

Dennis Answers Questions On Roads to Socialism

*At the request of the editors of Political Affairs, Eugene Dennis, general secretary of the CP-USA, commented briefly on a series of questions arising from the current discussions on the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The answers which were received on March 20th are published in full here by courtesy of that magazine.

By EUGENE DENNIS

Question: What is the overall significance of the 20th Congress of the CPSU?

The 20th Congress is a truly historic event. It has had a tremendous impact on the whole world. This is because it registered great achievements, as well as projected the way to new advances in the struggle for peace and in the further development of socialism. The Congress dramatized the results of the bold and flexible peace initiative of the Soviet Union in the past period which has been so successful in securing a relaxation of internal tensions. It offered to the world its slogan—"Let's trade," instead of "Let's arm"—as a concrete means of promoting peaceful co-existence—a policy which corresponds to the vital national interests of all countries, not the least our own.

The new Five Year Plan continues the rapid growth of industrial production and will make possible not only a substantial improvement in the economic well-being of the Soviet people, but makes it possible for them to bring to the masses of people in the undeveloped countries a new form of aid to their development—aid without strings, which will enable them to industrialize and help solve their own age-old problems of poverty and national sovereignty.

The historic significance of the growth of the role of the countries of Socialism and Peoples Democracy in strengthening the cause of peace and in demonstrating the superiority and new successes of the socialist system was summed up in the statement of Khrushchev that "the emergence of socialism as a world system is the



Eugene Dennis at the lectern addressing the 32nd anniversary meeting of the Daily Worker at Carnegie Hall last January.

main feature of our era."

Besides registering these achievements, and adopting policies to continue and advance them, the Congress made some basic theoretical contributions to the development of the science of Marxism-Leninism on the basis of the new international experience and profound changes in the world situation. In addition, the Congress made a profound evaluation in all fields of the harmful consequences of the cult of the individual that arose under Stalin's leadership and took far-reaching measures to strengthen and expand inner-party and Soviet democracy.

Q. What was new about the statement on non-inevitability of war?

First: Considerable ambiguity was swept aside, leaving this new fact of life in its full grandeur. For the first time in history, war is not inevitable. Many Americans have had in the back of their minds the idea that there is some law of nature that when two great social forces confront each other, it has to end in war. But the 20th Congress has placed before the whole world the fact that humanity can now make its own decisions effective on this ques-

tion. We are not the helpless prey of forces beyond our control. The people of the world are strong enough now to prevent war. Imagine what a difference this is from 1914 and 1939!

Throughout the entire post-war period, we American Communists have repeatedly said that another world war is not inevitable. But the Congress added something new. It declared that the time has now arrived when Lenin's thesis of "inevitable war under imperialism" no longer applies. This is due to the fact while imperialism still retains the economic basis for war that imperialism is no longer a world-wide system and the peace forces of the world—which include the powerful lands of Socialism, as well as India and other neutral countries—have now become a major force strong enough to prevent war. The maintenance of the obsolete thesis obscured the recognition of these facts and made it possible for the warmongers to use it to hinder the struggle for peace.

War is not inevitable. But this does not mean that a lasting peace will be attained automatically. However in the new world situation now unfolding

the peoples are strong enough to prevent war, if they but unite and make that strength effective in bridling the advocates of war, the advocates of aggressive military alliances and an atomic arms race.

Q. What light do the theoretical discussions of the Congress throw on the road to Socialism?

The Congress pointed out that the forms of transition to Socialism in various countries will become more and more diversified. They will by no means be just a repetition of the experience of the Soviet Union or of the Peoples Democracies. The only decisive and indispensable factor that will be common to all is the political leadership of the working class headed by its vanguard. It is true that in most of the period between the two world wars, thinking on this question tended to become somewhat "frozen." However, the changes that took place in the world since the second world war have reopened this question in the full richness in which it was originally envisaged by Marx and Lenin. They always emphasized that everything depended on the period, the relationship of class forces, the concrete situation and traditions of each country.

Viewing things from this angle, Khrushchev points out that it is perfectly possible that given the present and growing strength of Socialism on a world scale, and the internal changes taking place within various capitalist countries, many peoples may now be able to achieve their transition to Socialism through peaceful means based on winning the majority of their peoples for Socialism and winning a stable majority in the parliament of their country. Khrushchev points out that this new generalization is based considerably on the experience of the labor and Communist movements of other countries.

We, American Communists have ourselves perhaps made some modest contributions on this score, since we have for some time been exploring the question of the American road to Socialism. In the past we made clear that we are not advocates of force and violence as a means of effecting the transition to Socialism, and particularly in the period since World War II we have made clear that we strive for the constitutional and democratic path of transition. We believe that the possibilities of such a path will be enhanced by the course of events in our own country and the world.

To realize a peaceful transition requires among other things, a broad and militant people's democratic coalition led by a united and class-conscious working class which will uphold and enforce the Constitution of the U. S. and its Bill of Rights, and decisively curb the monopolies—the historical practitioners of force and violence—the perennial opponents of all democratic advance and social progress.

Obviously this will entail big popular struggles on the economic, political and electoral fronts—sharp class struggles which will be forced upon the people by the offensive of the monopolies against peace and the liberties and standard of living of the people. Naturally we must continue to study this

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question and develop our position more fully.

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Q. What about the role of Stalin?

Apparently what is going on now in the Soviet Union is that for the first time they are finding it possible to make a fully objective assessment of the role of Stalin, his many and great contributions as well as the gravity of his errors and weaknesses, and in particular his responsibility for the fostering of the cult of the individual and for certain costly mistakes and harmful violations of the Soviet Constitution occasioned by the absence of real collective leadership during the past two decades. Necessarily our own ability to judge this record and the progress of this present reassessment is greatly limited by the absence of first-hand knowledge or contact. However, we believe that the frankness of the CPSU leadership in facing this question and boldly placing it before the membership of the CPSU and the whole Soviet people does a great service to their Party and to the whole people. Only a Party that is really strong and enjoys the confidence of the people based upon actual achievements on their behalf would be able to open up such a question and pursue it publicly. In turn, one can feel sure that this discussion will become a new source of strength to the CPSU and to all other working-class parties.

Q. The press indicates that there was a special report of Khrushchev to a closed meeting of the 20th Congress on the question of Stalin, the cult of the individual and collective leadership in the CPSU. If this was of such importance, why didn't it appear in the main report?

Possibly because the press in the capitalist countries would have seized upon this noteworthy feature of the 20th Congress to obscure its most important decisions and policies on the new epic Five-Year Plan, peaceful co-existence, the non-inevitability of war, the possibility of peaceful transition, etc. At least this way, for the first two weeks after the opening of the Congress the world did get the full impact of these policies. Today, however, a reading of the press would make it appear that the only thing that happened at the 20th Congress was the reevaluation of Stalin. Everything else that happened at the Congress is being blotted off the newspapers, kept off the radio and TV. Big Business and its press are trying to use the issue of the re-evaluation of Stalin's role to blot out of the people's mind the significance of the Congress for the peace and well-being of the peoples everywhere.

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Q. Why doesn't the CPUSA criticize the Soviet Union even though it is now clear that many things were wrong there? And what criticism should be made of the attitude of American Marxists in relation to the role of Stalin?

The facts disclosed about the errors of Stalin in regard to the absence of collective leadership are, of course, new to us and without any doubt come to us all with something of a shock and raise many questions. The Soviet Union has been the first and leading country of Socialism and has with few intermissions been continually under every form of attack by the capitalist forces all over the world. Not the least among these forces were the whole network of calumniators, vilifiers and slanderers whose unremitting hostility to the Soviet Union was hostility to Socialism and to working-class rule under any conditions. Our attitude has

been similar to that as when confronted by the typical slanders launched against unions and workers in the course of a strike. We support the workers and their organizations and are not deterred by the fact that some secondary errors on their part have been used as a pretext for denouncing the strike by those who are against all unions and against the workers generally.

However, it is true that in fighting these slanders we often tended to gloss over the problems, difficulties and shortcomings which the CPSU leaders themselves admitted. In heralding the epochal achievements of the Soviet Union, we also often fell into the habit of attributing these accomplishments to Stalin instead of to the CPSU and its Central Committee, to the Soviet people and to the system of Socialism. We sometimes allowed our discussion of the magnitude and grandeur of the history-making progress of Socialism in the Soviet Union to take on an aspect of virtually attributing infallibility to the leadership. In addition we sometimes tended to take a position on certain questions without having a first-hand knowledge of the facts. Incidentally this first-hand knowledge of facts was and is denied us by the Administration's restrictions on passports which prevents us from having any contact with developments over there and thus being in a better position to estimate them.

Moreover, one of the main lessons we must draw from this situation is that dogmatism and doctrinairism must be uprooted from our Party's approach to the theory and application of Marxism-Leninism. Our Party must continue to study with utmost attentiveness the experiences and the theoretical conclusions of the Marxists of all countries. But this must be a scientific study which always considers the time, the place, the actual relationships of class forces that led to those conclusions. But the key task is for us to study the situation of our own country and to apply creatively and develop the theory and practice of scientific socialism in the U.S., in accord with the conditions and needs of our own people. It follows from this that we must encourage in our Party the freest atmosphere for critical and self-critical examination of all questions.

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Q. What lessons can be drawn for the CPUSA from the discussion around the role of Stalin?

Together with the ever pressing need of examining all questions and developments factually, objectively, scientifically—the chief lesson is the lesson of collective leadership, criticism and self-criticism. No matter how great any leader may be, no matter how well equipped for his tasks, if work is not done collectively, if he together with the other leaders does not continually participate in criticism and self-criticism, if he does not maintain ties with the masses, he will make serious mistakes.

We have much to learn from this. The question of collective leadership, criticism and self-criticism cannot be settled once for all time. The earlier writings of Stalin himself contain excellent statements on this question and explanations of their particular necessity in a Communist movement. As we see, however, from their experience and as we ourselves have learned from our experience following our struggle against Browderism, the struggle for collective leadership must be a continuing process. We must constantly encourage in our Party the fullest political initiative, collective responsibility and the freest atmosphere for critical and self-

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with the regaining of the property:

The Government's claim for taxes from a newspaper which ran at an annual deficit of \$200,000 had been thoroughly debunked, as had its unprecedented tax claim from a political party. Presumably the phony claims would be processed legally for a court hearing. In the meanwhile, to prevent a re-seizure, the lawyers for the paper and the party insisted on the office property being sold, to city editor Max Gordon and Miss Grace Hutchins respectively.

Alarm for the safety of the entire dissident press had been raised in the land with this exhibition of arbitrary action.

President Eisenhower and Secretary of the Treasury Humphrey were clearly hearing from many people both in this country and abroad.

As an interesting little by-product, the Daily Worker reported the receipt of many letters asking for sample copies of the paper just to "see what the government doesn't want me to read," as one college student in the midwest put it.

Ironically enough, the day the Daily Worker returned to its office, the mail brought a routine letter from the local Treasury Department containing a check for \$29, a slight overpayment on social security withholding taxes for 1951. It was signed by Donald R. Moysey.

Back to work, the Daily Worker staff regarded this as one battle won, with more ahead in the steady pattern of harassment which has attempted for years to close down its voice for peace on every possible pretext. It was confident the attempt to destroy the Bill of Rights by devious ruses would be detected and fought by aroused democratic opinion, in the future as in the case of the great "tax" seizure.

critical examination of all questions.

We have much to learn on the question of how to ensure the kind of criticism and self-criticism and democratic centralism without which there can be no collective leadership. In the recent period, owing to the attacks of the Administration upon the Bill of Rights and upon our Party, we were unable to work normally, and many abnormal practices developed. Now, however, as I mentioned in the speech at Carnegie Hall on Jan. 20, we are taking a new look at all the major features of our policies.

Some things we have been examining. For example: while we correctly signaled the aggressive role of U.S. imperialism in the post-war period and the new dangers of war and fascism—and, as a matter of fact pointed out in 1951 and since that world war was neither imminent nor inevitable and that the drive to fascism could be halted—may we not have presented this question at times one-sidedly in actual practice?

Second, the question of our overall relations in regard to the trade unions.

Third, whether at a time when we see the new level and scope of the heroic struggle of the masses of Negro people in the South for integration and full equality, the slogan of self-determination is valid.

Fourth, a critical reexamination of our Party Program, The American Way, that was adopted in 1954.

All of these questions involve a study of the realities of American life today, utilizing and enriching the science of Marxism on the basis of American experience and traditions to advance and promote the interests of the American people.