

Soviet One-Party Rule — CP's Views and Ours

By Murry Weiss

John Gates, editor-in-chief of the Daily Worker, in his July 24 article, "The DW's Attitude on the Recent Soviet Changes," deals with the question of the one-party system in the Soviet Union. Gates presents the view that there is "no material base" for a multi-party system in the USSR; that the Soviet Union has gone beyond bourgeois democracy and is now faced with the expansion of socialist democracy. Socialist democracy has no need for more than one party, according to this view, because it is based on a society in which the class struggle has been eliminated and there are no social antagonism among the people that cannot be harmoniously expressed through a simple party.

Gates is merely repeating, in a stunted and dogged manner, the official litany of the Soviet bureaucracy which, moreover, becomes increasingly incongruous as the facts of life in the Soviet Union become known to wider and wider circles of Communist workers.

AFTER 20TH CONGRESS

How can Gates talk of the lack of a "material base" for rival parties in the Soviet Union after the Khrushchev report to the 20th Congress of the CPSU? Is he joking? There is obviously no party and no independent working class political tendency that has escaped material destruction by the Kremlin rulers.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was long ago taken over and transformed into the political creature of the bureaucracy. All opposition to the bureaucracy has been crushed with brutal force; every strata of the Soviet people and every area of the Soviet Union have felt the lash of bureaucratic tyranny; whole populations of national minorities have been exiled; the best representatives of Jewish culture were wiped out; artists were put in straitjackets; and a reign of terror and mass murder descended upon the working class and Communist youth through the institution of the secret political police directed by the all-powerful dictator Stalin.

It is therefore a monstrous fraud to speak about "socialist democracy" as a more or less efficient and functioning reality in the Soviet Union. It is true that bureaucratic terror has been relaxed under pressure of rising mass discontent and profound changes in the world situation, including the Soviet orbit. But the relaxation of bureaucratic terror is not the same thing as



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the functioning of socialist democracy.

Take, for example, the hard fact that Trotskyism in the Soviet Union is still a forbidden subject: Trotskyists remain in jail; the Moscow trials frame-up against the Trotskyists has never been officially renounced; the works of the Left Opposition remain suppressed; the falsification of history, expunging the role of Trotsky, continues. In other words, the violent suppression of ideas, tendencies and all the processes of workers democracy remains the prevailing mode of political life in the Soviet Union. What does this signify?

The violent suppression of ideas and their carriers is for Marxists a symptom of a society gripped by deep contradictions (of the antagonistic variety, if you please). Violence is not an innate quality of the human species arising from a moral flaw in the structure of man. Violence is the product of the clash of material interests of social classes and groups vying for their portion of the social product. The class struggle in all its forms has been organically tied up with violence—with the state as the most finished expression of that violence as exerted by the ruling class against the oppressed classes.

That's why the idea of a socialist society that does not witness the "withering away of the state," that is, the elimination of violence as an everyday social phenomenon, was always regarded by Marxists as a complete contradiction in terms.

THE BOLSHEVIK VIEW

When the proletariat conquered power in Russia and established a Soviet government, this was regarded by the Bolsheviks in a twofold way:

First, insofar as the proletariat needed a state, that is, an organized form of violence of the new ruling class and its allies against the dispossessed classes of landlords and capitalists and the imperialist invaders, this state represented an inherited burden from the reactionary past. In that sense its maintenance would be a measure of the distance separating direct workers rule from socialism.

Second, the new type of state, organized on the basis of Soviets (workers councils), was regarded by the Bolsheviks as a higher and historically superior form of democracy, the first democracy of the producing toilers of society. It was so regarded precisely because the Soviet system was in its very nature a state that aimed at its own liquidation, that is, the abolition of the class struggle and thereby of relations of violence among men.

I should add that not a single Bolshevik, including Stalin up to 1924, ever pronounced the absurdity that within the confines of the Soviet Union itself, in a backward country, surrounded by a hostile capitalist world, a socialist society, that is, a classless society which witnesses the "withering away of the state," could be attained. It was the universally accepted program of Bolshevism to build and strengthen the Soviet Union as a "besieged fortress" which would achieve a socialist society in concert with the working class of the advanced capitalist countries through the international socialist revolution.

DANGEROUS MEASURE

The rule of the Soviet system was conceived and organized by Lenin and Trotsky as the democratic rule of the working class. This, of course, meant the right of parties to function within the Soviet system with different programs and organizations. Only with the civil war (1918-21) did the one-party system come into being as a temporary measure imposed by the harsh reality faced by the country. The Soviet Union was impoverished, wounded and hungry, invaded on every front by the armies of imperialism and the White Guards. The monopoly of power by one party was considered a dangerous temporary measure, to be immediately discarded as soon as the young workers state gained a breathing spell.

It was only with the rise of the bureaucracy, headed by the Stalin faction in the party, that the civil war measures were seized upon and turned into permanent institutions—and this

was passed off as Bolshevik principles!

Under Stalinism it became rigid dogma, not only to prohibit rival parties within the Soviets but to prohibit factions within the party. And all this was merely the juridical expression of the fact that every organ of workers democracy—the Soviets, trade unions, youth organizations and the party itself—had been systematically strangled and destroyed as democratic organizations. The workers state ruled Russia, but the bureaucracy ruled the state, depriving the workers of any expression of democratic life whatever.

Under these conditions the historic alternative was posed: either the working class would regain political control over the state and reestablish workers democracy, or the bureaucracy would pave the way for a restoration of capitalism.

REVIVAL OF REVOLUTION

History is now providing the answer: alongside the growth of productive forces in the Soviet Union and the concomitant growth of an industrial working class, we witness the first intimations of a tremendous revival of the working class movement. The international crisis of capitalism and the revolutionary tide in the colonial countries has added enormous power to this trend. The working class of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries are showing the historic road that will be taken—the removal of the intolerable fetter of the bureaucratic caste through a working class political revolution.

The irreconcilable antagonism between the Soviet working class and the Soviet bureaucracy is at bottom a manifestation of the class struggle. Not because the bureaucracy is a "class" in the Soviet Union any more than the trade union bureaucracy is a "class" in the United States. But because the socialist struggle everywhere requires above all the development of the fullest, freest and most democratic expression of the self-emancipating revolutionary activity of the working class.

For this reason the working class of the Soviet Union will feel compelled to rebuild its authentic revolutionary party as against the party of the bureaucracy. This is exactly what the Kremlin bureaucrats fear and will oppose with all their might. And this is the prospect they are trying to halt by every means—including the falsification of the tradition of Bolshevism.

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