

THE REVALUATION OF STALIN'S WORK

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THE ADVANCE of Stalin to key leadership in the USSR began upon the death of Lenin in January 1924. It was consolidated during the long struggle against the Trotsky - Bukharin - Zinoviev opposition in the latter 1920's and early 1930's. This definitely established him as the Party leader, which he remained thenceforth, until his death in March, 1953. What is happening now in the USSR is the beginning of a critical survey of this crucial period of Soviet history, especially of the role of Stalin as the theoretical and practical leader. The present leadership has already demonstrated, by its firm line, that it is well capable of making this political examination.



The revaluation of Stalin's work began shortly after his death, an early marked manifestation of it being the reversal of Party and Soviet policy towards Yugoslavia. But the review especially manifested itself at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held during February of this year, when Stalin's work was subjected to sharp criticism. The main attack made was against his tendency towards one-man leadership, with the negation of criticism and self-criticism. Called into question also were some of his economic writings and various of his political policies.

ALL THIS, of course, is only the beginning of a fresh estimate of Stalin and his activities. After what has already been said, a thorough revaluation of all this has now become very necessary—for two major reasons. For one thing, the bourgeoisie has seized upon the criticism of Stalin as a justification of all the slanders which it has been circulating for years against the USSR, and these must be refuted; and secondly, large numbers of workers, including many Communists, among whom Stalin has enjoyed a tremendous prestige, have become troubled with many questions, to which must be given basic answers. These problems can be met solely by a thorough review of Stalin's work and this can be done most authoritatively only by those leaders who have worked closely with him in the top circles of the Communist Party and the government of the Soviet Union.

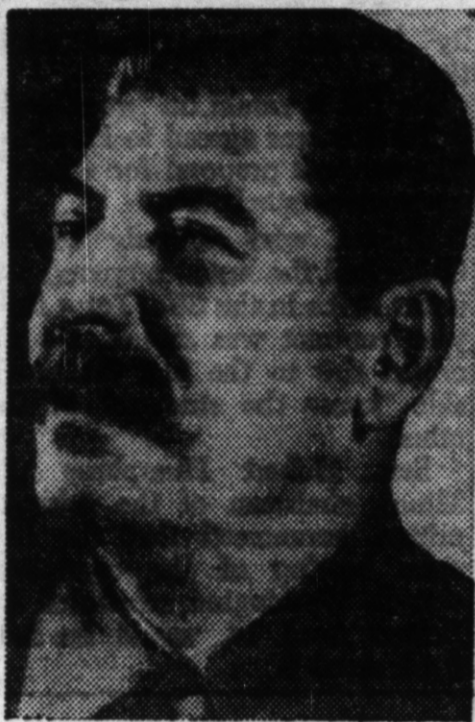
One thing which has become clear in the discussion so far is that Stalin made serious errors in his failure to develop a real collective leadership. This undoubtedly tended to hinder the initiative of other leading forces and also to distort, more or less, the line of the Party. The general question is, to what extent these negative effects prevailed? Specific questions are what, if any, decisive political mistakes were made by Stalin? What alternative policies to Stalin's were suggested by others and rejected? What resistance was made in top official circles to Stalin's trend towards super-centralization and denial of collective leadership? Were injustices committed during the purges?

No doubt, as the review proceeds, these and many additional important questions will be clarified by the Soviet leaders. Meanwhile, our task is neither to rush indignantly to the defense of Stalin nor to tear him to political shreds, as some in our ranks seem inclined to do.

AT THIS TIME, the leadership of other Communist parties, including our own, are being questioned for not having criticized Stalin's errors which are only now being made public. In this respect, the general line of Communist parties, especially since the dissolution of the Communist International (in whose Congresses the work of all the parties came more or less under discussion), has been to rely upon the self-criticism of the respective parties for estimates of their shortcomings, rather than to indulge in general criticism from afar.

Stalin's excessive stress upon individual leadership did not, of course, grow out of thin air. It had an objective basis in the severe trials and struggles of the Soviet people during the past generation, throughout the period of Stalin's leadership. To meet these tasks required imperatively a high degree of centralization and a strong discipline, without which failure must have ensued.

Among these vitally urgent tasks may be mentioned, the prolonged struggle against the inner and outer Party opposition, the long-continued, monumental



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effort to industrialize the country; the formulation and application of several five-year plans; the carrying through of the bitter world war against Hitlerism; the vital test of Soviet strength during the cold war in recent years, the struggle for the policy of peaceful co-existence, and many others. Under such circumstances, which demanded the last ounce of effort upon the part of the Soviet people, it was not difficult to fall into Stalin's command methods of leadership.

THE FOREGOING conditions do not condone or justify Stalin's incorrect methods of work, but they at least help to explain how they could have developed in the great Communist Party of the USSR. They also help to emphasize the need of eternal vigilance against the dangers of bureaucracy. This is a lesson that the Communist Party, U.S.A., among others, can well take to heart.

In the past, we had to learn at great cost, in the affair of the renegade Browder, the danger attendant upon allowing too much power to concentrate in the hands of one individual. Centralization and discipline are powerful Leninist weapons and they have contributed basically to Communist strength all over the world. But they may nevertheless be incorrectly used and can grow into a serious danger. There is imperative need for collective leadership, for criticism and self-criticism, and for a never-ending struggle against bureaucracy and for Party democracy.

In facing up to the revaluation of Stalin's policies and prestige which is now getting under way, Communists and other left forces must be doubly vigilant not to fall into the bourgeois trap of

making a negative and destructive sum-up of this whole situation. Above all, we must remember and keep in the forefront of our discussion of this important question, the elementary fact that during the past generation, throughout the period of Stalin's leadership, the USSR made stupendous progress in nearly every direction in the building of socialism.

Among the more important of its individual achievements were the great ideological and political victory over the Trotskyites and other opportunists; the unparalleled industrialization of the country, with central stress upon heavy industry; the collectivization of agriculture; the building of the invincible armed forces of the USSR; the leadership in the pre-war fight against fascism and during World War II; the blocking of the Wall St. warmakers in the cold war; the creation of the world-leading educational system in the Soviet Union, and, on the basis of all this progress, the drastic raising of the living standards and cultural levels of the Soviet people. And of vital significance, too, is the fact that notwithstanding all these complex tasks and problems the unity of the Party has been maintained—let us recall Lenin's deep concern just prior to his death about the grave danger of a disastrous split in the Party.

The general result of all these Soviet policies and achievements has been that the USSR, along with People's China and the people's democracies of Europe and Asia, have together become so strong that they are now rapidly overtaking and surpassing world capitalism on every front. Undoubtedly, particularly in view of Stalin's failure to develop a genuine collective leadership many serious mistakes were made in the course of the great surge forward during the past generation, without which, in all probability, Socialism would have made still more rapid progress than it has done.

VERY PROBABLY all this will be made clear in the review of this past period that is now getting under way in the Soviet Union. We will get a better, more balanced picture of the role of Stalin. Obviously, however, he is entitled to a great share of the credit for the tremendous progress made by the Soviet Union during the past three decades. But it is also clear that he has taken the lion's share; that his mistakes have been minimized or covered up, and that due credit has not been accorded to the Party, to the Central Committee, and to Stalin's immediate co-workers for the work done during the years in question. Such a self-critical review as is now beginning could not possibly be made by any bourgeois government.

We may be confident, that from this situation, the Communist Party of the USSR will draw valuable and constructive political and organizational lessons. The Party will emerge from the review of Stalin's work and of the history of the Soviet Union during the past generation, considerably stronger ideologically, more unified organizationally and politically, and all the better equipped to meet the heavy tasks that still lie ahead. The Stalin revaluation is another of the many complex problems that the people of the Soviet Union have had to face along the way, in their long and difficult revolutionary struggle. Of course, they will also master this problem, and in the doing, they will bring forth lessons of great value for the workers of all the world.