Communication

CONCERNING EDWARD KARDELJ'S ARTICLE

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N Mainstream (December-January issues), Edward Kardelj, Vice-President of Yugoslavia, has an extended article, entitled "Socialist Democracy: Our Path." The article was prepared as a speech to a group of Social Democratic leaders in Oslo, Norway, in September 1954, the year following the death of Stalin and just prior to the reconciliation between the erstwhile quarreling Soviet and Yugoslav governments as a result of the frank admissions of certain important errors on the part of the Soviet leaders in their relations with Yugoslavia.

Dr. Kardelj's article deals with many important questions—chief among them being, first, an extensive exposition of the Yugoslav system of socialism; second, a sharp and prolonged attack upon "Stalinism," and third, an attempt to indicate the road to socialism for the workers in the various countries of the world, notably in the capitalist west.

As for the first of these points, the one relating directly to Yugoslavia, I shall have little to say. The system, with its workers' councils and consumers' councils, is highly decentralized and localized in its approach to socialist problems generally. Possibly it may serve a country of Yugoslavia's size and state of economic and political development. Indeed, Dr. Kardelj cites many socialist successes in his country, but there are some big gaps in the picture he presents—especially regarding the key peasant question, which he does not deal with at all. But when Dr. Kardelj puts forth the decentralized Yugoslav system as the one to be applied also in big industrialized countries, then one must take direct issue with him. While he says, "We by no means regard the socialist and democratic forms we have evolved in Yugoslavia as automatically suited for all and sundry," nevertheless this is the burden of his argument.

DR. KARDELJ directs his main fire against "Stalinism." By this term, however, obviously he does not mean simply the bureaucratic distortions that Stalin introduced into the Soviet system, but rather the whole system itself. Kardelj is therefore, in reality, firing into certain basic aspects of Marxism-Leninism, although he does not put it into so many words.

The Soviet system cannot, however, be thus encompassed within the term of "Stalinism." This is because the basic structure of this system was worked out under Lenin's leadership and it very definitely bears his imprint. Lenin developed such elementary features of the USSR as the structure of the State and the Communist Party, of the trade unions, of the economic organs, and of various other key institutions. He also outlined the relationship of the various mass bodies with the state proper. Stalin deeply bureaucratized this whole system in his later years, but, as the resolution of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. says (New Times, July 5, 1956), "Despite all the evil which the Stalin personality cult caused the Party and the people, it could not and did not alter the nature of our social system." Kardelj is, therefore, fighting not only Stalinist bureaucracy, but the Leninist concept and the reality, in general, of a centralized state in a Socialist country.

Dr. Kardeli sees little or no real role for the State in a socialist regime, even in this transition period. He says, "We assert that the revolution shall not only substitute one state apparatus for another but that, simultaneously, it should also inaugurate the process of the withering away of the state as the instrument of authority generally." He modifies this drastic formulation somewhat as he also says: "The withering away of the state can occur only when socialism no longer needs the state to lean upon." But he indicates, at most, only a very short productive life span for the state born in the revolution. He asserts that, "Centralization of power in the hands of the state, based upon the nationalization of industry, can play a progressive role and earn the support of the masses only under special circumstances and for but a brief period."

Dr. Kardelj greatly overestimates the speed of the withering away of the socialist state. But his conclusions are refuted by the experience of the socialist revolution in all countries where it has taken place. In the U.S.S.R. the working class for the 39 years of the Revolution has had to maintain a centralized state as a life-and-death proposition. Without such a state the Revolution would surely have been defeated and overthrown. But with this state (and despite the Stalin bureaucracy of later years) the workers have been able to make tremendous socialist achievements in every field, as the whole bourgeois world has been compelled grudgingly to admit. They are rapidly "overtaking and surpassing" capitalism in all spheres.

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People's China also feels the indispensability of a strong socialist state under present world conditions. Mao Tse-tung (On the People's Democratic Rule, p. 8) says: "We are asked: 'Don't you want to destroy state power?' Yes, that is so, but not just now. We cannot destroy state power at present. Because imperialism still exists, because Chinese reactionaries still exist, and because classes still exist in our country. Our task today is to strengthen the apparatus of the people's state, which means in the main, the people's army, the people's police, and the people's courts, national defense, and defense of the interests of the people." Significantly, People's China is now following the basic lessons of the Russian Revolution. Mao Tse-tung, in the above pamphlet, states that, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is our best teacher, from whom we must learn." This is socialist realism.* It is also plain that, in the face of imperialist intrigues, the people's democracies of Eastern Europe are at the present time having a sharp lesson on the need for a strong state.

There are three basic reasons why, particularly under present conditions, a socialist regime requires a strong state. The first of these is the imperative need to repress and hold in check the powerful counterrevolutionary forces of the given countries. The second basic reason for the centralized socialist state is to repel the constant war threat from the armed and hostile outside capitalist world, which has been such a pronounced world factor ever since the U.S.S.R. was born in November 1917. Nor will this double need for a state of the socialist workers disappear until (after how many years?) capitalism has lost its power to wage war against socialism, both domestically and on a world scale. The third elementary reason for a centralized state in socialist regimes is the need for a strong, nationally organized industry, capable, at once, of developing the very highest economic efficiency and also of being quickly mobilized for national defense.

EMOCRACY is the very essence of socialism. To the workers it is indispensable for the realization of economic, political, and social justice. Socialist democracy must soar far above bourgeois democracy, which, together with its working class exploitation and oppression, is literally saturated with bureaucracy throughout its every fibre-in its government, its industries, its schools, its churches, etc. Workers' organizations functioning under capitalism—trade unions, political parties. cooperatives, etc.—are also heavily infected with the corrosive and parasitic disease of bureaucratism. As a result of the Stalin cult revelations the Communist world is now having a dramatic lesson in the indispensability of socialist democracy.

It is in the very nature of the present world situation that the workers in the socialist countries have had to develop their democratic institutions within the framework of strong, centralized, even militarized, states. This imperative, however, does not present the workers with a hopeless problem, as Dr. Kardelj would have us believe. The dictatorship of the proletariat, even in the necessarily centralized forms of today, does not imply bureaucratism. The basic answer to this serious question of bureaucracy under socialism is to be found in the principle of democraticcentralism, as developed in theory and practice by Lenin. The substance of this system is that the workers, imperatively requiring both centralization and democracy, must learn how to combine effectively the two element so as to insure both efficiency and democracy.

It was upon this general principle that Lenin laid the foundations of the Soviet system. Democratic-centralism applies not only to the organization of the Communist Party itself, but also to the structure of the socialist state, of the industries, the trade unions, and other major mass institutions. Lenin, on the one hand, sought to avoid a crippling overcentralization, and on the other, a paralyzing decentralization. The famous dispute over the trade union question in 1920 illustrates Lenin's system. At that time Trotsky wanted to make the trade unions organic parts of the state; but Lenin, while supporting close working relations between the unions and the state, insisted that the unions nevertheless retain an autonomous status. At the same time, Lenin stressed that the workers would necessarily have to fight ceaselessly against bureaucracy, not only in the trade unions but in the state and in all other socialist institutions.

The basic error of the Stalin regime, especially in its later stages, was that it departed radically from the democratic-centralist principles as formulated in theory and practice by Lenin. It over-emphasized centralism at the expense of democracy, with the seriously negative results that we have seen—the creation of a huge bureaucratic machine, the cruel repression of legitimate dissent, the stifling of popular initiative in many spheres, the semi-deification of Stalin, the establishment of dictatorial controls over science and art, the cultivation of dogmatic rigidity in Leninist theory, and related undemocratic practices.

TT IS of the very greatest importance to understand just how the Stalin abuses developed. Bourgeois spokesmen are declaring that such undemocratic procedures are inherent in the very nature of socialism, while some others, spokesmen for the workers, like Kardelj, are implying that the trouble originated in Lenin's principle of democratic-centralism. But

^{*} Although this pamphlet was written in July 1949, these lessons are still pertinent.

neither is correct. The real answer is to be found in a distortion of democratic-centralism, which was facilitated and cultivated by the extreme economic, political, and military pressures upon the USSR, generated by the conditions of capitalist encirclement, under which that country has had to function ever since its birth in 1917. The general result has been that the Soviet people have carried out, under the relentless pressures of the world situation, a whole series of the most urgent drives, demanding the utmost mobilization and discipline-to industrialize the country at top speed, to wage all-out war against invading fascist forces, to resist with all their strength the threatened third world war by American imperialism, etc., etc. All these problems were intensified by the industrial backwardness of Russia and the lack of democratic traditions among its people. Under such extreme conditions, Stalin's dictatorial methods could and did flourish. They also tended to reflect themselves in Communist parties throughout the world. The Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. summed up the situation as follows (New Times, July 5, 1956):

In carrying out the colossal tasks involved in building a socialist society in one country, the Soviet people and the Communist Party had to surmount incredible difficulties and obstacles. Our country had, in the shortest possible historical time, and without any outside economic assistance whatever, to eliminate age-old backwardness and rebuild the entire economy on new, socialist principles. This complex international and internal situation required iron discipline, constantly growing vigilance, the strictest centralization of leadership, which was bound to have an unfavorable effect on the development of certain democratic forms. Our country, locked in bitter struggle against the entire world of imperialism, was constrained to introduce some restrictions of democracy, justified by the logic of our people's struggle for socialism in conditions of capitalist encirclement. But even at that time, the Party and people regarded these restrictions as temporary, to be repealed as the Soviet state became stronger and democratic and socialist forces throughout the world developed. Our people consciously accepted these temporary sacrifices, knowing that every passing day brought continued progress for the Soviet socialist system.

Unfortunately, however, the general course of events did not facilitate the lifting of the restrictions on democracy that had been instituted nationally in the name of a greater driving power and a stronger discipline. Indeed, the last dozen years of Stalin's term, including the all-out struggle to win World War II and the tremendous peace effort to check the war drive of American imperialism during the cold war, led to the imposition of even more "restrictions upon democracy," including Stalin's gross excesses. It was not until after the death of Stalin in 1953, which considerably relaxed his bureaucratic regime, and after the holding of the Geneva "summit" conference of 1955, which substantially eased the war danger, that the Communist Party found it possible to put Soviet socialism on a more democratic basis. This line is now being carried out energetically by the present leadership of the C.P.S.U. Communist parties in all parts of the world, breaking with their previous harmful policy of idealizing Soviet socialism, are following a similar course in their respective spheres. The whole development, however, is not without serious problems, as is very plainly to be seen in the changing relationships between the USSR and the East European people's democracies.

The wave of democratization now going on throughout the socialist world basically reflects, in general, the growing strength of world socialism and the growing decline of world capitalism. And in particular, it signifies a substantial weakening of the imperialist policies of aggression and encirclement against the socialist countries. Basically this democratization is proceeding with new applications of the fundamental principles of Lenin's democratic-centralism, in accordance with the changed situation. This means that the needful new Communist unities and disciplines will be achieved upon a higher, more democratic basis—including improved living standards, better civil liberties, more effective workers' controls and democratization of the state and industry, increased theoretical flexibility, a rewrite of hitherto distorted Soviet political and military history, more autonomy of the peoples within the socialist states, and an increasingly vigorous struggle against bureaucratism in all its forms. Short of being checked by a new and grave war danger, the socialist countries are now embarked upon what may well become an unprecedented democratic upsurge.

This added stress upon popular action will involve, doubtless, the development of many new forms of socialist democracy-economic, political, and otherwise—and already this major development is getting under way in all the socialist countries and Communist parties. On the other hand, together with the fight against bureaucracy, it will also involve struggle against extremist and negative tendencies, such as Kardelj's over-stress upon decentralization and localization, and against the growth of "national Communist" tendencies in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe, as opposed to the necessary new cooperative forms in the relationships among these countries with the Soviet Union. All this development, in a historical sense, represents a long stride in the general direction of the "withering away" of the socialist state, but not in the premature sense foreseen by Kardelj.

IN LINE with his criticism of various important aspects of Marxism-Leninism, Kardelj, who has no word of criticism for Social Democracy, either directly or by implication, condemns the road to socialism being followed by Communists in other countries than Yugoslavia. He polemizes against an alleged "dogma which seeks to impose the pattern of the October Revolution on all countries," and he states, "It is wrong of us to go on inventing economic and political patterns, to which all other countries must conform."

But such criticism has little relation to the modern communist movement. With considerable justice it could have been leveled against these parties up until a couple of decades ago, but since 1935 there has been a growing radical change in this respect. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern of that year, with its historic people's front policy, definitely began to open up new paths to socialism. The establishment of the people's democracies in Eastern Europe following World War II, with their multi-party governments which are modified forms of the proletarian dictatorship, was another advance in revolutionary strategy. The Chinese people's revolution with its worker-peasant relations, also hammered out its own special road to socialism. And practically every Communist Party in the world now proclaims its own specific national road to Socialism. The XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February of last year, put its stamp of approval upon this flexibility in developing the socialist program of Marxism-Leninism in the various lands in accordance with the changing national and world situations. Granted that there is still much dogmatism remaining in Communist thought and practice following the Stalin period, there is no basis for Kardeli's assertions about trying "to impose the pattern of the October Revolution" indiscriminately.

Dr. Kardelj is equally wrong in placing the question of the parliamentary road to Socialism as though it were something foreign to Marxism-Leninism. The fact is, of course, as remarked above, that the Communist parties in the western capitalist countries have been increasingly orientating upon this basis ever since the Seventh Comintern Congress. The French and Spanish people's fronts of the same period, in which parliamentary victories played a vital role, were long steps in this general direction. So too, were the post-war people's democracies of Eastern Europe. The Italian and French Communist parties have long had policies essentially based upon the parliamentary perspective, and the C.P.U.S.A. worked out in 1949 its conception of the parliamentary road to socialism in the United States. The XXth Congress of the C.P.S.U., also in accord with this trend, declared that, "In a number of capitalist countries" the working class and its allies are "in a position to defeat the reactionary, anti-popular forces, to win a solid majority in parliament and turn it from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will." (Resolution, p. 13)

IN HIS article, Dr. Kardelj paints a picture of western capitalism automatically growing over into socialism. Thus he states that, in addition to the Communist-led revolutions in various countries, "similarly, gradual evolution towards socialism through the classical democracy has become a historical fact in a number of countries." Referring to Social Democratic activities, he says, "With the development of socialist relationships, therefore, we must assume that the mechanism of classical bourgeois democracy as we know it will gradually transform itself into a system of more direct democracy based upon the self-government of man in all the spheres of social life."

Such a picture is obviously a false one. Bourgeois democracy never "transform itself" in a direction favorable to the workers. It is transformed by the workers' conscious struggle. The whole history of the world labor movement illustrates this elementary fact. Nor, in any case, has capitalism, even under such pressure as the Social Democrats have been able to generate, ever "transformed itself" into socialism. The Right Social Democrats have been in power in almost every country in Europe, but they have established socialism nowhere. The situations in Great Britain and Scandinavia, their show places of achievement, are very far indeed from socialism. The only socialism in the world is that in the countries led by Communists.

If the capitalist world now offers increased opportunities for the workers to secure socialism along parliamentary lines, this is because, on the one hand, there has been a gigantic increase in the strength of the world's democratic and socialist forces during recent years, particularly in the communist-led countries of Socialism, and on the other hand, a profound weakening of the power of the world capitalist system. This basic change in the relationship of international class forces is making it possible for the workers and their allies to develop and to hold the democratic processes intact, as against real or potential capitalist violence, so as to enable them to achieve socialism along parliamentary channels and in a relatively peaceful manner. The XXth Congress correctly analyzed the situation as follows:

The Congress underlines that the more favorable conditions for the victory of Socialism in other countries have become possible thanks only to the fact that Socialism has triumphed in the Soviet Union and that it is winning victories in the People's Democracies. The triumph of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism and the consistent and resolute struggle against the ideology of reformism, opportunism, was the necessary condition for this victory. (Resolution, p. 13.)

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Dr. Kardelj is correct in stressing the vital importance and the growing possibility of establishing international socialist unity. This fact, however, all Communists are quite aware of, and they also understand the changing international conditions that are increasing the opportunities for such unity. Moreover, it is safe to forecast that the decisive initiative in establishing world unity will be taken by the Communists. It was they who took the lead during the great People's Front movements of the middle 1930's, in the establishment of socialist unity in the people's democracies of the middle 1940's, and in the setting up of the great World Federation of Trade Unions at the end of World War II. They are already actively proposing the merging of the two great world federations of labor. All this is in line with the vanguard role of the Communist parties.

But it would be absurd to conclude from all this that the perspective ahead will be one of calm, struggle-less evolution. Dying world capitalism will use every weapon at its disposal to check advancing world socialism. If a world war is to be averted and the peaceful coexistence of the nations assured, this can be done only through the vigilance and strength of the peace-loving forces internationally. And by the same token, if civil war in the various countries is to be prevented and an orderly parliamentary advance secured, when socialism becomes the immediate issue in the capitalist countries, this will be accomplished primarily through the strength and activity of the working class and its allies, basically led by Marxist-Leninists.

No less than before, the workers will need the guidance of a flexible, fighting, and clear-sighted Marxism-Leninism. The cue to the working class from the present world situation, therefore, is not to discard Marxism-Leninism and to slip backward towards Social Democracy, but to strengthen their Marxism-Leninism and to make it even more adaptable to every complex national and international situation. This is precisely what they are doing in the world-wide tactical and theoretical discussion that is now taking place in the Communist Parties all over the world.