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USA: Ideology

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"INDEPENDENT MARXIST-LENINIST" CONDEMNS INVASION

Summary: Just before his death Leo Huberman, co-editor of the independent American Marxist journal Monthly Review, penned a harsh indictment of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia -- a moral, political and ideological disaster, as he puts it. But the Soviet hard-liners have won only a temporary victory: the Czechoslovak experiment in socialist democratization represents an idea whose time has come. His co-editor, Paul Sweezy, also condemns the invasion, but from a very different viewpoint: believing that both Czechoslovakia and the USSR were drifting toward capitalism, he inclines rather to support the Chinese view of the crisis.

The death in Paris of Leo Huberman (1) has ended a remarkable partnership in political journalism. For nearly two decades he and Paul M. Sweezy have jointly edited Monthly Review, a hard-hitting American journal the orientation of which is perhaps best described as "independent Marxist-Leninist." Each issue opened with a "Review of the Month" by "The Editors"; and it was a work of subtle textual exegesis to distinguish the hand of Huberman in this passage or the voice of Sweezy in that.

Their joint positions were frequently an offense to orthodox Communists in America and elsewhere. On balance, they gave critical support to the Chinese in the Sino-Soviet conflict; and they were as ready to attack Soviet great-power opportunism or the revisionist reformism of Western Communist parties as they were to denounce imperialist wiles or the evils of monopoly capitalism. In recent years they showed particular favor for Cuba and the

(1) See report in L'Unita, 4 November 1968.

Castroist guerrilla movements, and corresponding contempt for the old-guard Communist leaderships of Latin America.

Ironically, this working partnership failed just before it was ended by Huberman's death -- because of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In this case it proved impossible to hammer out a joint editorial from two incompatible drafts. The October issue of Monthly Review therefore carries two editorial statements on Czechoslovakia.

Huberman's outraged response to the invasion was that of a Marxist humanist. For him, there was "absolutely no justification" for the occupation: "From every point of view -- morally, politically, ideologically -- it was a disaster." The Czechoslovaks had been trying to create "a socialism free of repression, consonant with human dignity, infused with a true Communist morality"; and the Russians had intervened to crush that attempt. But the struggle for a democratic, humanistic socialism would continue, he argued with idealistic optimism: "The hard-liners in the Soviet Union and the other invading countries have won only a temporary victory. The end is not yet." Huberman's last message was a worthy close to his career.

His co-editor's reaction, on the other hand, was that of an academic Marxist-Leninist. Paul Sweezy agreed that there was no justification for the invasion -- the Russians had intervened not to meet a counterrevolutionary situation (which did not exist) but to crush an infectious example of democratic reform. But Sweezy criticized both the Czechoslovak reformers and the "decadent bureaucracies" of the other regimes on different grounds: whether they realized it or not, all were involved in a fatal "drift to capitalism." In his view, "the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a sign of Soviet weakness in the face of a growing crisis in the bloc as a whole," and the economic and political problems which lay behind it would "surely bring on new and greater crises in the future." It was China, he thought, which had gained most from the crisis -- China which had denounced the invasion as it deserved to be denounced without falling into the naivetes of the theory which saw Czechoslovakia as headed for some kind of a democratic socialist utopia."

The gap between the editorial partners was wide: where Huberman thought in terms of personal liberties, Sweezy thought in terms of market relations and the global struggle against the class enemy. The result was a demonstration of the disruptive impact which the Czechoslovak crisis has had not only on the international Communist movement, but also on independent Marxist movements in many countries.

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