

# A Reply to Questions Concerning Communists and Civil Liberties --- 2.

By MAX WEISS

(Concluding Article)

**THE SECOND TYPE** of argument advanced by those who disagree with my article is directed to the right of dissent under socialism.

As those who disagree with me see it, the workingclass fights for civil liberties in order to advance the struggle against capitalism. But, according to them, when the workingclass comes to power it establishes a socialist government in which broad civil liberties are assured for the masses while the bourgeoisie is automatically deprived of civil liberties regardless of what the actual situation may be.

According to these readers, the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state makes this mandatory under all conditions as a matter of principle.

But this is not so.

It seems to me that this position rests on confused views about the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state as well as on oversimplified conclusions reached by historical analogy rather than historical analysis.

Actually, two distinct even though interrelated questions are involved.

**THE FIRST QUESTION** is a general theoretical one: can a socialist democracy be established without automatically restricting democracy for the bourgeoisie as a class? Clearly, it cannot.

The bourgeoisie as a class enjoys real democracy under capitalism because it owns the means of production and controls the machinery of state. It has real freedom of speech because it owns all the newspapers, radio and television networks, etc. It has real freedom of assembly because it owns all the halls, meeting places, auditoriums. It has real political freedom because, by controlling the repressive machinery of state, it enforces its own system of laws, ensures the free functioning of its own political parties, guarantees the really unrestricted right of its own franchise, etc.

By contrast, the democracy which the working class enjoys is seriously restricted and curtailed. The democratic rights to which it is legally entitled remain largely formal. It has the right to freedom of press but it doesn't have the millions of dollars which are necessary to launch even a single daily newspaper in a given city, to say nothing of a chain of newspapers in all the cities of the country.

It has the right to free speech and assembly, but it does not have at its disposal radio and TV networks, stadiums, auditoriums, halls which would be necessary to realize freedom of speech and assembly.

It has the right to vote but it cannot exercise this right universally because of literacy requirements, residents requirements, working conditions, etc.

It has the right to form political parties but it cannot secure their free functioning because of requirements for getting on the ballot, the gigantic expenses of conducting political campaigns, etc.

**WHEN SOCIALISM** is established, the bourgeoisie as a class is deprived of the basic economic and political pre-conditions for continuing to enjoy complete democracy. Its freedom of press is automatically restricted and curtailed because, it no longer has unlimited access to stocks of newsprint or presses; nor does it have the advertising which it formerly got from private corporations without which it could not publish its newspapers on the scale it does. Its freedom of speech and assembly is auto-

matically restricted because it no longer owns the radio and TV networks, the stadiums, auditoriums, halls. Its political freedom is automatically restricted because the repressive machinery of state is used by another class, the working class, to enforce a different system of laws, different functioning of political parties, etc.

Conversely, the working class as a class for the first time in history enjoys real democracy because it owns and controls the economic and political pre-requisites for this (the means of production and the machinery of state).

This is the simple meaning of the Marxist proposition that in a socialist democracy, the bourgeoisie as a class is put in a position of inequality in relation to the working class. For in a class society real democracy can exist only for the ruling classes. There is no such thing as a "pure democracy" in which both exploiting and exploited classes equally enjoy democracy.

This is a universal characteristic of all socialist countries without exception for as long as a bourgeois class, or its remnants, continues to exist.

So much for the first question.

**THE SECOND** question which is involved is not a matter of the general theory of the state. It has to do with the specific features of the transition to socialism in one or another country. It deals with such concrete questions as: the franchise for the bourgeoisie, the existence of bourgeois parties, the representation of the bourgeoisie in parliamentary bodies, the existence of bourgeois newspapers, etc.

There is absolutely nothing in the general Marxist-Leninist theory of the state which makes it mandatory on the grounds of principle for a socialist government, without regard to the type of resistance which the bourgeoisie offers, to automatically deprive the bourgeoisie of its franchise, to outlaw all bourgeois parties, to close down bourgeois newspapers, to expel bourgeois representatives from parliamentary bodies, etc.

It may or it may not do all or some or none of these things depending on the nature of this resistance, on whether the bourgeoisie subordinates itself to social law or violates it, whether the bourgeoisie does or does not organize civil war.

That is what Lenin meant when he wrote:

"The question in which countries, and in the presence of what special national features of this or that capitalism, democracy for the exploiters will be infringed upon or restricted (wholly or in part) is a question of the special national features of this or that capitalism, of this or that revolution. The theoretical question is an entirely different one, viz., is the dictatorship of the proletariat possible without infringing democracy for the exploiting class?"

(Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade. Selected Works, Vol. VII, p. 13).

**LET US TAKE** so important a question as depriving the bourgeoisie of the franchise. Did the Soviet government in 1917 deprive the bourgeoisie of the franchise because it was a matter of general principle flowing from the Marxist Leninist theory of the state? Of course not! It did so only because of specific conditions which existed in that country after the October Revolution.

"It should be observed that the question of depriving the ex-

plorers of the franchise is purely a Russian question, and not a question of the dictatorship of the proletariat in question. . . ."

"We know the example of the Paris Commune, we know all that was said by the founders of Marxism in connection with it. On the basis of this material I examined, for example, the question of democracy and dictatorship in my book, 'The State and Revolution,' which I wrote before the October Revolution. I did not say anything at all about restricting the franchise.

"And now it must be said that the question of restricting the franchise is a specifically national question and not a general question of the dictatorship. One must study the question of restricting the franchise in the light of the specific conditions of the Russian Revolution and the specific path of its development. This will be done later on in this pamphlet.

"It would be a mistake, however, to guarantee in advance that the impending proletarian revolution in Europe will all, or for the most part, be necessarily accompanied by the restrictions of the franchise for the bourgeoisie. Perhaps they will. After our experience of the war and of the Russian Revolution we can say that it will probably be so; but it is not absolutely necessary for the purpose of realizing the dictatorship, it is not an essential symptom of the logical concept, 'Dictatorship,' it does not enter as an essential condition in the historical and class concept 'dictatorship.'" (All boldface are Lenin's.—M.W.)

(Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade. Selected Works, Vol. VII, pp. 142-3.)

**SOME** readers may say: but this deals "only" with the question of the disfranchisement of the bourgeoisie. It does not deal specifically with the question of bourgeois parties or their elected representatives.

But the franchise for the bourgeoisie is the central question which determines everything else. If the bourgeoisie is deprived of its rights of franchise, it is automatically deprived of any ability to form a political party. What kind of a political party would it be whose members were prohibited from voting and, hence electing its candidates to office?

On the other hand, if the right of franchise for the bourgeoisie is permitted to continue, then the right of bourgeois political parties to continue existing is implicitly recognized. This remains true even though one or another specific bourgeois party may be outlawed if, for example, it is guilty of overt acts of violence against the socialist government.

The right of franchise means the right to elect or to be elected. The political struggle to elect or be elected always takes place on the basis of a program. And the political struggle to elect candidates on the basis of a program constitutes the content of the work of a political party, no matter by what name it calls itself.

**NEVERTHELESS**, let us turn our attention to the specific question of the existence of bourgeois parties. Is the outlawing of bourgeois political parties and the expulsion of their representatives from elected bodies an inevitable feature of socialist democracy? Of course not!

Everybody knows that the

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# A REPLY TO SOME QUESTIONS

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Cadet Party, the main party of the big bourgeoisie in Russia, was outlawed in the Soviet Union a few weeks after the October Revolution. But not everybody, apparently, knows that this was not done according to preconceived plan. It was done not out of general considerations flowing from the concept of the socialist state but as a result of the specific course which the Russian Revolution took.

The Cadet Party was outlawed because it organized and took part in an armed uprising against the Soviet government. And why was the Menshevik Party as well as the Socialist Revolutionary Party expelled from the Soviets? Likewise because they organized and took part in armed uprising against the Soviet government.

What about the People's Democracies?

Take Czechoslovakia. There are bourgeois parties in existence in Czechoslovakia to this day. They function legally. They have elected representatives in the Czechoslovakian parliament. This, mind you, even after the attempt by the leadership of these bourgeois parties to precipitate an internal crisis by their mass resignation from the cabinet in 1948. Even after such an attempt to turn the wheel of history backwards, these parties were not outlawed.

AND WHAT about our own country?

It seems to me that the readers who take issue with me have

not thought through all the implications of the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. What will the situation be at such a time?

There will be a socialist majority in Congress. But that means there will also be a non-socialist, even anti-socialist, minority in Congress as well. Suppose the situation is such that the bourgeoisie is unable to organize civil war. What do the readers who disagree with me propose should be done? Do they propose that the socialist majority should pass a law expelling the minority from Congress on general principles? Do they propose that this socialist majority should pass a law outlawing all parties except those which stand for socialism—also on

general principles?

If they do, I do not know what general principles they are referring to. There are no such general principles in the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state.

As I understand the principles of Marxist-Leninist theory, the Communist Party of our country should take up an attitude to civil liberties which flows from its struggle to realize the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. And this means that whatever may be the situation in other socialist lands, the Communist Party in our country should advocate the maintenance of full civil liberties, including the right of political dissent, not only today under capitalism, but on the morrow as well, under socialism.

## RACIST STONE-THROWERS

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"It's the kids," he continued. "They were pushed up to do this thing, but it doesn't mean the people in the neighborhood feel this way."

"Parents should be held responsible for something like this," he added.

"Naw," interjected a young man about 32 years of age, "No parent teaches a kid rotten stuff like that. I don't know where they pick up that kind of thinking."

The bartender said a Puerto Rican Church in the next block had also faced a stone-throwing attack some time ago.

A copper-haired young mother sitting on a bench on Southern Boulevard with two little daugh-

ters, a blond-haired little girl and a red-haired one-year-old baby, said:

"It's unfortunate this happened. There aren't many Negroes living in the neighborhood but, to my knowledge, nothing like this incident has ever occurred before. I certainly think people have the right to live anywhere they choose." She also felt the incident was not an organized expression of community sentiment but was the action of "kids."

Two teen-age girls queried, said they knew the 16-year-old boy involved in the rock-tossing "slightly" thought "what he did was not right."

"He was trying to be smart," one said.