

# **Marxist Leadership or 'Personality Cult'**

By **GEORGE MORRIS**  
(Second of a Series)

THE "CULT OF THE PERSONALITY" they are discussing in the Soviet Union is not a strange cult to American unions. The vesting of excessive, even unlimited authority, in a leader, for perhaps a lifetime, has been cultivated in the American labor movement for many decades.

It is not unusual for heads of American labor unions to hold their positions without interruption for 30, 40 and even 50 years. The late W. D. Mahon of the streetcar men, held the presidency for more than 50 years when he chose to retire. Samuel Gompers was president of the AFL for 40 years. William Green succeeded him for 25 years. John L. Lewis headed the miners for nearly 40 years. So the record runs.

Many of the present-day major leaders are so entrenched in their organizations, fortified by a clique of yes-men and bureaucratic machines, that it is virtually impossible to differ with them, much less challenge them in office.

Their judgment is warped by advanced age, inability to pace the times, and inclination to look back rather than ahead. Even their close friends hardly dare advise them. In fact, the yes-people help to build up an infallibility for the personalities around whom they dance, and in time they themselves believe that the strength and unity of their organization, is tied up with the maintenance of a god-like authority for the president who can do no wrong.

American unionists are quite familiar with disastrous consequences for the labor movement from such "leadership."

IT IS not my intention to make the comparison mechanically to the situation the people of the Soviet Union now seek to correct. But our experience illustrates at least in a limited way, how the menace of one-man rule can creep up.

The campaign to wipe out the "personality cult" has implica-

tions that go far beyond the re-valuation of Stalin personally. The entire pattern of relationships in the world Marxist movement has been affected because of the tremendous influence of the Soviet Union within it. A change for the better within the USSR will have a profound influence and further the advance of socialism on a world scale.

It should not be forgotten, however, the concepts and practices that the Soviet Communists now seek to root out, stem in large measure from the earlier history of the USSR.

The problem of the young Soviet Republic from the day of the 1917 revolution was how to survive and how to build socialism in one country while it was still surrounded by enemies on every side and faced a much stronger capitalist world. Of necessity it had to exist like an armed fortress. Success was possible only through the most thorough organization and control, centralization, discipline, vigilance and often ruthless application of decisions.

IT WAS PRINCIPALLY in that period and test that Stalin's leadership developed to its high stature. The prolongation of that crucial earlier period, followed by a comparatively brief easing before the even more crucial Nazi threat and World War II period began, tended to "freeze" the methods, including excesses and to virtually remove all question of Stalin's personal authority.

Nor, it seems to me, was it entirely the personal responsibility of Stalin for encouraging the "personality cult" to the very harmful point it reached. It appears that the other leaders of the Soviet Union had so intimately tied Stalin's personal authority to the authority and power of the Soviet Union that they believed they had to maintain the "personality cult" relation at all cost.

A review of things since Stalin's death has revealed that  
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this cost was; indeed, high.

The seriousness of the problem became apparent as the relations which developed under Stalin continued into the period that began after the war; when tensions relaxed considerably, the power of socialism rose tremendously and became a "world system" of 12 countries with nearly a billion people, and as the peace camp gained a dominant influence in the world.

The old methods and relations clashed with increasing sharpness with the new conditions and actually stood in the way for a much broader advance of the socialist and peace forces under the new great opportunities that opened. The completely unjustified and unfortunate break with Yugoslavia was just one example of that contradiction.

In the process of resistance to the new demands of the times there was even greater negation of collective leadership and distortion of well known truths and even of some long-established Marxist theories.

A DISAGREEABLE product of the situation was the unhealthy relationship it brought between the USSR and the other socialist countries and the Marxists of capitalist lands. The views of Marxists of capitalist countries were not always appreciated. Often Marxists under capitalism found it difficult to explain or defend things that have been happening in the Soviet Union.

# World of Labor

by George Morris



But while it was common for Marxists outside the USSR to express privately dislike for some of the things done or said in the Soviet Union, the traditional attitude, perpetuated since early days of the Soviet Republic, was not to be critical publicly lest the enemies of socialism gain aid and comfort from it. American friends of the Soviet Union are not the only sinners. Almost nowhere (outside Yugoslavia) were Marxists publicly critical of the USSR. On the other hand, it seems that the Soviet Communists, until quite recently, took it for granted that criticism can come only from enemies abroad.

The result has been a false relationship that negated the old Marxist precept that every land will find its own independent path to socialism and should be encouraged to find that path.

The enemies of socialism in this country, like the New York Times, have pounced on the "de-Stalinization" theme because they think it provides fresh ammunition for them, and they hope to confuse people with the claim that everything done under

Stalin's leadership was wrong and should be scrapped. They'd like the Soviet Union scrapped, too. They are in for a sad awakening, however, because what is being done in the USSR is the removal of the obstacles for a still greater and swifter socialist advance and for effective peaceful competition with capitalism.

The collective leadership set up, the further democratization now developing in all spheres of Soviet life, will also give forth a new and healthy fraternal relationship between the USSR and the Marxists of all other lands—a relationship that will emphasize the independence of Marxists in the new democracies and in capitalist lands; encourage them to break sharply with old dogmas that fence them in, and embark on a course that can broaden working class and socialist unity. That to me is the most important possibility that grows out of the 20th Congress and it is bound to have a profound effect of the world's labor movement.

(To Be Continued)