

TWO PROBLEMS IN THE CP DISCUSSION

THE COMMUNIST PARTY DISCUSSES DEMOCRACY...

By H. W. BENSON

The whole Communist Party is in arms against bureaucracy. Everyone repents the past and pledges to protect inner-party democracy in the future; gone are the days when the most elementary rights of rank-and-file members were passed off with a shrug.

So universal are democratic professions that the matter seems raised above dispute. Yet it would be foolhardy if the party members trusted to simple expression of good intentions.

The future of democracy in the CP depends not on the good will of leaders, not even exclusively upon the alertness of its membership, but upon the political means chosen to solve the party crisis. Foster's road leads ultimately back to bureaucracy; not necessarily because he is a willful man but because he wants to overcome the party crisis in a certain manner.

What has caused the crisis and what is the way out? The answers to these questions will in the end determine the fate of internal democracy.

Consider the approach of John Gates, Steve Nelson and their supporters: For them, the party dilemma is rooted basically in a failure of party policy in a fundamental sense to meet the needs of our times. *The party and its policies must be changed radically* if it is to make its essential contribution to socialism in the United States.

Once this view is carried out consistently, democracy becomes more than a mere preference; it becomes an indispensable instrument.

SEEING DEEPER

In the first place, it would be impossible to make the essential turn now and tomorrow without the most thoroughgoing participation of the membership in action, in decisions and in debate.

But this is the minor key. For there are others who would agree: *So far, so good. But so far, and no farther!* For them, the question of democracy is posed as though it were a code of etiquette to guide the family in the private relations among its members.

But those in the party who move toward democratic socialism view democracy as something more than mere traffic rules and see it in its deeper significance. It is not enough to grant each other the dispensations of democracy; they must convince trade unionists, Negroes, all peoples fighting for democracy, that they are actively turning away from dictatorial methods, away from independence upon any authoritarian regime and toward democracy.

Party democracy becomes a life-and-death matter for them, not only for private purposes but because without it Communists are doomed before working-class opinion.

Some socialists, who regrettably have not followed the Communist Party discussion with the attention it deserves, demur. "You claim there is a democratic socialist tendency in the CP, even among some of its leaders," they object, "But look at their past; see how they still refer to Russia as a socialist state and shy away from a full and frank criticism of its role in Hungary. Do you imagine that they can be sincere in this turn?"

But it is not a question of "sincerity" as some disembodied spirit. Look upon the past in a new light; insist upon a change in a given direction; and you are led willy-nilly toward a new view of party democracy, flowing from a whole political outlook. Such a leaning or tendency arises in the party; we can only hope that

it continues consistently along the road which it has charted for itself.

To understand their outlook, contrast their views with Foster's.

For him life is quite simple. The only crisis that he notices is the annoying fact that others in the party persist in talking of a crisis! What is fundamentally wrong, he thinks, is that there are too many comrades who insist that there is something fundamentally wrong.

FOSTER "SETTLES" THINGS

The 20th Congress? The Khrushchev report? Events in Eastern Europe? Isolation from the mass movement? No problem for Foster: just don't think too much about them.

Pages flutter from his pen like butterflies around a flower garden. Thirty pages "On the Party Situation" (*Political Affairs*, October); nineteen more on "Marxism-Leninism in a Changing World" (*Political Affairs*, September and December). The world changes but not Foster. He flits lightly across the big questions in passing.

Why bother, in any case? The basic difficulties have been handily settled for us, now and forever, just as in the past. "Now, however, upon the initiative of the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Stalin undemocratic cult is being liquidated root and branch." (*Political Affairs*, September.) What more do you want; let us go on to "constructive" work and leave such things to our highest "leaders."

Everything could have easily been straightened out by Foster, given a little time to think up a good apology and to acquire a prefabricated Marxist explanation. As he puts it (*Political Affairs*, October): "Although the situation created by the Stalin revelations presented certain problems no doubt the party could have overcome them without great difficulty, absorbing the immediate lessons from the Stalin exposure and studying the long-range implications of this important matter."

"Just a bit of a problem, nothing different from what he juggled successfully many times before. But alas, it was not to be because there were Gates and the others."

To quote from Foster (*Political Affairs*, October): "This Right tendency is now menacing the Marxist-Leninist foundations of the party." And "If it were desired to liquidate our party no more effective means could be used to this end than the current discrediting of the party and its leadership by ascribing to them endless 'errors,' many of which never happened." And "These wrong views included bitter attacks upon the Soviet Union, upon our party, and upon its whole leadership."

There is no doubt in Foster's mind where the crisis originates; the cause can be pinpointed exactly: it is the rise of the Gates-Daily Worker tendency.

KEEPER OF THE SEAL

The solution? It follows inexorably, from Foster's bizarre conception of what is happening in the world and in the party, that *the way out of the crisis, for him, is the defeat of the Gates tendency and the return to "normality."*

Remember that we are dealing with the keeper of the seal, the man who will countenance no deviation from "Demo-

cratic Centralism" and who longs for the "monolithic unity" of the party—whatever it means to anyone else, we know what it means to him. For Foster this discussion can be nothing but an annoying, unavoidable overhead.

What follows from his line and from his whole conception of the nature and solution of the party crisis is that the Gates group must be smashed and the buds of party democracy cut off.

"This time," says Foster (*Discussion Bulletin* No. 2), "there will be no Duclos article to bail us out of our folly." A thought scented with nostalgia for the good old days when everything could be decided by a nod from above, or a letter.

Not only that, things have gone far enough; that is: too far. "Such an exaggeration of mistakes as we have had in our party during recent months would not be tolerated in the Communist Parties of the USSR, Peoples China, Italy, etc.," he warns. Why then tolerate them in your party, Foster? Doubtless he asks the same question of himself and has an answer ready for the proper time.

Everyone pays lip service to inner-party democracy. In keeping with the spirit of things, all kinds of constitutional changes, organizational devices and structural novelties are advanced to safeguard the rights of members. But the real test will come in the fate of the opposing tendencies.

Can democracy win out in the party, can the party advance if Foster and allies take it in a stultifying grip? The most ornate constitution devised by the human imagination could hardly maintain democracy if the Gates-Daily Worker tendency comes under his heavy hand. If they are penalized in any way for their views, or removed from posts of responsibility, or their right to speak bridled, what will be the fate of the party then?

Nelson, Gates and the others take on nothing less than the task of defending democracy in the party and its reputation outside. Before they can face the working-class public, they must face their own party.

Can they tolerate an appeasement of Foster's Stalinist conceptions? There is the first hurdle.

MALICE IN A FOG

As the discussion goes on in the Communist Party, everyone assures everyone else that a "peaceful road to socialism" is possible in the United States; no one protests. By a process of natural selection the question should disappear.

Yet it does not. Debate continues; more accurately, two debates: the real debate and the fake one.

Knowing Foster's methods, we expect him to steer the discussion up a blind alley. We are not disappointed.

As far back as the first Smith Act trials, he posed the possibility of "achieving socialism" in the United States by peaceful means if democracy prevailed at home and world capitalism continued to decline. He, at least, should have little objection when others speak of the same possibility. But we are dealing with a Foster. Where there is no real difference, he is ready with a false substitute.

True, he admits, a peaceful development is possible. But you, you compromisers, he cries to the dissidents, insist that the peaceful road is inevitable? That's the difference: is it merely possible or is it inevitable? And there follows from him and his imitations an interminable flow of disquisitions, complete with digressions, on overestimation of capitalism, revisionism, class-collaboration, etc.—all of which is presumably

contained, tightly compressed, in this simple original difference.

It is all arrant nonsense; it is an argument concocted out of nothing but sheer malice. And if fog settles in a shadowland, if everyone gropes about blindly, so much the better! That is the ground on which he prefers to fight.

His task is made easier by those on the other side; for they are not quite clear on what they are driving at, or they are not able to say.

In the December issue of *Party Voice*, Norman Schrank contributes an article entitled "Strengthen the Draft Resolution." By title alone we locate him in the political spectrum. He is for the party's Draft Resolution as a beginning but he sees the need for a deeper analysis and more extensive changes in party policies.

"SERIOUS OMISSION"

"Sometimes I feel," he writes, "the stand-pat dead-center comrades are still too much hypnotized by the international movement. They wait for distant winds to blow." And he concludes: "the charge that we move to extremes is being used today by those who hold the stand-pat position who want no change and by those who want to return to old policies. Under today's conditions, this criticism which was once sound becomes harmful. It becomes a pernicious thesis against change!"

All this is simple truth. What is even more significant is this: "I believe," he says, "there is a serious omission in the resolution's failure to describe the socialism we seek as democratic socialism."

Democratic socialism! If this phrase is conceived in all its depth and not as a catchword, it summarizes the whole crisis in the Communist movement and points the way out. The crisis derived from a failure to come forward truly as a democratic socialist movement, and the solution lies in moving toward it.

It seems to us that when the Gates-Daily Worker tendency speaks of the peaceful road to socialism it is already reaching toward an even deeper concept: the democratic nature of socialism, in general. Perhaps that is what really irritates Foster.

Notice how Schrank returns to the point in the same piece: "Given the democratic, peaceful and constitutional path to socialism in America, what is wrong in characterizing the socialism we seek as democratic socialism? Is the socialism we seek undemocratic?" (His emphasis.)

In his mind, then, the peaceful, constitutional road is virtually synonymous with the democratic road to socialism.

THE DEMOCRATIC ROAD

It is true that the peaceful road to socialism is possible and desirable in the United States. As humanitarians and champions of civilized methods in every respect, socialists will do everything to make this possibility a reality. There are countries ruled by dictatorships where a "peaceful road" is barred, not only the peaceful road to socialism but the peaceful road to almost anything else of importance to the people! But even where the peaceful road is blocked, socialists hold to the democratic road; That is the only road to socialism. For the democratic way to socialism is not necessarily dependent upon parliaments and constitutions where these do not exist.

In November 1917 when the Bolshevik Revolution took place in Russia there was literally no constitution in existence. Yet the revolution became a triumph of democracy; it was based upon the support of the masses of soldiers, workers, and farmers, and was not imposed upon them. In 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany under the forms of the old Weimar Constitution. Yet this "constitutional" method was the road of totalitarian dictatorship.

Socialism remains democratic under all conditions and under all constitutions. The road to socialism in the United States, with its democratic institutions, will be vastly different from that in Spain where a dictatorship suppresses every democratic right. But in both countries, as in all, socialism must come with the support of the majority of the people. Without such support, it will not come; or what will come will not be socialism!

Socialism always and everywhere insists upon the rights of democracy. And more: it seeks its objective not against the will of the people, not over them, but with their support. That is why any authentic socialism is democratic socialism.