

ON FRATERNAL DISCUSSION

THE OPEN Letter to Communist Party Members by a majority of the party's National Committee concluded with these words on the recent events in Eastern Europe:

"The entire Party should continue to make the most searching study of these events and their consequences and discuss in a comradely fashion differing viewpoints. We are confident



that in the process our Party will collectively draw the lessons of these far-reaching developments. In this way we will make a greater contribution to the cause of world peace and the democratic advance to socialism in our country."

This advice is thoroughly sound, in my opinion, and should be heeded by those of all views. The events in Eastern Europe are too new—too different from anything in our experience—to make final conclusions possible without the

widest and most exhaustive exchange of opinion. How to assess the differences and even struggles between countries, both of which are led by Communists, what kind of position to take with regard to these differences, how to insure that such a position will aid and not hinder the fight against reaction in our own country—all these are highly complicated questions on which no one can really have the last word, even though many of us who write—including myself—often sound as if we think we know the answers.

IT IS BECAUSE the questions are so difficult and the views so varied that the Open Letter, in the interests of attaining both unity and clarity, stresses the need to "discuss in a comradely fashion differing viewpoints."

In my opinion, Eugene Dennis' recent letter (Nov. 12) and his article (Nov. 29) on the Daily Worker and Hungary, strayed far from the advice of the National Committee. I am not referring to the points on which Dennis disagrees with

Daily Worker editorials or with different approaches by various columnists and writers. It is important that these disagreements be discussed openly and frankly. What I find disturbing is the element in Dennis' letter and his article which seems to impugn the socialist integrity of Daily Worker editors and writers.

Let me give some examples.

Dennis writes: "We American Communists once made the mistake of looking at the Soviet Union uncritically. But we never made the mistake of looking at it through the eyes of the American imperialists." (An inference that the editors of the Daily Worker do look through the eyes of imperialists?)

"It is my opinion that a truly independent Marxist position cannot be arrived at by declaring one's independence from workingclass ideology and partisanship." (An inference that the DW's editors are declaring such independence?)

"But one may well ask what kind of an American brand of Marxism is it that would . . ." etc., etc.

"True American Marxists will now more than ever do all in their power . . ." etc. etc. (Who are the untrue American Marxists?)

The above quotations are from Dennis' article. In his letter he writes in respect to Joseph Clark's column of Nov. 7 "a new low has been reached." Why not simply "another error"?

Dennis asserts that the Daily Worker editorial of Nov. 5 equated events in Hungary and Egypt, and remarks that "Comment is really superfluous for those who have a Marxist, scientific working class outlook." He concludes by asserting that in critical times like these, "firm adherence to socialist working class principles" is sorely needed.

Dennis appears in all this to be attempting to read out of the camp of "Marxist, scientific workingclass outlook," all who disagree with him on these questions. This is a task which no one individual should undertake with regard to other Marxists.

I disagree sharply with Dennis on many questions. But it would never occur to me to cast

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doubt on his integrity or on his adherence to socialist and workingclass principles.

THIS FLAW in Dennis' letter and in his article is extremely serious in my opinion—and not only as an injustice to those whose integrity he impugns. Far more important is the fact that this is the surest way to prevent the discussion which the Open Letter says is needed. I am aware, of course, that Dennis is not the only offender in this respect. Such invectives as "anti-Soviet," "anti-socialist," etc., have become the main instrument of those who evidently want to quash all discussion unless they themselves can define its limits and its outcome.

Regardless of the merits of Dennis' arguments, his letter and his article could have served a useful purpose if they had discussed "in a comradely fashion," as the Open Letter urged. It would also have been helpful if Dennis had indicated whether or not he supports the letter of the National Committee and not left this question to conjecture.