

FERMENT ON THE LEFT

An unprecedented "agonizing reappraisal" is now going on everywhere within the Communist parties of the free world—the party in the United States being the latest to announce its shock—and among those who have sympathized and worked with them. In the latter category no figure has been more important this past decade than Pietro Nenni, leader of the Italian Socialist party, which has worked hand in glove with the Italian Communist party. Now, basing himself upon the partial text of Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech released by the State Department, Mr. Nenni has belatedly joined the world call for an honest explanation from Stalin's former colleagues and present successors. And he calls for "political liberty" in the Soviet Union, a truly revolutionary demand to pose before a naked dictatorship.

The need for the present painful Communist and fellow-traveler soul searching arises from a cardinal fact. Over the past several decades the factor which distinguished Communist parties from all other movements was their primary allegiance to the Soviet Union and to Stalin as the Soviet dictator. The needs of Soviet foreign policy dictated the Communist position in each country of the world. For the sake of the Soviet Union Communists of the free nations became traitors, spies and saboteurs. They did not hesitate even to embrace Hitler when Stalin and Molotov embraced him in 1939.

In all this Communists operated under the delusion that they were serving the "higher" interests of humanity. Now they must live with the shattering knowledge that they really served only a homicidal maniac. Could their moral and political bankruptcy be more plain?

It is characteristic of the Communists' naïveté that they now demand a Marxist explanation of how Stalin's crimes could have happened. Democratic forces in the free world long ago knew and broadcast what was happening in the Soviet Union. A dictatorship had been set up there with unlimited power to impose upon the Soviet people at enormous cost a gigantic transformation in every sphere of life.

Unchecked by a free press, by opposition political parties or by the other mechanisms of a democratic society, the bureaucracy which ran this dictatorship under Stalin became corrupt in every way, feathering its own nest at the expense of the people and engaging in internecine rivalry for power. Khrushchev and Company were simply the most successful members of this bureaucracy, their own personal rise under Stalin being the results of their talents as bootlickers and conscienceless executors of the despot's will.

What is perhaps most revealing about the current situation within the Soviet Union is the effort of the bureaucracy to preserve its powers and privileges. To make the dictatorship still viable the cult of Lenin is being substituted for the cult of Stalin. Free political debate is still outlawed, and those daring to go outside the permitted limits of criticism are being denounced as "rotten elements."

For all the sham show of a new democratic spirit, the "general line of the party" is still beyond free public debate. The desire of the Soviet people for a better life is still held secondary to the Stalinist proposition that heavy industry must have first priority. And, most omi-

nous for the future, the ground is being laid for the present bureaucracy to pass its power and its privileges on to its children through the institution of new boarding schools to train the "élite" of tomorrow.

Today Communists the world over are trying to convince us that they have seen the error of their ways.

They extend the hand of friendship and cooperation not only to Socialists but to every other "progressive" element in each free nation. Yet on the record so far, these avowals must be regarded as hypocritical and unacceptable.

The Communists, after all, have not given up their goal of dictatorship, the root institution from which Stalin's and his colleagues' crimes arose. They have not recognized that Stalin's foul deeds extended far beyond the Soviet borders, and that the Soviet Union was responsible and is responsible for the international tension since World War II. They have not recognized the enslavement by Stalin of Eastern Europe. Unlike Mr. Nenni now, they do not call for economic and political democracy within the Soviet Union. They still do not put their own countries' interests before those of the international Communist conspiracy.

In short, they are still Communists, tarred by the same brush as in Stalin's time, but pretending that the death of that one man has somehow fundamentally changed the rottenness of their ideology and the speciousness of their reasoning.