

# U.S. MARXISTS AND SOVIET SELF-CRITICISM

By ALAN MAX

I FIND absorbing some dispatches in the New York Times which tell how calmly the average Soviet citizen is taking criticism of the past 20 years and of shortcomings in the leadership of Stalin.

The people of the Soviet Union seem to take these developments much more calmly than do many American Marxists, including myself. (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.)

The people of the Soviet Union are calm for several reasons, at least so it seems to me. In the first place, the process of criticism and examination has been going on in their daily lives over the past three years. In the second place, they experienced at first hand the shortcomings and mistakes of the

past 20 years of which American Marxists either were ignorant or which we glossed over. Finally, the Soviet people have also experienced the tremendous progress—admitted even in capitalist circles—of the past three years and which accompanied the process of self-examination.

MANY THINGS bother a person like myself: where were the present leaders during the period when they say that collective leadership was lacking?—what about their own mistakes in that period of capitalist encirclement?—are they giving proper weight to the achievements of Stalin? etc. For the answers to such questions, one must either speculate or await further developments.

But we American Marxists also need to give thought to our own role in accepting many things about the Soviet Union which Marxists in the Soviet Union are now criticizing. After all, whatever positions American Marxists took, they took of their own free will. Nobody told them to do so, any more than anyone elsewhere deter-

mines their position on any question.

I do not pretend that I have given this matter sufficient thought or, for that matter, that any one individual could come up with all the answers by himself.

SOME THINGS do appear obvious to me, however. When we Marxists were defending certain aspects of life in the Soviet Union which, to our embarrassment, the Soviet Union now says were wrong, we did it in a certain situation. This was in an atmosphere of rabid Soviet-baiting which extended without interruption—except for the Second World War—over the past 38 years. This Soviet-baiting was based on the most vicious type of falsification, slanders and, on many occasions, actual forgeries. It was designed to alibi military intervention by our and other governments in the first country of socialism in the '20s. It was aimed at excusing the rise of Hitler, the regime of Mussolini and the insurrection of Franco. It was used as a convenient tool with which to heat down

the labor and progressive and New Deal movements in our own country. Since the war, this Soviet-baiting has been used as an excuse for the Cold War, for a war program and for participation in military adventures like the Korean War.

In this situation, American Marxists courageously and almost single-handedly fought against the Cold War propaganda which was endangering our country. Neither prison, nor deportations or other forms of persecution could stop a principled position of which American Marxists can always be proud.

But at the same time, 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 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.

ALL THIS—or much of it—could have been avoided, it seems to me, if we Marxists had stood more firmly on our own feet on these matters, as we have on the fundamentals of a Marxist program for America upon which the Communist Party has always developed its own answers and outlook.

I should add that non-Marxists as well as Marxists have a responsibility here too. The sooner all of us unite to end the Cold War the sooner will freedom be restored here in our own country, the easier will it be for the Soviet Union to get rid of all excesses, the easier will it be for Marxists here to take a more fully objective view of developments in all countries of socialism.

What I am writing here are my own first reactions to one side of the proceedings at the 20th Party Congress. What do our readers think about the matter? We could all profit from hearing from you.

