

SPEAK YOUR PIECE

An Expanding Philosophy

Editor, Daily Worker:

Intelligently and comforting Howard Fast stated in his article *What I Believe* that disillusion is part of our time and that it can be many things; that it can be an end or a beginning.

Very true. Disillusion like disappointment can be the nurse of wisdom; to noble souls as purifying and clarifying as thunderstorms are to the air; as cold water to burning metal; it strengthens, it tempers.

Only mean and weak spirits are disturbed when disappointments strike them. Those with stout hearts, sound minds and unshakable faith in the people's unextinguished thirst for knowledge, improvement and progress, learn how to turn these into stepping stones for reaching higher levels of understanding, cooperation, goodfellowship. And having that faith makes them capable builders of scientific socialism which will stand as a wide open gate to the temple of the brotherhood of man.

So let no one be overcome by disillusion but rather acquire inspiration from words Eugene V. Debs spoke at Canton, O., in 1918: "Socialism is a growing idea; an expanding philosophy. It is spreading over the entire face of the earth. It is as vain to resist it as it would to arrest the sunrise on tomorrow."

—Forward-looking

Study Urged Of Concrete Facts

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.

Editor, Daily Worker:

We have followed the lively and forthright discussions in your "Speak Your Piece" column with enthusiasm and have been greatly impressed by them. Especially were we impressed by Sid Resnick's critical, powerful, and incisive letter which points out the real weakness of the American Marxist movement: not so much the cult of the individual as the cult of uncritical attitudes toward the Soviet Union. On this and other points in Resnick's letter, we are in strong agreement and would like to see it (along with others like Gates' reply to Allen, Nelson's letter, etc.) reprinted for general circulation.

If any one lesson should be learned by American Marxists from recent developments, it is that the leaders of the Soviet Union are mortal men, and as such just as fallible and subject to, and in need of, criticism. This is particularly true in those

cases where action in the Soviet Union have a significant impact on the American Marxist movement (e.g., the case of the Jewish writers and doctors).

In this realm American Marxists have not only the right but the duty to ask frank questions and to expect straight-forward answers. To shrink from frankly criticizing aspects of Soviet policy (as we have in the past) is to be false to the basic precepts and spirit of Marxism-Leninism, the most powerful and dynamic analytical framework for seeking and finding truth.

Our refusal to frankly criticize aspects of Soviet domestic and foreign policy when such criticism was warranted has also facilitated the spreading of the gross falsehood that the American Marxist movement is "tied to," and "controlled by," a foreign power.

Another question close to our minds is that of doctrinarism and dogmatism among American Marxists.

It is necessary for us American Marxists to realize, that the laws of Marxism are only the most general principles of development and, in analyzing a contemporary problem, can only serve as a guiding framework. This framework can only be filled in by serious study of concrete facts; there cannot be any substitute for hard study and hard thinking.

In a letter to Schmidt (Aug. 5, 1890) Engels warned some of his Marxist friends against using the materialist conception of history (i.e., Marxism) as "an excuse for not studying history." The materialist conception of history doesn't prove history, but rather history proves the materialist conception of it. Thus HISTORY, as Engels well put it, must be our point of departure.

To heed Engels' warning will help us correct two unfortunate results of our dogmatic quoting of Marxian classics: (1) it sheds no new light on the problem under consideration, and (2) it repels liberal non-Marxists who view this method of analysis as a confirmation of charges that Marxism is a "religion," a "dogma," whose classic writings approximate the Holy Bible.

Finally, we want to mention that this letter represents the thinking of a number of Marxist students who hope someday to play a concrete role in the struggle to build a socialist America. Despite this letter being primarily critical in its tone, we are not unmindful of the great and worthy contributions

that American Marxists have made, and will continue to make, to American life.

—STUDENTS.

Should Ex-Boss Speak His Piece

BUFFALO, N. Y.

Editor, Daily Worker:

I disagree with W.G. (May 7) on civil liberties. He considers civil liberties only as a weapon with which to protect oneself against a stronger opponent during the period of class struggle. This view is too limited. The object of civil liberties is not only to civilize the class struggle to some extent, but to insure the continuous possibility of free investigation and experiment.

Civil liberties is not only a weapon but a tool. When there is no longer a class struggle, the sword may become a plowshare. It is the same steel still sharp, still dangerous, but put to a different use. Under Socialism the ex-Boss too must be allowed to speak his piece. To deny him would be to suggest that truth is not strong enough to win. If people are allowed to do their own adding, they will usually come to the conclusion that 2 plus 2 equals 4, not 3 with the boss putting 1 in his pocket.

Civil rights and liberties have been hammered out from the earliest times. They did not come upon the scene as W. G. suggests with the bourgeoisie. I would compare them to the discovery and use of the wheel, which while it can make no progress itself, yet makes all progress easier. They are a permanent contribution to civilization, not to be discredited with the winning of Socialism.

—T.S.A.

Asks New Look At Religion

Editor, Daily Worker:

As already suggested by another correspondent, the traditional Marxist approach to religion needs to be freshly examined. When Marx referred to religion as "the opiate of the people," did he necessarily refer to all religions, to every form of religious expression and thinking? My reading of history suggests to me that, at various times, religion has actually been a vehicle for progress.

Surely, the particular Christian beliefs of the Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Harry F. Ward and the Rev. Elliot White have not perceptibly dulled their political and social consciences. Many other fine people have been moved by their religious

ideals to seek in the field of political action to advance their vision of human brotherhood. Many of the finest and most warm-hearted of our fellow citizens receive comfort and inspiration from their religious convictions. Why should such admirable people continue to be made to feel unwelcome in the left-progressive movement? It is my sincere view that, by a complete review of our position and attitude on religion, we can and must strike from the hands of reaction one of its most potent weapons—that of the presumed inherently deadly antagonism of communism and religion.

There are many other angles to this question which I hope others will be encouraged to discuss. I am especially eager for writers such as Howard Fast and Abner Berry to give us the benefit of their views.

Sincerely, D. HOLMES.

Further Thoughts

On May Day

Editor, Daily Worker:

After reading the letter by E. S. on May Day in your May 4 issue I decided not to put mine off any longer. My feelings were not mixed as were those of E. S., I was depressed.

There were some positive features to the meeting. For one, the fact that it was held (even on April 30) is a most positive feature. Another was the presence of many young people. And, finally, the sight and voice of Ben Davis after a long absence was inspiring.

With all due respect to Howard Fast and his associates who undertook the sponsorship and difficult task of arranging the meeting I must say that it lacked creativity. It came off like a necessary chore in a mechanical form. No wonder few people listened to the speakers. I was relieved when I found someone I know and began talking too. I frankly admit I could feel no pride in this "May Day Rally." All I could feel was embarrassment.

In view of all the difficulties why did this meeting have to be held outdoors? I believe a hall could have been found. Arrangements could have been made for a light supper as has been done at the Labor Bazaar for years. A cultural program could have been arranged, tied together with a narrative. Speeches could have been held to a minimum and dancing could have followed the formal program. Such a meeting could have launched a mass appeal to organized labor to restore May Day to its proper

place in America by May 1st, 1957. Such an appeal to the rank and file and leadership of labor and the Negro people should be undertaken now by the Sponsoring Committee or some other appropriate committee.

I believe the May Day Rally was another example of our sectarian methods of work. I am convinced we have enough imagination and creative ability to find a way to make May Day 1957 an event no one will want to miss.

—D. H.

Questions Raised by Abner Berry's Article

Editor, Daily Worker:

Some weeks ago Abner Berry wrote a column in which he questioned the correctness of the present position of the Communist Party as a solution to the problems of the Negro people.

Therefore, in order to get some positive views on this question I would like to ask Abner Berry or anyone else that desires to answer a number of questions.

1. Do you believe that the characteristics of a nation as stated by Stalin are wrong? If so, what do you believe are the characteristics which go to make up a nation.

2. Do you believe that the Negro people in those areas of the South where they constitute a majority are not a nation? If so kindly explain. Also how would you characterize them as a national minority, a national group, or as something entirely new particularly peculiar to the American scene. Also how would you characterize the Negro people outside the areas of Negro majority both in the south and north.

3. In view of the fact that it is undeniable that the Negro people suffer a special form of oppression, what is your explanation for this.

4. Is the present immediate slogan of the Negro people for integration in contradiction to the basic idea of a form of self-determination? Please explain.

5. Can real integration be achieved without the Negro people gaining control of the political machinery in those areas in which they are a majority and getting substantial representation in the areas in which they are a substantial minority, both north and south?

6. Is our problem mainly one of having a basically wrong policy or as yet an inability to overcome our isolation from the mass movement of the Negro people, which thus has not given us a fair test of our policy in practice?—G. S.