

Eastern European Regimes Implode

Death Agony of Stalinism

The unravelling of the political order imposed upon Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union after the Second World War has profoundly altered the configuration of world politics. The dramatic recent events can be traced to Gorbachev's acceptance, last August, of a Solidarnosc-led government in Poland, which signalled that the Kremlin would no longer back up its Warsaw Pact clients with troops and tanks.

With the threat of Soviet intervention removed, mass popular demonstrations against decades of Stalinist tyranny exploded across the region. In Romania this popular upsurge spilled over into a bloody armed conflict with Ceausescu's Securitate. Elsewhere the ruling Communist Parties, devoid of any belief in their own legitimacy, changed their names and sacked their leaders before running for cover. To date, overtly pro-capitalist governments have taken office in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (DDR) and Hungary. In Romania and Bulgaria the "reform" Stalinists who still hold the reins of power promise to implement capitalist market measures in the near future.

While Moscow's domination of Eastern Europe is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, the region's future remains murky. But the momentum is clearly to the right. Forty years of Stalinist rule have profoundly discredited the very idea of socialism among broad layers of the working class. Misled, betrayed and confused, the East European proletariat has yet to assert itself as an independent political factor. The masses of people who tore down the Berlin wall and stood up to Ceausescu's thugs were united by their hatred for the privileges, mendacity and economic mismanagement of their bureaucratic taskmasters. They knew what they didn't want, but had no positive program.

The political vacuum created by the collapse of bureaucratic authority created an opening for pro-capitalist intellectuals and nationalist fanatics. Across Eastern Europe there is a recrudescence of fascist organizations dating from the Hitler era. In the Romanian city of Tirgu Mures an organization calling itself the Iron Guard took responsibility for the murder of ethnic Hungarians; fifty years ago their namesake carried out pogroms against Jews. In Bulgaria vicious pogroms against the Turkish minority have caused thousands to flee for their lives. In the DDR, assaults on immigrants and leftists by gangs of Nazi skinheads have become common. Behind these forces stand the bankers and industrialists of the West who have been itching to reconquer the countries of the Soviet bloc.

The restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe—a prospect now acutely posed—would represent an immense setback for the international proletariat. The bureaucratically-decreed collectivization of the means of production brought concrete benefits for the working class. Employment was guaranteed; food, housing and

transportation prices were stabilized (and frequently subsidized); and health care and education were made generally available. In the DDR, daycare has been cheap and widely available, and special provisions have ensured affordable housing for single mothers and retirees. These social gains, which are directly targeted by the architects of capitalist restoration, remain genuinely popular among large sections of the masses, despite their current infatuation with the "magic" of the market.

For Political Revolution—Not Capitalist Restoration!

Millions of East European workers are not going to enjoy the introduction of capitalist speedup and layoffs. They will not sit still as food prices and rents soar while real wages are cut, nor will they be herded quietly into the unemployment queues and soup kitchens that await them in the kingdom of "free enterprise." This poses an acute problem for the new pro-capitalist governments. Their main asset is mass support, yet they have a mandate for social counterrevolution that requires them to savage their base.

The projected absorption of the DDR by West Germany would create potentially explosive contradictions as the bourgeoisie attempts to make the working class assume the costs of the *Anschluss*. But the West German capitalists possess both a powerful state apparatus and immense economic resources with which to impose their will. Elsewhere in the region however, the lack of an effective repressive apparatus presents huge problems for the new governments. The existing military/police apparatuses inherited from the old regimes are in a state of disarray and cannot be relied on without first undergoing deep purges and new selections of personnel. This will not be easily accomplished, and in any case, requires time. Meanwhile the economic situation is rapidly going from bad to worse. There is not going to be any new Marshall Plan. To pull off the Pinochet-style "economic miracle" the new regimes hope for, they will need the military capacity to crush working-class resistance.

At this point the openly fascist formations, like the anti-Semitic Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), which aspire to translate the anger and desperation of the plebian masses into pogroms and white terror, are too marginal to do the job. Without a sufficient counterweight to a cohesive working class, the embryonic capitalist regimes remain extremely vulnerable as the initial euphoria of "freedom" wears off, and the masses begin to comprehend exactly what life under capitalism means.

Now more than ever, the masses of East Europe need a revolutionary leadership committed to defending collectivized property and instituting the direct political rule of the working class, i.e., the perspective of *proletar-*

ian political revolution. The first qualification of such a leadership is the ability to face the truth squarely and acknowledge the gravity of the restorationist danger. On this score most of the groupings of the ostensibly Trotskyist left come up short. Whether out of reluctance to criticize “mass movements,” or unwillingness to admit that the present political tide is not running in the direction of progress, the majority of the left pretends that it lives in a world more to its liking than the one that exists. This can only disarm the working class politically in the face of the reactionary onslaught.

The Collapse of Stalinism: Trotsky’s Prognosis Vindicated

The test of any political theory is its ability to explain great historical events. Over fifty years ago Trotsky characterized the Stalinist bureaucracy as a privileged social stratum, resting on the economic foundations created by the October Revolution of 1917. He pointed out that the bureaucracy’s political stranglehold prevented the democratic input and control by the producers necessary for the proper functioning of a collectivized economy. In the *Transitional Program* Trotsky predicted that, “Each day added to [the bureaucracy’s] domination helps rot the foundations of the socialist elements of economy and increases the chances for capitalist restoration.”

Trotsky also argued that the Stalinists’ quest for wealth and status contradicted the egalitarian property forms on which their rule was based. This is why the Stalinist caste could never congeal into a new ruling class. Trotsky further asserted that the bureaucratic oligarchy remained a highly unstable social layer, vulnerable to either working-class uprisings or capitalist-restorationist currents. This analysis has been powerfully confirmed in recent months by the dramatic disintegration of what various impressionists had depicted as an unchanging totalitarian monolith. If nothing else, current developments in the “Soviet Bloc” conclusively refute all claims that the Stalinist bureaucracies constitute a new ruling class.

For many years the best known proponent of the “new class” theory was Max Shachtman, who split from the Trotskyist movement in 1940, and went on to claim that the Stalinists represented a “bureaucratic collectivist” class, neither bourgeois nor proletarian. Shachtman’s new class theory was so indeterminate, and his eventual defection to the imperialist camp so ignominious, that few leftists now lay claim to the doctrine of “bureaucratic collectivism” in its original form.

A variant of Shachtman’s theory is that of “state capitalism,” according to which the Stalinist bureaucracy has transformed itself into a new, collective, capitalist ruling class. The largest “state cap” tendency is headed by Tony Cliff, leader of the British Socialist Workers Party. Cliff’s grouping originally deserted the Trotskyist movement in the early 1950s, just as the Cold War was turning into a shooting war in Korea. In North America Cliff’s followers are known as the “International Socialists.”

While the “theory” of state capitalism absolved Cliff and his co-thinkers from the uncomfortable task of de-

fending the Soviet bloc against imperialism, and made them “respectable” in their social-democratic milieu, it could not explain the Cold War or the social revolutions led (and misled) by the Stalinists in the Third World. Nor could it explain why, if there was no fundamental antagonism between the two variants of “capitalism,” the imperialists fought so ferociously to contain and roll back “communism” from the Chinese revolution of the 1940s, to Korea, Vietnam and Cuba.

Harman vs. Cliff on the Character of the Bureaucracy

While the Cliffites have spent most of their time enthusing about the collapse of Stalinism and promoting various social-democratic oppositionists as “revolutionary Marxists,” their occasional attempts to explain events (rather than merely describe them) clearly expose the insoluble contradictions of their theory.

In a piece which appeared in the press of the American International Socialist Organization, Chris Harman, the British Cliffites’ leading Soviet expert, explained that: “The market is a code-word for restructuring the economy in Eastern Europe. Those sections which are not competitive with the West are to be wiped out, workers in other sections will have to work harder for less” (*Socialist Worker* [U.S.], January). True. But if wholesale privatization will have such disastrous consequences for the working class, it should surely be the elementary duty of Marxists to defend the *status quo* of state ownership—call it “bureaucratic collectivist,” “state capitalist” or anything else—against the “free market” onslaught. Yet such a call for the defense of state ownership would flatly contradict the visceral anti-Sovietism which defines the International Socialists’ worldview.

The Cliffites seek to conceal the manifest bankruptcy of their theory as a guide to action by downplaying the restorationist danger and instead singling out the rapidly disintegrating Stalinist state apparatuses as the main threat to the working class. According to Harman:

“It is premature to predict exactly how political life will now develop in Eastern Europe. What can be said with certainty is that the old ruling class is nowhere finished yet.

“This is true even if, as seems possible in Hungary, the old ruling party collapses completely.

“A ruling class and a ruling party are never quite the same thing...

“...the class can preserve the real source of its power and privileges, its control over the means of production, even when the party falls apart. This was shown in Germany, Italy and Spain after the fall of their fascisms.

“The formal networks binding together police chiefs, army officers, government ministers and industrialists disintegrated.

“But informal networks remained, as did the drive to accumulate which gave them a common class goal against those below them. It was not long before they were able to build new ruling parties just as capable of defending their interests as the old ones had.

“In Eastern Europe, whether these networks stick to the old parties or switch to new ones, they will be preparing now for the next round in the fight...”

—*Ibid.*

Harman is apparently not concerned that his superficial analogy directly contradicts his mentor, Tony Cliff. In *State Capitalism in Russia*, Cliff compared the two systems of “class rule” as follows:

“Wherever there is a fusion of economics and politics it is theoretically wrong to distinguish between political and economic revolution, or between political and economic counter-revolution. The bourgeoisie can exist as the bourgeoisie, owning private property, under different forms of government: under a feudal monarchy, a constitutional monarchy, a bourgeois republic...In all these cases there is a direct relation of ownership between the bourgeoisie and the means of production. In all of them the state is independent of the *direct* control of the bourgeoisie, and yet in none of them does the bourgeoisie cease to be a ruling class. Where the state is the repository of the means of production, there is an *absolute* fusion between economics and politics; political expropriation also means economic expropriation.”

Cliff at least recognizes that the “informal network” that binds capitalist classes together, regardless of which political faction is in charge of the state, is nothing less than *private property in the means of production*. And if, as Cliff and Harman will readily concede, the absence of private property is a distinctive feature of the collectivized economies of the USSR and Eastern Europe, then the only way that the Stalinist “ruling class” can maintain its power is through an absolute monopoly on the state. Why then are the Stalinists relinquishing their political monopoly in one Eastern European country after another? Are they the first ruling class in history to abandon power without a fight? If so, isn’t Harman wrong to call Eastern European opposition leaders “reformists,” who are naive about the dangers of Stalinist retrenchment? The reformist strategy would appear to be working.

Stalinist Bureaucracy: Caste Not Class

The Stalinists do not behave like a ruling class because they are *not* a ruling class. The main enemy of the workers of Eastern Europe today is not the various national bureaucracies, which are in an advanced stage of decomposition, but the capitalists of the U.S. and West Germany, who seek to reintegrate these economies into the imperialist world market.

In a particularly opaque piece in the February issue of *Socialist Worker Review*, the Cliffites’ monthly magazine, Chris Bambery claims that:

“In reality, the choice for the bureaucracy is whether to cling to the old state capitalist methods of the past or to adopt policies similar to Thatcherite privatisation. Both Gorbachev and Thatcher are concerned with increasing exploitation.”

Bambery’s notion that the impulse for the projected privatization of the economies of Eastern Europe originates in a conscious decision by the Stalinist rulers aimed at consolidating their rule by “increasing exploitation” is ludicrous. The drive toward capitalist restoration can only further disintegrate whatever social power the Stalinist apparatuses still possess. When and if the Comecon countries reintroduce capitalism, the Stalinist bureaucracies will be dismantled. The bulk of the *nomen-klatura* is well aware that their replacement by the

capita-list market as the regulator of economic activity will entail a loss of both material privileges and social status.

In the *Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky anticipated that, “The fall of the present bureaucratic dictatorship, if it were not replaced by a new socialist power, would thus mean a return to capitalist relations with a catastrophic decline of industry and culture.” In *State Capitalism in Russia*, Cliff ruled out such a development: “*The internal forces are not able to restore individual capitalism in Russia...*” Cliff’s mistaken projection was not just an unlucky guess; it is a necessary corollary to the claim that the Soviet bureaucracy is a new ruling class rooted in a new form of class society, rather than a parasitic growth on working-class property forms.

The precipitate panic and desperate backpedalling of the Eastern European bureaucracies in the face of recent events has graphically revealed the profound instability of these bureaucratic castes. Those elements of the bureaucracy who can, are already scrambling to find places in the emerging capitalist order, not as members of a Stalinist “ruling class,” but as individual entrepreneurs. Those bureaucrats who see no place for themselves in a Western-dominated economy will be compelled, regardless of their motives, to throw in their lot with the sections of the working class disenchanted with the “market reforms.” This is not the behavior of a ruling class, but rather that of an unstable social layer torn between major contending forces in any decisive class confrontation.

The current crisis of Stalinism has revealed Tony Cliff’s doctrine as what it has always been: a smokescreen for political accommodation to anti-Soviet prejudice. The Cliffites’ inability to answer the most elementary questions posed by the class struggle in Eastern Europe or explain, much less predict, the behavior of the Stalinists, testifies to the complete lack of scientific merit of the theory of “state capitalism.” Worse, if followed by leftists in Eastern Europe, it could only mean abstention in the major class question posed today: whether or not to defend the system of collectivized property (which alone can provide the basis of democratic planning) against those who would restore private ownership in the means of production.

USec Embraces “Dynamic” of Social Counterrevolution

Unlike the “state capitalists,” Professor Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) claims to stand in the tradition of Trotsky, including his position on the “Russian Question.” Thus, they characterize the USSR as a degenerated workers state and recognize the states set up by the Kremlin in Eastern Europe after World War II as deformed workers states. But the USec has been, if anything, even more Stalinophobic and less fastidious about the character of the “mass movements” they champion in Eastern Europe than the Cliffites. The Mandelites have embraced any and all anti-Stalinist currents in the region, including those with openly fascist sympathies. The 18 Septem-

ber 1989 issue of the USec's main English language organ, *International Viewpoint* (IV), published a revolting appeal for the rehabilitation of the Estonian "Forest Brothers," an anti-Semitic band of Nazi-collaborators (see "How Low Can Mandel Go?", 1917 No. 7).

The same Stalinophobic reflex was evident in the USec's enthusing over Polish Solidarnosc, despite the latter's adoption of an openly capitalist-restorationist program at its September 1981 congress. Today Solidarnosc, at the head of the Polish government, is aggressively pushing the program of capitalist restoration that it adopted nine years ago. The human costs for the Polish workers will be enormous. In the 25 March *Toronto Star*, liberal columnist Richard Gwyn commented that, so far: "The scale of the pain is—to us—utterly unimaginable. In January, the real incomes of Poles dropped by one-third." Moreover:

"The second shock, starting this summer, will knock some people flat on their faces when they find themselves unemployed while others, the black-marketeters and joint-venture employees, will skip and dance to the head of the income queue.

"There is a risk of conflict that is growing all the time," says Maciej Jankowski, vice-chairman of the Solidarity union's Warsaw district and a government loyalist."

None of this has prompted Mandel to rethink his position. His American adherents in the Socialist Action grouping, who have raised the openly counterrevolutionary call for the "unconditional" (i.e., capitalist) reunification of Germany, still use an adaptation of the Solidarnosc logo on the masthead of their newspaper. The USec's European leadership, which is not quite so clumsy, attempts to distance itself from Solidarnosc in power, while remaining completely unrepentant about having tailed Walesa & Co. all the way to the Sejm.

Pabloite Objectivists: See No Evil

The USec leadership rationalizes its adaptation to the burgeoning pro-imperialist movements for "democracy" in Eastern Europe by downplaying the restorationist threat. In a lengthy analytical piece that appeared in the 30 October 1989 *International Viewpoint*, Mandel wrote:

"The main question in the political struggles underway is not the restoration of capitalism. The main question is whether these struggles head in the direction of an anti-bureaucratic political revolution or of a partial or total elimination of the democratic freedoms acquired by the masses under glasnost. *The main fight is not between pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist forces. It is between the bureaucracy and the toiling masses...*"

—emphasis added

To back this assertion Mandel points to the "objective logic" of class forces. Noting that, "In none of the bureaucratized workers' states does the petty bourgeoisie and middle bourgeoisie represent more than a small minority of the society..." He concludes: "The only minimally realistic possibility for arriving at such a result [capitalism] is relying outright on the 'reform' wing of the bureaucracy." But even this is no cause for worry, because for the:

"very great majority of the bureaucracy, the restoration of capitalism would reduce their power and privileges. Only a small minority would or could transform themselves into real entrepreneurs of big industrial or financial firms..."

"Assuming that the bureaucracy is heading in this direction means assuming that it is ready to commit hara-kiri as a crystallized social caste."

Mandel goes on to assert that the workers and poor peasants will never embrace capitalism because, "The weight of the ideological factor...remains subordinate to the confrontation of real social interests." In Poland:

"However delighted they may be by Solidarnosc's spectacular political victory...and however great the real ideological influence (often exaggerated abroad) of the church and nationalism, the Polish workers will act decisively to defend their standard of living, their jobs and even the miserable social security that they have gained when any government, even one led by Solidarnosc, attacks them. It is their interests and not any 'ideological values' that in the last analysis will determine their day-to-day behavior..."

—*Ibid.*

Barnesites' Criminal Idiocy

Jack Barnes, leader of the American Socialist Workers Party, Mandel's partners in the USec, also sees the key issue in Eastern Europe as one of democracy versus Stalinism. The Barnesites, who are in the habit of uncritically retailing every pronouncement of the Cuban bureaucracy, have uncharacteristically taken issue with Fidel Castro over this question. In the 9 March issue of the *Militant*, SWP leader Cindy Jaquith criticized Castro for denouncing the "ferocious anticommunism" of Solidarnosc and its allies. Jaquith lectures the Cuban jefe that "it is not the case that the fight for democratic rights in Eastern Europe hurts Cuba; just the opposite." She continues:

"It is not socialism that is being dealt a blow by this upsurge, but Stalinism, which has kept a counterrevolutionary grip on the working classes of these countries for decades. And by dealing a blow to Stalinism, the workers are dealing a giant blow to world imperialism, which has relied on the stability of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe to maintain the status quo for 40 years."

To portray the reopening of this major sector of the world economy to capitalist penetration as "a giant blow to world imperialism" is so completely at variance with reality that it defies description. Even the Barnesites must know that a return to capitalism in Eastern Europe will mean an orgy of anti-Semitic pogroms, attacks on women's rights, wholesale reduction of living standards for the masses, and the transformation of millions of workers to homeless paupers. Yet Jaquith brightly opines:

"as millions of workers in Eastern Europe confront the devastating consequences to their living standards and working conditions resulting from the introduction of capitalist methods, they will resist. And they will reach out for revolutionary ideas that have been denied them for decades..."

What will the SWP hand the future paupers of Eastern Europe when they "reach out"? Remaindered copies of

the speeches of deposed Third-World bonapartists Thomas Sankara and Maurice Bishop?

False Consciousness in the Proletariat

Those SWPers and USec members who can think, and who are not cynics, should be deeply troubled by the attitude of their leaders. If the workers will always defend their interests “decisively,” why did they vote in overwhelming numbers for the pro-capitalist Solidarnosc candidates in the first place? The monumental false consciousness of the Polish working class, which imagines that it has friends from the White House to the Vatican, demonstrates that class consciousness is not an automatic function of objective social interest, as Mandel and Jaquith suppose. If it were, socialism would have triumphed long ago.

Humanity makes its own history, but often not as it intends. When workers act on the basis of a faulty understanding of their objective situation major defeats for the class can result. The history of the American trade-union movement contains abundant examples of white workers striking against the hiring of blacks, to “protect” their jobs. The Ulster Workers Council strike of 1974, one of the most powerful and successful labor actions in the recent history of the British Isles, was conducted with the aim of maintaining Protestant supremacy. The British miners’ strike of 1984-85 was defeated in part because a majority of the Nottinghamshire miners scabbed on their fellow workers.

Polish workers do not compare their lot with that of the impoverished masses of Latin America, but with the skilled workers of Western Europe and the U.S. They do not see the squalid ghettos in which American blacks and immigrant workers are imprisoned, nor the millions of homeless indigents sleeping in cardboard boxes. Nor do they see the image of their future in the devastated industrial belts of the American Midwest or the north of England. Instead, their gaze is fixed upon the full shop windows, the VCRs, and the well-appointed suburban houses portrayed in capitalist propaganda as the birth-right of all who live in the realm of “free enterprise.”

The Necessity of Revolutionary Leadership

The attempt to reimpose capitalist exploitation on Eastern Europe will undoubtedly provoke massive resistance from the working class. But each defeat for the workers *in the present* weakens their capacity to fight back *in the future*. The Polish workers would have had a better chance of turning back the restorationist tide had they broken with Solidarnosc *before* it came to power. They will be in a stronger position by mounting a struggle against the Solidarnosc government *now* rather than waiting until millions are thrown out of the factories and living standards are slashed further.

The objective class position of workers in society makes their struggle for power possible, but it does not guarantee success. The workers are best able to fight when they are politically armed against the false conceptions that paralyse their capacity for struggle, and when they are alerted, *at every step of the way*, to the dangers that threaten them. This is the task of revolutionary

leadership. Panglossian assurances that the “objective logic” of the class struggle will automatically lead the workers to reject false ideas, and act out their role in accordance with some predetermined “Marxist” script is, in the end, a rationale for abdicating the struggle for Marxist consciousness within the working class.

Such rationales are not new in the history of the social-ist movement. Lenin’s Bolshevik party was forged in struggle against a doctrine known as “economism” or the “spontaneity of the masses.” According to the economists, the day-to-day economic struggles of the class would somehow lead to the “historically inevitable” triumph of socialism. In rejecting such doctrines, Lenin counterposed the need to organize the politically conscious minority of the class into a vanguard party committed to combat bourgeois consciousness in the working class and win influence for the revolutionary program. Mandel’s pronouncements to the effect that the workers “interests” and not their “ideological values” will determine their day-to-day behavior have far more in common with economism than with Leninism, a legacy the USec falsely claims.

Workers Power: Left Face of the Third Camp

The British centrists of Workers Power, who can usually be found a step or two to the left of the USec, seem more alert to the dangers of capitalist restoration. The September 1989 issue of *Workers Power* proclaimed: “Poland—No Return to Capitalism!” In 1981, while the USec was singing the praises of the “dynamic” embodied by the counterrevolutionary Solidarnosc leadership, Workers Power took a more critical attitude. But a close examination of the political record reveals that Workers Power’s “leftism” is nothing more than a posture. When the showdown came in December 1981, as the Stalinists moved to suppress the counterrevolutionary leadership of Solidarnosc, Workers Power joined the USec and various other fake-Trotskyist outfits in defense of this openly capitalist-restorationist movement. Eight years later the same Solidarnosc leadership, espousing the same program, has finally made it into the halls of power, intent on setting up a market economy. When it counted, Workers Power was on the wrong side of the barricades.

The March issue of *Workers Power* rationalizes its Stalinophobia as follows:

“spontaneous working class opposition to Stalinism is likely to equate Stalinism with the revolutionary movement to which it owes its origins. This confusion can be overcome, not by siding with the Stalinists against the working class, but by basing ourselves on the mobilised working class in its progressive struggles.”

“Progressive struggles” are all very well, but when the working class is mobilized by the forces of clerical reaction and capitalist restoration, as it was in Poland, Workers Power falls right in behind.

Despite its ostensible Soviet defensism, Workers Power has not travelled very far from its origins in Tony Cliff’s International Socialists. An article on German reunification in the November 1989 *Workers Power* called, “For the expulsion of foreign troops from both states.” This is nothing more than a concretization of the

Cliffite slogan, “Neither Washington Nor Moscow.” The March 1990 issue notes that “NATO is an imperialist alliance” and proclaims, “we fight for its dissolution and for the unconditional withdrawal of all its forces to their country of origin.” Very good. But the article continues:

“The Warsaw Pact was created in response to the imperialist threat to the Soviet Union and those states it had conquered. Whilst its troops were and are a form of defence of the post-capitalist property relations of those states, the only combat they have ever undertaken has been the suppression of the insurgent working classes....and *we are in favour of its dissolution and the withdrawal of its troops.*”

—emphasis added

If the Warsaw Pact increased the defensive capacity of the deformed workers states against imperialist assault, why call for its dissolution? This is not just muddle-headedness. As its defense of capitalist-restorationist Solidarnosc demonstrates, Workers Power represents the “left” face of Stalinophobia in the ostensibly Trotskyist milieu.

The attitude of revolutionaries toward the Soviet military in the deformed workers states depends on the concrete circumstances. Insofar as it represents a bulwark against imperialist military pressure, or domestic counter-revolution, we defend it. Unlike Workers Power, we did not oppose Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Had the Soviet Union intervened in Vietnam against the imperialists, as the Chinese army did during the Korean War, we would have supported it militarily.

Where the Soviet army is used against the working class, as in the DDR in 1953 or Hungary in 1956, we demand its immediate withdrawal and defend the insurgents. In the DDR last fall Soviet troops did not pose any immediate danger to the mobilizations of the working class. Given the relative disparity between the military and economic weight of the DDR and West Germany, the withdrawal of the Soviet military presence would significantly weaken the defense of collectivized property. While paying lip service to the distinction between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, Workers Power’s position of even-handed opposition to both is pure third campism.

Spartacist Hallucinations and the Political Revolution

The U.S.-based Spartacist League (SL), and its satellites in the “International Communist League” (ICL) recognize that capitalist restoration, and not a resurgent Stalinist bureaucracy, is the main danger facing the workers of the region. For this reason we extended critical support to the candidates of the “Spartacist Workers Party” (SpAD) in the March 18 elections in the DDR (see statement reprinted in this issue).

Yet while the SpAD calls for the formation of “Leninist-Egalitarian” parties in East Europe, the ICL itself is little more “egalitarian” than Ceausescu’s Romania. Any recruits to the SpAD who think they are joining a democratic group are in for a rude awakening.

The ICL’s departures from Trotskyism go beyond the autocratic nature of its internal regime. There is a strain in their treatment of the crisis of Stalinism that dovetails

with the pseudo-optimism of the USec. Immediately after the Tiananmen Square massacre last year, *Workers Vanguard* (WV, 9 June 1989) triumphantly proclaimed: “Chinese Stalinism has provoked a *political revolution* that may well spell the doom of this bureaucratic, anti-worker regime” (emphasis added). The article concluded, “That revolution has now begun.” But there was no political revolution in China last spring. In our statement on the Beijing massacre, we commented:

“Various impressionistic self-proclaimed ‘Trotskyists’—from Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat to the Spartacist Tendency—declared that a full-fledged political revolution was underway. While the upheavals were enormous in scope and certainly *potentially* revolutionary, they did not constitute what Trotskyists could characterize as a political revolution. First, any serious attempt to replace the CCP would require revolutionary institutions capable of challenging and ultimately replacing the existing bureaucratic state power. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which was an attempted political revolution, threw up workers councils, which could have become the main institutions of *state power* had the workers prevailed. But the Chinese ‘democracy movement’...created no organizational forms which could have constituted a framework for state power. The aim of the movement was not to destroy but to *reform* the institutions of bureaucratic rule.

“Secondly, a political revolution in a deformed workers state would aim to throw out the bureaucracy, while preserving state ownership of the means of production. The ‘democracy movement’ possessed no such clarity regarding its objectives.”

Some people interpreted the Spartacist references to political revolution in Beijing as only a premature and over-enthusiastic reaction to the Chinese upheaval. But the same error reappears in the group’s coverage of events in the DDR. A front-page article in the 29 December 1989 *Workers Vanguard* begins: “A political revolution is unfolding in the German Democratic Republic...” The 26 January WV features an article headlined: “A Chicago College Student Sees It Firsthand—The Political Revolution in East Germany” which reports from “the midst of the unfolding workers political revolution against Stalinist bureaucratic rule.”

Why do the Spartacists insist on seeing proletarian political revolutions where none exist? Veterans of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.) of the 1960s and 70s can recall their leadership’s attempts to win new members and reassure old ones with claims that every organizational initiative would result in a “broader, deeper, more profound” mobilization of the masses. The same “everything’s going our way” syndrome that prompts Ernest Mandel to argue that the objective logic of the class struggle will lead inexorably to the triumph of the political revolution, leads James Robertson to claim that it is already in progress.

You’ve heard us talk a lot about the political revolution, Robertson might tell a starry-eyed Chicago college student or an older member whose commitment is waning, and if you belong to that small minority of our members still in the habit of reading, you’ve probably read about it in *The Revolution Betrayed*. Well, now you can see the political revolution with your very own eyes. Join (or stay in) the Spartacist League and go to the DDR!

So a few college students sign on and perhaps some long-suffering cadres dig a little deeper, hoping that maybe this will turn out to be the big wave they've been waiting for. But temporary organizational gains made by such methods tend to dissipate very quickly when the promised breakthrough doesn't materialize. As Robertson well knows, the drunken euphoria of a Saturday night can turn into in a pretty wicked hangover on Sunday morning. And right now, after months of frantic activity, the mood in Robertson's German "party" appears to be a bit down.

The 20 March issue of *Arprekorr* (the Spartacist's DDR newsheet) contains a short article entitled "They Stole the Wrong Cars," which reports that two star DDR recruits recently decamped, taking a number of their friends with them. Apparently the dissidents had grown tired of the commandist leadership style of Robertson's lieutenants. One of those to leave was Gunther M., who had only recently been added to the editorial board of the German *Spartakist*, the main journal of the SpAD. *Arprekorr* claims that those who walked out, who we

have heard numbered about a dozen, took a portion of the group's assets, including automobiles, books and mail. To add insult to injury the SpAD dissidents immediately registered as a political group with the DDR government using "copies of the program and statutes of the SpAD."

For Leninist Realism—Not Idiot Optimism

The Spartacists, Cliffites and Mandelites are, each in their own way, inclined to substitute a more congenial reality for the one that exists. The arc of history bends toward socialism, but that arc can be long, and lead through many episodic defeats. The will to survive those defeats and persevere until victory requires tempered commitment—not fairy tales, idiot optimism or sugary-false hope. The class struggle will not disappear, regardless of the outcome of events in Eastern Europe. The future belongs to socialism, because it alone charts a path out of the barbarism and pathology of the imperialist world order. ■