

G. D. H. Cole Analyzes Effect of Stalin Reevaluation

By MAX GORDON

In the Aug. 4 issue of *The Nation*, there is an article by the veteran British Socialist scholar, G. D. H. Cole, of considerable interest to the Left in our country.

Professor Cole attempts a "highly provincial estimate of the impact on western (European) Communists and Socialists of the dethronement of Stalin." He says it is much too soon to make a definitive estimate, and doesn't know how far the momentum of developments in the USSR will carry that country in correcting the weaknesses of the Stalin period.

Though he has always been philosophically opposed to centralization of power and authority, Cole writes, he nevertheless has always viewed the Russian Revolution as a tremendous achievement which could succeed only under the leadership of a highly disciplined, strong and ruthless party, "with little regard for those liberal values of which the Russian people have had no experience at all."

To deny the right of existence to such a leadership, he maintains, is the same as saying the

Revolution should not have taken place at all, or that it should have allowed itself to be crushed. He emphatically rejects both of these alternatives.

But, he maintains, while ruthlessness and centralized power may be essential to social revolution under the conditions which faced the Russian Bolsheviks, there is a distinction between that which is necessary and a perversion of power which can be avoided without endangering the revolution.

COLE EXPRESSES the view that two things went wrong in Russia which resulted in perversion, as distinct from necessity. One was the attempt, which he attributes to Lenin, to impose the Soviet revolutionary pattern on all other countries. This split the world socialist movement and destroyed its chances of victory in the west, he maintains.

The second thing that went wrong was Stalin's destruction of "interior democracy" of the party; his replacement of democratic centralism with "centralism without democracy."

Whether or not Professor Cole is right about the reason for the

split in the world socialist movement, it is incontestable that Lenin built much of his work on the need for sharp differentiation of the Communist movement from Social Democracy. And this did become the pattern for the world Communist movement along with other aspects of the Russian Revolution some of which arose solely out of Russian environment.

The Stalinist destruction of "interior democracy" likewise became something of a pattern for other Communist parties. This is one reason why the revelations regarding Stalin have had such an impact upon the internal life of the Communist movement in the U. S.

COLE MAINTAINS that Communists in Europe have reacted to the Stalin revelations in two ways. One is a sharp "moral revulsion." The other rejects such "moralizing," minimizes the seriousness of the crimes by insisting on Stalin's great contributions, and reduces the revelations to errors of judgment by Stalin.

The first reaction is sharpest in Poland, he writes, where it is strong not so much against Sta-

lin as against centralized discipline and suppression of freedom. The second reaction is strongest in France, where the Communist Party is "standing pat" and ignoring the revelations as much as it dares.

Regarding his own country, Britain, Cole singles out R. Palme Dutt, the "outstanding intellectual of the Party," as belonging "unquestionably to the amoralist wing which wishes to play down Stalin's 'mistakes' and is opposed to any major change in the party's attitude or policy."

He notes that Palme Dutt, after first dismissing the revelations as unimportant, was forced by the reaction of his readers in *Labour Monthly*, which he edits, to make "a most confusing half-retraction which still amounts to a comprehensive defense of Stalinism. . . ."

Cole is here referring to Palme Dutt's articles in the May and June issues of the *British Labour Monthly*. He declares that Dutt's position is being sharply challenged by "those who feel most deeply the moral aspects of the questions raised by the recent revelations."

COLE MAKES the significant

point that Communists he knows personally have suffered deep moral shock and seem to be eager to "diminish their feeling of isolation from other left wing socialists." He now can talk freely with Communists "of this type," something previously not possible.

Most important, Cole reveals that a new organization has been set up of Left Wing socialists of various countries, the International Society for Socialist Studies. At the founding conference in Paris, this group revealed an impressive change in attitude regarding socialist-communist relations. Cole expresses the view that while formal rapprochement between Communist and Socialist parties in the west is a long way off, it is time individuals of both parties began to discuss their differences in an amicable way and look for "points of agreement."

This was the spirit of the ISSS gathering, he writes, and behind it was the conviction that the process of change in the Soviet Union and Communist movement is only beginning, and in the long run will react as profoundly on socialism in the west as on the Communist movement.