

TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

Other Aspects of the Khrushchev Interview

THE BIGGEST ISSUE of the 20th century is co-existence. Current Soviet efforts to get top-level talks with our country can turn out to be the most important diplomatic development of the entire post-war period.

This is what gave such extraordinary significance to Khrushchev's comments on the need for American-Soviet negotiations, in his interview with Turner Catledge of the N. Y. Times. Khrushchev's remarks on the need for American-Soviet amity were far and away the most notable aspect of that interview. It was to these major aspects that I devoted last Friday's column.

The Soviet Communist leader also discussed other matters of deep interest although not of the same immediate political significance.

In answering a question about censorship of foreign correspondents in the Soviet Union, Khrushchev said its aim was solely to bar slanderous dispatches. Lord knows the world's first socialist state has been the target of slander ever since the Times reported Lenin killing Trotzky and vice-versa. Whether censorship ever defeats slander, however, is another question. The most effective way to expose slander is by contrasting it with the truth. Recognition of this fact became evident when the Soviet Union considerably eased the censorship of foreign correspondents since I was there in 1953.

CATLEDGE asked Khrushchev if the version of his speech on the Stalin cult to a closed session of the 20th congress, as published in other countries by omissions or distortions. Khrushchev replied: "I do not know

what text you have in mind."

Clearly, there was a speech and it has a text. If the text was distorted in the West, the only way to correct that is by publishing the true version.

I may be wrong in my judgment but it appears to me that Allen Dulles and other enemies of socialism are the only ones who can benefit from the failure to affirm or deny anything about the text and the failure to publish it in the Soviet Union.

This is especially true, in my opinion, since the speech dealt with such vital matters as the crimes of the Stalin era, including Khrushchev's estimate that 70 percent of the delegates to the 17th congress and of the central committee it elected, were framed up and murdered.

Khrushchev's appraisal of Stalin in the interview seemed to me somewhat in contradiction to the appraisal made at the 20th congress. Here I refer not to the acknowledged fact that Stalin had great achievements as well as great shortcomings. However, at the public sessions of the 20th congress, Khrushchev and Mikoyan traced these efforts back for at least 20 years of Stalin's rule. And at the Congress, hitherto unpublished documents by Lenin were distributed showing Stalin's grave errors on the national question in Georgia and elsewhere during the early years of the Soviet Union.

Then Khrushchev notes that "Lenin indicated very clearly the shortcomings of Stalin and warned the party of these shortcomings." That warning came in 1922, some 31 years before Stalin died. Khrushchev himself at the 20th congress quoted Lenin's memo breaking off relations

with Stalin because of the latter's actions toward Lenin's wife Krupskaya.

KHRUSHCHEV'S interpretation of Stalin's role, as developed in the interview, deserves fraternal debate among Marxists. Khrushchev said:

"Obviously, every man has his failings which he cannot control. With the passage of time, the unfavorable features of Stalin's character pointed out by V. I. Lenin became more pronounced and that caused damage to our cause, to our party."

This, in itself, is hardly a historical materialist interpretation. The mere statement of the role of Stalin the individual and his personal characteristics sheds little light on how Stalin's crimes took place in a socialist economy, since they clearly violated and harmed the socialist structure. This question needs long and continuing study. Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti made some interesting points in this connection in his report to the last congress of the Italian C.P. Said Togliatti:

"The debate on the causes of the erroneous policies and the grave, regrettable and inadmissible facts denounced by the 20th congress will surely continue, for it interests the whole workers' movement; and the mad attack of the enemy, who would like to exploit this point, can be repulsed so much more easily to the degree that our inquiry and our answers are serious and reasoned and leave no aspect of reality unappraised.

"I am still convinced that inquiry must tend to bring to light, particularly, the relations and contrasts and reciprocal influence between the economic developments and the polit-

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ical superstructure, of which the method of top political leadership is also a part. When the evolution of the economic base had already arrived at a level that rendered possible and demanded an extension of democratic life, this was not done and restrictions and artificial barriers arose instead."

In his analysis Togliatti took cognizance of what the Soviet-haters refuse to do. He saw that a process of correction begins with self-examination and he praised the Soviet leaders "who had the courage to expose and the courage and capacity to make corrections."

LATER in his interview, Khrushchev uses the term "pseudo-Communists." Whether he meant those Communists who do not interpret the Stalin era in terms of one man's character is not clear, but in any case the use of ambiguous terms does not promote fraternal discussion.

I think, however, that Khrushchev is on unassailable ground when he says: "No person and no party can claim the exclusive right of interpreting Marxist-Leninist teachings."

It is also incontestable that there has been considerable democratization and rectification of the errors and crimes of the Stalin era in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

The anti-Communist crusaders, who have been gloating and using the revelations of the 20th congress for their unscrupulous propaganda, are not at all interested in such corrections. But Marxists, who are part of a world-wide movement for peace, democracy and socialism are heartened by every step toward eliminating the wrongs of the Stalin era and toward fortifying the democratic foundations of socialism.