

Socialism and the Elections (1)

By MAX GORDON

In the March issue of Monthly Review, a socialist periodical, there appears an exchange of letters between editor Leo Huberman and a West Coast reader regarding the attitude of socialist-minded Americans to the 1956 elections.

The M.R. reader, Jean R., writes she is confused by a statement by Huberman in his speech to the Debs Memorial Rally in New York last November. In this speech, Huberman talked of "the fruitless debate between those who would dabble in the internal politics of the capitalist parties, and those who would use up our time and energy in the creation of an independent—not plainly socialist—party which hasn't the slightest chance of success."

"Where does this leave us for practical purposes in the election campaign?" Jean R. wants to know.

Huberman maintains, in his reply, that for "convinced socialists" the only course is to "spread the gospel of socialism," and to refuse to support or vote for capitalist candidates. He examines the four parties that consider themselves socialist—the Socialist, Communist, Trotskyite Socialist Workers, the DeLeonite Socialist Labor—and finds them all inadequate. Nevertheless, he says, "I shall have to choose from among the four socialist parties—however unsatisfactory that choice may be."

HUBERMAN makes a contribution in his emphasis on the need to "proclaim—and teach—our socialist faith." In the self-examination now taking place in the U. S. Marxist movement, the almost complete disappearance of this agitation for socialism needs to be thoroughly reviewed.

In part, I believe, this flows from the mistaken view that agitation for socialism means agitation only for its achievements in the Soviet Union, in China and Eastern Europe. Monumental as these achievements are, the level of ma-

terial development in our country is still far ahead. Hence the American worker will not be over-impressed by the material gains in those countries unless they can be related to problems and concerns he faces.

Moreover, since the propagandists for big business here have succeeded fairly widely in identifying the lands of socialism with the concept of "national enemy," many socialist-minded workers are chary of discussing the achievements of these lands for fear of being labelled "traitorous."

It remains, nevertheless, essential to bring to the workers of the U. S. the truth regarding these socialist achievements in the lands where the workers have gained political power.

The starting point of such agitation should be the effect of the world socialist system upon the aspirations of mankind, and specifically of Americans, for world peace and national freedom.

It is also necessary to take note of the fact that the world socialist movement is wresting important concessions even from the capitalist moguls of our country. Witness, for example, the fact that the nation's rulers are forced to take a position against segregation and discrimination, for improved education, against support of colonialism (largely verbal) and similar positions because of fear of the competition from the socialist system.

MOREOVER, the growth of the power of socialism will inevitably have its attractions for many Americans. In fact, there are already signs of a revival of interest in socialism here because of the developing strength of world socialism. Expansion of socialist democracy will advance that trend.

But it would appear to me that the starting point of socialist agitation in the U. S. needs to be what it will mean for our country, for the American workers, the Negro

people, the small farmers.

This is one aspect of the deep-seated reorientation required by the U. S. Marxist movement in the direction of becoming a thoroughly American workingclass movement; one which retains a fraternal, highly sympathetic, though not uncritical, attitude toward Marxist movements and socialist growth elsewhere, which studies their experiences, but which does not take its lead from the movements.

In this reorientation, another look needs to be taken at our attitude toward other socialist trends in the country. Up until now, we have tended to view them mainly as competitors for the minds of socialist-minded Americans, and this they no doubt are. The question is whether we do not need to place our main emphasis on developing unity with these currents in order to use our combined strength to expand socialist education in America, though we may differ as regard to political tactics.

And we do differ. Thus, the electoral views expressed by Huberman in the letter cited above are, in my opinion, self-defeating. We will discuss this tomorrow.

Baptists From Soviet Union To Visit U.S.

SEATTLE, April 22.—Five representatives from the Russian Baptist Union will attend the 1956 sessions of the American Baptist Convention in Seattle June 15-22, it was announced this week.

The convention is expected to draw between 8,000 and 10,000 delegates. The Baptist World Alliance said that the denomination is the largest Protestant body in Russia and that representatives attended an international gathering in London last year.

The Russian church leaders will also attend Baptist gathering at Kansas City during their month's stay.