

'THE COMMONWEAL' AND THE POPULAR FRONT

By ALAN MAX

THE "NEW COMMUNIST LINE" is the title of the main article in the July 13 issue of the Catholic weekly, *The Commonwealth*. The author of the piece, Michael Harrington, examines the reports of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the reports to the



April meeting of the National Committee of the American Communist Party.

He comes to the conclusion that the "fundamental nature of Russian soci-

ety or the nature of the various Communist Parties" has not been "transformed."

"In political terms, cooperation with Communists remains as impossible as ever," Harrington says.

This, however, is not Harrington's only conclusion. The

new efforts of the 20th Congress and of Communists everywhere to promote socialist, working-class and democratic unity, which Harrington refers to as a revival of the Popular Front of the '30s, weigh heavily on his mind.

The recent changes in Communist Parties everywhere, Harrington says, "may well make this Popular Front line all the more seductive."

TURNING his attention to the American scene, Harrington finds three aspects to the "direction of the new line."

In the first place, there is Eugene Dennis' report to the National Committee of the Communist Party, whose "tone is one of reasonableness, moderation. All kinds of past mistakes are admitted. Perhaps the Progressive Party shouldn't have been formed. Communists should not have been intransigent in the CIO and courted their expulsion. . ."

Secondly, "and coupled with these admissions and shifts in

judgment about America," he continues, "are the *Daily Worker* editorials 'demanding' that Khrushchev explain himself on this or that point."

The "capstone of this edifice," Harrington finds, "is the thesis about 'peaceful and democratic road to socialism.'"

From all this, the *Commonwealth* writer reaches the conclusion that "although the fundamental character of the American Communist Party has not changed, the shifts which have taken place are of such a nature as to make the new Popular Front line a difficult one to handle."

TO "HANDLE" the Popular Front line effectively, Harrington calls for a new approach on the part of liberals. He criticizes the leadership of the American liberals — like Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson and Hubert Humphrey — for having tried to prove "that they could be as 'hard' on Communism as the right-wingers." He reproves lib-

erals for having let Point 4 die during the coldest of the cold war years and for supporting "the increasing militarization of America's struggle against Stalinism with all of the reactionary consequences that this implied, the alliances with the Bao Dai's, the Franco's, the Chiang's."

The author calls for what he describes as a "principled, democratic anti-Stalinism on a political basis." On the domestic front, this means "opposition to all the self-defeating undemocratic forms of anti-Stalinism, such as the notion that the way to deal with anti-libertarian Stalinists is to infringe upon their (and everyone else's) civil liberties." An important step in this, he says, is a "principled defense of the rights of Stalinists."

Along with this, Harrington calls for what he terms a "democratic international opposition to Stalinism." This would include "aid to the colonial peoples, the rejection of reactionary alliances and the like. One might sum up this point: take

Walter Reuther's rhetoric seriously, and expand it."

NATURALLY, I disagree with Harrington's opinion of the character of Communism and Communist movements and of the possibility of liberals cooperating with Communists. But the civil libertarian and anti-colonial program with which he proposes to fight Communism, I find excellent.

I would only ask Harrington to ponder this question: He calls upon liberals to be truly liberal in order to defeat Communism. What I want to know is can Communism be so inherently evil if it brings out the best in the liberals who oppose it?

Furthermore, Harrington will discover that as more and more liberals fight for the program which he sets forth, they will find Communists right in there fighting side by side with them. How then can one be so sure that Communism and liberalism are on opposite sides of the fence?