

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN THE PEOPLES DEMOCRACIES

"This process of the practice of changing the world on the basis of a scientific knowledge of it has already reached an historic moment both in China and in the whole world, a moment of such importance as the world has never witnessed before. This change is none other than the complete overturn of the world of darkness, both in China and elsewhere and its transformation into a world of light that never existed before. . . . What is meant by the external world which is to be changed, includes the persons who are opposed to that change. *To be remolded they will have to go through a stage of compulsion before they enter into a stage of remolding of their own accord.* When the whole of mankind, of its own accord, remolds itself and changes the world, that will be the age of world communism." —*On Practice* by Mao Tse-tung

The frank exposure of crimes and errors by the leaders of the Soviet Union and the European Peoples Democracies is historically unprecedented. The leaders of no previous social order have ever engaged in such relentless self-criticism. The pained outcry expressed in public mass meetings and in the press, the bold self-criticism by the leaders and the drastic measures taken to prevent the recurrence of the grave injustices testify to the moral superiority of socialism.

Disillusioned American leftwingers, however, have assumed that these exposures empower them with the right to preach to the leaders of the Peoples Democracies; especially since the abatement of war tensions, the last-
ing" economic boom and the rebuff to McCarthyism have made for a new look at American democratic free-

doms. As a result, *Daily Worker* writers have swung from uncritical praise to uncritical accusations and even supercilious disparagement of the socialist countries. They have begun to sermonize on the delay of the Peoples Democracies to introduce Western-type civil liberties.

On the one hand, these Marxists disclaim further adherence to Leninist theory, proclaiming its inapplicability to conditions in the United States. "Lenin is no icon to hang on the wall," vulgarly proclaimed Joseph Clark, the *Daily Worker* columnist.* On the other hand, these political analysts have asserted that Jeffersonian democracy is applicable to conditions in Eastern Europe. Such sophistry had in the past been reserved to the Free World champions, who have unabashedly made beguiling comparisons between the amenities of life in Connecticut with its three centuries of uninterrupted industrial development and those in Azerbaijan or Rumania with their twenty-five years and ten years, respectively.†

Apparently convinced that western leftwingers know more about the building of socialism than those who are engaged in it, I. F. Stone, the well-known liberal political commentator, counselled: "Now is the time for western leftists' opinion of all kinds to make its influence felt on

*The exaltation of great genius—of a Shakespeare, Beethoven, Rembrandt, Marx, Einstein or Lenin—is not cultism. The adulation of those who made transcendent contributions to humanity will grow and deepen as their creations become the general property of the people.

†American correspondents boast of American automobiles and refrigerators and mock the first stage of socialist construction. They conveniently ignore the fact that the American standard of living was achieved at the expense of Indians, Negroes, Mexicans, Filipinos and Latin Americans, who have been plundered, enslaved and massacred, and at the expense of millions of immigrants who have been ruthlessly exploited. Nor do they note that the blood of two world wars was converted into gold by American big business.

the side of the Poznan workers if socialism is ultimately to survive in Eastern Europe.”*

In which western country have social democrats or left-wingers grappled directly with the problems of building socialism? What special formula do these Western leftists possess for solving the immensely difficult problems of building socialism in backward countries? Do these westerners perhaps know a way of attaining high living standards, leisure and culture for all without going through an initial period of deprivation and sacrifices? Or have they some magic formula for accumulating the vast capital necessary for erecting the basic network of heavy industry without creating agricultural lags, shortages of consumer goods and other deprivations leading to mass discontent?

Ought not the liberals and Marxists who today cavill at the Peoples Democracies first examine such questions *as the relationship between freedom and civil liberties and the stage of economic development in a country and the tasks and problems that that country is called upon to solve?* Without noting this relationship how is it possible to distinguish between the avoidable and the unavoidable, between the condemnable and unnecessary and the lamentable but historically necessary?

It is only seven to nine years since the Peoples Democracies launched their program for liquidating backwardness. Considering the low level from which they started, their accomplishments in this short period seem almost

*I. F. Stone used to refer to Soviet leadership as “extremely intelligent and perspicacious” and as “possessing a profound grasp of the movement of events.” This was his judgment when he was still fearful of a possible Third World War and was issuing warnings about the plans of certain aggressive Washington circles. Now he smugly refers to “the top men in Moscow” as “people of limited mentality . . . doped by their own incense.” Even the October Revolution, he concludes after a ten day visit to Moscow, “was a hoax”!

miraculous. In all these countries, the bequest of the old ruling gentry was lice, typhus, famine, illiteracy and ravaged towns and villages. In Eastern Europe, a sullen, suspicious, xenophobic peasantry under the influence of a medieval obscurantist church adamantly resisted all change. Worst of all, there was almost no heavy industry, capital or skilled labor. Not a single engineer could be found in Warsaw after the nazis evacuated the city. In 1945 there was more industry in the state of New Jersey than in all the European Peoples Democracies combined.

Perplexity arose among the new leaders as to how or where to begin. But the decision was soon forced by the Western powers, which announced in effect: “We know of your anxiety to improve living conditions and to demonstrate the superiority of your new order to the old. We, however, are interested in a different kind of contest—a race with atomic weapons, jet planes and guided missiles. Indeed, let us see first whether you can dig out of the ruins of the last war and prepare for the next one by matching our latest death weapons as well as those of your recent “visitors,” the capable death masters of the Ruhr. You have nationalized land and factories belonging to our friends on the London and New York stock exchanges. We therefore declare you outlaws and bandits. We will not only deprive you of access to machinery, capital and raw materials but also expend millions to disrupt your development with an incessant barrage of balloons, leaflets, and broadcasts to stir up popular discontent.”

To erect the foundations of the new society, illiterate peasants had to be trained as technicians and shiploads of badly needed foodstuffs had to be exported in exchange for machinery. But construction was hampered by indo-

lence, alcoholism, racial and national prejudices, flagrant waste, thievery and bureaucracy. "Millions of zloty were pocketed by swindlers and profiteers," reported E. Ochab, First Secretary of Poland's United Workers Party, on June 10, 1956.

Oscar Lange, the noted Polish economist and former professor at the University of Chicago, declared in a press interview on July 17, 1956: "Poland was industrialized by methods of war economy, for no other road was open for a country so devastated, backward, boycotted and threatened."

The external pressures and internal difficulties necessarily determined the state of civil liberties.

According to a recent Associated Press dispatch, *more than 30,000 Polish Communists and members of the Security Police had been killed by Polish underground forces since 1945*. What would obviously be the reaction of the Polish leaders to such a campaign of assassination? Many of those murdered had fought courageously against the nazis and had experienced imprisonment and torture, manifesting complete devotion to their socialist ideals in the face of mortal peril. The leaders of the nation would naturally strike fiercely at the murderers of their comrades. The inspirers of the original violence and their apologists can hardly complain or preach when force is met with force. Indeed what would be the state of civil liberties in the United States if some fascist underground supplied by foreign powers was to roam within the country and kill almost 200,000 members of the Democratic and Republican parties and government officials (this figure is in proportion to the populations of the two nations)?

A rigorous legal system was established with severe

punishments for infractions. Injustices were committed. It was often difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the criminal disrupter or project X agent and the ordinary petty thief. The law had to be inflexible. In the critical transition period, complacency and lack of firmness toward counterrevolutionary enemies was dangerous.

Under conditions of strain and apprehension, rifts and suspicions are not difficult to create. *To exploit these tensions and even to provoke revolutionaries to liquidate each other by means of skilfull fabrications were the avowed purpose of the western-financed counterrevolutionaries.*

Decidedly, the state of civil liberties during the first stage of socialism in a backward country subjected to economic boycott, subversion and cold war threats cannot conform to abstract principles. Aside from the factor of security, the state of civil liberties depends upon the level of productivity, the size of the national product and the manner in which it is to be distributed. In short, the level of civil liberties is determined by the degree of compulsion necessary to enforce the "who will get what and how much."

This is not to say that consumption and living standards do not rise even during the first stage of socialism and despite the heavy demands of basic industry. The living standards of Polish peasants and workers are incomparably higher today than those that prevailed in the pre-war Poland of the big landlords, when millions lived in mud huts, went barefoot and subsisted on a per capita income of two dollars a week. But in the very process of building socialism, new cultural and material needs are awakened, demands for better food and housing, schooling and clothing — improvements of which the people did not

even dream under the old regime—as well as expanded civil liberties. The rationings, priorities and shortages during this preliminary stage along with the demands for greater productivity often lead in turn to discontent and additional curbs on civil liberties.*

Practically all Marxists are now in agreement that the Russian “Model T” road to socialism can no longer serve as an example for other countries. Each nation will effect a transition to socialism according to its specific national political traditions and institutions.

This view, however, does not imply that each country develops fundamental laws of social change valid only for itself or that the great social transformations in this century do not exhibit common general laws and features.

Under conditions of peaceful coexistence, the industrially backward countries comprising eighty per cent of humanity may advance to socialism free of the burdens that hampered Soviet development—without the immense depletions in the national wealth resulting from war

*Some American Marxists have been speculating on the state of civil liberties during the first stage of socialism in the United States. Max Weiss, a Communist Party theoretician, has announced that a socialist America would extend fullest democratic liberties during even its first stage to all, including opponents of socialism. The basis for this possible exception does not lie as is imagined by some in the character of the American democratic heritage but in the exceedingly advanced technology and productivity of this country. The leadership of a Peoples Democratic United States could make drastic reductions in the people's debts, mortgages, rent and tax loads and otherwise demonstrate the advantages of the new over the old. It is nevertheless impossible to predict the state of civil liberties during this initial period. Until it is thoroughly bankrupt, the old does not yield place. No one can determine today the degree of class struggle, economic decay, moral corruption and degeneration the American capitalist system and society will exhibit on the eve of the transition to socialism. It is thus impossible to foretell the degree or kind of suppression required during this period.

devastations and unremitting war preparations.* But it still remains to be demonstrated whether countries like India will be able to abolish mass famine, build an industrial base commensurate with its population and raise the national per capita output from the present \$55 per year even to only \$1,000 (the United States' 1954 level was \$2,240) without imposing semi-military discipline, curbing civil liberties, requiring sacrifices and suppressions and introducing the leadership of a revolutionary workingclass party.

The gradualists would avoid this stage of suppression allegedly in the interests of preserving individual freedoms and avoiding injustice. But the gradualist toll of suffering, sacrifice and injustice is immeasurably greater than the revolutionary. In India alone the number of people who perish unnecessarily every year from disease and poverty runs into the millions. The opponents of Leninism are blind to this injustice and immorality.

“Justice,” Marx declared, “can never rise superior to the economic conditions of society and the cultural developments conditioned by them.” (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*) Marx necessarily was referring to the legal systems and concepts of justice prevailing before the development of socialism. Socialism seeks to overcome this inexorable interdependence between justice and economic conditions. But the degree to which socialist consciousness becomes a potent social force depends on the extent to which socialist society acquires the material means for liberating itself from bondage to the past, to the vestiges of the old within and surrounding it.

*According to a recent statement by Bulganin, “the Soviet Union spent during the last thirty-eight years almost half the total output on wars forced upon it and in healing war wounds.”