DISCUSSION:

The Principle of self-determination

SELF-DETERMINATION QUALIFIED

"THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT cannot triumph within the old framework of the fatherland. It creates new, superior forms of human society, in which the legitimate requirements and progressive aspirations of the working masses of every nationality will for the first time be satisfied in international unity on the basis of the abolition of existing national barriers". (my emphasis—JBH). Lenin "The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International."

In his article "On Self-Determination", (Australian Left Review No 5 1968) Ted Bacon, in the second paragraph states: "No justification of the occupation of socialist Czechoslovakia by the armed forces of the USSR and four other socialist states has yet been attempted in terms acceptable to marxists. The right of all nations to self-determination has been an established marxist principle for many years."

However, in the same paragraph, he admits that should the circumstances be grave enough "demonstrably very grave indeed", then this "occupation" (Ted Bacon's word) would be "permissible".

It is clear therefore that he agrees that in certain circumstances a higher principle applies. Nevertheless the tenor of his article appears weighted against this view and he speaks of "striking right at the heart of a major principle of socialism — the right of all nations to self-determination".

That the situation was sufficiently grave to warrant the application of this greater and higher principle is precisely the case of the USSR and the four other socialist states.

This being so it is strange indeed that nowhere in his article does he attempt to disprove the case of the five socialist states.

The evasion of the case of the Five has been a marked and disturbing feature of those in Australia who disagree with the action of the Five.

They just know the situation wasn't grave. This, despite the fact that for months past the USSR and others in numerous documents have pointed to the growing danger of German revanchism and the huge build up of armaments.

Ted Bacon says: "Imminent danger of imperialist intervention and internal counter-revolution can be discounted". That's that!

His admission that in certain circumstances a higher principle than self-determination should prevail makes the remainder of his article largely pointless if he does not disprove the case of the Five with respect to the necessity for the application of the higher principle.
In discussions in Brisbane some Communists held that self-determination was an immutable principle applicable in all circumstances even to the extent of agreeing to Czechoslovakia going back to capitalism if that was what the people wanted. One must assume that no Warsaw Pact assistance should be forthcoming to assist those inside Czechoslovakia fighting against this.

In this connection Lenin once said: “But no Marxist, without flying in the face of Marxism and socialism generally, can deny that the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the right of nations to self-determination”. (Theses by Lenin on the Question of a Separate and Annexationist Peace).

What relevance can Ted Bacon’s examples about oppressor nations and oppressed nations have with regard to the Czechoslovak crisis?

He says: “The early Soviet Governments, for example, did not intervene to enforce socialism in such former parts of the Russian Empire as Finland and Poland”.

This is supposed to show that the situation then was such as to be even graver than that in Czechoslovakia today, yet as a matter of principle the Soviet Government did not intervene “to enforce socialism”.

Is Ted Bacon here admitting that the action of the five Warsaw countries was to enforce socialism in Czechoslovakia? If so, my case is proved. Enforcing it against reaction!

However, let us look at the facts re Poland and Finland at that time.

In 1917 Finland declared its independence from Russia. Even though it was a bourgeois government in Finland the Soviet Government promptly agreed. This is in accordance with self-determination of nations at such a period in history.

Also in accordance with marxist theory, the Social Democrats and workers of Finland were urged by Lenin to fight against their own government for the socialist revolution in Finland, to link a socialist Finland with the rest of the Soviet Union.

In January 1918 the Red Guards of Finland commenced a struggle for socialism which was drowned in blood.

This was at the time of Brest-Litovsk negotiations and to suggest that the Soviet Union was in a position to assist in Finland, Poland or anywhere else was ridiculed by Lenin. This is surely well known.

It is apparently forgotten that Poland and Finland were part of the sacrifice that had to be made at Brest-Litovsk to preserve the Socialist Republic.

Lenin specifically states that assistance to such revolutions was “an aim clearly defined and approved by the Socialist Army” . . . “However, we obviously cannot set ourselves this aim at the given moment” (Lenin’s emphasis). (Theses by Lenin on the Question of the Immediate Conclusion of a Separate and Annexationist Peace).

If Ted Bacon’s example has any relevance whatsoever for Czechoslovakia it is to show that today the USSR and the four others are in a position to defend and safeguard socialism in that country and elsewhere.

With regard to the mistakes of Stalin and the CPSU on the National Question which is mentioned (and no doubt some mistakes were made) I will let Ted Bacon answer himself: “Though the Soviet Union is rightly regarded as a model of a multi-national state, it is not a perfect model”. (emphasis mine JBH).

He quite correctly maintains that the denigrations of Stalin, Khrushchov and others were never satisfactory ex-
Planations for marxists. I will not deny that this may possibly have some relevance to Czechoslovakia.

One must agree that on the evidence available limitations on freedom of expression and other errors are present in the Soviet Union but here too let us have no blanket denunciations.

After all is it not the same USSR that is providing such life-saving assistance to socialism in Vietnam; that is an indispensable bulwark for the development of the national liberation movements throughout the world?

The colossal assistance of all kinds given by the USSR to socialist countries and progressive movements, especially in developing countries, on the initiative of the CPSU is of the same nature and stems from the same source as the action of the USSR in Czechoslovakia.

Despite great expansion of democracy in the USSR (see P. Clancy’s article “Discussion” No. 1 1968), weaknesses still exist.

However, to assume that from these weaknesses stems a violation of “established marxist principles” in Czechoslovakia is no more justified than to assume that the tremendously progressive role in other areas stems from these same weaknesses.

The so-called violation of marxist principles never took place. The action in Czechoslovakia resulted, not because of the weaknesses in Soviet democracy but for another reason altogether — the threat to socialism in that country. For reasons of the highest marxist principle!

Ted Bacon says that: “The main crime of the Czechoslovak Party has, in the eyes of Soviet leaders, been their determination to take the bold step of abolishing the restrictions on democracy which has caused alarming slowdown of progress and widespread discontent among the Czech and Slovak peoples and in their Party”.

Why would the Soviet want to prevent the raising of the rate of progress in Czechoslovakia?

The oft stated case is (and I repeat it once again from the latest Moscow News to hand, No. 40) “The danger presented by the internal and foreign reaction, which was preparing a counter-revolutionary coup in Czechoslovakia with the idea of wresting the country from the camp of socialism”.

Ted Bacon and others can refuse to accept this if they so desire, but in so doing they are not rebutting the Soviet case but one of their own choosing.

The Warsaw five agreed in their first letter to Czechoslovakia in July that there were forces in that country — listed them — capable of handling the dangerous situation, but the necessary lead was not being given.

It was when the danger had become “demonstrably very grave indeed” that they acted to defend socialism in Czechoslovakia and thus in the Socialist Commonwealth of which Czechoslovakia is an integral part.

The socialist world has entered the epoch of the transition to Communism. The Warsaw Pact countries, including Czechoslovakia (though not all as yet at the same level of development) will attain to Communism in the same historical epoch.

They are leaving behind the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat though not entirely as yet.

Old formulas regarding self-determination no longer have full application. This is the period to ever greater integration, not drawing away.

The ever closer integration of the socialist countries economically, cul-
ationally and in defence will lead to the abolition of national boundaries. This, of course, will be a process of development over a period.

National differences will persist for a lengthy period but defence of the system to allow of this development is an immediate matter.

This drawing together of nations has been the over-riding principle in the right of nations to self-determination since Marx.

No Communist would advocate the withdrawal of a socialist country from the Socialist Commonwealth. No Communist would permit the forcible removal of a socialist country from that Socialist Commonwealth.

The Soviet Union and the other four socialist countries have acted in accordance with the "established marxist principle" of self-determination.

J. B. Henderson

EQUALITY — NATIONS AND PARTIES

IT IS NOW widely accepted that the occupation of Czechoslovakia, which was a heavy blow to socialist influence in the world, violated the established principles of relations between socialist nations and between Communist Parties. Ted Bacon's article on Self Determination dealt with the marxist-leninist principle of relations between socialist nations and only briefly touched upon the principles governing relations between communist parties. The 1957 and 1960 meetings of the world communist movement, taking into account violations of the rights of parties during the Stalin period, spelt these out. The 81 Parties meeting declared unequivocally:

"All the marxist-leninist parties are independent and have equal rights; they shape their policies according to the specific conditions in their respective countries and in keeping with marxist-leninist principles, and support each other."

In order to overcome the serious political and economic weaknesses inherited from the Novotny regime, the Dubcek leadership set out to renovate the economy. They also introduced simple and direct democratic measures and took steps designed to give to "socialism the human face appropriate to it," to use the significant and expressive phrase of Mr. Dubcek. The efforts of the new government were in sharp contrast to the bureaucratic and repressive methods of the Novotny Government and quickly won strong support among the people.

The CPSU and the parties from other socialist countries showed growing concern at the democratic methods and development in Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt that these democratic methods and measures went beyond the democratic practice in other socialist countries, especially in the field of freedom of the press and ideas, and abolition of censorship. There is also no doubt that those measures were taken advantage of by anti-socialist forces, who became more active. The Czechoslovak Communist Party was well aware of this, as a perusal of their documents will show. They were proceeding systematically within the law and the agreed democratic procedure — there could be no return to the repressions and violations of law that took place during the Novotny regime — to deal with anti-socialist activity.

The Czechoslovaks maintained that in their conditions and with their traditions democratic freedoms should be extended and democratic processes should permeate the whole of the organisational structure and methods of party and government leadership; but their far-reaching proposals were not acceptable to the other Parties.
The statements and activities of anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovakia were seized upon by the press in some of the other socialist countries and magnified out of all proportion to the reality and increasing pressure was exerted on the Czechoslovak Party to modify its democratic program.

Explaining the reasons for the military occupation of Czechoslovakia Pravda, August 28, wrote that it was necessary because of "the threat to the socialist system and the constitutionally established statehood in Czechoslovakia from counter-revolutionary forces that have entered into compact with external forces inimical to socialism."

As socialists we are not indifferent to the fate of socialism in Czechoslovakia or any other socialist state. No socialist would stand by and watch Czechoslovakia torn from socialism by internal and external counter-revolutionaries. The community of socialist nations have a common defence organisation, the Warsaw Pact, and it is accepted by them that a threat to one would be a threat to all of the socialist countries. The Czechoslovak Government and Party in statement and practice reaffirmed their support for the Warsaw Pact.

The question arises, was there a serious threat of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia? The party with the fullest and most precise knowledge of the class forces and the political situation in Czechoslovakia is the Czechoslovak Communist Party. It is an outstanding party with a most capable and responsible leadership. It had a long experience of struggle against capitalism, it led the fight for the socialist revolution in Czechoslovakia to victory and for 20 years has led the nation in the building of socialism.

The Czechoslovak Party rejected the view advanced by the CPSU and the other Parties that there was a serious danger of counter-revolution. They explained the measures they had already taken and new steps they were about to take to combat the anti-socialist forces and activities. They stressed the importance they attached to their democratic Action Programme for socialist renewal in Czechoslovakia. They pointed out that apart from the strong growth of mass support for the party and government resulting from the democratic measures they had implemented, they also had powerful forces in the shape of the military, workers' militia and police, that could effectively deal with any counter-revolutionary actions should these occur.

As we now know, the CPSU and the other Parties chose to reject this estimation of the Czechoslovak Party. They proclaimed instead their own estimation of the situation — that a serious threat of counter revolution existed, and despatched military forces to occupy the country. When this was completed they then dictated changes in the policy of the Czechoslovak Party, including modifications of its democratic program.

The military occupation of Czechoslovakia was in direct conflict with the "principles of complete equality, respect for territorial integrity, state independence and sovereignty and non-intervention in each other's internal affairs" which the CPSU declared in 1956 and reaffirmed as late as the Bratislava Agreement in 1968, as the foundation for the relations between socialist states. It was also in violation of decisions of the world communist movement on the relations between parties, on the independence and equal rights of parties.

The events in Czechoslovakia pose the most serious questions for the world communist movement. The idea that one party or several parties acting in concert can place themselves above other parties, is wrong and very dan-
The principle that each communist party is independent and has equal rights, that each Communist Party basing itself on marxism-leninism decides policy in its own country is crucial for the future of the communist parties and the world communist movement.

B.J.

A MAJOR PRINCIPLE

TED BACON and ERIC AARONS have made useful contributions (ALR No. 5, 1968) in helping to establish the lines of self-investigation forced on the socialist movement by the surprise invasion of socialist Czechoslovakia by five of her fellow socialist countries and Warsaw Pact allies, headed by the Soviet Union.

Nothing—not even the great schism with China—has created such profound problems for the world communist movement in recent years as this act (which was an uninvited invasion, no matter how unpalatable the word may be) and the methodical interference in Czechoslovak affairs which has followed, even if some can find consolation in the fact that this interference has the justification of "agreements" made under duress.

Hungary in 1956 could be explained in terms of the actions of counter-revolutionaries there, though the explanation failed to satisfy many and more may yet be heard about that operation. China was a body blow, but marxists could and still can reason that the madness of the Mao cult must pass with the growing-up of Chinese socialism, as did the Stalin cult in the USSR. Whatever validity Chinese criticisms of the CPSU may have had was destroyed by the intemperate, unsubstantial nature of the Chinese argument and the systematic divergence of Chinese theory and practice from marxism. But Czechoslovakia is a very different matter. Her right to self-determination has clearly been violated and, as Ted Bacon points out, this could be justified only if it were proved beyond doubt that no other course was open.

To lay the chief stress—as some do—on the fact that the right to self-determination is only one of the principles of socialist democracy, which may be overridden by greater considerations, is wrong.

Self-determination is one of the main principles, not something of relative unimportance. Lenin regarded it as the principle of democracy in relation to the national question, an essential part of the democracy he considered the key question in the struggle for socialism.

Nationalism, for good or for evil, is very much a part of the world we live in—a world still divided into hundreds of nationalities. It is the aim of socialism to break down national antagonisms, to work consistently to build international friendship and understanding. Socialism envisages a world in which all distinctions based on national, religious, class and other such differences will be eliminated: the "amalgam" of nations of which the earlier socialists spoke often. But all experience shows that the breaking down of the mutual hatreds, suspicions, jealousies, etc., formed during the centuries of national conflicts and oppressions is a slow and painstaking process, in which all socialists—and especially those representing great and powerful countries—have to exercise the greatest tact and patience in their relations with those of other countries, especially those which (like the Czechs and Slovaks) have experienced generations of oppression and disregard or contempt of their national characteristics.

This was always Lenin's starting point in his arguments with the "lefts"
such as Rosa Luxembourg about the right of, e.g., Poland, Finland, even the Ukraine, Byelorussia and other subject nationalities to secede from Russia—an argument he developed long before the matter became one of practical politics for the Bolsheviks after the 1917 Revolution. At all times, he treated the right to self-determination as the principal aspect of the question, though conceding that occasions might arise when it would have to be treated as secondary.

Stalin, in theory at least, supported Lenin's view, The right of Union Republics freely to secede from the USSR, as well as other sovereign rights, is still contained in the Soviet Constitution. In fact, all Soviet theoreticians have treated the right to self-determination as an essential part of socialist internationalism. In one of the most important Soviet works on international law to appear recently (Peaceful Coexistence, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968) the distinguished lawyer Georgi Zadorozhny, Professor of International Law at the Soviet Institute of Foreign Relations, writes (p. 305): "The principle of self-determination . . . has acquired cardinal importance in the present era of transition from capitalism to socialism. . . Self-determination implies the inalienable right of every nation to a free choice of political, economic, social and cultural system, form of government and state structure; it means that no state may impose any system or form of government on any other nation, and affirms the right of every people to develop the political, economic and social order it has chosen."

We have, of course, been given a great many assurances by Soviet and other writers that the situation in Czechoslovakia was very grave. But the Czechoslovak leaders—highly experienced and popular Communists—have steadfastly denied this and true friends of the Soviet Union could only wish that most of the Soviet explanations (including the booklet On Events in Czechoslovakia by a group of Soviet journalists) had never been printed. Instead of the cast-iron proof that is needed, what we have been given is a series of different reasons for the invasion, flagrant misrepresentations of many occurrences and writings in Czechoslovakia, and some (probably accurate) accounts of the plans and dreams of counter-revolutionaries inside and outside Czechoslovakia and of West German revanchists, CIA agents and others.

Even if all the voluminous quotations could be taken at their face value, there is no semblance of proof that counter-revolution was getting on top, that imperialist invasion was imminent or that the Czechoslovak Party, Government and armed forces were unable to cope with the situation.

Above all, it is impossible to explain away the fact that the Czechoslovak Party and Government said clearly and firmly, while they could still speak freely, that the invasion was uninvited and unwarranted.

The argument put forward by some (including, according to reports, Brezhnev at the Polish Party Congress this month) that once a country has become socialist there can be no turning back, is dubious marxism. Certainly, all marxists will agree that, after establishing socialism every nation needs to exercise great vigilance and firmness—including force, if necessary—to prevent the overthrown oppressing class from making a comeback. But this is a vastly different thing from the use of external force to prevent a nation from changing direction. The role of force as a positive part of the building of socialism is limited in time and extent and is secondary to the develop-
ment of the widest democracy, which is the purpose of socialism and the only sure basis on which it can be built and permanently maintained.

One thing appears certain: principled examination of the invasion, its consequences and all the facts surrounding it is essential if the world communist movement is to build a new unity from the present chaos. Attempts to evade such discussions or gloss over the facts can lead nowhere. A major principle has, for whatever reason, been violated and the mutual trust on which unity depends cannot be re-established until the invasion is either proved to be justified or honestly atoned for.

E.W.

REVISIONISM

THE ROLE OF CHIEF spokesman of right-opportunism and revisionism in the C.P.A. is being played by Eric Aarons, and his outstanding effort to date is his article Censorship and Socialism (A.L.R. No.5, 1968). Aarons' modus operandi is faithfully adhered to in this article. Under cover of a pretentiously serious and profound analysis of problems and events, Aarons proceeds to slander the Soviet Union and distort the principles of marxism-leninism.

Communists are orientated on the position of irreconcilable struggle against imperialism — the ferocious enemy of human progress. “Concrete analysis of a concrete situation”, the chief requirement of materialist dialectics, demands, today, that the examination of any problem of socialist activity must proceed from the need for unity in the struggle against imperialism’s global attempt to halt human progress. Close analysis of Aarons’ article, purporting to be a principled study of censorship and socialism, reveals no recognition, let alone explicit mention, that our enemy is imperialism whose aim, in which ideological weapons play an important part, is to destroy all the gains of the international working class and national-liberation movements. Reading Aarons, one would imagine our main enemy is the U.S.S.R. Censorship, he declares, is wrong in itself. The class struggle can be forgotten. What communists need, especially in the socialist countries, is practice (like a boxer in training!) in combating hostile ideas and, in order to have maximum practice there must be the maximum publication of anti-socialist ideas. We can ignore the 1960, 81-Parties Statement which said:— “Historical experience shows that the survivals of capitalism in the minds of people persist over a long period even after the establishment of a socialist system. This demands extensive work by the party for the communist education of the people and a better marxist-leninist training of party and government cadres”. “The task”, the Statement said, “is to work to free the people from the shackles of all types and forms of bourgeois ideology, including the pernicious influence of reformism, and to disseminate among the people progressive ideas making for social advancement, the ideas of democracy and freedom, the ideology of scientific socialism.”

This work is unnecessary, says Aarons, in effect. Let there be no censorship of hostile ideas. Let the ideologues of imperialism disorientate the masses with demagogy, slander, and lies; let them confuse the people with cunning appeals to nationalism, racism, religion. How can the astronomers prove the earth is round if the flat earth theorists are not able to provide the necessary competition? According to Aarons’ revisionism, the principles of “freedom” of expression and discussion stand above the interests of the revolutionary struggle for the emancipation of the working people. As long as we can beat the
imperialists in open debate they will retire from the scene. The suppression, in a working-class state, of reactionary, anti-socialist propaganda is, in Aarons' view, "censorship" which he declares to be impermissible. Such is the "utter disastrousness of opportunism which . . . helplessly surrenders to the bourgeois psychology, uncritically adopts the point of view of bourgeois democracy, and blunts the weapon of the class struggle of the proletariat." (Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, 1904). One of Lenin's oft-quoted statements is: "In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation." Aarons has revised this. His version of the struggle is this: Proletarian organisation is unnecessary. Give the workers ring-side seats to the great polemical fight in which the "marxists" (read — "intellectual anarchists") take on all-comers and annihilate them!

Aarons makes the brilliant discovery that "the view that ideas alone can cause a counter-revolution is in contradiction with the marxist concept of the relation between life and ideas". He does not say who has expressed this view, but, by implication, he attributes it to the leaders of the C.P.S.U. This, of course, is quite dishonest because no-one in the C.P.S.U. has advanced such a view. The Czechoslovakian counter-revolutionaries had more than "ideas", unless in the category of "ideas" we can include the 13 machine-guns, 81 tommy-guns and 150 cases of ammunition found in the Prague House of Journalists, or the statement by the fascist Brodsky at a gathering of members of the Prague "Club-231" that "The best communist is a dead communist, and if he is alive, his legs should be torn off!" Who, then, is guilty of a "contradiction with the marxist concept of the relation between life and ideas"? It is not the unknown protagonist of the non-existent view that "ideas alone can cause a counter-revolution"; it is the known person who signs his name to the opportunist prattle that ideas alone can win and defend a revolution!

Every communist reader of the A.L.R. should carefully analyse this article by Eric Aarons, every paragraph of which reeks with right-opportunism and revisionism.

E. Aarons is not among those who express failure to understand the resolute measures taken by the allied socialist countries in Czechoslovakia. He understands everything. There was, Aarons declares, no counter-revolution, no imperialist subversion, no direct interference by the C.I.A. and the agencies of West Germany, not even an ideological offensive by capitalism; the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had everything under control because it had won everybody's heart by abolishing censorship and bringing the joys of bourgeois "freedom of the press" to Czechoslovakia.

It was all a "monumental blunder" by the U.S.S.R., Aarons informs us. Fifty years of Soviet power and socialist economic, social and cultural achievements, fifty years of unrelenting front-rank fighting against imperialism have produced nothing more than a monumental blunder, plus a stringful of puppets in the other socialist countries who can be dragged into participating in this blunder. There are no socialist gains of the international working class and the communist movement. At least nothing to get enthusiastic over. There are only "sham ideological struggle", "communist-official lies", "persecution of writers", "bureaucracy", "censorship", "repression", "erroneous and contrived theories", "dubious interpretations of marxism-leninism", "mismanagement", "lack of freedom", "reliance on positions of authority", "concentration of power", "flabby ideological atmospheres (?)", "repetition of so-called
well-known truths about the glorious this and the unshakeable that”, “boring formalism”, “self-deception” and so on, without end. And this is not anti-Sovietism! This is “principled criticism”!

1948-1968

If History does not repeat itself exactly, it does offer such similarities as to make one pause and wonder. Twenty years ago in January 1948 a keynote speech was made in Yugoslavia by President Tito who said in part ‘... democracy of a new type is possible and can be obtained’.

At the end of March that year the Communist Party of the Soviet Union complained to the then Communist Information Bureau of certain trends in Yugoslavia. They did not complain directly to Yugoslavia but commentators in Pravda and other journals were making their points clear enough for all who wanted to read.

The Communist Parties of Eastern Europe soon supported the accusations of the USSR, again without seeking to know Yugoslavia’s side to the story. Then came an exchange of letters, a summons to a meeting which Yugoslavia refused to attend on the grounds that the majority had already made up their minds, and then, at the end of May, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform and dramatic calls were made to Yugoslav communists to correct the course of their leaders or to remove them.

The analogy with Czechoslovakia in 1968 is fair enough even if events moved faster — from January till May and not from January till August — but not so far.

In 1948 Yugoslavia was merely excommunicated, not invaded. The analogy holds further when one considers the nature of the accusations. Reading the booklet On Events in Czechoslovakia it is an interesting exercise to compare the charges made with those of the Cominform in 1948. Yugoslav leaders were accused of paying lip service to the USSR but secretly slandering it, slandering the Soviet army by claiming that officers were there without invitation and were, therefore, qualifying Yugoslav independence, stifling democracy in the Yugoslav Party by expelling those communists who wanted to be friends with the USSR, submerging the party, seeking imperialist credits, identifying the external policies of the USSR and the USA, denying the leading role of the working class. Need one continue?

The proofs of these charges were similar to the current proofs. An unnamed leader of the Yugoslav CP is quoted as speaking of “degeneration” in the USSR. This was said to be “borrowed from the arsenal of the counter-revolutionary Trotsky”. Anna Pauker quoted another unidentified Yugoslav leader as saying that Yugoslav communists should not study the Short History of the CPSU (B) as a main text since this could lead to ‘mechanical’ transference of experiences. She saw this as clear proof of revising theories on the role of the Communist Party and called the Short History the “clearest, most profound, militant account”. In July 1948 proof of the Yugoslavs’ intransigence was seen in the size of their CP. It was one of the smallest in the socialist world, only Albania’s was smaller. Yet within a few months in the trials of Eastern Europe the excuse or proof that the CP’s of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc., were infiltrated with enemy agents was that they were too big!

In case there are those, who, like the Chinese, doubt Yugoslavia’s claim to be a socialist country one must turn to 1955. At this time the CPSU
stated, "We sincerely regret what took place and decisively thrust aside all that attended that period ... (we have) studied materials, grave accusations and insults lodged against Yugoslavia ... the facts show that these materials were fabricated by the enemies of the people, despicable agents of imperialism, who deceitfully wormed their way into the ranks of our party" (the CPSU-M.R.).

For those who say that the USSR is always right one may ask was it right in 1948 and wrong in 1955 or vice versa?

Perhaps the most pertinent comment of 1955 was contained in the official speech of the Soviet Government, delivered by then Premier Khrushchov, at Belgrade Airport. Speaking on behalf of one socialist country to another he said.

"Following the teachings of the founder of the Soviet State, V. I. Lenin, the Government of the Soviet Union builds its relations with other countries — big and small — upon the principles of peaceful co-existence of states, upon the principles of equality, non-interference and respect for sovereignty and national independence, upon the principle of non-aggression and recognition of the inadmissability of some states encroaching upon the territorial integrity of others."

Was the Soviet Union right in 1955 and wrong in 1968 or vice versa?

Little wonder that it is the Yugoslav communist leader Edward Kardelj who has written so thoughtfully on the topic of socialism and war. His book written originally in reply to Chinese attitudes has a pertinent message in today's situation. Here there is room for only one point: "Both the Russian and the Yugoslavian revolutions took place in countries which were relatively backward economically, in countries of reactionary dictatorships, where every appearance of democratic ideas had been stifled. The automatic transfer of the experience and forms of those revolutions — even were we to presume them to be without faults, which is not the case — to any more developed country with a relatively firmly established democratic tradition, might result in a complete isolation of the revolutionary forces from the people."

"In brief, socialism is not spread by simple repetition or extension of forms already achieved, but by the constant birth and perfection of new forms, which influence the old ones, enriching them and in this way stimulating them to the further advancement of socialism. Anything that hinders this process, anything which is thrown into the process as an alien body — here meaning above all any form of political or ideological monopoly or domination — constitutes a brake, a temporary disturbance, the reflection of difficulties and deformations in overcoming of the contradictions of the internal movements of socialist society, and for this reason needs to be submitted to the criticism of practice, which is possible only under conditions of the free development of the socialist relationships in every country separately."

"And here is why we Yugoslavs, in the name of socialism and as revolutionaries, are against the imposing of socialism or any particular socialist forms either by war or by any form of force or pressure from without." Such a book is worthy of reading or re-reading.

It is simply my assessment that as with Yugoslavia the Soviet Union will have to make a re-appraisal of the events of Czechoslovakia. Let us hope it does not take until 1975. It is simply my speculation that in the short run the policies of Khrushchov, good (of which there were many) along with the bad are all
in danger of repudiation. This would square the circle and make 1948 right, 1955 wrong and 1968 right but then who wants a squared circle, especially one that, to come out right, would require the rehabilitation of a Stalin and a Beria and a renewal of the guilt of countless innocents?

Czechoslovakia, like Yugoslavia, is not just raising 'national independence' to the nth degree but the very nature of socialism.

Mavis Robertson


2 Anna Pauker, Rumanian communist leader, later removed from positions of authority because of her connections with Stalinist persecutions.


BASIC CAUSES

TED BACON, in his article "On Self-determination" (ALR No. 5) repeated the still neglected questions asked by Togliatti in his last letter, printed both in Italy and Moscow Pravda more than ten years ago: Why have such bad tendencies persisted with the good ones within socialist society in the USSR? He asked again in the words of Togliatti: "... the problem of the origin of the Stalin personality cult has not been solved up till now and ... no explanation has been furnished as to how it became possible at all."

"Denigration of Stalin, Beria, Molotov or Khrushchov were never satisfactory 'explanations' for marxists," Bacon points out "but most believed or hoped that the mistakes of the past would never recur, that their causes had been or were being eliminated." This persistence of what may be termed "Stalinism" led to the failure to appreciate and then respect the rights of the Czechs and led to a recurrence of what has been termed "Great Russian chauvinism" in relation to smaller nations.

A pattern that became as firmly woven into the processes of Soviet life as the Stalin "impatience" and "lack of respect for the individual" will not disappear automatically with Stalin's death, nor by trying to wish away the facts and consequences. One of the real values of Bacon's article is its call for marxists to get to the root causes of past wrongs and begin to provide real remedies, instead of trying to ignore and forget the past. It is not surprising that doubts arise about all aspects of the Czechoslovaks' problems within Australian unions, but it is surprising that the special viewpoints of the Czech unions firmly backed by leaders of the World Federation of Trade Unions don't attract more interest and response from Australian unionists.

The needs of socialist man in Czechoslovakia today and the promise of the future arising from a new technological base and really humane industrial relationships, in which man has truly mastered technology, is a peculiarly trade-union concept discussed for some years, now, by Czech workers, their unions and the leading union journal Czech Trade Unions. This debate and the understanding achieved by Czech unions and unionists appears to have had no parallel in any other socialist or capitalist country.

Whilst the confusion among the "Left" in the Australian unions is understandable, there's no simple set of words that can rectify it. It is of little use pointing to the "political narrowness" of Australian unions, to their containment by the Commonwealth Bureaucracy through adher-
ence to the compulsory arbitration system and absolute regulation and authoritarian control of every phase of union activity. It is of little use merely pointing to the way in which "Left" union ideas, resolutions, decisions and programs have been channelled into the Albert Monkian consensus and containment. For "Left" unionists in Australia to understand why and how the Czech unions have been struggling, it becomes necessary to move to an understanding of the way in which Australian unions, left, right and centre, have allowed themselves to become so integrated with the needs of Australia's national and international monopolies and made so completely another arm of the bureaucracy — this powerful, all pervasive Commonwealth Bureaucracy.

To achieve that necessary understanding of the Czech struggle, Australian unions on the "Left" need to come to an understanding of the "democratic and personal freedoms" they need and must fight for if they too are to meet the challenges of the scientific and technological revolution successfully. These are the similar "democratic and personal freedoms" Togliatti condemned Stalin and the CPSU for destroying and not renovating and restoring after Stalin's death. And it is of no use "Left" unionists backing away from this frank examination of errors and deformations in Soviet society (as well as its great achievements at the same time.)

The revolutionary conformism of other Parties with the post-Lenin CPSU and the kind of special legitimacy which that Party conferred on other Parties and Marxists is now ending. First it was Yugoslavia developed a kind of illegitimacy, then China and Albania, then Cuba and then Romania, but now Czechoslovakia. The same illegitimacy of Parties in former capitalist and present capitalist countries can be traced from Poland to Japan, but this now begins to develop, it seems, in Italy, France, Britain, Australia and Japan . . . everywhere!

The heirs of Stalin's legitimacy are now denying it for whatever it has been worth!

Is the CPSU to take over even more of the infallibility being shed by the Popes? Or are the USSR and the CPSU to take their rightful places as the first and leading socialist state which has, because of peculiar difficulties, had certain kinds of failures which its heirs have been reluctant to examine fully?

Some of the broadsheets with extracts from Gus Hall, CP USA, now being circulated to unions give a small part of what American Marxists are saying. One Party newspaper has already moved right away from the stand taken by Gus Hall, and his stand has little support among US unions, intellectuals and students.

But as important as those questions may be, the Czechs have projected every socialist's views into the future — what measures and forms of democracy and freedom must people have to secure some of the promise of the scientific and technological revolution in capitalist countries and all of that promise in socialist countries. Without projecting it too far, those questions carefully pursued should bring us nearer to an understanding of the "heresies" of China and Cuba — is it possible to make the new socialist man before or partly before building the material basis of that new socialist man?

Freeing the critical ability and intelligence of Australians — unionists, Marxists, intellectuals — from socialist conformity and the "socialist consensus" is as necessary as freeing them from the imperialist consensus. The struggle by the Czechs must assist this process, and this is part of our path to greater democracy, freedom and living standards and a world at peace.

COLANTI