

AN OPEN LETTER
TO MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS
OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN CRISIS.

Dear comrades,

The decision of the five Warsaw Pact countries to invade the Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic had shocked revolutionary and socialist forces throughout the world

To its credit, the CPA was one of the first to protest at this violation of proletarian internationalism

On Wednesday, 21 August, immediately after the news of the invasion became public student militants, revolutionary socialists and members of the CPA staged a demonstration in Martin Place. In an attempt to enter the Polish Consulate that night ten student militants and revolutionary socialists were arrested.

The Left has, because of the stand of the CPA and the prompt protests of students and revolutionary socialists been able to seriously reduce the harm done to the socialist cause by the Soviet invasion.

It is necessary however to continue to act in an outgoing way and take the socialist and revolutionary viewpoint to the Australian people. In particular, we must show the connection between Vietnam and Czechoslovakia and also the hypocrisy of Gorton and Johnson who had, in the long run, as much to fear from socialist democracy flowering in Czechoslovakia as the stalinist bureaucrats.

IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO PROTEST,
IT IS NECESSARY TO EXPLAIN HOW
SUCH AN ACT COULD OCCUR

It is not however sufficient to simply protest the Soviet intervention. It is necessary to understand how such events could occur.

An act of such magnitude cannot be explained away by putting the blame on a few individuals or their personal quirks. It can only be satisfactorily explained by a profound examination of the social roots of this action among the different classes and layers in Soviet society.

The immediate causes are reasonably easy to discover. The Soviet leaders wanted to stop the workers socialist democracy which was being born in Czechoslovakia from spreading to other Workers States and the Soviet Union itself.

The Kremlin could accept the Rumanian swing to closer links with the West with relative equanimity because the Rumanians maintained internally a quite stalinist regime. The Rumanians have developed closer relations with the West than the Dubcek regime did. The Soviet regime also accepted the close links of the Gomulka regime with the West for a whole period.

The Czechs and Slovaks however because a really remarkable freedom of speech and assembly developed in Prague and elsewhere, and because of the growing demands among workers for workers

management of the factories. Although the Sik reforms did not include such a proposal, there was an increasing demand for workers management of factories. Such a measure would question at the base the whole power of the bureaucracy.

Dubcek's reforms opened the way to such a development. The battle for workers management in the factories and economy as a whole still had to be won. But even this modest degree of socialist democracy won under Dubcek was enough to disturb the stalinist bureaucrats in Moscow.

THE ONLY VALID EXPLANATION IF IS THE FEAR OF A PRIVILEGED BUREAUCRATIC CASTE OF WORKERS DEMOCRACY.

The only valid marxist explanation of the Soviet invasion is the fear of a privileged bureaucratic social caste in all Workers States of the development of workers democracy.

This caste developed in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution and took power under Stalin after Lenin's death. This bureaucratic caste was able to take power because of the smallness of the working class in 1924, its exhaustion and decimation after the civil war and the backwardness and isolation of the first Workers State. The principles of socialist democracy were defended by Trotsky and the Left Opposition, which was decimated by the Stalinist secret police. In the Thirties the bureaucracy took on increasing privileges and in 1931 removed any semblance of workers control in the factories.

Today however, the Soviet working class has expanded enormously in size. It is now highly educated with a high cultural level. This has been due to the economic expansion allowed by the nationalised and planned economy and despite stalinist bureaucratic waste. The Soviet Union has shared in the scientific and industrial revolution of the past two decades, which has had as revolutionary effects in the Soviet as in the West. As a result, the workers and the intellectuals and students who express the aspirations of the masses have increasingly challenged the bureaucratic dictatorship of the heirs of Stalin. This bureaucratic caste is now historically in a state of decline and decay

As a result, it develops many different tendencies and conflicting groups, "conservatives" "liberals" "centrists" all differing on the best way to meet the challenge of the masses.

"LIBERALS" FOR A PERIOD EXPRESS THE DEMANDS OF THE MASSES IN A DISTORTED WAY

The "liberal" tendency of the bureaucracy may for a period express the desire of the masses for change and remove the harshest aspects of bureaucratic police dictatorship. However even such modest reforms may awake truly revolutionary aspirations among the masses for a genuine workers democracy. Thus the "liberals" (Dubcek Nagy) may be crushed by the conservative stalinist wing of the bureaucracy which fears the "liberals" may not be able contain the workers' desire for socialist democracy in limits that preserve the basic interests of the bureaucracy.

Yet when the "liberals" have remained in power as did Gomulka

now participates in the attempt to crush Czechoslovakia's "1956". Perhaps one of the immediate causes of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was the call by GIEREK a Polish CP Politburo member for more democracy in Poland, made just a few days before the invasion.

It is insufficient therefore to completely identify oneself with the "liberal" tendency of the bureaucracy. Revolutionary Marxists identify themselves with the growing demand for workers democracy at all levels among the masses, and gives critical support to the "liberals" who give expression to this demand. This is another point which differentiates us from the Aarons leadership. We do not exclude either that the "liberals" courageously defend the road they have chosen or even that elements among them may come to the side of full workers democracy; but then they will have ceased to be merely "liberals".

CPA LEADERSHIP MUST MAKE FULL ANALYSIS OF REASONS FOR INVASION

The CPA leadership has taken an important step in attacking the invasion. The terms of the condemnation have not been as strong as they may have been but nevertheless the step has been taken.

But CPA members and supporters will now be demanding that a real explanation of the invasion be given. They are asked to join Revolutionary Marxists in demanding that the National Committee :

** make a real analysis of the social base of the degeneration of the Soviet leadership; something which can be traced to Stalin's supremacy. A full analysis of the history of Stalinism and the role of Trotsky and the Left Opposition is needed.

** the CPA must face up to its own past. An honest history of the stalinisation of the CPA under Sharkey and the mistakes made. In particular the role in the trade unions, the anti-war movement and the relation with the ALP Left must all be reexamined. The CPA must come clean on its attitude to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

** The CPA must put under examination its neo-reformism which it inherited from Stalinism. Today there is an urgent need for a genuinely revolutionary socialist party.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, FRANCE VIETNAM AND AUSTRALIA

As we mentioned earlier, the symptoms of the revolt in Czechoslovakia and the advanced capitalist countries are similar. In particular, the roots of the French workers and students revolt in May - June this year are clear.

The French workers and students were basically in revolt against their alienation from decision-making in all spheres of work and life. Parliamentary democracy has been emptied of meaning; only workers' power and workers management of factories have any meaning for a real democracy. The failure of the French CP to recognise that fact led them to betray a revolutionary situation in May.

Thus a development of a genuine workers democracy in Czechoslovakia would have in the long run set an example to the workers in all the advanced capitalist countries including Australia.

The Left must also draw all the lessons for the struggle in Vietnam. The Soviet action bears close resemblance to the American aggression in Vietnam although arising from a different social and political motivation. While rejecting simplified analogies the Left should draw the comparison and show the hypocrisy of the Gortons and Johnsons on this question.

BUILD A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY

The two organisations signing this Open Letter are in the process, with many other revolutionary socialist workers and students who are not members of either Fourth Internationalist group, of forming a revolutionary socialist organisation which will have full freedom of tendency. This organisation shall also be open to members of the CPA who agree with its basic aims. One of its main aims will be formation of a revolutionary socialist wing inside the CPA which will include the demand for a full marxist analysis of Stalinism as one of its major planks.

This revolutionary socialist organisation will be transitional to the formation of a larger revolutionary socialist Party which will join with a revolutionary socialist wing of the CPA (which we hope will in its majority opt for such a Party).

Such a revolutionary socialist Party will be the base for a future mass Party which will develop in relation with the evolution of the ALP Left and other revolutionary forces.

Join in the construction of the revolutionary socialist organisation.
Demand that your leaders give a fully marxist analysis of Stalinism.
Demand an honest history of the CPA and the truth on Hungary 1956.
Complete solidarity with the Czechs and Slovaks fighting for Socialist Democracy.

SIGNED:

25 August 1968

Denis Francis for
INTERNATIONAL magazine
organ of Australian Section of
the Fourth International
Box 13 Balmain -2041.

P. Collins for Editorial Board
SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE
organ of the Fourth International
in Australia,
Box A444, Sydney 30th F.O.

OTHER DOCUMENTS IN THIS BROCHURE:

- (1) Declaration of the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency of the Fourth International on the Czech Crisis (1 July 1968).
- (2) Declaration of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International on the Czech crisis (1 August)