

The Theory of Sharpening Struggle Under Socialism

By A. B. MAGIL

The Daily Worker is to be congratulated on its editorial of April 13 condemning the frame-up and execution of Jewish political and cultural leaders and the suppression of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union. This is the most shocking of all the revelations of mistakes and excesses during the last 20 years of Stalin's leadership. It is all the more shocking in that it occurred in a socialist country and was so sharp a departure from all the Soviet Union stood for. It was Stalin himself who years ago defined anti-Semitism as "the most dangerous survival of cannibalism."

These outrages represented a crass violation of socialist principles and the Soviet national policy as specifically applied to the Jewish question from the inception of the Soviet regime. How could the Party and the government which ended the czarist pogroms, abolished all discrimination against the Jewish people, encouraged the flowering of Jewish socialist culture, saved millions of Jews from the Hitler hordes in the World War II—how could this Party and government have permitted such a situation to develop?

Let me also confess to being shocked that confirmation of what enemies of the Soviet Union have charged for years reaches us second hand—from the Yiddish organ of the United Workers' Party of Poland—rather from Moscow.

One of the worst aspects of this whole affair has been the curtain of silence drawn over it from the beginning. Friends of the Soviet Union who sought information were rebuffed; Soviet writers who visited other countries and were questioned gave

evasive answers. I'm sure all your readers will endorse your "strong dissatisfaction that the Soviet leaders have not offered any explanation of what took place." In fact, there has yet been no official acknowledgement that anything at all took place.

The suppression of Soviet Jewish culture and the physical extermination of a number of its leading representatives was the terrible fruit of an evil that began to take root in the early or middle thirties. It seems to me that to call this evil "the cult of personality" or one-man rule is to oversimplify and to cover up a more basic question: the mutilation of socialist democracy.

Lenin more than once pointed out that the proletarian dictatorship—that is, the rule of the workers—meant an enormous expansion of democracy for the Russian masses and created the economic basis for democracy's further growth. Nothing that has happened in the Soviet Union alters this fundamental fact. It is interesting to recall Lenin's views during the first months after the socialist revolution on how this dictatorship, directed against the exploiting classes and the external enemy, should operate in respect to the masses. In a speech on March 8, 1918 at the seventh congress of the Communist Party, he declared that "what is theoretically indisputable" is that "the Soviet power is a new type of state, in which there is no bureaucracy, no police, no standing army, and in which bourgeois democracy is replaced by a new democracy—a democracy which brings to the foreground the vanguard of the toiling masses, turning them into legislators, and executives, and a military guard, and which

creates an apparatus capable of re-educating the masses."

Then he added: "In Russia this has barely begun, and badly at that. If we realize what is bad in what we have begun, we shall overcome it, that is, if history give us the opportunity of working on Soviet government for any respectable length of time."

Unfortunately, civil war and foreign intervention—the savage efforts of the internal and external capitalist enemies to destroy the young workers' and peasants' republic—made it impossible immediately or during the next few years to cast the Soviet state in the theoretical image that Lenin had projected. Necessarily socialist democracy, though far superior to the capitalist kind, retained certain limitations and imperfections.

After Lenin's death, the launching of the first five-year plan for industrializing the country and collectivizing agriculture inevitably produced an intensification of the class struggle as the exploiting classes, aided by foreign powers, resorted to sabotage, wrecking, murder and the organization of armed intervention in the effort to halt the march of socialism. The suppressive aspect of the Soviet state likewise was intensified. During this period of the late twenties and early thirties Stalin, condemning the views of the Trotskyites and Bukharinites, insisted—correctly in my opinion—that only by intensifying the class struggle could the hostile classes be eliminated and a socialist economy built.

By the mid-thirties this had been achieved. In his report on the new Soviet Constitution in November 1936 Stalin declared that "we now have a new, socialist economy" and "all the

exploiting classes have now been eliminated." One of the specific features of the new Constitution, he said, "is its consistent and thoroughgoing democratism." He spoke of "the victory in the U.S.S.R. of full and thoroughly consistent democracy."

There were great expectations both in the Soviet Union and in other countries that the new Constitution would mean an internal relaxation of the proletarian dictatorship and a great expansion of socialist democracy. What happened, it is now clear, was the direct opposite, at least as far as civil liberties were concerned. The Trotskyite-Bukharinite conspiracies and the advance of the fascist Axis toward World War III were used to justify widespread arrests, in which many innocent people were victimized, and a general atmosphere of fear and conformity was created.

Here false theory proved the midwife of evil practice. Only a few months after he had announced the elimination of all exploiting classes, Stalin at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party denounced "the rotten theory that with every advance we make the class struggle here of necessity would die down more and more . . ." He declared: "On the contrary, the further forward we advance . . . the greater will be the fury of the remnants of the broken exploiting classes, the sooner will they resort to sharper forms of struggle . . ."

Even after the war, when capitalist encirclement had been broken and people's democracies had come into existence in Europe and Asia, this false theory evidently held sway and the hunt for internal "enemies" continued. Under such conditions and in the absence of col-

lective leadership, adventurers like Beria were able to commit atrocities, criticism and dissent were stifled and socialist democracy was further deformed.

Two series of factors combined to produce this state of affairs. First was the fact that throughout most of its history the Soviet Union has been a beleaguered country, the object of countless capitalist conspiracies, of Nazi-Japanese hot war and Washington sponsored cold war. A state of siege climate is not conducive to the flourishing of civil liberties. In addition, there was the highly important subjective factor: mistakes in theory and practice by the Soviet leadership, for which Stalin was primarily, though not solely responsible.

The relaxation of international tensions during the past year, the greatly strengthened position of the socialist world and of the "zone of peace" that includes non-socialist countries, and the correction of serious past errors should make possible a rebirth and unprecedented expansion of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union. The very admission and correction of mistakes and abuses in the U.S.S.R. and the people's democracies—though for my money, it is proceeding too slowly—is proof of the basic health and democratic character of socialism.

This bitter Soviet experience, with its attendant shocks for Communists and progressives throughout the world, has profound implications for American Marxists and the Left generally. There isn't the space to discuss them here. But one thing is clear: democracy in all its aspects must never be put on the shelf. Before and after the establishment of the social-

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ist society, democracy and socialism must be inseparable.

In our view, the pressures of the workingclass on the politicians of the two capitalist parties will reach a stage where a third party will become necessary, not as a "futile" minority, as Huberman puts it, but as a major force in our political life. It probably will not be socialist in its beginnings, though this cannot be predicted certainly.

But as socialism advances on a world scale, and as American capitalism becomes more and more incapable of providing the

American people with their needs, the workingclass will pass from the struggle for reform to the struggle for socialism.

What's On?

Coming

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