

We are publishing excerpts from letters on the column by Alan Max and other comments in the Daily Worker about the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

Letters which exceed 300 words cannot be printed in full.
NEW YORK.

Dear Alan Max:

The very warmest congratulations on your article "U. S. Marxists and Soviet Self-Criticism" in today's D.W. As a regular reader of the paper for nigh on to 20 years, it strikes me as in many respects the most mature article the D.W. has ever printed. My wife (who is not a regular reader) says that with more articles like that one she would be!

Without getting hysterical and running around in self-castigatory circles (you don't!) it is perfectly clear now that (as some of us have suspected for some time) serious mistakes have been made over a period of years—mistakes which, as you very clearly point out were "wrong and hence self-defeating" and "made it easier for the reactionaries to persecute and isolate us."

The next step, it seems to me, is, first, just what did happen? And, second, WHY did it happen and (by implication) how can it be prevented from happening in the future? A great deal will (I hope) be written on this during the next few months; the follow-

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ing are merely some first thoughts.

Central to the whole problem, I think, is the consistent failure to understand completely the famous statement that Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action. How does a science become a dogma? Science draws its theories from the facts; dogma selects (or invents) its facts to fit theories.

I don't think it can be too often stressed that the primary job of any group calling itself scientific is to get at the facts—no matter how confusing or unpleasant they may be. Given the facts, theory can provide the guide to changing the facts; without the facts, theory becomes ingrown and sectarian dogma. It's worth remembering, too, that the most skillful theoretical exposition is NEVER more than an approximation to many-sided and complex reality.

But after all, we have known for a long time (or thought we did) that Marxism was not a dogma. How did it happen that this was "forgotten?"

Undoubtedly there were many historical factors at work here. Paul Sweezy, in the current Monthly Review, touches briefly on some of them. One that he does not

mention is—plain arrogance: the assumption by Marxists (and especially some leading Marxists) that they "knew it all"; that because they possessed Marxism, the theoretical key to history, they were bound "automatically" to come up with the right answers. As a corollary, anybody who disagreed, even though he claimed to be a Marxist also, was either a fool or a knave.

American Marxists certainly have no apologies to make for their years of combatting anti-Soviet and interventionist propaganda—much of it, as you point out, amounting to literal forgery. The unfortunate thing is that this fight was so often carried on rigidly and dogmatically—on the principle that ANY criticism of the Soviet Union was ipso facto wrong.

I wonder if this has to some extent not been due to a distrust of the American people? A feeling that while of course there WERE unpleasant things existing in the USSR, to discuss them would simply confuse people. Better not to mention them; better still not to think of them. Hence the distinct flavor of press-agentry which clings to so much Marxist writing on the USSR—and hence the distrust of these writings by the American people, who as the most press-agented people in history have an ingrained distrust of the salesman.—O. C.