

THE DISCUSSION IN THE CP CONTINUES—

'We Must Probe How It Can Happen...'

By GEORGE POST

The past weeks have witnessed increased confusion within the American Communist Party, which is heavily involved in the "revelations" of the Russian 20th Party Congress. This atmosphere has allowed the party, or at least significant voices within it, to "re-evaluate" certain aspects of the American Stalinists' line on various questions, in particular those which have long been felt to be mistaken by many both within and around the CP.

Thus, for example, many party writers are "taking a new look at the Negro question," in an attempt to abandon the last remnants of the CP's theory of "self-determination for the Negro people in the black-belt," a theory which always had been identified as being derived from "Stalin's work on the national question."

Abner Berry, who in the past publicly has supported the line without question (although certain CP leaders such as Doxey Wilkerson had not), writing in the West Coast CP paper, the *People's World*, for April 12, declared that since the 20th Party Congress had attacked "doctrinarism," the American CP should re-examine its line on the Negro question.

Shachtman Talks — —

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well as proving that the standard of living of the workers had increased greatly. Moreover, he stated, Khrushchev would introduce democracy.

During the exchange, Shachtman took up the claim that the growth of industry equaled socialism, explaining why this was false. He showed not only that the growth of industry and the exploitation of the masses are not contradictory, as had been claimed by one of the LYers, but that indeed the vast industrial development in Russia took place only through the most extreme exploitation of the Russian workers and peasants by the ruling class.

In a firm but sympathetic manner, Shachtman asked them how they knew that Khrushchev was introducing democracy in Russia and would straighten out all of Stalin's "misdeeds." Wasn't it true, he challengingly inquired, that they were now being asked to believe that the present Russian rulers would institute "collective leadership" and put an end to undemocratic abuses on the same basis that they had previously been expected to think Stalin "the greatest genius of mankind," namely the word of the Russian Stalinist leadership and the leaders of the American CP? Why should you take their word for it, he asked, the word of these people who did not lift a finger to oppose Stalin when he was alive? Demand deeds, not words, he told them.

He pointed out that their leaders had in the past sycophantically endorsed everything Stalin did and were just as sycophantically now endorsing the new line. Why should you believe them now, when you know they have deceived you in the past, he enquired?

He explained to them that because of the attitude of the Communist Party they had been kept in ignorance of the independent socialist movement in this country and knew nothing about it. "Why don't you read our press and find out about us, even if its just in order to be able to oppose us intelligently?" he suggested to them. And in conclusion, he proposed that they ask their leaders to accept the YSL challenge to debate the meaning of the dethronement of Stalin.

"Indeed," Berry writes, "there is now a grave doubt as to whether there was a basis for restating in 1946 the old analysis of the Negro people constituting a nation in the 'Black Belt.' And this is written with the full recognition of my own contribution to, and partial responsibility for, the final decision."

In the same fashion, the CP's current "discovery" that it was wrong in not defending the 16 members of the Socialist Workers Party who were convicted in Minneapolis at the beginning of World War II under the Smith Act, enables it to get out from under one of the major accusations against it when it currently opposes this infamous law.

On the Jewish question in particular, the CP press has made a sharp switch, as against the shrill denials of Russian anti-Semitism which had been the CP's task in the past. The Stalinist press is currently, in line with the new line, feeling "a deep sense of indignation, anger and grief over the latest disclosures of violation of socialist principles under the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union."

No less a leader than Eugene Dennis, writing in the *Daily Worker* of April 16 decries the "imprisonment and execution of political and cultural leaders of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union."

Dutifully the American CP has denounced the "Rajk frameup" in Hungary. The *People's World* for April 11 goes so far as to liken it to the frame-ups of Haymarket, the Molly Maguire, Joe Hill, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Rosenbergs and Willie McGee. And, of course, the Kostov "frameup" in Bulgaria is also denounced.

So the new line is implemented—still in typical Stalinist fashion. The Russian party decries Stalin; the American party seconds it; the Russian bureaucracy calls for "criticism and self-criticism"; the American party dutifully engages in same—and finds that it has exactly the same criticisms to make. Because of this puppet-like reaction, the most important thing to observe is not that this goes on, but the way it goes on, what it reveals about the CP from below.

ONE LONG MISTAKE

The letters to the editor in the CP press still remain the most interesting thing about the entire discussion, for

IN SAN FRANCISCO—

Schneiderman Says He Doesn't Know...

By CHARLES WALKER

San Francisco, Apr. 6

About 350 Stalinists and their sympathizers, disturbed to varying degrees, attended the CP's only San Francisco meeting devoted to explaining the 20th Congress of the Russian party. It was held tonight with State CP Chairman William Schneiderman doing the explaining. Schneiderman is currently stamping California on this subject.

Schneiderman's approach was to stress the "positive" and more theoretical features of the 20th Congress, as against the more sensational matters like the assault on Stalin's reputation and the revelations of past injustices. The latter, he claimed, were being deliberately pushed by the "State Department" to "divert attention."

For the most part Schneiderman followed the course already laid out by American CP explainers. The congress

What about the role of the other Russian leaders? Schneiderman said he didn't know; wasn't there.

As for the U.S., the CP (he said) should have known better after the "Browder episode"; but even with more information, it would still be debatable as to what action should have been taken, "in the face of anti-Soviet slanders"; perhaps it would not have been mentioned at all.

Written questions submitted to Schneiderman and answered by him indicated

they, in part at any rate, reveal something of what goes on in the minds of the rank-and-file CPers, forced, as the lady said at the Jefferson School, to "learn how to think."

One of the most revealing of these letters is by someone who describes himself as a union man from Philadelphia. He lists a series of mistakes committed by the American CP, mistakes which amount to nothing less than the total CP position on every major question in the past ten years.

In the first place, the Progressive Party was a mistake, for it isolated them from the labor movement.

In the second place, the party exaggerated the threat of war and in so doing utilized mechanical tactics which isolated them from the people.

In the third place, the party had a false estimate of the imminence of economic crisis.

In the fourth place, on McCarthyism, the CP "retreated too far, again leaving the people to find their own way, which they did."

In the fifth place, their line on the Negro question was wrong.

And in the sixth place, on the question of agitation for socialism, he writes, "We just quit."

A reader of the *Daily Worker*, who writes that he was in Hungary during the Rajk trial, demands:

"We must probe how it happens that innocent people are executed under socialism. What happens that persons with doubts remain silent? What happens that people are stampeded into demanding the death penalty for the accused, despite an abhorrence of capital punishment? What about the prosecutor in the case? What of the judge? What of the people like myself, who were led to accept the mere accusation as justice, and ready to shun anyone who dared protest?"

G. S., writing in the *Daily Worker* for April 11, questions the entire procedure of Stalinist "self-criticism."

"Why," he asks, "were criticisms of Stalin made at a secret meeting, the text of which has not even been published in the Soviet Union? Why does not the present Soviet leadership openly declare their own responsibility for past errors? If Beria and his gang were responsible for the break with Yugoslavia why was he not brought to open trial? If the executions in Hungary were frame-ups is it correct to put all the blame on a police chief rather than the party leadership?"

"ABERRATION"?

Thus, the readers of the *Daily Worker* and the *People's World* make, when all their individual contributions are combined, what amounts to nothing less than

a total attack on Stalinism; they question its politics on almost every major question, they question even the nature of the current accusations against Beria, who is accused and convicted without an open trial (even a murderer is entitled to that elementary democratic right,) and they question the present leadership of the Russian bureaucratic class.

But there is still a significant gap between even such a measure of disillusionment and a turn toward revolutionary opposition to Stalinism, on the part of serious rank-and-filers of the movement, especially the youth, who have mistakenly identified their radical sympathies with the Russian totalitarian regime.

This gap is utilized in the pages of the *Daily Worker*, as the party leadership puts up arguments to keep the membership loyal despite the mind-shaking disclosures.

The current discussion of Russian official anti-Semitism is a good case in point, for the party leadership tries to apologize for it by declaring: "in a socialist country like the USSR, where there are no exploiting classes, whatever temporary distortions have occurred in attitudes to nations and peoples, whatever violations of the principles of socialist justice have taken place—these are departures from the principles of socialism. The progress and advance of socialism makes the correction of these aberrations inevitable. And that is what is now taking place in the Soviet Union, under the leadership of the Communist Party of that country."

BASIC EQUATION

The argument is simple: Russia is a socialist society, and a socialist society has mechanisms within it to correct its mistakes; the horrors now being revealed are just mistakes; and the socialist society will correct them.

This may satisfy many American rank-and-file CPers who have not themselves been part of the apparatus, whose life within the party has been a matter of ALP activity and the like; for many of them have a simple equation in their heads which reads: State ownership of the economy = socialism; therefore Russia is socialist; therefore all these things are simply aberrations.

It is the first premise which is fundamental to the CP apologia. Jumping the gap means: to realize that the state ownership of the economy under Stalinist totalitarianism is the social basis of a new type of exploiting society which is as antithetical to socialism as it is to capitalism. It is the type of social system we call bureaucratic collectivism.

Russia is not a socialist society. Socialism means more freedom than capitalism, not less. And this freedom depends not simply on state ownership of means of production, but on working-class "ownership" of the state.

But the "aberrations" that have been revealed mean there is not a particle of actual political power that resides in the hands of the masses of people in Russia. And without this, there can be no socialism.

real uneasiness in the local ranks. Schneiderman's replies were evasive.

—Didn't the Rajk confession and the doctors' confessions call for real doubt about Soviet justice?—It calls into question the "methods of review." However, there are no excuses for false and framed-up charges. Don't blame individuals.

—Was the re-evaluation of Stalin taking place in the best manner possible?—This is questionable. Other CPs should have participated.

—When will public opposition to current doctrines be possible in the Soviet Union?—It is now going on [so claimed Schneiderman coolly, without even referring to the armed suppression of the Tiflis demonstration or the unanimity of the 20th Congress]. It was stifled before, but it is to be hoped that wider latitudes of democracy will be opened up as the war recedes.

—Why did the French CP support Mollet in Algeria? Doesn't this aid imperialism?—We lack information. [A frequent reply by Schneiderman.] However, it seems necessary to prevent France from getting a right-wing government and becoming an American puppet. If the French broke from the U.S. and came to an agreement with the Soviet Union on international policy, this would contribute to peaceful solutions of world problems. The French CP would try to influence the French socialists better from within, as far as Algeria is concerned...

(Of course, in the meantime the Algerian people should no doubt hail the Stalinists for arming their oppressors! Note also that in this reply, Schneiderman automatically accepts, as always, the role of the other CPs as auxiliaries of Russian foreign-policy needs, with the right to sell out any fight for freedom to achieve any Moscow slogan.)

—Why was no correction of mistakes made before Stalin's death?—Don't know.

—How do you preserve monolithic unity and still prevent errors?—There is a time for discipline and unity, and there are other times when this is only a pretext for anti-democratic acts. When it's the right time for democracy, use it.

(Of course, the decision as to which time is which... will be made by the little Stalinists.)

—Did you, Schneiderman, discuss your speech with the leadership before giving it?—I wouldn't have dared otherwise.

Schneiderman did his level best to answer the faithful. Most of the audience seemed to be composed of middle-aged and older people who have probably been around the CP for years.

Among the Labor Youth League youth, the response may be different. Schneiderman will probably also hold a meeting on the same subject in the East Bay area, and more dissent may be visible there.

In Philadelphia—Hear Max Shachtman
on
STALINISM WITHOUT STALIN
The Meaning of the 20th Congress
THURS., MAY 3, at 8:30 p.m.
St. James Hotel, Room 304
13th and Walnut
Auspices:
Independent Socialist League