

**IT IS EASY** these days to write and speak against the crimes and excesses of the late Joseph V. Stalin but it is harder for those of us who once saw in him a leader of world socialism and defended without criticism his policies and pronouncements to recognize our own responsibilities. And since ignorance is no excuse for offense against laws, we cannot plead ignorance as an excuse for grave offenses against our contemporaries who refused for whatever reasons, to accept our erroneous conclusions.

I have held since my early youth, and I still hold, that socialism offers to Americans, and especially Negro Americans, the ultimate answer to the economic, social and political problems with which we are confronted. But in the light of overwhelming recent evidence, it is clear that the model of socialism which my associates and I described for Americans fit this nation as poorly as the midget's suit would fit the circus fat lady.

The Russian socialist model would have been a misfit here even if Joseph Stalin had not developed into the political ogre he is known now to have been. For it is, and was, impossible to equate American conditions with those obtaining in old Russia, where socialists had to take the special measures they did in order to establish socialism there. But it is a fact, and it has to be admitted, that the American Communists, as heroically as they have fought to advance the cause of the workers and the Negro people in the U. S. nevertheless, used a political form which had evolved out of conditions differing vastly from those here. And it is a fact that this form of political organization with its complement of terminology, analytical method and perspectives, came to be considered an importation by many of those who joined it. The deification of Stalin, plus the doctrine of infallibility applied to the Soviet Union, made it possible for our enemies to impute to us the false status of foreign-directed activists.

THE CHARGE, of course, was not true, but the uncritical manner in which we followed and supported the policies of the Soviet Union did leave us open to such accusations.

The acceptance by us of everything which issued from the Soviet Union as the "gospel truth" forced us to consider as "enemies" those of our contemporaries who were under no such spell, whose powers of reason-

# On the Way

by Abner W. Berry

## Stalin Wasn't God— And We Weren't Angels

ing demanded demonstration and proof.

Did we not look askance at the "Double VV" campaign initiated by the Pittsburgh Courier, the Negro weekly, during World War II? And I am certain that this cool, even hostile, attitude toward the Negro leaders who did support this campaign was dictated by the subjective fears that this campaign would not only harm the U. S. war effort but delay the needed aid for the Soviet Union. The Negro leaders were thinking in terms of U. S. democracy, of expanding it to include rights for Negroes in the U. S., as well as the rights of citizens of the countries occupied by Hitler. But we, with the best of intentions, made the costly mistakes of attempting to apply mechanically what was a correct foreign policy for the Soviet Union to an American domestic issue, thereby harming equally our fellow-citizens and the world's first socialist state.

Did we not make acceptance of our position on foreign policy the necessary condition for unity within Negro organizations? I think back to the National Negro Congress in 1940, when A. Philip Randolph, as chairman of the National Negro Congress, supported the position of the late President Roosevelt on Finland and on aid to Britain and other nations fighting Hitler's armies. It was the "left," the Marxists, in the Congress who insisted upon isolating Randolph and hewing to a line of "the yanks are not coming." At the time there was a non-aggression pact in operation between the Soviet Union and Germany.

But that fact did not dictate to us the necessity of fighting for a policy of neutrality as between the Nazis and their victims. In fact, our position, as history has shown, did not aid the USSR nor did it hasten the defeat of Nazi-ism. It is now admitted that while we were pursuing a policy of neutrality, the late President Roosevelt and the then Prime Minister Winston

Churchill were warning the Soviet Union of the imminent Nazi attack. At that juncture, for their own special reasons, Roosevelt and Churchill, it must be admitted, were doing more to save the Soviet Union than was the American Marxist "Left."

THIS INSISTENCE upon foreign policy as a condition agreement and action helped to split the Negro movement. And I must say now that in the light of developments, the anti-Communist resolutions of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the manner in which these resolutions have been administered, did not deserve the reams of vituperation which we hurled at NAACP leaders.

In the polemics that were engaged in prior to and following the 1950 convention there have been incidents of name-calling on both sides. We have gone to the extreme of calling Negro leaders who did not accept Stalinism traitors." And we have been called "agents of Stalin."

I submit that in the light of recent events these differences appear to have been distorted more by a religious insistence, on our part, upon making our international views the basis upon which unity could be achieved. I fully realize that many of these leaders, Stalin or no Stalin, would have been anti-Communist, just as President Roosevelt was opposed to socialism. But the debate on ultimate solutions became vitiated by the injection into it of what we now know to have been unrealistic and erroneous dogma.

It seems to me that the air must be cleared of these dogmatic fogs if Marxists are to seek a new basis of understanding with the broad social movement based upon organized labor and the Negro people's mass upsurge. I'm ready to begin by clearly recognizing my own part in the debacle of the past 15 years and seek to repair the damage so that we all may move ahead.