

The CP Faithful Get a Rundown-and-out on the Line — Uncle Milty at the Jeff School

By GEORGE POST

Every Wednesday evening for the past month, the Stalinist faithful and close sympathizers in New York have been meeting at the Jefferson School to listen to a number of leading party hacks explain the Russian 20th Party Congress to them. A LABOR ACTION correspondent infiltrated the third of these meetings on March 21 by the clever ruse of paying the \$1 admission fee.

The speaker for the evening was Milton Howard, one of the literati entrusted with putting out the *Daily Worker*, and his subject was "Paths to Socialism." The hall was crowded with about 300 truth-seekers, part of the audience having to be accommodated in the basement where they listened to Howard's voice piped to them appropriately from above.

In addition to a few independent Stalinists and a few anti-Stalinist radicals present, those attending seemed to be from that petty-bourgeoisie which has been the backbone of the CP in New York City, sprinkled with types who were the backbone of the International Workers Order, cultural isolates who are not really fully aware that the CP in 1956 is not exactly the same organization which the Socialist Party's language federations were instrumental in founding in 1919.

Those expecting much in the way of edification were disappointed by the formal part of Howard's talk. It was filled with dull "basic lessons," half-developed ideas, and parrotings of the line of the 20th Party Congress.

After engaging in a 25-minute lecture on the contradiction between the social

production of the socially necessary product and the private ownership of the means of production, in order to demonstrate how socialism arises in the first place, Howard threw out some vagaries about the relationship between socialism and democracy.

Then he turned his gaze upon The Two Errors of Marx and The Two Major Contributions of Lenin. The two errors were Marx's belief that the socialist revolution would occur first in one of the Western advanced capitalist countries (so said this ignoramus) and his notion that the socialist revolution would have to be an international one spreading from country to country. And Lenin (not the Lenin of real life, of course, but the Lenin of "Lenin's Struggle for the No-Strike pledge," a common figure for readers of the Stalinist press) corrected these two errors by his understanding that socialism would come first where capitalism was weakest and that of course "socialism in one country" was possible, especially when that country was backward Russia.

At this last point Howard, gagging a bit on what was even for him too ridiculous, commented that in waging the "struggle" for these two theories, especially that of "socialism in one country," Lenin was aided by Stalin—and that one must acknowledge this "contribution" of Stalin. But he carefully qualified this bit of information by declaring that after all "it was only my opinion." (He meant: "my opinion at the moment.")

Having now spent about 85 per cent of his time saying almost nothing, Howard proceeded to repeat the 20th Party Congress formula on "the peaceful and parliamentary transition to socialism." And then he added a postscript to all this concerning the CP's current position on civil liberties.

ON THE RUNWAY

He let his listeners into a secret which had previously not been leaked to the public—the Stalinists were absolute civil-libertarians. Furthermore, they are about to tell the entire world this in the forthcoming April issue of the independent Stalinist magazine *Monthly Review*. (The *Monthly Review* posed a series of questions on socialism and civil liberties almost a year ago—and the CP had studiously avoided answering them up until the present.) Howard said that in this article, the CP, of course, comes out "in favor of the Bill of Rights" which would continue in force under "socialism" and declares that under "socialism" one would not only be free to pose alternative ideas on "how much socialism," etc., but would be free to advocate the return to capitalism.

He was in that expansive, madcap, generous mood where he was rarin' to concede anybody's right to advocate the return of anything—of capitalism . . . of democracy . . . of Peter Ibbetson . . . or almost anything, with the possible exception of the return of Stalin's medals to the Museum in Moscow. Nobody asked him about that.

But the real fun of the evening began in the question period. Released from his prepared hack address, Howard allowed himself to become a cigar-store Romeo playing up to the middleaged Juliets in the audience.

After having gone through the pretense of gathering questions from the multitude, Howard "answered" precisely two questions: "What do the Russian

events mean?" and "How did the Yugoslavian error happen?" As for all other questions, he shrugged them aside by courageously telling the audience: "They are very good; some I can't answer because of time considerations, some because I don't know the answer. Come back in a year or two and I may be able to deal with them then." (Laughter.)

The gist of Howard's answer to the first question was that he didn't know more than the audience. Coming out (as it were) onto the runway, Howard bared his breast to the audience and told them that he did not know what was going on in Russia. Then he proceeded to explain these events he did not understand—for, of course, loyal Stalinist hack that he is, he had to accept the official story and make sense out of it. His version went something like this: Stalin committed many mistakes, in particular that of one-man leadership. This arose partially due to capitalist encirclement, etc., but partially also because of Stalin's ego. Repressive measures had been utilized—but they were now a thing of the past.

IN THE CONFESSIONAL

Then warming to his task, he asked a question which brought down the house, with the ticket-holders below stomping their feet and laughing out loud. Howard insinuatingly inquired: "Where were the present collective leadership when all these mistakes were going on? Were they afraid of being killed? Probably. Were they cowards? I don't know. Where were they, for that matter, since their barmitzvahs?" (Why watch Uncle Milty Berle when you can have Milty Howard?)

After the rousing success of this foray, Howard decided to use "Self-Effacement" as the next gambit. Having determinedly practiced self-criticism for years, of course, he was equal to the task. He decided to show all how even the lower-level leaders of the American CP had been like Stalin and had utilized repressive measures. And he told the following story whose moral is plain:

"Once upon a time, not too long ago, I utilized repressive measures against a writer for the *Daily Worker* who had submitted a movie review of a Russian film. The review not only was highly critical of the movie, it criticized the political

line of the film, which had glorified some Russian naval hero who everyone knew was a skunk—a Russian skunk." (Laughter for a full minute. Woman next to me whispers: "Now he is free to say it.")

"I suppressed the movie review after Alan Max and myself had gone to the movie ourselves. By the way, we got in free, because the manager saw who we were and knew we would give the film a favorable review. We slept through it and then came back and wrote a letter to the reviewer telling him that we could not print the review."

After more of the same, a woman got up from the audience and requested a moment to ask a question. It was granted. Obviously quite upset by the entire affair, she suggested that if criticism was the word of the hour, then wasn't it obvious that one had to be critical of the criticism leveled by the Russian leaders against Stalin? And of course Howard, keeping everyone happy, said: "A very interesting point which we all should consider."

LET'S ALL CONSIDER IT

In answer to the question about Yugoslavia's fall-from-grace and rise into the holy circle once again, Howard attributed the fall to Stalin's ego. Not a mention of Beria, who up to yesterday, had been the devil who had committed the dastardly crime of saying that Tito was a nogoodnik. On this note the meeting adjourned.

But all was not over. A loud, powerful voice was heard demanding three minutes to speak, which was granted. The voice identified itself as belonging to William Mandell, a former teacher at the Jefferson School, and an occasional contributor to *Sweezy's Monthly Review*. He told the story of how he had been expelled from his teacher's post at the Jefferson School because he had made slightly critical remarks about the Soviet Union, and he demanded reinstatement at the school. For that matter, he said, the students of the Jefferson School should work for academic freedom at the school itself.

When he had completed his statement, Howard replied: "A very interesting point which we all should consider," and on his way out called to Mandell, "Good point, Mandell." At that point one expected the Stalinists and the independent Stalinists to link arms and sing a chorus of "Solidarity Forever."

There was no question that the evening had been memorable for all. Outside, in the slush on Sixth Avenue, one woman was overheard saying to her companion: "The man's right. We've been too dogmatic. We'll have to learn how think!"

Good point, lady.

Raid CP — —

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the CP have been blown sky-high in confusion over the Russian revelations on Stalin and have been shaken loose from their moorings of party loyalty by the impact of these confessions, when dispute and debate are extending even into the *Daily Worker's* public columns—just at this time the U. S. government comes to the rescue with a move which is guaranteed to solidify their ranks, give them something to rally round, take their attention off their inner troubles, and make it twice as hard for any of them to make the hard break.

Ironically, the *Daily Worker's* managing editor Alan Max, caught in the midst of the "soft" line promulgated by the 20th Congress, complained to reporters that the seizure was only a "reversion" to McCarthyism, whereas "this country ended the violations of McCarthyism, except for such reversions as this."

The picture of America that this seizure creates in the eyes of the world (and of Americans) is ludicrous. The government in its majesty finds it necessary to invent such flimsy excuses in order to close down a CP so weak and discredited that they could find only four headquarters (if that many) worth closing in the whole country. Agents sent to Newark to do the job there couldn't find anything to seize.

All that will be accomplished in the rest of the world is to strengthen the Stalinists by giving them a companion-piece to exhibit alongside the embarrassing disclosures of Stalin's "monstrous" excesses.

The enormity of it all is compounded when, as we write this, it is announced (or claimed) that this action was taken on his own by one Donald Moysey, who is merely director for Lower Manhattan (where the CP national headquarters are located) of the internal-revenue division of the Treasury Department.

According to these reports, Washington officials claim "they did not even know whether the [Communist] party and the newspaper actually owed any taxes" and that the amount of taxes levied "were arbitrary figures arrived to force disclosure of the Communists' finances."

Asked about the neo-Palmer Raids, the federal Internal Revenue Commissioner hesitated and then said: "Well, I guess I'll have to take responsibility for them."

Will they? Has this country gone so far that they can get away even with this, without exciting a storm from enemies of Stalinism who are also enemies of a home-grown police state?

Silone's Politics — —

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to whether he agrees or disagrees with Hookism on civil liberties, now that he has gone out of his way to solidarize himself with "particularly Sidney Hook." Sidney Hook.

Pacifist and libertarian! "In no century have words been perverted from their natural purpose of putting man in touch with man as they are today," says Don Paolo in *Bread and Wine*. "To speak and to deceive (often to deceive oneself) have become almost synonymous."

And an old man says later: "Each one of us has within himself his own thief, or his own worm, or his own hail. . . . One must frankly admit that in the post-war years the circumstances were ideal for the thieves, worms, and hail that each one of us carries about within him. But that does not absolve any of us of responsibility."

Kefauver and the Liberals — —

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what it is, even the most liberalistic program is bound to get ground to bits and be thrown out in unrecognizable condition if this party is put back into power, even if we assume the undemagogic sincerity of a candidate.

If Stevenson were to suddenly come up with a rip-snorting program to save the poor farmers, tear up the Taft-Hartley Act and go back to Wagner, for a capital levy, vast school program, and strict enforcement of the law against the Southern racists as well as a democratic foreign policy instead of the Acheson-Dulles lunacy—if he came out for all that he could rightly be charged with having compounded his political pusillanimity with demagoguery. From all the evidence it appears that he is an "enlightened" conservative who has been terribly misunderstood only on one respect. His liberal-labor supporters have insisted on believing that he is at least something like them, when he really isn't at all. What befits Kefauver would be for Stevenson transparent political trickery.

But Kefauver can point to his record, and it is indeed, it must be admitted, the record of one of the least conservative of the Democrats in Congress. (This is as close as one can get to talking about liberals there.) We remember that Kefauver, at least, was one of those who held out against the Humphrey "Communist Control Act." We recall that he spoke out on the Kutcher pension case.

As we pointed out several weeks ago, Kefauver has been there right along as the most logical candidate for liberals and liblabs who within their own narrow limitations want to support a capitalist-party candidate in the field. It is only now when, without their aid, Kefauver has shown strength that some of them are now turning to take a second look at him.

It is a noteworthy example of what radical sociologists have often pointed out about the liberals and which considerably infuriates them when it is said:

These "powerless people" love to pride themselves on their objectivity and powers of intellectual discrimination, as against the Ignorant Masses who are swayed by "emotion" and other non-scientific motivations; but in real life, like all middle-class elements, there are none more than liberals so easily taken into camp by power, raw power. Nothing succeeds with them like success. They were born to be camp-followers, for they have no program of their own that can hang together.

But the Minnesota result is of more immediate importance for another reason.

If Stevenson demonstrates increasingly that he cannot win the nomination, or that if he does he will really be a weak candidate for the Democrats this year, the repercussions may go far beyond a simple reshuffle among the party leadership with another generally acceptable candidate getting the nod.

After all, the more Stevenson cleaves to his line in the face of Kefauver's evident successes, the more it becomes clear that he is the candidate above all of the conservative wing of the Democratic Party. Liberal-labor forces who were willing to have him woo the Southern leadership as long as they felt reasonably sure that it was their man making a deal with the enemy for their mutual advantage cannot help but feel differently if he turns out to be as much the "enemy's" man as theirs. If the Minnesota experience should be repeated in California it would become fairly clear that, at this moment, the American public is ready to listen to something quite different from the subtle nuances of liberal conservatism versus conservative liberalism.

This could mean real trouble for Democratic Party unity. For nothing could be so explosive as a running together of the two streams of the Negro struggle for equality and a struggle for political, economic and social gains by the workers and poor farmers.