

# TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

## A Soviet Article On 'National Communism'

ONE REASON it may be a long time before I see the full text of that "Sovietskaya Rossiya" article, which mentions me by name, is that someone in our government is afraid to let me read certain newspapers. This may not curl the hair of our economy-minded secretary of the treasury, but one of his employes gets paid for reading foreign publications addressed to the Daily Worker. He draws his salary for deciding whether those papers are suitable for our eyes.

Little more than a week ago, the post-office deposited a big bundle of back copies of "Sovietskaya Rossiya" which had taken so long for the customs censor to read that they weren't newsworthy any longer. So in discussing this particular issue of the paper I'll have to confine myself to the few quotes which the news agencies sent through.

I DO FIND it hard to believe that the news reports were accurate when they said that the Soviet article mentioned only me by name when criticizing American, Polish and Yugoslav writers. Whoever coached that editor of "Sovietskaya Rossiya" certainly gave him an inflated idea of my importance.

Anyway "national Communism" is our common fault, it seems. May I hasten to interject at this point my pleasure that Soviet publications are conducting a public sort of debate. I've dished out criticism so I should be able to take it.

There has been only one disconcerting aspect to such de-

bates, at least in the past. As several Polish and Yugoslav Communists have pointed out, Soviet publications often attack something they do not quote, or if they quote, it will often be out of context.

Thus, I find it difficult to discern anything I wrote in the accounts quoted from "Sovietskaya Rossiya." According to these I was accused of trying to separate Leninism from Marxism. Looking back to see what I had actually written on this subject I found the following:

"Lenin was a great Marxist because he did not accept conclusions that were obsolete and inapplicable to the world he lived in. He used the Marxist method and scientific approach to study the world he lived in and to change it, as we should do today. And we have the advantage of Lenin's contribution to a creative Marxism which has no truck with dogmatism."

FRANKLY I don't know what's meant by "national communism." But I do know that nothing can be more alien to Marxism than the view that all countries will come to socialism along the same path. American Marxists have traditionally suffered from a sectarianism based in large part on a failure to study the specific features of our country's labor movement, its history and American economic conditions.

Ironically, it was Lenin who warned Russian Marxists against applying to Russia, concepts which Marx and Engels developed about the United States.

Lenin noted some specific features of the socialist movement in America as follows: "The sectarian isolation of groups, handfuls of Socialists isolated from the proletariat; not the slightest success of the Socialists in the elections among the working masses, etc. Whoever forgets these fundamental conditions and sets out to draw broad conclusions from 'American-Russian parallels' displays extreme superficiality."

Lenin singled out what he thought was the most important advice for American socialists as follows: "Marx and Engels taught the Socialists at all costs to rid themselves of narrow sectarianism and join the labor movement. . . ." (Emphasis is Lenin's.) And Lenin concluded:

"To think that these recommendations of Marx and Engels to the British and American labor movement can be simply and directly applied to Russian conditions is to use Marxism, not in order to elucidate its method, not in order to study the concrete historical peculiarities of the labor movement in certain countries, but in order to settle petty factional, intellectual accounts." (Still Lenin's emphasis.)

WHILE "SOVIETSKAYA Rossiya" is displeased by references to the struggle against "Stalinists," it is not at all averse to labeling Marxists—who agree with Lenin about the sectarianism of American socialism—as a "Right Wing."

The article also accused certain American, Polish and Yugoslav Communists of "bourgeois nationalism disguised in Communist terminology." Strong words, but I impatiently await  
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the evidence. Meanwhile, the advice Engels gave to the German - American Socialists still sounds good to me: "They will have to become out and out American."

Frederick Engels was aware of the distinctive features of the American scene in his time when he wrote to his friend Sorge here. "For the masses are to be set in motion only along the road that fits each country and the prevailing circumstances, which is usually a roundabout road."

I wonder what the author of the "Sovietskaya Rossiya" article thinks of Lenin's view that in Marxism, the vital thing is "to elucidate its method." And that there's nothing more important than "to study the concrete historical peculiarities of the labor movement in certain countries."

Let's have some friendly competition in such study. While American Marxists welcome the opinions of Marxists everywhere, they will find their own path through study and participation in the labor movement.

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