

# The DW's Attitude on the Recent Soviet Changes

By JOHN GATES

The recent changes in the Soviet Communist leadership were of unusual significance not only for the Soviet Union in the first place but also for the entire world. Governmental figures ranging from Nehru to Churchill, Eisenhower and Dulles almost universally, with various degrees of emphasis and differing motivations, regard the changes as favorable for world peace and an advance for the people of the Soviet Union.

In analyzing an event of such magnitude it is understandable that there should be many interpretations. This is true among Communists as well. The Daily Worker has published an editorial, a column by Joseph Clark, and the Worker has carried two articles by A. B. Magil. These have aroused considerable comment, particularly the column by Clark, and I wish to discuss some of the questions raised in the letters we have received, several of which have appeared in "Speak Your Piece."

The Daily Worker outlined its own basic approach to these very significant events in its editorial of Tuesday, July 9, 1957, stating that they "strengthen the tide to peaceful coexistence and a durable peace."

The editorial went on to say that the Soviet leadership had reaffirmed the policies of "emphasis on the possibility of peaceful co-existence and the rejection of the theory of the inevitability of war; the various roads to socialism; the possibility of the transition to socialism by parliamentary means in various countries; the emphasis on the equality of socialist nations, the post-Stalin policy of internal democratization and internal reorganization based on the tremendous growth of the socialist economy."

It said further that the Soviet Communist Central Committee took "decisive steps against those who were resisting these policies by factional means and were, in fact, seeking to overturn them by a coup among the members of the CPSU Presidium."

Our editorial went on: "We who fight for peace, democracy and socialism in our own land can only view sympathetically all those developments in the first land of socialism which strengthens the fight for peace and social progress."

It then suggested however that "a wide public discussion (should have) preceded the meeting (of the Central Committee)" and that the "process of democratization requires such public debate; the process of correction

of the abuses of Soviet democracy will undoubtedly provide new forms for such public discussion."

And it added: "But this is distinctly subordinate to the historic events themselves—events which will help shape a peaceful world."

On the following day we published a column by our foreign editor Joseph Clark with a somewhat different emphasis and tone than our editorial.

The column said that the present basic trend in the Soviet Union began with the death of Stalin, was first indicated by the speeches at the funeral of Stalin, and has been "more clearly illuminated" by the recent changes. This basic trend, the column declared, consists of the following: 1) relaxing international tensions and opposition to the policy of "tightening the screws" in East-West relations; 2) democratization and eliminating the miscarriages of law and justice; 3) drastically improving living standards, consumer goods production and housing; 4) decentralizing economic and political controls and enhancing the rights of the various national republics in opposition to the violations of national equality. But it then went on to say that "it would be unfortunate if that basic trend were obscured by the methods being used by the Soviet leaders to fight against Stalinism."

It is on this latter point that I differ with the column. I believe there is a substantial difference in the methods of the present leaders from those used during most of Stalin's leadership of the Soviet Union. And in my opinion the basic trend of which Clark speaks has been clarified, not obscured, strengthened and speeded, not weakened and hindered by the recent events.

Clark makes the question of methods the main thing, while the editorial, in agreeing that the methods leave much to be desired, calls them distinctly subordinate to the historic events which will help shape a peaceful world. His column, in my opinion, tends to minimize, underestimate and obscure the main significance of the new events. The tone and emphasis therefore do not, it seems to me, help the American people to take maximum advantage of what Nehru has called "the psychological moment" for easing East-West tensions and for new progress in the current London disarmament talks.

It is interesting to note that on the matter of emphasis on method, the British liberal publication "The New Statesman," has this to say:

"Yet the comparison with Stalin's rise to power misses the point. Stalin built his dictator-

ship against the party, for a truly Leninist party, however limited its 'democratic' functions might be, could not screw the utmost out of the Soviet people; and international tension gave Stalin the excuse for making the secret police the instrument of the 'sharpening class-struggle' within the USSR. Khrushchev, on the contrary, presents the party as the instrument of an easier and more prosperous life in a world where, he says, tension can be diminished. These slogans may, as we have seen in the past year, have a vitality of their own—and by using them Khrushchev has given fresh impetus to the forces of change within Communist society."

Though Clark may "miss the point," this does not mean that several of the points he raises are unimportant and can be summarily dismissed. Our editorial, for example, takes a forthright stand for public debate and discussion in the USSR of the basic issues as necessary for the further advance of socialist democracy, although we consider this point a secondary one in the total picture at the moment.

Incidentally, some of those who disagree with Clark's column also disagree with the section in our editorial which was critical of the lack of public debate in the Soviet Union. Their position seems to be that no criticism of the Soviet Union, even within a positive evaluation of the events as a whole, is legitimate. With this point of view I cannot agree.

Clark's column raises several questions about methods. These questions are on minds of many people and need to be discussed seriously. But while he declares that there were important issues of policy behind the conflicts in the Soviet leadership, he implies that the element of jockeying for power was uppermost. This appears to be true of Molotov and his allies who tried to pull a fast one, a coup in the leadership, and so present the nation with a fait accompli. I do not believe, however, that this can be said of Khrushchev. The present events were precipitated by a group who used the old undemocratic methods, and who were defeated when Khrushchev brought the issues for full discussion before the Central Committee. This in itself is an important advance over the old method of settling everything within the small Presidium, as Clark admits.

If differences of policy within the Soviet leadership are not paramount, then how does Clark arrive at his conclusion, with which I agree, that the basic trend of further democratization and for strengthening the policy of peaceful coexistence was "more clearly illuminated" by the recent developments?

Clark dislikes the method of retroactively blaming the removed leaders for mistakes of the past which he feels the present leaders also share. I think most of us have the same feeling. Yet there is such a thing as varying degrees of responsibility for what happened in the past. Even more important is the necessity to distinguish between those leaders who are ready to recognize the mistakes of the past and move to correct them, and those who try to obstruct that process. Otherwise there is a tendency to lump together all the Soviet leaders in the same pot and to deny the real struggle of some of them to rectify past errors and to move ahead.

Clark is on stronger grounds, however, with respect to the failure of the Soviet leadership to keep the masses of the people informed on the issues. At present, the people of the Soviet Union and the world must accept on faith the statements of the leadership about the removed leaders. Now it happens that these statements coincided with indirect evidence over the years of resistance and opposition to present Soviet policies within the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party. But it seems to me the world would have immeasurably greater confidence in the wisdom of the recent changes if the positions of the removed leaders were made known in their own words.

But much more is involved here. The larger and more important question is that of participation by the masses of people in shaping policy and in popular control over the power of their leaders. Marxists debated the problem of restraints on power in a socialist state long before the first socialist state came into existence. Lenin grappled with this question until the day he died. Failure to solve this problem, theoretically and practically, led to tragic consequences with the development of the arbitrary power of Stalin. Much has been done in the past four years to correct this situation. But obviously a great deal still remains to be done.

In a different historical context our own Founding Fathers were seriously concerned with the problem of checks on the power of government and, with the help and pressure of the people, wrote important safeguards into our Constitution which the people on many occasions have been able to use to defend and expand their democratic rights. Of course, reaction has also used these checks and balances for its own purposes. The rights we now enjoy were won not only in the course of great liberating bourgeois revolutions against British

feudalism and the American slavery but also by the people against the desperate resistance of the capitalist class. American Communists are proud of this American revolutionary heritage.

Unquestionably the American people will fight to retain and extend its democratic achievements in the course of attaining and building socialism. Socialism provides the best framework for the retention of what is most precious in bourgeois democracy and for a far greater expansion of democracy than is possible under capitalism. In our country, because of the new world situation in which the forces of peace are strong enough to prevent a new world war and in which a peaceful and constitutional transition to socialism is possible, a multi-party system will probably continue for a considerable period after the American people attain socialism.

In the Soviet Union, however, there is no material base for a multi-party system. There can be no question of a return to bourgeois democracy there. The question, therefore, is how to expand socialist democracy within the framework of their system. Obviously, there have been major policy differences within the Soviet leadership, but should not the Soviet people be given more direct opportunity to choose between alternative policies and to select the leaders who stand for the policies the people want? Undeniably the leaders at present are more attentive to the needs and desires of the people than in the past, but should they not take the people more into their confidence and enable them to have more direct control over policy?

When the Soviet Union was a weak, economically backward, largely illiterate country, a beleaguered fortress surrounded on all sides by far more powerful and hostile forces bent on its destruction, limitations on socialist democracy were understandable if not always justified. Now, when the Soviet Union is a strong, advanced and highly educated state, and the relationship of forces on a world scale are no longer in favor of capitalism, has not the time come for a major advance in socialist democracy?

In any case that is a matter for the Soviet Union to decide and I am supremely confident of its outcome. American Marxists express their opinions on the matter but it is not our province to settle the problems of other socialist countries. Our chief concern is our own country. One thing we have learned is that each country will reach socialism in its own way and that the way of one should not and cannot be imposed on another. This

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is because each country is different, with its own history and tradition, circumstances and institutions. Socialism in the United States will therefore come differently and be different in many respects from other countries. This will be so not because we are better than anybody else but because our circumstances are different and because we will learn from the successes and mistakes of others. We are not Titoists, Gomulkaists, Maoists or Khrushchevists. We are American Communists who think for ourselves, stand on our own feet and make our own decisions based on the interests of the American working class, nation and humanity.

At the same time, as advocates of socialism and opponents of capitalism, we are partisan toward socialism where it comes into being. It is true that just because we are partisan, we have tended in the past to close our eyes and minds to injustices and shortcomings in the socialist world, and this actually was a disservice to the cause we espouse. Now we have replaced our old concept of "Socialism—right or wrong" with—to paraphrase Carl Schurz—"Socialism—when right to be kept right, when wrong to be set right."

Some of our readers think it is intolerable if the foreign editor of the Daily Worker gives a different interpretation of an event from that expressed in

the editorials of the paper or by the editor-in-chief. I do not think so. Where differences of opinion exist—and they exist among many of us—they should be argued out and resolved. While I disagree with the emphasis and tone of this particular column of Clark's, I am convinced that failure to publish it would have clarified nothing, would have resolved nothing, while, on the contrary, free exchange of opinion and full discussion can only benefit us all.

The editorials of the Daily Worker express the paper's policy. From time to time, columns may be published which are not fully identical or even take issue with the paper's policy. A correct approach is that if false facts are presented, refute them with true ones, answer wrong arguments and dispute improper conclusions. I think such an approach is more in line with the spirit of the recent National convention of the Communist Party and its new Constitution which guarantees the right of dissent.

The right of dissent is important not only because it protects the right of minorities and individuals. It also stimulates debate which is essential to arrive at truth. Moreover, history in general, including the history of the Communist movement, demonstrates that minority points of view at times turn out to be correct.

The biggest need of Marxist

theory today is an atmosphere where all questions can be examined and reexamined on their merits, without name-calling, invective, abuse, and organizational measures as a substitute for serious debate. The movement for socialism in the U. S. needs those people who raise new questions, explore new ground, and are critical of present policies. They will often make mistakes, which when demonstrated to be wrong, should be corrected. But no progress can be made if those who present new or dissenting ideas are answered with fixed formulas which deaden rather than stimulate thought. Marxist theory will be strengthened and enriched in the clash of ideas.

As far as the Daily Worker is concerned, its fundamental policy is reflected in its editorials, which are a collective product. It will continue to express this collective policy through its editorials while it discusses dissenting views by any of its writers and readers in the spirit which I have attempted to outline here.

I am convinced that this is the best way to unite the overwhelming majority of our readers for the central task of the Daily Worker—the struggle to unite the American workers and their allies, the Negro people, against the common enemy: monopoly capital.