

Chronicle, Polemic, Discussion**STRIKING THE BALANCE**

by

Malcolm MacEwen

THERE is a serious danger that in the long overdue discussion that has been taking place both within the Communist Party and in the socialist movement generally, we may lose sight of the purpose for which the movement exists, and the immediate practical tasks that it has to face. It is all too easy for those who have left the Communist Party in revulsion against the revelations of the 20th Congress or the support given to Soviet policies in Hungary, or for those who remain in the Communist Party but have misgivings about the Party's Policy on these questions, to fly from, one extreme to the other. It seems to me that it would be very foolish, for example, to abandon the cult of Stalin only to fall for the cult of, shall we say, Trotsky. It would be even more foolish, in an understandable desire to probe to the very roots the crimes committed in the Soviet Union, to forget the crimes of imperialism and to imagine that the present Soviet leadership and the undoubted shortcomings of the Soviet system or Soviet policies have become the main objects of exposure and attack.

In the "Universities and Left Review," the appearance of which I welcome as a potent sign of the new currents of thought that are stirring among socialist intellectuals and bringing together the Marxists and the Labour Left, there is much that is stimulating and helpful. But when we find "socialists" who refer to the Soviet Union only in terms of "Stalinism" or "Soviet imperialism," and refer to the capitalist states only as "the west," and speak about the problem of how the "west" is to help Poland to persevere on the path to democracy, then it is clear that there is a grave danger of going right off the rails.

The onslaught of the Tory Government on the social services is bad enough. But the naked aggression of the Suez adventure, followed by the criminal agreement between Eisenhower and Macmillan to continue the H-bomb race, show that world peace and the future of humanity are probably in greater danger today than at any time since 1945. It is undoubtedly true that the Soviet Union has made mistakes in its foreign policy, and has contributed to the worsening of tension that followed the Krushov-Bulganin visit which seemed to mark the beginning of a new period of peaceful co-existence.

But many of the mistakes of the Soviet Union—and its intervention in Hungary was one of them—would probably not have been made had it not been for the continuously aggressive policies of the western powers since 1945, with their insane hatred of socialism and their declared aims of "liberating" eastern Europe. We cannot be so naive as to imagine that "liberation" to a Macmillan or a Dulles has anything in common with the socialist freedom that all socialists wish to see in the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. The "west" means Dulles, Macmillan and Mollet, three capitalist statesmen who stand for the most naked reaction throughout the world. The process of democratisation in eastern Europe can be assisted by socialists in the west, but not by "the west." And, whatever the mistakes of Soviet foreign policy, we should not overlook the fact that since 1945 the responsibility for the cold war must be placed in the main on the shoulders, of Britain and the United States. Certainly that is the position today. The atomic arms race, the rearmament of Western Germany, the appointment of Gen. Speidel, all show where responsibility lies. It is in the "west" that the main blows have got to be struck that will end the arms race, ease tension, and avert the catastrophe that hangs over us all. And these blows have got to be struck, first and foremost, by the organised working class movement and by the socialist intellectuals. The great problem is how to achieve unity, not allowing disagreements even of the most serious kind on our ultimate objectives or methods to get in the way of agreement to fight the Tory Party. This must surely be one of the major purposes of the discussion on the left.

The main criticism that I would make of the attitude of the Communist Party leadership in the year that has passed since the 20th Congress of the CPSU is that it has failed completely to grasp the new opportunities for unity that the Congress presented, just as the Soviet leadership has wantonly thrown away the opportunities that it had created for itself by making a break with the evil legacy of the Stalin regime. These lines are written before the Communist Party Congress, but in my opinion the Congress must be judged not by the number of times Unity is written in letters a yard high, but by the practical contribution that it can make to establishing relations of confidence with the Labour left.

We have to recognise that the Labour left has perfectly genuine reasons for regarding with suspicion all Communist proposals for a united front. The Labour man who asks whether, in a Communist Britain, he will be free to reject the Communists if he finds he does not like them has had his answer in Hungary. I do not want "national Communism," if that is something opposed to the international brotherhood of man, and the united action of all Communist, Socialist and workers' parties for peace and Socialism. But, if the British workers axe to have confidence in

the British Communist Party, the Party itself must demonstrate that it is itself permeated with the spirit of proletarian democracy, and is prepared to face the facts honestly and in full. "Unity" docs not mean the forcible, swallowing of Social Democracy by Communism: and the Communist Party's insistence on the need for a single working class party based on Marxism seems to me to postulate precisely that—unity on the Communists' terms. To lay down such terms is particularly absurd for a Party which is extremely weak, and if suffering severely from years of exclusion from the movement by the bans and proscriptions of Transport House. Those bans and proscriptions remain, not only because the right-wing is determined to exclude militants from the Labour Party and keep the Labour Party away from militant infection, but also because the Labour rank-and-file is not convinced that the bans and proscriptions should be removed. Once the Communist Party can prove to the Left that it is an independent Party (and by that I do not mean an anti-Soviet Party) and that it can be trusted to fight for a Socialism that is markedly more humane, liberal and democratic than anything yet seen east of the Elbe, the right wing will find itself isolated and unable to maintain bans and proscriptions that will have no meaning for the rank-and-file.

Nothing would do more to convince other socialists of the honesty and independence of the British communists than a serious reassessment of Soviet history ever since the revolution. In the Soviet Union itself the process of re-examining the archives, and replacing the Stalinist myths by a sober assessment of the facts, seems to have begun — although it must be questioned whether the Kruschov-Bulgandin leadership which participated in the crimes and mistakes of the Stalin regime can be expected to allow this reassessment to go the whole way. But Britain is not the Soviet Union, and there is no reason at all why the British Communist Party should continue to entrust its propaganda about the Soviet Union to such writers as Andrew Rothstein.

For example, in his new book "The Soviet Union and Socialism" Rothstein takes a small step forward when he refers to the memorandum written by Lenin in December, 1952 assailing Stalin for his Great Russian chauvinism in Georgia, and to Lenin's Testament. But Rothstein's small step forward prompts me to ask two questions: when did he first become aware of Lenin's Testament and of the other document he now mentions ? And why does he not now mention a great many more documents of a similar nature ? The fact is that for some 30 years Communists were led to believe, or allowed to believe, that the whole story about Lenin's Testament, his rift with Stalin, his request to Trotsky to speak for him at the 1923 Party Congress against Stalin, his threat to break off all relations with Stalin, were "lies and slanders" invented by the Trotskyists, or at least grotesquely exaggerated by

them. Yet it is now clear, from the documents issued to 20th Congress delegates and published by the State Department as a supplement to Kruschov's speech that the version of events given in Souvarine's "Stalin"¹¹ 20 years ago was substantially true. It looks to me more and more as if, on his deathbed, Lenin was shocked and alarmed by Stalin's policies, his methods, and the grip which he had got on the Party and the state. It appears as if, in defeating^ the inner-party oppositions, Stalin destroyed inner-party democracy long before 1934 and was able to do so because the forms of democratic centralism that emerged from war and civil war placed vast and uncontrolled powers in the Party centre.

I am not at all opposed to taking a balanced view of Stalin. We must not fly to extremes and begin to see in him the incarnation of evil as the Trotskyists do. To do so is to repeat the folly of the Stalinists, who could see nothing but the incarnation of evil in 'Trotsky.' If it is right to take a balanced view of Stalin however I (and the) view now taken both by the CPSU and the British Party leadership seem to me unbalanced, because it glosses over the appalling character of the crimes) it is also right to take a balanced view of Trotsky, and to abandon once and for all the name calling and smearing that made argument and rational discussion impossible. If Communists can see Trotsky without the horns sticking out of his head, we may be able to see all the figures in the British Labour and Socialist movement in a more accurate light also. The British Trotskyists, who talk about "peaceful co-existence" as if it was the betrayal of proletarian internationalism; by the Soviet Union, seem to me also to be victims of the cult of **the** individual, and to be mesmerised by their long standing grievance against the Soviet Union. But this should not prevent us from **understanding** that there is a good deal of truth in the criticisms which Trotsky made of Stalin, and a great deal to be said for Trotsky's contribution to the Russian Revolution.

All this may seem to be a long diversion from my real point, **but** it is not. My plea is for the restoration of real Marxism, the end of all the myths and shibboleths, an end to doctored history and the presentation of half-truths as the whole, a victory for **honesty** and frankness in the Communist Party and throughout the socialist movement. If this happens, then I believe that out of J the present healthy questioning, re-examining and discussion, in **which** none of us will take anything for granted, may come not a distrustful cynicism but a veritable rebirth of British Socialism, and the creation of a formidable united movement of the working class with Socialism.