

SELF-CRITICISM — COMMUNIST AND 'COMMONWEAL' . . .

By **ALAN MAX**

THE LIBERAL Catholic weekly, "Commonweal," this week features an article by John C. Cort titled "Theory and Practice — Catholics and Social Justice." Cort is critical of the labor relations and the anti-union practices existing in many—though not all—Catholic institutions.



I don't propose here to repeat the examples given by Cort. But I would like to quote some paragraphs where he is self-critical for not discussing such subjects in the past:

"I have not written about these things in the past because I thought that such information would comfort enemies of the Church, and in particular the Communists, who would doubt-

less use it to discredit, among the workers, all the efforts by Catholic clergy and laity to spread the social teachings of the Church and to inspire management and labor with the spirit of social justice and charity.

"It seems unthinkable that the Communists, who had good sources of information, never got wind of these little scandals themselves. Perhaps they too were afraid of publicizing them, for fear of getting a reputation among the workers of being anti-Catholic. But the fact is that very few of these incidents ever reached the light of public print. Some, of course, could not very well avoid it and I remember that the Daily Worker found it easy to make grist for its mill out of the New York cemetery strike."

Cort says that these questions, however, are now "receiving increasing attention in the Cath-

olic press" and he proceeds to give several examples.

IT MAY STARTLE Cort to learn that the first thing that struck me upon reading his article was a similarity between his self-criticism and a passage in the resolution adopted by the recent national convention of the Communist Party.

"The party also viewed uncritically developments in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries," the resolution reads. "It mistakenly thought that any public criticism of the views or policies of the Marxist parties of these countries would weaken the bonds of international working class solidarity or bring comfort to the enemies of peace and socialism."

I do not want, of course, to strain the similarity. But it is fair to say that Communists, from their own experience, can understand how Cort and other

Catholics felt when they were silent on bad practices in Catholic institutions. Catholics likewise should have little difficulty in understanding why Communists did many of the things for which they now criticize themselves.

CORT IS quite right when he suggests that the Daily Worker has hesitated to publicize anti-union practices in Catholic institutions. He says this may have been out of "fear of getting a reputation among the workers of being anti-Catholic." I would ascribe it rather to the fact that the Daily Worker definitely is not anti-Catholic and has no desire to impugn the religious beliefs and practices of Catholics, but is always accused of harboring such purposes.

Actually, there is no reason why Communists and other left-thinking people should not feel

free to join with Catholics in fighting against anti-labor practices in Catholic institutions, as elsewhere. The sole purpose would be to back up the rights of the workers and of unionism, with matters of religious convictions and practices in no way entering the picture.

Communists, on the other hand, do not ask that their own principles be exempt from discussion or criticism in any united action with others. Since Communist principles are primarily political and social, Communists are always ready to have their principles discussed and criticized. They ask, however, the right to reply for themselves and that their principles—or any distortion of them—not be used to exclude Communists from their rights as citizens of the country, as members of a legitimate political party, as well as of trade unions and other organizations of the people.