

Howard Fast and Stalinism

By Murry Weiss

When Khrushchev's "secret" report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was published early last June, Howard Fast, the well-known novelist who was then writing a column for the Daily Worker, voiced an anguished cry of despair and protest in an article entitled "Man's Hope." This article, published in the June 12 Daily Worker, detailed his personal reaction to the ghastly revelations of Khrushchev; in his concluding sentences Fast said:

"... if Russia has in me a friend, it also has a severe and implacable critic. Never again will I remain silent when I can recognize injustice—regardless of how that injustice may be wrapped in the dirty linen of expediency or necessity. Never again will I fail to question, to demand proof. Never again will I accept the 'clever' rationale, which appears to make sense but under scrutiny does not."

STILL FOR SOCIALISM

In this same article, Fast, as if in anticipation of the inevitable attack from Stalinist diehards, reiterates his dedication to socialism, his hatred of capitalist injustice, his belief that the Soviet Union is a "socialist land" with many progressive achievements and his opposition to the "fools and scoundrels (who) use the madness and wickedness of a handful of Soviet leaders as an excuse to preach the destruction of the socialist part of the world."

Shortly after the appearance of this article, Fast stopped writing for the Daily Worker; rumors circulated as to what had happened to him but nothing conclusive became known until on Feb. 1 the New York Times published an interview in which Fast announced his resignation from the Com-



HOWARD FAST

munist Party. In the March issue of Mainstream, a cultural magazine close to the CP, Fast, on the invitation of the editors, explains the reasons for his decision "in terms of communism and morality." The editors reply in a lengthy comment.

It is apparent from his Mainstream article that Fast has not altered his basic viewpoint during the months of silence which for him must have been filled with a painful inner struggle to decide what course to take.

A PROTEST

As for his decision to quit the Communist Party, he advances two reasons: "Firstly, as the only extreme protest against the course of events in the communist world that I saw as being meaningful and purposeful; and secondly, because I feel that the Communist Party of the United States—mostly through events beyond its control—is compromised to a point where it can no

longer make any effective contribution to the continuing struggle for democracy and social justice."

As in his June 12 article in the Daily Worker, Fast again emphasizes that his opposition to the crimes of the bureaucratic clique ruling the Soviet Union in no way induces him to see any virtues in American or world-capitalism. He goes further and declares where he stands on the revolutionary uprisings in the Soviet orbit:

"But within the Soviet Union, an increasing contradiction between Communist Party leadership and practice and evolving socialist society exists; and in good time this contradiction will become intolerable to the Soviet people.

"Where then does the duty of the man of good will, the progressive, the socialist, the communist lie? I answer this question only for my self. I say that it lies with socialism, with the ancient and enduring dream of brotherhood, with the Soviet people, who twice created out of ruins the fabric and potential of a good society, with the Poles, who so gallantly went their own way toward democratic socialism.

"I say that it does not lie with the pretentious dogmatism of Soviet leadership, indicted not only for their acquiescence in the crimes of Stalin, but for their continuing record of intolerance and dogmatic bossism since the exposure of those crimes."

REJECTS OFFICIAL STAND

Fast does not accept in any way the official Stalinist explanation for the crimes revealed in the Khrushchev report:

"I also experienced for the first time [after reading the 'secret' report] the limitations of the man, Khrushchev, not only in his describing the hell he pictured as

the work of one man, but in the cynicism of his definition and explanation of this as "the cult of the individual"—an explanation not only empty, but almost facetious in its unrelatedness to the events it describes."

Fast's explanation of the phenomena of Stalinism seems to be developing along two main lines:

(1) There is something in the very structure and historical development of Communist parties which lead them to fall prey to a "tragic contradiction." In order to carry out their mission of opposing fascism and colonial oppression, etc., they require discipline. Programmatically they are for freedom. But "in other circumstances," presumably when they are in power, or under the influence of those in power, "their very structure denies freedom within itself; against oppression, their very structure oppresses within itself; and conceived as a liberating force, the monolithic power structure chokes both the democratic process and the liberating thought. Their historical development has been toward an ever increasing and ever more rigid bureaucracy—and this very process nurtures an egotistic and dehumanized stratum of leadership, which is perpetuated to a point where the threat of recall must be seen by leadership as a threat to the existence of the organization. The rationale of those in power can then turn into paranoid hatred and corroding suspicion."

(2) The Soviet Union is a socialist society in its economic and social structure. But instead of achieving a higher degree of democracy than capitalism, the most elementary democratic rights established by the bourgeois revolution have been denied. Fast obviously considers this question to be related to the previous point—the seeds of despotism inherent in the very structure of Communist parties. He counterposes to "socialism without liberty" and the contradictory character of the Communist parties an ethical structure which he appears to be proposing as an indispensable ingredient of socialist doctrine.

Fast's views deal with fundamental problems confronting the revolutionary socialist movement today. It is vital to discuss the questions he raises with the utmost objectivity and thoroughness if theory is to play its crucial role in the liberation of the working class. There are a number of points that immediately suggest themselves as an agenda for such a discussion.

First, there is the contradiction Fast calls attention to between the CP leadership in the Soviet Union and "evolving socialist society." Is he correct in ascribing the contradiction to something basically wrong in the very structure of the Communist parties. Earlier discussions in

the socialist movement over whether Stalinism is the logical outcome of Lenin's conception of the role and structure of the revolutionary party may cast light on the kind of thinking Fast expresses today.

DEFINITION OF SOCIALISM

Second, there is the question of whether or not it is correct, in any scientific socialist sense of the term, to describe Soviet society as "socialism." This is a particularly important question since so many times in the past, those awakening to the crimes of Stalinism, and confounding these crimes with the "inherent nature" of a socialist society, have declared: "If this is socialism, then I am for capitalist democracy."

Third, there is the question of the views of Marxism on such abstract slogans of capitalist democracy as "freedom" and "justice," and the relation of socialism to them.

The answer of the Mainstream editors to Fast should also be examined. All they can counterpose to Fast's arguments are the sophisticated apologetics for Stalinism and Stalin's heirs that are to be found in the books of Isaac Deutscher. These are all to the effect that the bureaucratic dictatorship will reform itself in the direction of socialist democracy.

Finally, there is the question of Fast's conduct and method as a revolutionary intellectual who has the responsibility to help Communist workers solve the terrible problems and dilemmas that they, as well as Fast, are beset with.

(First of a series)

Charge Mollet Govt. With Using Torture On Algerian People

Criticism continues to mount in France against the reign of terror waged by the French government against the Algerian national independence movement.

In the current debate in the National Assembly, Robert Lacoste, French Minister Residing in Algeria was questioned about the suicide, March 23, of a Moslem lawyer, Ali Boumendjel, who had been arrested as a "rebel suspect." A deputy belonging to the Roman Catholic Popular Republican Group charged that there appeared to exist in Algeria arbitrary detention and, if not torture, "at least exhausting interrogations." He demanded that the government of "Socialist" Premier Mollet put an end to practices that the French resistance movement had fought during the German occupation of France. Lacoste is also a "socialist."

Ex-Slave Laborers Win Compensation at Farben

By John Black

I. G. Farben, the largest German chemical and dye trust has just signed an agreement to pay damages to some of its former employees, to the tune of 30 million German marks. (Figure about two marks to the dollar.)

One might infer from this that some former employees had demanded back wages and that the company had decided to pay. However, that is not the way it happened—not quite.

NEVER PAID

The truth is that the employees had never been paid a cent by I. G. Farben, although they worked very hard and one might therefore assume deserved compensation. But they did not

world chemical constellation. Farben had branches in every country and was powerful everywhere. In the United States, John Foster Dulles, now President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, was one of Farben's legal representatives.

FARBEN GOES TO WAR

But if Farben was a power in peace time, it really came into its own during the war. Without Farben, Hitler's panzers could not have blitzed into neighboring countries. Without Farben, the Luftwaffe could not have sent one plane into the air. In particular, two patents from Farben vaults were the key to its importance. Farben chemists knew how to make Buna—a syn-

many as a hundred a day died from exhaustion. Few lasted over three months. Eight miles away from this camp was the Farben Fuerstengruben (coal mines). Here the murderous speed-up and the general nature of Farben "labor-management" relations led to the intervention of the SS camp guards who had to prevent foremen from beating the workers to death. (This item is taken from the records of the postwar Nuremberg trials.)

But the real innovations, which Farben introduced for its employees were the gas ovens built conveniently close to the Farben compounds at Birkenau. Workers who fell ill and thus could no longer stand the brutal rate of exploitation were gassed and