

The Communist Party Discussion on Regroupment in the Socialist Movement

By H. W. BENSON

In the bitter discussion of irreconcilable views that is slowly shaping up inside the Communist Party as its national convention approaches, a prominent place is occupied by the question of "a new united party of socialism" in the United States.

No one tries to define its nature with precision, a task that would doubtless prove fruitless and unnecessary at this stage of the discussion. But in general it is suggested that Communists join together with "other Left groups" in a new broad movement that would combine all "socialist currents" and allow for the coexistence of divergent views within the framework of a united organization.

In the debate, all comers pay at least lip-service to the idea, but for different reasons and with different aims. There's the rub.

The slogan "For a Mass Party of Socialism" was advanced by Eugene Dennis in April at an enlarged meeting of the CP National Committee. The draft resolution prepared for the February 1957 convention speaks of "the perspective of a united party of socialism in this country."

William Z. Foster, who changed his vote from yes to no on the resolution, still endorses the call for a new movement. Dennis, who voted for the resolution but who whitewashes the Russian attack on the Hungarian workers' revolution, is also for it. The National Committee majority seems to be for it. And the Daily Worker board, which offers an unprecedented if straddling criticism of Russia's role in Hungary, is also for it. All seem united; everything seems calm, at least on this front. But is it?

The acrimonious tone of the discussion belies the surface agreement. In fact, the same slogan can serve as an umbrella to cover at least two utterly opposed and hostile perspectives.

FOSTER'S WAY

One way would be to hide behind the call for "unity on the Left"; to gloss over the CP internal crisis; to wait and to hope that the lessons of the 20th Congress and the new lessons of Hungary will be forgotten, and then to go on as before as though nothing fundamental had changed. This is the perspective of all-around lip-service: it means talking about democracy but supporting dictatorship; it means talking about unity of socialism while apologizing for the crushing of the socialist working class of Hungary.

That is clearly the way of Foster and Dennis.

On the other hand, the perspective of a new, broad socialist movement can and does serve those who are honestly and deeply disturbed by the Khrushchev revelations and are horrified by the realization that their party consistently and unwaveringly apologized for every crime against socialism committed by the Kremlin. They are looking for a way out, for a new road to socialism.

In the past they clung to what they now call "dogmas"; they were disoriented by old formulas. For a new orientation they look toward collaboration and discussion among all currents of the "Left."

SEEKING ANOTHER WAY

For Foster it is a question of filling up every crack with plaster; gluing together the falling pieces and binding up the disintegrating whole with mending tape, all into a reasonable facsimile of the old. For others, it is a question of finding an authentically socialist way out of the undenied crisis into which they have been plunged.

They have a long way to go; one cannot devote the energies of a whole generation toward warping the very conception of socialism and toward wiping out its genuinely democratic content by apologizing for anti-socialist totalitarianism, and then emerge suddenly pure and undefiled, wise and crystal-clear in program and principle. But the tendencies are there to see; they are not as clear-cut as defined here for economy of

space but nevertheless the basic leanings are detectable.

Foster and Dennis are in the unenviable position of men who must admit to 30-odd years of apologizing for crimes against socialism and then request that the whole past be forgotten. In effect they announce:

It is quite true that we denounced honest socialists as fascists; we called true democrats agents of imperialism; we applauded when revolutionists were executed; we explained away frame-up trials; we called those who told the truth liars and those who lied honest men; we undermined socialism and defamed its name by equating it with anti-socialist terror. All right! We have admitted it. Now please be satisfied that we recognize our crimes and errors. Having admitted our shameful course in the past, we call upon all workers to support us in the bright future.

"Just a moment," comes the inevitable question. "How can we have confidence in you? Have you examined the basic causes of your shameful role? What fundamental changes have you made in your policies and principles? And above all, how are your protestations and promises reflected in the position you take on the events of the day? What about Hungary? Are you still an apologist for Russia?"

Away with such talk—that is the essential content of Dennis' and Foster's rejoinder. Haven't we explained that we admit our errors of the past? Now, be content and let us talk of unity and such things. It is enough that we say we once were wrong; do you demand that we make a fundamental change besides? That is un-Marxist, un-Leninist, un-socialist. It is liquidationist; it is a surrender to the bourgeoisie. Anyhow, counter-revolutionaries in Hungary tried to overthrow a Communist regime.

A DREAM OF NIKE

Let us imagine that the 1960 election campaign is on. The Republican Party runs its new beloved leader Nike Eisenhower for president under the slogan "I like Nike" and demands a vote of confidence from the people. Nike comes to the voters with startling revelations:

He reveals that the previous Republican administration was actually paid by big business. It tried to break up unions. It was corrupt and willingly sold out to the highest bidder. It secretly murdered Negroes. It sent unionists to death and to jail. It fabricated evidence against socialists, Communists, New Dealers. It pilfered the national treasury and distributed forged banknotes to its retainers.

"And now," concludes Nike in thunderous peroration, "having admitted openly and honestly all these crimes and errors, we are certain that you, the voters, will see that we now merit a landslide vote of confidence in 1960. Obviously, too, this is a time for national unity."

Among other things, we can imagine the look of unbelieving amazement on the face of William Z. Foster as he put pen to paper in reply.

Yet this absurdity is the underlying content of the Foster position. Fortunately for the reputation of the human race in the animal kingdom, dissenting voices are strongly heard in the Communist Party, even among leading people.

STALINIST VIEW

In 30 expansive pages entitled "On the Party Situation" (Political Affairs, Oct.) Foster outlines exactly three major "errors" of the party during the cold war and ascribes them to precisely seven basic "causes." He catalogues no less than 21 burning questions that must be clarified, ending his list with "etc." and

he points the finger at no less than 16 fundamental errors of the "right" wing in the internal discussion. All this is in accord with a familiar and often effective bureaucratic device for derailing a discussion. To prevent the debate from throwing light on the key, decisive issues and clarifying what is under discussion, he fragmentizes it into an encyclopedia of endless questions, big and small.

Yet, despite this exhaustive detail, he dismisses one of the crucial questions in an off-hand comment:

"Although the situation created by the Stalin revelations presented certain problems, no doubt the party could have overcome them without great difficulty, absorbing the immediate lessons from the Stalin exposure and studying the long-range implications of this important matter."

For Foster, the crisis in the CP is created not by the 20th Congress bombshell but by those who conclude that a big change is necessary and who are groping for a new road. If only one could say, "Yes, we committed unfortunate mistakes," and then go on with business as usual, Foster would be quite content.

DODGING ISSUES

He finds it hardly necessary to "waste" time on this most critical aspect of the discussion in his 30 pages dismissing the whole matter as follows:

"There were errors, too, in connection with the Stalin cult of the individual, especially manifested by the party's uncritical attitude toward developments in the USSR. These mistakes, however, were international in scope, not merely those of the CPUSA. They spread out over 20 years and they were particularly damaging during the years of the Cold War. Inasmuch as they have been widely discussed in our party, there is no need for me to dwell upon them here."

Highest on his list of criticisms of party opponents is what he calls "the cultivation of a sharply critical attitude toward the Soviet Union."

With this background, we begin to understand Foster's attitude toward a "new party of socialism." For him, the Communist Party must remain basically what it has been and he looks upon it as the force to lead the fight for "socialism." The new mass party is put forward as a minor tactical maneuver.

And so he writes:

"The resolution should also de-emphasize the slogan for a new mass party of socialism from its present implications of immediacy to the status of a possible long-range objective."

But the real point at issue is not "immediacy" versus "long-range" but diverging conceptions of the role of the CP today and of the crisis within it.

Foster attacks everyone who looks upon the "new party" as a real possibility:

"Almost certainly," he writes, "in the United States the fight for socialism will be made not by the Communist Party alone, but by a combination of economic and political groupings among which the Communist Party must be a decisive leader. The present immediate path as the workers proceed to the building of a mass socialist movement in this country, therefore, is the strengthening of the Communist Party upon the basis of Marxism-Leninism and the development of broad united-front mass struggles."

To Foster, the Communist Party must be the "leader" and he seeks to strengthen it and dodge the big issues by talking about a new mass party.

WELCOMING IDEAS

But that is Foster. On the other side, for example, there is John Gates who replies to him in the November issue of Political Affairs.

Gates has a different estimate of the state of the CP:

"The advance of the American workers to socialism is impossible without a conscious and organized vanguard. In all candor we must admit that we are not that today. Nor are we likely to be the exclusive channel through which such a leadership will come into existence, but I do

think we are an important and essential part of this process and can make a decisive and distinctive contribution if we face up to our present crisis and make the necessary changes to surmount it."

He adds:

"To achieve this, we need to create an atmosphere which welcomes all new ideas no matter how unorthodox they may be and debates them on their merits without resort to name-calling as a substitute for thinking."

The CP, then, is not the "vanguard"; it can make a "contribution" but only if it "surmounts" its own crisis and considers all new ideas. This is a far cry from the Foster standpoint and is clear evidence of the search for a genuinely new road in the ranks of the CP.

Gates repeats in conclusion:

"The test as to whether we shall succeed in becoming a truly independent American working-class organization dedicated to the immediate struggles of the American people and socialism lies right now in the kind of atmosphere we develop in the discussion, and ultimately of course in the policies we adopt."

AGAINST MONOLITHISM

In the same issue of Political Affairs, in an article entitled "A New Party of Socialism," Steve Nelson argues against "those who say that it was a mistake" to have raised the question:

"This view," he writes, "refuses to concede that there were any serious mistakes in policy and that there ever could have been anything wrong with our organizational concepts. Those who take this view tend to play upon the present discussion in the world Communist movement and treat it as a surface phenomenon. They apparently draw the conclusion that no fundamental problems are to be reconsidered anew. Everything in the past is taken for granted as if everything was answered for all time. There are some in our party who are afraid to examine the causes of our errors in the most fundamental way. They tend to treat them superficially and therefore will not provide answers to our problems."

He goes on to quote none other than Rosa Luxemburg for free elections, free press, free speech, free assembly in the Russia of 1918, and continues, "Unless we change the monolithic concept, we are not going to be prepared to develop a true working-class party that will operate on American traditions and concepts. If we do not, all the talk about our favoring the democratic process in establishing socialism, recognition of the existence of other parties in the U.S.A. is meaningless."

Those who seriously are thinking about the "new mass party" are beginning a genuine process of re-evaluation, but they are only beginning.

FACING HUNGARY

The basic cause of the crisis in the CP is not shrouded in mystery. The ranks are beginning to understand that they were led to support anti-socialist crimes committed by the rulers in Russia.

The crisis is deepened by the re-enacting of the whole scene in Hungary where the tanks and planes of the Russian state mow down worker-revolutionaries. The Daily Worker cannot face the issue squarely; it is ready to criticize Russia in subdued tones but seeks in vain for a tenable niche on both sides of the barricades of the workers' revolution.

Gates, Nelson and their co-thinkers, too, have a long way to go in order to shake off their ideological ties to the Kremlin and its spurious "socialism." Needless to say, they think socialism exists in Russia.

Nelson, for example: "From the present discussion and criticism in the world Communist movement of the errors committed under Stalin's leadership in the USSR, none should conclude that those who supported the Soviet Union from its inception were wrong. . . . The USSR played the chief role in inspiring other peoples to establish socialism in their countries. . . . True errors were committed

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Hungary's Revolution Still Fights - -

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Here is an attempt to summarize some of the highlights of the period between November 4 and 20.

General fighting in Budapest from Sunday, November 4 on. The Russians pour 200,000 troops with 5000 tanks into Hungary, concentrating on Budapest. The fighting continues for ten days, with the last organized resistance in workers' districts, especially on the industrial island of Csepel.

The Kadar puppet government promises all kinds of reforms, and sets repeated deadlines for surrender of the revolutionaries without reprisals. Finally, on November 14, the last organized resistance ends when the Csepel workers lay down their arms. The "workers' council of the industrial area of Buda" issues a manifesto in which it offers to resume work immediately and unconditionally on cleaning up the capital and restoring supplies.

It states that the resumption of all other work must be preceded by the following conditions:

"1. Reorganization of the Kadar government to meet the will of the people.

"2. Free elections in which those parties that have declared their readiness to accept 'socialist' achievements should participate.

"3. Release of Nagy and his colleagues, including officers of the Hungarian army and all insurgents.

"4. Immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest and negotiations for withdrawal from the whole of Hungary."

WORKERS ADAMANT

November 16: Kadar promises "free elections" in the above sense, dissolution of the secret police, publication of all Russo-Hungarian treaties. The general strike has been on for three weeks. Railroad workers who had returned to work go on strike again when it is discovered that the Russians are transporting Hungarians to the east.

November 17: Kadar promises that a regime will be set up like that in Yugoslavia with "factory councils." His government announces that henceforth food will be distributed only through government stores, and that workers who return to their jobs will be given a hot meal and food for their families. These decrees are intended to stop delivery of food to the workers by farmers, and to starve the former into submission.

November 18: Leaflets are distributed in the streets of Budapest stating that, in an all-night session, Kadar had threatened the Budapest Workers Council with arrest and deportation unless they called off the general strike. It was this threat which had led to their decision, by a slim majority, to call off the strike on November 16.

A workers' delegation protests to the

council against the decision, and demands that delegates be elected by factories and offices to a "Workers Parliament," which should meet in a few days and choose new representatives to negotiate with the government.

Though some workers are returning to the factories, they do no work. They stand around in the courtyards and by their machines, discussing the course to take. In any event, the lack of coal and transport makes it impossible for most factories to do any sustained work.

Miners' and oil workers' delegations from Tatabonya, Komlo, Varpalota and Darog protest the deportations of Hungarians to Russia, and threaten to blow up oil fields and flood coal mines if their demands to stop these deportations are not met.

A secret radio report that on November 15 freedom fighters blew up the railroad track near Kisvarda, and freed about 2500 persons from a train.

UNITED FOR GOOD

November 19: Despite threats and promises, less than half the factory workers have returned to work. "Kadar didn't convince us," one worker tells a reporter, "but winter is here and misery

comes." "The whole country can't live on relief," another says. "The workers were so much united by last week's events that they will never fall apart again. The government must realize by now that the use of force is pointless."

According to refugees pouring into Austria, the Russians are able to control only what is within range of their guns in a country completely united against them. They control a few rail and highway arteries, but some lines have been so disrupted by sabotage that no trains are running.

Increasing reports are circulating of fighting among Russian troops. Although correspondents warn to treat these rumors with caution, they say they are widespread among the refugees. The cause of the fighting is reported to be refusal of garrison troops to return to Russia. Russian troops are also reported to be escaping to Yugoslavia in the hope of getting asylum.

The present hope of the Hungarian Revolution lies in its extension. The Hungarian workers, backed by the whole nation, are doing everything that lies in their power to make that extension possible.

How They Killed Aid to Hungary

There were ways to come to the aid of the Hungarian Revolution other than intervening militarily. The answer was not to start the third world war. There was a political answer. The U.S. authorities helped to squelch it.

This is the damning charge made from Berlin in the current *New Leader* by Rainer Hildebrandt, the well-known author of *The Explosion*, an account of the East German revolt. It is of first-rank importance.

The question is what the West German, particularly West Berlin, workers could have done to help bring the East German workers to active support of Hungary.

The ground was fertile, says Hildebrandt, who maintains organized contact across the border. On October 29 there was a movement in East Germany toward a solidarity strike with Hungary which "was prevented by the authorities."

Moreover, in West Berlin the workers were straining at the leash imposed on them by their own authorities. On Nov. 5 at a mass torchlight demonstration, more than 100,000 demanded "action" and were restrained from making a march to the Brandenburg Gate only by cops and water hoses.

But Hildebrandt does not mention this to advocate adventurist intervention by Western arms, as do some desperate

people. He condemns the fact that "the West Berlin government, supported by U.S. authorities, has been working to forestall any active movement" to help the freedom fight across the Iron Curtain.

One such proposal was made, by none other than the chairman of the West Berlin trade unions, Ernst Scharnowski. On October 27 Scharnowski proposed that an appeal be broadcast to the East German workers for a "peaceful general strike" of solidarity.

"But," says Hildebrandt, "the West Berlin radio stations, including RIAS [Radio in American Sector], were not permitted to broadcast the appeal and Mayor Otto Suhr was so upset that Scharnowski was forced to retract it."

The West Berlin radio, that potentially powerful weapon, "remained stubbornly silent" while the Hungarian people waited two weeks for solidarity strikes in other satellites.

"I personally believe," adds Hildebrandt, "that if at the end of October there had been sit-down strikes in Germany, the Soviets would not have been able to launch their bloodbath in Hungary. The Soviet military forces are not homogeneous. Soviet soldiers joined the Hungarian freedom-fighters in the first days of the revolt, and many Russians in uniform showed sympathy for the Hungarians. It would have been a great risk to proceed with such an army against several oppressed peoples simultaneously.

"Once before, the West passed up such a magnificent opportunity: On June 16, 1953, when the construction workers of East Berlin called for a general strike, Western government quarters knowingly suppressed the words 'general strike.' The radio stations were not allowed to broadcast this slogan. Today we know that if the forces which on the following day created 'June 17' had assumed the form not of an explosion but of a strike lasting several days, the strike would have spread to the major plants of the satellites and the forced-labor camps of the Soviet Union."

And he concludes: "Only a political innocent can believe that today the only choice is between abandoning the Hungarian people or supporting them with Western weapons."

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CP Discussion

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ted in the USSR in this period but in spite of that, the positive things remain." And more of the same.

And Gates: "The historic role of the USSR in blazing the trail for socialism, and in transforming the world situation to where lasting peace is now possible, has fully justified the high regard we have always had for the Soviet Union and its Communist Party. Humanity will be forever indebted to the Soviet Union for those services."

This is only a small sample of how a fundamental Stalinism without Stalin persists in all tendencies in the CP.

Still, Gates can write without noticing any difficulty:

"The violations of democracy and justice in the USSR cannot be explained by the deficiencies of Stalin alone. How could one man have achieved the power he did and why was a whole country powerless before him? How could such flagrant violations of socialist ideals take place for such a long time in a socialist country?"

One wonders: was the USSR "blazing the trail" during all this, during "such a long time"?

Gates and his friends see the need for big changes. In a devious, contradictory, even self-defeating way they see the solution in a new party of socialism and for that they admittedly need new policies. But what policies?

They are engaged in discussing everything under the sun and Foster is quite willing to raise bigger, better, and more numerous questions. The whole repertory of issues can only be fully settled in time, if ever.

THE PRECONDITION

Yet the fundamental question, we repeat, is clear: Will you or will you not break in every respect from the bureaucratic dictatorship in the Kremlin, and completely your political dependence upon it, and cease apologizing for it?

A new broad movement could play a tremendous role in reinvigorating socialism in the United States and in reviving it as a significant tendency in the working class. But if one factor more than any other caused the decline of socialism, it was the rise of the bureaucratic dictatorship in Russia.

"Is that your socialism?" demanded every intelligent militant in the labor movement. "If so, we want none of it." Every bourgeois ideologist, from right to left, identified socialism with the totalitarian dictatorship in Russia in order to defame and discredit socialism, and up to now they have succeeded.

The CP, in this country, as in all others, helped to put over the hoax.

No mass movement for socialism is possible, in this country, unless it clearly and without evasion rejects the social system that exists in Russia and unambiguously denies that the Kremlin dictatorship has anything in common with socialism in any respect whatsoever.

Socialism will begin anew in the United States as a democratic, anti-totalitarian movement against capitalism and against the social system of Stalinism, or it will not rise at all. If the discussion in the CP moves the ranks in that direction it will serve a worthy cause. And for that, the voice of democratic socialism must be heard.

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on

REGROUPMENT FOR A
NEW SOCIALIST MOVEMENT?

Current Discussion Among
Socialists and Communists

Labor Action Hall
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Djilas: The Storm - -

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only a phase in the evolution and withering away of contemporary Communism.

It is no longer possible to stop the struggle of the people of Eastern Europe for independence, and only with great effort their struggle for freedom. These two struggles are gradually becoming one. If Moscow's imperialism suffers defeat and is prevented from war adventures, the USSR, too, will have to undergo considerable internal changes. For, just as it is compelled to be national in its forms, in essence Communism is one and the same, with the same historical origins and the same destiny. The events in one Communist country necessarily affect all other Communist countries, as in one and the same living organism. And just as Yugoslav Communism, separating itself from Moscow, initiated the crisis of Soviet imperialism, that is, the inevitable birth of national Communism, in the same way the revolution in Hungary means the beginning of the end of Communism generally.

As in all other great and decisive historic events, the Hungarian fighters for freedom, struggling for their existence and country, may not have foreseen what an epochal deed they had initiated. The world has rarely witnessed such unprec-

edented unity of the popular masses and such heroism. The unity of the popular masses was so strong that it appeared as though there had been no civil strife, as though a ruling class had not been wiped out overnight as if it never existed. And the heroic intoxication was so high that bare-handed boys and girls were stopping the tanks of the interventionists who, like the Cossacks of Nicholas I in 1848, tried to suppress their liberty and enslave their country.

This event will probably not be repeated. But the Hungarian Revolution blazed a path which sooner or later other Communist countries must follow. The wound which the Hungarian Revolution inflicted on Communism can never be completely healed. All its evils and weaknesses, both as Soviet imperialism and as a definite system of suppression, had collected on the body of Hungary, and there, like festering sores, were cut out by the hands of the Hungarian people.

I do not think that the fate of the Hungarian Revolution is at all decisive for the fate of Communism and the world. World Communism now faces stormy days and insurmountable difficulties, and the peoples of Eastern Europe face heroic new struggles for freedom and independence.