

Reply To Professor Cole

by DR. HERBERT APTHEKER

PROFESSOR Cole's article, it seems to me, continues his enviable record, correctly summarized by himself, as that of one who has "always been strongly sympathetic to the Soviet Union, continually urged the need for working-class unity, national and international, in the struggle against capitalism and colonialism, and consistently refused to be associated with any sort of anti-Communist crusade." Believing, as he does, that "to improve world Socialist relations" it is necessary that "from the outset the points of difference are unequivocally stated," Professor Cole proceeds to state them.

The points of difference are several and serious: a questioning of the validity of the whole concept of proletarian dictatorship; a challenge to the possibility of simultaneously just and efficient functioning of democratic centralism; an excoriation of bureaucracy and a fear that it is intrinsic in certain Marxist-Len-

DR. HERBERT APTHEKER, distinguished historian, is editor of "Political Affairs," a monthly Marxist magazine. Outstanding among his many books is his "Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States." His illuminating "The Truth About Hungary" was recently published.

inist principles and practices; a reminder of the existence of now-admitted gross illegalities and severe malpractices; and the suggestion that there exists a tendency to forget the needs of sheer humanity in the crucible of and the concentration upon the class struggle.

It is axiomatic that it is easier to raise problems than to solve them. This does not mean that it is not a major service to raise problems; this does not mean that without raising problems, there can be no solutions. But this does mean exactly what it says. Within the severe space limitations imposed on me by the editors, it is possible for me only to indicate some approaches to the questions and challenges Professor Cole poses; in several instances, under any circumstances, my capacity to do justice to these questions is highly uncertain.

All of us now have a more sober appreciation of what Lenin must have had in mind when he wrote of "the difficulties of building socialism." To a high degree there was in the past appreciation of the difficulties involved in defeating capitalism; but there was a tendency to assume that once this was accomplished, the rest—the coming into be-

ing of a socialist society and its continual flowering—would be more or less automatic and painless, so far as the internal forces were concerned.

In a sense it is perfectly natural that this should have been the approach, given the fact that the historic task was to defeat capitalism, difficult enough in all conscience. It is a mark of the enormous progress that humanity has made, highlighted by the Russian Socialist Revolution of forty years ago, that it now faces as an urgent task the actual building of socialist societies, or, as is the case in the USSR, the purification of a socialist society as part of the process of the establishment of communism.

Historically speaking, the task is altogether new; the quality of the undertaking is quite unprecedented. That there have been severe failings is to be understood—which does not mean condoned; but these are failings *that have not caused the process itself to be reversed, let alone defeated*. The failings have hurt the accomplishment; but the accomplishment stands: *the socialist reorganization of society has been achieved among one-third of humanity*. It remains for those hundreds of millions, Communists and non-Communists, to eliminate the failings and injustices which they themselves see and feel, while at the same time preserving inviolate and extending the colossal gains their revolutions have achieved. Or better, the process of purification, which the socialist peoples are themselves conducting, is necessary for that preservation and extension.

On the specific questions raised by Professor Cole, I find it possible

here only to make assertions, rather than develop full-bodied arguments. The concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat" seems to me fully valid and, indeed, vindicated, by the history of the past half century, and by the realities of political science. There have existed in the past, state forms which may be accurately defined as dictatorships of slaveowners, of feudal lords, of capitalists, of monopoly capitalists. This does not mean that the forms of these states have not, in each stage, varied from place to place and time to time; and it does not mean that the variance was sometimes not very considerable. It does not mean that one form was not to be preferred to another; or that one type of particular class rule was not preferable to another. But it does mean that the basic foreign and domestic policies of these states, their fundamental orientations, and the roots of the conflicts within them, lay in the ruling classes' relationship to the means of production and their comprehension of their own interests.

In exactly the same way, with much room for lags and with no dependence on rigid one-to-one responses, working-class ownership and control of the means of production would mean working-class domination of the state. This does open the road, within each country, for fraternal relations with other, non-exploitative elements in the population; for an enormous advance in productivity; for a concerted and successful attack upon poverty, illiteracy, disease, cultural impoverishment and bigotry. This does spur forward, internationally, the demise of imperialism, the lib-

eration of oppressed peoples, and the consolidation of peace. None of this is accomplished automatically; all of it requires tremendous effort and persistent struggle.

Enormous progress has been made in the past forty years in the achievement of all these superb ends. Proletarian dictatorship, in varying forms, has been the state form and the propelling force in all cases. Where this has not been present, Socialists have ruled in name but capitalism has endured in fact; where this has not been present, Socialists have ruled in name, but have in fact helped maintain imperialist domination, from the Belgian Congo to Cyprus, from Algeria to Kenya.

One may add that, with the candor characteristic of Professor Cole, his own references to the necessity for the maintenance of socialist organization and power, once it is achieved, go a long way towards explaining the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat, in some form, during the transitional period of the socialist revolution. His comments on the problems arising from democratic centralism and from bureaucracy surely are well-taken. It is a fact, I think, that the whole problem of the exercise of power, *per se*, has not been dealt with sufficiently in Marxist literature; not surprising in a literature devoted very largely to polemizing against existing power. Now, with socialism a viable institution in one-third the globe, it is past time that the frankest coming to grips occur with problems of corruption, nepotism, division of authority, rotation of office, the fullest activation of *all* elements in the population.

Bureaucratic behavior is of the essence of exploitative societies, just as racist and chauvinist practices and feelings are. These are hostile to socialist society and therefore *can be eliminated* only with socialism. That they are tenacious is true; this must mean the need to intensify the struggle against them, and never to compromise with them.

On certain of the specific points raised by Professor Cole—notably that dealing with Hungary—I have written at length elsewhere. There I have tried to substantiate my understanding of the Hungarian events; here I feel it proper only to say that this understanding differs from that of Professor Cole. Where he raises the general question of the definition of counter-revolution, I think the answer must be that counter-revolution, as applied to socialist society, is that which seeks the restoration of the private ownership of the means of production.

I would add that counter-revolution almost never sloganizes its actual intent—certainly not in its early stages. Further, counter-revolution always promotes its course in the name of those entities or ideas it feels are most precious to as wide a segment of the population as is possible. The fact that in every counter-revolutionary effort considerable numbers of the population participate with the purest motives in the world, does not alter the fact that there have been counter-revolutionary efforts in the past; nor does it alter the fact that imperialists hate socialism and seek its destruction in every possible way, under every conceivable guise and excluding no means.

This observation brings me to

what I feel is a serious omission in Professor Cole's article. I have reference to his consideration of what he sees as the weaknesses or errors in the development of the USSR, quite divorced from contemporaneous developments outside the country. Surely it is not necessary to argue with G. D. H. Cole the fact of the intervention against Soviet Russia, nor the devastation of World War II. It is not necessary, I think, to argue with him the implacable hostility of world capitalism to the USSR, and the measures of defense that this has required from the first socialist country.

I want here only to suggest that when one discusses the limitations of the Soviet Union, or what one sees as faults within its administration, it is absolutely vital that these be placed within the context of imperialist policy to destroy that country. I do not mean that the limitations and errors are to be justified by this environmental fact; many cannot be so justified, though their comprehension will be aided. But I do insist that unless this policy and its attempted implementation is given its full weight, one examines the Soviet Union not only critically but also unfairly, and I know that this is not Professor Cole's intent.

I would suggest another thought. A partisan of socialism who lives in England—or in the United States—has as his first responsibility conditions in his own country. A partisan of socialism, who lives within the home areas of Anglo-American imperialism, is obliged to keep to the forefront, I think, the role of the British and American Governments. Surely when such a one assesses the failures, as he sees them, of com-

rades in the Soviet Union, he should do this not only in the most fraternal and constructive and modest way as is possible; he should also do this while understanding that his own country is yet imperialist and that the policies of that country are responsible, to a considerable extent, for the pressures and difficulties that beset the Government and the inhabitants of the Soviet Union.

But there are two considerations put forward by Professor Cole that far outweigh in importance the points of difference we have argued. One is Professor Cole's insistence on the need for united action of all friends of socialism in support of the central aims they hold in common. And in this call Professor Cole's gentle reminders of rigidity and arrogance and thoughtlessness that have characterized the behavior of many amongst us who are Communists must be taken to heart, so that such obstacles to the vital unity are removed.

For his part, Professor Cole contributes to the forging of such unity by the stimulating challenges he presents, by the reality of his friendship for the Soviet Union, and by his impatience with those who persist in their "denunciations of Communism" and who really fear the success of efforts in the socialist world towards purification and rectification.

The second consideration which Professor Cole raises is nothing less than mankind's survival. This requires the peaceful co-existence of socialism and capitalism; it requires more specifically that there must not be war between the Soviet Union and the United States. To be cherished is all that serves to allay interna-

tional hostility and tension; all that tends to curb the armaments race; all that induces popular good-will and understanding.

I have seen no words which more incisively express humanity's most

urgent need than those in the concluding paragraph of Professor Cole's article. I would respectfully ask that the reader consider them as part of my contribution, too, and re-read them.

From Diego Rivera

THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the October Revolution is a day of universal rejoicing, confidence and hope, a day for remembering the struggles and sacrifices that are past, of testifying to the tremendous achievements attained as a result of heroic efforts to build a new and better society.

Hero of this epic is the great Soviet people, but from the very first there were those from all parts of the world who contributed to the creation of a new humanity; each one of them brought back to his people the inspiration gained from the work of their brothers in the Soviet Union.

The results have been stupendous: from 1917 through 1957—a 40 year span—the 600 millions dwelling in the many-centuried, marvelous Chinese land have become part of the peoples' democratic regime, setting their feet on the path to socialism, as have hundreds of millions from other parts of the world.

The USSR has acquired vast power for defending and preserving peace, as well as for producing collective wealth in city and countryside—vast as the longing of its great people for peace and their determination to have it.

In vain the forces of obscurantism have encircled a quarter of the globe, with fantastic resolve to bar out human thought, using for this money and the weapons of mass destruction. This foolish project is absorbing enormous efforts, and condemning us all to constant crises and the hysteria of a terror provoked in order to convert the sweat and blood of the people into atom bombs by means of the war taxation they are subjected to.

But arms are ineffectual because the workers' land continues to make better ones than their enemies make, rendering attack impossible, so that peace shall not be destroyed. And day by day Socialist thought penetrates more deeply into the ranks of the producing masses, oppressed by taxation and by the war hysteria and racial strife set in motion by the depraved gangster ruling elements.

For these reasons every man who loves his country will celebrate this anniversary of the October Revolution with boundless rejoicing, since for the colonial and semi-colonial oppressed peoples, for all countries not yet liberated by the proletarian revolution, the one great possibility for a better, truly human life is the one the people will bring into being thanks to the historic example which the Soviet Union gave us forty years ago today.