

# Joe Clark's Resignation Points to New Crisis in CP

By H. W. BENSON

As the Communist Party national convention was winding up in February, a rumor buzzed through the little anteroom that served as a press room; Joe Clark, foreign editor of the *Daily Worker*, it was hinted, would demand the floor and in a dramatic last minute declaration resign from the party. It never happened but the rumor was, at worst, premature. On September 9, in a letter printed in the *Daily Worker*, he finally left the party.

His resignation comes as another shattering blow to the dwindling morale and tattered prestige of the CP. There have been others, notably Howard Fast and John Steuben. But this time, unlike the others, it seems that Clark's move will set off the internal party faction fires that had been banked and smouldering for seven months. John Gates, DW editor and spokesman for the only formal tendency in the party that has aroused any interest in the broad socialist public, felt impelled to restate the need for a struggle inside the party for his views. And, simultaneously, perhaps by coincidence, Gates was attacked by name for the first time in the Russian press, in an article in *Kommunist*, political organ of the Russian CP. It is difficult to see how a revival of the wide-open fight can be avoided.

Clark served on the *Daily Worker* staff for 12 years; he had been a Communist for 28 years. He joined in his teens during the so-called "Third Period" when he became a leader of CP student work, organizing mass student demonstrations and helping to set up the National Student League, which later entered as the Communist wing into the American Student Union. Ever since, for a political lifetime, he has served as a loyal and prominent party leader and spokesman. What he says now becomes political evidence of the first order. As Gates commented in the DW, "The resignation of Clark is another sign of the continued decline of the Communist Party." And so it is. But more, it will undoubtedly upset the relations of the various groups and tendencies within it.

Like others who supported Gates, Clark was encouraged by the recent CP convention and waited for a full-scale turn. But in vain. "The hope and promise of that convention," he writes, "have not [been] fulfilled." Apparently, the downfall of Molotov and Malenkov was a last straw. Clark says, "To support Khrushchev against Molotov and Malenkov as the party and *Daily Worker* have done, is no service to socialism or the Soviet Union. Wrong though Molotov has been, the Soviet people face the perspective, and I think will succeed, in producing a new leadership, one which is not responsible for the crimes of Stalin as both Molotov and Khrushchev are. American socialists should be partisans of socialism everywhere. But one cannot have an independent stance or a scrupulous regard for truth, and support the 'unity' of the Soviet Communist Party behind Khrushchev, as the *Daily Worker* did editorially."

## For Socialist Democracy

He calls for "independence" of American Marxists, as have others of all shades of opinion in the party. The word is a euphemism, carried along from his past. Socialists require more than "independence" from a dictatorial, repressive regime headed by men who worked hand-in-glove with Stalin; they are hostile to it and look toward and support every genuine movement for democracy. But Clark obviously inclines beyond mere "independence"; he speaks now of a "new leadership" in Russia. Elsewhere, he says, "my view is that socialism can be served only by a complete break with Stalinism. The latter perverted socialism by substituting autocracy for democracy. But Marxists have always advocated socialist democracy, which they uphold as more libertarian than any yet attained."

One question comes to mind instantly because it is so fundamental: does Clark maintain that Russia was "socialist" under Stalin and is it socialism-without-democracy today? We note, that even a man who broke so sharply with Stalinism, like Howard Fast, was unable to throw off his old misconceptions on this score. But Clark does not say!

"Communism on a world scale," he still maintains, "has been the major current in our time through which socialist transformations have taken place." That appears clear enough. But do the Communist regimes here and now represent socialism? At this point, Clark becomes cloudy. He speaks of "the successful revolutions in Russia, China, and Yugoslavia" and in the same breath of the "socialist transformation in Poland." This apparently subtle differentiation between Poland and the other nations is underlined when he writes:

"Marxism realized its greatest triumph in the Russian and Chinese revolutions. It also reached its most serious crisis as a result of Stalinist perversion of the Communist movement. Within the Communist countries there is great hope for socialism in the complete elimination of Stalinism which deprived socialism of its humanism and high moral principles and which replaced scientific method with a religious type dogma."

We ask again—are they socialist now? Clark neglects to mention even once that holy of holies, "the socialist world," referred to with reverence even by the most professedly anti-Stalinist Communist. We refer to this "oversight" not in order to ridicule an "inconsistency" which we have gleefully discovered or to chide Clark for missing the crucial point. (We leave to his Stalinist enemies the task of berating him for his "anti-Sovietism" as they have already begun.) Quite the contrary. We take great pains to note Clark's "omission" because in that "defect" lies perhaps his most important contribution to the reorientation of Communists.

## Key Political Questions

On another plane, however, Clark is just beginning to raise the key political questions, even for himself. He calls generally for socialist democracy; and for a "new leadership" in Russia. But a lot can fit under those headings. Concretely, the issue is posed thus: are you for real and tangible democratic rights now in the nations dominated by Communists: free speech, free press, the right to strike, the right to form free trade unions? the right to form legal and peaceful opposition parties, free to change the regime by peaceful, constitutional methods? We are for all that here. Are we for it there?

In the answer to this question lies the future of socialism, in America as elsewhere. It is this, at bottom, which finally ruined the Communist Party when it served as the political apologist for a totalitarian power. Like many others, Clark doesn't yet feel it in his bones.

"Fundamentally the demise of the party is related to that of every other socialist movement in our country since the days of the first Marxists here," he writes. Not content with growing directly out of the struggles of the American people, and basing themselves on the specific conditions of American life, these movements have unwittingly tried to impose their dogmas on the struggles. But at one time, with the same dogmas, the CP could enroll a hundred thousand members and influence a million others. What has changed is not the party but the world of labor, liberalism and socialism. Yesterday, Russia could win their sympathies and the CP, which rested upon it, grew. Today, the dictatorship in Russia arouses the detestation of all; the CP which continues to apologize for it, even if less blatantly, falls to pieces.

Clark repudiates the advice of Jaques Duclos, French CP leader, who put pro-Russian apologetics in their most arrant form. Duclos maintained that "internationalism" meant "solidarity with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union." This Clark rejects and he criticizes the American party for not explicitly repudiating this thesis.

## Supports Hungarian Revolt

He writes: "In 1939, internationalism required support for the anti-Hitler war, not the shameful neutrality of both the French and American Communist parties." Entirely apart from any judgment on the validity of Clark's own new conclusion, there is no doubt that it represents a thrust at Stalinism at one of its weakest points. More important is Clark's outright support of the Hungarian revolution: "And in 1956, proletarian internationalism required solidarity with the Hungarian workers opposing Soviet intervention. It demanded support for the Hungarian workers who formed a solid phalanx of workers' councils and for their 100 per cent general strike."

Finally, in a letter to the *New York Times*, in which he appealed for an amnesty for Gilbert Green and Henry Winston, Clark reminded himself of the Moscow Trials, "Nothing made me more ashamed than learning that the trials of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and other Bolshevik leaders were dastardly frame-ups as were the Rajk, Kostov and Slansky trials."

In sum, Clark does not pretend to offer any platform or special program, except to reiterate his faith in socialism; he certainly essays no theoretical analysis. What he does is sufficient for his purposes of the moment: it is a stinging criticism of the Communist Party and a renunciation of Stalinism. He is convinced that "the party has become a hindrance rather than a means for advancing socialism."

To appreciate the impact of Clark's resignation upon the inner party situation we need only examine two quite different reactions to it: 1. a statement by

the National Administrative Committee of the CP, and 2. a statement by John Gates, ostensibly written as a "reply" to Clark.

The party is naturally not in a position to exert its full talents of vituperation in these difficult days, but its official statement makes the best of it. Its NAC, reject Clark's contention that the Party is in any way as is only natural, announces that all its members "will an obstacle to the achievement of socialism." The Committee is entitled to its vain hopes but it will not rest content with that. It goes on, "but Clark goes beyond mere loss of faith. He asserts that the Communist Party has become a hindrance to the advancement of socialism. This is more than dissatisfaction. It places him as an opponent of the Party—as one who believes that the cause of socialism can best be served by its liquidation."

Thus the edge is directed not only against Clark but against those Gatesites who proposed the transformation of the party into a political action association. And then the inevitable: "Clark has lost all conception of a sound workingclass attitude toward the Soviet Union." And, "Clark's statement . . . gives grist to the mills of those who plan to exploit the 'foreign agent' lie." In this rather mild muck-dropping this stands out: the Committee considers Clark an enemy.

But John Gates still considers Clark a friend and future collaborator. In his "reply," Gates ends, "In the farewell *Daily Worker* staff gave Clark a few days ago, I expressed the thought that in saying farewell to Joe we were not bidding farewell to his and our mutual fight for socialism. Clark replied in kind. We parted in sorrow and not in anger, as friends not enemies. I hope we will be able to discuss our disagreements in such a way as to be able to march to socialism, each in our own way, at the present time, but unitedly some time in the future." Gates, is careful to distinguish his views from those of Clark. He thinks the party is moving in the right direction; he believes that Duclos was repudiated; "we supported the recent changes in leadership in the Soviet Union," he writes, "because we were for the policies enunciated by the 20th Congress of the CPSU."

## One Step Backward

Here, we might recall, that as far back as July 24 in a discussion of Clark's views on Russia, Gates took a big step backward when he wrote in the *Daily Worker*, ". . . 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." Not even under Stalin? Not even now under Khrushchev who was linked with Stalin? Why not? Perhaps he will soon be compelled to give other answers. Let us hope so. But at any rate, his discussions with Clark remain on the plane of political affinity.

But how different his handling of the Foster wing in his own party! Gates, in effect, denounces the Fosterites for forcing Clark out of the party; it is a difficult if not untenable position; he has more in common with Clark who calls for the end of the CP than with the Foster wing with which he remains united! At a meeting of the CP National Committee July 27-28 (before Clark resigned), Gates spoke out against Foster, "If you want to exclude from the pages of the *Daily Worker* columns like Joe Clark's, let's talk about excluding articles by Foster and anyone else that also contradicts the line of the Party. I say that this is a vital question, because it has to do with the direction our Party is going. He struck back at his critics, "There was a remark made to the effect that comrades who advocate a political action association were putting forward the position of imperialism—that's the way you talk to enemies, not to comrades!"

Foster answered, "Comrade Gates said that I also had written anti-Party articles, which were printed in the *Daily Worker*. That is not correct. Every article I submitted to the *Daily Worker* was first submitted to, and passed upon by the Party. I wrote some articles, that were against the line of the *Daily Worker*, which is quite a different line from that of the Party, in many respects."

## A Reply to Foster

With this as a background, we can understand that Gates' "reply" to Clark is actually a reply to Foster. ". . . we have not yet succeeded in creating the kind of atmosphere in the Communist movement where new ideas can freely be advanced and explored without name-calling, invective and abuse." That, explains, Gates, is why Clark was forced out of the Party. And Gates goes on: "there are those who opposed these new policies before the convention and who resist, obstruct and seek to reverse them now. This is a real struggle and has not yet come to a definitive conclusion."

As everything seems poised for a new eruption inside the Communist Party, two problems which will affect the immediate future of socialism in the United States press forward again:

1. Will those still inside the Communist movement who want a real break with Stalinism move toward democratic socialism? That is, will they affirm their adherence to democracy, not only for the United States, but for all the nations now under Communist control.

2. Can democratic socialists present an active, positive militant anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist program capable of attracting those who have already broken with Stalinism; those who are breaking from it today under our very eyes; and those who will inevitably do so tomorrow?