

## *THE CORRUPTION OF LENINISM*

The decisive characteristic of the first stage of socialism is the struggle between the dying and that which is being born and the fierce stubbornness of the old before yielding to the new. The struggle undergoes constant development. Its forms and expressions today in the Soviet Union are different from those that prevailed in the thirties, but the obstacles presented either by the blatant or subtle forms of this contradiction are far from overcome. There are in the Soviet Union today millions of people of a new type—creators and builders imbued with a socialist

consciousness transforming the face of the land and its social structure. But bureaucrats, careerists, thieves and embezzlers still exist in the crevices of Soviet society along with wholly corrupt, degenerate, anti-social and anti-Soviet elements (one per cent? two per cent? two or five million people?). The fact that part of the Soviet population in occupied regions collaborated with the nazi invaders and even participated in criminal activities is proof that the Soviet Union was still riddled with bitterly anti-Soviet elements even after the war. These remnants or "defects," as Marx called them (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*), "are unavoidable when, after long travail, communism emerges from the old society."

These remnants like every social aggregate seek political expression and engage in underground activities when prevented from engaging in political activity openly.

"It was evident," wrote Pietro Nenni after the publication of the Krushchev report "that Soviet public life had undergone in the previous ten years a double process of degeneration. On the one hand, of the party and state machine towards forms of bureaucratization and terrorism, and on the other hand, of the internal opposition towards forms of conspiracy and palace revolution." Palmiro Togliatti declared: "The real problems are lost sight of, which are: how and why Soviet society arrived at certain forms of estrangement from democratic life and the legality that had been established, even at forms of degeneration."

In reply the report of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party stated that "there are no grounds for raising such a question as to whether Soviet society has not arrived at 'certain forms of degeneration.'"

Indeed, a society becomes corrupt or degenerate when

illegality, crime and oppression serve to enrich or maintain it. The crimes of the Stalin era were manifestly in contradiction to the needs and aspirations of the Soviet society. Practically every visitor returning from the Soviet Union, including bitter anti-Communists, report the generally friendly, warm, humanist spirit of the Soviet people, their love and devotion to science and culture and genuine hatred of injustice, racism, violence and oppression. None can deny that Soviet schools, newspapers, magazines, books, films, radio and television programs today, as during the Stalin period, seek to teach friendship and peace.

The Soviet party, however, must have stagnated or even arrived at some "forms of degeneration" during that period. The Krushchev report speaks of "party people fearing their own shadows," of "flatterers, routinism, sterile formalization" and "lessened initiative." Indeed, could thousands of leading Leninists be liquidated and the party remain healthy? These reports indicate some corruption of Leninist principles among sections of the party. And it would be preposterous to assume that the Leninist core about whom the Central Committee document speaks has already succeeded in restoring Leninism within the party as a whole.\*

Neither the deviations from Leninism in the Soviet party nor the violations of socialist justice can be attributed solely to the personal traits of Stalin. The party and Stalin both deviated from the Leninist path on a whole series of questions. It failed in its role of vanguard also in relation to the Stalin cult. The cult could not have been established or assumed such enormous dimensions

\*It was certainly no example of Leninism when *Pravda* arbitrarily omitted sentences referring to the crippling of Soviet Jewish culture and the execution of many of its leading exponents in a reprint of an article by Eugene Dennis.

had the Soviet party been more vigilant. Although there were periods when the prevention of errors was practically impossible, yet even during the difficult war years, according to Krushchev, party leaders and military chiefs found ways to circumvent Stalin's directives when they thought them incorrect.

There were, of course, objective causes for the weakening of Marxist-Leninist morality, justice and legality: the singleminded preoccupation with the survival of the socialist system, the preparations for the Second World War and then for a possible Third World War — all requiring a highly centralized apparatus, a semi-military chain of command and frequently the institution of crude devices of reward and punishment.

In the process of accomplishing the huge tasks, the party was allowed to merge with the state apparatus. Strict party supervision had to be imposed on projects that were stagnating. The ideological and educational functions of the party were neglected. Praise, recognition and status were reserved for those who got things done. Leninist principles of party conduct and morality were often ignored. The party became riddled with authoritarian "little Stalins," careerists and bureaucrats, as Mikoyan and Suslov have pointed out. Always surrounding themselves with toadies, bureaucrats face no criticism.

The urgent demands of the war and of the postwar period served to accentuate this trend. In the face of the threat of A-bomb war, failure to keep pace with the West meant disaster. The situation was complicated by the depletion of the party cadres at the battlefield. The Marxist-Leninist education of the youth who matured during the war period was necessarily deficient. The pressures after the war continued this lack. All these factors must have

contributed to an ideological decay among various party circles, to a decline of vigilance and to a complacent, cavalier attitude toward errors and injustices.

The leaders who merely write, supervise, plan or direct are especially susceptible to the degeneration of bureaucratism. There is something about a desk and the walls of an office that deaden perception. Those who issue orders often lose some of their humanity. Many of them become bureaucrats without sympathy for their associates, men of vision often turning into robots or power-hungry monsters.

The new material wealth created by socialism in the newly constructed factories does not automatically produce socialist humanism as it does hairpins or tractors. The educator, according to Marx, must educate himself. But schooling and study of theory alone does not develop the new type of socialist man. In order to educate himself, the educator must leave his ivory tower, even abandon his role as educator and learn from the people who themselves are changing in the process of transforming nature and society.

It is the function of a Marxist-Leninist party to discover onesidedness and degenerative tendencies and to intervene *before* they lead to disastrous consequences. The mere recognition of errors does not represent the fulfillment of responsibility. In this respect, the Soviet party has apparently failed in upholding some essential Leninist principles.

It must be emphasized, however, that the Soviet Communist Party, buffeted by storms that might have shattered another party, did maintain its over-all integrity. Millions of workers and party people remained firm in their convictions and loyalty to socialism. They carried

on despite injustices and despite the shock of the executions of respected leaders. The party was the chief victim of Stalinist terror, but it proved indestructible. It continued educating new cadres and solving difficult problems despite Stalin's degeneration as a leader. Many who perished in the Stalin purges regarded themselves properly as martyrs to the cause of socialism. They were as much victims of counterrevolution as those who had fallen during the civil war period.

Those victims who survived have exhibited a nobility inexplicable to people of a bourgeois outlook. Numerous revolutionaries remained loyal to socialism in the face of imprisonment, maltreatment and the humiliation of being branded traitors. The devotion manifested by these martyrs was based on the conviction that under socialism, truth would ultimately prevail over falsehood. Such stamina, dedication and understanding was exhibited by our own Anna Louise Strong.