

A HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACIES: Eastern Europe since Stalin, by François Fejtő. *Penguin Books*, London, 1974. 565 pp. 95p.

BUREAUCRACY AND REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE, by Chris Harman. *Pluto Press*, London, 1974. 296 pp. £4.30 (hardback), £1.50 (paperback).

The recurring crises in Eastern Europe have left few friends and supporters for the regimes set up by Stalin in this, his post-war 'sphere of influence'. Today, expressions of support (from those who bother) are applied selectively: for the 'independence' of Ceausescu's Rumania, for the 'prosperity' of Kadar's Hungary, or even, by some, for the stringency of Hoxha's Albania. Superficially, it seems that uniformity of Communism in Europe has broken up into competing experiments, with each government intent on avoiding the pitfalls experienced by its neighbours.

In fact, these two books suggest that each regime is trying to avoid the same crisis. For François Fejtő this crisis derives from the contradiction between Soviet imperialism and the national aspirations of the peoples of Eastern Europe. Within each society it is manifested by a struggle between the 'anti-national' sections of the ruling bureaucracy, those who welcome Soviet domination, and *all* other sections of society. In fact, he implies a parallel with the version of the anti-colonial revolution which asserts the myth that imperialism was buried by a unified opposition of an oppressed nation. 'There is nothing irreconcilable', he suggests, 'between the interests of the other classes'.

Such a view, however, founders against the subtle strength of bureaucratic rule. Fejtő's distinction between the treacherous and the patriotic fails to explain why the Gomulka who stood up to the Russians in 1956 should unleash his own, Polish forces against Polish workers in 1970. It does not explain why Dubcek, the epitome of Czech nationalist and democratising forces was eventually revealed, in Fejtő's own words, to be 'bound hand and foot by an ideology whose touchstone was devotion to the USSR'. If the de-Stalinisers can become Stalinists what hope is there for the pluralist, liberal-socialist democracy which Fejtő hopes will evolve in Eastern Europe?

The key to success, given the failure of peaceful reformism in Czechoslovakia, is seen in the emergence of Dubcekism in Moscow itself! Such a conclusion serves only to illustrate that reformism can also be idealistic.

Harman is concerned to show that all the ingredients Marxists have applied to the scenario of class struggle and workers' power in Western capitalism are applicable to the crises which afflict the state capitalism of Eastern Europe. Although we lose a discussion of state relations within the bloc (which Fejtő deals with exhaustively) we gain detailed accounts of the workers' revolt in East Berlin in 1953, the workers' councils of Poland and Hungary in 1956, the arrested reform in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the Baltic riots of 1970/71. In Harman's account the split in the bureaucracy between the pro-Russian hard-liners and the liberal technocrats is important but not central. This split in the ruling class, Harman shows, accelerates the social crisis and immobilises the forces of state repression. But this is merely the prelude to the real confrontation: between workers setting up factory councils to fight for production based on need, and bureaucrats, whether 'liberal' or 'hard', who share a common determination to subordinate production to accumulation.

Accumulation for what? For survival in competition, says Harman, with the private capitalist West. And the cost of staying in the race, in terms of arms expenditure, is great enough to demand continued attacks on workers' living standards. Like Fejtő, Harman recognises that Eastern Europe will only be finally liberated by events in the Soviet Union itself. But, unlike Fejtő, Harman's prognosis is realistic. The symptoms which have produced upheavals in Eastern Europe display an even greater virulence in the Soviet economy. And there will be no 'fraternal' troops to 'normalise' a social upheaval in the Soviet Union.

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