

THE COMMUNIST CONVENTION IS NEWS

• • • • By **ALAN MAX**

THE NATIONAL convention of the Communist Party is a week away, and one magazine after another carries lengthy articles on the event.

There is the article by Michael Harrington in the liberal Catholic weekly "Commonweal", Sydney Lens in the Progressive, Robert Bendiner in The Reporter, Louis Jay Herman in the social-democratic New Leader, Daniel Seligman in Fortune.

These articles are an event in themselves.

There was a time not so long ago when almost every magazine in America had almost the same thing to say about the Communists. Whether the publication was liberal or reactionary, the articles usually read alike. There was a monolithic sameness about them and as soon as you saw the title you

knew what clichés and slanders to expect.

It always appeared as if the articles were ordered as a matter of anti-Communist duty and that the authors didn't hesitate to crib from one another since they didn't expect many people to read their articles anyway.

The present cycles of articles, however, is another story.

IT SEEMS that the recent discussion within Communist ranks in this country has not only benefited the party but has been of considerable benefit elsewhere too. At the very least, it has resulted in a series of articles in which, while generally anti-Communist, try to present some information about the coming convention. Even more important is the fact that the Communist Party discussion has compelled these publications to discuss the Communist Party—and discussing the Party is something quite different from dismissing it or denouncing it.

The articles that I have listed reflect too many different attitudes to permit much generalizing about them. But certain

ideas run through most of them.

One of these is that the discussion within the party is a thoroughly real one and must be taken seriously.

Another is that this discussion in itself is already a sign of significant change in the party, and that whatever further changes may be marked by the convention cannot be dismissed as a "facade".

One need not agree with the manner in which the articles describe the differences within the party or the exaggerated manner they play up the personalities involved. But one cannot escape the conclusion that something of definite importance is happening here. This is that the very discussion within the party on how to overcome its isolation has already served to make a dent in that isolation to an extent and in a way not anticipated ten months ago.

MICHAEL HARRINGTON, writing in the liberal Catholic "Commonweal," says his view of the discussion has changed since he wrote an article several months ago, which I quoted in this space at that time. As hos-

tile as ever against Communism, he now calls for a "democratic dialogue" with the Communists—in order to break them away from Communism of course.

But the Communists will welcome any such dialogue, I am sure, since it takes two to make a dialogue and while the Communists will not seek to break Catholics away from the Church, they will try to arrive at clarity on a program for the needs of America, which includes Communists and Catholics alike.

Louis Jay Herman writes in the New Leader: "The CPUSA, 1957 model, will bear little resemblance to its old self with its 'monolithic unity' and its readiness to follow every switch in the Moscow line at the first stutter of a news ticker".

Robert Bendiner, whose article in The Reporter, unlike the others, is thoroughly pessimistic about any future for the Communists, writes of the convention: "Either they will split into harmlessly warring sects or else the domestic Titos, Gomulkas, and Nagys who sprang up with the breath of independence to stir the party in a quarter of a

century will sullenly creep back to the slavish orthodoxy that had already brought the organization close to rigor mortis".

Daniel Seligman, in the Luce publication "Fortune", writes that there is "nothing phony" about the criticism by American Communists of the errors in the Soviet Union.

Sidney Lens writes in the Progressive that American Communism will "develop new forms and new approaches different from those of Yugoslavia, Poland or Hungary. American socialists and liberals, who will clearly not rush to embrace it, will be watching with profound interest."

It might be added that not only will the coming convention be watched with profound interest by socialists and liberals, but that the reactions to it by socialists and liberals will also be watched with interest.

It will be one of those dialectical ironies of history if a party which many have viewed as hopelessly isolated, should be able at its convention to make an impact upon the country through its very efforts to break with that isolation.

