

The Debate in the 'Daily Worker' —

The U.S. Communist Party Rocks-and-Rolls in the Crisis

By GEORGE POST

The American Communist Party, past victim of countless shocks to its nervous system caused by sudden right-angle or swivel turns in the Stalinist road, is entering—shuddering—into another period of trauma, perhaps its worst, in reaction to the news of the Russian bureaucracy's attacks on Stalin.

In the past three weeks the *Daily Worker* has started on what amounts to an open discussion, with something of the very note of "panic and disarray" against which Stalin's heirs warned on his bier in 1953.

Talk of a "split" in the party is certainly premature, if at all realistic, but there have been two quite distinct approaches set down, reflecting two obvious and distinct tendencies.

One has been represented by articles of William Z. Foster, the national chairman of the CP, and Joseph Clark, the *Daily Worker's* foreign editor. The other has so far been articulated by the paper's managing editor, Alan Max, and in a letter by Ring Lardner Jr., one of the "Hollywood Ten."

Alan Max's tendency is to openly admit the disorienting and mind-upsetting effect of the recent anti-Stalin revelations and to raise, various questions about the validity of past and present CP lines.

The Foster-Clark tendency seems to be: let us go along with the Moscow line as far as we must, echoing whatever the Russian leaders lay down so flatly and unequivocally that we are left no choice; but let us drag out feet on this—don't be in a hurry to get ahead of the parade fit-jumping on Stalin—go slow!

NEW NOTES

For some weeks after the 20th Party Congress the *Daily Worker* tried to act as if nothing had happened. James Allen, writing in the *Sunday Worker* on March 4, for example, declared that there was nothing in the Congress to cause concern or embarrassment; rather, the congress displayed the "great confidence, the élan, the inner strength, the new advance and upsurge" of Stalinist society.

A similar tone was maintained by Joseph Clark in the *Daily Worker* for March 12.

But as the weight of evidence began to pile up and the attack on Stalin went from a critique of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* to Khrushchev's accusations on claiming Stalin's "phobia," new notes were sounded:

Alan Max gave tongue to this new confusion in the *Daily Worker* on March 13, admitting: "Any Marxist who says he has not been jolted is either not being honest with himself, in my opinion, or minimizes the extent of the developments now in progress in the Soviet Union."

Editor Max raised many questions which he said he could not answer: "where were the present leaders during the period when they say that collective leadership was lacking?—what about their own mistakes in the period of capitalist encirclement? are they giving proper weight to the achievements of Stalin?" etc. And he admitted that "for the answers to such questions, one must either speculate or await further developments."

But while he could not answer these questions, still the fact that the Russian Party had attacked Stalin, and Max has obviously little doubt that at least in part the Khrushchev line is correct, made him aware that the complete adoration of Stalin and every aspect of Stalinist society was questionable.

Max concluded: "... we went overboard in defending things like the idea of Stalin as infallible, in opposing any suggestion that civil liberties were not being fully respected in the Soviet Union, in discouraging serious discussion and criticism of Soviet movies, books, etc. As a matter of fact, while the defense of the Soviet policy as a policy of peace was proper and necessary for the welfare of the American people, going overboard on these

Go Slow, He Says



WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

other matters was wrong, and hence, self-defeating. It made it unnecessarily more difficult to win the ear of our fellow-Americans on the more basic questions. It made it easier for the reactionaries to persecute and isolate us."

And, of course, in saying this, Max says a mouthful for a Stalinist editor, for he has attacked the Russian art cult (something certainly which many Stalinists, faced with some of the cultural monstrosities of "socialist realism," have wanted to do for a long while), and he has admitted that civil liberties in Russia were "not being fully respected." This moderate bit of jargon for a Stalinist is tantamount to admitting that Russian society also knows witchhunts.

Taking his cue from the 20th Party Congress' declaration that "socialism" would be achieved in different ways according to specific national traditions and conditions, Max muses that all these errors could have been avoided if American Stalinists "had stood more firmly on our own feet on these matters." Max here verbally challenges the monolithic structure of Stalinism.

FOSTER INTERPRETS

Max's line was taken up by Ring Lardner Jr. in a "Letter to the Editor" which appeared in the *Worker* for March 18. He too attacks the "near deification of Stalin" and "the cloying panegyrics" which appeared in the *Worker* on Stalin's 70th birthday celebration. But he carries this lesson further, applying it to the United States. He observes:

"And in that connection, recalling the damage done in this country through leadership by personality [an attack on Browder?], I wonder if some of the rather maudlin testaments to William Z. Foster on his recent birthday are really the most mature and effective way of acknowledging the respect due America's outstanding working-class leader."

There is also an Aesopian bit in Lardner's letter which suggests "that distortions of revolutionary history had unfortunate effects in relation to old requirements as well" as future needs; but he does not carry this any further. Lardner, as well as Max, admits that "any expression of doubt regarding Soviet judicial procedure" might not be "an unforgivable sin."

Foster's contribution put on the brakes, in the face of this invitation to free-wheeling re-examination and soul-searching. Not daring to challenge the dictates

of the Russian party, Foster accepts as fact that Stalin made a mistake in reference to Yugoslavia and that he had a tendency toward "one-man leadership with the negation of criticism and self-criticism."

However, he softens the blow by interpreting the Khrushchev line as a "review" of Stalin's work. The wholesale political attack almost becomes in Foster's hand a tentative essay at a "theoretical reevaluation." This "reevaluation" is considered as being in process rather than a *fait accompli*.

Foster asks to what extent the negative effects of the "failure to develop a real collective leadership" prevail; "what if any, decisive political mistakes were made by Stalin? What alternative policies to Stalin's were suggested by others and rejected? What resistance was made in top official circles to Stalin's trend toward super-centralization and denial of collective leadership? Were injustices committed during the purges?"

And while this review proceeds, Foster goes on to suggest, the task of the CP "is neither to rush indignantly to the defense of Stalin nor to tear him to political shreds, as some in our ranks seem inclined to do."

DEFENDS STALIN

But Foster in effect makes his evaluation of Stalin.

He defends Stalin, declaring that the "excessive stress upon individual leadership" arose out of the "objective" conditions: "the prolonged struggle against the inner and outer party opposition, the long-continued, monumental effort to industrialize the country; the formulation and application of several five-year plans; the carrying through of the bitter world war against Hitlerism; the vital test of Soviet strength during the cold war in recent years, the struggle for the policy of peaceful coexistence, and many others."

And with all this, and even given the errors of overstressing individual leadership, one should not "fall into the bourgeois trap of making a negative and destructive sum-up of this whole situation." For after all, one must remember "the elementary fact that during the past generation, throughout the period of Stalin's leadership, the USSR made stupendous progress in nearly every direction in the building of socialism."

Foster then proceeds to a list of the "achievements" of Stalin from "the great ideological and political victory over the Trotskyites and other opportunists" through "the drastic raising of the living standards and cultural levels of the Soviet people." Foster is willing to concede that without the failure to develop a genuine collective leadership "in all probability, Socialism would have made still more rapid progress than it has done," but nothing more.

Foster's reference to "the victory over the Trotskyites" is thrown in as a reminder that there is nothing to the loose talk about rehabilitating Trotsky. Even more pertinent is his reaching-out to drag in the name of Browder: "In the past, we had to learn at great cost, in the affair of the renegade Browder, the danger attendant upon allowing too much power to concentrate in the hands of one individual."

Not Interested



EARL BROWDER

For Browder's name inevitably springs to mind in this whole upset. The trend of the present line is that of which Browder was accused, in his time. And like Bela Kun and others being rehabilitated in Moscow, Browder was a thorough Stalinist who lost out in an intra-Stalinist purge, not an opponent Stalinism. Politically, therefore, there is no doubt that logic would demand his revival, just as it demands that in France the CP make up with Pierre Hervé.

But this type of logic is not too relevant to the power-politics of the Stalinist movement. Foster, Browder's factional enemy in the American movement, will never permit Browder's return; and Browder, today a sad hulk of his former self in every way, has indicated only the barest interest in anything that is happening.

Then, in a front-page editorial on March 19, the editors of the *Daily Worker* attempted to discuss the unusual situation created by these differences. They explain that of course differences of opinion exist in the CP and these differences are permitted to be expressed—

"... it would be peculiar indeed if any two articles or letters in our paper were to express themselves in exactly the same on such a vast event—not to mention an event on which all facts have not yet been made public. . . ."

Ah, different times, different arguments! Time was when Stalinist editors used to explain, without any trouble at all, how there could be universal and instantaneous unanimity in the CP press—expressed in the same words—with the same brand-new political lines—on the same day in every CP organ from Labrador to *Tierra del Fuego*; namely, because "Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism" is a "science," and it's just as if two physicists, one in Moscow and one in New York, performed the same experiments and got the same results, down to the third decimal point or punctuation mark. . . .

Now Alan Max, and also the foot-dragger Joseph Clark, call on their readers to discuss, the columns are open, etc. Joseph Clark, ended up a Fosterite-type article on March 18 with: "this is only one man's views, who would appreciate it if our readers wrote us and told us theirs."

ALL MIXED UP

For the former it is at least partly a way of saying: *Please tell me what to believe about all this, I'm all mixed up, aren't you?* For the latter, representing the hard bureaucratic core whose main concern is living through it all, it is a way of postponing that which is impossible anyway at the moment: the putting forward of an authoritative "line."

As the *Daily Worker* editorial mentioned, "all the facts have not yet been made public"; new revelations may yet come from Moscow; the pot there is still bubbling; the secret Central Committee document being circulated in Russia has not yet traveled the ocean; anything may still happen. . . . Wouldn't it be risky to take a hard-and-fast position now while everything is still in flux? Hang on, hold fast, tread water, wait it out till the mists clear, and then we'll lay down the line . . . if we're still around.

Meanwhile there is considerable confusion in CP ranks. The CP's New York school, Jefferson School, has been offering a Wednesday evening series of lecture-discussions on the 20th Congress, and a second one is scheduled right away.

It must be remembered, however, that the American CP is pretty much down to a hard core of members. It can be conjectured that those who have been able to stick out the CP's switches and vicissitudes up to now are less likely to be shaken out of their faith than (say) the mass membership of parties like the French or Italian CP. Short of anything as dramatic as a "split," there is more likelihood of defections in ones or twos by those who cannot emerge from their mental and spiritual tailspins.

On the other hand, though there seems no prospect of a rapprochement with the politically defunct Browder, the new Stalinist line and the present talk of party reorientation would seem to call for friendlier relations with the various independent-Stalinist grouplets and elements who have been loyally complaining about the CP in the past: the "Sweezyites" around the *Monthly Review* and their friends, the "Cochranites" and other Stalinoids.

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