

IN THE OLD GROOVE

W. Z. FOSTER VS. HUNGARY'S REVOLUTION

By H. W. BENSON

Nothing is awry in the world of William Z. Foster. Where the normal socialist-minded resident of this planet sees the empire of the Kremlin wracked by internal struggles with the masses of Eastern Europe fighting at different levels to free themselves from dictatorship and to establish socialist democracy, he notices no irregularities.

In the November 21 issue of the *Daily Worker*, for example, he discusses Hungary with this "optimistic" conclusion:

"The Hungarian tragedy has caused considerable uncertainty in the ranks of Communist Parties in various countries, the U. S. included. Temporarily, the prestige of the Soviet Union has been hurt among the masses. But all this does not signify, as some charge, a crisis in international Communism comparable to that of the Second International in 1914. The latter was the degeneration of Social Democracy; whereas this situation, for all its seriousness, is a 'crisis' of growth for world Communism."

This gem of analysis would be on a par with the thought that the French difficulties in North Africa and Egypt are only part of a "crisis" of growth for French imperialism, that independence for India came as part of a "crisis" of growth for the British Commonwealth. Anyone can add his own absurdities.

Ordinarily it would be a waste of time to examine Mr. Foster's effusions. This human duplicating machine reprints upon demand the handouts, canned phrases, and prefabricated facts that fit neatly into the latest line devised by the still-Stalinist rulers of the USSR.

Die-Hards vs. Events

Russia, he insists, represents "socialist" democracy; consequently he defends without qualification all its main moves. His art consists in an unwavering presentation of every oscillation. It would be more economical to follow the line of the Kremlin directly in the speeches of its UN delegates, its resolutions and articles, than to bother with English transmogrifications by Foster and his faction friends. But times are not normal.

Events are moving the Communist Party of the United States; there is now no doubt of it. Revolution, mass struggles, and the resurgence of socialist struggle in the Stalinist world are not without impact upon it. Whole sections of its membership and of its leadership are driven to break out of the trap of Stalinism and are groping for democratic socialism.

On the way, they come into head-on collision with the die-hard Foster. His views command attention now, not for their own sake, but because of the fight against them inside the CP.

In the November issue of *Political Affairs*, Steve Nelson, Pittsburgh CP leader, writes, "All friends of Socialism would do better if they pitched into the discussion, suggested changes in policy, program, and structure. This would do more good than to stand on the side and offer advice to us to dissolve."

And he adds, "It is hoped that this discussion will not bypass them and that there will be Socialists who will enter this discussion constructively."

Nelson leaves us unclear on where this kind of discussion is to take place; our view of the discussion from week to week will be found in the pages of LABOR ACTION.

The Smear Pattern

Foster's reconstruction of the Hungarian events, which needless to say is virtually point

for point and date for date a repetition of what he has heard from his Kremlin mentors, could be summarized in these main points:

(1) Under the old Rakosi-Stalin regime, errors and blunders were committed leading to a rise of resentment among the Hungarian people.

(2) Khrushchev and the 20th Congress changed everything. The way was now opened for reforms that would reverse the grievous errors of the past.

(3) Regrettably, the regime in Hungary delayed. When it failed to make a turn, the masses with their justified grievances demonstrated for a change.

(4) But "fascists" took advantage of the legitimate demands of the people and turned their demonstrations into a counter-revolutionary, anti-socialist uprising, Nagy capitulated to the "fascists."

(5) To prevent Hungary from falling into the hands of reactionaries, Russian troops were compelled to intervene and save "socialism." Russia was not merely justified; it fulfilled a duty to "proletarian internationalism."

We might ask: what kind of regime was the CP in its decade of rule, a regime so barbaric and oppressive that the masses were ready to permit what you call "fascism" to take over, so long as they could get rid of it?

But we need not ask that question, for Foster's apologetics hang upon one gigantic fraud and lie. It is nothing new; the whole history of Stalinism as defended and explained by Foster in years past was filled with just such lies and frame-ups. When an opponent could not be refuted, he was called a "fascist"; if possible, executed; or, second best, murdered. Foster merely continues in old-fashioned style; it is another piece of evidence that for him nothing has changed.

In an article on page 3, we call attention to the flimsy factual basis for this newest frame-up of a whole revolution. There we learn that "60,000 fascists" crossed not the Hungarian border but the editor's desk at the London *Daily Worker*.

The prosecutors will doubtless busy themselves as the months go by with fabricating "evidence." Thus far they have dredged up nothing but vociferous slanders and outright falsification.

No License from Foster?

Let us look at the CP-Rakosi regime as Foster himself describes it:

It (1) "lowered living and working standards for the masses"; (2) was guilty of "bureaucratic blunders and tyranny"; (3) "excesses and brutalities"; (4) "great-Russian chauvinism"; indeed "the national independence of the Hungarian people was virtually liquidated"; (5) "they were stripped of their civil liberties and subordinated to the vicious domination of the secret police"; (6) brought "needlessly severe economic strains"; (7) "the several political parties . . . were either emasculated or liquidated"; (8) "these harsh and unjust measures alien to the principles of Socialism could not be justified. . . ."

It was against this that the peoples revolted, against this and for socialist democracy. And such a revolution against such an oppression we hail as a vindication of the great role of the working class in the fight for democracy.

The workers did not wait to be generously "liberated" from above by new CP dictators or by bourgeois imperialists; they took their fate into their own hands and for a time were

victorious. Even in defeat they have given an enormous impulse to the world struggle for democracy and socialism.

But they had to do this without Mr. Foster's kind permission. In his view, they should have awaited reforms from above through the ruling CP. Meanwhile, he gives them a permit to have "justified grievances" and he is even willing to put an official stamp of approval upon their first peaceful demonstrations for reform. The party in Hungary, he tells us, regrettably was dilatory and the "explosion" derived from its failure to act soon enough. Presumably, the people should have waited patiently.

In Poland, Foster feels, things worked out far more felicitously:

"Fortunately, however, the shift from the old to the new situation was finally accomplished [in Poland] without a serious rupture, and Comrade Gomulka emerged as the leader of a new regime with a policy of rapidly developing Polish Democracy and of establishing friendly relations with the Soviet Union. . . ."

Definition of "Fascism"

One cannot help but wonder what Foster's reaction would have been had Russian troops deposed Gomulka. Doubtless, he would have discovered that Gomulka too had been a tool of fascism.

Mr. Foster's office, you see, issues permits which are carefully circumscribed; the people are permitted to press for and demand what is tolerable to the Russian bureaucracy. They must stolidly await dispensations from above; they must be satisfied to remain under the rule of the Communist Party, reworked and refashioned as it sees fit in its good time.

They may, in sum, go as far as Poland but no farther; for so it is written by Khrushchev and so it must be. Anything more is "fascism."

For the sake of argument, let this be, just for a moment. In Poland there now exists a government which is "socialist" by permission of Mr. Foster. So far, its actions have the official stamp. But Russian troops are still stationed there. Have the Polish masses the right to demand their removal? Should the government insist upon their leaving Polish soil? At any rate, if the people do not want Russian armies on their territory, have they the right to demonstrate and to fight for their departure?

Foster doesn't say directly but it is clear that such actions are beyond what his "socialist" patent allows.

They Fought for Freedom

But let us leave Russian troops in Poland. Mr. Foster frowns upon the Rakosi regime which outlawed other political parties. So far, there is no indication that the Gomulka government will permit really free elections. It has not permitted the reconstruction of free political parties; and we refer not to parties which are manufactured to support the government but genuinely free parties, free to oppose it.

Have the Polish people the right to demonstrate for free elections and for free political parties? And if the government refuses to grant such demands, have they the right to overthrow it?

Mr. Foster doesn't bother with such matters because his license doesn't cover such grants. That, in his view, is nothing short of "fascism."

The world-shaking significance of the Hungarian events lies in this: the socialist working class did not wait for permission from Mr. Foster and his ilk in Hungary or in Russia. They wanted freedom and they fought for it. Their surge for freedom could not be contained within the framework of bureaucratic dictatorship and it therefore had to be smashed by anti-socialist dictators.

That is what happened in the Hungarian Revolution. Socialist-minded workers rejected the promises of their oppressive rulers; they did not trust the promises of dictators and they sought to take power into their own hands. This socialist revolution was crushed only by the power of Russian arms.

All the lies and frame-ups are calculated to hide this basic truth, but they will not succeed.