The Communist writer's break with the Communist Party presents a test for the dissidents inside the Stalinist movement and for the critics outside of it.

By H. W. BENSON

When Howard Fast left the Communist Party in February he shook up American Stalinism as much as any single individual could. His novel, "The Fire Next Time," sold by the millions. In Russia, the party had counted him as one of its literate treasures; he was a Stalin Peace Prize recipient; and he was not just a fellow traveler but a regular, official party member, and had been so for fifteen years.

"Like thousands of others he had been deeply shocked by the Stalin revelations and had his turn to democracy in Russia with expectancy; but he waited in vain. His turn was definite and public.

Many others, in the party and out, deplored Stalin and suggested that it was time to curb the dictatorship. But Fast made a sharp break denouncing injustice, murder, totalitarianism for what they are, precluding his own personal dedication to the fight for democracy.

"He insisted that he remained a socialist, true to his socialist convictions. Yet, like so many ex-Stalinists who have been awakened to the bare truths without warning, he is not only shocked but perplexed. The Russian regime is dictatorial, he calls out with no evasion; its policy has been anti-socialist; but in his view it remains "socialist," a tragically dictatorial, totalitarian "socialism" that must become democratic and humanist.

The case of Howard Fast, if we can turn him from an individual into a symbol, puts all groups to a test. Those who profess to abandon Stalinism and actually have; meet a forthright repudiation of it. Will they grapple with Fast's arguments with some attempt at honesty, or act as in the past with Stalinist-type-abuse?

And those who have always been anti-Stalinist meet the test of opportunity. Gaar they resist the current of the current? Does the regime that are breaking with their Stalin past, and call upon them to join in reconstructing a powerful democratic socialist movement in the United States. There are hundreds, not as fast in his repudiation of Stalinism as as thoroughgoing.

February 17, the N. Y. Times announced Fast's break with the CP. It was there that the party first read the news. The CP national convention was yet to cope—"The Daily Worker" of 6th February was a sure sign of a responsive、posterior faction, was calm enough. It deplored his action but seemed it and expressed the hope that all could remain friends.

FALSHADE

In the Worker on March 10, A. B. Magil reported on his interview with Fast under the head, "He Affirms Socialist Beliefs but Severs Communist Ties," all in a friendly spirit. Where Fast was rebuked by a record of unexplained crimes, Magil noticed "shortcomings" which Fast made too much of.

"Clearly Howard Fast is deeply troubled, even bitter about some developments in the socialist countries," diagnosed Magil. "To this writer it seems that he tends to magnify serious shortcomings in the Soviet Union and to see them in a one-sided way. To criticize those shortcomings, to suggest changes in one thing. But doesn't Fast overlook the fact that the Soviet system made the greatest and most fundamental change in history... It is this change that would involve even the whole society to reverse.

It was only a trace of a hint of the old tone. That was yet to come, blantly from others.

Fast still felt compelled to credit the Communist Party in the United States with making "contributions"—at least, so Magil reported. But this was a concession that could hardly cancel out his open attack on the Russian regime.

Magil reported: "But more bitter than anything else was his criticism of what he described as 'an almost total lack of functioning democracy in the Soviet Union.' What we witness in Russia is not democratic or humanist socialism. It is totalitarianism. It is to say exactly this—and to say it as forcefully as I can—that I left the party. There was no other effective way I saw to protest this terrifying distortion of all that socialism means to so many.

Fast told him too: "I can't close my eyes to the fact that a Russian writer who through his writings had attempted to expose the very real abuses of democracy in his own country would have had his work dead stillborn. He himself, as the record shows, would have either been discredited, faulted, or eliminated."

The future? Fast remains a socialist, he said. "If at some future time a broad socialist movement comes into existence in the U.S., I'll like his views in their March issue, which he did in a nine-page statement entitled "My Decision."

The Communist Party, wrote Fast, is not associated with an "old-fashioned tone. As a concession to the spirit of the times, they invited Fast to explain his views in their March issue, which he did in a nine-page statement entitled "My Decision."

"How could he have remained in the party whilst the Russian repressions went on? He explained: "I believed, as did millions of men of good will, that the only truth about the Soviet Union was the picture presented by friends of the Soviet Union."

But when "this unspoken document" appeared—namely, the "Khrushchev report"—"I was filled with losing and disgust. I felt a sense of unremembered natures at the realization that I had supported and defended this murderous bloodbath, and I felt as so many did then a sense of being a victim of the most incredible swindle in modern times."

"The dimensions of this horror were not only beyond anything we could have dreamed of, but beyond our, the worst accusations of the worst enemies of the Soviet Union." And he will not be satisfied with a form-

al, gingly, mechanical, passionate admission of past "errors."

The attempt he feels for the new school of apologists is expressed in one simple incident. A French Communist intellectual wrote him a bitter letter pointing out that the French CP had asked for "a more complete theoretical explanation of the serious wrongs attributed to Comrade Stalin." The Frenchman was indignat, that Fast remained unattired. The Soviet Communist Party then issued a statement implying precisely this theoretical analysis, a statement which forms a document of major importance to every militant of the working-class and which has enabled the working-class parties to make a sound appraisal of the ideas already involved."

To this incredible trash, Fast replies in just three words, completely and adequately: "Heaven help us!"

"THE DUTY OF SOCIALISTS"

Fast is torn by the apparent paradox of "socialism" that is totalitarianism.

"In Russia we have socialism without democracy, we have socialism with without trial by jury, we condemn the crimes of a corrupt bureau without condemning the bureau. We have socialism without the consent of the people, we have socialism without civil liberty. We have socialism without protection of the working-class. We have no revolution of the proletariat. We have no socialist party, and we have no socialists."

To those who claim that Russia is now at least on the road to democracy he replies: "Where jail or death is the price of criticism directed at government, such claims are not only false but even obscene."

"Where, he asks, is the duty of socialists now? I say that it lies with socialism... it does not lie with the proletariat, but with those who lead, with the leadership, indicted not only for their acquiescence in the crimes of Stalin, but for their continuing record of incompetence and dogmatic bias since the exposure of those crimes."

Clearly, then, we have met a man who is not a shamed and fallen, a near-apologist or a half-apologist, but one who is ready to speak out his hatred for Stalinism, for totalitarian dictatorship in all its forms. And if he still looks upon Russia to be part of it. I plan to go on fighting with all my strength against perversions of democracy here, of which there are no small number."

LOATHING AND DISGUST

The editors of Mainstream begin the process of co-opting and reining in a vigorous and independent Fast. You admittedly knew nothing of all those crimes, they reply, but neither did we or the party; how can you hold us responsible for crimes and errors that were concealed from us? Thus they take refuge in a cloak of common ignorance.

But now they do know; Fast knows; he is sickened and horrified and cries out in protest as any decent man should. They, the editors of Mainstream, know too; but they persist, with as much scurrility as as apologists: for the Stalinist-without-Stalin regime of dictatorship. That is the essential difference between them.

When Fast attacks dictatorship, they protest that he only brings confusion "when the need to achieve some sort of working cooperation, if you like, with the new order. If that is by "united front," he says, "it is by applying it all. If the insistence upon unity as a substitute for criticism, if it is because their is a unity which endorses the very totalitarianism they once condemned."

If Fast denounces the murder of Jews in Russia, they reply that the Israeli government conceives opposition papers; if he protests against the denial of democratic rights of the Jews in the United States, they turn a blind eye on the in juridical irrelevances and assumed ignorance. "We are not competent to discuss this."

But they claim to be quite competent to discuss the U.S. Intelligence Service.

If Fast insists upon democracy and exposes
Reaction of CP Hacks to Fast's Criticism Runs in the Old Groove . . .

hypocrisy in Russia, they deplore his lack of patience.

Their comprehension of apologologies, irrelavan-
tant political reasons, etc., led them to state their dissa-
"Howard Fast has become confused about who is the
"Is Stalinism perhaps one of them? Magil

chinese steel workers, but his objec-
tion has nothing in common with those like ours-

essentially building a new life, are deci-
ding by their actions against the most difficult problems of so-

for his statement a disservice not only to the
Communist Party, not just to the cause of so-
cialism, but to the American progressive move-

ment."

The form is somewhat restretched but the
content rings familiarly.

CHORUS SINGS OUT

A month later Mainstream solicits comments on the exchange with Fast.

Herbert Aptheker finds a lot to attack: he
denounces the "reaction" in Hungary; he is
critically concerned with British and French
colonialism meets his wrath, in British Guiana,
Guatemala and Colombia. Franco Spain, West
Germany and Japan are exposed as citadels of
reformulation. Naturally, he has little space
left to deal with Fast's stinging repudiation of
Russian dictatorship.

He is left with this: in Russia "the real
masses, the vast majority of tollers are them-
selves building a new life, are deciding by their ac-

tions against the most difficult problems of social-

ist organization." All this under the Stalin

political dictatorship too? Did the masses choose
that too by "themselves," or was it foisted upon them?
Useless questions? Aptheker is Aptheker.

Another writer, one of Mainstream's contrib-
utors, finds conflict with "the real Fast" who

guilty of "desertion under fire," which of course finishes
him off neatly. Thus the author need only add,
"I am not going to try to answer Mr. Fast's attack on
the Soviet Union." Joseph Starobin, another commentator, is
careful to note that Fast "neither grew as a worker nor as a mass worker" which was not
in the party. An interesting literary and psycho-

"national" that might be fitted into
something time: I have no sympathy for the
way the Soviet leaders have behaved," he
writes; "their society should never have been
taken as the model for what we wish to build and
it is not yet today. But Howard's indictment is as
extravagant and oversimplified as his passion
used to be."

APOLOGETICS AGAIN

A month later, A. B. Magil returns to the scene with two articles in the
Worker (April 21 and 28).

The first article stands alone, expressing three
columns of belated surprise that Fast should

find the CP "compromised." Of course, Magil
adds, mistakes have been made, even serious
ones, but we have acknowledged them. Why he
asks blandly for conclusions!"

By the following week, Magil has supplied
the raw materials for a reply to his own ques-
tion. He addresses himself to Fast's criticism of
the Russian dictatorship and begins to raise it
more audibly than before, the voice of the apolo-

gist.

"If it seems to me," he writes, "that Howard
Fast has become confused about who is the
enemy of mankind." There follows the inevita-
ble threat at imperialism—in France, in Brit-

ain, in the US—that "the crime of capitalism somehow
mite those of Russian dictatorship.

Yes, the enemies of mankind have been myth-

ritten, is Stalinism perhaps one of them? Magil

hastens on without a reply.

He is amazed that Fast discovers socialism
without democracy in Russia but his objection
has nothing in common with those like ours-

we who find no socialism in Russia, No! Magil
insists that Russia is socialist and there-

we must be democratic; in order to examine the
facts, no need to face Fast's indictment; for
"Isn't socialism without democracy a contra-
diction in terms? When all the projects of
socialism are the same as those of tiny private
capitalists and landowners and con-
verted into public property, when the labor of
the workers is not sold as a commodity for
the gain of non-workers—Isn't this itself an
enormous democratic transformation?"

A curious reader might wonder: if democracy
was a project in Russian "socialism," why

what, was Stalinism? No place for it in
Magil's scheme.

There wasn't and there isn't a trace of de-

magistracy in Stalinist Russia. Neither was there
socialism. The fact is that the means of
production were owned not by the "public" but by
the state, and that state was controlled by an
explosive bureaucracy.

When Fast exposes the lack of democracy,
Magil replies that the Soviet legal system "was
fashioned in bitter struggle against external and
internal class enemies." That might have im-
pressed some of his friends three years ago.

But now we know that the Stalinist legal system
was fashioned against workers, socialists,

and Communists, and that under it more Com-
nunists were executed in Russia than in any other
country in the world.

Magil concludes: "Fast has tossed away the
compass of scientific socialist principle and is
now running wild. We may as well cry: there
are no limits to the passive; we may as well
have to conclude; a thousand times better Fast's
intuition than Magil's apologues!"

FOSTER'S OBITUARY

Our last chapter begins on June 9 when Fast
released the text of his correspondence with
Russian writer Porelov to the Times. It added
little to what Fast had already expressed in
Mainstream.

But he was quickly castigated for going to
the bourgeois press—by none so sharply as Wil-
liam Z. Foster. His critics, however, were
curiously undisturbed when Krushchev chose to
underline his inconsistency in order to sup-
port his defense of the policies of the Rus-

sian dictatorship. Obviously, the proscriptions
are directed at the enemies of Stalinism, not les-

than aesthetes?

If Fast chose to make his views known not
to the mere world of 7000 Daily Worker read-
ners, to the knowledgeable audience of the
New York Times, who can blame him? His
break from Stalinism was not intended to be a
public act before a select circle but a public
declaration against autocracy.

Foster's diatribe against Fast, available for
inspection in the June 11 Daily Worker, is worth
attention on the token of the public revival of
Stalinist methodology.

Fast expresses open horror at the Stalin

revelations in strong words—but that is only
the beginning. Now he rejects the Russian re-
geime because it remains totalitarian and dic-
torial. Foster doesn't waste time with so
deceitful a point; he bushes himself to explain
that Stalinism is impossible to be easily explained by ob-
jective conditions.

But objective conditions, however potent, an
other explanation. We must try to explain away. And when Foster protests against con-

tinuing supression of democracy in Russia, Foster bursts euphets: "slander; "monstrous
dictatorship"—playing directly into the hands of the
class enemy."

IN THEIR NAME

And so, we repeat, the case of Howard Fast
has become a ta." He has lost his faith in
the Communist Party because he would not wait indefinitely for a fundamental
transition and lost all hope of a transition to de-

ocracy in Russia. Perhaps there is a place for it
but there are those who still remain inside the
Communist Party in the hope of moving it toward a
democratic conception of socialism. The least

they can do, the very least, is to protest against the
denigration of the name of Howard Fast and the
name of the Stalinist style of distortion of his views.

Fast writes as he speaks in his own idiom and
ingenuousness. In his views he expresses the feelings of

thousands of others who have no way of putting into
their feelings. The struggle which has been
exist in Russia and on the dictatorship that
still exists. They have left the Communist Party
or gone into sympathetic exile; and why upset
everything, however, they imagine that Russia is
somehow "socialist." It is to them a terrible form of
"socialism." They want not but democratic socialism. These are the thousands
of radicals who are breaking away from Stalinis-

or who have already broken from it.

A militant socialist organization, worthy of
the name, would know how to take the side as
they are and channelize their energies, shil-

lows and idealism in the common cause of dem-

ocratic socialism.

Italian Socialism in Crisis: Problems of Unity — —

(Ca Ted from page 1)

CP unity is up; CP unity is up; CP unity is up —— an
which achieved a new degree of profes-

sionalism in the factories.

The labor movement in Italy, and the whole political future of the coun-
try, is in the balance in which the socialist crisis is going to be
decided.

Before, Venice, Saragats solution was to draw the PSI into the "Center coali-

tion" of the "progressive" wing of the PSI. Today, this solution has be-
come the only possible to prevent the PSI from splitting.

On the trade-union level, this opera-
nation involves the breaking up of the powerful trade-
generation of the Workers, the "left-wing" (i.e., CP-

ists), and the incorporation of the so-
cialist elements in the "free" trade-

unions, or into a new "all-socialist"

organization which would be a larger edition of the
UL.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this type of solution is not as un-
usual in the CP leadership; it would be a logical possibility for the
party to come up with a solution to the country's problems for years to
come, by removing the socialist movement as an entirely separate
political force in the political scene.

On the PSI side, Saragats policy is strongly opposed by the left-wing mi-

nority, which is about half of the party. It is the progress of this group
which forced Saragats to withdraw his resignation last week.

His temporary spell in opposition will enable him to undercut the left wing in
his own party, and to make the rapprochements to the righthanders in the
IU, in the hope of getting them out of Nenni's party.

The solution of the PSI majority, on the other hand, was to merge with the
PDSI and to break up the Christian-

Social Party, with a view to this new party's taking over the latter's work-

class and trade-union wing. In the face of Saragts attitude,

the left-wing PSI, which had been increasing increasingly.

A serious split is already underway; an agreement by which the two groups
probably can be established now is with

PSI had to make one way or another: either the left-wing PSIs left the

league, or Saragats leaves, or the left-

wing union and merge with the PSI.

A unified socialist party (assembling the former PSI, USI, PSID and

PSI-Popolari) could then make an ef-

fective appeal to the Catholic workers, with fair chances to split Christian-Dem-

ocrats along class lines. It would also be in a position to present a policy for

all workers and peasants; that is to say, a clear break with the Fascist policy
right into the midst of the PSI
could open a new phase in the crisis of the party.

Such a policy, however, involves a strong and coherent action: the party
would have to be reconstituted through free elections on effective local sections, functioning as permanent councils of workers and peasants, both on small daily matters and on major

problems.

For a disorganized and confused party as the PSI is today, this is an immense

stake: but a start has to be made some-

where.