

A Reply to Questions Concerning Communists and Civil Liberties

By MAX WEISS

MY ARTICLE "Communists and Civil Liberties" has precipitated a lively controversy. Whatever its outcome, all participants, including the author, will doubtless increase their understanding of this important question.

Before discussing certain differences with the substance of my article, I would like to acknowledge the validity of many criticisms which were made of its manner of presentation. The ineptness of certain formulations about the right of dissent under Socialism conveyed an impression that I was announcing a change in the policy of the Communist Party. I would like to remove that impression. The article represented my personal views on that particular question. It is true that these views are also shared by many others in the leadership and membership of the Party. But they are not at present the official policy of the Communist Party.

But neither is the position of those who disagree with me the official position of the Communist Party, although many of them also write as though it were. The situation is that the Communist Party has no official policy at the present moment on the right of dissent under Socialism. To insure against any further misunderstanding let me make clear at the outset that all views expressed in this article are my own.

IN THE MAIN, those who take issue with my article seem to base themselves on two types of argument. The first flatly disagrees with the basic assumption of my article, which happens to be the declared policy of the Communist Party, that a peaceful, constitutional road to socialism is possible in the United States.

What objections have been advanced against this policy?

One reader disagrees because it is premature to predict a peaceful transition. But this reader is knocking down a straw man. I do not predict that will happen. I assert that a peaceful, constitutional path to socialism in our country is possible. I am in favor of formulating all of our policies with the aim of expanding and enhancing that possibility. Because I believe that such a possibility exists, I am in favor of striving to realize it.

OTHER readers, however, flatly deny that there can be any possibility of a peaceful, constitutional path to socialism.

But are there any grounds for asserting that a peaceful transition to socialism is impossible from a theoretical point of view? No. This has never been the viewpoint of Marxists.

Marxists have always made it clear that there is no theoretical principle which makes it inevitable for the working class to come to power only by armed insurrection or civil war. They have always maintained that the only thing which is inevitable is that the working class must everywhere come to power as the leader of the majority of the people.

But how and in what form it comes to power depends on the situation which prevails in a given historic period and, even within that period, on the situation which prevails in a given country. Possibilities must be determined by concrete analysis.

What are the possibilities in our country?

DURING their lifetime, Marx and Engels believed that in most of the countries of continental Europe it was not pos-

sible for the working class to come to power peacefully. But they did believe that it was possible for the working class to come to power peacefully in Britain and the United States (and possibly even Holland).

In 1917, however, Lenin believed that the situation had so changed on a world scale, as well as within Britain and the United States, that even in these countries the possibility of a peaceful transition had disappeared.

Forty years have passed since then. Vast changes have taken place on a world scale and within various capitalist countries. Unlike the period in which Lenin wrote, socialism exists today as a world system embracing some 900,000,000 people. In the leading and biggest socialist country, the USSR, classes have been completely abolished. In the last 10 years former colonies embracing one billion two hundred million inhabitants have broken out of the clutches of imperialism and become independent nations. While still very strong, imperialism is mortally wounded in contrast with the period in which Lenin wrote.

The achievements and successes of the socialist countries are already enormous. They facilitate the grasp of socialist ideas by millions in contrast to the past when there were no such living examples from which the workers of all countries could learn.

Together with this, the internal situation in various capitalist countries, including our own, has changed significantly. These changes make it easier for the working class to rally round itself the vast majority of the people including the farmers and the city middle classes. Hence a new possibility has opened up which did not exist in Lenin's time: the possibility of creating a powerful anti-monopoly coalition, based on and led by the working class, and including the mass of farmers, the Negro people, city middle classes.

THE STRUGGLE of this anti-monopoly coalition for the fulfillment of its program must inevitably result in a deep-going realignment of political parties in our country. This opens up the possibility of such a coalition electing a government and a majority in Congress. In the process of struggle for the election of such a government, and in the struggle of such an elected government for the implementation of its anti-monopoly program, the repressive powers of the monopolists can be curbed, their sharpest claws pulled even before the question of electing a socialist government comes on the order of the day.

Lenin's denial of the possibility of a peaceful transition in the United States in the 1917 period would no longer be valid under such conditions. For under such conditions, parliamentary bodies could play a differ-

ent role than in the past. The working class, based on and supported by the active political struggle of the majority of the people, and led by the party of socialism, could win a presidential election as well as a stable majority in Congress. In such a situation a peaceful, constitutional path to socialism is fully possible.

SOME readers say that a peaceful transition may be possible in some other countries. But after all, they say, the United States is not the principality of Monaco. Here the monopolists are powerful and the forces of repression at their disposal are enormous. What may be possible in other countries is completely Utopian in the United States, according to them.

Now, if it is said that the monopolists are strong and their forces of repression powerful today, I quite agree. That is very true today. But no one in his right mind advocates the transition to socialism today. We advocate the transition to socialism only when a majority of the people led by the working class will support a program for the socialist reorganization of our country. Hence the question at issue is this: how strong will the monopolists and their anti-popular repressive powers be then?

Titanic economic and political struggles will intervene in our country before a majority of our people understand the need to bring about a socialist reorganization of society. Can it be maintained that these struggles, if successful, will have no effect in curbing the repressive powers of the monopolists? To think so is to live in a dream world.

Take such a struggle as that which is being waged by the Negro people in the South. Victory in this struggle will still leave our country very far indeed from the period of transition to socialism. But can it be denied that such a victory will result in seriously curbing the repressive powers of the monopolists? Only those who know nothing about the unimaginable repression which has existed in the South up to, and including, today will be able to deny this.

Multiply such struggles as these and we begin only slightly to envisage what is involved in advancing to the point where a majority of the people have been won for socialism. And simultaneously we will begin to grasp the fact that the bourgeoisie cannot emerge from such struggles as strong as it is today in its ability to repress the popular will.

That is why we have no hesitation in declaring that the possibility does exist in our country for a peaceful, democratic, constitutional path to socialism. And since such a possibility exists, that is what we advocate and fight for.

(To Be Concluded Tomorrow)

3 Scandinavian Nations Invite Soviet Leaders

STOCKHOLM, May 23.—Sweden, Norway and Denmark have invited Soviet leaders to visit Scandinavia. Ambassadors of the three nations extended the invitations to Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin and Communist Party secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev in Moscow yesterday.

Sources in Oslo indicated the visits will probably be held next spring.

The premiers of the three Scandinavian countries all have made formal state visits to Moscow recently.

Syria Seen Ready To Recognize China

CAIRO, Egypt, May 23.—Syria has "virtually decided" to recognize China, the Mideast News Agency reported today.

The agency quoted Syrian Ambassador Abdel Rahman Azm as saying Syria had decided to follow the lead of the Egyptian government in recognizing Peking.

9 Die in Storm On Lake Michigan

MILWAUKEE, May 23.—Nine men were drowned in Lake Michigan squalls last night and early today. Seven of them in the sinking of a barge at work on a construction project.