

# Opinions On Our 'Rajk Trial' Editorial

PITTSBURGH

## A Letter from Steve Nelson

John Gates,  
Editor, Daily Worker:

Dear Johnny: April 3, 1956

Since this is a day when most of our friends are rejoicing over the victory in my case, you would think that my letter to you would deal with that event. Actually I'm writing you about something that I consider of even greater importance. I want to congratulate you and the paper for the departure from past practices in your editorial of April 2, dealing with the Rajk case. This is an important historical step for our movement and for our paper, and despite momentary joys on the part of our enemies and confusion on the part of some of our supporters, this is of great historical advance.

Last Friday I tried reaching you by telephone, to urge you to write an editorial, and to speak out along the lines that you did. In reading your editorial this morning, you have literally taken the words out of my mouth on the things I wanted said.

Obviously you have drawn the same conclusion I have as a

result of the current discussion, for we have been making many mistakes in the past, in our desire not to hurt those who are basically fighting for correct aims, Socialism. Actually, our silence and uncritical acceptance, helped the enemies of Socialism.

Also, we developed the wrong concept of Internationalism, which some of the discussion articles on the Daily Worker seemed worried about; that is, that a critical criticism of the Socialist countries and some of its actions will lead to a weakening of Internationalism. Those who think thus, have not comprehended the full meaning of this struggle. They are still living in the past.

Criticism of wrong methods or wrong policies does not weaken one's belief in Socialism but rather strengthens Socialism. Therefore your editorial in sharply criticizing those responsible for the ugly Rajk frameup and in calling for an end of such capitalist methods, will strengthen Internationalism.

We must explain that these remnants from the capitalist past, even if carried through by people who call themselves Communists, will not be condoned, even if momentarily the bourgeoisie will be happy with joy at such criticism.

The whole Soviet experience with the Cult business cries out against silence on these matters, and condemns the notion that we ought to be quiet when obviously wrong things are being done.

One of the conclusions I have come to out of this discussion is that self-criticism was forgotten, and its very essence destroyed and centralism remained without democracy. Thus they developed the "great man theory" and forgot the essence of Socialist democracy and collective leadership, and the role of the common people.

Remember Lenin's admonition that "every cook must learn how to operate the state." Remember the paintings of Lenin

carrying logs with other workers who donated their free labor on their off days for special projects. He did not sit behind the Kremlin walls. Likewise, recall the paintings of Lenin sitting in his office, with scores of peasants around him, making complaints and criticism. This was later forgotten by false claims of security.

Constructive criticism of leaders and policies and methods in Socialist lands by supporters of Socialism in capitalist lands, is a must, rather than the opposite which we have followed till now. Leaders in Socialist countries must stand accountable for mistakes, not only before their own people, but before supporters of Socialism everywhere. This, in my opinion, would lead to more solid Internationalism on the basis of facts and knowledge and understanding, and not just blind loyalty, which is counter to Marxism.

I like your point that even within this ugly admission

where a Socialist country admits a serious crime, as in the Rajk case, one can see something new, something which no capitalist country has ever done, (admitted its own criminal mistakes). However, I agree with your editorial that this is not enough; that everything cannot be thrown on a "Beria misled us" proposition.

I wish to conclude by congratulating you as the editor of the paper for making this very important first step in the direction of new Marxist, realistic, attitudes towards weaknesses in Socialist countries. My own steam has been pent up on this subject for quite a while, and your editorial sort of gave vent to it.

I'm not saying that I saw these things years ago and I see them now, but I'm sure it's the same with you and others. The important thing is that we don't allow events to pass us by, now that we see the problem. Thus I urge you to continue in your bold step. This will be to the good of the Marxist movement throughout the world.

Sincerely yours,

STEVE NELSON.

April 7, 1956

John Gates, Editor, and Members of the Editorial Board of the Daily Worker and The Worker.

Dear Friends:

Your editorial of April 2 on the Rajk case raises some questions with respect to the position of the Daily Worker. I believe these questions so vital that they should be discussed in public.

As a newspaper which has advocated Marxian socialism for over 30 years, the Daily Worker has every justification for expressing indignation at the miscarriages of socialist justice which have recently been exposed in the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. The sharp self-criticism and self-correction now proceeding in those countries, with the consequent impulse to inner-party and Socialist democracy, are providing the best guarantee against the repetition of similar violations. These events call attention to the need for eternal vigilance on matters affecting the basic principles of working-class political parties, especially freedom of criticism and of inner-party controversy.

## A Letter from James Allen

What I question is the Socialist propriety of raising demands as you did in the editorial, for the trial and punishment of Soviet and Hungarian Communist leaders responsible for the Rajk case, as well as the demand that the U.S. Government undertake, through the United Nations, "to secure a world covenant ending capital punishment." It seems to me that these demands, and the manner in which you raise them, are subject to serious misunderstanding. In fact, they may be misinterpreted as "interventionist," or as unwittingly encouraging an interventionist position.

Everyone knows that the Daily Worker has always fought against intervention, and no one can accuse it of supporting or encouraging the anti-Sovieters in any way. Johnny Gates went to jail, together with others, because he fought against the cold-war policies; the Editorial Board carried on courageously throughout the worst period of McCarthyite hysteria. All the more reason, then, to inquire

how an editorial could have been published that is subject to this kind of misinterpretation, that might be grist to the mill of Voice of America, and which encouraged a Trotskyite group in this country to invite the Communist Party of the United States to join it in setting up a commission to investigate the Socialist countries.

It is improper and unworthy for the Daily Worker to demand a trial of Communist and State leaders in other countries. Is it not a departure from basic Socialist principles to intervene in the affairs of other parties, the mistake for which Stalin was so justly criticized with respect to Yugoslavia? Does it not seem entirely beside the point for the Daily Worker to raise such demands of parties which rule in Socialist countries and which are themselves currently engaged in rectifying their mistakes?

Is it not utterly immodest to point the finger at other parties when the American Marxists still have to face up to a self-critical, basic re-examination of

their program, policies and organizational principles, in a thorough-going democratic manner?

As the editorial correctly points out, the U.S. Government has failed to acknowledge, let alone set right, numerous and monstrous injustices in this country, the most recent of which are new arrests under the Smith Act and the raid upon the offices of the Daily Worker and the Communist Party. Do you seriously believe that our government would undertake a campaign to abolish capital punishment unless such a campaign would serve its anti-Socialist purposes?

The recent inner Soviet developments have created a very favorable impression upon public opinion, and particularly the broader progressive and Social-Democratic sectors in many countries. In general, these circles are welcoming the leap forward in the Soviet Union, especially in the realm of Socialist democracy, and its new

and powerful peace offensive.

A basic shift is taking place in popular opinion in our country, as well, in view of the continued relaxation of world tension so powerfully encouraged by the Soviet self-criticism. New possibilities arise for the revival of the progressive labor and people's movement. Against this unfolding situation, does not your editorial have the effect of confusing and misdirecting a very important sector of the Left? Does it not tend to obscure the real tasks of the moment? Is it not true that it might encourage sectarian attitudes?

Many lessons can and should be drawn from recent developments in the Socialist countries. The most important universal lesson is that when basic principles of inner democracy in working-class political organizations are violated everything suffers.

As a former Foreign Editor of the Daily Worker, and as a current although occasional contributor of articles, I urge you to clarify the position of the paper beyond the possibility of misinterpretation.

Fraternally yours,

JAMES S. ALLEN.

## Reply by John Gates

I agree with Jim Allen that our editorial of April 2 raises vital questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss it.

Allen agrees that the Daily Worker was justified in expressing indignation at miscarriages of justice that have been exposed in the socialist countries. He correctly says that the self-criticism and self-correction now going on in the socialist countries are the best guarantee against the repetition of similar violations. I would add that the indignation expressed by workers in other countries over the injustices also helps to guarantee against repetition.

Allen thinks it was right for us to protest but not to demand that all those guilty be punished because this could be misinterpreted as interventionist. The logic of this escapes me. To protest is okay and non-interventionist, to ask for punishment of the guilty is wrong and interventionist. It seems to me that any protest against injustice must be accompanied with demand for justice.

Certainly our intention was not to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries. But these trials and executions were not merely internal affairs of those countries. When they took place they became matters of

world significance. The Daily Worker defended and supported the convictions and punishments. The revelation now that innocent men were put to death has had a profound impact on our public opinion. The revelation that such miscarriages of justice could take place in countries of socialism dealt a serious blow to the moral authority and prestige of socialism which the Daily Worker felt it incumbent to repair and restore, insofar as we could, with the people of our country.

Of course, the most important step in this direction has been taken by the socialist countries with their exposure and rectification of the injustices—a process unprecedented in history and a sign of the vitality of socialism and of the seriousness of the present leaders.

I believe the charge of intervention is a false issue. To criticize does not mean to intervene. When workers in other countries criticize injustices in our country, they are not intervening in our internal affairs but are carrying through their internationalist duty. Are we to say

that workers in capitalist countries have no right to criticize injustices in socialist lands? I think such a position is untenable and conflicts with genuine internationalism.

Certainly capitalist injustice cannot be equated with injustices that take place in socialist countries. Socialist injustices are a drop in the ocean compared to those that have been taking place for hundreds of years under capitalism. Capitalism cannot rule without injustice. But when injustice takes place under socialism, it cannot be condoned. It conflicts with socialist principles and hinders the development of socialism. That is why the socialist countries are now correcting the violations of socialist democracy that have taken place.

For socialists, even one act of injustice is too much and cannot be tolerated. It was in that spirit that we wrote the April 2nd editorial.

Similarly, I cannot understand how our call for abolition of capital punishment in the United States and all countries, and our demand that our govern-

ment introduce such a covenant in the UN can be called interventionist. Jim Allen asks if we really believe the U.S. government would do this unless motivated by anti-Soviet purposes. Of course we have no faith that the government will of its own choice abolish capital punishment (a mainstay, for example, of Dixiecrat rule in the South) but a vigorous and sustained campaign by the American people can compel it to do so.

Our government refuses to support the Human Rights declaration in the UN but does that dissuade us from urging it to do so? The government has been forced to do many things it was unwilling to do as a result of public pressure.

Allen says our editorial might give grist to the mill of the Voice of America. I think he turns facts upside down. What has given grist to the mill of the reactionaries is the fact of the execution of innocent men. Furthermore, a whole week has passed since our editorial appeared, and not a single Big Business newspaper to my knowledge has made use of the

editorial which Allen apparently thinks is so useful to the reactionaries. And this at a time when the press is going over the Daily Worker with a magnifying glass and making use of the slightest thing we print! Apparently, they did not find our editorial very useful for their anti-Communist purposes. Perhaps Jim Allen has found things in the editorial that are not really there and that even the capitalist press could not discover.

In any case, Communists and other Marxists should never desist from criticism or self-criticism merely because the reactionaries might make use of it. The essential thing is to pursue a correct, just and truthful policy.

Allen is right in saying that American Marxists, as their first task, still have to face up to a self-critical examination of their own policies. Does he suggest by this that the Daily Worker must not criticize anything else that happens in the country or world until American Marxists review their own policies? He seems to be contradicting what he said at the outset: that the Daily Worker is justified in expressing indignation at the Rajk trial. Apparently he thinks we should express indignation but

(Continued on Page 3)

# Gates' Reply

(Continued from Page 4)

not be critical of those responsible. I think this is really the heart of Allen's position and I disagree with it.

Allen is right in saying that possibilities are growing for unity between Socialists and Communists and to win new friends for the Left. But I think it is a mistake to think this will come automatically. I think we cannot be blind to the fact that we have suffered severe blows because of our own mistakes and of mistakes abroad. Much will depend on what we do to correct our mistakes of the past, including our past uncritical defense of everything in the socialist camp.

I do not agree that our editorial misdirects and confuses, obscures the real tasks, or encourages sectarian attitudes. On the contrary I think the editorial is a significant break with our sectarian attitude of the past. From reactions I have received from all over the country, I know that the editorial has helped to bolster and strengthen the faith and confidence of our readers in socialism at a time when it has been shaken and strained by the events in the socialist countries. I think, rather, that the position put forward in Jim Allen's letter is sectarian and confusing.

In saying all this, I do not claim the editorial was perfect and could not have been improved in content and style. We wrote it at a time when our offices were occupied and under great pressure. For instance, we wrote that the Rajk case was "a betrayal of the socialist revolution." Obviously this was a poor phrase since it could be interpreted as meaning that socialism no longer exists in Hungary, which is not true, as the rest of the editorial made clear. What we should have said was that the Rajk case was profoundly harmful to the cause of socialism. Other words and phrases could have been altered, deleted or added, and undoubtedly the style could have been improved. But all this should not detract, in my opinion, from what I am convinced was a splendid service done by the editorial.

—JOHN GATES

Editor, Daily Worker