



Stalin

A POLITICAL
BIOGRAPHY

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A

STALIN

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

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relating to this as well as to other periods of Stalin's career—given to me by statesmen, diplomats, and politicians of many nationalities and conflicting political views whose activities have at one time or another brought them into touch with Stalin. To these men, whose names I cannot mention, I gratefully acknowledge my debt.

I make no apology for calling this work a political biography. I admit that I am inclined to study the politics rather than the private affairs of public men. And altogether apart from this, it is impossible to narrate the private life of Stalin, since only one private letter of his has yet come to light, and this in the confiscated book by A. S. Alliluyeva, his sister-in-law.¹ Nearly all biographers who have been tempted to delve into this aspect of Stalin's life have had little of real interest to say, or have had to be content with unverifiable gossip. Even so shrewd an observer and so notable a writer as Trotsky, who sat with Stalin in the Politbureau for nearly ten years, was no exception to this rule.

As to the early and middle periods of Stalin's career, it is not the scarcity of documentary evidence but its abundance and contradictoriness that have troubled the biographer. Stalin's life-story is like an enormous palimpsest, where many scripts are superimposed upon one another, each script dating from a different period, each written by a different hand, each giving a different version of events. Even the scripts in Stalin's own handwriting contradict each other glaringly. I trust that the reader of this book will find in it an explanation of this bizarre circumstance. For more than twenty years I have watched the progress of this palimpsest and now I have examined it again, script after script, and compared, checked, and cross-checked the conflicting versions. Here I have set out my findings. I have tried to avoid encumbering this narrative unduly with an account of the involved processes of comparative analysis by which I have arrived at my conclusions. This, I am certain, would have wearied the reader beyond measure. Students and experts, however, will find the necessary clues in my footnotes, where references to sources hostile and friendly to Stalin frequently appear side by side.

¹ This letter is quoted on page 128. One cannot, of course, regard as private the few letters published for the first time in Stalin's *Sochineniya* in the last two years, for these he wrote, as a rule, *ex officio*.

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as the parish priest respectfully greeted by the neighbours. The prospect was dazzling—only a few years before, ecclesiastical schools were still closed to children of peasant estate.

Soso attended the Gori school for five years, from 1888 till 1893. Usually he was one of the best or even the best pupil in his form. Teachers and schoolmates alike quickly noticed that the poor pockmarked boy had a quite extraordinary memory and learned his lessons almost without effort. They also noticed a streak of self-assertiveness, an eagerness to outshine others that waxed the keener the more Soso grew aware that most of his schoolmates came from wealthier homes than his, and that some of them, also aware of the difference, looked down on him. Nevertheless, he had the advantage in the classroom, where he could recite his lessons with greater ease than the pampered offspring of wine or wheat merchants; while in the playground he excelled them so much in agility and daring that they let themselves be bossed and ordered about by the shoemaker's boy. It was in this obscure parish school that the future Stalin had his first taste of class differences and class hatred.

There, too, he had his first glimpse of a problem that was to keep him preoccupied in his mature years—the problem of national minorities. Georgian was the Djughashvili's native tongue. Ekaterina knew no Russian at all; and it is doubtful whether her husband had as much as a smattering of it. At school most lessons were taught in Russian—the curriculum provided for only a few lessons in Georgian every week. Soso absorbed the alien language with the ease natural to his age. But out of school and at home he went on talking Georgian. The native tongue of some of his classmates may have been Armenian, or Turkish, or some Caucasian dialect. At school all the vernaculars were silenced, and Russian reigned supreme. This policy of Russification, enforced by the Government, caused bitterness. Even boys in their early teens staged school strikes and other demonstrations in defence of their native tongue. In the seventies, school riots were frequent in Georgia: Russian teachers were assailed and beaten up and pupils set fire to schools.¹ In the years when Djughashvili attended the Gori school there was no such turbulence, but there must have been much simmering resentment.

¹ *Istoriya Klasovoi Borby v Zakavkazi*, vol. i, Appendix, pp. 89–90.

was to make of him the rebel and revolutionary of later years. It is impossible to say just how strong was this awareness. Official Soviet biographers and memoirists claim that already at Gori their hero had read Darwin and become an atheist. One may doubt whether he could have read Darwin at so early an age. But he may have acquired a vague notion of the new theory from popular summaries, and his mind may have turned against religion. The fact of his precocious mental development is established, for in 1895, only a year after he had left the Gori school, he was already publishing verses in a leading Georgian periodical. He must have tried his hand at verse-writing while at Gori. His official biographers also claim that it was there that he first acquainted himself with Marxian ideas. This seems highly improbable: by that time Marxism had won only a few converts at Tiflis, the capital of Transcaucasia, and its influence could hardly yet have spread to the Gori school.¹ Stalin's apologists are only too ready to project his 'Marxist-Leninist' orthodoxy almost into his childhood. Subsequent events seem to warrant no more than the following hypothesis: young Djughashvili left the Gori school in a mood of some rebelliousness, in which protest against social injustice mingled with semi-romantic Georgian patriotism. While in the upper forms, he had been much more impressed by the nostalgic nationalism of Georgian poetry than by any sociological ideas. 'In the upper classes of the Gori school', writes one of his school-fellows, Vano Ketskhoveli, 'we became acquainted with Georgian literature, but we had no mentor to guide our development and give a definite direction to our thoughts. Chavchavadze's poem "Kako the Robber"' made a deep impression on us. Kazbegi's heroes awakened in our youthful hearts a love for our country, and each of us, on leaving school, was inspired with an eagerness to serve his country. But none of us had a clear idea what form this service should take.'² Since Djughashvili was careful to conceal his rebellious sentiments from his teachers they regarded him as an exemplary pupil and helped him to the next stage of his career.

¹ L. Berya, *On the History of the Bolshevik Organizations in Transcaucasia*, p. 11; F. Makharadze, *Istoriya Rabochevo Dvizheniya v Gruzii*, pp. 114-28; S. T. Arkomed, *Rabocheye Dvizhenie i Sotsial-Demokratya na Kavkaze*, pp. 49-50.

² E. Yaroslavsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

That next stage was his matriculation, in the autumn of 1894, at the Theological Seminary of Tiflis. His mother's dream seemed to be coming true. As the poor washerwoman was unable to contribute to his upkeep at the seminary, the headmaster of the Gori school and the local priest succeeded in obtaining a scholarship for him. The promising boy must have felt encouraged by the prospect opening before him. The mere change from the small dreamy county town to the sprawling and turbulent capital of the Caucasus was dazzling. At the age of fifteen he was mature enough to realize the advantages of his new position, advantages that not so long ago were unattainable to peasant children. He must have travelled the forty miles to Tiflis with an exhilarating sense of his own social advancement, infinitely more real than the one that had lured his father on the journey from Didi-Lilo to Gori some twenty years before.

His stay at the Theological Seminary lasted from October 1894 till May 1899. For his intellectual development these were decisive, formative years. What broader influences were now to mould his mind?

In the last decade of the nineteenth century two problems agitated Georgian society: Georgian-Russian relations; and the consequences of the abolition of serfdom in the Caucasus.

Throughout the century Tsarist Russia was engaged in conquering the Caucasus and consolidating the conquest. Georgia, which had been a Russian vassal since 1783, completely lost her independence. The lot of the Georgians was in some respects similar to that of the Poles. But unlike the Poles, who in every generation rose in arms to fight for their independence, the Georgians made no serious attempt to break away from Russia. With them anti-Russian feeling combined with a relative indifference to national aspirations. Their grievance against Russia was tempered by the consciousness that Georgia had no chance of maintaining her independence in any case, and that of all her possible conquerors Russia was to be dreaded least. The last Georgian kings had surrendered to the Russian Tsar when Turkey and Persia had threatened to conquer their country. Religious considerations determined the choice—

from him an almost sensuous feeling of closeness to those who were at the very bottom of the social pyramid. The revolutionaries from the upper classes knew from personal contact only an *élite* of the working class, intelligent workmen who were susceptible to Socialist propaganda and eager to make friends with idealistic intellectuals. They would describe the great inert mass that was not so accessible to Socialist notions as the backward and unconscious sections of the proletariat. The Marxian revolutionaries had some idea of the dead weight of that backwardness. They remembered the lot of upper-class revolutionaries of a previous generation who idealistically 'went to the people' to work for their weal in their own midst, only to be bestially massacred by suspicious peasants or betrayed by them to the gendarmes. But the Marxists hoped that enlightenment and political experience would eventually bring to socialism even the backward and the unconscious. Meanwhile they, the theorists and the propagandists, had really no common language with the still unawakened masses. On the other hand, the first impulses that pushed young people from the upper classes towards socialism were usually those of humanitarian sympathy mixed with a sense of guilt. Such feelings made them see the oppressed classes as the embodiment of virtue and nobility of spirit.

The young Djughashvili must have had quite an exceptional, an almost instinctive, sensitiveness towards that element of backwardness in Russian life and politics, a sensitiveness that was to grow even stronger in future years. Though he, too, would now be chiefly interested in the advanced workmen, because it was only through them that the backward mass could be approached and shaken from its meekness and inertia, he would not at heart give himself to sanguine hopes or idealistic generalizations about the working class. He would treat with sceptical distrust not only the oppressors, the landlords, the capitalists, the monks, and the Tsarist gendarmes, but also the oppressed, the workers and the peasants whose cause he had embraced. There was no sense of guilt, not a trace of it, in his socialism. No doubt he felt some sympathy with the class into which he had been born; but his hatred of the possessing and ruling classes must have been much stronger. The class hatred felt and preached by the revolutionaries from the upper classes

could do without them. That hierarchy was in no way inferior to the officialdom of any normal, respectable, western European party. In some respects—in idealism, devotion to its cause, and even in education—it was superior. In the Menshevik pattern of the party it had no definite place or role. In theory, though by no means in actual fact, it was put on an equal footing with everybody else, 'every striker and Socialist-minded intellectual'. Martov was an ideologue and a man of letters, not the head of any hierarchy. Not so Lenin. Although as an ideologue and propagandist he was second to none of his rivals, he was, even in those early years, also the head of a revolutionary administration. He felt and behaved as such without shyness or inhibition. He defined clearly the framework of that administration, and exalted its activities to the plane of the ideal.¹ In Koba's eager response to Lenin's attitude there was therefore a streak of unconscious gratitude for moral promotion.

While the Socialist underground was torn by the controversy and the factions were beside themselves with polemical frenzy, they hardly noticed the outbreak of the first Russian revolution. The Bolsheviks were preparing a new Congress to be convened in London in April 1905. Lenin, having withdrawn from *Iskra*, at last succeeded in publishing a new periodical in Geneva—*Vperyod* (Forward). The Mensheviks announced that they would boycott the Congress and convene a conference of their own. Meanwhile, the Russo-Japanese war ended with the fall of Port Arthur and Russia's defeat. On 9 January 1905, according to the old Orthodox calendar, a huge crowd of workers, led by the priest Gapon, marched towards the Winter Palace in Petersburg to submit a petition to the Tsar. The procession was meant to be peaceful. Its participants were inspired by faith in the Tsar, from whom, they believed, bad advisers had kept the truth about the plight of the people. The tone of their petition was plaintive and timid. The loyal character of the demonstration was stressed by the many church icons and portraits of the Tsar carried by the demonstrators. The Tsarist

¹ 'We ought to raise the calling and the importance of the member of the party higher, higher and still higher', thus at the Congress Lenin wound up his speech on Paragraph 1 (*Sochineniya*, vol. vi, p. 459). 'We should have created', he added later, 'a coherent, honest *Iskra-Ministry*' (ibid., vol. vii, p. 65).

The rumour proved grossly exaggerated; and with some difficulty Lenin succeeded in persuading the sensitive commissar to resume office.

From the first day of its existence the Government was boycotted by the civil servants who refused to obey the orders of the new masters. 'Alexandra Kollontai', relates an eyewitness, '... appointed Commissar of Public Welfare ... was welcomed with a strike of all but forty of the functionaries in the Ministry. Immediately, the poor of the great cities ... were plunged in miserable want; delegations of starving cripples, of orphans with blue, pinched faces, besieged the building. With tears streaming down her face, Kollontai arrested the strikers until they should deliver the keys of the office and the safe.'¹ The revolution was still breaking the sabotage of its enemies with tears streaming down its face.

One of the first decrees of the Council of Commissars abolished the death sentence, in spite of Lenin's protests. The Cossack General Krasnov who marched on Petersburg to overthrow the Bolsheviks and disperse the Soviets was taken prisoner by the Red Guards and released on his solemn pledge that he would not resume the fight. Later Krasnov headed one of the White armies in southern Russia. It took time before the revolution, amid the gruelling experiences of civil war, wiped away its tears, ceased to trust the pledges of its foes, and learned to act with that fanatical determination which gave it some new and repulsive features, but to which it owed its survival. We shall soon find the 'man of steel' among those who weaned the revolution from its sensitive—or was it sentimental?—idealism.

In his own department Stalin met no sabotage by civil servants: for no special department dealing with the affairs of the various non-Russian nationalities had previously existed. He had to build up his Commissariat from scratch. At first the whole 'machinery' of his department consisted of a single table—in a room in the Smolny—on which a piece of cardboard had been pinned with the high-sounding name of the Commissariat. Later he secured a more impressive abode for his Commissariat through a strong-handed intervention in a somewhat comic scramble between the commissars for accommodation. Then he gathered around him a staff of assistants, Georgians, Poles,

¹ J. Reed, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-1.

Ukrainians, and Jews, people competent to deal with the problems of his Commissariat.¹

He had hardly begun the job when the first Council of People's Commissars ceased to exist. The right wing of the party, the former opponents of the insurrection, strongly represented in the Government, worked behind the scenes for a reconciliation with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. They urged their party to share power with the moderate Socialists. The demand was supported by Rykov, the Commissar of the Interior, Miliutin, the Commissar of Agriculture, Nogin, the Commissar of Industry and Trade, Lunacharsky, Kamenev (who had in the meantime been elected President of the Republic), and Zinoviev. These commissars resigned and so compelled Lenin to open negotiations with the other parties.² The attempt at reconciliation failed, however, because the Mensheviks insisted that Lenin and Trotsky, the two inspirers of the insurrection, should not be included in the coalition government. There was some hesitation about that condition in the Bolshevik Central Committee; but the majority saw in it an attempt 'at beheading the Bolshevik party' and rejected it. Stalin voted against the exclusion of Lenin and Trotsky and for bringing negotiations with the Mensheviks to an end. A new series of resignations from the Government and the Central Committee followed, which was only stopped when the recalcitrants were threatened with expulsion from the party. Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were the first to sign the statement containing the threat. The crisis did nevertheless lead to the formation of a new government which included the left wing of the Social Revolutionaries. This group, the only one willing to co-operate with Lenin and Trotsky, did so primarily in order to carry to its end the agrarian revolution.

It is difficult to understand the crucial role which Stalin came to play in the Soviet Government from its inception, unless due allowance is made for the effect that the 'softness' of most Bolshevik leaders had on Lenin. Their vacillations filled him with apprehension and alarm. He saw his Government confronted with almost insuperable adversities: internal chaos, economic paralysis, inevitable counter-revolution, and a legacy of war. He looked round to see which of his colleagues in the

¹ L. Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 256.

² J. Reed, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-4.

speaking from the view-point of the peasant', said Lenin.¹ Who could understand such language better than the son of Georgian peasants?

Stalin was not prominent in the debates which raged for the next two months in the Central Committee, the Government, at the fourth Congress of the Soviets, and at the seventh Congress of the party. (He was, incidentally, rather inconspicuous at any of the great debates, the true tournaments of ideas, in which the party periodically indulged during Lenin's lifetime.) But he said enough at a session of the Central Committee to show which way his mind worked: 'In accepting the slogan of revolutionary war we play into the hands of imperialism. Trotsky's attitude is no attitude at all. There is no revolutionary movement in the west, there are no facts [indicating the existence] of a revolutionary movement, there is only a potentiality; and we in our work cannot base ourselves on a mere potentiality. If the Germans begin to advance this will strengthen the counter-revolution in this country. . . . In October we talked about a holy war against imperialism, because we were told that the one word "peace" would raise revolution in the west. This has not been borne out. . . .'² Though he voted with Lenin there was a subtle difference in the emphasis of their arguments. Lenin, as usual, kept his eye on the facts and the potentialities of the situation and spoke about the delay in the development of the revolutionary movement in the west. Stalin grasped the facts and dismissed the potentialities—'there is no revolutionary movement in the west'. True, he added that if Trotsky's 'neither peace nor war' were to be accepted 'this would create the worst possible conditions for the revolutionary movement in the west', thereby implying that he, too, was concerned with that aspect of the problem. But in the context of his reasoning, this was hardly more than a casual tribute to obligatory Bolshevik parlance. The real weight of his argument was in his denial of the actuality of the revolutionary movement in the west and in his sour remark about the exploded illusions of October.

After many ups and downs in the stormy controversy which at times threatened to tear the party to pieces, after a break-

¹ *The Essentials of Lenin*, vol. ii, pp. 304-5.

² J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. iv, p. 27.

single party. Government by a single party had hitherto not been a plank in the Bolshevik programme. But the course of events was such that the Bolsheviks could not help becoming the country's sole rulers after their partners had refused to share responsibility for the peace. Alone in office, they still refrained from suppressing their opponents, except for the extreme right the initiators of the civil war. Only in June 1918, when the civil war was already in full swing, were the Mensheviks and the right wing Social Revolutionaries temporarily outlawed, on the ground that some of their members sided with the White Guards. The Mensheviks were again permitted to come into the open in November of the same year when they pledged themselves to act as a loyal opposition within the framework of the Soviet régime.

But already in July the left Social Revolutionaries provoked the first real outburst of Bolshevik terror. In an attempt to disrupt the peace and to force the Bolsheviks back into war against Germany, the left Social Revolutionary Jacob Blumkin assassinated the German Ambassador Count von Mirbach. A series of insurrections staged by the same party broke out in various places including Moscow, to which the Government transferred its seat after the conclusion of peace. On 30 August Lenin was wounded and two other Bolshevik leaders, Uritsky and Volodarsky, were assassinated by Social Revolutionaries. Trotsky narrowly escaped an attempt on his life. The Bolsheviks officially retorted with mass reprisals; and their self-defence was at least as savage as the onslaught to which they had been subjected. The spirit of those days can be gauged from a dispatch which Stalin sent to Sverdlov from Tsaritsyn, the future Stalingrad, whither he had gone as a political commissar: 'The War Council of the Northern Caucasian Military Region, having learned about the wicked attempt of capitalist hirelings on the life of the greatest revolutionary, the tested leader and teacher of the proletariat, Comrade Lenin, answer this base attack from ambush with the organization of open and systematic mass terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents.'¹ The message was signed by Stalin and Voroshilov, the Commander of the Tsaritsyn army. The Cheka (the Extraordinary Commission), the forerunner of the O.G.P.U., directed by the

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. iv, p. 128.

x Pole Dzerzhinsky, began a feverish activity which did not shrink from the shooting of hostages. The party responsible for the attempts and assassinations was, of course, outlawed. Such were the passions let loose by the peace of Brest Litovsk and such were its sombre consequences. Where he was posted, at Tsaritsyn, Stalin kept his word. The Red terror in the town, which was to bear his name, soon became a byword, just as the atrocities of the young Jacobin Fouché in Lyons were a byword in France nearly 130 years before. T Terror and counter-terror inexorably grew in a vicious and ever-widening spiral.

Another less important consequence of the Brest Litovsk controversy concerned the personal standing of the various Bolshevik leaders. Lenin emerged with enormous moral credit. He had shown that undogmatic logic and courage of conviction which enabled him to defy the party's prevailing mood, and the extraordinary power of persuasion which enabled him in the end to sway the mind of the party. The party and the country which had seen and heard him but little during the actual upheaval in October could now gauge his real stature, the rare virtues of his mind and character. During the crisis the 'deserter and strike-breaker' of October, Zinoviev, rallied to his side; and Lenin was as quick in forgetting an old grievance as he had been ruthless in voicing it. On the other hand, Trotsky suffered a temporary eclipse. He had laid bare an important weakness of his—a certain lack of plain realism, a propensity to verbal solutions and theatrical gestures in a situation which brooked neither. His eclipse was not serious. His moral authority was still second only to Lenin's. He resigned from the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, where he was replaced by Chicherin, and became the Commissar of War. In his new post he soon rose to a new climax of fame as the founder and builder of the Red Army. But among the leaders his attitude during the Brest Litovsk crisis was not forgotten; and it would be brought up against him several years later, in the bitter struggle over the succession to Lenin.

Stalin's position was correspondingly enhanced, though since the break-up of the coalition Government the Bolshevik triumvirate of the inner Cabinet ceased to exist. Since Stalin did not mount the rostrum to speak for peace in public, he made no gain in popularity. But he made himself even more

I am driving and scolding everybody who needs it. Rest assured that we shall spare nobody, neither ourselves nor others, and that we shall deliver the bread. . . .’ In his messages practical soberness mixed with a queer relish for expressions of ruthless determination.

The same message in which he asked for military powers gave the first hint of his conflict with Trotsky. It contained the following remark: ‘If only our war “specialists” (the shoemakers!) had not slept and been idle, the line would not have been cut; and if the line is restored this will be so not because of the military but in spite of them.’¹ This was the point over which the famous Tsaritsyn dispute started.

A few months before, after the complete disintegration of the old army, Trotsky had begun to build up the Red Army, first with volunteers and then with called-up workers and peasants. As the new army had no staff corps, Trotsky put officers of the old Tsarist army in charge of newly formed divisions and regiments; but, since the political reliability of the ex-officers was doubtful, he attached to them Communists as political commissars. The ‘military specialists’ were to train the army and lead it in battle, while the commissars were to watch the conduct of the officers, prevent, if need be, treason on their part, and ‘educate politically’ the rank and file. Each military order had to be signed by the commander and the commissar; and both were to enforce military discipline. The novel and bold experiment was at first viewed with apprehensive scepticism by the leaders of the party; it aroused the most violent opposition on the part of the left Communists. Lenin himself dropped his doubts only when he learned from Trotsky that about 40,000 ‘specialists’ had already been employed in the Red Army and that the whole military machine of the Republic would crumble if they were to be dismissed. Impressed by the shrewdness of the experiment, he threw the weight of his influence behind Trotsky, describing his move as the building of socialism with the bricks left over from the demolished old order, an indispensable method of building.²

Indispensable as it was, the experiment did not work smoothly.

¹ Ibid., pp. 118–19.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, vol. xxiv, pp. 65–6; L. Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas Revolyutsiya*, vol. i, pp. 154–73.

him sympathetically towards the 'Tsaritsyn group', even if he had viewed their doings with a critical eye.

The Tsaritsyn group refused to submit to the authority of the commander of the southern front, Sytin, a former Tsarist officer. Complaints about Voroshilov's insubordination were repeatedly wired from the command of the southern front to the General Staff and from the General Staff to Trotsky. Trotsky, in his turn, showered exhortations, injunctions, orders, and remonstrances on the Tsaritsyn headquarters. Several instances of treason committed by 'specialists' on the spot increased the obstinacy of the 'N.C.O.s' opposition', as Trotsky labelled the Tsaritsyn group.¹

Stalin's sympathy with the opposition is at first sight puzzling, even if allowance is made for his old connexion with Voroshilov. In the Government and the Central Committee he stood for central authority and discipline. His own capacity for enforcing by stern means discipline on confused and semi-anarchist elements was one of the chief qualities for which he was valued. What then disposed him to comply with the defiance of authority at Tsaritsyn? The plebeian distrust of the Tsaritsyn group for the old intelligentsia, for the 'gentry' to whom the ex-officers belonged, probably struck a chord in the commissar of Georgian peasant stock. Nor were all the rights in the controversy on one side and all the wrongs on the other. Budienny, for instance, urged the High Command to form a Red Cavalry and to use it in large massed formations or even as a separate army. The imaginative idea of the ex-sergeant-major was cold-shouldered by the military specialists in much the same way as other specialists dismissed proposals for the use of tanks in mass formation at the beginning of the Second World War. Budienny's idea was at first rejected also by Trotsky, who feared that the cavalry would have to consist mainly of the Cossacks, Russia's born horsemen, who were unfriendly towards the Soviets. Only some time later did Trotsky issue his order: 'Proletarians to horse', which embodied the idea and started the most romantic legend of the civil war, the legend of the Red Cavalry and its commander Budienny.² Meanwhile, at Tsaritsyn, the ex-

¹ L. Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas Revolyutsya*, vol. ii, pp. 59-65, 92-6, and K. Voroshilov, *Lenin, Stalin i Krasnaya Armiya*, pp. 70-5.

² K. Voroshilov, op. cit., p. 56; L. Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 274; E. Wollenberg, *The Red Army*, p. 97.

In his unfriendly attitude towards Trotsky, Stalin was not alone. The old workers of the underground, Lenin's professional revolutionaries and organizers, had a distinct *esprit de corps*. To many of them Trotsky was a new-comer. His exceptional status in the party vaguely offended their collective sentiment. No caucus likes the brilliant outsider who joins the party, wins the heart of its following by storm, and towers high above the men of the caucus. True, in 1917, when Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks, he was received by them with open arms. But the party was then only striving for power; and Trotsky joined it in the days of the July crisis, when it was cornered by all its foes and did not know whether its next move would be to descend underground or to ascend to power. The adherence of a man of Trotsky's stature gave a fillip to the party's temporarily waning self-confidence. The perils of civil war again cemented the ranks of the Bolsheviks, whose future, in so far as it was at all dependent on any individual, depended on the success or failure of the Commissar of War. The force of events still kept the caucus in its place. But there were always enough committee-men about with long memories of past feuds, whom it would not be difficult to turn against Trotsky, especially when new grievances gave new strength to old memories.

The food transports from the northern Caucasus arrived in Moscow as Stalin had promised. Thus the Council of People's Commissars had reason to be grateful to its envoy at Tsaritsyn. Stalin, having failed to receive an answer to his first and somewhat timid request for special military powers, insistently repeated his demand in a cable to Lenin dated 10 July 1918. The message, which was first published only in 1947, contained a violent attack on Trotsky, an attack which by implication was also a remonstrance with Lenin. If Trotsky continued to send his men to the northern Caucasus and the Don without the knowledge of the people on the spot, Stalin stated, then 'within a month everything will go to pieces in the northern Caucasus and we shall irretrievably lose that land. . . . Rub this in to Trotsky. . . . For the good of the cause military plenary powers are indispensable to me here. I have written about this but received no reply. All right, then. In that case I alone shall, without any formalities, dismiss those commanders and

Trotsky's version, Stalin somewhat meekly asked him not to treat the 'Tsaritsyn boys' too severely. Trotsky's answer was sharp and haughty: 'The fine boys will ruin the revolution which cannot wait for them to grow up.' Subsequently Voroshilov was transferred from Tsaritsyn to the Ukraine.

Stalin arrived in the capital just before the celebration of the first anniversary of the revolution. He wrote for *Pravda* a brief and dry summary of last year's events:

From beginning to end [he stated], the insurrection was inspired by the Central Committee of the party, with Comrade Lenin at its head. Lenin at that time lived in Petersburg on the Vyborg side in a secret apartment. On 24 October, in the evening, he was called out to Smolny to assume general charge of the movement. All practical work in connexion with the organization of the uprising was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the President of the Petersburg Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotsky for the rapid going over of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the efficient manner in which the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee was organized.¹

Thirty years after it was written, Stalin's appreciation of Trotsky's role in the revolution sounds fantastically eulogistic. It was cut out by the author from his *Collected Works* in 1947. In the last twenty years no Soviet historian or writer has dared to quote it—so dangerously heretical have Stalin's own words become. But at the time they were written they sounded like anything but a eulogy. Their purpose was subtly to belittle Trotsky's role and to portray him, not quite in accordance with the facts, as a mere executor—a very able one, to be sure—of Lenin's idea. This was the extreme limit to which Stalin could then go in venting his grudge; he could hurt his rival only with a thorn concealed in a bouquet.

A few days after the first anniversary of the Russian revolution, Germany and Austria were aflame with their own revolutions. The First World War came to an end. The thrones of the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs lay in the dust. Councils

¹ This appreciation of Trotsky's role has been omitted in Stalin's *Sochineniya*, vol. iv, p. 154, published in 1947. It is quoted from the official English edition of his *October Revolution*, p. 30.

philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism. Moreover, he did not think that the east by itself could achieve final emancipation. The west, because of its industrialization and higher organization was, after it had done away with imperialist capitalism, predestined to lead the east. According to circumstances, the one or the other strand in his thought came to the fore. Now when the dawn of revolution seemed to rise over Europe, the 'western' element in Leninism assumed the greater weight. It was in those days that the Communist International, based, apart from the Bolsheviks, on the extreme left wing of western European socialism, was hastily formed.

How did Stalin react to the new situation? He had little to say about the events in the west. This was the domain of the émigré leaders who spoke from their knowledge of the west and from their long study of its problems. Stalin's contribution to the debate consisted, significantly, of two articles, one of which bore the title 'Do not forget the East', and the other—'Ex Oriente Lux'.¹ The man who had grown up among Russian, Tartar, and Persian oil workers and Georgian peasants on the borderline between Europe and Asia intimately identified himself with the 'eastern' strand in Bolshevism. The fact is the more remarkable because the two strands were not at all distinct; and none of the leaders, certainly not Stalin, was then aware of any potential disharmony between them. Any suggestion of a rationalized preference on the part of Stalin for the eastern element in the Bolshevik outlook at that stage would fly in the face of historical facts. His predilections were purely instinctive. In his view, too, it was 'primarily there, in the west, that the chains of imperialism that have been forged in Europe and are strangling the whole world, will be broken'.² But the remark on the importance of the west for the revolution, though sweeping in form, was merely incidental. It was meant to give point to his warning: Do not forget the east. There was a touch of political jealousy for the attention which the west was now monopolizing in his words: 'In such a moment the East with the hundreds of millions of peoples enslaved by imperialism, automatically fades from our view and is forgotten.' Speaking about a conference of Moslem Communists

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. iv, pp. 171-3, 177-82.

² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

mind. Again, when Yudenich was advancing on Petersburg for the second time, Lenin overrated the strength of the attacker and, to ensure that the defence of Moscow was adequate, pleaded for the surrender of Petersburg. Both Trotsky and Stalin stubbornly opposed this proposal and the event proved them right. These disputes did not reflect opposed political or strategic principles; they were caused by differences of views on what was militarily expedient.

Stalin's secret messages and reports from the various fronts show him in a different light from the one given by his public speeches and journalistic writings. The contrast between the styles of his public and his confidential statements is remarkable. It was on the platform and in the newspaper that his weaknesses were most apparent. His language betrays an astonishing barrenness of imagination, rare even among politicians. It was dull, dry, colourless—'soporific', as Trotsky called it. His arguments were unbearably repetitive, sprawling, and bristling with illogicalities. His images and metaphors were as a rule wildly incongruous. Happily, they were few and far between: not more than perhaps a score of metaphors occurred in all his writings over nearly twenty years; and not many more were to occur in the next thirty. Once his mind had seized an image he chewed upon it and returned to it over and over again with a monotony that revealed the narrowness of his vision. Face to face with a mass audience he was incapable of striking a spark either in himself or in the audience. This was not merely a literary or oratorical failing. The man felt ill at ease under public scrutiny, with the result that in public his voice acquired an uncannily ventriloquist ring. There was a rigid artificiality in his manner and style, the artificiality of utterly ineffectual histrionics.

But what a different man emerges from his confidential service messages. Their style was most often clear and cutting, concise and precise. Here spoke the great administrator, free from the inhibitions that public appearance imposed upon him. Almost no trace of his wearisome repetitiveness, of his bizarre incongruities and miscarried metaphors. Here the sober investigator, the inspector of danger spots, reported on his findings in straight and business-like terms. One could almost see him at the job: he had just arrived at his destination and was casting

Unreliable people sit in the [local] Soviets; the committees of poor peasants are in the hands of well-to-do peasants [kulaks]; party organizations are weak, unreliable, unconnected with the centre; party work is neglected; and the local leaders try to compensate the general weakness of the party and Soviet institutions by the intensified work of the Chekas [political police], that have become the sole representatives of Soviet power in this province. . . . The newspapers of the party and the Soviets at Perm and Vyatka work badly. . . . (You would find nothing in them, except empty phrases about "world social revolution"). . . . Yet, . . . out of 4,766 officials of Soviet institutions of the town of Vyatka, 4,467 held the same jobs in the district administration under Tsardom. . . .¹

The numerous technical and political suggestions for reform culminated in a proposal that a special Commissariat be formed to control and supervise all the other branches of the administration. The proposal was soon to be accepted and Stalin was to be put in charge of the new Commissariat.

Lenin studied the messages with a discerning eye. He took the criticisms of Trotsky with a grain of salt. When Trotsky, annoyed at the charges, resigned, the Politbureau passed a unanimous motion solemnly entreating him to stay in office. (Stalin, who had obliquely asked for Trotsky's dismissal, also cast his vote for the motion.) Stalin's reputation as a great administrator, however, was enhanced by his numerous inspections. When, some time after his appointment to the Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, a prominent party man criticized the accumulation of so many important jobs in Stalin's hands, Lenin replied: 'We must have someone to whom any national representative can appeal. . . . Where is such a man to be found? I do not think Preobrazhensky can point to anyone but Stalin. It is the same with the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate. The job is enormous. To cope with it there must be a man with authority at its head.'²

The campaigns against Denikin and Yudenich were followed by the Russo-Polish war, during which Stalin was political commissar on the southern sector of the front. In May 1920, the Polish army under the command of Marshal Pilsudski advanced into the Ukraine and seized Kiev. Pilsudski's victory was short-lived. His army operated under a decisive handicap:

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. iv, p. 208.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, vol. xxvii, pp. 263-4.

it was met with hostility by the Ukrainian peasantry, who suspected that the victory of the Poles would lead to the re-establishment of the domination of the Polish landed gentry over the Ukrainian country-side. In June the Poles evacuated Kiev, hotly pursued by Tukhachevsky in the north and Yegorov and Budienny in the south. In a lightning offensive the Red Army reached the River Bug, which roughly separates ethnographic Poland from the Ukraine. Should it cross the Bug, carry the offensive into purely Polish lands and try to seize Warsaw? This was the question debated in the Politbureau. Lenin urged a continuation of the offensive, while Trotsky was in favour of offering peace to the Poles. Stalin at first shared Trotsky's view, but then sided with Lenin.

The issues at stake were momentous. Lenin hoped that the entry of the Red Army into Poland would spur on the Polish working class to Communist revolution. His main interest, however, was not in Poland but in Germany, which at the time was in a state of revolutionary ferment. His objective was to effect a junction between the Russian and the German revolutions. He played with the idea that communism in the west, not yet strong enough to seize power by itself, might be decisively strengthened by the advance of the Red Army. He wanted 'to probe Europe with the bayonets of the Red Army',¹ an idea which strikingly conflicted with his own warnings about the inadmissibility of attempts at carrying revolution abroad on the points of bayonets. His attitude reflected his despair at the continued isolation of the Soviets; and it was an attempt to break out from it. Lenin was supported by Zinoviev and Kamenev, who, now as in 1917, saw little hope for communism in Russia without a revolution in the west. Underlying their policy was a gross under-estimation of the resistance which the Polish people, including the Polish working classes, enjoying the honeymoon of their national independence, were to put up to Soviet invasion.

A clearer view of the mood in Poland prompted both Trotsky and Stalin to oppose talk about a march on Warsaw. Even before the recapture of Kiev by the Reds, Stalin warned the party in *Pravda* that 'the hinterland of the Polish forces is . . . to Poland's advantage, very different from that of Kolchak

¹ Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, pp. 19-21.

it was too late. The Red Army was already in disorderly retreat from Warsaw.

Now followed the inevitable argument over the mistakes that contributed to the defeat. Trotsky and Tukhachevsky blamed the southern command for their delay in changing direction from Lvov to Warsaw. Stalin repeated his familiar charge that Trotsky and the General Staff had failed to build up strong reserves behind the fighting lines. The mutual criticisms were well justified, though the chief cause of the defeat lay not so much in the mistakes committed during the offensive as in the very decision to carry it deep into Poland.¹

After the Polish war and a quick campaign against Baron Wrangel, whose forces were driven from the Crimea and pushed into the sea at the Perekop Isthmus, peace at last returned to Russia. Soviet power was now consolidated, the ruling party sat firmly in the saddle, and the leaders paraded their laurels. But the country was devastated, hungry, and sick.

Over and over again emergencies had driven the ruling party to act against its original intentions, to contradict and overreach itself. The Bolsheviks had pledged themselves to abolish the police and the standing army. Instead the political police, 'the sword of the revolution', grew to become, as Stalin wrote from Perm, 'the sole representative of Soviet power' in many parts of the country. At first the Bolsheviks tried to display tolerance towards their opponents. At the congresses of Soviets and trade unions, Menshevik, Social Revolutionary, Syndicalist, and Anarchist spokesmen freely and severely criticized the Government. A restricted but still wide freedom of expression existed. The ruling party itself was continually alive with open controversy, in which ideas were vigorously thrashed out and no authority was spared. Its members were free to form them-

¹ Lenin admitted his error in his talks with Klara Zetkin, quoted above. Trotsky's viewpoint is found in *Mein Leben*, pp. 439-44, and in his *Stalin*, pp. 328-30. The Stalinist viewpoint is given by Voroshilov in *Lenin, Stalin i Krasnaya Armia*, p. 58. See also E. Wollenberg, *The Red Army*, pp. 121-48. Tukhachevsky expounded his own view in an interesting essay on 'Revolution from without', reprinted in his *Voina Klassov* (pp. 50-60) and in lectures on the 1920 war. A Polish translation of these appeared as an appendix in J. Pilsudski's *Rok 1920*, which, like W. Sikorski's *Nad Wisłą i Wkrą*, analyses the war from the official Polish viewpoint.

environment and thrown into the all-pervading chaos of black markets. The 'proletarian dictatorship' had been more or less consolidated; but in the process the proletariat itself had vanished as a class-conscious element and an organizing factor.

In order to put industry back to work, the Government gradually embarked upon militarization of labour. At first the armies which enjoyed a respite from fighting were employed on essential work such as the felling of timber and the transportation of fuel and food. They were reorganized into 'Labour Armies'. This had been Trotsky's idea. Stalin, as the political commissar on the Ukrainian front, became Chairman of the Ukrainian Council of the Labour Army. Later on the method was used on a wider scale and in a sense reversed: not only were conscripted soldiers used for industrial work, but industrial workers were conscripted for labour like soldiers. In 1920 Trotsky pleaded for the militarization of labour before the annual Congress of the trade unions.¹ Despite Menshevik opposition, the trade unions consented to act as the agents of militarization. Thus the party that had promised to abolish the standing army was transforming the working population into an army.

During the civil war there was little else that the Government could do. But then the rulers made a virtue of the dire necessity. They asked the people to accept what they did, not as emergency measures but as true socialism, as the new style of life, the higher civilization of Soviet society. This was the main illusion of the so-called War Communism. While Lenin and Trotsky argued that the labour armies were an indispensable feature of socialism, Bukharin extolled the galloping inflation and devaluation of money as the foretaste of a true Communist economy without money.² These notions contrasted sharply with the deliberate slowness and caution with which the Bolsheviks had begun to nationalize large-scale industry after the revolution, when they were acutely aware of the complexity of the transition from Russia's semi-feudal condition to a Socialist economy. But in the atmosphere of civil war the ruling party seems to have exchanged its original realism for

¹ *Tretii Syezd Profsoyuzov*, pp. 87-95.

² This was the view expressed by Bukharin in his *Dengi v Epokhe Proletarskoi Diktatury*.

a stubborn and quixotic passion to achieve Utopia. As Karl Radek put it, the Bolsheviks hoped to force their way by a short cut, rifle in hand, into a perfect classless society. Above all, they acquired the habit of military command and persisted in that habit when they were confronted with an economic and social chaos out of which no military command could create order.

In March 1921 the restive mood of the country suddenly flared up in the rising of Kronstadt which coincided with the tenth Congress of the party. 'This was the flash', said Lenin, 'which lit up reality better than anything else.'¹ There was a bitter irony in the fact that the scene of the rising was Kronstadt, the Bolshevik stronghold of 1917. White Guards sympathizers, Anarchists, and even Bolsheviks fought side by side against the Red troops which, on Tukhachevsky's orders, rushed across the frozen surface of the Bay of Finland to suppress the rising. A measure of the alarm that the rising caused in the ruling party can be seen in the fact that on receiving the news about its outbreak the Congress of the party interrupted its debates and sent most of its delegates to participate in the storming of Kronstadt. At no critical moment of the civil war had there been any comparable panic.²

The insurgents of Kronstadt demanded an end to the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party and the restitution of genuine government by Soviets such as the Bolsheviks had promised to establish. They also demanded an end to economic and political oppression. Some of the leaders were Anarchists and left Communists; and their watchwords were borrowed from the slogans of the Bolsheviks in the early days of the revolution. Yet, in spite of its extreme left colouring, the rising stirred new hope in the ranks of the defeated counter-revolution. The dictatorship had reached a point, familiar from other revolutions, when, having defeated the adherents of the *ancien régime*, it drove Right and Left, conservatives and revolutionaries, into a common bitter opposition. For a while, the shadow of the tumbrils which amid the rejoicing of the Parisian plebs and aristocracy carried Robespierre to the guillotine must have appeared before Lenin's eyes.

¹ *The Essentials of Lenin*, vol. ii, p. 693.

² L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 96.

The reform was carried out on the spur of the Kronstadt rising, without any preliminary debate.

2 | Almost simultaneously another, less conspicuous, act was carried out in the political field, an act the implications of which were hardly clear to its authors. While the economic dictatorship was radically relaxed, the political dictatorship was tightened. During the later stages of the civil war the parties of the opposition, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, were finally suppressed. The next step was to forbid the formation of any opposition groups inside the ruling party itself. Unknowingly, almost gropingly, Bolshevism now reached the threshold of what was later to be called the totalitarian state. It is necessary to stop here for a moment to contemplate once again the outlook of Bolshevism and to analyse the impulses and the motives of its leaders in order to obtain a clue both to the further evolution of the Soviets and to Stalin's subsequent ascendancy.

The ban on opposition groups inside the ruling party was passed by the tenth congress after a dramatic debate over the role of the trade unions in the Soviet system. Three or four viewpoints emerged in the great controversy which flared up on the eve of the Kronstadt rising. The Workers' Opposition, led by the former Commissar of Labour Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai, demanded the syndicalization of the state—the transfer of all economic power to the trade unions. Curiously enough, the chiefs of the trade unions, Tomsy and Rudzutak, were not among the leaders of the Workers' Opposition; for it expressed not the aspirations of the trade union leadership but the discontent of many rank-and-file Bolsheviks with the party's economic dictatorship. The opposition criticized the growing economic bureaucracy and its rough treatment of the rights and interests of the workers. The trade unions, so Shlyapnikov and Kollontai argued, as the direct representatives of the working class should be made responsible for planning and directing the national economy; and they should be built up into a counter-weight to the Politbureau and the Government, both dominated by the same personalities.¹ Another group of malcontents, the faction of 'Democratic

¹ *Desyatyi Syezd RKP*, pp. 41, 54–5. See also A. M. Kollontai, *The Workers' Opposition in Russia*, p. 31.

What usually prevents them from transgressing their terms of reference is some diffusion of power through the whole system of government, effective control over them, and, sometimes, the integrity of officials. The over-centralization of power in the Bolshevik leadership, the lack of effective control, and, last but not least, the personal ambitions of the General Secretary, all made for the extraordinary weight that the General Secretariat began to carry barely a few months after it had been set up.

The picture would be incomplete without mention of another institution, the Central Control Commission, that came to loom large in Bolshevik affairs. Its role *vis-à-vis* the party was analogous to that of the Commissariat of the Inspectorate *vis-à-vis* the governmental machine: it audited party morals. It was formed at the tenth congress, in 1921, on the demand of the Workers' Opposition, with which the congress had otherwise dealt so harshly. It was in charge of the so-called purges. These, too, were initiated by the tenth congress, on the demand of the Opposition. They were intended to cleanse the party periodically of careerists, who had climbed the band-wagon in great numbers, of Communists who had acquired a taste for bourgeois life, and commissars whose heads had been turned by power. Lenin adopted the idea and intended to use it in order to stop his followers departing from the party's puritanic standards. But he also turned one edge of the purges against 'anarcho-syndicalists', waverers, doubters, and dissidents, against the real initiators of the new practice.

The procedure of the purges was at first very different from what it became in later years. The purges were no concern of the judiciary. They were conducted by the party's local control commissions before an open citizens' forum, to which Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks had free access. The conduct of every member of the party, from the most influential to the humblest, was submitted to stern public scrutiny. Any man or woman from the audience could come forward as a witness. The Bolshevik whose record was found to be unsatisfactory was rebuked or, in extreme cases, expelled from the party. The Control Commission could impose no other penalties than these.

The original motive behind the purges was almost quixotic. It was to enable the people to crack periodically a whip over their rulers. But, since the ruling party was convinced that in all

acclaimed as *their* ideological triumph. The authentic Leninists, on the other hand, approved those acts as conquests for the revolution, not for Russia. In their eyes Russia herself was merely the first domain, the first rampart, of international revolution: her interests were to be subordinated to the super-national strategy of militant socialism. For the time being, however, the boundaries of both Russia and victorious socialism were the same. The Leninists still believed that socialism demanded equality between nations; but they also felt that the reunion of most, if not all, of the Tsar's dominions under the Soviet flag served the interests of socialism. At this point the line of division between Leninism and Ustrialovism became blurred. Between the two there was plenty of room for equivocation. The new, half-spurious and half-genuine, nationalism insinuated itself into the political thinking of the party, as Stalin was shortly to admit.¹ He himself, more than the other leaders, was in, and of, that amalgamated civil service. He registered its contradictory moods with an almost seismographic sensitivity. In the Georgian affair his own bent and bias concurred with the much wider, impersonal pressures that were making themselves felt in the state.

In the summer of 1922 his Commissariat was involved in a new conflict, this time with the Ukraine. The Ukrainian Government, too, protested against his interference. Its leaders, Rakovsky, the influential descendant of an aristocratic revolutionary Bulgaro-Rumanian family; and Skrypnik, a veteran Bolshevik, stuck to the letter and the spirit of the party's pledges about the independence of the outlying republics; and they demanded that the pledges be honoured, even though Stalin's interventions in Kiev or Kharkov were not even remotely as drastic as they had been in Tiflis. The Ukrainians and the Georgians joined hands and decided to challenge him in the forthcoming debates on constitutional reform.

It would, however, be false to exaggerate the importance of these conflicts. There was a brighter side, too, to Stalin's

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. v, p. 239. Professor Ustrialov himself wrote in 1921, when he was still an émigré: 'The Soviet Government will strive with all means to re-unite the outlying lands with the centre—in the name of world revolution. Russian patriots will fight to achieve the same objective—in the name of great, indivisible Russia. For all the ideological differences, they practically take the same road.' N. V. Ustrialov, 'Patriotica' in *Smiena Vekh*, p. 59.

Lenin's successor. This motive, the only one that made for their solidarity, impelled them to act in concert. As the other members of the Politbureau walked each his own way, the triumvirs automatically commanded a majority. Their motions and proposals, on which they usually agreed before every session of the Politbureau, were invariably carried. The other members were bound hand and foot by the discipline of the Politbureau—any attempt by one of them to discuss their inner controversies in public would have appeared as an act of disloyalty.

With the scene so set, Stalin had little to fear from the congress. He had against him only second-rate opponents, who failed to carry the mass of the delegates. Many delegates were already dependent for their political standing on the General Secretariat. The degree of that dependence was indicated by Stalin himself when he described to the congress the work of the personnel department in the General Secretariat. His account shed light on the manner in which the party was securing its control over every field of public life. The year before only 27 per cent. of the regional leaders of the trade unions were members of the party. At present 57 per cent. of them were Communists. The percentage of Communists in the management of co-operatives had risen from five to fifty; and in the commanding staffs of the armed forces from sixteen to twenty-four. The same happened in all other institutions which Stalin described as the 'transmission belts' connecting the party with the people. Not a single public institution was to be left outside the system of these transmission belts.¹

To be able to marshal its forces, the personnel department kept solid files with the most detailed records of the party's 'key-men'. The party had now, after the first purges, about 400,000 ordinary members and about 20,000 officials. So far the personnel department had compiled the records of the upper and medium layers, including 1,300 managers of industry. The investigation, Stalin disclosed, was still on. The files were compiled with special attention to every member's professional skill and specialization, political reliability, and moral bearings. Every blemish in a member's record was duly registered. 'It is necessary to study every worker through and through', said

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. v, p. 197 and *passim*.

imprisoned. These were the first instances of clandestine opposition among Communists. So far, the secret groups had acted without concert and lacked leadership. The triumvirs feared a link-up between their rivals and the discontented rank and file.¹

They reacted to the crisis in a self-contradictory manner. They put before the Central Committee a motion about the need to restore democracy and freedom of discussion for the members of the party. On the other hand, they mobilized the political police against the secret oppositions. The police found that ordinary Bolsheviks often refused to co-operate in tracing the opposition groups. Dzerzhinsky asked the Politbureau to authorize the police to take action against uncooperative Bolsheviks, too. At this point the fight between Trotsky and the triumvirs entered a new phase. Without making it quite clear whether he thought that Dzerzhinsky's demand should be granted, Trotsky attacked the triumvirate. What had happened, he stated, was symptomatic of the party's state of mind, its sense of frustration, and its distrust of the leaders. Even during the civil war 'the system of appointment [from above] did not have one-tenth of the extent that it has now. Appointment of the secretaries of provincial committees is now the rule.' He granted that there was a grain of demagoguery in the demands for a workers' democracy, 'in view of the incompatibility of a fully developed workers' democracy with the régime of the dictatorship'. But the discipline of the civil war ought to have given place to 'a more lively and broader party responsibility'. Instead, 'the bureaucratization of the party machine had developed to unheard of proportions; and criticism and discontent, the open expression of which was stifled, were driven underground, assuming uncontrollable and dangerous forms'.²

The triumvirs evaded the issues raised by Trotsky and charged him with malevolence, personal ambition, neglect of his duties in the Government, and so on. They accused him of trying to establish himself as Lenin's successor.³ This last charge was, in a sense, true, for the fight over the succession was inherent in the situation. Yet this as well as the other charges

¹ Ibid., pp. 354-61; N. Popov, *Outline History*, vol. ii, pp. 194-204.

² M. Eastman, *Since Lenin Died*, Appendix IV, pp. 142-3.

³ N. Popov, *Outline History*, vol. ii, pp. 144-96.

Trotskyism and Stalinism. Both insisted on their basic loyalty to the Marxist outlook; and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of their professions. For both factions to claim allegiance to Marxism and Leninism was as natural as it is for Protestants and Catholics to swear by Christianity. In the one case as in the other the professions of faith, common to both sides, offer almost no clue to their antagonism. What underlay Trotsky's attitude was a cautious and yet very real revolutionary optimism, a belief that, if only the rulers pursued the right Socialist policy, the working classes would support them. This belief had indeed been implicit in the Marxist philosophy; and Stalin never openly contradicted it. But between the lines of his policies there is always present a deep disbelief in the popularity of socialism, and even more than that: an essentially pessimistic approach to man and society. In the last instance the revolutionary optimist sets his hope on his frank appeal to the people, even when he may seem to hope against hope. The pessimist in power distrusts those whom he rules. The Communist pessimist treats his own doctrine as a piece of esoteric knowledge. He does not believe that the working classes are really capable of accepting it, unless it is, brutally speaking, pushed down their throats. Both the optimist and the pessimist are convinced that communism is the only remedy for the evils of capitalist society. But whereas the former is convinced that sooner or later—and sooner rather than later—the patient himself, if properly enlightened, will ask for the remedy, the latter is inclined to order the cure without much regard for the patient's wish. However, this digression perhaps runs ahead of our story.

A few weeks after Zinoviev had officially opened the public debate, Stalin addressed the Communists of Krasnaya Presnya, a working-class district in Moscow, on the meaning of the 'New Course'.¹ He frankly admitted that the party was in a state of ferment and that it had lost touch with the mood in the country. The reason for this he saw in the organizations on the spot, which had ceased to discuss public affairs and had abandoned elective practices in favour of nomination from above. The fault of the leadership, if there was any, was that it had not discovered these abnormal conditions in time. 'In 1917', he went on, 'we

¹ J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. v, pp. 354-70.

In view of all that had recently passed between Lenin and Stalin, it might be thought that this half-mystical oath was a piece of sheer hypocrisy. Such a conclusion would seem to oversimplify the matter, though it can hardly be doubted that Stalin's exalted valediction contained its streak of insincerity. Yet he was undoubtedly sincere in his belief that he had the right to regard himself as Lenin's orthodox pupil. His adherence to Bolshevism had lasted twenty years; he had been a member of Lenin's Central Committees for ten years; and more than half of that time, for six difficult and stormy years, he had served directly under Lenin, with energy and devotion. Could their brief and violent conflict have obliterated their long, close association? Stalin still felt entitled to think of his clash with Lenin as of an awkward episode, a misunderstanding, which, if Lenin had recovered, might have been smoothed out to their mutual satisfaction. He was certainly convinced that his attitude towards the body of doctrine bequeathed by Lenin was beyond reproach. In all probability he was not aware that the Leninist cult, and in particular his own half-religious oath, sounded like a mockery of the real Lenin.¹

Presently, he expounded Leninism, as he understood it, to the Communist youth and the undergraduates of the Sverdlov university, where the party was bringing up its new intellectual *élite*.² What he had to say on the subject was so unoriginal and dull that it hardly deserves to be summarized. The only original side of his exposition was its form. He presented Lenin's doctrine, which was essentially sociological and experimental, as a series of rigid canons and flat strategic and tactical recipes for mankind's salvation, all listed and enumerated with the precision of a book-keeper. He codified and formalized Leninism in that style of spurious simplicity and lucidity that is highly attractive to the mind with little sociological training. He supported every contention of his with a quotation from Lenin, sometimes irrelevant and sometimes torn out of the context, in

¹ Lenin bitterly scoffed at any attempt to introduce ritual form or quasi-religious parlance into socialism. On one occasion he was asked whether it was proper for a Socialist to say that socialism was his religion. 'If an ordinary worker said this [Lenin answered] then it only meant that that worker was abandoning religion in favour of socialism. But if a socialist leader or an intellectual was claiming socialism as his religion, he was abandoning socialism in favour of religion.'

² J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. vi, pp. 69-188.

what the Communists did in Germany in 1923, in the middle of the turmoil provoked there by the French occupation of the Ruhr.¹ In the autumn of 1923, Trotsky argued, Germany was ripe for proletarian revolution; but the revolutionaries missed their opportunity because they succumbed to the same inert timidity shown by Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1917. Ostensibly, his attack was directed against the leaders of German communism. Actually, it aimed at the triumvirs, especially at Zinoviev, who, as president of the Comintern, inspired the policy of its German branch.

The triumvirs parried the blow. They produced their own version of the history of the revolution, in which they minimized or even denied their hesitations, boggings, and disagreements with Lenin. They also did their best to play down Trotsky's role in 1917. This was the first of a very long series of those bizarre 'revisions' and 'corrections' that, in the end, were to make the history of the revolution an almost illegible palimpsest, where countless and conflicting narratives were superimposed upon one another. In addition, all Trotsky's epithets about Lenin and all Lenin's rejoinders, dating from before 1917, were once again lifted from the archives and republished. The rank and file of the party were disgusted with the spectacle, which seemed to bear no relation to the country's misery and the constructive tasks of government and party. The leaders, many thought, were making an inexplicable exhibition of their own irresponsibility.

Stalin was the only man whose prestige was not impaired. Trotsky, whatever the merits of his views, had to take the blame for having initiated what looked like a squabble over by-gones.² The endless recollections of his anti-Bolshevik past were not without their effect. On the other hand, his own scathing reminders of Zinoviev's and Kamenev's behaviour in 1917 did a lot to compromise the two. Trotsky could say little or nothing against Stalin, except in obscure hints; for, whatever Stalin had done or said in 1917, he had as a rule done it anonymously or in his usual elusive manner. Unwittingly, Trotsky now helped him to his ascendancy over Zinoviev and Kamenev. The latter were now in desperate need of a favourable testimony from the

¹ See L. Trotsky, 'The Need to Study "October"', in *The Errors of Trotskyism*, pp. 29-119.

² J. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. vii, p. 6.

in the autumn of 1924. Belief in socialism in one country was soon to become the supreme test of loyalty to party and state. In the next ten or fifteen years nobody who failed that test was to escape condemnation and punishment. Yet, if one studies the 'prolegomena' to this article of Stalinist faith, one is struck by the fact that it was first put forward by Stalin almost casually, like a mere debating point, in the 'literary discussion'. For many months, until the summer of the next year, none of Stalin's rivals, neither the other triumvirs nor Trotsky, thought the point worth arguing. Nor was Stalin's own mind fixed. In his pamphlet *The Foundations of Leninism*, published early in 1924, he stated with great emphasis that, though the proletariat of one country could seize power, it could not establish a Socialist economy in one country.

But the overthrow [these are Stalin's words] of the power of the *bourgeoisie* and establishment of the power of the proletariat in one country does not yet mean that the complete victory of socialism has been ensured. The principle task of socialism—the organization of socialist production—has still to be fulfilled. Can this task be fulfilled, can the final victory of socialism be achieved in one country, without the joint efforts of the proletarians in several advanced countries? No, it cannot. To overthrow the *bourgeoisie* the efforts of one country are sufficient; this is proved by the history of our revolution. For the final victory of socialism, for the organization of Socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of a peasant country like Russia, are insufficient; for that, the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are required.¹

In his *Problems of Leninism*, however, which he wrote later in the same year, Stalin corrected himself and asserted the opposite. He withdrew the first edition of his *Foundations of Leninism* from circulation and renounced it as apocryphal. He was at first hardly aware of the weight that circumstances were soon to give to his 'socialism in one country'. He reached his formula gropingly, discovering, as it were, a new continent, while he believed himself to be sailing for quite a different place.

His immediate purpose was to discredit Trotsky and to prove for the *n*th time that Trotsky was no Leninist. Searching in Trotsky's past, the triumvirs came across the theory of 'perma-

¹ This quotation is taken from the English edition of J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (p. 157), published in Moscow in 1945.

nent revolution', which he had formulated in 1905. They started a polemic against it; and it was in the course of that polemic that Stalin arrived at his formula. Since his 'socialism in one country' thus originated as a counter to Trotsky's 'permanent revolution', it is proper to sum up and analyse the two formulas in their bearing upon each other.

Trotsky had borrowed his theory from Marx and applied it to the Russian revolution.¹ He spoke of the 'permanency' of the revolution in a double sense: the revolution, he foresaw, would be driven by circumstances to pass from its anti-feudal (bourgeois) to its anti-capitalist (Socialist) phase. Contrary to the then accepted Marxist view, not the advanced western European countries but backward Russia would be the first to set out along the road to socialism. But Russia alone would not be able to advance far upon that road. The revolution could not stop at her national frontiers. It would have to pass from its national to its international phase—this was to be the second aspect of its 'permanency'. Under the impact of Russia western Europe, too, would become revolutionized. Only then could socialism be established on a broad international basis. The progress of mankind, so Trotsky argued, was now hampered not only by the capitalist mode of production but also by the existence of nation-states. The final outcome of the revolutionary transformation could only be One World, one Socialist world. There was, however, a disquieting question mark in this prognostication. What will happen—Trotsky asked in 1906—if the revolution fails to spread from Russia to western Europe? His grim answer was that it would then either succumb to a conservative Europe or become corroded in its economically and culturally primitive Russian environment.

Until 1917, it will be remembered, this theory was Trotsky's personal contribution to Marxist thought, rejected by Bolsheviks as well as by Mensheviks. On one or two occasions Lenin vaguely sketched a not dissimilar view of the future; but, on the whole, his policy was firmly based on the premiss that the Russian revolution would confine itself to its anti-feudal

¹ Trotsky first developed his theory in his famous pamphlet: *Itogi i Perspektivy Ruskoi Revolyutsii*, published in 1906. He gave the most complete exposition of his theory in *Permanennaya Revolyutsya*, written in 1928, after his deportation to Alma Ata, and published abroad in 1930.

could, in his view, through its control of industry and credit, develop those resources and carry the building of socialism to a successful conclusion, because in this endeavour it would be supported by a vast majority of the people, including the peasants.

This, the most essential, part of Stalin's formula was very simple. It proclaimed in terms clear to everybody the self-sufficiency of the Russian revolution. It was true that Stalin begged many a question. He did not even try to meet the objections to his thesis that were raised later by his critics. One objection that most peasants, attached as they were to private property, were certain to put up the strongest resistance to collectivism, he simply dismissed as a heretical slander on the peasantry. Nor did he seriously consider the other argument that socialism was possible only on the basis of the intensive industrialization already achieved by the most advanced western countries; and that Russia by herself would not be able to catch up with those countries. According to his critics, socialism could beat capitalism only if it represented a higher productivity of labour and higher standards of living than had been attained under capitalism. The critics deduced that if productivity of labour and standards of living were to remain lower in Russia than in the capitalist countries then socialism would, in the long run, fail even in Russia. Nor did Stalin ever try to refute their forecast that in an economy of scarcity, such as an isolated Russian economy would be, a new and glaring material inequality between various social groups was certain to arise.

But, whatever the flaws in Stalin's reasoning, flaws that were obvious only to the most educated men in the party, his formula was politically very effective. It contained, at any rate, one clear and positive proposition: we are able to stand on our own feet, to build and to complete the building of socialism. This was what made the formula useful for polemical and practical purposes. It offered a plain alternative to Trotsky's conception. For a variety of reasons, however, Stalin did not present his thesis in that plain and clear-cut form. He hedged it round with all sorts of reservations and qualifications. One reservation was that the victory of socialism in Russia could not be considered secure so long as her capitalist environment threatened Russia with armed intervention. Socialism in a

agree about the materials of which it was to be built or even about its shape. Ostensibly, the only point at issue was whether it would be possible to cover the edifice with a roof. Stalin's yes was as emphatic as his opponents' no.¹ Both sides still agreed that the 'roof' was not to be laid for a very, very long time yet, that classless socialism would not be achieved within the lifetime of one or even two generations. Both sides also agreed that hostile forces might wreck the building at any stage of their work on it—they constantly saw the shadow of war falling across Russia. Finally, Stalin, like his critics, professed to believe that long before the time came to put on the roof, the problem he had posed would cease to exist, because revolution in the west would free Socialist Russia from isolation.

It might seem then that it was preposterous for the disputants, who were men of action, to pose the problem as they had posed it; and that, on their own showing, they could have travelled a very, very long way together, leaving their differences to professional scholastics to thrash out. Was the whole dispute, then, a mere smoke-screen for a clash of personal ambitions? No doubt the personal rivalries were a strong element in it. But the historian who reduced the whole matter to that would commit a blatant mistake. He would still have to explain why 'socialism in one country' split the ranks of Bolshevism from top to bottom, why it became an issue of such deadly earnest for a whole Russian generation, why it determined the outlook of a great nation for a quarter of a century. The other suggestion which is often made, that socialism in one country was invented to allay the suspicions of foreign governments, alarmed by 'subversive' activities directed from

¹ At a later stage of the debate, in January 1926, Stalin thus formulated his view: 'We mean the possibility of solving the contradictions between the proletariat and the peasantry with the aid of the internal forces of our country, the possibility of the proletariat assuming power and using that power to build a complete socialist society in our country, with the sympathy and the support of the proletariat of other countries, but without the preliminary victory of the proletarian revolution in other countries.'

'Without such a possibility, the building of socialism is building without prospects, building without being sure that socialism will be built. It is no use building socialism without being sure that we can build it, without being sure that the technical backwardness of our country is not an *insuperable* obstacle to the building of a complete Socialist society. To deny such a possibility is to display lack of faith in the cause of building socialism, to abandon Leninism.' See J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (English edition), p. 160.

Moscow, is even more pointless. When Stalin formulated his thesis, his name was still almost unknown abroad; and, even later on, the desire to allay foreign suspicions did not prevent him from making statements on communism in Europe that made the flesh of many a Conservative abroad creep.

As sometimes happens in important disputes, where both sides are strongly committed to certain common principles, so in this controversy, too, its explanation cannot be found in the literal meaning of the disputants' words, certainly not in their zealous reiteration of 'common' principles, but must rather be sought in the subtle, often imperceptible, shifts in the emphasis of their arguments. The explanation is further to be found in the state of mind and the moods of the milieu in which the disputants act and which they address. In the last resort, the doctrinal controversy grows out of those moods; and they—the moods—form the sounding-board that imparts a significant ring to the seemingly undistinguishable formulas that are bandied about. The audience that listens to the disputants is left unmoved by their professions of common principle; it treats these as part of a customary ritual. But it pricks up its ears at the different hints and allusions thrown out by either side; and it avidly absorbs all their undertones and unspoken conclusions. It quickly learns to tell the operative part of any formula from the reservations and escape clauses that seem to contradict it.

Now the operative part of Stalin's thesis, the thing that was really new and striking in it, was the assertion of the self-sufficiency of the Russian revolution. All the rest was a repetition of traditional Bolshevik truisms, some of which had become meaningless and others embarrassing, but all of which had to be repeated, because they had the flavour of doctrinal respectability. The thing that was new in Stalin's argument represented a radical revision of the party's attitude. But the revision was undertaken in a manner that seemed to deny the very fact of revision and to represent it as a straight continuation of an orthodox line of thought, a method familiar from the history of many a doctrine. We shall not lead the reader further into the thick of this dogmatic battle. Suffice it to say that Stalin did his best to graft his formula on to the body of doctrine he had inherited from Lenin.

More important than the dogmatic intricacies is the fact that

now, in the seventh and eighth years of the revolution, a very large section of the party, probably its majority, vaguely and yet very definitely felt the need for ideological stocktaking and revision. The need was emotional rather than intellectual; and those who felt it were by no means desirous of any open break with Bolshevik orthodoxy. No revolutionary party can remain in power seven years without profound changes in its outlook. The Bolsheviks had by now grown accustomed to running an enormous state, 'one-sixth of the world'. They gradually acquired the self-confidence and the sense of self-importance that come from the privileges and responsibilities of power. The doctrines and notions that had been peculiarly theirs when they themselves had been the party of the underdog did not suit their present outlook well. They needed an idea or a slogan that would fully express their newly won self-confidence. 'Socialism in one country' did it. It relieved them, to a decisive extent, of a sense of their dependence on happenings in the five-sixths of the world that were beyond their control. It gave them the soothing theoretical conviction that, barring war, nothing could shake their mastery over Russia: the property-loving peasantry, the industrial weakness of the nation, its low productivity and even lower standard of living, all these implied no threat of a restoration of the *ancien régime*. Whoever, like Trotsky, and later on Zinoviev and Kamenev, dwelt on the dangers to the revolution inherent in all those circumstances, offended the complacency of the party.

Below this psychological attitude, which was confined to the rulers, there was a much broader undercurrent: the party and the working classes had grown weary of the expectation of international revolution which had been the daily bread of Bolshevism. That expectation was dashed in 1917, 1918, and 1920. It rose again in 1923, during the turmoil in Germany. This time the deferment of hope made the heart of the party sick. 'The European working classes are letting us down; they listen to their social democratic leaders and tremble over the flesh-pots of capitalism'—such was, roughly, the comment of many a politically minded worker on the daily news from the west. It was a galling thought, one which was inseparable from Trotsky's 'permanent revolution', that in spite of all this the fortunes of Russian communism should still be regarded as ultimately

not, however, prevent 'socialism in one country' from becoming the national creed. For all its triteness, Stalin's innovation had its weight and its *raison d'être*. Doctrines may, broadly speaking, be classed into two categories: those that, starting from a long train of intellectual ideas, strike out boldly into a remote uncharted future; and those that, though they are neither deeply rooted in ideas nor original in their anticipations, sum up a powerful and hitherto inarticulate trend of opinion or emotion. Stalin's theory obviously belonged to that second category.

The truly tragic feature of Russian society in the twenties was its longing for stability, a longing which was only natural after its recent experiences. The future had little stability in store for any country, but least of all for Russia. Yet the desire at least for a long, very long, respite from risky endeavours came to be the dominant motive of Russian politics. Socialism in one country, as it was practically interpreted until the late twenties, held out the promise of stability. On the other hand, the very name of Trotsky's theory, 'permanent revolution', sounded like an ominous warning to a tired generation that it should expect no Peace and Quiet in its lifetime. The warning was to come true, though not in the way its author expected; but it could hardly have been heeded.

In his argument against Trotsky, Stalin appealed directly to the horror of risk and uncertainty that had taken possession of many Bolsheviks. He depicted Trotsky as an adventurer, habitually playing at revolution. The charge, it need hardly be said, was baseless. At all crucial moments—in 1905, 1917, and 1920—Trotsky had proved himself the most serious strategist of the revolution, showing no proneness to light-minded adventure. Nor did he ever urge his party to stage any *coup* in any foreign country, which cannot be said of Stalin.¹ Trotsky firmly believed that western European communism would win by its own intrinsic momentum, in the ordinary course of the class struggle, in which outside initiative or assistance, though important at times, could play only a subordinate role. In weighing the chances of communism in the west, Stalin was more sceptical; and his scepticism was to grow as the years passed by. Be that as it may, the epithet 'adventurer' stuck to the ideologue of the 'permanent revolution'. Stalin went further

¹ See Chapter X.

and charged Trotsky with a fondness for terror which had allegedly horrified Lenin. This charge, too, was unfair, especially in Stalin's mouth. Trotsky had not shrunk from using terror in the civil war; but he can be said to have been as little fond of it as a surgeon is fond of bloodshed. Yet in the circumstances just described the charge had a vague and yet distinct eloquence. People afraid of the continuation of the terror were led to believe that the man who had laid the charge against Trotsky was himself at least liberal minded.¹

The remarkable trait in Stalin was his unique sensibility to all those psychological undercurrents in and around the party, the untalked of hopes and tacit desires, of which he set himself up as a mouthpiece. In this he was very different from the other triumvirs. At the beginning of the controversy over 'permanent revolution' they acted in unison; towards its end they were already poles apart. As Zinoviev and Kamenev admitted later, they started the campaign in order to discredit Trotsky with outdated quotations from Lenin against the 'permanent revolution'; at heart they had no quarrel with its basic tenets, which had become the household ideas of the party. Their attacks upon Trotsky's theory were therefore strangely unreal; they were confined to pointless quibbling over long-forgotten episodes of the days of pre-revolutionary exile. They did not even dream of opposing Trotsky with a positive doctrine of their own. It was otherwise with Stalin. What for him, too, had begun as ideological shadow-boxing developed into a real ideological struggle. The debating-point became the issue. He came to feel a real hatred for his opponent's views; and because of this he had to counter with something positive. He sensed which of his arguments evoked the strongest response from the mass of party officials and workers, that vast human sounding-board which was his *vox dei*. The sounding-board proved unexpectedly responsive to 'socialism in one country'. As happens with revelationists, a figment of his mind, the vision of socialism in one country, took possession of him; but it did so because it corresponded to the things that were latent in so many other minds.

For a long time Zinoviev and Kamenev were unaware of the change that had occurred in their partner. They shrugged their

¹ J. Stalin, *The October Revolution*, pp. 88 and 92.

rational organization and division of agricultural labour was possible. Many of the collective farms threatened to disintegrate and fall asunder as soon as they had been formed. It was now imperative that industry should, within the shortest possible time, supply fantastic masses of machinery, that the oil wells should produce the millions of tons of petrol by which the tractors were to be driven, that the country-side be electrified, that new power stations be built, and last, but not least, that millions of peasants be trained in handling and driving engines. But the plants and factories to produce the stuff did not exist. The output of coal, steel, oil, and other materials was desperately inadequate. And the men who were to teach the illiterate *muzhiks* to handle a tractor were not there either.

The whole experiment seemed to be a piece of prodigious insanity, in which all rules of logic and principles of economics were turned upside down. It was as if a whole nation had suddenly abandoned and destroyed its houses and huts, which, though obsolete and decaying, existed in reality, and moved, lock, stock, and barrel, into some illusory buildings, for which not more than a hint of scaffolding had in reality been prepared; as if that nation had only after this crazy migration set out to make the bricks for the walls of its new dwellings and then found that even the straw for the bricks was lacking; and as if then that whole nation, hungry, dirty, shivering with cold and riddled with disease, had begun a feverish search for the straw, the bricks, the stones, the builders and the masons, so that, by assembling these, they could at last start building homes incomparably more spacious and healthy than were the hastily abandoned slum dwellings of the past. Imagine that that nation numbered 160 million people; and that it was lured, prodded, whipped, and shepherded into that surrealistic enterprise by an ordinary, prosaic, fairly sober man, whose mind had suddenly become possessed by a half-real and half-somnambulistic vision, a man who established himself in the role of super-judge and super-architect, in the role of a modern super-Pharaoh. Such, roughly, was now the strange scene of Russian life, full of torment and hope, full of pathos and of the grotesque; and such was Stalin's place in it; only that the things that he drove the people to build were not useless pyramids.

In his own mind he saw himself not as a modern Pharaoh

The paper was well informed about happenings inside Russia; and Trotsky was not a critic to be ignored. Quite a few of Stalin's own moves may be traced to suggestions which were first made in the *Bulletin*.¹ Apart from this, the *Bulletin* enlightened Stalin better than the reports of his own political police on the moods and hopes of the opposition.

He was not inclined to take lightly the influence which Trotsky unexpectedly began to exercise from abroad. He remembered that Lenin's *Iskra* (Spark), a sheet not more impressive than Trotsky's *Bulletin*, had once 'kindled the flame of revolution'. Trotsky, it was true, now preached reform, not revolution. Unlike the old clandestine Bolshevik papers, his *Bulletin* probably never reached workers in Russia; but it circulated all the more freely among high officials and influential members of the party, many of whom had served under Trotsky and preserved a sentiment of loyalty towards him. Soon after his banishment one of the chiefs of the political police itself, Blumkin, during a trip abroad, visited Trotsky in Prinkipo. Stalin was determined to put an end to such contacts. Blumkin was shot, *pour décourager les autres*. This seems to have been the first instance in which a sympathizer of the opposition suffered capital punishment. Some time later Trotsky and his family were deprived of Soviet citizenship. From now on anybody who put himself in touch with the founder of the Red Army was liable to be charged with contact with a 'foreign conspirator'.

Nevertheless, Trotsky continued to exercise some influence from afar, especially during the critical years 1932-3. At the height of the crisis, about the time when Stalin's wife committed suicide, his *Bulletin* published a detailed survey of the economic situation, containing a wealth of statistical data of the sort that was available only to members of the Soviet Government.² The anonymous article concluded: 'In view of the incapacity of the present leadership to get out of the economic and political deadlock, the conviction about the need to change the leadership of the party is growing.' The author of the survey was I. N. Smirnov, the victor over Kolchak, an adherent of Trotsky who had 'capitulated' and was now back in office. Trotsky himself, protesting against being deprived of Soviet

¹ This is especially true of economic policy in 1932-3. See, for instance, *Bulleten Oppozitsii*, no. 33, March 1933.

² *Ibid.*, no. 31, November 1932.

Stalin to give his autocracy a more Liberal tinge, while others advocated the strong hand. It seems that Kirov, Voroshilov, Rudzutak, and Kalinin were the 'Liberals'. Voroshilov had to reckon with the effects of collectivization on the army's morale. The commander in the Far East, General Blücher, declared that he would not shoulder responsibility for the defence of the Far Eastern frontier if collectivization was enforced on the borderlands.¹ Voroshilov supported Blücher's view before the Politbureau and obtained the exemption of farmers in the Far East from collectivization. Kirov, who had gone to Leningrad to suppress the Zinoviev opposition, willy-nilly became a mouthpiece of the restive mood that prevailed in Russia's most European and most revolutionary city. He pleaded with Stalin for leniency towards the opposition; and in his own domain he did his best to restrain the political police.² Rudzutak, vice-Premier and leader of the trade unions, exercised his influence in the same direction. Molotov and Kaganovich were the chief advocates of the strong hand.

The devotion of all these men to Stalin was beyond doubt. They were the leaders of his praetorian guard. The public, who saw them always marching in step closely behind Stalin, had no idea of the tug-of-war. Stalin himself watched it calmly; he had nothing to fear from it. The antagonists appealed to his wisdom and awaited his verdict. He gave his support now to this and now to that faction. Throughout 1934 he wavered between intensified repression and Liberal gestures. In the spring he ordered a limited amnesty for rebellious *kulaks*. In June, however, he authorized a decree which proclaimed the collective responsibility of every family for treason committed by one of its members. People who failed to denounce a disloyal relative to authority were made liable to severe punishment. A month later he abolished the G.P.U. and replaced it by the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. The powers of the political police were limited; and the Attorney-General—an ex-Menshevik lawyer Andrei Vyshinsky was soon to be appointed to that post—was given the right to supervise its activities and to veto them if they conflicted with the law. The leaders of the oppositions were allowed to address public meet-

¹ E. Wollenberg, *The Red Army*, p. 258.

² A. Barmine, *One Who Survived*, pp. 247-8 and 252.

with suppressing the revolutionaries. They held the moderate opposition responsible for the deeds of the radical youth. The Liberals protested and charged autocracy, which had not allowed open and legal opposition, with the moral responsibility for the 'excesses' of the youth. Thus, the reign of Alexander I abounded in semi-Liberal reforms. The Decembrist rising of 1825 was the prelude to the reign of Nicholas I, the Iron Tsar, the Tsar of the gendarmes. The semi-Liberal Alexander II was killed by revolutionary conspirators, whom his successor Alexander III suppressed with a mailed fist. The policy of the last Tsar swayed between the two courses. Under Stalin these traditional features of the political struggle in Russia were thrown into even sharper relief by tensions characteristic of an unconsolidated, post-revolutionary society.

Nikolayev and his associates were executed. They were tried *in camera*, under a decree issued *ad hoc*, which denied the terrorists the right of defence and appeal. Stalin would not allow them to use the dock as a platform from which to state their views and fling accusations at the rulers. He did not stop at that. Like the old gendarmes, who used to take the Liberal 'fathers' to task for the deeds of the radical 'sons', he charged Zinoviev and Kamenev with responsibility for the assassination of Kirov. Their trial, too, was secret. Both denied any connexion with the assassin. Condemning the deed, they admitted that the young terrorists might have drawn inspiration from the criticisms of Stalin they had once made; but they claimed that, by suppressing open criticism, Stalin had driven the Komsomoltsy to acts of despair. Zinoviev was sentenced to ten and Kamenev to five years' penal servitude. But Stalin was now least of all interested in keeping the two old Bolsheviks in prison, which would have made of them martyrs and, in a sense, re-established them as claimants to power. His main aim was to extract from them an admission of guilt, by which they would with their own hands destroy their halo of martyrdom.

What followed was a grotesque process of bargaining over a formula of recantation, bargaining that went on between Stalin's offices in the Kremlin and the prison cells of the Lubyanka, where Zinoviev and Kamenev were held. Stalin agreed publicly to exonerate the prisoners from all connexion with the assassins; but he demanded from them an admission

that they had aimed at the restoration of capitalism. This the prisoners refused. Then Stalin seized upon the one point which they had already admitted, namely, that the terrorists had drawn their inspiration from the opposition's old propaganda.¹ Whether by threat or argument, he got Zinoviev to make that admission in public. 'The former activity of the former opposition could not, by the force of objective circumstances [so Zinoviev stated], but stimulate the degeneration of those criminals', that is of Kirov's assassins. Sincerity was mixed here with diplomatic evasiveness. The condemnation of the terroristic act was sincere; and Stalin was able to extract it from Zinoviev because he, too, wished to counteract the tendency towards terrorism. But Zinoviev took care to stress that he was prepared to shoulder only indirect moral responsibility—it was, in his words, only the 'former activity of the former opposition' that might have inspired the terroristic trend. The formula also implied an accusation of Stalin, for it said that terrorism had been bred by 'objective circumstances', i.e. by the oppressive atmosphere in the country. At this stage neither Zinoviev nor Kamenev was prepared to say more in self-accusation; and Stalin left matters at that. To the public the subtle qualifications by which Zinoviev hedged off his 'admission' meant nothing; the admission itself mattered. The leaders of the opposition had moved farther down the slippery slope that led to the great purge trials.

The assassination of Kirov alarmed Stalin. Had not conspirators penetrated into his own office? In the spring of 1935 nearly forty men of his own bodyguard were tried *in camera*. Two were executed. The rest were sentenced to various terms of penal servitude. No mention of that trial was made in the press.² A feverish search for terrorists followed in all branches of the party and the Komsomol. Stalin now acted on the principle that it was not enough to hit his real opponents; he rooted out the environment that had bred them. He vented his wrath on Leningrad, whose *genius loci* had seemed to defy him for the last

¹ See *Bulleten Oppozitsii*, nos. 42, 47, 52/3. The course of events can be reconstructed from reports in *Pravda* for the second half of December 1934 and beginning of January 1935.

² Most of these facts were disclosed by A. Ciliga, ex-leader of the Yugoslav Communist party, who had met the defendants of those trials in prison. See *Bulleten Oppozitsii*, no. 47.

ten years. He appointed Andrei Zhdanov to succeed Kirov as the governor of Leningrad. Zhdanov was a young, capable, and ruthless man, who had purged the Komsomol of deviationists and distinguished himself in arrogant attacks on Tomskey during the fight in the trade unions. Stalin could rely upon him to destroy the hornets' nest in Leningrad. In the spring of 1935 tens of thousands of suspect Bolsheviks, Komsomoltsy, and their families were deported from Leningrad to northern Siberia. Multitudes of 'Kirov's assassins', as those deportees were called, from other cities, too, filled prisons and concentration camps.

The treatment of the political prisoners underwent a radical change. Hitherto it had not been different from that accorded to them in Tsarist days. Political offenders had enjoyed certain privileges and been allowed to engage in self-education and even in political propaganda. Oppositional memoranda, pamphlets, and periodicals had circulated half freely between prisons and had occasionally been smuggled abroad. Himself an ex-prisoner, Stalin knew well that jails and places of exile were the 'universities' of the revolutionaries. Recent events taught him to take no risks. From now on all political discussion and activity in the prisons and places of exile was to be mercilessly suppressed; and the men of the opposition were by privation and hard labour to be reduced to such a miserable, animal-like existence that they should be incapable of the normal processes of thinking and of formulating their views.¹

While Stalin was thus betraying the hopes of Liberal reform, he still pretended that he was willing to satisfy them. He offered the people a diet mixed of terror and illusion. He acted shrewdly, for if he had fed them with terror only, they might have revolted in such desperation that even the most powerful political police might have been helpless. But popular illusions would not have protected a government like Stalin's if it had

¹ While trainloads of 'Kirov's assassins' were moving east and northwards from many corners of Russia, Stalin thus justified his action: '... these comrades did not 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. Evidently, they reckoned on frightening us and compelling us to turn from the Leninist road. . . . We were obliged to handle some of these comrades roughly. But that cannot be helped. I must confess that I, too, had a hand in this. (*Loud cheers and applause.*)' (J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, p. 522.)

country and whether international communism represented a mere shadow. Over these issues they split. To his last day Trotsky believed that there was more reality in international communism, despite all its weakness, than in socialism in one country, despite all its achievements. Most of the other leaders who vacillated between Stalin and Trotsky hesitated over this crucial issue. As to Stalin, this, the major premiss of his policy, remained unchanged throughout the period between the wars.

The peculiar point to be considered is that he was never free to lay bare his main premiss. The view that the world had entered into the era of Socialist revolution had been the main-spring of Leninism. The need for Stalin to pay lip-service to the expectation of revolution was the more pressing the more he was involved in the fight against the left Bolsheviks, who charged him with abandoning the Leninist heritage. It was mainly in the first phases of that struggle, in 1925 and 1926, that he could allow himself to argue publicly from the assumption that no Socialist upheaval in the west would occur for about twenty years. Then, pressed by his opponents, he either sought refuge in ambiguity or vied with them in prophesying the nearness of revolutionary events. Such prophecies represented the exoteric aspect of his policy, the coating without which a large section of the party would not have consented to swallow his ideas. His esoteric view he kept to himself: at the most, he discussed it with the leaders of his own faction; but it was always implied in what he did. The contradiction between the two sides of his policy gave to his behaviour that touch of insincerity and even duplicity which made his anti-Bolshevik critics accuse him of plotting for world revolution, while his Bolshevik critics charged him with plotting against it.

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The débâcle of German communism in 1923 decisively speeded up the crystallization of the set of ideas associated with Stalinism. In the summer of that year the Politbureau and the Executive of the Comintern hotly debated the German crisis provoked by the French occupation of the Ruhr and the galloping devaluation of the German currency. Some of the Bolshevik leaders saw the approach of the 'German October'. Heinrich Brandler, the leader of the German Communist party, arrived

Russian advocates of revolutionary action gained ground and began to 'spur on' the Germans. Stalin ceased to air his scepticism and kept in the background. He let Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek, who did not see eye to eye with one another, commit themselves. Brandler returned to Germany with a set of incoherent and contradictory instructions: he was to organize a revolution against the Social Democrats and at the same time to enter the Social Democratic government of Saxony; he was to start the revolution in Saxony, not in the capital or any other decisive centre, &c.—instructions that would have made any insurrectionist party miss its best opportunities. The enterprise ended in a series of unco-ordinated moves, and in failure. The effect of the failure on Moscow was very great: the isolation of Russian communism was now sealed.

In the next few years the fate of the Comintern remained unsettled. Although Stalin believed the organization to be more or less useless as the instrument of revolution, he could not dissociate Russia's ruling party from it—the ties between Bolshevism and the Comintern had been too strong for that. The Comintern, on the other hand, was inspired by a sense of its mission. It spoke for only a minority of the European working classes; but that was a large and important minority comprising the most idealistic, active, and ardent elements of the western proletariat. Its activity could not but embarrass Soviet diplomacy. This was one motive which compelled Stalin to try to tame the unruly organization. Another was the influence which the Comintern might have on the internal struggles in Russia. In those years the European Communist leaders, though accepting guidance from the successful Bolshevik experts on revolution, still talked to them as equals and took for granted their own right to have a say in Russian affairs. Most of them at first sided with Trotsky against Stalin, with the European-minded Bolsheviks against the self-centred Russian hierarchy of secretaries. Thus, for domestic as well as diplomatic reasons, Stalin could not but extend to the Comintern, still accustomed to the interplay of various trends, traditions, and views in its midst, the methods by which he was remoulding the Russian party into a 'monolithic' body.

He acted from behind the scenes, mainly through his

swayed the majority.¹ This was the mechanism through which he controlled the International. The Russian members of the Executive nominally had no prerogatives other than those possessed by representatives of foreign parties; but their moral pull was decisive. Where this was not enough, various forms of pressure were used to crush opposition. Rebellious foreign leaders were assigned with all honour to work at the headquarters of the International in Moscow, where they were easily controlled and cut off from their followers; public opinion in other Communist parties was mobilized against them; and their opponents and rivals in their own countries were encouraged and raised up. When, in spite of all the campaigning against them, in which calumny had its part, the 'deviationists' still enjoyed authority in their own party, the cashiers of the Comintern withheld their subsidies from that party. But the effectiveness of this, the crudest means of pressure, was secondary.² It was the legend of the Russian revolution, its solid and permanent substance as well as the transitory myths woven into it, that gave Stalin his power over a vast agglomeration of foreign parties, in whose ranks the idealistic seekers for a new way of life were incomparably more numerous than the time-servers. And even the time-servers were time-servers only in a relative sense: they were ready to obey any master, but only if that master spoke with the authority of revolution. Over the years Stalin succeeded in drilling his hosts according to his own

¹ Stalin himself was nominally a member of the Russian delegation to the Executive of the Comintern. But only very rarely did he act in this capacity; and when he did so it was always in order to dispose of this or that foreign 'heretic'. See *Sochineniya*, vol. viii, pp. 1-10, 100-8, 109-15.

² The subsidizing of the various branches of the Comintern was innocuous at first. Every section was to contribute its share to the treasury of the organization and to draw on it according to needs. In varying degrees this had also been the custom in the previous Internationals, the second and the first, without producing corruption. As the financial resources of the Russian party were incomparably greater than those of the other sections, the Comintern became up to a point dependent on them. Foreign parties with a large following could, of course, easily support themselves. But Moscow encouraged them to spend on organization and propaganda beyond their means; and the more they did so the bigger grew their bureaucratic establishments and their need for subsidies. Accustomed to easy money they then tended to neglect the collection of their own dues, which had a demoralizing effect on them. While the role of 'Moscow gold' in fostering communism abroad has very often been melodramatically played up, it is true, nevertheless, that the subsidies did much to make the Communist hierarchies amenable to Stalin's guidance.

ground that it subordinated Chinese communism to middle-class leadership. The dispute generated incredible heat and bitterness and speeded up the final split between Stalin and Trotsky.

Meanwhile, the 'bloc of the four classes' in China was also falling asunder. The growth of Chinese communism, moderate though its policies were, frightened Chiang Kai-shek and the leaders of the middle classes. Chiang brusquely rid himself of his embarrassing allies: he sent his Russian military advisers back to Russia and cruelly suppressed the Communists who had served under him. So strongly had Stalin committed himself to the support of Chiang that his position and prestige were for a time gravely shaken. He tried to save what he could from the ruins of his Chinese policy and instructed the Chinese Communists to coalesce with the leftish Liberals of the Kuomintang, who formed a government at Hankow opposed to Chiang Kai-shek. Soon that coalition, too, broke down. Communism, even while it attempted to deny its own nature and to adapt itself to middle-class allies, to train itself for the arts of moderation and compromise, to change its symbols and its language, did not cease to strike fear and panic in the leaders and parties of the middle classes. It bore the curse or the blessing of its origin, the hallmarks of revolution; hallmarks which evoked either horror or hope and which no tactical artifice could conceal and not even the most vigorous scourings efface.

Similar frustration attended the other major experiment in moderation, the Anglo-Russian council of trade unions, which was formed in May 1925. The Politbureau hoped that the British trade unions would use their influence to improve Anglo-Russian relations, at that time strained. Stalin delegated Tomsky, one of the most influential members of the Politbureau, to address the annual congress of the British trade unions at Hull. He hoped that understanding with the British would be followed by a fuller agreement between the opposed wings in the international Labour movement. Parallel with the Comintern, the *Profintern* (the International of the Red trade unions) had opposed itself to the so-called Amsterdam International, in which the reformist trade unions of the west had been organized. The failure of the Profintern had been even more striking than that of the Comintern. Moscow was now willing to acknow-

policy Stalin tried, towards the end of 1927, to save his face by advising the Chinese Communists, already greatly weakened by savage persecution and slaughter, to stage the rising of Canton. The rising was in advance doomed to failure, and led in fact to a new massacre of the Reds.¹ Soon the whole Comintern sought to make amends for its ill-fated exercises in moderate statesmanship by indulging in a long bout of 'ultra-leftism'. That new ultra-left policy was carried to a suicidal extremity by the German Communist party in the face of rising nazism.

Another reason for the change in the Comintern, one that was certainly more decisive than the feeling in its own ranks, was the new alinement that took place in the Russian party in 1928-9. Stalin was then subduing the right-wing Bolsheviks. Not a single political concept or slogan that had originated from Bukharin, Tomsy, or Rykov withstood condemnation. All the real issues at stake were Russian issues: the N.E.P., industrialization, collectivization, &c. But the powerful 'switch over to the left' in the Russian party transmitted itself automatically to the Comintern hitherto guided by Bukharin. Some foreign Communists tended to side with Bukharin; and so Stalin could not but carry the struggle against him into the International.² He produced new policies for the European parties, which on the surface corresponded to the trend in Russia. In Russia co-operation between Communists and private farmers and traders had come to an end; and the formal corollary to this was that Communists abroad should cease to co-operate with the other parties, especially the Social Democrats.

That automatic transmission of every movement and reflex from the Russian to all the other parties constituted the main and the most bizarre anomaly in the life of the Comintern, an anomaly which became the norm. It was because of this that an air of unreality hung over so much of the Comintern's activity. Stalin's leftward switch in Russia was not only an earnest affair: it had the grandeur of national drama; it re-fashioned to its foundations the social structure of a great country. The whole power of the monster state stood behind

¹ The story of the 'Canton Commune' is told in Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 352-77.

² J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 245-9.

every swing of the party line and transformed words and slogans into lasting deeds. But what did such swings and turns in the policy of the Comintern signify? Meaningless mimicry, at best. It was as if the giant figure of an athlete engaged in a homeric fight had thrown around itself twenty or thirty shadows, each mimicking the tense wrestling and the violent gestures of the real body, each pretending to shake heaven and earth. The strange picture was made even stranger by the fact that the foreign sections of the Comintern were not mere shadows. They were half bodies and half shadows. With one part of their existence they were immersed in the realities of their national life, trying to express the aspirations of their own working classes, while with the other they participated in the hectic dance of phantoms round the General Secretary.

In December 1927, immediately after Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev had been expelled from the party, Stalin surprised the fifteenth congress by stating that the 'stabilization' of capitalism had come to an end. 'Two years ago', he said, 'one could talk about a period of relative balance between the Soviets and the capitalist countries and about their "peaceful co-existence"'. Now we have every reason to say that the period of "peaceful coexistence" recedes into the past, giving place to a period of imperialist attacks and of preparation of intervention against the U.S.S.R.¹ He did not try to square this new view with his previous forecast of fifteen or twenty years of 'peaceful coexistence'. His new thesis was finally accepted as the basis of a new policy at the sixth congress of the Comintern, in the summer of 1928, at which he surprised the foreign delegates by the virtual demotion of Bukharin, carried out behind the scenes.²

The congress forecast the approach of a catastrophic economic crisis in the capitalist countries. (The forecast, authorized by Stalin, was strikingly confirmed, in the following year, by the great slump in the United States.) From these premisses new tactics were developed. A whole chain of revolutionary ex-

¹ 15 *Syezd V.K.P. (b)*, p. 34.

² For Stalin's own version of Bukharin's demotion see his speech on 'The Danger of the Right Deviation' delivered before the Central Committee in April 1929. *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 244 ff.

plosions was expected. The Communist parties in the west were to launch their final offensive against capitalism. The reformist Social Democratic parties, now labelled Social-Fascist, were to be regarded as the most dangerous enemies of communism. The left wings of the Social Democratic parties were to be regarded as even greater obstacles to Socialist revolution than the right ones—'the more to the left the more dangerous'. Any co-operation or contact between Communists and Social Democratic leaders was contaminating. The Comintern was to muster its ranks for the world-wide struggle, relying exclusively upon its own strength and pull.¹

It is doubtful, to say the least, whether Stalin believed in the imminent eruption of all the revolutionary volcanoes, which his propagandists heralded. Though his grasp of conditions in foreign countries was poor, it was not so poor as to make him share the ultra-revolutionary illusions of the sixth congress of the Comintern. With even greater emphasis than hitherto, as if ignoring all the trumpets of the Comintern, he made 'socialism in one country' the supreme article of faith, obligatory not only in his own party but in the Comintern as a whole. He now attached incomparably more importance to a single factory newly built in Russia than to all the great expectations of revolution abroad.² His diplomacy was feeling its way even more cautiously than before and continued to work on the assumption of Russia's prolonged isolation. There was an undeniable contradiction between his two lines of policy, the one he pursued in Russia and the one he inspired in the Comintern. It is easy to guess which of the two policies had the greater weight.

The Comintern was now indeed engaged in a mock fight. Its ultra-radicalism was so unreal that Stalin, in all probability, countenanced it only because he attributed very little practical significance to whatever the Comintern did in those years. If this was what he thought, he was profoundly mistaken, for the ultra-radicalism of the Comintern had important, though only negative, consequences. This was especially so in

¹ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh*, pp. 769-92, 876-7, 915-30, 952-65.

² 'One Soviet tractor is worth more than ten good foreign Communists' was a characteristic remark heard from highly placed Bolsheviks in the days of the first five-year plan. The phrase reflected the tenor of the intimate talk about the Comintern in Stalin's entourage.

Germany, the chief testing-ground of the new policy, where the Labour movement was threatened by the rapid rise of nazism. The split between the Social Democrats who looked to Hindenburg for protection against Hitler and refused to have anything to do with Communists, and the Communists who held the Social Democrats to be a greater menace to them than the Nazis, that completely irrational split, paralysed the political strength of the German working class when it alone could have barred Hitler's road to power. This is not the place to tell the story of the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the story which ended in the surrender of the most powerful labour organizations on the Continent to the Brown Shirts, without a single shot, without a single act of real resistance. Suffice it to say that after the collapse, one of the phrases that were current among the men of the German left was that 'without Stalin there would have been no Hitler'. The saying should be taken with a grain of salt. Amid the *Katzenjammer* which befell them after 1933, most leaders of the German left were only too eager to explain away their own failure and ascribe it to Stalin's evil influence. Nevertheless, as the inspirer of the Comintern policy, Stalin must be held to bear his share of responsibility for the contribution which that policy unwittingly made to Hitler's triumph.

The point that emerges clearly from every Comintern document of the early thirties and from Stalin's own utterances is that he was completely unaware of the significance and the destructive dynamism of nazism.¹ To him Hitler was merely one of the many reactionary leaders whom the political see-saw throws up for a moment, then down and up again, another Brüning or Papen, another Baldwin or Harding. He, of all men, completely missed the totalitarian aspirations in nazism and its power to act on these aspirations. He formulated the essence of his views on fascism as early as in 1924:

It is not true that fascism is only a militant organization of the *bourgeoisie*. . . . Fascism is the militant organization of the *bourgeoisie* which bases itself on the active support of Social Democracy. Objectively, Social Democracy is the moderate wing of fascism. There is no reason to suppose that the militant organization of the

¹ Stalin consistently treated nazism and fascism as essentially identical. The two terms are used here, too, interchangeably.

and intelligence of a great power and a vast international organization, displayed at this momentous test and the insight and sense of responsibility with which Trotsky, from his lonely retreat on Prinkipo island, reacted to the German crisis. In a series of books, pamphlets, and articles Trotsky gave what is to this day the most exhaustive sociological explanation of nazism. He followed the development of Hitler's movement step by step, predicted well in advance every phase of it and tried in vain to impress the German left, the Comintern, and the Soviet Government with the fury of destruction about to break upon their heads.

It is [our] duty [he wrote in 1931] to sound the alarm: the leadership of the Comintern is leading the German proletariat towards an enormous catastrophe, the core of which is the panicky capitulation before fascism. The coming into power of the German National Socialists would mean above all the extermination of the flower of the German proletariat, the disruption of its organizations, the extirpation of its belief in itself and in its future. Considering the far greater . . . acuteness of the social antagonisms in Germany, the hellish work of Italian fascism would probably appear as a pale and almost humane experiment in comparison with the work of German national socialism.¹

Workers, Communists, [Trotsky sounded the alarm again, two years before Hitler's rise to power] . . . should fascism come to power it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle. And only a fighting unity with Social Democratic workers can bring victory. Make haste, you have very little time left!²

In those days Stalin and the other Soviet leaders still played up the bogey of a French-led anti-Soviet crusade, but missed the real anti-Soviet crusader when he appeared on the horizon. In July 1930 Stalin still described France as 'the most aggressive and militarist country of all aggressive and militarist countries of the world' which prepared for war against Russia.³ 'None of the "normal" bourgeois parliamentary governments', this was in effect Trotsky's rejoinder, 'can at the present time risk a war against the U.S.S.R. . . . But if Hitler comes to power

¹ L. Trotsky, *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*, p. 23.

² Ibid., p. 44.

³ J. Stalin, *Leninism*, vol. ii, p. 321.

and proceeds to crush the vanguard of the German workers, pulverizing and demoralizing the whole proletariat for many years to come, the fascist government will be the only government capable of waging war against the U.S.S.R. . . . In case he is victorious [in Germany] Hitler will become the Super-Wrangel of the world *bourgeoisie*.¹ Moscow received Trotsky's alarm cries with complacent derision. The leaders of the Comintern went on obdurately repeating the incoherent slogan about the antipodes and the twins.

Until Hitler's rise to power, Soviet diplomacy pursued, by and large, the policy of Rapallo. It gave qualified support to vanquished Germany against the victors. That support varied in form, but it did not, on the whole, extend to the German ambition to achieve a forcible revision of the peace of Versailles. The Soviets derived what benefit they could from their alinement with Germany, especially as long as the other powers confronted them with various degrees of boycott. The import of German industrial goods assisted Russia in her recovery in the twenties. The Politbureau authorized Trotsky and Tukhachevsky to enlist German military skill, the skill of unemployed officers and technicians, in the training of the Red Army. As a *quid pro quo* the Russians permitted German military technicians to continue on Russian soil experiments which they could not carry out in Germany under the Versailles treaty. In these arrangements Stalin made no change. They continued by force of inertia for some time after Hitler had seized power.²

For all that, the relations between the two countries did not have the character of an alliance. Their aim was, as it was said before, to counterbalance the predominance of the *Entente* and to prevent Germany from coalescing with the west against Russia. Whenever the western powers tried to mitigate the burden of reparations on Germany, as under the Dawes plan, or whenever they tried a *rapprochement* with Germany on the basis of Versailles, as in the pact of Locarno, the Soviet leaders

¹ L. Trotsky, *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*, p. 25.

² This was the grain of truth in the accusation that Trotsky and Tukhachevsky co-operated with the Wehrmacht. The co-operation between the Russian and the German armies went on for about twelve years, from 1922 till 1935, with the authorization of the Politbureau and under its control.

CHAPTER XI

Foreign Policy and Comintern. II

(1934-41)

Stalin's cautious silence in the first year of Hitler's rule.—The search for 'collective security' (1934-8).—Stalin receives Eden, Laval, and Beneš (1935).—Russia joins the League of Nations; the Comintern proclaims the policy of Popular Fronts.—World-revolution—a 'tragi-comic misunderstanding'.—Stalin's stake in the Spanish Civil War (1936-8).—Russia's isolation before and during Munich.—Stalin's *riposte*.—His speech at the XVIIIth Congress (March 1939).—Diplomatic manoeuvres in the last months of peace.—Final preliminaries to the Russo-German Pact.—Ribbentrop at the Kremlin (23 August 1939).—The partition of Poland.—The first Russo-Finnish war.—Stalin refuses to go to Berlin at Hitler's invitation (March 1940).—Stalin surprised by the collapse of France.—Russo-German rivalry in the Balkans.—A Japanese envoy in the Kremlin.—Stalin becomes Prime Minister (6 May 1941) and makes his last attempt to conciliate Hitler.—The balance sheet of Stalin's diplomacy in 1939-41.

THE Nazi upheaval in Germany did not at once suggest to Stalin the need for some revision of his foreign policy. He at first waited to see how stable the Nazi régime would prove to be, and whether Hitler would take up the Rapallo policy of his predecessors or whether he would, in accordance with the ideas expressed in *Mein Kampf*, take up an attitude of implacable hostility towards the Soviets. Meanwhile Stalin took great care not to offer any provocation. The absolute passivity with which German communism had allowed itself to be crushed by Hitler might have been expected to facilitate continued friendly relations between Russia and Germany, so spectacularly did it seem to disprove the current notions about Russia's interference in German affairs.¹ The agreement of Rapallo and the pact of neutrality and friendship of 1926 were still in force; they had been prolonged in 1931; and the prolongation was ratified in May 1933, a few weeks after Hitler had become Chancellor.

¹ Some of Stalin's Communist opponents (Wollenberg, Krivitsky, and others) claimed that Stalin had deliberately led the German Communists to surrender to nazism in order to save the policy of Rapallo. This version has, in our view, not been supported by convincing evidence. Stalin's policy *vis-à-vis* rising nazism represents a record of rare shortsightedness and folly, but not of deliberate treachery.

was fraught with revolutionary complications. The working classes, armed for the defence of the republican Government, might attempt to establish a proletarian dictatorship, Communist or Anarcho-Communist. The landless peasants, in a country as feudal as old Russia, might press for agrarian revolution. But if Spain were to have its 'October', western Europe would be split even more sharply; and the chances of agreement between Russia and the west would be even more slender. The Comintern therefore instructed its Spanish members to limit themselves to the defence of the legal republican Government against Franco. No demands were to be made for socialization of industry or expropriation of landlords. Stalin ordered Litvinov to join the committee of non-intervention, which was formed on Leon Blum's initiative; and for some time Russia was indeed conspicuous by her non-intervention in Spanish affairs.¹

Stalin could not, however, persevere in this attitude. For one thing Hitler and Mussolini did intervene; and this alone made it very difficult for him, the protector of the left, to keep aloof. He, too, intervened, and, through the French Communists, urged France to follow his example. The least he hoped for, if France did so, was to frighten Hitler and Mussolini off Spain. But a bigger issue was at stake as well. If the western democracies had intervened, they would have gone a long way towards a definite military commitment against Germany. From being a European shooting-range, Spain might even have become the first real battlefield of the Second World War. It was precisely because they feared that the Spanish war might become the prelude to world conflict or because they were reluctant to help the Popular Front in defeating Franco, or for both these reasons, that the western governments persistently refused to intervene, even though Hitler and Mussolini were the beneficiaries of their inactivity. In the end the wrangle over Spain in the committee of non-intervention did much to exacerbate the relations between Russia, Britain, and France.

The contradictions in which Stalin involved himself led him to conduct from the Kremlin a civil war within the Spanish civil war. The extreme Spanish Anarchists and

¹ G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs, 1920 to 1938*, pp. 430-2; Joaquin Maurin, *Révolution et Contre-révolution en Espagne*, pp. 131, 145.

Wehrmacht from scoring its great initial victories. He met Hitler's onslaught only half mobilized. In June 1941 the number of mobilized Russian and German divisions was almost equal, but only part of the Russian divisions were ready to meet their experienced and well-equipped opponent, to whom a long succession of brilliant victories had given high self-assurance. Yet the Red Army could have had strong superiority in numbers.¹ The excessive complexity of his political game led Stalin to put himself at a military disadvantage. He had been uneasy enough to mobilize 170 divisions and to move most of these to the frontier; but he had still been too complacent, or too wary of 'provoking' Hitler, to carry out the mobilization on the scale required. For this we have his own authority: 'The fact of the matter is', he stated (3 July 1941), 'that the troops of Germany, a country at war, were already fully mobilized, . . . and in a state of complete readiness, only awaiting the signal to move into action, whereas the Soviet troops had still to effect mobilization and to move up to the frontiers.'² What Stalin in fact admitted was that in the last weeks before the invasion he had squandered much of that precious time, to the gain of which he still pointed as to the justification of his policy. 'Of no little importance', he added, '. . . was the fact that Fascist Germany suddenly and treacherously violated the non-aggression pact.' The world was told then that 'vigor'd falsehood and base forgery' betrayed his 'credulous innocence'.

When the balance of those strange twenty-two months is drawn, it is impossible to overlook the gratuitous service which the Comintern unwittingly rendered to Hitler. No sooner had Molotov and Ribbentrop put their signatures to the pact of August 1939 than the Comintern called off the anti-Hitler crusade to which its trumpeters had so long summoned governments and peoples.

¹ Cyril Falls, *The Second World War*, p. 113. Schulenburg was obviously wrong when he assured Hitler that the 'urge for security' made the Russians send ten divisions wherever the Germans sent one.

² J. Stalin, *War Speeches*, pp. 7-8. Stalin admitted the fact even more explicitly to Harry Hopkins. See Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 333 and 335. Not only the mobilization of the army but the final conversion of industry to war was also unduly delayed. It was only in 1948 that the chief of the State Planning Commission, Vice-Premier N. Voznesensky, disclosed that the economic plans for the third quarter of 1941 had been based on the assumption of peace, and that a new plan, suited for war, had been drafted only after the outbreak of hostilities. N. Voznesensky, *Voennaya Ekonomika SSSR*, p. 37.

regarding aid to the Soviet Union and the declaration of the United States government. . . .¹ As in 1812, Russia was fighting a 'national patriotic war', which was also a war for the freedom of all peoples. He wound up by calling upon the people to 'rally round the party of Lenin and Stalin'.² This unexpected reference in the third person to himself, added a touch of incongruity to his speech—a speech at once so great and so flat, so indomitable and so uninspiring.

Russia was to sell space for time; the space sold was to be made unusable to the enemy; and a merciless price was to be exacted for it. This was the only way in which, after all his errors and miscalculations, Stalin could meet the conqueror of Europe. He confronted him with superior will-power. But is it true, as it has been asserted, that he never lost his confidence, even for a moment? In the light of some of Stalin's casual remarks, made in those critical months, one may doubt whether this was so. In his speech of 3 July he spoke not only of Napoleon's defeat in Russia. He also recalled the fate of Kaiser Wilhelm, who, although he had been considered invincible, had finally been defeated 'by Anglo-French forces'. Stalin did not recall that the Kaiser's army had defeated Russia before it succumbed to its western enemies. But his mind was obviously wandering from Napoleon to the Kaiser and from the Kaiser to Napoleon. He could not help reflecting whether Hitler might not achieve what the Kaiser had achieved. Some such thought must have flashed across his mind when, on 30 July, he talked to Harry L. Hopkins, President Roosevelt's envoy. He admitted that he himself had not expected Hitler to launch the attack; he further said that the 'war would be bitter and perhaps long', that 75 per cent. of his war industries were located in and around Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov, all soon to be threatened by the enemy, and that he would like the President to know that he, Stalin, 'would welcome American troops on any part of the Russian front under the complete command of the American army'.³ This is one of the most revealing statements attributed to Stalin by the memoirists of the Second World War. Throughout the war Stalin persistently refused to

¹ J. Stalin, *War Speeches*, p. 12.

² Ibid., p. 12.

³ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 339-43.

admit to the front any foreign troops not under his command. He kept foreign observers away from the fighting lines; and as a rule, to which there were exceptions, he would not even allow allied pilots to fly over Russia. What then made him eager to 'welcome American troops on any part of the Russian front under the complete command of the American army' in July 1941, when the United States was not even at war and when his suggestion was completely unreal? One can only conclude that he uttered those words in a mood of flagging confidence, perhaps of despair. This would have been only natural, because, when Stalin talked to Hopkins, Hitler's troops had covered more than 450 miles in less than a month; in the north the battle of Smolensk was flaring up; and in the south the rout of Budienny's armies was beginning. In September, after Budienny's disastrous defeat on the Dnieper, two other visitors, Harriman and Beaverbrook, noticed signs of depression in Stalin; and Stalin then inquired whether the British would not send some of their troops to the Ukrainian front.¹ Later in the autumn, when the Germans were approaching Moscow, he betrayed his anxiety to Sir Stafford Cripps. He told the British Ambassador that Moscow would be defended to the last, but he also envisaged the possibility that the Germans might seize it. He went on to say that if Moscow fell, the Red Army would have to withdraw from the whole territory to the west of the Volga. He believed that even then the Soviets would be able to go on waging war, but that it would take many years before they could strike back across the Volga.

Shortly after the war Stalin himself made an oblique admission. On 24 May 1945, celebrating victory at the Kremlin, he raised a 'toast to the Russian people'. 'Our government', he said, 'made not a few errors, we experienced at moments a desperate situation in 1941-1942, when our army was retreating, because there was no other way out. A different people could have said to the government: "You have failed to justify our expectations. Go away. We shall instal another government which will conclude peace with Germany. . . ." The Russian people, however, did not take this path. . . . Thanks to it, to the Russian people, for this confidence.'² In the first months

¹ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 387-9.

² J. Stalin, *War Speeches*, p. 139.

corps of the Red Army had been the only organization in the state upon which Stalin had not brought to bear the full measure of totalitarian pressure. To be sure, he kept the armed forces under his control. But he also took care not to involve them too closely in all the controversies and intrigues which shook party and state. He encouraged the non-political general, devoted to his job and bent on making the best of it, as long as that officer paid lip service to the party on one or other rare occasion. The general who had in the past been sympathetically inclined to this or that opposition but had not been politically active was not required to go through these humiliating motions of contrition, which no civilian with a similar blot on his political conscience was allowed to dodge. Military art was one of the few politically important domains in which Stalin encouraged the original and experimenting mind, in which he did not impose the do's and don't's of his pseudo-dialectical catechism. Until 1937 he had allowed Tukhachevsky a free hand in matters concerned with strategic and tactical conceptions and with the modernization of the armed forces. Thus, the officers' corps largely escaped that oppressive spiritual drill which, over the years, maimed and crushed the civilian character. True enough, the purge of 1937 led to a grave worsening. But it was significant that not one of the indicted military leaders was brought to recite the usual confessions and self-accusations. All faced their judges and executioners like men. That circumstance alone indicated that the officers' corps had acquired a distinct mentality of its own, an independence of mind and a moral staying power quite exceptional in the climate of totalitarianism.

In the first phase of the war the army paid a heavy price for, among other things, the loss of self-reliance which its commanding staffs had suffered as a consequence of the purges. The warning was not, however, wasted on Stalin. He had the sense to give back to his generals their freedom of movement, to encourage them to speak their mind, to embolden them to look for the solution of their problems by way of trial and error, and to relieve them from the fear of the boss's wrath, a fear which weighed so heavily on Hitler's generals. He punished his officers with draconic severity for lack of courage or vigilance; he demoted them for incompetence, even when the in-

and tricks, which in the end fell into the pattern of a revolution, but which in themselves were petty and wicked. Of these tricks none was quite as wicked as the falsification of the popular vote—sooner or later 99 per cent. of the voters must vote for the powers in being. In Russia the Bolsheviks had at first described their rule as proletarian dictatorship; they had disfranchised the members of the former ruling and possessing classes; they had made an electoral law so designed as to ensure the predominance of the industrial workers over the peasant majority; but within these avowedly narrow limits the vote had been a vote. Friend and foe of the Bolshevik revolution knew where they stood; and even its foes had to acknowledge with some respect the frankness with which it had proclaimed its class principle. The eastern European offspring of the Russian revolution pretended much higher democratic respectability; they indignantly denied that they had anything in common with dictatorial rule; they produced with superior airs the overwhelming votes they had allegedly obtained in universal and secret ballot; and even their friends were irritated by the crude hypocrisy of their pretensions.

Yet, by sponsoring that strange revolution, Stalin rendered the peoples of eastern Europe 'services, of which it is difficult to overrate either the wickedness or the utility', to paraphrase Macaulay's verdict on an English statesman. Between the two wars nearly all those peoples had been stranded in an impasse; their life had been bogged down in savage poverty and darkness; their politics had been dominated by archaic cliques who had not minded the material and cultural retrogression of their subjects as long as their own privileges had been safe. That whole portion of Europe had emerged from the Second World War and from the hideous 'school' of nazism even more destitute, savage, and helpless. It may well be that for its peoples the only chance of breaking out of their impasse lay in a *coup de force* such as that to which Stalin goaded them. In Poland and Hungary the Communist-inspired land reform fulfilled, perhaps imperfectly, a dream of many generations of peasants and intellectuals. All over eastern Europe the Communists, having nationalized the main industries, vigorously promoted plans for industrialization and full employment such as were beyond the material resources and the wit of native 'private

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but also against Russia and communism. His claim for reparations to be paid by Germany, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Finland, understandable as it was in view of the devastation of the Ukraine and other Soviet lands, could not but have the same damaging effect on the Communist cause in those countries. This was even truer of Stalin's demand for the liquidation of the bulk of German industry. Already at Teheran, if not earlier, he had given notice that he would raise that demand; at Yalta he proposed that 80 per cent. of German industry should be dismantled within two years after the cease fire; and he did not abate that demand at Potsdam.¹ He could not have been unaware that his scheme, as chimerical as ruthless, if it had been carried out, would have entailed the dispersal of the German working class, the main, if not the only, social force to which communism could have appealed and whose support it might have enlisted. Not a single one of these policies can by any stretch of the imagination be described as a stepping-stone towards revolution. On the contrary, in every one of those moves, Stalin himself was laboriously erecting formidable barriers to revolution. This alone seems to warrant the conclusion that even at the close of the war his intentions were still extremely self-contradictory, to say the least.

Mikolajczyk reports a curious conversation with Stalin in August 1944. Not without peasant-like slyness, the Polish politician tried to sound Stalin on his plans for Germany, and told him that German prisoners, captured by the Poles, allegedly expressed the hope that after the war Germany would embrace communism and, as the foremost Communist state, go on to rule the world. Stalin, so Mikolajczyk reports, replied indignantly that 'communism fitted Germany as a saddle fitted a cow'. This contemptuous aphorism undoubtedly reflected his mood. It harmonized so perfectly with the whole trend of his policy *vis-à-vis* Germany, it was so spontaneous, so organic, so much in line with what we know of his old disbelief in western European communism, and it accorded so much with all that he said and did in those days, that it could not have been sheer tactical bluff.

It was, indeed, in Stalin's approach to Germany that the conflict between his nationalism and his revolutionism was

¹ James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, pp. 26-7.

22 sharpest, and that the nationalist, one might say the anti-revolutionary, element predominated longest. 'It would be naïve to think', he said shortly before Yalta, 'that Germany will not attempt to restore her might and launch new aggression. . . . History shows that a short period—some twenty or thirty years—is enough for Germany to recover from defeat and re-establish her might.'¹ He had used the same argument at Teheran, only that there he had forecast Germany's come-back within a much shorter period.² He repeated the same thing to nearly every one of his many visitors in the Kremlin. He appeared almost obsessed by the thought of future German revenge. When he spoke about the need for the unity of the great allied powers in peace, he pointed to that danger. He did the same when he proposed to cripple German industry, to change Germany's frontiers, to detach Austria from Germany, or to establish a pro-Russian government in Poland, 'that corridor through which the Germans march into Russia'. In this preoccupation with Russia's security *vis-à-vis* Germany, he used the language that Foch, Clemenceau, and Poincaré had used after the First World War, the language of the Conservative who projects the past into the future and sees that future in terms of competition, struggle, and war between nations. His warnings about German revenge 'in twenty or thirty years' were in his mouth identical with the firm assumption that 'in twenty or thirty years' Germany would still remain a capitalist, imperialist nation, obviously because 'communism fitted her as a saddle fitted a cow'. Had he reckoned on the chance of a Communist revolution in Germany he would have seen no need for the punitive peace he advocated.

In speaking as he did, he undoubtedly spoke for Russia. It is not an exaggeration to say that the whole of Russia hoped that the day of victory would be the day of judgement for Germany and that the judgement would be conducted by Germany's victims. Internationalist ideas and sentiments of solidarity with foreign working classes, in so far as such sentiments had not been swamped by the nationalist tide, had no validity *vis-à-vis* the enemy nation, for the German working classes appeared to have done nothing either to prevent Hitler's

¹ J. Stalin, *War Speeches*, p. 113.

² Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 786-7.

Russia came too late to be effective. In the last days of the war masses of German soldiers, stricken with guilt and panic, fled from the Russians into British and American captivity, while German representatives sought to arrange an armistice with the western powers, but not with Russia. Bristling with suspicion, Stalin watched these manoeuvres; and when at last he was able to announce the German surrender, he could hardly suppress his own surprise and relief at the fact that the Wehrmacht had capitulated to Russia, too.¹ The events of the last few weeks of the war revealed the terrible gulf between Germany and Russia, which both Hitler and Stalin, each in his own way and each in a different degree, had dug, a gulf that neither ordinary diplomacy nor revolutionary policy would be able to bridge for many years after the war.²

Stalin's foreign policy thus appears to have been not the result of any preconceived plan but the resultant of contradictory domestic and foreign pressures. Now, as so often in the past, the control of events over him was much stronger than his control over events. We have seen some of the domestic pressures at work. As to the foreign ones, these were evident in the long series of inter-allied conflicts and squabbles which filled the months between Yalta and Potsdam, and in acrimonious controversies at Potsdam itself. Despite the agreement on the zones of influence and despite Stalin's silence over the civil war in Greece, the western powers protested against Russian intervention in Rumania and against developments in Poland and Yugoslavia. Disagreement over the United Nations, patched up at Yalta, came to light once again. Stalin showed his displeasure by refusing Roosevelt's request that Molotov should attend the founding conference of the United Nations at San Francisco. (Only after Roosevelt's death, on 12 April 1945, did Stalin, wishing to make a friendly gesture

¹ J. Stalin, *War Speeches*, p. 136.

² It was largely for that reason that the Free German Committee, formed in Moscow after the battle of Stalingrad, was utterly ineffectual in its propaganda. The role which Stalin assigned to that Committee, at first headed by General Seydlitz and then also by Field-Marshal von Paulus, was the object of much anxious speculation among the western allies. It was thought that the Committee was the nucleus of a Russian sponsored German Government. Actually, it was merely an abortive propagandist venture. It attempted to appeal primarily to German conservative opinion, and for that reason it not only spoke in the non-revolutionary idiom, but used the old banner of the Hohenzollern Empire as its own.

country had that contrast been identified with socialism and a classless society. Stalin asked the working classes not only to make the effort they were making and bear the sacrifices they were bearing, but also to believe that they had an easier and better life than the peoples of the capitalist countries. This was not and could not have been true; and this was not the fault of socialism. Nor was it, by and large, the fault of Stalin or of his Government, although some of their mistakes aggravated the situation. But it was Stalin's fault, if this be the right word, that he presented to the Russian people their miserable standard of living as the height of Socialist achievement.

This misrepresentation was the source of an astounding system of hypocritical deception. Its first consequence was that the mass of the people was not to be allowed to make real comparisons between the Russian and the foreign standards of living. The second was that over many years the propagandists not only gilded the conditions of life at home, but persistently set up an absurdly exaggerated picture of the misery of the working classes abroad. The third was that as few Soviet citizens as possible were allowed to study social life in foreign countries either through personal observation or through reading foreign books and newspapers. To maintain the 'iron curtain' became Stalin's major economic and political interest.

Russia's isolation from the world became hermetic, and turned into a morose psychosis during the great purges. The picture of a sinister, all-pervading foreign conspiracy, which Vyshinsky, the general prosecutor, drew, and which the defendants through their confessions made even blacker, the fact that the conspiracy was alleged to have had its agents in almost every cell of the body politic, the terrible punishment inflicted upon the 'conspirators'—all that spread a neurotic horror of all things foreign. Every contact, be it ever so casual, with foreigners and foreign affairs was deemed contaminating. Old people suspected, of course, that it was all a frame up; and, from fear, they accepted the isolation. But the young took things at their face value. Their horror of foreign vice coupled with domestic heresy was genuine. It was part of their normal state of mind, part of their character. They had almost from the cradle been moulded by the monolithic state; they had been indoctrinated not with Marxism indeed, but with one crude

Byzantinesque version of it. They had not been allowed to acquire the habit of questioning accepted truth; they had not been afforded the experience of any real clash of conflicting views and principles, the experience of independent formation of opinion. The purges finally insulated the mind of the young generation from any disturbing outside influence.

Made up of so many diverse elements, the 'iron curtain' performed in effect a dual function, 'progressive' and 'reactionary'. Behind that curtain the revolution found a degree of safety and the Government could go ahead with the job of industrialization and modernization. (The strictly military value of the 'iron curtain' was up to a point demonstrated in the war, when Hitler's generals, on invading Russia, found that what they had known about their enemy was next to nothing.¹) At the same time, the 'iron curtain' shielded Stalin's autocracy, his uncanny despotism, his legends and deceptions. In both its functions the 'iron curtain' had become to Stalinism the indispensable condition for its very existence.

It was of that condition, of that *sine qua non* of its self-perpetuation, that victory now threatened to rob Stalinism. Russia suddenly found herself involved in a thousand ways in the life and the affairs of the outside world. Millions of Russian soldiers marched into a dozen foreign lands. They were, in more than one sense, *l'état en voyage*, as Napoleon had called an army marching into a foreign country. Millions of former forced labourers returned home from a long sojourn in Germany. Multitudes of Russian officers sat on inter-allied commissions, in daily contact with an alien world. The 'iron curtain' was pierced, breached, almost shattered.

The impression that the capitalist west made on the Russians was by no means as uniformly favourable as some people in the west, given to self-flattery, were inclined to think. The Russians saw Europe in ruin. Millions of their men and women had lived for years behind the barbed wire of German concentration camps or in the shadow of gas-chambers. They saw the hideous diseased rump of European civilization, not its old noble face. To many of them the picture of the outside world must have looked even blacker than the propagandists at home had painted it. Even those who had been spared such gloomy

¹ B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, pp. 184, 187, and 196.

fervour he hoped, in particular, to restore the morale of the intelligentsia and to re-reconcile it to the rigours of his rule. By one of history's many ironies Leninism was now called upon to stop the breaches in Stalin's 'iron curtain'.

There was a Sisyphean touch about these labours, which was due to an obvious contradiction between Stalin's foreign and domestic policies. His foreign policy was to keep Russia in Europe. His domestic policy was to keep her mind out of Europe. His purpose was to re-isolate Russia not only from that part of the Continent that was under American and British influence, but even from that portion of it that had come under Russian influence, for the way of life and the spiritual climate of the 'people's democracies' was very different from the Russian. In part this was due to the dissimilarity of the national traditions of Russians, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Serbs. Even in Russia the formative processes of Stalinism had lasted many years and had necessitated many economic upheavals, political shocks, and slow changes. The end product of that long painful evolution could not be exported ready made to the countries in the Russian orbit. Meanwhile, their economic systems, with private ownership still predominating in farming, with diverse methods of industrial work and varying degrees of efficiency, would be different from the Russian. The standards of living of the Czechs or Poles, traditionally higher than those of the Russians, could not be so depressed for the sake of industrialization as they had been in Russia. All this was likely to produce 'deviations' from orthodoxy. Genuine contact between Russia and the 'people's democracies'—free travel and free exchange of ideas—could easily have become another source of ferment inside Russia. Stalin had therefore to keep in being two 'iron curtains', one separating Russia from her own zone of influence, the other separating that zone from the west. Public opinion in the west was more preoccupied with the latter, but it was the former that was the more impenetrable of the two. Yet it is questionable whether even this double wall can effectively serve a policy that aspires to keep Russia in and out of Europe at the same time.

The chief drama of victorious Stalinism lies, however, in a wider and much more dangerous dilemma. Stalin has staked

everything on revolutionizing the whole of the Russian zone of influence. He apparently believed that, having achieved this, he would be able to secure the great truce, the 'peaceful co-existence', to use his own term, between the capitalist west and the communist east. These two objectives, revolution within the Russian orbit and the peaceful coexistence of the two systems, have tended to militate against each other. (The truce between capitalism and communism, which lasted through the twenties and thirties, was based on a precarious balance of power, which can hardly be restored. Among its essential elements were Russian weakness and American isolationism. Both belong to the past. Any new balance would require that the United States should reconcile itself to Russian ascendancy in the east and Russia to American ascendancy in the west. It would require that the powers should perpetuate the division of the world into zones of influence. Even if they could bring themselves to do that, the new balance would still be highly unstable, because of the extreme polarization of power in the world and the friction on the borderlines of the two systems. More important still, the outcome of the Second World War has posed the question whether the world, on the threshold of the atomic age, has not become too small for the two antagonistic systems. This is not an entirely new question. The advance of industrial technique has long since tended to render nation-states and empires obsolete. But the sudden expansion of both the American influence and the Soviet system, coinciding with the new revolution in industrial technique, has re-posed the question with baffling insistence and unendurable acuteness. Before that question victorious Stalinism, like the rest of the world, seems to stand defeated.)

Here we suspend the story of Stalin's life and work. We are under no illusion that we can draw from it final conclusions or form, on its basis, a confident judgement of the man, of his achievements and failures. After so many climaxes and anti-climaxes, his drama seems only now to be rising to its pinnacle; and we do not know into what new perspective its last act may yet throw the preceding ones.

What appears to be established is that Stalin belongs to the

breed of the great revolutionary despots, to which Cromwell, Robespierre, and Napoleon belonged. It is only right to place equal emphasis on each part of this description. He is great, if his stature is measured by the scope of his endeavours, the sweep of his actions, the vastness of the stage he has dominated. He is revolutionary, not in the sense that he has remained true to all the original ideas of the revolution, but because he has put into practice a fundamentally new principle of social organization, which, no matter what happens to him personally or even to the régime associated with his name, is certain to survive, to fertilize human experience, and to turn it in new directions. It has, indeed, been one of Stalin's triumphs to see how many other governments have tried to steal his thunder, claiming that they, too, have adopted the methods of planned economy. Finally, his inhuman despotism has not only vitiated much of his achievement—it may yet provoke a violent reaction against it, in which people may be prone to forget, for a time, what it is they react against: the tyranny of Stalinism or its progressive social performance.

The complexity of Stalin's character and of his role becomes most apparent when a comparison is attempted between him and Hitler. Their similarities are numerous and striking. Each of them suppressed opposition without mercy or scruple. Each built up the machine of a totalitarian state and subjected his people to its constant, relentless pressure. Each tried to remould the mind of his nation to a single pattern from which any 'undesirable' impulse or influence was excluded. Each established himself as an unchallengeable master ruling his country in accordance with a rigid *Führerprinzip*.¹

Here the similarities cease and the differences begin. Not in a single field has Hitler made the German nation advance beyond the point it had reached before he took power. In most fields he has thrown it back far behind, terribly far behind. The

¹ There is, however, a difference between the Nazi and the Stalinist versions of the *Führerprinzip*. Hitler was worshipped by his followers as a demi-god, without any inhibition, because hero worship suited only too well a racialist mystique. The cult of Stalin, on the other hand, could never be made to fit in properly with the realism of Marxism-Leninism. Stalin has been worshipped not as the mythical hero but as the guardian of the doctrine, the trustee of the revolution, the symbol of authority. The Marxist inhibition has compelled him to cloak his personal authority with the collective authority of the Politbureau or of the Central Committee.

What a contrast, after all, Stalinist Russia presents. The nation over which Stalin took power might, apart from small groups of educated people and advanced workers, rightly be called a nation of savages. This is not meant to cast any reflection on the Russian national character—Russia's 'backward, Asiatic' condition has been her tragedy, not her fault. Stalin undertook, to quote a famous saying, to drive barbarism out of Russia by barbarous means. Because of the nature of the means he employed, much of the barbarism thrown out of Russian life has crept back into it. The nation has, nevertheless, advanced far in most fields of its existence. Its material apparatus of production, which about 1930 was still inferior to that of any medium-sized European nation, has so greatly and so rapidly expanded that Russia is now the first industrial power in Europe and the second in the world. Within little more than one decade the number of her cities and towns doubled; and her urban population grew by thirty millions. The number of schools of all grades has very impressively multiplied. The whole nation has been sent to school. Its mind has been so awakened that it can hardly be put back to sleep again. Its avidity for knowledge, for the sciences and the arts, has been stimulated by Stalin's government to the point where it has become insatiable and embarrassing. It should be remarked that, although Stalin has kept Russia isolated from the contemporary influences of the west, he has encouraged and fostered every interest in what he calls the 'cultural heritage' of the west. Perhaps in no country have the young been imbued with so great a respect and love for the classical literature and art of other nations as in Russia.¹ This is one of the important differences between the educational methods of nazism and

Hitler. Even the most ruthless implementation of socialist and communist economic doctrines would not have been more devastating in its consequences than was Hitler's complete ignorance in matters of economic policy. . . . Hitler's four year plan had nothing in common with constructive planning in the style of the Russian five year plans.' This statement comes from so uncompromising an opponent of communism and socialism as Hjalmar Schacht, Hitler's one time 'financial wizard'. Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, *Abrechnung mit Hitler*, p. 41.

¹ In the years of the Soviet régime, up to the war, the total editions of foreign classics were: Byron's works half a million copies, Balzac nearly two millions, Dickens two millions, Goethe half a million, Heine one million, Victor Hugo three millions, Maupassant more than three millions, Shakespeare one million two hundred thousand, Zola two millions, &c.

Stalinism. Another is that Stalin has not, like Hitler, forbidden the new generation to read and study the classics of their own literature whose ideological outlook does not accord with his. While tyrannizing the living poets, novelists, historians, painters, and even composers, he has displayed, on the whole, a strange pietism for the dead ones. The works of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Belinsky, and many others, whose satire and criticism of past tyranny have only too often a bearing on the present, have been literally pressed into the hands of youth in millions of copies. No Russian Lessing or Heine has been burned at an *auto-da-fé*. Nor can the fact be ignored that the ideal inherent in Stalinism, one to which Stalin has given a grossly distorted expression, is not domination of man by man, or nation by nation, or race by race, but their fundamental equality. Even the proletarian dictatorship is presented as a mere transition to a classless society; and it is the community of the free and the equal, and not the dictatorship, that has remained the inspiration. Thus, there have been many positive, valuable elements in the educational influence of Stalinism, elements that are in the long run likely to turn against its worse features.

Finally, the whole structure of Russian society has undergone a change so profound and so many sided that it cannot really be reversed. It is possible to imagine a violent reaction of the Russian people itself against the state of siege in which it has been living so long. It is even possible to imagine something like a political restoration. But it is certain that even such a restoration would touch merely the surface of Russian society and that it would demonstrate its impotence *vis-à-vis* the work done by the revolution even more thoroughly than the Stuart and the Bourbon restorations had done. For of Stalinist Russia it is even truer than of any other revolutionary nation that 'twenty years have done the work of twenty generations'.

For all these reasons Stalin cannot be classed with Hitler, among the tyrants whose record is one of absolute worthlessness and futility. Hitler was the leader of a sterile counter-revolution, while Stalin has been both the leader and the exploiter of a tragic, self-contradictory but creative revolution. Like Cromwell, Robespierre, and Napoleon he started as the servant of an insurgent people and made himself its master. Like Cromwell he embodies the continuity of the revolution through all its

J. D. has written the book of his pre-
reflex. Nobody else could have done it.
Without him we should continue to be lost
in a maze of secrets - to live all-over
again.

The problem of contemporary history:
unhealthy? Obsolete? It is an ha-
zard to be a man. - and has become
a shame. Many have become ashamed of
their past -

He has sold the story of the '30s, called
in terms that make sense and thereby
deprives the whole affair of its sense
of riddle - enigma - mystery -

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