

# Two Viewpoints on Herschel Meyer Book

By WILLIAM L. PATTERSON

"The Khrushchev Report and the Crisis in American Life" is a book that every U.S. Marxist should read and that every non-Marxist who can be persuaded to read should have in hand. Hershel D. Meyer has made a significant contribution to objective thinking in the realm of political science.

In "The Khrushchev Report" this Marxist scholar has dealt as few other American Marxists, with the nature and content of N. S. Khrushchev's criticism of the mistakes of Joseph Stalin. Meyer has done this at a most propitious moment, while the Communist Party of the United States of America is in the throes of fierce debates concerning "basic tenets of Marxism." Meyer sees this report as a vital factor which "brought to a head a long maturing crisis" in the American left and says that with the recognition of past errors, or what now appear to be errors, the disheartening effect of the Khrushchev revelations along with the isolation of the American Communist Party have intensified frustration and confusion.

One should not go too far in this direction. This book itself is an antidote against confusion and frustration.

This book can be extremely valuable to those seeking greater clarity and insight into the monumental Stalin era.

Mr. Meyer believes that the Khrushchev report exposed Stalin's worst personal traits and their evil effects upon the Party but that it dealt with these in "almost total isolation from other casual factors."

Meyer does not see these events in isolation nor do leading Marxists in the Soviet Union, in Italy, France, and most of the Eastern European Peoples Republics, to say nothing about the leading Marxist spokesmen of People's China; all of these figures have stated in one way or another: "The single-handed preoccupation with the survival of the socialist system the preparations for the second World War and then for a possible Third World War—all required a highly centralized apparatus, a semi-military chain of command and frequently the institution of crude devices of reward and punishment." And these were the "objective causes for the weakening of Marxist-Leninist morality, justice and legality." The proof is in the book.

With reference to the latter, this Marxist author pertinently asks: "Ought not the liberals and Marxists who today cavil 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? (emphasis Hershel D. Meyer). 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?"

How well might Dr. Meyer have contrasted the almost impenetrable atmosphere of threats, intrigues and provocations against the USSR and those "free country" conditions of "law and order," the intrigues, persecutions, bombings and murders to which Negroes seeking the enjoyment of American democracy are subjected to in the southern states of the U.S.A.

Meyer clearly shows that the historical development of the socialist countries inevitably leads to an end result which "is not dictatorship but an expanding people's democratic order and its gradual transition from government for the people to one also by and of the people."

In *The Crisis in the American Left* Meyer draws the lessons that flow from the Khrushchev report and

(We asked Robert Friedman to discuss Dr. Meyer's book. Since the book is highly critical of the Daily Worker we also secured, in the interest of fairness, an additional review by William L. Patterson.)

their impact upon some members of the American Party. "Anti-party and anti-Soviet accusations were," he says, "voiced along with attacks upon Marxism-Leninism as a mumbo-jumbo . . . some members have even urged the party's dissolution." This has brought the party to "the most critical juncture of its development."

However, Meyer recognizes that the crisis in the American Communist Party goes in time and extent beyond the Khrushchev report. He deals with its mistakes and calls for a reorientation upon the American scene. He emphatically states that " . . . the contradictions in American capitalist society do not manifest themselves solely in the economic sphere. Non-Marxist observers express increasing alarm at the degeneration of U.S. social and cultural life. Large sections of the nation are increasingly conscious that the greed and tension of our acquisitive economy leads to dehumanization, moral corrosion, fear, anxiety, mental breakdowns, family disruption, juvenile delinquency, crime and other symptoms of social decay."

Meyer concludes that: "The party cannot resign prestige by perfunctory admissions of 'bureaucracy' or 'wrong methods of work' nor will it stop there as it moves to rectify the present intolerable situation. Meyer believes that the present crisis may impel a significant transformation in the party and result in the institution of what the Chinese Communist Party defines as "the fundamental principle of the Marxist-Leninist line of work"—"the summing up of scattered unsystematic views, then taking the resultant ideas back to the people, explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own, stand up for them and translate them into action."

Estimates will necessarily differ on some of the conclusions Herschel D. Meyer has drawn. Those who believe that conditions in the USSR and the Eastern People's Democracies call for changes in name and form of the American Party may not like this book. But the author has given food for thought at a most critical moment in the life of the American Marxist movement. It can help light the path to an effective action program enhancing the prestige and strength of the CPUSA immeasurably.

## Theatre Openings

### Tonight

**VOLPONE**—An adaptation by Jules Romains of the Stefan Zweig version of the Ben Jonson play at the Winter Garden, presented by S. Hurok in cooperation with the French government. Performed by the Madeline Renaud-Jean Louis Barrault company.

### Thursday Night

**A VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET**—A new play by Gore Vidal at the Booth Theater, presented by George Axelrod and Clinton Wilder. Cyril Richard heads the cast, which he directed.

**LE MISANTHROPE**—A revival of the Moliere play at the Winter Garden. Performed by the Renault-Barrault company.

**JERRY LEWIS**—A variety show at the Palace Theatre starring Mr. Lewis with Eydie Gorme and the Wiere Brothers.

### Off Broadway

#### Tuesday Night

**MRS. PATTERSON**—A revival of the play by Charles Sebree and Greer Johnson at the Davenport Theater, presented by Trio Productions. The cast is headed by Irene Kane and features Andrew Prince

## THE KHRUSHCHEV REPORT AND THE CRISIS IN THE AMERICAN LEFT.

By Hershel Meyer. Independence Publishers. Brooklyn, 111 pp. \$1. Paper.

By ROBERT FRIEDMAN

This booklet is, in fact, an extended contribution to the present discussion on the future of socialism. As such it is no more conducive to ordinary reviewing than is a letter to this paper's Speak Your Piece column. Either you agree with the author—in whole or in part—or you don't.

I happen to "don't", in good part. I think Dr. Meyer deserves credit for having not only the courage of his convictions but the zeal to make them available in printed form. I found his polemic, however, confusing and contradictory.

Meyer presents a lengthy review of imperialist crimes as a preface to his treatment of the crimes enacted in the Soviet Union against Communists (by Communists) and concludes that "murder committed under the deluded but firm conviction that it serves to prevent the murder of millions in war, and to preserve social gains, cannot be measured by the same moral yardstick as murder committed in order to launch a war or to prevent social change."

Yet, though he suggests elastic "yardsticks", he subsequently asserts that "for these cruel perversions of justice there could not have been and was not any historical necessity" and categorically attributes Stalin's crimes to "Stalin's paranoia".

Whatever the state of Stalin's mental health in his last years of life, is it not a parody of Marxist social analysis to predate that illness to his most vigorous middle years when as the Khrushchev report suggests, his usurpation of power and abuses of socialist democracy were well under way?

By what logic does Meyer devote page after page to a search for the socio-historical reasons for the catalogue of injustices revealed by Khrushchev, only to sweep them all away with the pronouncement that one man's madness was all to blame?

On page 15, Meyer writes about the "historic pressures that conditioned and impelled Stalin to his tragic crimes."

On page 18, however, Meyer categorically asserts that: "These crimes are related to a historical accident—Stalin's paranoia—a factor outside the realm of politics and economics or what is commonly referred to as objective historical circumstances."

I'm sorry but I can't take such writing seriously. Unfortunately, the pamphlet

contains other contradictions of fact and interpretation. The author, who is critical of this paper's stand on Hungarian and Polish events, writes: "Thus the Daily Worker joined the New York Times and anti-Soviet spokesmen in hailing the events in Poland and Hungary." And, "The Daily Worker has found itself in the distinguished company of Chancellor Adenauer and Countess Esterhazy (formerly the chief Hungarian feudal landowner) in denouncing the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian counter-revolution."

The above, I submit, is not serious political discussion about matters which, Lord knows, are open to sincere differences, but vulgar heckling, unworthy of an author who is searching for the answers to difficult questions.

How distorted, unbelievably self-contradictory are Dr. Meyer's judgements can be seen from his treatment of the events in Poland. On one page we find him citing Gomulka as an authority. On another we have him complaining "That Polish Marxists should echo and even promote these nationalistic sentiments is surprising and alarming. In assigning the onus for all Poland's difficulties to the Soviet Union, these disgruntled leftwingers ignore the cold war pressures and threats of atomic war from the West. . . ."

In view of the recent electoral triumph of these "disgruntled leftwingers", to use Dr. Meyer's singularly ill-chosen phrase it seems that he has been over-hasty in his disparagement of people who, by all accounts, carry the future of Polish socialism on their shoulders.

As for Dr. Meyer's advice to the members of the Communist Party on the future of their organization, presumably the delegates to that organization's upcoming convention will weigh it along with the mountains of opinions already before it.

## Dance Calendar

### Tuesday

N. Y. CITY BALLET 8:30, "Concerto Barocco," "The Unicorn and the Gorgon and the Manticore," "Western Symphony."

### Wednesday

N. Y. CITY BALLET, 8:30, "The Unicorn, the Gorgon and Manticore," "Picnic at Tintagel" (revival) "Pied Piper."

### Thursday

N. Y. CITY BALLET, 8:30, "Filling Station," "The Masquers," "Pas de Trois," "Symphony in C." EVENING OF MODERN BALLET, 8:40, Carnegie Recital Hall, "The Automaton," "Three Gymnopedies," "Harpisichord Variations," "The Thornapple," "Balletto da Camera," "The Mask."

### Friday

N. Y. CITY BALLET, 8:30, "Four Temperaments," "Pas de Dix," "The Masquers," "Western Symphony."

### Saturday

N. Y. CITY BALLET. At 2:30 and 8:30, "The Nutcracker." GLADYS BAILIN, modern dancer, with group, 8:40, Henry Street Playhouse. "Two Preludes," "Suite," "Quartet," "Maelstrom."

## Classified Ads

### BABY SITTERS WANTED

BABY SITTERS urgently needed by parents of young children for Saturday, Feb. 9th, in order to get to the DAILY WORKER BALL. Baby sitters can apply for jobs at home of your nearest neighbor who has a small child.

### MUSIC INSTRUCTION

REGISTER now for Courses at the Metropolitan Music School, 18 West 74 St. Pre-school Children's and Adult Departments, Children's Chorus Dance & Drama. Instruction in all instrumental and theoretical subjects.

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and Stefan Giersach. Directed by Jack Balch.

### Wednesday Night

**A HOUSE REMEMBERED**—A new play by Louis A. Lippa at the Actors' Playhouse, presented by S. Beryl Lush. Byrne Piven and Miriam Phillips head the cast. Directed by Mr. Lippa.

### Friday Night

**THERE IS NO END**—A new play by Anthony Palma at the Covenant Theater, 52 E. 78th St., presented by Mr. Palma.