

Foster's Phony Balance Sheet on Stalin

By Tom Kerry

William Z. Foster, head of the American Communist Party, has called upon CP members and supporters to curb their impatience for an explanation of the 20th Congress assault on the "Stalin cult." Wait, says Foster—touted on his recent 75th birthday as an outstanding Marxist theoretician, historian and scientist—until Moscow completes its re-evaluation of the Stalin era and then we'll have all the answers.

But the be-patient-and-wait line is not meeting with much favor. A letter by a reader of the Daily Worker published in the March 23 issue, complains that Foster "seems to be suggesting that American Marxists should not themselves attempt to re-evaluation the Stalin era but should leave this to the Russians." The writer of the letter protests against the practice of accepting "automatically and uncritically the views of Soviet leaders—who are, after all," he adds, "not without responsibility

for Stalin's errors." And, the letter concludes, "It seems all too clear that there has been a good deal too much at 'leaving it to the Russians' already."

THE DILEMMA

The leaders of the American CP are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Since the 20th Congress opened fire on the "Stalin cult" it has made front page copy for newspapers throughout the country. Motivated by internal necessity the bureaucrats in the Kremlin are proceeding cautiously. The tempo and scope of their anti-Stalin campaign is determined by the response of the Soviet masses and the degree of pressure exerted upon the Kremlin by the mounting discontent of the Soviet workers and peasants.

Thus, the nature and extent of Stalin's crimes are permitted to trickle through only in piecemeal fashion. The capitalist press pounces gleefully upon each succeeding revelation to serve its own reactionary aims. While the leaders of the American CP would prefer to wait until all the "facts" were in, they cannot and they dare not. Their own ranks, fed for years on the myth

of Stalin's infallibility, clamor for an explanation. Unless an acceptable explanation is forthcoming Foster's vaunted "Marxist science" would be exposed for what it is: a readiness to accept "automatically and uncritically" the views of those who shared responsibility for Stalin's crimes.

Foster, of course, has an explanation. With slight variations and amplifications it is repeated by his cohorts. The composite can be summarized as follows: the capitalist encirclement of the Soviet Union, the threat of imperialist attack, the bitter war for survival against Hitlerism, etc., justified the imposition of stringent "security measures," but Stalin went too far. On the other hand, to Stalin's credit, they assert, is his leadership in the war against Hitler, the industrialization of the Soviet Union, its growth and expansion, the building of socialism, etc., etc.

The method consists of drawing a balance of errors and achievements. By comparing the plus signs on one side of the ledger with the minus signs on the other, you get, in the words of Foster, a "more balanced pic-

ture of the role of Stalin." While this may be accepted procedure for the bookkeeping of a petty shopkeeper it can hardly be dignified by the name of Marxism. For with each revelation from the Kremlin the signs become scrambled, with minus replacing plus, with startling rapidity.

"MILITARY GENIUS"

For example, the legend of Stalin's military genius and leadership in the war against Hitlerism. In Foster's balance sheet, this myth appeared as a plus sign, on the very day that the world press disclosed that Khrushchev in a secret report to the 20th Congress flayed Stalin's 1937 frame-up purge of the Red Army General Staff headed by Marshall Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky. This crime beheaded the Red Army on the eve of the war and emboldened German imperialism in its preparation for attack upon the Soviet Union.

Subsequently, Walter Ulbricht, head of the East German CP, lashed Stalin for his failure "to prepare the country for war in the necessary manner, even though the aggression of Hitler Germany was foreseeable." Al-

though informed in advance of Hitler's impending attack Stalin refused to believe. When the blow fell it caught the Soviet people by surprise. The Red Army reeled back with frightful losses. A large part of the country was occupied and devastated. Latest figures estimate Soviet casualties at forty million. Only the most heroic resistance of the Russian workers and peasants averted the destruction of the Soviet state and guaranteed the victory.

Since the publication of his balance sheet, Foster has remained silent. Those members and supporters of the Communist Party who are seriously searching for an explanation of the events now transpiring in the Soviet Union will derive little satisfaction from the rationalizations of their leaders. What is required is a thorough-going political analysis of the origin, nature and development of Stalinism and the Stalin cult from the very beginning. Such a Marxist explanation can be found only in the writings of Leon Trotsky and his disciples whose analysis has met the acid test of Marxist science—the test of historical confirmation.