

Stalin's popularity among the Soviet people and among friends of socialism throughout the world derived from their conviction of his concern for the people's welfare and for peace and progress. His ruthlessness toward alleged enemies and his extreme suspiciousness and other negative characteristics appeared as virtues, especially to the Soviet people. The huge obstacles they had to overcome and the threat of further devastation while they were still digging themselves out of the ruins of World War II created a tense, determined mood among them. Indeed almost any accusation in regard to the enemy must have appeared credible. Their state of mind and their concept of justice were determined by the loss of millions of loved ones and the tortures and agonies imposed upon them by German and international fascism. The majority of the Soviet people thus accepted the draconian measures as necessary for the security and defense of their socialist homeland.

This attitude is understandable. The objective conditions which shaped this state of mind, however, also served as an impenetrable shield for a state of affairs where evil could parade as virtue. Moreover the people were aware of Stalin's constant public pleadings with party officials and administrators to "first of all learn to value people, not to fling people about like pawns . . . to display the greatest solicitude towards workers little or big" and "of all the valuable capital the world possesses, the most valuable and most decisive is people." These humanist slogans were emblazoned on countless banners across the entire Soviet land as the essence of Stalinist socialism.

This humanism embraced its opposite also and apparently without contradiction. In the very speech from which these slogans are quoted, delivered on May 4, 1935 and published under the title "The Soviets and the Individual," Stalin presented the following theses:

"In order to accumulate the funds for the creation of a first-class industry in a country of famine and medieval darkness, we had to impose a rigorous economy in everything, to arm ourselves with strong nerves, to march on unswervingly toward a straight goal, without permitting any wavering or uncertainty in our ranks. But not all our comrades had the necessary spirit, patience and grit. They said, 'What is the good of your industrialization? It would be better if you gave the population more consumer goods, more of the small things which adorn the life of man.' But with such a plan we should have found ourselves in captivity to the bourgeoisie. We chose the plan of advance and moved forward along the Leninist road, brushing these comrades aside. But these comrades didn't always confine themselves to criticism and passive resistance. They threatened to raise a revolt in the party against the Central Committee. More, they threatened some of us with bullets. They forgot that the more the enemies rage and the more hysterical the foes within the party become, the more red hot the Bolsheviks become for fresh struggles and the more vigorously they push forward. It is true that in our course we were obliged to handle some of these comrades roughly. But we cannot help that. I must confess that I too took a hand in this business. (Loud cheers)"

The loud cheers were not confined to the hall where Stalin spoke. They reverberated among Communists the world over, none of whom then realized what Stalin meant

by "brushing aside comrades" and "handling them roughly." Marxists at that time could not believe Stalin capable of ordering the executions of innocent people, for they could not conceive of themselves committing such crimes.

Before the eyes of the entire world there stood the incontestable historic achievements of socialism under Stalin's leadership: the great strides in science and education and the undeniable love and loyalty of the majority of the Soviet people to their leader. The existence of a cesspool of crime in this society seemed most unlikely.

It would be false, therefore, to claim that Communists did not approve of any rough handling of enemies who, as Stalin warned, "threatened us with bullets," or that Communists were wholly unaware of excesses in regard to the "enemies of the people." "Toughness" was sanctioned. Doubts were rejected disdainfully as "softness." Reports of violations of justice in the Soviet Union were rejected as anti-Soviet fabrications.

There were theoretical justifications for this close-mindedness. But this one-sided rationalization did not develop in a vacuum. It was shaped by the events of that period.