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### THE CLASS NATURE OF THE BUFFER COUNTRIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Report by M. Stein  
at the  
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## REPORT ON BUFFER COUNTRIES BY M. STEIN AT NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

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The problem of Eastern Europe we are discussing is really not a new one. It has been with us for several years, ever since the advancing armies some six years ago entered foreign soil in pursuit of the defeated Germans and began to occupy one country after another. Soviet control over Eastern Europe was a recognized fact by the end of 1944, following the Big Three agreements at Yalta and the armistice agreements with Bulgaria, Finland and Hungary.

The evolution of the countries under Soviet control, to which we have been referring as the "buffer" countries, has been watched carefully by the world Trotskyist movement. Every stage in their evolution has been carefully analyzed in articles and documents. It was examined by the Second World Congress of the Fourth International in April 1948, and the views of the world Trotskyist movement at the time were incorporated in the resolution on the USSR and Stalinism. This document has been the common platform of all Trotskyists who hold the position that the Soviet Union is a degenerated workers' state. Only one tendency in the international Trotskyist movement -- the Revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain -- differed at that time on this question. They said even then -- two years ago -- that the changes in Eastern Europe, brought about by the Stalinist bureaucracy, had in effect established workers states there. But no one took these views very seriously. This tendency, represented by Jock Haston and his friends, had long ago made a name for itself by its empiricism, political imbalance, and a leaning for a solution of the social problems on forces outside the revolutionary movement, and hostile to it.

When the discussion of Eastern Europe was resumed a year later at the Seventh Plenum of the International Executive Committee, the views in the world movement remained essentially the same so far as the buffer countries themselves were concerned. The differences which emerged at the Seventh Plenum concerned only Yugoslavia.

Some comrades at the Plenum -- and many more today -- considered it was a mistake to lump Yugoslavia together with the rest of the buffer countries in analyzing this question. These comrades felt that while the resolution was correct in speaking of a tendency toward the structural assimilation of the buffer countries dominated by the Soviet bureaucracy, Yugoslavia is in a distinct category; that, because of the historic origin of the Yugoslav regime, which came into power as a consequence of a civil war and revolution and because of the subsequent economic and social transformation of the country culminating in the break which freed it from the Kremlin's special forms of restraint and exploitation, Yugoslavia can be considered a workers state, even though with bureaucratic deformations.

This, briefly, is the background of the present discussion. It was originally even called the discussion over Yugoslavia. But by the time this so-called Yugoslav discussion was taken up by us, it became evident that there was no common position within the Political Committee on the totality of the problem, and not merely on Yugoslavia alone. Let me add that in Europe, too, the discussion has

since gone beyond the question of Yugoslavia. There too, judging from the discussion bulletins, the entire previous analysis of the buffer countries has now been brought up for reexamination by some comrades.

For the purposes of my opening presentation I will deal with the buffer countries under Kremlin's control and leave Yugoslavia aside for the moment. Because to lump them together can only confuse the issue, theoretically as well as practically. I shall state my point of view on Yugoslavia in the summary and I believe that following the Plenum we will have to enter into a more thorough discussion of Yugoslavia.

Our preliminary discussions in the Political Committee have revealed two positions: (1) that of the majority of the Political Committee which bases itself in general on the analysis and conclusions of the World Congress theses and the IEC resolution; (2) that of the minority which considers that the buffer countries have ceased to be capitalist states and must now be considered as workers states (deformed or degenerated).

These differences have not as yet been spelled out in different tactical lines. This means that we can afford a leisurely discussion. We are under no pressure for immediate conclusions which would affect our daily activity. But in discussing and studying this problem, we ought to bear in mind that involved here is not merely a question of what label to pin on one or another country. Class definitions in the Marxist movement have a logic of their own and will in time lead to different conclusions in perspectives and tactics.

Noteworthy also is the fact that even though there seems to be general agreement among us on the facts concerning the evolution of the buffer countries and on the concrete situation prevailing in them at present, we, nevertheless, disagree on the method of interpreting these facts. In other words, a sort of difference over methodology is involved here. A difference in appraising what is and what is not a workers state.

Let us therefore start with this question of: What are the criteria for a workers state? In Marxist theory and in historical experience, we know of only one way in which a workers state can come into existence -- by way of the proletarian revolution. That is, the proletariat, through its independent mass action and guided by the revolutionary party, is the only force in modern society able to abolish capitalist rule and construct a workers state. We know also, from theory, and one might add a century of Marxist practice, that the bourgeois state cannot be reformed into a workers state, but it and all its institutions must be abolished. And only then, can it be replaced by a workers state and its specific ruling organs. Now these propositions have been ABC in the Marxist movement. They have been defended by the Marxists throughout the years against the Blanquists, against the Social Democratic opportunists and against the Stalinists.

Purely economic criteria for establishing the existence or non-existence of the workers state have figured in our movement only in

discussing the degeneration of a workers state previously established by a proletarian revolution. In discussing the Soviet Union and its degeneration, Comrade Trotsky on several occasions ridiculed the petty-bourgeois snobs who viewed the Soviet Union, dominated by the monstrous bureaucratic caste; who compared it with the norm of a workers state described by Marx and Lenin, and as it emerged out of the October Revolution, and then shied away from reality because it did not measure up to the norm. But in defending his position that the Soviet Union remains a workers state so long as its economic foundations established by the October Revolution remain, even though the working class there had been expropriated politically by a privileged bureaucracy, Comrade Trotsky never for a moment assumed that the working class can also be expropriated politically in the task of accomplishing the revolution and creating a workers state. In other words, Trotsky never assumed that there can be such a monstrosity as a "bureaucratic revolution." And when Shachtman tried to impute to Comrade Trotsky the idea that a bureaucratic revolution was possible, the Old Man angrily rebuked Shachtman for such a monstrous distortion of his views. He said that "this charge is not only incorrect but disloyal." "Disloyal" was one of the sharpest words in the Old Man's vocabulary. He couldn't have rejected this proposition more emphatically.

This exchange between Shachtman and the Old Man took place in 1939 over the incorporation of Eastern Poland into the USSR and the problems raised at the time by the Soviet-Finnish war and the occupation of the Baltic countries. Comrade Trotsky, you will recall, watched these developments very carefully and made some predictions as well as analyzing the events. He summed up the role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the territories it incorporated into the Soviet Union in the following two propositions: (1) The Kremlin bureaucracy would be forced to destroy capitalism in the territories it incorporates into the Soviet Union, because it cannot and will not share its power and privileges with the bourgeoisie; (2) in order to destroy capitalism in the regions it incorporates into the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy must give an impulse to a revolution, limited though it may be. It must call the masses into action. As he wrote at that time ". . . without such an appeal even if worded with extreme caution it is impossible to constitute a regime." The meaning is quite clear. Even in cases of direct incorporation of new territories into the USSR, the bureaucracy would one way or another be compelled to bring the proletariat on the scene in order to effect the transformation. Without this "it is impossible to constitute a new regime."

It is essential, before we go any further, to try to understand fully the Old Man's reasoning in these propositions. And to understand his reasoning, one must first understand the dynamics of social revolution. I hope the comrades will go back to our classics and read especially Trotsky's monumental work on the history of the Russian Revolution to get a feeling of what a social revolution is.

A social revolution means the transfer of state power from the hands of one class into the hands of another class. In the case of the proletarian revolution it means, in the first instance, a socialist program which attracts the workers, which convinces them, a

party which organizes and mobilizes them as a class. It means the smashing of the old state and all its institutions. It means the setting up of the new state based on workers' councils as the organs of the new power.

No mistake is possible in establishing the existence of a workers state once the revolution has taken place. Nobody made that mistake after the October 1917 revolution. To recognize the existence of a workers state at that time it was not necessary to study the statistics on nationalizations or whether planning had been established or if there was a monopoly of foreign trade. Before anything was nationalized, everybody knew there was a workers state in Russia. And above all the Russian proletariat knew it; it knew it was the master of the house in Russia; it was imbued with socialist consciousness; it was led by a confident party which the workers trusted. No one doubted that the socialization of industry would follow as a matter of course.

In brief, the most important element in the social revolution is the consciousness and self-action of the working class as expressed in the policy of its vanguard party.

Even the Bonapartist Kremlin bureaucracy was compelled to appeal to the toilers in Eastern Poland and the Baltic countries in 1939 because without such an appeal it could not constitute a new regime in these territories which it incorporated in the USSR. It had to resort to the mobilization of the masses because otherwise it could not get the men and women to replace the old regime.

Even the bureaucracy when it acquired new territories was forced to bring the working class on the arena for a limited period in order to be able to select the personnel even for its type of police regime.

The Kremlin bureaucracy faced an entirely different situation in the final stages of the war -- from 1943 to 1945. The occupation of new territories by the Soviet armies coincided with a widespread and deep-going revolutionary upsurge of the masses. This upsurge wasn't confined to this or that country. It was European in scope and even world-wide. At this stage the Stalinist bureaucracy, which fears the revolutionary action of the masses more than anything else, made a common front with the imperialists for the suppression of all revolutionary manifestations. This is all recent history and there is no need to recount here in detail the measures by which the revolutionary masses were thrown back and defeated. Nobody among us had any doubts on this score at the time.

The bureaucracy was not able to afford even a limited appeal to the masses in order to establish a different regime. In the territories the Kremlin bureaucracy annexed or re-incorporated into the Soviet Union, it no longer resorted to an appeal to the masses. The resort instead was to a total depopulation of these territories. In the Karelian territory that was annexed, for example, they expelled 400,000 across the border into Finland. In the annexed strip of Eastern Prussia, they expelled every last German and brought in some 500,000 Russians from White Russia and other areas. One and

a half million Rumanians were expelled from Bessarabia and Boukovina. They expelled 4,000,000 Poles from the territory east of the Curzon line into Western Poland. And Poland is supposed to be the ally of Russia.

What we see here, in the absence of even a limited appeal to the masses such as was witnessed in 1939, is a process of the most brutal and complete Russification. When incorporation or annexation of territories into the Soviet Union takes place, there is no difficulty in recognizing the fact. Such territories become indistinguishable from the rest of the Soviet Union. They have one and the same productive relations, one and the same GPU, one and the same state, one and the same army, etc. There is, of course, a change in population. The whole weight of the Soviet bureaucracy, which isn't insignificant as we all know, is brought to bear on a limited area in order to achieve the results.

We have witnessed an entirely different process on the scale of virtually half of Europe -- that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and Eastern Germany. This process is defined in the documents of the world movement as a tendency to "structural assimilation." First there came the alliance of the Soviet bureaucracy with the remnants of the native bourgeoisies for the strangulation of the revolutionary mass upsurge and for the reconstitution of bourgeois regimes in these countries subservient to the Kremlin. And then, as the conflict between the Soviet Union and U.S. imperialism began to unfold and found its expression in the countries within the Soviet orbit, the Stalinist bureaucracy found itself obliged to resort to a series of economic reforms and purges of the state institutions in order to keep its stranglehold on these countries.

This process is still going on. The question is, what will be its end results? Barring any sudden changes which can come about if war breaks out or if one or another country tears itself out of the Stalinist orbit, the process would end, as the Resolution of the IEC points out, in the organic linking of these countries with the Soviet Union. In that case their relations with the Soviet Union would be no different than, for example, those of the Baltic countries. That is the only outcome we can envisage as far as the end of the road of structural assimilation is concerned. I shall deal later with some of the problems the bureaucracy faces before it reaches the end of this road.

Obviously we cannot draw the conclusion that the structural assimilation has already taken place because that's not so. They are moving in that direction. But they haven't as yet been assimilated into the Soviet Union. The IEC Resolution singles out six, seven, or eight important fundamental differences between the Soviet Union and these countries. They differ in their economies, in their social relations, in the political regimes, and so on. No, the process hasn't been completed and the Soviet bureaucracy knows only too well that it has many important hurdles to overcome before it can consider these countries as component parts of the Soviet Union.

Is it the conclusion of the minority that these countries should be considered workers states in their own right? For example, that it is correct today to consider Czechoslovakia as the Czechoslovak degenerated workers state; Hungary as the Hungarian degenerated workers state; and the same for Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, or Eastern Germany? If that is the case, the comrades of the minority will have to explain to us how all these workers states came about, by what process. And, to begin with, they will have to try to square their conclusions with the basic Marxist concepts of social revolution.

I have been trying to find out exactly what it is that the minority wants us to do, and I turned to Comrade Hansen for an explanation. He devotes a good part of his article to attacking the idea that economic planning is a criterion for a workers state. He is, I admit, very forceful in his criticism. By the time he is through with the point on economic planning there is little left of it but shreds. But what bearing does this have on the nature of the buffer zone countries?

If we were dealing here with workers states, established by proletarian revolution, and some of us refused to recognize them as such because they are too small or too backward to engage in real planning, then such an argument would be completely in place. One need only point out that there wasn't any real planning in Russia for a number of years after the October Revolution. We all know this. But the question of planning has been raised in an entirely different connection. It was raised by Comrade Germain, for example, as one of the guide posts on the road toward structural assimilation of these economies with the Soviet Union and not at all as a criterion for a workers state established by revolution. There is a profound difference between proletarian revolution and the process we are witnessing in the buffer countries. But Comrade Hansen refers to the two interchangeably as if they were one and the same thing.

Let me quote from his article to illustrate my point:

"For socialist planning you do need a minimum material base. But it seems to me that Comrade Germain should have added for the benefit of revolutionary-minded workers in Rumania, Luxemburg and Paraguay that they can still make a good start toward the goal of socialist planning by conquering power and setting up their own government. That would give them a workers' state, and while this is a long way from socialism, still it is a most essential and most decisive step in making a start."

Then comes the punch line:

"Comrade Germain could not do this, however, without running up against the criterion laid down in the resolution that the qualitative point of change between a capitalist state and a workers state is the institution of 'real planning' which is possible only on a minimum material basis which neither Rumania, Luxemburg, nor Paraguay has available."

Comrade Germain knows the ABC's of Marxism and I also know that if a revolution made by the working class takes place in any country

in the world he would surely recognize such a country as a workers state, planning or no planning.

It seems to me that it is Comrade Hansen and not Germain who needs enlightenment -- not on planning -- but on the difference between a workers state arising from a proletarian revolution and this process of structural assimilation, or incorporation, of countries which the Stalinist bureaucracy is now trying to carry through as a substitute for proletarian revolution. As a matter of fact, Comrade Germain is quite explicit on this point in his article. He says, "Actually, Lenin often insisted on the fact, and Leninists have always recognized, that the victory of the socialist revolution (that is establishment of the Soviet power) is itself the decisive criterion proving its own existence. The state resulting from such a revolution is 'proletarian' to all intents and purposes, even if the economic relations have not yet undergone any immediate overturn." (International Information Bulletin, January 1950, page 14.)

The minority will be wasting its shots if it continues to fire away at planning as a criterion for a workers state; or at dependence on the world market; or at the capitalist nature of agriculture in the buffer countries, and so on. We readily grant all these points and even go a step further and say that the immediate nationalization of industry is not necessarily a criterion for a workers state either -- provided the regime in the country is that of workers' power arising from a proletarian revolution.

But even from a cursory knowledge of the various stages in the evolution of the buffer countries since the end of the war, it is clear that the existing social relations in these countries did not result from a proletarian revolution. What we witnessed instead was the Stalinist strangulation of the revolution, the establishment not of workers' power, but of bourgeois states.

The nationalizations and the purges of the capitalist elements which followed at the next stage have been purely bureaucratic police measures. But while a bureaucracy is capable of degenerating and undermining a revolution, it is not capable of substituting itself for the proletariat and making the revolution. The Kremlin bureaucracy knows this very well. This is why its objective in the buffer countries can only be their total incorporation or assimilation into the Soviet Union so that every phase of life in these countries becomes no different from the Soviet Union. It is in this connection, in connection with assimilation, that we speak of the still formidable differences in the existing political, social and economic relations inside the buffer countries as compared to the Soviet Union. These differences should not be dismissed. On the contrary, we must realize that all of Stalin's elaborate schemes may well blow up sky high in his attempts to resolve precisely these differences. This is not merely a hypothesis but verifiable fact. We have already seen this happen both in the case of Yugoslavia and Finland. Yugoslavia, because of the revolutionary origin of the regime, resting on the popular masses, simply refused to be assimilated and has embarked on an independent course. In Yugoslavia it was the revolutionary proletariat which proved too tough to crack. In Finland, on the contrary, it was the bourgeoisie.



I said at the beginning that we all seem to be in general agreement on the facts concerning the evolution of the buffer countries. It is more accurate to say that we had been in agreement on the facts until recently. But now that the minority is seeking to justify its position on the buffer countries, it is compelled to revise the facts to bring them somewhat closer into harmony with what it conceives to be the end result of the developments there, that is, workers states. The comrades of the minority are faced with a hurdle they cannot surmount: their "workers states" have come into existence not by means of proletarian revolution but through bureaucratic counter-revolution. How square this with our Marxist concepts of the proletarian revolution?

They are fully aware, for example, that the origin of the Soviet Union in the October Revolution is an inseparable part of our definition of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state. They have tried to overcome this difficulty in two ways, both equally dangerous. On the one hand, some of them try to minimize the importance of origin. This is very dangerous because such a course can only lead them into the trap of "bureaucratic revolution." That would be the unavoidable conclusion of such an argument pursued to its logical end.

Some comrades of the minority must surely be aware of this trap. So they have tried to provide themselves with an escape hatch. They have suddenly discovered that we did in effect have a proletarian revolution of sorts in the buffer countries. This revolution apparently escaped even the minority up to the present. But once they embraced the workers state concept for the buffer countries, they had, so to speak, cataracts removed from their eyes and can now peer into the past and see clearly what none noticed before. Let us examine these new claims and see if they are real or only a mirage.

I must refer once again to Comrade Hansen's article. He bases himself in his argument on quotations from Comrade Trotsky's writing during 1939-40. One of these is from an article written for the St. Louis Post Dispatch in January 1940. It reads as follows:

"In order to include Finland in the framework of the USSR -- and such is now the obvious aim of the Kremlin -- it is necessary to Sovietize her, i.e., carry through an expropriation of the higher layer of the landowners and capitalists. To accomplish such a revolution in the relations of property is impossible without a civil war. The Kremlin will do everything in order to attract to its side the Finnish industrial workers and the lower stratum of the farmers. Once the Moscow oligarchy finds itself compelled to play with the fire of war or revolution, it will try, at least to warm its hands. It will undoubtedly achieve certain successes in this way." (Internal Bulletin, Vol. XII, No. 2, page 25.)

Comrade Hansen then goes on to explain how the bureaucracy has been warming its hands at the fires of war or revolution in the buffer countries. The trouble is, it is necessary to do violence to the facts to make them fit this quotation. This prognosis of the Old Man's did not, as everyone knows, come to pass in Finland either in 1940 or in the postwar period. In 1940 the Kremlin was frustrated by

the toughness of Finland and by Hitler's impatience for a quick settlement. At the end of the war it was not merely Finland but more than half of Europe which was in the grip of the Kremlin. Actually, the whole of Europe was in a revolutionary ferment. While the Kremlin could afford to warm its hands where a limited, localized revolutionary fire was concerned, it knew well enough that it would only burn its hands in the case of a general European-wide revolutionary conflagration. This is why, from the beginning, far from warming its hands at the fires of revolution, the bureaucracy became the extinguisher of revolutionary fires everywhere in Europe. This is a fact nobody can successfully deny.

Instead of warming its hands in revolutionary fires, the Kremlin set itself entirely different objectives -- to crush revolutions and to pillage the countries entered by the Soviet armies. What we actually witnessed was outright and open counter-revolution by the Kremlin in all the buffer countries. The comrades of the minority say, we all know that. Naturally, we don't minimize the counter-revolutionary role of the Kremlin. The Stalinists suppressed the workers; they wiped out all of the incipient organs of dual power, the workers' committees. They shot militant workers who on their own initiative took over factories; they returned these factories to the owners. Sure, we know all of that. But, what happened nevertheless, especially since 1948? True, this quotation of Trotsky's did not apply in the first three years following the war, but doesn't it apply now? Hasn't the Kremlin been warming its hands at the fire of revolution since 1948? Or to put it more charitably, hasn't it been carrying on a "special type" of civil war since then?

Such argumentation may appear formally correct. But as Marxists we are duty bound to analyze the stages of Kremlin policy in buffer countries in their interrelationship. At least this is what Comrade Trotsky always taught us and this is how he always analyzed the Soviet Union in its degeneration. The workers state established by the October Revolution could not escape the barbarism and the backwardness inherited from Czarism. This barbarism and backwardness became incarnated in the bureaucracy. But the Bonapartist bureaucracy is unable to wrench itself free from the revolutionary origin of the regime. This is the basic contradiction of the degenerated workers state and in it is to be found the explanation for the Old Man's insistence on the origin of the Soviet Union every time he defined its social nature. This insistence on origin is not an abstraction, not something secondary and certainly does not flow from a mere sentimental attachment to the great October Revolution. It is this contradiction that has determined, as it still does, the relationship of living forces in the USSR.

The various stages in the evolution of the buffer countries must be examined in their interrelationship. What is the origin of these so-called workers states, if you want to call them that? Their origin is in counter-revolution, isn't it? Who has forgotten that the advancing Soviet armies suppressed the insurgent masses and crushed the elements of dual power created by them, along with all manifestations of independent working class action? The Soviet bureaucracy made its alliance with the remnants of the native bourgeoisie, on occasion even with the fascist elements. National unity and the

fatherland front -- that was the program and the banner around which the political crystallization and the organization of regimes took place in those countries under Stalinism. National unity provided the Kremlin with a good cover for its pillage and subjugation. Under this cover it could stifle resistance to the heavy reparations it imposed. Under this cover it was able to dismantle "German-owned" plants and remove them to the USSR. It seized the stocks in industry and banks the Germans had themselves plundered. It established joint-ownership corporations for the exploitation of these countries. It took away grain, livestock, and other goods by the hundreds and thousands of carloads. It made these countries pay for the upkeep of the occupying forces, as some are still doing to this day.

The respective bourgeoisies tolerated this pillage because they had little choice. They could not challenge the Kremlin without their big uncle in Washington who wasn't ready as yet for a showdown. The first partial test came with the Marshall Plan. The governments of both Poland and Czechoslovakia decided to join the Marshall Plan, and it is safe to say that every government in the buffer zone would have quickly followed suit. This was a warning signal to the bureaucracy of how easily the buffer countries could slip out of its control. Moscow became panicky. It was then that the measures against the various native bourgeoisies were undertaken in earnest. Nationalizations were stepped up. It was then that a number of purges was undertaken. The weight of American dollars proved unequal in the contest as against the Kremlin's military might and pressure. Stalin won this round.

But, what is the social condition of these countries today, after the purges and nationalizations of 1948? The minority comrades offer their "sociological definitions." Our answer is that what happened there, following this Marshall Plan experience, hasn't at all led to a social overturn in these countries. A purge of individual capitalist politicians or groups from top government posts, changes the ruling personnel but not the bourgeois character of a state. Removal of individual capitalists or groups from commanding posts in industry is important to the individuals involved but does not change decisively the social relationships in the country. But, where then is the bourgeoisie? It continues to exist in every pore of society in the buffer countries.

We must not be hypnotized by statistics on nationalizations. Bare figures can never give us the correct answer to the existing relationships of social forces in society. We can come much closer to a correct answer if we examine the actual position of the class forces in daily life. And such an examination will disclose, for example, that the bourgeoisie remains in industry as managers of nationalized plants. I had occasion to talk recently with a Rumanian who left that country shortly after the bulk of nationalization had taken place. I asked him what was the procedure followed in taking over the factories. It was very simple, he said. A couple of government functionaries came to the owner and told him that the enterprise no longer belongs to him but that if he wanted to sign up in the Communist Party he could remain as the manager. In most cases the owners, of course, signed up in the Communist Party.

This story is quite credible, and I dare say it is typical of practically all of the buffer countries. It stands to reason that the constitution of a new regime to run all economic and political and cultural institutions, including individual plants, scores of thousands of men and women are required. Where did they all come from? In some of these countries even the Stalinist parties themselves have hardly existed. The Hungarian Communist Party, for example, had the grand total of 110 members when the Soviet army occupied the country. This is testified to by the Yugoslavs, who are surely in a position to know. The situation in the other countries approximated that of Hungary.

Only a proletarian revolution could have brought forward the staff required for a new regime. Lacking such forces, Stalin had to draw on the native bourgeoisies. They exist in all the departments of government as we are so often reminded when another batch of them jumps over the fence. And these include high diplomatic personnel from all these countries. They desert in droves when sent on diplomatic missions to the West. And bear in mind that when the Stalinists send somebody abroad they try at least to make sure to send those who are the most reliable. Yet even out of this closely-sifted selection we see such a high percentage of bourgeois. This surely provides a sort of gauge for measuring of the living relationship of forces. As for agriculture, the relations there remain, of course, bourgeois, owned and operated privately, even though with some government restrictions. These countries with the sole exception of Czechoslovakia are, as we all know, heavily agricultural, even Poland about 50%, Bulgaria 80%, Hungary about 70%.

The bourgeoisie and its representatives permeate the educational system of these countries; they are deep in the police force, the staffs of the army, the clergy, which now takes loyalty oaths, with mental reservations, for double their former salaries. All these elements are simply biding their time, waiting for their chance and in the meantime they are camouflaged, if you please, as the best Kremlin patriots.

It is by no means excluded that numerically the relationship of class forces within these countries has in recent days shifted to an extent even more in favor of the bourgeoisie. The Kremlin overlords have unquestionably become more and more hated by ever larger sections of the population, including the working class. What can the workers now get from or see in the nationalizations, except another form of Russian oppression. Together with nationalizations comes the job freeze, longer hours, the piecework system, a continued scarcity of necessities and consumer goods, etc. In any case, we may be sure that a prolonged dreary struggle still lies ahead and the true relationship of class forces in these countries will first really be revealed in the course of such a struggle.

Those who believe that a real social transformation has already taken place in the buffer countries and that they have become workers states do not understand the meaning of the "special type" of civil war to which they are now making so many references. Actually, this is to have more faith in the possibility of effecting bureaucratically a social transformation than does the bureaucracy itself.

Let us take some instances of the "special type" of civil war of which the bureaucracy is capable to see what it really is like. Let us, for example, take a good look at those territories that were actually absorbed in the Soviet Union. In each of those cases whole populations were uprooted and expelled across the borders or exiled into Siberia, as happened in the Baltic Countries. It is not for nothing that we have so often argued in the past that the bureaucratic method, the bureaucratic purges, not only cannot produce socialist results, but that their cost in human lives is extreme.

We have a classic example of how vast is such cost when a bureaucratic liquidation of classes is attempted. We saw this in the Soviet Union itself in 1929-33 when the Kulaks were first liquidated as a class. The bureaucratic struggle against this single layer of the population twelve years after the October Revolution cost millions upon millions of lives. And it is quite understandable.

Revolutions are fought out not only in the streets. They are first fought out in the factories, in the schools, in the offices, in the meeting halls, by oral and written arguments. Masses become convinced and are drawn into the struggle, living an intense political life. A revolution transforms the whole way of thinking, the social consciousness of peoples and classes and groups in society. Purges on the contrary only make the population more hostile, requiring in turn more purges. Everybody knows that. We hardly have to argue this point among ourselves. But knowing this we ought also to apply this knowledge to the events transpiring in the buffer countries. They are still in their initial phases. If and when Stalin ever gets a chance to assimilate these countries, then we will see purges there on a scale at least comparable with, if not more horrible, than Stalin's operations against the Kulaks.

The reason Stalin is proceeding today in such slow and easy stages is not alone for fear of Washington. Personally, I think that aspect is quite secondary. Stalin's primary fear is that of a general explosion in these countries which would shake off the tenuous hold the bureaucracy has on them.

Yugoslavia's break with the Kremlin offers us a good example of the sentiments of the population toward the Kremlin. Yugoslavia is, of course, different in every other important respect from the buffer countries. Nevertheless, it is instructive that Stalin, with all his vast resources, was not able to mobilize among the Yugoslavs more than a corporal's guard against Tito. If you read the literature of the Yugoslavs you will find how throughout the war, and following it, the Yugoslav Communist Party kept assiduously preaching love for the Soviet "socialist fatherland" and, in the first instance, for Stalin. Stalin's writings were used as the chief textbooks in the education of the Yugoslav cadres. But despite all this adulation of Stalin and the Soviet Union, there could not be found in the country any sizable group that would favor Stalin in the split. Undoubtedly one of the reasons is that the predatory nature of the Kremlin bureaucracy had revealed itself quite fully in life, belying and nullifying the high-pressure propaganda. In the case of Yugoslavia, the revolutionary origin of the regime created the conditions for a clean break with the Kremlin in a leftward direction. In Yugoslavia there was no bourgeoisie strong enough to benefit from the mass hostility to the Kremlin. It had been defeated during the civil

war and the revolution. The state and all its institutions found themselves in the hands of new cadres forged in revolution, who had a stake in defending the revolutionary gains. It is these cadres which gave organized expression to the revolt against Moscow domination and made its success possible to date.

The very same causes which provoked the break between Yugoslavia and the Kremlin exist in the other buffer countries to an even higher degree. They have been squeezed much harder by the Kremlin than Yugoslavia ever was. We have every reason to assume that East European populations are just as ready for a break with Moscow as the Yugoslavs proved to be. What is lacking for such a break is, of course, organization and leadership. But if and when any of the buffer countries does break out of the Kremlin's grip, it is not at all certain in what direction it would then go -- because the relation between the classes hasn't been resolved in the buffer countries as it was in Yugoslavia. As of the present, the advantages would be heavily on the bourgeoisie's side. For the proletariat to gain the upper hand, it would have to fight hard and long for it.

The existing relation of class forces is what accounts for the twofold character of the purges in the buffer countries. They are directed not alone against bourgeois elements who are biding their time and waiting for a more favorable international conjuncture, but also against the native Stalinists who have any sort of independent base among the workers and who might become likely candidates for leaders in a movement in a revolutionary direction against Kremlin exploitation.

Let me repeat, to compare Stalin's course in the buffer countries with his course in Eastern Poland and the Baltic countries in 1940 is to distort and misinterpret the true picture of developments. In 1940 Stalin was compelled to give an impulse to the revolutionary action of the masses in the territories incorporated into the Soviet Union in order to eliminate the bourgeoisie. Once rid of the bourgeoisie he could turn against the revolutionary workers and establish the domination of the bureaucracy,

In the buffer countries, just the reverse happened. Here it was the working class which had to be dealt with first and Stalin made his alliance with the bourgeoisie. This alliance lasted several years, permitting the Kremlin to pursue unhampered its plunder and exploitation of these countries. The result was the demoralization of the proletariat and the rehabilitation of the bourgeoisie, until the Marshall Plan imposed a new course on the Kremlin. A wave of purges followed. Nationalization was stepped up. All classes in the population of the buffer countries have become alienated and repressed in turn. But what must be emphasized in this connection is that nowhere and at no time has there been a decisive showdown between the classes.

The whole course of the Bonapartist Kremlin bureaucracy in the buffer countries has been one to prevent what it fears the most; namely, such a showdown between the classes. The bureaucracy could not survive it, and knows it. It is hated by the bourgeoisie as well as the proletarian masses. In advance of this decisive

showdown we cannot possibly draw the conclusion that a social revolution had taken place in these countries.

The simplified approach which reduces itself in essence to the proposition: nationalization equals workers state, can only disorient our movement. It is a caricature of Marxism. It substitutes bureaucratic nationalization decrees for a real analysis of the living class forces and their relative position in society. Such an approach cannot conceivably serve us either as a guide to understanding the events transpiring in the buffer countries or as an aid in shaping our policy toward them. Nationalization of industry, important as it is, can be considered as only one field in which the bourgeoisie has been compelled to surrender its decisive positions. But the bourgeoisie still has, as I mentioned earlier, considerable strength in society. Not the least of these is the fact that the agricultural relations remain capitalist, and that the bourgeoisie permeates all the institutions of the state, nationalized industry included.

In this connection let me cite from Comrade Trotsky's writings to illustrate the contrast in the method he used in arriving at conclusions about the social nature of a regime, as against the schematic approach employed by the minority.

My quotation comes from his writings six months prior to Stalin's campaign to liquidate the Kulak as a class. This was, as we all know, a very critical period. Here is what Trotsky wrote under the date of May 1, 1929, assessing the internal class relations within the Soviet Union: "Weak as our native bourgeoisie is, it is conscious, and for good reason, that it is a section of the world bourgeoisie and that it constitutes the transmission mechanism of world imperialism. But even the internal base of the bourgeoisie is far from negligible. To the extent that the rural economy develops on the basis of the individual market, it must unavoidably produce a numerous rural petty-bourgeoisie. The mouzhik who is enriching himself or the mouzhik who is only trying to enrich himself but runs up against the Soviet legislative barriers, is the natural agent of Bonapartist tendencies. This has been demonstrated by the whole evolution of modern history. This has been once more verified by the experience of the Soviet Republic. Such are the social origins of the elements of dual power, which characterize the second chapter of the October Revolution following Lenin's death" (La Revolution Defiguree, Paris, 1929, p. 11).

Comrade Trotsky, it will be noted, speaks of the Soviet regime in that period as a regime of dual power. He reached his conclusions not from any statistics on nationalizations but from his appraisal of the then existing relations between living class forces, not the least important of whom is the peasantry. (Some minority comrades have tried to brush aside the significance of the fact that agriculture in the buffer countries remains privately owned and operated). Comrade Trotsky then proceeded to estimate the relative weight of the contending elements under this dual power.

"The problem of dual power therefore consists at the present time in knowing to what extent the bourgeois classes are rooted in the Soviet State apparatus and to what extent bourgeois ideas and



tendencies are rooted in the apparatus of the proletarian party. For on this degree depends the party's freedom for maneuver and the possibility for the working class to take the necessary measures of defense and attack." (Same, p. 15.)

"We thus return here to the question of establishing to what measure state power still finds itself in the hands of the proletariat and its party, that is to say, to what measure the state power continues to be the power of the October Revolution. One cannot answer this question a priori. Politics has no mechanical rules. The forces of classes and parties reveal themselves in the course of struggle. And this entire struggle still lies ahead." (Same, p.15.)

Six months after the Old Man penned these lines, the struggle he had predicted came to a head. The Stalinist bureaucracy had set out to liquidate the Kulak as a class. Trotsky wrote later, "The basic conquests of the revolution were saved in the end at the cost of countless sacrifices." (New International, July 1935.) He also referred to this operation against the Kulaks as a supplementary revolution. I quoted Comrade Trotsky not because I think there is an identity between the situation in Russia at that time and today's situation in the buffer countries. On the contrary. He was analyzing the class forces in a country where the proletarian revolution had taken place eleven and a half years earlier. But it is precisely this that gives greater emphasis to his method which penetrates beyond the facade of bureaucratic monolithism and official statistics designed to disguise the class struggle, in order to deal with the actual contending forces in society. It is only on the basis of such a method, which takes into account all the factors, that one can form a sound judgment of the class character of the state.

Some comrades will say, as they have already said, that by setting up such a yardstick for determining the class nature of the buffer countries, we are thereby opening the door for a revision of our position on the Soviet Union which we continue to characterize as a degenerated workers state. They bring up the similarities between the regime in the Soviet Union and the regime in the buffer countries and demand: Where is the difference? The regime in the Soviet Union is totalitarian and bourgeois inasmuch as it defends the privileges of the bureaucracy. The proletarian party has been smashed, capitalism is reproducing itself even in collectivized agriculture, and so on.

Superficially such arguments may appear weighty. But actually they are not. There are indeed many features of the counter-revolutionary Bonapartist regime in the Soviet Union which we find also in the buffer countries. But these are not the features which have ever determined for us the fundamental working class character of the Soviet Union. Our criterion has always been: the proletarian revolution of October 1917 and the correlation of social forces and productive relations which resulted from it.

An inseparable part of Comrade Trotsky's definition of the class nature of the Soviet Union was always the fact that "the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses" (My emphasis).



It is true that the proletariat has been expropriated politically in the Soviet Union; that the party which was once the instrument of proletarian class rule has been long transformed into an instrument of the bureaucratic caste. But it was the revolution which has also determined the specific character of this privileged caste, its strength as well as its weakness.

To identify the class nature of the buffer states with that of the Soviet Union is to say that the ruling "supra-class" bureaucracy which has come into existence in the Soviet Union as a consequence of a given set of historical conditions has found a way of reproducing itself at will in other countries regardless of the differences in the objective conditions. Such a line of reasoning can give aid and comfort to the proponents of bureaucratic collectivism. The method of reasoning would be quite similar except for this, that while Shachtman conjures up a new class, our minority discovers new workers states.

The trouble with all this is not only that it violates our previous conceptions on the nature of Stalinist Bonapartism, but what is far worse, it assumes as resolved one of the main contradictions plaguing Stalinism and which may well be the cause of its collapse. If the Kremlin bureaucracy is capable of reproducing at will its social regime in other countries, it would thereby be assured of a bright future. Fortunately, this is refuted by the facts. The status of the buffer countries resembles more that of occupied areas which are coming more and more under the direct rule of the occupier. The Kremlin bureaucracy rules the buffer countries more and more through a system of gauleiters, its own direct appointees.

In Bulgaria, for example, the bidding of the Kremlin is carried out by a group of some 500 who have lived most of their lives in the Soviet Union in the service of the GPU as part and parcel of the Russian bureaucratic caste. The native Stalinists have almost all been purged. The dominant figure in Poland today is none other than Marshall Rokossovsky. The whole course of the buffer countries is consequently not one toward establishing workers states, or even permitting them to exist as independent states at all, except as a legal fiction, but to assimilate them structurally under the direct rule of the Russian bureaucracy.

The Russian bureaucracy has even improvised a theory to justify this course. In Russia, they have sought to justify themselves by means of the "theory" of socialism in one country. But they will not permit their agents in the buffer countries the benefit of this "theory" for themselves. The "theory" supplied them is that there can be no liberation without the Soviet army and that they must all accept the "leading role" of the Soviet Union. This is a doctrine of abject subordination and unquestioning obedience to the dictates of the Kremlin. It has been imposed on the Kremlin because of the nature of the bureaucracy and its own limitations which make it impossible to pursue any other course except that of structural assimilation. In pursuing this line, the Kremlin comes into conflict with the class interests of the proletariat, the peasantry and the bourgeoisie and violates the national interests of the masses. This conflict has

by no means been resolved not only in the historical sense but in the immediate sense. And it would be wrong to assume that the structural assimilation of these countries has already been achieved or even that it will ever be achieved. The struggle is still ahead. The IEC Resolution lists the obstacles remaining on the road to structural assimilation. I need not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that anyone of them may prove to be the spark that could blow up the predatory schemes of the Kremlin bureaucracy, and eventually the bureaucracy itself.

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