

Neo-Stalinist coup in Czechoslovakia

by Luba George

The Czechoslovak Communist Party finally held its Central Committee Plenum (twice postponed since June), on Oct. 10-11 in Prague. The Plenum, as Czech news releases underscore, faithfully reflected the consolidation of the KGB's "Andropov Kindergarten" in the Soviet leadership at the Soviet CC Plenum of Sept. 30. This was the most obvious feature of the Prague events, but has been curiously all but absent from the Western media coverage.

The Czech Plenum created a new leadership structure of 18 Central Committee commissions, one for each major policy area. The most vital posts went to those ultra-Stalinist Politburo figures who called in the Soviet troops in 1968 and who will make no concessions to any opposition forces. Jan Fojtik, for example, was promoted to head two commissions, the ideology portfolio and that of education; Vasil Bilak, the aging ideology czar, was placed in charge of foreign policy; and 73-year-old Alois Indra was promoted to head the legal and justice commission—paralleling the rise of his Soviet counterpart, former KGB head Viktor Chebrikov.

The Czech Plenum also followed the Polish model of September, by having the entire government resign, making it the scapegoat for the economic crisis. Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal and Slovak Prime Minister Peter Colotka, both under retirement age, "retired" from the Politburo. The entire cabinet is being reshuffled. The new prime minister, Ladislav Adamec, is an expert on the economy; with the removal of Vratislav Vejnar, the vital post of interior minister, who oversees both police and intelligence/security functions, will also change hands.

The Plenum caps the first phase of a wide-ranging purge conducted since December 1987, when Milos Jakes became general secretary. Forty thousand party members have quit the party (over 5%), reducing membership from 880,000 to 840,000. Most who quit openly criticized the present situation in the country, and criticized the party leadership for "awakening insecurity and passivity among the party members."

The speeches delivered at the Plenum set the tone for a crackdown. During the Oct. 11 meeting, neo-Stalinist Politburo member and ideologue Jan Fojtik assumed a dominant role, making it clear that even the mildest form of political opposition would not be tolerated. Referring to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, he declared that "one of the most fundamental lessons of the past" was that there

should be no weakening of the leading role of the Communist Party. "We must not close our eyes to any of the risks of reform," he said, and warned of "growing counterrevolutionary forces," supported or directly organized from abroad.

The backdrop to these developments emerged in August and September. A Sept. 6 *Pravda* commentary charging the West with acting "to prod the forces of counterrevolution into action" in Poland and Czechoslovakia, certified the triumph of the neo-Stalinist trend in the East bloc. It marked Moscow's first definitive reply to a mid-August attack by the Czech leadership on "illusions" in Moscow concerning the resurfacing of "counterrevolution" in Eastern Europe and inside the U.S.S.R. itself. In his Sept. 23 speech to Soviet media leaders, Mikhail Gorbachov himself railed against "illusions" and "confusion" in the Soviet Party.

The Czech challenge had come on Aug. 18—marking the 20th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—in a major article in the weekly of the Czech Writers' Union, *Kmen*, (no.33), by Jan Fojtik's Russian-trained wife, Eva Fojtikova. Fojtikova, a professor of Russian at Prague University, blamed *glasnost* for the emergence of the "counterrevolution." "One must not forget that the U.S.S.R. has not gone through . . . the Hungarian, Czechoslovak, and Polish counterrevolutions—who today still dares to call these events that?—and that the Soviets have had no direct experience in this kind of thing. That is why so many illusions survive, and that is why the danger is so great." She condemned the Soviet "liberal" press for its "sensationalism" and "possibly irresponsible opening of all the sluice gates."

Moscow's 'industrial milk cow'

Moscow requires the neo-Stalinist direction in Prague today for the same reason it invaded in 1968. Czechoslovakia must remain stable and docile, because its industrial base is one of the pillars for the Soviet economy. The Soviet Union, experiencing a devastating food and economic crisis, cannot afford to allow the situation to develop into "another Poland." Besides the question of their geostrategic importance for Moscow, East Germany and Czechoslovakia are indispensable as "industrial milk cows" for the Soviet Union. Moscow could not tolerate any Czech resistance to Soviet demands for industrial goods.

Czechoslovakia is Russia's only East bloc source for wide-diameter steel pipe and heavy-duty "Tatra" dump trucks and other construction machinery, without which the Soviet Union never could have developed the Tyumen and West Siberian oil and gas fields at the speed required for them to have become what they are today—the mainstay of Soviet foreign exchange earnings.

If one looks at a map of Soviet pipelines today, one sees that every oil and gas trunk pipeline between Russia and Western Europe, without exception, runs through Czechoslovak territory. This fact alone dictates the necessity of a Soviet garrison in Czechoslovakia.