

# PRAVDA AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

By ALAN MAX

ONE PARAGRAPH in Monday's Daily Worker editorial on the Polish events was rather widely quoted. It ran as follows:

"We believe that Pravda had a right to discuss what it didn't approve of in Poland, just as the Polish press has the right to disagree with

Pravda. We are dubious, however, of imputing on a blanket scale to sections of the Polish press the desire to restore capitalism. This sounds too

much like some of the unjustified criticism made of Yugoslavia in 1948."

This criticism of Pravda has two angles to it: first, the way Pravda unjustly (in our opinion) impugned the motive of the Polish press, and, secondly the broader question of freedom of the press.

I should like to say something further on the latter question.

Perhaps we on the Daily Worker are somewhat sensitive on this score because of our own sins over the years, when we virtually refused to print—until a few months ago—any letter in which a reader disagreed with us on a major question.

WHAT INCENSED the Polish workers, students and others over the past few months was the evident pressure from the Soviet leaders for a brake upon the recently achieved freedom of the press and for a return to the, in my opinion, unfortunate practices which still mark the Soviet press. This pressure reached a climax with the trip to Warsaw by Soviet Premier Bulganin in July. At that time Bulganin publicly criticized the Polish press, in which he saw attempts at "weakening under the label of so-called 'national peculiarity,' the international bonds of the Socialist camp and the attempts at undermining the power of a people's democratic country under the label of an alleged 'broadening' of democracy."

Here I am not questioning the sincerity of the concern expressed by the Soviet leaders. Throughout this entire matter, there is no question in my mind that what the Soviet leaders were concerned with, in the first place, was the strengthening of socialism and of Soviet - Polish ties which are so vital for the peace of Europe and of the entire world.

I must, however, question the wisdom of the Soviet leaders in the way they attempted to solve the problem. It was not less democratization or slower democratization that was needed in Poland (and in other socialist countries too, for that matter) but more and faster democratization.

This, in fact, is the essence of what the DW editorial called the "historic days" of last week-end, when the forces of Polish socialist democratization won a tremendous victory. The result, I predict, will be not the weakening of socialism or of international socialist bonds, as the Soviet leaders feared, but exactly the opposite. The prestige of the

Polish Communist leaders among the Polish people at this moment is overwhelming. The Polish leaders will be in a better position to speed socialization and the indispensable ties between their country and the Soviet Union will now rest on the firm foundations of enthusiastic popular support.

IN ALL OF THIS, the Polish press, in my opinion, has played an excellent part—in giving expression to the pent-up dissatisfaction of the Polish working-class and other sections of the population.

Suppose the press did carry some articles that were actually wrong. What of it? There is no guarantee that a socialist press will be right most of the time unless it is ready also to risk printing views that may be wrong. It is in the free clash of views that the truth triumphs. As Wladyslaw Gomulka declared in his historic speech to the Communist Party's Central Committee:

"The truth told to the nation shall become the source of

strength."

It is through the free exchange of views and through real freedom of information that those elements in Poland who are hostile to socialism and to the Soviet Union will be defeated.

It was the Soviet leaders themselves who at the 20th Congress in Moscow drew the clearest picture of the significance of the existence of an entire zone of socialist states and of the changes needed in the relations among Communist parties and socialist countries. But one of the inevitable lessons that needs to be drawn is to do away with the rigidities of the past. What might appear to be a loosening up will actually, under the conditions of today, provide a stronger international working-class solidarity than ever.

For a paper like the DW, which fights so steadfastly for freedom of the press in our own country where there are distinct limitations, we can show no less concern for the observance of this great democratic tradition in all the countries of socialism.