

Socialism? Capitalism?

New Turn in the Debate

By MAX GORDON

George F. Kennan, leading American "specialist" on the USSR, in a recent lecture over the British Broadcasting system, raised a couple of fundamental theoretical questions regarding capitalism and socialism which have been getting quite an airing in our nation's press. Kennan's points, which merit exploring, are:

- The Soviet Union's rapid economic growth has been due to its early stage of industrialization. But her economy is now reaching maturity. It is "beginning to run up against problems—organizational, manpower and others—which are familiar to all industrial countries." Hence its future growth will be no greater than advanced capitalist nations.

- Ouster of the Malenkov-Molotov group, followed by Zhukov, indicates instability and crisis in Soviet leadership. The crisis "is to be found in the relationship of senior figures to each other and in their relations to the people. . . ."

As regards point one, the issue is whether capitalism and socialism differ so basically as to guarantee that even at an advanced stage of industrialization, the USSR will grow more rapidly than capitalist nations.

I maintain such basic differences do exist. They include such well-known ones as the relative stability of the two systems, and the brakes on capitalist growth caused by joblessness, idle plant during crises and recessions, and the like.

Let me, in the space of one article, center attention on just one other factor of difference which—of all people—the Times' anti-Soviet expert Harry Schwartz noted in an item on Nov. 14.

Because the (Soviet) government owns and operates all industry," Schwartz wrote, "the typical enterprise has few of the sales, advertising, financial and legal problems that are frequently the main concerns of company heads in the U.S. and Western Europe."

He reported the USSR is jacking up engineer training to 100,000 a year, as against 25,000 in the U.S. The Soviet aim is to make the head of every enterprise, and even every foreman, a trained technical specialist. In the U. S., heads of enterprises are usually "legal, sales or even specialists."

Schwartz is saying, in specific terms, that a substantial sector of capitalism's manpower supply is used for non-productive purposes arising exclusively out of the mode of distribution under capitalism. This is true quantitatively and, as a matter of fact, legal problems, sales and certain aspects of accounting.

Since early 1956, U.S. manpower reports have emphasized that non-productive labor has outstripped productive labor (labor actually engaged in production and transport of goods). A large part of this non-productive labor is useful under any system, and does exist under socialism. But literally millions in our country are engaged in non-productive labor associated exclusively with capitalist processes and socially useless.

Hence the manpower problem referred to by Kennan assumes entirely different dimensions under socialism than capitalism. This is true quantitatively and, as Schwartz's article made clear, it is true qualitatively. Where Soviet enterprises are being manned by trained technical specialists, those in the U.S. are headed by people divorced from production. Is it not inevitable, then, that the USSR will be producing industrial "spunk" ahead of us, as long as we adhere to the capitalist system?

To get to Kennan's second point—methods of Soviet rule. Essentially, Kennan's view is that stable institutions of rule, the political super-structure, have not been established, and hence sys-



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tematic procedures for governing relations among Soviet leaders, or between leaders and the people, do not in practice exist.

Aside from his "crisis" characterization, I believe there are elements of truth in Kennan's critique. I say this even though the Soviet Constitution does provide for organs of Soviet rule and their election by the people. But real political power rests with the Communist Party. And the Party's structure and leadership are not regulated by the Constitution, nor, as far I know, by Soviet law.

Hence relations among the real Soviet leaders, and those between them and the people, are not governed by Constitution or state law. The great mass of Soviet people, who are not Party members, do not take part even formally in the election of the actual rulers of the state.

I believe it is important to understand, however, that this lack of a stable democratic political super-structure is historically conditioned; and that inevitably, this super-structure will evolve in conformity with the socialist material base, though there may be some sharp conflicts in the process.

In all great revolutionary social change, there has been a lag between transformation of the economic base and of the legal political, ideological super-structure. This is inevitable since both leaders and people have been brought up under the previous regime and are saturated with its practices and ideologies. The old super-structure is smashed, and it takes much pioneering before a new one is erected which conforms to the new material base. It took 150 years of intermittent, yet sharp, struggles before the British bourgeoisie, first to gain power, stabilized its political institutions.

Marx saw this quite plainly. He told the Communist League in 1850:

"Crimes, abuses, selfishness, superstition, all this residue of the historical past, all this mud of capitalism will cling for 50 to 100 years before the working-class is fit to rule."

Could it have been otherwise in the Soviet Union? On the contrary, the more drastic the social revolution, the greater the uprooting required in the ideology and practices of the people. The great backwardness of old Russia, the lack of experience with democratic practice, the immense pressures of hostile imperialism, made the lag inevitable.

I believe, too, the terrible distortions of the historic process under Stalin's rule tended to delay maturing of stable, democratic political institutions. This is true not only with respect to Stalin's leadership itself. But the present far-flung apparatus worked for at least 20 years under the conditions exposed by Khrushchev, and can-

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not so easily overcome the effects of its training.

But as indicated in the first part of the article, the Soviet's socialist industrial base requires a highly educated people operating in a democratic economy. It is thus inevitable that the political institutions, as they mature and become stabilized, will have a highly democratic content.

While a lag in development of these political institutions was inevitable, I believe the obstacles created by the Stalin Era have minimized the attractive power of socialism for American workers. Nor was it any help when American Communists, failing to understand the historic inevitability of the rationalized its errors and distortions. This made it impossible to win a hearing on true Soviet achievement.

Today, it seems to me, we can all pay tribute to the vast material gains made by Soviet socialism, to the incalculable aid it has rendered to the massive struggles for independence from imperialism of the majority of the world's people, and to its defense of peace. But, understanding the process of history, American Marxists need to maintain an objective, honest attitude toward all aspects of Soviet development, including its shortcomings. Otherwise, many will continue to be thrown by every internal political conflict and turn. And these will occur.