

The Daily Worker's Line Admits More Than It Intends on Russia . . .

The Confessions Of the Communist Party

By GORDON HASKELL

The exposure of the Stalin era which started with the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party has brought consternation and demoralization into the ranks of the American Communist Party and its friends. Just how deep these feelings will go, and what organizational consequences will flow from them only time can tell.

One of the sources of the Stalinists' difficulty is that a movement which has been trained to accept policies and theories from above as revealed doctrine, and to regard anyone in its midst who dared to criticize or contradict such theories and policies and to persevere in such criticism as by definition an agent of the bourgeoisie and an enemy of the movement, is now suddenly told that a vast slice of the old dogma was false. And in addition, the members of this movement are told that among the false doctrines was the idea that unthinking acceptance was the proper attitude for devoted party militants.

In the welter of uncertainty and confusion created by this whole situation, the Communist Party leadership in this country has to develop some kind of explanation which can seek to stem the demoralization at least until such a time as they can get themselves reoriented, and establish the new orthodoxies to which everyone will then be pressed to give allegiance.

Since logical, if applied to an examination of the meaning of the revelation that for at least 20 years the "land of socialism" was an arbitrary police-state despotism, can only deepen the demoralization, the party leadership has decided to turn to a more reliable "weapon" in this ideological struggle. That weapon is faith.

CALL TO BLIND FAITH
Faith, in the sense of blind believing rather than firm confidence, is for the Stalinists, as for other types of believers, a refuge from the necessity of facing up to unpleasant realities, and to thinking through difficult and distasteful problems.

Faith in what? Simply in the fact that the countries which have come under Stalinist rule are productive and powerful, that Stalinism has vastly extended the territories and peoples over which it holds sway. Faith, in a word, in the "success" of the Stalinist system.

"Believe strongly enough in this," they tell their bewildered followers, in effect, "and in due course all the rest will be adequately explained to you. Believe enough in this, and in the end you will see that what now appears as a series of stunning and annihilating indictments of this regime on socialist grounds is really a description of a few blemishes on the grand and glorious structure of the socialist society."

The impact of the self-indictment of the 20th Congress is so strong in this country that the leadership does not yet

quite dare to put the matter so crassly. In Russia itself, however, where the party directly represents a ruling class which has at its disposal the means of continuing to enforce its rule, the matter is put quite bluntly so that no one may misunderstand.

STRAIGHT FROM PRAVDA

Here are some excerpts from the famous April 5 editorial of *Pravda* which got a good deal of attention in America at the time it was published.

"Pretending to condemn the cult of the individual, some rotten elements are trying to question the correctness of the party's policy. All the course of the Soviet Union's historic development refutes these inventions, utterly demolishes such unworthy attempts.

"Throughout its history the party's policy was and remained a Leninist policy. This policy has been elaborated by the party and its Central Committee in the course of the struggle for the victory of socialism, and it embodies the party's collective wisdom. Its great virility has been tested by the decades of our people's great creative endeavor. The world historic successes of the Soviet people are an explicit and conclusive proof of the correctness of the Communist Party's policy. The fact that our party and government work, in economic construction, to overcome the consequences of the cult of the individual testifies to the great force of the party and its unshakable loyalty to Leninism. The Communist Party is now united more than ever before, and is closely rallied around its Central Committee. All our party is unanimous in approving the wise Leninist policy."

All those in this country who prattle about the "democratization" going on in Russia should read that over carefully.

There is a contradiction between the revelations of Stalin's crimes which, since he headed the party, became part of party policy, and the assertion that "throughout its history the party's policy was and remained a Leninist policy . . . and it embodies the party's collective wisdom."

The contradiction is so glaring that one wonders, for a moment, how anyone could write that, and even more, how millions could be expected to read it without protest.

"ALWAYS RIGHT"

But if one forgets about the niceties of logic, and directs one's attention to social purpose and function, the meaning of the editorial is crystal-clear.

What the editorial tells the party member, in a word, is: Keep your mouth shut. If you open it, be careful to repeat only what your party leadership has told you. Anything else is dangerous. Don't think that revelations about two decades of legal frame-ups and murders, of arbitrary one-man rule, of vast historical blunders, gives you license to put in your own two-bits' worth of criticism of the party leadership or its policy. The party is right, and it always has been right. If it may appear, from what the leaders have been saying of late, that it made mistakes in the past, it is enough for you to repeat their phrases without thinking about them, let alone expanding on them. Remember: the party is unanimous, as always under Stalin, and it is rallied even closer around its leadership than were the self-admitted sycophants of Stalin around him."

In this country, where the CP leadership does not enjoy a monopoly of the means of communication, and where they can't avoid having to deal to some degree at least with the real arguments of their political opponents, the line takes an attenuated form. They have to appeal (remember, they still have to appeal where the Russians can command) to their membership's faith and loyalty in more veiled ways.

UNLUCKY COMPARISON

In an article signed "J. C." (Joseph Clark?) in the April 15 *Worker* an attempt is made to "explain" the admitted frame-up trials by an ingenious combination of argument by analogy, and by the old trick of turning the discussion from the implications of the topic at hand to an attack on the crimes of capitalism. The article refers to and quotes at length from an editorial which appeared in the *Daily Worker* on April 2 which also tried to deal with the problem.

"The *Daily Worker* pointed out that frame-ups were typical products of capitalism. Miscarriages of justice in socialist lands, the editorial said, mean that capitalist methods had been adopted, instead of socialist legality, in the cases concerned. The *Daily Worker* editorial said:

"It is noteworthy that the Soviet leaders have undertaken a huge review of the operations of their system of justice with an aim to restoring completely the rights guaranteed to the individual by socialist law. . . ."

"Such a review has never been carried out by capitalist governments. Who has ever heard of capitalist regimes admitting they have wronged and persecuted countless victims of the fight for social justice? All the world knows that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent. But under capitalist rule not a thing is done to admit the wrong. . . ."

The article then goes on to wax indignant about victims of capitalist injustice, and to demand at the end, an explanation "from those responsible, [in the Stalinist frame-up trials] as to how confessions were made in open court by apparently innocent persons."

The comparison with the Sacco-Vanzetti case is an unfortunate one indeed for Stalinist apologists.

INDEX TO CLASS STRUGGLE

Frame-ups are a typical product of capitalism. When they occur in socialist lands, it means that capitalist methods have been adopted.

But why are frame-ups "typical" to the extent they are, of capitalism? Because of inadequate police or judicial methods? What a joke! Even a Stalinist knows that political frame-ups take place under capitalism because of the class struggle in capitalist society.

When they become "typical" of the legal processes in any country, it means that the society is very unstable and the bourgeois state is resorting to extraordinary measures to suppress the movements of its enemy class or classes.

But since the analogy from one society to another has been made, what is one to think if such "methods" become typical of any other state? Not that there was a mistake here or a "miscarriage of justice" there, but that for one or even two solid decades judicial frame-ups had become the norm for political "cases," that the whole police apparatus, that the vast legal machinery of a state ruled by the Communist Party of Russia was trained to produce legal frame-ups as a natural and ordinary part of its normal operations . . . what is one to think of that?

What can it mean but that here, too, the state was used as an instrument of the class struggle? How else could this have happened on such a scale and for such a long period of time?

And the next section is even more unbelievable. Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered by a legal frame-up. Everyone knows it, but the capitalist state won't admit it. Contrast that to the "huge review of the operations of their system of justice" which has now been undertaken in Russia.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

First of all, how did all the world get to know that Sacco and Vanzetti were framed? Because there was an independent political movement or series of movements in this country that proclaimed it to high heaven and the four winds. Because, despite all kinds of repressions and reprisals, there was enough freedom of speech and press in this country so that determined and courageous men and women, among them supporters as well as revolutionary opponents of capitalism and its state, could denounce and excoriate the injustice which was being done without having to wait for the heads of the government to repudiate the legal murder perpetrated by their own regime!

That aspect of the comparison should have been enough to make even a party hack, hard pressed for what to say, shy away from it. But consider how utterly fantastic, and yet revealing it is, in another respect.

Who were Sacco and Vanzetti? A poor fish-peddler, and a good shoemaker, as they referred to themselves, who also happened to be anarchists. They were men without power or influence who became symbols of the struggle for freedom and human dignity because of the vast forces of a vindictive capitalist society which were deployed to destroy them, and because of the nobility of character and ideals which they displayed in going through their ordeal.

Who were the people now admitted to be victims of the Stalinist trials? [We only refer to the admitted ones, not to confuse the line of argument with reference to the myriad others who may, or may not, be admitted tomorrow.] Tukhachevsky was chief of staff of the armed forces of Stalinist Russia; Traicho Kostov was one of the oldest and most respected leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party; Rudolf Slansky was general secretary of the Czech Communist Party; Laszlo Rajk, old leader of the Hungarian Communist Party; etc., etc.

That in capitalist countries avowed enemies of capitalism are persecuted in many ways, and often framed and railroaded to jail, is a commonplace of the class struggle. To equate this with the frame-up trial and execution of a whole series of the highest government leaders is to mix up two categories of things in an effort to confuse the unwary.

A VISION OF CRISIS

When McCarthy and Nixon charged the Democrats with "20 years of treason," there was quite a commotion in the country, despite the fact that this was merely campaign oratory, an area of discourse in which Americans are accustomed to a general lowering of the standards of veracity expected in personal relations. But what if Attorney General Brownell had gone beyond the broad insinuations of the Harry Dexter White case in testimony before a congressional committee, and had indicated, convicted and executed Truman, Acheson, General Marshall, Alben Barkley and Sam Rayburn on trumped-up charges of treason?

Although lots of fantastic things happened when McCarthy was riding high, such a development would have meant the triumph of his orientation and methods in American society.

What would we have had to say, not about the state of the "capitalist methods" of the administration of justice in this country, but of the regime and the social structure on which it rests?

For that to happen, you would have to have pretty close to a fascist regime in this country, would you not? And we would be compelled to conclude that if a regime has to frame up and execute some of its own most loyal and distinguished supporters, it must be gripped by a deep, brutal social crisis.

And this would have become all the more clear if, as would have been necessary for its success, any criticism of this frameup had been made impossible and illegal, until such time as the heads of the government, a few years later, had decided to get rid of Brownell for their own reasons, and had then "revealed" that his administration of justice in the country had shown that Stalinist "methods" had been adopted by the police under his administration.

If you want an analogy, that would at least come close to the magnitude and social significance of the revelations of the 20th Congress, rather than appeals to the shades of Sacco and Vanzetti.

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