



Nahuel
Moreno

The Historical Context of the Hungarian Revolution



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The Historical Context of the Hungarian Revolution

The toiling masses of the entire world are taking into their hands the destiny of humankind, as their own destiny. In these few words is synthesised the entire history of the last 10 years. With two important clarifications: first, it is a growing process, constantly increasing; second, the only zones of the world where workers are on the defensive are America and Australia. The working class or leftist militant who loses this vision as a whole or does not take it into account will not be able to interpret correctly any current phenomenon.

In the world, there is currently a force on the offensive: the workers and the colonial masses. On the defensive are the imperialist, bureaucratic, and capitalist exploiters. In the historical drama that has been developing for a decade, the first character is the working class and the colonial peoples. Each act increasingly pushes the workers into the foreground.

Today there is an infallible method to understand historical phenomena: ask yourself where the revolutionary process of the masses goes through in their determined struggle to rule their or their countries destinies. Once the fact or event that interests us is thus settled, we will have advanced in a double sense, specifying not only where the offensive of the revolution goes through but also the lines of defence of the counter-revolution.

This simple method allowed us, revolutionary Marxists, to position ourselves quickly on the face of two events as diverse as the Korean War and the coups against Peronism in Argentina. On which side were the Korean masses? What were the most urgent needs of the revolution the Korean peasants and workers aspired to? There could be no doubt: the masses with their demands had sided with North Korea. It was there where imperialism, landowners, and capitalism were expropriated. South Korea was the nest of the counter-revolution that, on the defensive, underpinned by imperialism, tried to save the interests of the exploiters from the push of the masses.

In Argentina, on which side were the workers who wanted to take the destinies of the country and their own in their hands? Undoubtedly, it was not in the camp of the coup plotters where the masses or their interests were placed. The anti-Peronist "*contrerismo*" agglutinated the reaction and the vanguard of the Yankee colonisation of the country. This is why we are fighting against them alongside the Peronist workers; we reckon the masses'

attempts to take their problems and those of the country in their hands, despite their reactionary and totalitarian leadership, went through there.

This simple criterion, although essentially correct, must be completed and adjusted to each situation and to each country. This is fundamental to face the danger of capitulation to the leaderships of the masses or the revolution, which are generally traitors or opportunists.

The current situation, of extreme simplicity, differs totally from that of before the Second World War. Then, who was on the offensive was the imperialist or capitalist counter-revolution. Chiang Kai-Shek's China was a country dominated by a nefarious oligarchy, which brutally exploited the workers and peasants. However, Leon Trotsky and the revolutionaries advised defending China — first prey of the aggressive Japanese colonisation policy in Asia — from the armed attack by Japan. Since the masses were not on the offensive, they had to adopt a careful policy, to see what was defended first.

That historical era in which workers from all over the world had to think very carefully about where their lines of defence went through, wondering first of all what was more important to defend, has definitely gone for good. Now the workers consider what they have to win and, despite frauds, setbacks, and counter-marches, they win it. A simple example from Argentina, which can be applied to any country, will show us the difference between the previous and the current stage of the masses' offensive. Suppose a brutal offensive of the companies against the meatworkers. It would then be a question of defending the union — even if bureaucrats head it — and the 80-hour fortnight with guaranteed payment, which were conquests of the previous workers' offensive. But if the workers were on the offensive, those who give the bosses a headache, what would be posed is to win the extension of the guaranteed payment to 96 hours even if the work diminished and the nationalisation under workers' control of the meatworks. The leader who, in this situation of offensive for gaining new achievements, only raised the defence of the 80 hours guaranteed payment, and only that, should be insulted or interned in an asylum since he does not know how to place himself in reality.

This is what happens today in the countries located in the Soviet sphere. It is not about defending state property or the planning of the economy, that nobody attacks, but to conquer democracy and the independence of the country from the yoke of the Russian bureaucracy since it is the masses that are on the offensive.

And this is indisputable. The Algerians do not defend their independence; they conquer it. The Egyptians conquer Suez. Morocco and Tunisia achieve their independence. China conquers land for peasants, factories for the State, independence and unity for the nation. The French and English workers have posed the conquest of socialism through the workers' government more or less immediately. This revolutionary process is also reflected in the relationship between organisations and their leaderships with the large masses. The latter reject, overcome, and break with their organisations and traditional leaderships.

In this also the current situation is totally different from the one before the war when the organisations and leaders were the dominant ones. Therefore, simplifying further, we can say where there are greater initiative and independence of the masses is where the vanguard of the world revolution is.

The Soviet masses or of the nations that fall under the sphere of Soviet influence are no exception to this whole process. The Soviet workers are an important part of the world working class, and equally, they want to take into their hands their own and their countries destinies. Put another way, the process of the rise of the world revolution is also reflected in the Soviet sphere, where the masses are on the offensive and the ruling bureaucracy on the defensive. The masses want, here as well, to conquer their government, their State, and so on.

This long introduction has one goal: before considering the great Hungarian and Polish revolutions, we need to establish clearly with what lens we will look at them. Do we look at them as part of the general movement of the masses to achieve domination of their countries, or as part of the world counter-revolution? Or, asking the same thing in another

way: do the workers in the Russian sphere of influence have no need or do not want to take their destinies into their hands, and these gigantic revolutions are provoked only by small fascist groups? Is it not, else, that the masses of Eastern Europe are also on the offensive?

Let us begin by pointing out under what conditions the lives of workers from Eastern Europe and even the USSR unfold.

The Russian bureaucracy: exploiter of Eastern European nations and their workers

Lenin already warned, shortly before his death, against the deviations of Stalin and the Soviet state in relations with the nationalities that made up the USSR. Subsequently, Trotsky raised the possibility that Russia would transform during a brief historical stage, in exploiter of other countries, although not under a capitalist-imperialist form or by creating a new social form of exploitation. We clarify the latter because there were and there are those who believe the current Russia exploiter of other nations evidences the emergence of a new and permanent social form of exploitation they call “state capitalism” or “bureaucratic collectivism”.

Without reaching what these ideologues proclaim, far from it, Lenin’s warnings and Trotsky’s predictions have today become a reality. Since the end of the Second World War, Russia has become a country that exploits other nations and their workers. Taking advantage of the revolutionary rise of the masses in the postwar period that terrorised imperialism and capitalism, and the presence of the Red Army in Eastern Europe, the Russian bureaucracy negotiated with imperialism the recognition of its influence on the region. To expand its sphere of influence in the world, the bureaucracy “paid” by giving up the revolution and Stalinism was transformed from that moment on into the mainstay of the weakened and semi-ruined capitalist regime in Europe. Because of this negotiation, the “People’s Democracies” emerged in Eastern Europe, and in them, the Kremlin hierarchy established — after many “cleanings” — their national bureaucratic agencies. The secret agreements of Yalta and Potsdam make up a permanent and irrefutable proof of the historic treason of the Russian rulers.

Without forgetting the social and economic background of the Russian bureaucracy policy, the fact it must still accommodate, in disgust, the new social forms established by the great October revolution, we can say its policy of plunder in the occupied countries is formally comparable to the most execrable imperialist policy.

“In accordance with the 1944 armistice agreement, Hungary was compelled over a span of eight years to deliver as reparations to the Soviet Union \$200 million worth of commodities at 1938 prices. At prices current then, this constituted nearly \$600 million in actual values. The Hungarians were also compelled to foot the bill for the entire cost of the Soviet Army in transit and occupation. Four million tons of grain alone were expropriated by the Kremlin in the first year of the occupation to feed its troops in Hungary. (...) As in other East European countries, the Soviets introduced into Hungary their joint-stock companies. (...) This setup gave the Kremlin control over the production of Hungarian oil bauxite, coal, minerals, chemicals; power plants, machinery production, shipping, air and motor transport, automobile manufacture and agriculture.

“Moreover, the Russians “invested’ half the capital for these companies with values stolen in Hungary itself. For example, in the joint aviation company, the Kremlin’s investment consisted of Hungary’s eleven best airfields which the Soviet Army had ‘liberated’ from the Germans.” (“The basic economic factors of the Hungarian revolution”, *The Militant*, January 21, 1957, p. 3.).

To this exploitation of nation by nation another is added, the one suffered by the workers and peasants of all these countries. Everywhere the same thing happens: brutal production norms and miserable wages (something similar to the “times” of the metallurgical

factories or the piecework of the meatworks in Argentina); confiscation of crops to the peasants and a high-handed policy so they enter the agricultural collectives.

This double exploitation suffered by the workers of Russian dominated countries is reflected in the political structure of these countries: a totalitarian regime, with no democracy, controlled by a bureaucracy manufactured and directed from Moscow.

Hence the double character of the Hungarian and Polish revolutions, that is, national on the one hand, and working class on the other. This is the reason why at the beginning, given the general character of the movement (the whole nation against the foreign oppressor), the whole population took part in the struggle. But after, the working class remains the only leadership, which not only struggles against national exploitation but also against the exploitation of the native bureaucracy.

The Stalinist bureaucracy's policy is the negation of Marxism and Leninism

To the national and social exploitation, the workers in the sphere of influence of the Soviet bureaucracy are subjected to, political and cultural totalitarianism is added. In all these countries, Stalinism prevents the workers from any independent manifestation in any field: scientific, artistic, political, or national. Nobody can discuss. In 30 years of Stalinist domination, nobody recalls of any problem — from economic plans to the scientific question of whether the inheritance of flies changes with the direct transformation of genes —not being resolved “unanimously”. Everything was resolved “by absolute unanimity”, no one disagrees.

This sinister totalitarian regime has nothing to do with true Leninism, with communism. With Lenin the exact opposite happened: there was not a single major problem (from whether the revolution was made, up to the war against Poland) that was resolved unanimously. There was never unanimity. Lenin was repeatedly defeated, despite the fact that the civil war and the defence against the imperialist attack of 21 nations imposed enormous restrictions on the workers' democratic freedoms. The tendency of the Leninists was, precisely, to reach a democracy as humanity never knew. These wars prevented from giving this example to the masses of the world, but even so, the life of Bolshevism in the times of Lenin offers us a thousand examples completely opposed to the acts of the current ruling bureaucracy.

For the Leninists, the workers and peasants and their political tendencies, like the different scientific and artistic currents, should have all the resources of the State to express their opinions freely, with no restriction. Precisely the revolution was made to inaugurate the historical epoch in which the masses truly bathe their will, discussing freely, making mistakes and rectifying each other. The program of the Bolsheviks was based on absolute confidence in the working class and its future. For Leninists, the more initiative, independence, and democracy the working class had, the sooner it would reach socialism.

But the bureaucracy of the first workers' state, the employees, the sectors of the modern middle class (technicians, company managers), took advantage of the fatigue of the working class, the backwardness of Russia, the internal pressure of the peasantry (vast majority of the population), and the external pressure of imperialism, to seize the government and transform itself into a privileged exploiting caste. Since then the anti-Leninist policy of the bureaucracy (privileges for some, exploitation for workers, Great Russian chauvinism, preventing national self-determination) acquired a precise name: Stalinism. Thus, the Leninist policy (absolute initiative for the working class and to favour the interests of the majority of workers) also materialised in a name: Trotskyism.

The bureaucracy continues a clear course: the absolute distrust and opposition to the initiative and mobilisation of the masses, and to the self-determination and independence of the countries it controls. Any mobilisation of the workers means a danger to the

privileges of the bureaucrats. Therefore, they tightened the tourniquet more and more until they reached a totalitarian State that, although it did not liquidate the great economic achievements of the October Revolution (the nationalisation of land, industries, and foreign trade, total planning of the economy) it ended with the Leninist content of such conquests: free and democratic participation of the workers.

The assault by the bureaucracy against workers' democracy and national self-determination could only be crowned with success due to the retreat of the Russian and world workers' movement. In the struggle between the bureaucracy and the Russian proletariat this was knocked-out by its exhaustion and fatigue, and not by the capacity and impetus of the bureaucracy.

This situation has changed radically. A much stronger and more qualified working class than in the time of Lenin has emerged in Russia and in all of Eastern Europe. This working class has already given its first battles and we can predict it will defeat the bureaucracy in an overwhelming way, opening the way to recover workers' power, true democracy, the free initiative of the workers, self-determination. In other words, it will open the Leninist path of the revolution.

The Berlin insurrection and the first stage of the rise of the Eastern European masses

As we said, Stalin's iron dictatorship could be imposed on the Soviet or Eastern European workers, because they were crushed. But for three years now, throughout the Soviet zone, a historical event has just begun, and only begun: the Soviet workers are beginning to act, to move, to fight to improve their lot. They say to the workers of the entire world "Present!"

German prisoners freed from Vorkuta concentration camps with sympathies to the left informed the world workers' movement that in 1953 there was a fabulous strike of 300,000 slave workers in that camp against the working regime. For us, the Trotskyists, this was a clear sign the rebellion of the Soviet masses against the sinister Stalinist bureaucracy was beginning. We were the only current of the workers' movement that understood it and said so.

Soon after, there was an insurrectional strike similar to that of Vorkuta in the Karaganda concentration camp, according to reports by Japanese soldiers released. Almost immediately, the world workers' movement learned of the strikes and resistance of the Czechoslovak workers to the economic exploitation of which they are subject by the bureaucracy.

The culmination of this entire stage of rising of the Soviet masses was the insurrectional strike in East Berlin. In it, the Berlin workers went on general strike to achieve better living conditions, shaking all the scaffolding of Soviet power in that country. Only the action of the Red Army prevented the strike in East Berlin from spreading. This movement not only took an economic character but also a political one: for the withdrawal of Russian troops and democratic freedoms. All these movements were local and primarily economic.

This first stage of the rise of the Soviet masses produced fundamental changes in the structure and politics of the Soviet bureaucracy. After the death of Stalin, the "liberal wing" led by Beria-Malenkov¹ took the helm of the bureaucracy. This wing was for a policy of slight concessions to the masses to preserve the essentials of privileges. The insurrectional strike in East Berlin, with its repercussion on the Russian ruling elite, detonated the defeat of this current. Malenkov was displaced and Beria quickly shot. The new team with the axis

1 **Lavrentiy Beria** (1899–1953) was Marshal of the Soviet Union and state security administrator, chief of the Soviet security and secret police (NKVD) under Joseph Stalin during World War II, and promoted to deputy premier under Stalin from 1941. He later officially joined the Politburo in 1946.

Georgy Malenkov (1902–1988) was a close collaborator of Stalin. He briefly succeeded Stalin as leader of the Soviet Union (March–September 1953) and was Prime Minister from 1953 to 1955.

around Khrushchev meant a centrist agreement between the two conflicting tendencies: the right, authoritarian, made up by the army, and the “liberal” of Malenkov.

The meaning of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the denunciation of Stalin

After the defeat of the Berlin insurrectional strike, there was a setback in the struggle against the Soviet bureaucracy. Actually, that relative calm was, rather than a setback, a taking of breath before jumping to a new stage of uprising, with greater impetus and characterised by great national movements against oppression, exploitation, and totalitarianism.

In a short time, there was a rebirth in the mobilisation of the masses. This situation created conditions for the emergence of a new liberal wing that, by promoting Khrushchev to the fore, triumphed in the 20th Congress of the CPSU. A new stage in the rise of the Soviet masses was then open. We can say that just as in the context of the bureaucracy the death of Stalin signalled the beginning of the first stage of the revolutionary process of the masses, this Congress signalled in the same bureaucratic context the initiation of the second. The right-wing course started with the liquidation of Beria is modified given the tremendous pressure of the masses.

This pressure from the mass movement, inside and outside of Russia, is what forced the bureaucracy, which was previously the executing arm of Stalin’s policy, to throw him overboard. Here, the bureaucracy did nothing but apply the procedure so often recommended by Stalin: to look for a scapegoat for the “mistakes” that were everyone’s responsibility, and set him publicly in the pillory. After his death, Stalin was another victim, the most outstanding of his own procedures.

But he will not be the last. Khrushchev’s speech assuring the return to “revolutionary legality” and the disappearance of totalitarianism shows a change, yes, but fundamentally in the relations within the bureaucracy itself, and not with the masses. What the 20th Congress intends is that now, under the push of the masses, the bureaucracy cease to fight violently with each other, with endless purges that endanger the very domination or existence of all. It is to the bureaucracy to whom Khrushchev and the Russian state try to assure peace of mind, without this denying the obvious attempt to ingratiate themselves with the mass movement.

In his now famous speech, Khrushchev accuses Stalin of using totalitarian and dictatorial methods, of crimes, serious faults to democracy, and so on. With this, the current Russian rulers do nothing but confirm the accusations Trotskyism repeated to exhaustion for 30 years. But Khrushchev and the new ruling team remain halfway because they do not denounce the bureaucracy — including themselves — as the sole cause of Stalin’s crimes.

The Trotskyists, we were the only ones who advanced the opinion that the national and social situation within the sphere of Soviet influence must be serious, very serious, for Khrushchev to be forced to jettison Stalin himself. We noted further: the reneging of Stalin and the supposed return to Lenin announced by the bureaucracy to calm the masses, would not achieve any result because the masses would continue the revolution already begun. That’s how it has been.

The 20th Congress served, incidentally, for the reformist tendencies of the workers’ movement — from the Titoists to the Pabloite sect — to shelter hopes for a peaceful, calm, reformist way to make the political revolution against the bureaucracy. In opposition to them, we asserted the 20th Congress showed the pressure of the masses was so powerful that it announced the proximity of a total confrontation, as a whole, of the masses against the bureaucracy, which could not stop being counter-revolutionary. The facts, also in this, have proved us right.

The new rise of the Eastern European masses culminates with the Hungarian and Polish national-workers' revolutions

With the political course pursued mainly since the 20th Congress, the Soviet bureaucracy tries to delay or prevent the revolutionary thrust of the nationalities oppressed by Russia, and the thrust of the working class, making petty concessions in the manner of Tito. Stalinism begins to transform into its variation, Titoism; it promises freedom to the masses to better agree with imperialism.

The tragic error for the bureaucracy is that they never take the masses into account. In this manoeuvre, they forgot a "small detail": that Tito succeeded in agreeing with imperialism because the Yugoslav masses were in retreat, exhausted by their great revolution against the Nazis, the capitalists, and the landlords. At present, a Titoist policy finds itself in a totally different situation, with the great Soviet masses on the rise. Therefore, any attempt to loosen the controls is used by the masses to march forwards.

The second stage of the rise of the masses culminates in the Hungarian and Polish revolutions. It is the generalised explosion against national oppression, social exploitation, and political totalitarianism. While the first stage of the revolution is characterised by the immediate, local, and economic character of the movements, the second stage is characterised by the national, general, and political character of the revolution and its program. It is no longer a matter of great strikes against no less great injustices but of a whole revolutionary process, of class and national.

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions are qualitatively different from all previous anti-bureaucratic movements. These struggles, although they have now entered an impasse, will culminate with the total collapse of the reign of the Russian bureaucracy and of its national agencies. And with the victory of the masses, workers' democracy and the free initiative of the workers will be reborn.

Just one truth: imperialism supports Khrushchev

This statement may cause surprise, however, it is the truth. Who most fears the mobilisation of the Russian and Eastern European masses is imperialism. The victory of the masses of the Soviet sphere against their bureaucratic masters would mean for imperialism the end of their heavier arguments against socialism.

Imagine a country with an economy planned and democratically controlled by the working class, coupled with the most complete social, political, scientific, cultural and artistic freedom. A country without landowners, capitalists, big monopolies, and with no privileged sector. The battle-horse of Wall Street, "champion of liberties", would disappear immediately. Imperialism could no longer hide its sinister face under the angelic mask of freedom. This would be revealed as the freedom of the bosses. The Yankee masses, the socialist masses, and those who reject Stalinism in the entire world would lose the fear of the socialist revolution.

The dictatorship of the bureaucracy plays a dual role in favour of imperialism and the counter-revolution. Direct, when it crushes without mercy the workers of the countries it dominates and prevents the independent action of the sectors of the international working class it controls. Indirect, by allowing imperialism and the reaction to confuse the great masses with the tale that socialism and the sinister politics of the bureaucracy are the same thing, moving them away from the revolutionary path and making them fall into the thousand variations of bourgeois or imperialist politics.

Imperialism, contrary to what the tabloid press wants us to believe, is not, was not, nor will be with any uprising similar to Hungary's. Everything that imperialism has done in the face of the Hungarian workers' insurrection was reduced to one thing: to use it as a matter of anti-communist propaganda, but it did not help the revolution with a single rifle.

The Catholic Church did the same, that is, used the case as a matter of propaganda and nothing else: it did not support in any way the workers' insurrection.

The New York Times, semi-official organ of Yankee imperialism, on 27 October 1956, clarified the thinking of the imperialist bourgeoisie when it said: "The predominant criterion among officials, although nobody says it publicly, is that 'evolution' towards freedom in Eastern Europe is better, from every point of view, than 'revolution'." A day later, the same newspaper insists: "for the western countries the problem is how to push the libertarian and nationalist spirit in the satellite countries without inflaming in them a large-scale revolt."

On the other side of the ocean, an equally important newspaper, *Le Figaro*, warned the French bourgeoisie on 23 October: "The biggest mistake in this crisis would be to confuse Moscow with communism. (...) The Polish upheaval, far from representing a symptom of decadence, points out, on the contrary, the victory of the communist faith. Judging itself threatened by the rulers, it denounces them, rejects them and dominates them, so as not to doubt anymore in their victory. (...). In Warsaw, as in Belgrade, it is a matter of rediscovering the sources, of overcoming an obstacle, of awakening the spirit of revolt."

But what shows, and not two ways about it, that imperialism was with Khrushchev and against the Hungarian masses is the eloquent comparison of Hungary with Korea. While the Yankees helped South Korea in a matter of hours, for weeks they did not help Hungary with a single bazooka to stop the tanks, even though the borders were open for more than a week. Furthermore, the consideration of the Hungarian issue in the United Nations (UN) was delayed as much as possible, the reverse of what happened with the Egyptian problem, addressed immediately.

As if this were not enough, in a statement from news agency *United Press* published shortly after the insurrection in *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires, it read: "The US government informed Yugoslavia, almost a month ago, that the United States is a supporter of the independence of the Russian satellite countries in Eastern Europe, but it opposes the emergence of new governments hostile to Russia."

Gomulka and Nagy² against Workers' Committees and Workers' Councils within the national revolution

In both Poland and Hungary, in the development of the struggle against Russian occupation, exploitation, and totalitarianism clear manifestations of dual power emerged, a general characteristic of every country shaken by an intense revolutionary process.

In Gomulka's Poland, as in Hungary under Nagy's government, there was this situation in which there were, in fact, two governments: on the one hand the official power, on the other the power of the workers and the masses. In Poland, the Factory Committees and in Hungary the Workers' Councils were the ones that actually did as they wished at the local level. Facing them were Gomulka and Nagy who remained standing thanks to the lack of consciousness and centralisation of the workers' and people's power. The official governments, managed by the nationalist sectors of the bureaucracy and supported by important sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, were the transmission belt of the imperialist and restorationist counter-revolution.

Although the workers' power was weak due to the total lack of centralisation, since there was no relationship between the local Workers' Councils, or between the Factory Committees, it had in its favour the fact of not facing a solid national landowning and bourgeois class, but the remnants of these classes, with no real economic power. Specifically, the workers' power confronted the petty bourgeoisie and a shadow of the national bourgeoisie.

2 **Władysław Gomułka** (1905–1982) was the de facto leader of post-war Poland until 1948. He was First Secretary of Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) from 1956 to 1970.

Imre Nagy (1896–1958) was Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic on two occasions. Nagy's second term ended when his non-Soviet-backed government was brought down by Soviet invasion in the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, resulting in Nagy's execution on charges of treason two years later.

Politically, the petty bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy were represented not only by the nationalist wing of the Communist Parties but also by the Social Democratic and Peasant parties. The Catholic Church was, both in Poland and in Hungary, the representative of that shadow of the national bourgeoisie.

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions also showed, additionally, that the fundamental forces at the present time are the workers' and colonial revolution and the imperialist counter-revolution. The Hungarian revolutionaries appealed to the solidarity of the international proletariat, while the official power — Nagy-Gomulka — resorted to the support of imperialism. The latter and the Church tended to support these governments against or in front of the masses.

The example of Tito, and now of Nagy and Gomulka, have shown convincingly that when the revolutionary process in Russia takes a violent turn, imperialism will ally with the Stalinist bureaucracy, or its most important sector, against the Soviet masses.

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions have provided us important lessons about the relations of the Soviet bureaucracy with the "national" governments and the masses. In Hungary, faced with the brutal pressure of the masses and the danger they would overflow Nagy himself, adding to the fact that Nagy sought the support of imperialism, the bureaucracy felt compelled to enter by fire and sword to crush the workers' revolution. On the occasion, imperialism washed its hands and the Church called for "social peace". The Soviet Army liquidated Nagy and crushed the workers' revolution with the tacit agreement of imperialism. In Poland, there was no open action by the Russian Army, but both the bureaucracy and imperialism underpinned Gomulka before the power of the Factory Committees. In fact, both in Hungary and in Poland imperialism and the Kremlin acted together, by common agreement, against the power of the masses.

The lack of a revolutionary party

The fundamental reason the workers' power was not imposed in Poland and Hungary has been the lack of a revolutionary party. The lack of a revolutionary leadership took away centralisation, homogeneity and precise goals of the movement. In these countries the political revolution was raised, the struggle not only against Soviet oppression but also against the national bureaucracy.

The weaknesses of the world workers' movement are also due to the same reason: the absence of a strong revolutionary party. Here, the world working class understood only weakly the true character of the Hungarian and Polish revolutions. The diffuse nature of the workers' revolution facilitated the subsistence of the governments of Nagy and Gomulka, and in Hungary, it was the tremendous vacillations what made the Red Army repression possible.

It is important to point out that in the process of these revolutions all the conditions for the building of a revolutionary party were already present. The participation of Trotskyists in the development of the Hungarian revolution is not accidental, nor is the fact that the communist youths in Hungary and Poland created a new political organisation. The revolutionary process itself teaches every day the best students' and workers' groups and militants which is the revolutionary path.

Neither the communist parties nor their youth organisations could be "amended" or transformed. Any revolutionary advance had to be made despite them, with splits and ruptures looking for other channels. In both Hungary and Poland, the revolutionary party tended to emerge as an independent possibility, as a new grouping and not as the overall tendentious continuation of the communist parties.

Trotsky's analysis of the class character of the CPSU and his definition as the party of the bureaucracy proved equally valid in the Eastern European countries. Moreover, as the duality of powers developed the communist parties — hated by the masses and highly

deteriorated — were the basis of the bureaucracy's power, the political pole opposed to the workers' power.

The revolutionary parties in the region corresponding to the sphere of influence of the USSR will be built based on the program of the political revolution against the bureaucracy and its party, the communist party.

The global crisis of Stalinism

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions have not only helped to speed up the political revolution in the sphere of influence of the USSR but also to speed up the crisis of the communist parties in other countries. Although with different intensity according to the countries, the crisis of "western" Stalinism has been general. This crisis, by allowing large sections of the working class to become independent of Stalinist apparatuses, encourages new sectors to seek a revolutionary path.

The bourgeois world press has compared the program of the Hungarian and Polish revolutions with Tito's resistance to the pressure of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Indeed, the resistance to the Kremlin's dictates is a feature that likens both processes. But here the comparison ends. While Yugoslavia had to resist the pressure of the Kremlin in the face of the relative passivity of the Eastern European masses, today the Hungarian and Polish revolutions take place within the framework of the revolutionary rise in this whole region. In Yugoslavia, the conquests and their national independence had to be defended, and this encouraged joining around the national bureaucracy, acting on the defensive against the Kremlin. The Yugoslav masses displayed signs of weariness and fatigue, whereas today the situation is totally different: the offensive belongs to the masses of Eastern Europe and the Kremlin is on the defensive. The difference in situations was reflected in a fact of fundamental importance. In Yugoslavia, there was no situation of a duality of powers between the masses and the national bureaucracy, unlike what happened in Poland and, especially, in Hungary, where an open, clear, and explosive dual power was generated.

One of the distinguishing features of the Hungarian revolution has been the intervention in it of the Red Army. Unlike Stalinism previous repressions in which the executing arm was the political police, on this occasion and also in East Berlin, the executing arm of the reaction was the Red Army.

This obeys a deep logic. The most reactionary sector of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the most homogenous and rightist, are the technicians of military production and the military caste, which makes up the caste of a privileged caste. As the confrontation of the masses with the bureaucracy intensifies, the army or, better said, the caste of officers, gains a greater preponderance within the State apparatus.

But this has its counterpart. Although the officer caste is the most reactionary, the safest for the bureaucracy, the army as an institution reflects contemporary Russia: its soldiers are workers and kolkhoz farmworkers exploited by the bureaucracy while officers are the best exponent of the bureaucracy. This contradiction latent in the Russian army was outlined in East Berlin when a regiment refused to shoot. In Hungary, the fraternisation between units of the Russian army and the population was a fact.

The *Daily Mail* on 26 October reported the crews of some Soviet tanks lowered the Soviet flag and fought under "the red flag of communism". The next day an Austrian observer told *Associated Press*: "Some Russian tanks have joined the rebels". A Swedish witness told *Reuter* he had seen Russian soldiers passing to the rebels, and "the Hungarians covered them with flowers" (29 October). The cases of fraternisation were numerous enough so that the newspaper of the Hungarian trade unions *Nepeszava* declared on 28 October the right of asylum in Hungary for the Soviet soldiers who had supported the Revolution. A day later, the Revolutionary Committee of Hungarian Intellectuals thanked the Russian soldiers "who have refused to shoot our revolutionary fighters".

The momentary withdrawal of the Red Army is ultimately explained by the eagerness of the Russian High Command to use in the repression against Hungary wild troops, with no social conscience.

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions confirm the program of orthodox Trotskyism

The program developed by the Fourth International for the zone dominated by the bureaucracy and for the USSR itself is simple and revolves around two pillars: political revolution and right to self-determination of the nations dominated by the USSR.

This program was updated in the postwar period with an addition of fundamental importance for the countries occupied by the Red Army: Red Army leave so that each country can do what it wants! That the Red Army set an example by not occupying or dominating any country! This theoretical and programmatic achievement cost our movement years. At first, our European movement did not understand the counter-revolutionary role of the Red Army and left us without a policy in front of it. Later, we clarified that the right to national self-determination in Eastern Europe was through the task of eliminating the control by the Soviet army.

But within our ranks, a revisionist, pro-Stalinist current headed by Pablo had infiltrated. This current was formed by the leaders farthest away from the workers' and mass movements, who had lost all hope in our future as a movement, who were surprised by the Chinese and Yugoslav revolutions and by the measures of the Stalinist bureaucracy against imperialism and the bourgeoisie in Eastern Europe. They concluded the Stalinist bureaucracy would increasingly go to the left and it would lead the workers' revolution pushed by the masses all over the world. Specifically, they believed Stalinism was no longer counter-revolutionary.

These theoretical deviations were reflected shortly and clearly in the political practice. When the Berlin workers' insurrection against the Soviet bureaucracy took place, Pabloism produced a manifesto which did not say a word about the Red Army and from which the slogan "Out the Red Army" had been removed.

For orthodox Trotskyism, the best cadres and sections of the Fourth International rose up in outrage against such capitulation to Stalinism, and clear demarcation lines were laid out. While Pabloite revisionism had ceased to demand the withdrawal of the Red Army and believed in its self-reform, orthodox Trotskyism demanded the withdrawal of the Red Army, characterised as the main counter-revolutionary force in the countries it occupied.

The Hungarian and Polish revolutions have put things in their place. Unequivocally, the masses applied the orthodox Trotskyist program, and they died by tens of thousands fighting for the expulsion of the Red Army. Let us add that despite this historical lesson, Pabloism sticks to its guns and even now it does not say the Red Army should be expelled from Hungary since they have once again published a manifesto without mentioning this slogan.

Towards the third stage of the Eastern European revolution

As we said, the first stage of this gigantic revolutionary movement had a limited, local, and economic character. The second stage, which will possibly close with the Polish and Hungarian revolutions, had a political and national character. The third stage will open with the rise of the struggles of the working masses inside Russia itself until it gains a political and national character. That third stage will condition the development and formation of the revolutionary party, an indispensable condition for the victory of the revolution in this zone, as in any other.

The irruption of the Russian working class, the second in the world for its numerical importance and the first in revolutionary experience, will mean not only the liquidation of the sinister bureaucratic regime but the possibility of imposing socialism throughout Europe and in the short term all over the world. The Hungarian and Polish revolutions have helped and help an enormity to elevate the isolated and economic protests of the Russian workers to a more general and revolutionary level. This alone would be enough to justify and vindicate the great Hungarian revolution, at the moment placed at the vanguard of the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist revolution that shakes our time.

A national and democratic revolution supported by Workers' Committees or Councils

The Polish revolution and to a much greater extent the Hungarian revolution have been characterised by being national (against the foreign oppressor) and democratic (against political totalitarianism and social injustices) revolutions. Neither of them has shown the slightest sign of wanting to go back, towards the regime of the landlords, imperialism, and capitalism. The foundation of both revolutions has been the people as a whole, including as right wing of the movement a sector of the bureaucracy, the most nationalist. But this overall popular movement had a backbone, sustenance, and a direction that was the working class organised in Poland in the Factory Committees and in Hungary in the Revolutionary councils. Specifically, the workers' movement began a political revolution for the democratisation of the regime and for the expulsion of the bureaucracy from the government.

The Stalinist apparatus and world imperialism try to confuse as much as possible about the true character of the Hungarian and Polish revolutions, striving to show them as friends of Westerners and landlords, capitalists, and the Catholic Church. But the truth that emerges from all the concrete information that can be drawn from the tangle of comments from the world imperialist press, confirms the character of workers' revolutions, for national liberation and for the democratisation of the Polish and Hungarian regimes.

Although we may be tiresome, we are forced to contribute, against the sinister Stalinist-imperialist collusion, some conclusive documents about the actual goals of these revolutions.

The true role of the Catholic Church: defending the order constituted by bureaucratic exploitation

Imperialism and the bureaucracy have skilfully tried to make the masses of the entire world believe the Catholic Church led the Hungarian insurrection. This propaganda strengthened both sectors. Stalinism becomes strong by saying to the world left movement, which hates the Church: "Did you see who leads the Hungarian movement? It's the counter-revolution!" Imperialism can assure those who do not believe in Stalinism: "See how, after 10 years of communism, the masses take refuge in the Holy Catholic Church, execrated by the Communists."

But in this also, truth makes its way. The policy of the Church, according to its own statements, was clear: to stop the revolutionary movement, to always support the sector that dominates, to serve imperialism but taking tremendous care the workers' and popular insurrection does not progress.

The Archbishop of Kalocza calls for peace: "The Catholic Church condemns every homicide and all those who destroy", said Monsignor Josef Groez, Archbishop of Kalocza, speaking on Radio Budapest. The prelate added: "I am persuaded that the faithful will not take part in such acts, especially when there is hope of achieving, as far as possible, what everyone demands" (*AFP cable*, 26 October).

A dispatch from Vienna signed by John MacCormac appeared in *The New York Times* on 3 December, reveals that the leader of the Polish Church joined István Dobi, “Hungarian” president controlled by the Kremlin, to ask on Radio Budapest the adjournment of the general strike: “Archbishop Josef Grosz, who during the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty acted as head of the Hungarian Catholic Church spoke on radio asking Catholics to return to work.”

Radio Budapest announced on 24 October: “Josef Grosz, Archbishop of Kalocza, President of the Deanery of Bishops, has made the following statement: ‘The point of view of the Catholic Church is clear. We condemn the massacres and destructions. Therefore, I sincerely hope that our believers will not take part in such activities and will set an example by preserving calm and order’.”

Letter from Zeran factory workers in Warsaw to the Central Committee of the Party: “We fight all those who have the impression that our democratisation is a first stage in the return to bourgeois democracy. In the course of the electoral campaign we have waged an agitation in favour of the candidates we know want to build socialism, but a socialism in which one lives more freely, more democratically than today” (reproduced from *La Verité*, 27 October 1956).

Dzien [The Day] of 19 October: at the Polytechnic School, 5000 young people voted the following resolution: “All Poles express their support to the part of the government and the people who have decided to apply the principles of a true government of the people without obeying external interference. We hope the negotiations with the Soviet delegation will end with the victory of the principle of equality between different countries and of a true internationalism, which recognises the right of each nation to choose its own path towards socialism.”

Trybuna Ludu [People’s Tribune], organ of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, addressed the Hungarian government of Nagy in these terms: “In the last few days you and we, simultaneously and in solidarity, undertook the struggle for socialist democratisation in our countries, and for the equality and sovereignty in relations between States. We are familiar with the process of creating Workers’ Councils, a program of full national sovereignty, a program that calls for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and bases friendship with the Soviet Union on Leninist principles of equality. We are far from wanting to interfere in your internal affairs. We feel, however, that this program is in harmony with the interest of the people of Hungary and the entire peace camp” (*New York Times*, 29 October 1956).

Appeal by the Revolutionary Committee of Hungarian Intellectuals (29 October 1956): It thanks the Russian soldiers who have refused to shoot against the revolution and sets out the following program:

- 1) Immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungarian territory;
- 2) Immediate cancellation of all commercial agreements unfavourable to Hungary and publication in the future of all commercial agreements;
- 3) General elections and secret ballot guaranteed;
- 4) All factories and mines will be owned by the working class;
- 5) Review of all wages and production standards;
- 6) Unions must be truly representative of the workers, with elected leaders;
- 7) Management of agricultural cooperatives by private persons and not by officials;
- 8) Financial and legal compensation to farmers for the injustices suffered;
- 9) On 23 October, the anniversary of the revolution, it will be declared a National Holiday.

The Hungarian Communist Party replies to Pravda. We transcribe below an editorial published on 29 October 1956 in *Szabad Nép* [Free People], the official journal of the Hungarian Communist Party:

“In its latest issue, *Pravda* published an article by its correspondent about the events in Hungary. The article was entitled ‘The Anti-people Adventure in Hungary fails’.

“This is a mistake. What happened in Budapest was neither an adventure nor did it fail. For five days, bombs exploded and machine guns sowed death. For five days this unfortunate city suffered and shed its blood with a thousand dead. It was the ideas of true patriotism

and true democracy that animated hearts and brains, for a socialist democracy, and not those of reaction and counter-revolution. The people want freedom. The revolutionary people of Budapest want freedom. Freedom for the people, and a life without despotism and without terror, more bread and more national independence. Can this be called an anti-popular adventure?

“What has failed, and what can truly be called anti-people, has been the control of the Rákosi-Gero³ gang.

“A little later, the *Pravda* article claims the action of the people of Budapest, the insurrection, has been unleashed by the underground work of Anglo-American imperialists.

“We can calmly say that this statement by *Pravda* is an insult to the one and a half million inhabitants of Budapest. A great part of the population of Hungary attended, physically and morally, to the demonstration last Friday, and approved or sympathised with the fundamental, patriotic, and democratic principles, of the great popular action. The long, bloody and yet magnificent five-day struggle, has been unleashed by our own mistakes and crimes, among which we must point out as the first the fact we could not keep alive the sacred flame of national independence of our great ancestors.

“What does the Hungarian youth want? This is how the revolutionary youth raised their first demand, in 1848. The youth wants the independence of the nation was the answer, the first of the twelve points of Petofi.⁴ Let us speak frankly. Even today, the first question and the first answer are formulated thus: that Hungary be a free and independent country, that it live in peace and friendship on this basis with the Soviet Union. This is why we fight, and this is what the writer, journalist, engineer, worker, miner, peasant and student, all the insurgents, and the Prime Minister of the country wanted and want. We have been freed from a heavy burden the moment this demand was adopted by the government and the new leadership of the party.

“And we will add something more about this lamentable *Pravda* article. Actually, there was a fratricidal war that lasted several days and we hope it will finally end. Then it will be time to punish, to punish those who, fearing for their power and their lives, began the fight and gave orders to shoot over a helpless crowd. We will also have to punish the criminals who have escaped from prison, who have infiltrated the ranks of the revolution. But this punishment will differ much from the liquidation mentioned by *Pravda*.

“No one was able and nobody wants to liquidate the revolutionary struggle of the Hungarian people.”

Resolution of the Workers' Council of the 11th District of Budapest (12 November 1956):

“The workers representing the workers of the District factories have unanimously decided that in the interest of the socialist construction of Hungary and the future of the Hungarian people, they are ready to resume work under the following conditions:

“1. We want to emphasise that the revolutionary working class considers the factories and the lands belong to the working people;

“2. The Workers' Parliament recognises the Kadar⁵ regime as part of the negotiations, assuming that the government, to ensure its own legality, will proceed to reorganise according to the wishes of the people;

3 **Mátyás Rákosi** (1892–1971) was the leader of Hungary's Communist Party from 1945 to 1956. From 1949 to 1956, he was the de facto ruler of Hungary.

Erno Gero (1898–1980) was a Hungarian Communist Party leader and briefly in 1956 the most powerful man in Hungary as First Secretary of its ruling communist party.

4 **Sándor Petofi** (1823–1849) was a Hungarian poet and liberal revolutionary. He was one of the key figures of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. He most likely died in the Battle of Segesvár, one of the last battles of the war for independence from the Austrian Empire.

5 **János Kádár** (1912–1989) was a Hungarian communist leader, General Secretary of the Socialist Workers' Party, and Prime Minister of his country between 1956–1958, and 1961–1965.

“3. The people have placed their faith in the Workers’ Councils to ensure the wish of the people will be fulfilled; we will demand the authority of the Workers’ Councils be extended to the economic, cultural and social fields;

“4. In the interest of preserving order and restoring peace, we demand a date be set for free elections in which can participate only those parties that recognise and have always recognised the socialist order, based on the principle that the means of production belong to society;

“5. We demand the immediate release of the members of the government of Imre Nagy, who was elected by the revolution, and the freedom of all combatants;

“6. We demand the cease-fire be ordered immediately, also the early withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Budapest, since the Hungarian authorities can ensure order with the strength of the toilers; and we demand that as soon as the workers have resumed work, the Hungarian government open negotiations for the gradual and orderly withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the country’s territory, and the keeping of the people informed on the progress of the negotiations;

“7. The police force must be organised with honest workers of the factories and with army units loyal to the people.”

Manifesto of the Hungarian writers: “We warn against the erroneous concept that if the Soviet weapons had not intervened, the revolution would have liquidated the socialist conquests. We know this is not true.”

Hungarian revolutionary radios speak out

We publish below transcriptions of Hungarian radio broadcasts captured in Europe between 25 October and 8 November 1956. The full texts were published in a brochure published by the Free Europe Committee in New York:

Radio Győr, 27 October: “The Administrative Committee of the Party supports the workers’ power of the Győr-Sopron county and its leading organisation, the Provisional National Council, which includes the Workers’ Council, the Soldiers’ Council, and the Peasants Council, together with the Council of Intellectuals and the Youth Council. This has nothing to do with the counter-revolution, but with the great national demands.”

28 October: “Workers’ Councils must be formed everywhere. The task of the Workers’ Councils is to decide each issue related to the production, management, and care of the factories (...) The main task of the Councils is to keep order and discipline in the workplaces and to resume production. They must defend, with the help of all the workers, their common life and the factories (...).

Radio Rajk, 1 November: “Comrades, if the Communist Party wants to continue in its leading role it must proclaim immediately and forcefully all that the Hungarian people demand. It is up to us and the Communist Party to publicly and officially ask Russia and the friendly Communist parties for our immediate disengagement from the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Russian troops from our country... The Soviet leaders must understand they cannot change the feelings of the Hungarian people with bayonets, nor can the young Hungarians be won for Marxism-Leninism by trying to transform them into Russians.”

3 November: “Let us explain to the Russian comrades there was a time when the liberating Soviet Army reached the borders of Hungary in 1944, and at least half of the Hungarian population put their trust in the Communist Party. Let us explain with brutal frankness that, because of the conduct of the Russian occupation army, we only got one-sixth of the votes in the free election that followed.”

5 November: “Comrades: blood is spilling again in our unfortunate country. The leaders of the Soviet Union have returned to the terrorist colonial policy of Stalin and Rákosi. They have betrayed us while we were holding what appeared to be friendly negotiations with them and their tanks and weapons have begun to mass murder. Through this barbaric

attack, they make it impossible for the Communist Party to exist openly and honestly in our country. János Kádár and his reorganised Party tried to deceive us, but the fact is Russian weapons are destroying democracy and communism in Hungary (...). Those who, in any way and on behalf of any party, cooperate with the occupying colonial power are traitors not only to Hungary, but to communism, and we must change them. Comrades, the place of every honest Hungarian communist is at the barricades.”

8 November: “Do not pay attention to the promises of the traitor Kádár. Do not believe Kádár and his gang will ensure the sovereignty of Hungary at the precise moment when a foreign army is engaged in the mass murder of our unfortunate homeland... Comrades, we fight to preserve the fighting spirit of Marxism-Leninism. Let us continue fighting for the independence of the Hungarian Socialist Nation.”

Radio Pécs, 27 October: “Female and male workers of the city of Pécs! The army unit of our city agrees with the workers’ demands that were broadcast by radio. We are also children of workers, miners, peasants, and intellectuals. We also know that the economic situation of the workers has not improved.”

Radio Rákóczi, 7 November. Proclamation addressed to Russian soldiers: “Soldiers! Your State was created at the price of a bloody struggle for you to have freedom. Today is the 39th Anniversary of that Revolution. Why do you want to crush our freedom? You can see it is neither the factory owners, nor the landowners, nor the bourgeoisie who have taken up arms against you but the Hungarian people who are desperately fighting for the same rights for which you fought in 1917.”

A communist correspondent unmasks the crime

Peter Fryer, who was a correspondent in Hungary for the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker*, has published a book entitled *Hungarian Tragedy*,⁶ in which he recounts the events of the decisive 14 days of the revolution. Fryer had been sent especially by the *Daily Worker*, to whose editorial staff he belonged but when he sent his information unmasking the Russian crime against the Hungarian workers’ revolution, the newspaper confiscated the reports and the Communist Party of Great Britain expelled him.

Fryer was in Budapest when the Russians launched their treacherous attack. There he witnessed four days and four nights of continuous bombings that, according to his words, “vast areas of the city — the working-class areas above all — are virtually in ruins”. There he witnessed a heroic revolution of which he said it was “fought in fact, not by fascists or reactionaries but the common people of Hungary: workers, peasants, students and soldiers”.

The Stalinist scum claims the weapons wielded by the people arrived by parachute, sent directly from Washington. Fryer, an eyewitness, replies this is an unworthy slander that “side-steps the whole question of the attitude of the Hungarian People’s Army. The troops in Budapest, as later in the provinces, were of two minds: there were those who were neutral and there were those who were prepared to join the people and fight alongside them. The neutral ones (probably the minority) were prepared to hand over their arms to the workers and students so that they could do battle against the AVH⁷ with them. The others brought their arms with them when they joined the revolution. Furthermore, many sporting rifles were taken by the workers from the factory armouries of the Hungarian Voluntary Defence Organisation. The ‘mystery’ of how the people were armed is no mystery at all. No one has yet been able to produce a single weapon manufactured in the West.”

Fryer also describes the work of the revolutionary committees, commenting on “their striking resemblance at so many points to the soviets or councils of workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ deputies which sprang up in Russia in the 1905 revolution and again in February

⁶ Interested readers can find *Hungarian Tragedy* in the Marxist Internet Archive: www.marxistsfr.org/archive/fryer/1956/dec/index.htm. All quotes are reproduced from there.

⁷ **AVH**, State Protection Authority, was the secret police of Hungary from 1945 until 1956.

1917, these committees, a network of which now extended over the whole of Hungary, were remarkably uniform. They were at once organs of insurrection — the coming together of delegates elected by factories and universities, mine and Army units — and organs of popular self-government, which the armed people trusted. As such they enjoyed tremendous authority, and it is no exaggeration to say that until the Soviet attack of November 4 the real power in the country lay in their hands.” §