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THE ISSUES IN THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

By Farrell Dobbs

(Speech summarizing debate at December 1956 Plenum)

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The Plenum, through its resolutions and decisions, determines the general line of the party on new questions that arise between national conventions. Thus the vote we are about to take on the Eastern European question will guide the press and our overall political approach to this question in the period ahead.

At the same time our rich discussion here at the Plenum paves the way for even deeper-going discussion in the pre-convention period, to further probe the developing political revolution in the Soviet sphere and its interrelation with the world revolution as a whole. We should also go into another question raised here at the Plenum by the comrades of the minority, that is, the pattern of their differences with various party positions developed across a substantial period of time. That discussion could profitably include questions of method as well as differences over political evaluations and tactical conclusions.

Concerning the present debate, let us first note and put to the side certain points that are not in dispute on the Hungarian question. There is no disagreement that capitalist reaction is looking for every possible opening to take advantage of the Hungarian revolution to promote restorationist aims. This is true of the bourgeois remnants that remain in the country, of clerical-fascists like Mindszenty, etc. It is likewise true of world capitalism. We don't dispute the fact that the reactionaries seek advantage from the revolutionary struggle, but we do differ as to how far they have gotten, as to the specific weight they have in these events.

We also agree that political confusion has been manifested among the workers, especially during the early stages of the revolution. But we differ as to the depth of this confusion and the degree to which it is being overcome, as well as to the character of the uprising. As Comrade Marcy said, the differences on this score are deep as a canyon, posing the fundamental question, is the Hungarian uprising a revolution or a counter-revolution?

The view expressed by the comrades of the minority can be summarized along the following lines: The insurrection represented a restorationist attempt to overthrow a deformed workers government, marking a relapse from a workers state to a bourgeois-democratic regime. The workers have been subordinated politically to the Nagy regime which the minority characterizes as a counter-revolutionary, bourgeois-restorationist government put in power by the uprising.

According to the minority view the objective role of the Workers Councils in the Hungarian uprising has been to subordinate the workers to the bourgeoisie. The Councils failed to concretize democratic demands going in a revolutionary direction or to call for an independent revolutionary dictatorship. Defense of the workers

state was left to the Red Army, making military intervention by the Kremlin politically necessary and an action to be defended.

The workers, in the minority view, have in large measure become alienated from communism by the Stalinist violations of their democratic rights and the economic repressions to which they have been subjected; hence the bureaucracy alone can be relied on to defend the workers state against bourgeois restoration. This circumstance will tend to prevail until a revolutionary-socialist party has been created to guarantee that insurrection against the bureaucracy will remain within the channels of political revolution and will defend the socialized property forms.

As near as I can determine from the discussion, such is the general evaluation of the Hungarian events by the comrades of the minority. It is a false view in every respect and fatal to a revolutionary perspective. It would leave nothing but defense of the status quo in the Soviet sphere, contradicting the very essence of the political revolution against the bureaucracy.

To characterize the Nagy regime as bourgeois-restorationist is to over-simplify a very complex aspect of the political revolution. Such a characterization, of course, helps to arrive at the conclusion that the whole insurrection is restorationist in content, but it fails completely to provide any key to the true nature of events and thus becomes the foundation piece for a mistaken analysis leading to erroneous political conclusions.

In reality the Nagy regime, as the draft resolution states, represented a continuation of the bureaucratic regime of the deformed workers state. Nagy has in common with Kadar and all the other bureaucrats -- fear of the rank and file. In the course of events Nagy undertook to launch a Stalinist-type Peoples Front government to circumvent mass action. By doing so he provided a point of infiltration for the bourgeois-restorationist elements. But that does not make the insurrection a counter-revolution, nor does the fact that the capitalist press sympathized with the Nagy regime as against the Kremlin.

The bourgeois press also hailed Gomulka's resistance to Kremlin dictation. Does that make the Polish revolution bourgeois-restorationist in character? Actually the Gomulka regime has subserved the Kremlin interests in that it has sought to preserve bureaucratic rule in Poland and to find a new cooperative relationship with the Stalinist gang in Moscow.

The capitalist press showed sympathy toward the workers uprising in East Germany, also toward the Poznan outbreak. As a matter of fact the imperialists have welcomed every sign of mass resistance to the Kremlin bureaucracy, hoping to derive some benefit from it. But the imperialist propaganda is not fundamental to the revolutionary reality of the workers struggles in Eastern Europe.

A political revolution against bureaucratic rule is developing, slowly but surely, throughout the Soviet sphere. The highest manifestation to date appeared in the Hungarian insurrection, so powerful

that the Kremlin had to employ large-scale military forces to suppress it. In Eastern Europe the struggle has taken the initial form of a national uprising, demanding freedom from Kremlin domination. The question of self-determination thus becomes involved alongside the fight for workers democracy on the basis of the socialized property. Working class leadership of the independence struggle serves to mobilize the masses generally in support of a socialist solution of the national problem. The revolt against Stalinist rule thus assumes a dual character. This duality cannot be brushed aside, as the minority comrades seem to think.

Nor can the revolutionary complex be reduced to the flat assertion that the workers, through lack of a full revolutionary program, are falling into a bourgeois-democratic trap. The workers are up against the fact that the military-bureaucratic overthrow of the old capitalist property relations in Eastern Europe left a residue of bourgeois elements and the capitalist relic of the parliamentary form of rule. Still another handicap arises for the workers from the Stalinist heritage of Peoples Front politics. Confusion as to the revolutionary form of political rule is thus bound to appear in the first stages of mass insurrection. But experience is already teaching the workers that they must abolish the parliamentary relic and replace it with the Soviet system as created under Lenin and Trotsky, just as they must overthrow the bureaucracy and establish workers democracy, if they are to build a socialist society.

The political drive toward the solution of the revolutionary form of political rule will be supplied by the working class which has emerged as the dominant class force in Hungarian society; the working class which spearheaded the mass insurrection; the working class which -- although consigned by the comrades of the minority to a role of political subservience to Nagy -- nevertheless refused to lay down their arms no matter how many times Nagy appealed to them; the working class which continued the struggle, continued to show its inherent power, even under the Kadar regime after the savage Kremlin repressions with tanks, machine guns and bayonets.

It is true that the Workers Councils lacked full revolutionary clarity. It is true that there were errors and omissions in their policy. But it is likewise true that the workers have shown a capacity to learn in the course of the struggle. They are a better organized, more conscious revolutionary force than they were at the beginning of the insurrection. The Councils are demonstrating in struggle that the working class is the main political force in the country, a force wholly capable of defeating the bourgeois-restorationists in a national showdown.

The Workers Councils retained vitality even in the face of savage military repressions. Throughout the conflict they have shown conscious determination to defend the nationalized property. The very rise of the Councils poses the question of the workers struggle for power. This revolutionary trend became further concretized through the demand for legalization of the Workers Councils as permanent political bodies with sole authority over the management of industry.

The emergence of the Workers Councils reveals the general form through which the political revolution will be organized throughout the Soviet sphere. To dismiss the Councils, in the manner of the comrades of the minority, as politically subordinate bodies tailing the bourgeois-restorationist kite is to lightly brush aside one of the two key instruments of the political revolution.

It is true the Councils lack what in the last analysis is the most fundamental instrument of all, a revolutionary party to give conscious political leadership. It is true that lack of a revolutionary party seriously impairs political consciousness and gives rise to mistaken policies. It is true that creation of the revolutionary party remains the central task of the political revolution. Yet it is barren schematism to contend, as do the comrades of the minority, that there must be a full-fledged revolutionary-socialist party before the political revolution can begin, or else the insurrectionary struggle is bound to go in the direction of bourgeois restoration.

We must see the political revolution in its dynamic as a living movement. When large masses are set into revolutionary motion by events the struggle becomes rich with potential for the development of political class consciousness that will find its supreme expression through the forging of a revolutionary party. Such a party will begin to take form in the Soviet sphere during the course of the struggle itself. In Hungary the cadres for the party are already being assembled, especially in the Workers Councils. The Hungarian Communist Party literally disintegrated with large sections of the ranks and secondary strata of the apparatus going over to the insurrectionary workers in the struggle against the bureaucracy.

These manifestations indicate that the revolutionary party will develop as the political revolution advances. But the revolution won't wait for the party to appear. It will be forged parallel with the unfolding struggle, with the Workers Councils serving as a principal arena for a showdown between the various political tendencies. New leaders of revolutionary calibre will arise from the insurgent ranks.

We don't foresee, nor have we ever anticipated, Stalinist bureaucrats turning revolutionary and heading an insurrectionary struggle against bureaucratic rule. The comrades of the minority are in error when they say, as Sam did in his remarks, that we expected Tito to turn toward Lenin in the break with the Kremlin back in 1948. It is an important point to clarify. I want to call to your attention a statement the National Committee issued on the subject in 1949. If you want to check the whole thing it appears at page 264, in the October 1949 issue of the Fourth International. I want to read some pertinent excerpts from it as follows:

"Revolutionary militants cannot remain neutral in the struggle between Tito and Stalin and wait until the opposition movement has developed ideological clarity on all the important questions.

"We are on Yugoslavia's side against the Kremlin. We participate in the fight as supporters of a basically progressive struggle while criticizing everything that is false and inadequate in Tito's policy and program. By our support we help to widen the breach in the hermetically sealed Stalinist world through which revolutionary ideas can penetrate. By our criticism we help deepen the struggle, projecting into it our fundamental analysis of Stalinism and our patient explanations of the need for a return to Leninism.

"Should we withhold this support for fear that Yugoslavia might be absorbed in the imperialist camp in the war against the Soviet Union? Such an abstentionist position could only play into the hands of the Kremlin. A Marxist analysis of the living forces involved demonstrates that this question is still far from settled and will be decided only in struggle. The fate of Yugoslavia as well as Stalinism may well be decided by the revolutionary intervention of the masses before the outbreak of World War III. In any case, it is the task of revolutionists to consciously strive for such a solution and not to passively consign all questions to the settlement of the coming war. . .

"Support of Yugoslavia by the world working class under present conditions does not aid imperialism but acts as a counter-weight to its influence by encouraging those revolutionary tendencies in the country which are striving for a completion of the socialist revolution in that country."

That's what the party actually said on the question of Yugoslavia. As you can see the statement emphasized both our partisanship in the progressive struggle against Kremlin domination and the tasks implicit in building a revolutionary party during the course of the struggle. We did not envisage Tito as the organizer of a revolutionary party. We did see the rupture in the Stalinist monolith as a breach through which revolutionary ideas could penetrate into the working class and in that sense we saw new opportunities for the creation of a revolutionary party in Yugoslavia. We now see a new breach in the Stalinist monolith in Poland and Hungary, accompanied this time by mass action which raises the revolutionary implications to a higher plane.

The comrades of the minority, following the logic of their method of thought, make the declaration, "rather the bureaucrats than the bourgeoisie." Involved here is a wrong application of the concept of defending the revolutionary conquests in the Soviet sphere as against imperialism. They stress only the shortcomings of the Hungarian workers movement and on that one-sided, false premise arrive at the definition of a restorationist counter-revolution. They see imperialism pulling the insurrectionary strings and call upon the workers to make a bloc with Kadar, the political agent of the repressive Kremlin bureaucracy. The comrades of the minority assign to the Hungarian workers the task of supporting a counter-revolutionary assault on their own political revolution.

The minority position represents a sterile attempt to isolate the Hungarian revolution from the general problem of overthrowing Stalinism throughout the Soviet sphere, including the Soviet Union

itself. They confuse defense of the workers states against imperialism with the problem of dealing with bourgeois elements in a workers political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy. They make the impossible demand that the workers refrain from insurrectionary struggle against the bureaucracy until they have provided guarantees against capitalist restoration in the form of a ready-made revolutionary party.

This position apparently stems from the process of reasoning the comrades of the minority have sometimes characterized as the "concept of the global class struggle." We reject this misnamed concept in its methodology. We reject it in its general conclusions concerning the political revolution and in its specific application to the case of Hungary.

The Hungarian workers are in revolt against the Stalinist bureaucracy in a wholly progressive struggle. To advise them to support the bureaucracy against their own revolutionary aspirations would strike a crippling blow at the work of building a world revolutionary-socialist party. The objective effect of such a course would be to discredit our own movement and help to keep the workers ensnared in the political noose of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Such a false line would confuse and contradict our political offensive against the Communist Party in this country, the general Trotskyist offensive against the Stalinist parties throughout the world. We reject such a line.

We hail the revolutionary Hungarian workers. We support their political revolution to establish workers democracy on a socialist basis. We denounce the Kremlin's counter-revolutionary intervention.

We shall take full advantage of the Hungarian revolution to commit political mayhem on the Stalinist movement in this country. In doing so we shall help to strengthen our own party, to vigorously press our class struggle program and to lend our weight as strongly as possible to the world revolution that is once more beginning to march in seven league boots.

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