

TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

A Reply to a Critic About 'Western' Socialism

A LETTER (see today's Speak Your Piece) by Manny Blum accuses me of distorting history. The offending paragraph which is the sole basis for the accusation reads as follows:

"The stern fact is that 108 years ago Marx and Engels wrote a Manifesto based upon the struggle for socialism in Western Europe. In the more than a century that has gone by socialism has triumphed in one third of the world. But it was victorious in precisely that part of the globe with which Marx did not deal in his Manifesto and in most of his writing."

To prove that I distort history, Blum cites some of the writings by Marx and Engels about Russia. But the paragraph in question contained two obvious facts and what seems to me a logical conclusion from the facts. The facts are:

1. That in the 108 years since the Manifesto was written no socialist revolution has taken place in Western Europe.

2. That Marx and Engels based their Manifesto on the struggle for socialism in Western Europe and that in most of his writing Marx did not deal with that part of the globe where successful socialist revolutions have taken place.

The conclusion I drew was that if Marxism is to be viewed scientifically, not as Holy Writ, Marxists in the West must address themselves to the specific problems of Western capitalism and of Western socialism.

NOT ONLY the Manifesto but Marx' major work, Capital, was based primarily on conditions in Western Europe. The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of Moscow prepared a two volume edition of Selected Works by Marx and Engels. Roughly 95 percent of the contents deal

with Western Europe or data drawn from Western Europe.

Lenin discussed the origins of Marxism in an incomparable essay, as follows:

"Marx was the genius who continued and completed the three chief ideological currents of the 19th century, represented respectively by the three most advanced countries of humanity: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines."

In that same essay Lenin said scientific socialism is "the theory and program of the labor movement in all the civilized countries of the world. . ."

As the greatest Marxist of the 20th century Lenin opposed dogmatism. He developed the theory of Marxism in a new epoch and under new conditions for a vast part of the world which did not encompass "the civilized countries of the world." Not only did he lead the first successful socialist revolution in Russia but he indicated that China and India, with Russia, could become the fulcrum of socialist development in the new epoch.

Blum refers to the slogan which Marx and Engels supported regarding Russia—"for a general war of revolutionary Europe against the backbone of European reaction — Russia." I wonder why he quoted that? Certainly it proves only one thing—that Lenin was successful because he did not adopt Marxist slogans which were completely out - dated. Blum quotes Engels that the Russian revolution might become "the signal for the proletarian revolution in the West."

But what happened? The revolutions in the West were suppressed, while revolutions in

the East, especially in China, succeeded.

OR TAKE the writings of Engels on Russia. The preface to the Manifesto by Engels which Blum mentions suggests that if the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West the type of common ownership of land in feudal Russia might "serve as a starting point for a communist development."

Lenin was a great Marxist, so he refused to accept this erroneous conception of Engels. Lenin studied the actual course of Russian agricultural development. Events did not proceed in Russian agriculture as Marx and Engels suggested they might. Lenin was a scientific socialist because he based himself on what really existed in Russia, on the changes that took place since Marx and Engels died.

Lenin also departed drastically from the views Marx and Engels had about the colonial world. Engels in a letter to Kautsky Nov. 12, 1882 said that proletarian revolutions would take place in the civilized countries and then the colonial possessions "must be taken over for the time being by the proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence. . ."

Engels was wrong of course. Lenin was a great Marxist because he did not accept conclusions that were obsolete and inapplicable to the world he lived in.

He used the Marxist method and scientific approach to study the world he lived in and to change it, as we should do today. And we have the advantage of Lenin's contribution to a creative Marxism which has no truck with dogmatism.

As to Blum's criticism of my remarks about the French and Italian communists, I hope to deal with them in a future column.