is the free discussion which has been taking place in the newspapers, in the factories, in the streets of Prague and the rest of Czechoslovakia which is what frightens the Russian rulers.

The East German 'Communists' have given as the reason for the invasion the failure of Dubcek to reimpose censorship. This is undoubtedly correct, but under no circumstances does it make the invasion, as East German rulers claim, a 'shining example of socialist internationalism'.

All the Eastern European regimes depend to varying degrees on the naked exercise of force to maintain their positions. In East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956 the Russian army was used to put down workers' insurrections.

In Warsaw earlier this year the security police used rubber truncheons to beat up students and young workers. In Russia itself tanks were used against the workers of Novocherkassk in 1962.

Even in normal times the most rigid censorship prevails. The plight of writers such as Daniel and Sinyavsky in Russia is well known. It is the ending of this sort of repression in Czechoslovakia which Brezhnev, Kosygin and their cronies see as a threat.

This prevention of free speech for the mass of the people has nothing in common with socialism. The first years of the Russian revolution saw an unparalleled flowering of democracy in the factories and the press and made free speech a reality for the mass of the workers.

replaced by working-class democracy, based upon workers' control of production, and with workers' councils replacing the existing states.

The ferment in Czechoslovakia could begin to lead to this. That is why the Russians are suppressing it. That is why we give the same unconditional support to the Czechoslovak people against the Russian leaders as we give to the National Liberation Front in Vietnam against the Americans.

BACKGROUND

1945 Potsdam conference agrees to division of Europe into Anglo-American and Russian spheres of influence. Russians prove they accept this two years later by not helping Greek resistance against US supported government.

1945 Czech industry 80 percent German owned. Defeat of Germany leaves it under control of workers' councils.

October 24 nationalisation decree (by government of Communists, socialists and bourgeois parties) removes industry from workers' councils and appoints managers.

1947 Only one list of candidates permitted for Works Council elections. When a third of candidates voted down, CP trade union leader extends life of existing councils for one year.

1948 Communists use threat of Russian invasion to take over completely in February. Secret ballot for Works Council elections abolished. Trade with Russia rises 45 percent in one year.

1950 Hundreds of thousands of Communists expelled from Czech CP. Foreign minister, Clementis arrested as 'agent of imperialism.'

1951 Many leading Czech communists, including party secretary Slansky and 11 government ministers hanged.

1953 Uprising by workers in provincial town suppressed by army.

1963 First murmurings against old regime within party.



Budapest 56: Russian tanks amidst the rubble

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NEITHER WASHINGTON NOR MOSCOW BUT INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM!

WHY RUSSIA INVADED - FEAR THAT REVOLUTION WILL SWEEP EASTERN EUROPE

by Chris Harman

TWELVE YEARS after 15 armoured divisions of Russian troops put down the popular uprising in Hungary, the rulers of Russia have proved that their power still rests on the same resort to force.

They have shown that they still fear popular discussion and debate. In order to subdue the Czech population they have massed huge concentrations of troops along the Czech borders.

Their armed forces have been engaged in the largest "exercises" in their history. With scarcely veiled threats they have offered Prague the same treatment as Budapest in 1956.

PROFESS

Once again the bosses of the Kremlin have shown how little they have in common with the socialism they profess.

The immediate pretext for the actions of the last month

cotts . . ." where necessary. This tentative and hesitant call to the people to begin to take control of society into their own hands was immediately disowned in moderate terms by the Czech government and Communist Party leaders.

SHUDDER

But the mere suggestion of this sent a shudder of fear through the rulers of Russia, East Germany and Poland. Meeting in Warsaw they demanded that the Czech leaders clamp down on such activities and reimpose censorship. Brutal repression is the only answer they know to any questioning of their rule.

But it is not enough just to condemn Russian intimidation. We need to be clear about what exactly is happening in Czechoslovakia, and why it worries the Russians.

For nearly 20 years—from February 1948 until recently—Czechoslovakia was a monolithic and bureaucratically organised society, run according to orders issued from the top. All power over the state and industry lay with the Communist Party, which in turn was completely subordinate to those



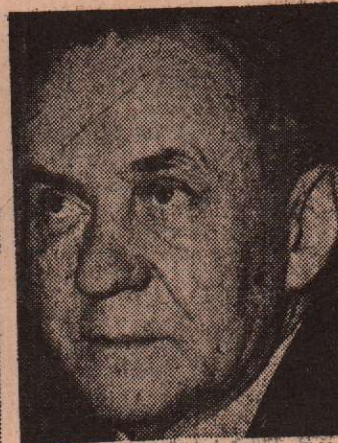
DUBCEK
Problems . . .

turn used crude threats to speed up the pace of work, stop absenteeism, prevent workers demanding wage increases.

INCREASE

In this period, both the rulers of the Czechoslovak bureaucracy and the Russian leaders upon whom they depended wanted only one thing: to continually increase the level of production of Czechoslovak industry.

For the Russians this was important because it meant an ever increasing supply for them of the products of Czech industry. They could buy these on the cheap because the Czechs



KOSYGIN
Problems . . .

The bureaucratic ruling class began to split down the middle. Some, at first a minority, saw that unless there were major changes in the organisation of industry the whole basis of their rule would be undermined.

They demanded that inefficient industries should be closed down. Like Harold Wilson, their spokesman, Professor Otta Sik, spoke of "redeployment" and like him meant unemployment, of the order of 400,000. Other industries, they argued, could not become efficient until the crude methods of making workers produce based on the "stick" were replaced by ones based on the "carrot."

reformers are really committed to democracy or free speech. After all, many of them held positions of prominence without too much difficulty under the old regime. Dubcek lived quite happily in the Soviet Union during some of the worst years of Stalin's reign.

But it does mean they could not come to power without first dismantling those structures that had kept the rest of society in chains for so long. And once such a process had begun, it was not easily kept in check.

It allowed other groups to organise. This is what worries the Russians.

SWEEP

The internal convulsions in Czechoslovakia could give rise to a rash of working class self-activity that would sweep all the regimes of eastern Europe away.

The reaction of Russia is the same as that of the US to the threat to her dominoes in South East Asia.

The economy is not yet picking up. Before it can do so Dubcek has to accomplish two opposed sets of tasks. He has to remove the thousands of old style bureaucrats that remain, which means allowing the present "democratisation" to continue.

But he has also to begin cut-

ting wages, increasing wage differentials, closing down plants—all of which will give rise to tremendous working-class opposition if there is not a clamp down on free discussion.

In 1956 Gomulka of Poland led the reforming wing of his bureaucracy to power. He was also hailed in the western press as a "democratic socialist" hero.

He used the threat of Russian intervention to keep the movement among the workers and students "moderate" and he used, too, the threat of the workers to gain a nominal independence from the Russians. This gave him time to re-establish complete control by the bureaucracy, so that today Poland is one of the least "liberal" of the state capitalist countries.

This is what Dubcek would like to do. Although the independent workers movement has not yet developed in Czechoslovakia as far as it did in Poland in 1956 (there was a virtual insurrection in Poznan) the economic crisis seems to leave Dubcek less room to manoeuvre.

We must hope that the Czech workers will develop their own organisations, such as workers' councils, independent of all bureaucratic groups. Meanwhile our first duty is to oppose any Russian interference aimed at preventing such a development.

Czech intellectuals called 2000 Words that appeared at the end of June. This was denounced by the Russians and their supporters as a "counter-revolutionary pamphlet," as outlining "the tactics to be used in the next stage of counter-revolution . . ." (Neue Deutschland, 30.7.68).

In fact the passage which provoked this outcry called on people at all levels of Czech society to "establish committees for the defence of freedom of expression" and to hold meetings to "demand the resignation of people who have misused their power, who have harmed the public property or who have behaved dishonestly or brutally." It called for "public criticism, resolutions, demonstrations . . . strikes, and boy-

who control the central apparatus. These men had come to power not through any popular upheaval but by means of police power to destroy all other political organisations, both of workers and of old bourgeois elements, combined with threats of Russian invasion.

Within the Communist Party itself no questioning of decisions was permitted. To ensure compliance, the political police and the terror it practised was directed inside the party as well as outside.

The constant threat of terror and fear it gave rise to had its effect on those involved in the economy. The managers obeyed without question directives from above by bullying the foremen below them. They in

had no choice but when they should trade with. In the early 1960s all this changed. After 13 years of building up their industries the other countries of Eastern Europe no longer needed to import large quantities of machines and engineering products. They could make equipment of the same quality as the Czechs.

The breakdown of the cold war made it possible for them to buy plant from the west. Suddenly the Czech bureaucracy faced the classic problem of any capitalist—finding a market for its goods. The impact on the economy was immediate: in 1963, instead of economic growth there was a reduction in the national income by 3.7 per cent.

tered their physical weakness with talk about "democracy" and "freedom of speech." They demanded these in order to organise within the bureaucracy without fear of police action.

They were useful slogans for mobilising other groups in society to countermand the formal strength of their opponents.

At the key moment in the struggle against the former president, Novotny, the reformers took over newspapers, abolished censorship, and aligned themselves with a student opposition that had been developing in the universities for three years. They had no choice if they were not to allow the old guard to regroup and retain power.

This does not mean that the

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Background to the Czech crisis

OPEN LETTER

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