

TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

I. E. Stone's Appraisal of Lenin

NO ONE need carp with I. F. Stone for spending only six days in the Soviet Union and then writing about that rather large country. Stone is a journalist of modest means and he's perfectly justified in giving us six days worth of vivid if surface impressions of Russia.

But Stone is not at all justified in trying to master and write about Marxism-Leninism—also in a few days. After all, he has spent decades studying the subject of civil liberties and he is a profound expert on the matter. But on returning from Moscow Stone tells us he bought up a mass of literature by Lenin and Stalin. Within a few days he wrote an essay on Lenin and Leninism which is embarrassing in its ignorance.

STONE explores a perfectly legitimate subject: to what extent Lenin and Leninism is valid in our day and under Western conditions. But his exploration—no matter how sincere and honest in intent—leads him to a grotesque caricature of Marxism. Stone writes:

"Lenin emphasized not the economic determinism of Marxism but its hidden idealism—that is, its appeal to men to take their destinies in their own hands and change the world. Lenin believed that the revolution could not be brought about by the working class but only

if conscious revolutionaries drawn from the old possessing classes forced the revolution on the working class from above, against their natural instincts."

One hardly knows where to begin, since there's nothing of Marx, less of Lenin, and all Stone in those two sentences. Lenin couldn't emphasize the "economic determinism" of Marx because Marx and Engels sharply opposed such a determinist view of history.

Lenin, like Marx of course, believed that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

Neither Lenin nor Marx believed the working class could accomplish this task without leadership by "conscious revolutionaries," which both of them were in their respective day and age.

Neither thought, wrote or intimated that these "conscious revolutionaries" would, could or should "force" the revolution on the working class.

Both Marx and Lenin knew that the "natural instincts" of the working class brought them into collision with the capitalist class. But both Marx and Lenin taught that socialism as a science had to be imparted to the working class. They taught that the joining of the labor movement with the science of socialism would ultimately bring the socialist revolution.

STONE challenges those who think he exaggerates, in the passage quoted above, to read or reread Lenin's "What Is to Be Done." Dutifully, I reread it and can only marvel at what Stone offers as a summary of this work.

Lenin disputed the idea, in that booklet, that the spontaneous struggle of the working class for economic demands can in itself lead to a socialist transformation. Lenin notes that socialism became a science with Marx and Engels. It's not as Stone so unjustly suggests that "Lenin didn't trust the working class!" Just as chemistry was developed by chemists and biology by biologists, socialism as a science was developed by social scientists, the outstanding of them being Marx and Engels.

Lenin does not say or suggest that this science must be forced on the workers. What Lenin stressed was the need of a Marxist Party to conduct educational activity and to impart socialism to the working class movement.

Lenin showed his profound faith in the ability of the workers to master scientific socialism. He does so in one passage of "What Is to Be Done," a passage which Stone couldn't possibly have read. He couldn't have read it because I think Stone is an honest man and the passage directly refutes his summary of Lenin's alleged intent to "force" socialism from

(Continued on Page 5)

On I. F. Stone

(Continued from Page 5)

above on the workers.

Lenin wrote that the workers have a part in creating socialist ideology. He wrote: . . . "the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia and it is only a few (bad) intellectuals who believe that it is sufficient 'for the workers' to tell them a few things about factory conditions, and to repeat over and over again what has long been known."

•

STONE says Soviet society "is a paradise only for a rather stupid type of Communist Party member, good but sharply limited." But in the Soviet Union I knew workers who had read Lenin's "What Is to Be Done" and who, like me, would be embarrassed to discuss the booklet on the basis of Stone's analysis because his analysis is so empty, so sharply misleading.

Stone has some cogent criticism of Soviet society. But his effort to relate the shortcomings and failings to Lenin flops for the simple reason that he didn't acquaint himself with Lenin's work or writings. In my own opinion there is definitely a relationship between what happened in the Soviet Union when Lenin was alive and some of the negative developments under Stalin. Stone hasn't probed that at all, and I hope to continue this discussion in my next column.
