



LET HISTORY JUDGE

**The origins and
consequences of Stalinism**

by Roy A. Medvedev

**A Soviet scholar's monumental
study of the Stalinist system**

ROY A. MEDVEDEV

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HISTORY
JUDGE

The Origins and Consequences
of Stalinism

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PART TWO

THE PRECONDITIONS OF STALINISM

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Editor's Introduction

UP TO NOW scholarly analyses of Stalinism have appeared only outside the Soviet Union, nearly all of them written by non-Communists. With this book, a Soviet Marxist is trying to begin the discussion at home. He submitted the work to a Soviet publisher; it was turned down; so he has authorized publication abroad. The author's motives for writing it in the first place are amply explained in his own introduction, written for the intended Soviet audience. This introduction is primarily for the benefit of outsiders, who may wish to know who the author is, how his analysis of Stalinism compares with previous interpretations, and how this translation compares with the Russian original.

The author is one of twin sons born in 1925 to a Soviet Marxist philosopher, Alexander Romanovich Medvedev, who coined names for his children that were in keeping with the times—as many believers in a revolutionary break with the past were then doing. Roy (or Roi) means “Dig” (the imperative of *ryt'*), and Reis, the original name of his twin, means “A Route.” When Reis altered his name for euphonic reasons to Zhores, the brothers seemed to be named for the French Socialist Jaurès and the Indian Communist M. N. Roy, a pleasant coincidence of revolutionary tradition and linguistic innovation.

In the late thirties, when the father was teaching dialectical materialism at the Tolmachev¹ Military-Political Academy, an institution that trained commissars for the Red Army, the terror snatched him away. The sons nevertheless followed his example, both of them becoming scholars with strong social consciences. Zhores is now a distinguished biochemist who has written exposés of tyranny in Soviet intellectual life.² (In reprisal, the tyrants dissolved his labora-

¹ N. G. Tolmachev, a Bolshevik who died in the Civil War, not to be confused with the Tolmachev who was expelled from the Party in 1933 and killed by the terror. They may have been brothers. The Academy seems to have been renamed for Lenin when the terror struck it. See below, pp. 155 and 212.

² See his *Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko* (New York, 1969), and *The Medvedev Papers* (New York, 1971).

tory and had him dragged off to a mental institution, but the protests of fellow scientists won his release and restoration to a laboratory.) Roy, trained in philosophy at Leningrad University, went on to receive a graduate degree in education. After teaching history and serving as a principal of a secondary school, he became a research associate in the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. He has published two books and many articles, chiefly in the field of vocational training.³ He is, in short, a scholar with an unusual combination of *Sitzfleisch* and versatility, who has moved from philosophy to pedagogy and has now arrived at history.

The XXth Party Congress in 1956 precipitated Roy Medvedev's involvement in history. That Congress startled the world by opening a campaign against the Stalinist legacy of despotism and terror. Medvedev joined the Party and began an intensive study of Soviet history. When the XXIInd Congress in 1961 reaffirmed the call for de-Stalinization, he began to write this book. But by the time he finished, in 1968, there were growing signs of a reversal. *Kommunist*, the theoretical organ of the Party's Central Committee, published a defense of Stalin, which provoked Roy into sending a long critical letter to the editor. A common act, with very strange results. The letter sent to *Kommunist* appeared in *Posev*,⁴ an anti-Soviet journal published in West Germany by an émigré organization that is widely believed to be supported by the CIA and penetrated by the KGB. The émigrés are ready to publish any dissident Soviet manuscripts they get their hands on, whether or not the authors approve, and Soviet authorities are just as ready to punish anyone whose manuscript is published by the émigrés.

This weird cooperation between anti-Soviet émigrés and Soviet vigilantes—perhaps sincerely ideological on both sides, since both genuinely dislike Communist reformers—has a very practical function. It helps to keep alive within the Soviet Union the fear of putting disapproved thoughts on paper. Post-Stalin legal officials have tried to distinguish between permissible criticism and the sort of thing that American vigilantes call subversion, but the distinction can hardly become meaningful as long as the KGB turns criticism into subversion simply by channeling it to the émigrés in West Germany. Because of the letter to *Kommunist* that wound up in *Posev*, Roy Medvedev was expelled from the Party. *Posev* strengthened the case against him by publishing another letter over his name, this one a complete fabrica-

³ See his *Professional'noe obuchebie shkol'nikov na promyshlennom predpriatii; nekotorye vyvody iz opyta raboty eksperimental'nykh shkol v RSFSR* (Moscow, 1960); translated into German (Berlin, 1962) and Bulgarian (Sofia, 1962). See also his *Voprosy organizatsii professional'nogo obucheniia shkol'nikov* (Moscow, 1963).

⁴ 1969, Nos. 6-7; see also the French translation: *Faut-il réhabiliter Staline?* (Paris, 1969).

tion. His angry protest elicited a declaration of scrupulous delicacy from the editors: they refrained from checking the authenticity of names attached to the manuscripts that they printed, for fear, they said, that their inquiries might endanger the authors. Anyhow, they guessed that Medvedev's *disavowal* might be a fabrication, created with the participation of the KGB.⁵ That vicious circle is the background of Roy Medvedev's decision, when news of his big manuscript began to spread in the West, to authorize untainted publication, by a Western press with an impeccable reputation in the field of historical scholarship.

The Soviet audience for which this book was written would take for granted many things that may puzzle or annoy outsiders. Stalinism itself is a term that may cause confusion, for many people in the West have only a vague notion of the difference between Stalinism and the Soviet system or Communism in general. Medvedev draws a sharp distinction. He uses Stalinism to mean personal despotism sustained by mass terror and by worship of the despot ("the cult of the personality"), precisely those features of the Soviet system that Stalin's successors repudiated, sometimes calling them crimes but usually brushing them off as "mistakes." Medvedev agrees with the official view in one sense: he regards despotism and terror and the cult as accidental deformations of a fundamentally sound system, mistakes on the part of the Party and the country as a whole. He vehemently denies that they were mistakes on Stalin's part, for Stalin deliberately engineered them. They must be listed among Stalin's crimes, not among his mistakes.

The reader who detects a scholastic odor in such reasoning, or who is simply annoyed by the author's heavy use of the term "mistakes," should bear in mind that this is not Medvedev's personal idiosyncrasy. It is standard Soviet usage, perplexing to outsiders because it tends to confuse miscalculation and misbehavior—being factually wrong and being morally wrong. Medvedev's desire to overcome that confusion is one of the reasons he labors the distinction between Stalin's mistakes and Stalin's crimes.⁶ He is less aware of a more serious difficulty: implicit in the constant talk of mistakes is the dubious assumption that there is always a "correct line" in politics, and an associated confusion between two different methods for establishing it, the say-so of unimpeachable authority and the usual rules of reasoned judgment. Medvedev insists on the sovereignty of reason,

⁵ The fabrication is in *Posev*, 1970, No. 1. Medvedev's disavowal is in the *New York Times*, April 26, 1970. For the oily reply by *Posev*, see *Le Monde*, May 6, 1970.

⁶ See below, p. 343, for Medvedev's objection to the Stalinist tendency to fuse the "objective" and "subjective" aspects of behavior.

but he limits its rule in two important ways. He constantly appeals to Lenin's dicta as unquestionable truth. (There is one important exception: he criticizes Lenin's 1922 recommendation on extra-legal justice.) And he usually fails to consider the perfectly rational, though depressing possibility that human beings in certain situations cannot find the correct line, or, worse yet, that some problems may be insoluble. He is, in short, struggling to clarify the Bolshevik mode of thought, not to abandon it.

The strongest evidence of his difficulty is the book's underlying interpretation, or rather, the bundle of interpretations that keep him in constant tension, struggling to prove them consistent with each other. In this case, his difficulty is a spur to very considerable achievement. His tensely balanced interpretations are as fascinating to the intellect as his vivid extracts from unpublished memoirs are to the imagination. He takes for granted the Marxist rule that the development of state superstructures is determined by the development of socio-economic bases, but he seems to make Stalinism an exception: it was *not* a product of the Soviet social system. He offers brilliant analyses of the conditions, the long-run historical trends, that enabled Stalin to establish despotism, terror, and the cult, but he is anxious to prove that these enabling conditions were not determining causes. He insists that Stalin's criminal plotting was the most important determinant. Stalin created Stalinism.

At first glance this seems to be an ironic triumph of the Stalinist cult over Marxist determinism. The "personality" formerly praised for all good is now blamed for all evil; he still seems endowed with superhuman power to alter history by acts of will. Readers inclined to such criticism should give special attention to the passages, especially in Chapters X and XI, where Medvedev analyzes the historical trends that enabled Stalin to carry out his criminal plot. He argues that Stalin's will was a necessary, not a sufficient, cause of Stalinism. Such readers should also ask themselves whether they do not misunderstand the diversity of Marxist responses to the problem of determinism. Marx can be quoted against himself on this matter, which is hardly surprising, for he was dealing with a fundamental paradox of social science. Patterns of social development are affected, perhaps effected, by individual acts of will, but the converse is also true: individual acts of will are affected, perhaps effected, by patterns of social development.

This paradox raises difficult problems for the moral philosopher as well as for the social scientist, and the reader will see that Medvedev is as intensely involved in moral philosophy—in moralizing, some critics may say—as he is in social science. He is against rigid determinism, above all, because it seems to exculpate Stalin. The only way

to prove Stalin guilty, he believes, is to prove that personal despotism and mass terror were caused by, could not have occurred without, Stalin's willing them. To assert that irrepressible historical trends gave rise to despotism and terror strikes Medvedev as a denial of Stalin's responsibility. This may seem a simpleminded confusion of historical causation and moral responsibility, especially to American readers, who are currently learning the intricate problems of assigning personal responsibility to the cogs of a state machine that impersonally destroys multitudes of human beings. But the charge of simpleminded moralizing is clearly inapplicable to the passages where Medvedev examines the involvement of lesser officials and ordinary citizens in the mass crimes of the Stalin era. He shows great sensitivity to the various degrees of moral responsibility of particular individuals, who may approve or oppose or try to look the other way, but cannot stop the carnage. In other words, he applies different moral standards at different levels of the political pyramid. And he is right to do so, if he is also right in his basic assumption about individual will and historical causation: the closer to the apex of the pyramid, the more nearly they are fused. The higher one goes the harder it is to argue, "Don't blame me. If I didn't, someone else would."

Aside from Medvedev's urge to find Stalin guilty, he has strong grounds in Marxist political theory for objecting to the fatalistic view that despotism, terror, and the cult were predetermined by unalterable historical forces. Such a view cuts the nerve of political action. A combination of voluntarism and determinism, the will to act on the basis of realistically appraised historical trends, has been a persistent feature of Marxism, and is one of the main reasons for its recurrent vitality despite repeated indications of imminent extinction. Extreme voluntarism can have the same enervating effect on Marxists as extreme determinism. Whether irresistible power is assigned to impersonal historical forces or to the will of great leaders, the political consequence can be the same mass torpor, a passive waiting for fate to have its way. Stalin himself, in his last years, began to perceive this self-defeating aspect of his cult, and Khrushchev campaigned against it vigorously, though with his usual erratic inconsistency. Khrushchev called for a revival of the kind of Marxism that charges everyone with responsibility to take bold action on behalf of history's inevitable goal. Perhaps that is, as critics have remarked, a secular version of Calvinism, but one should make such a remark without a sneer. The scholar who is trying to revive the grand old faith in this book, at great risk to himself, deserves unalloyed respect. Besides, if we take that historical analogy seriously, we should recall the strangely mixed potential of Calvinism for democracy as well as despotism, "for freest action form'd under the laws divine."

The Western reader who accommodates himself to an unfamiliar conceptual framework and somewhat annoying word usage will discover that Medvedev has achieved a penetrating analysis of Stalinism. To appreciate it fully, one must be aware of the explanations that have been favored by authors outside the Soviet Union. Reflection discloses six basic theories. They rarely appear in such extremely simple, separate form as I will give them here. They are frequently combined with each other in complex ways, and almost always the deterministic motif is muted by a great array of historical particulars. What I am offering is a typology, which resembles the actual theorizing of real authors as the zoologist's taxonomy resembles the essential structures and functions of real animals.

1. The oldest theory holds that despotism is inherent in socialism. Private property is alleged to be the foundation of individual liberty; if it is replaced by collective property, then everyone becomes totally subject to the small group or the individual that gets control of collective property. This argument antedates not only Stalinism but the Bolshevik Revolution. It was an early response to the first proposals for socialism, and is still widely used by defenders of capitalism, who like to hold up Stalinism as the great minatory example.

2. Another venerable theory derives Stalinism from Lenin's program for a tightly disciplined party leading a lower-class revolution. Beginning with the Mensheviks, who charged Lenin with Jacobin and Bonapartist tendencies in the early years of this century, many critics have argued that his program entails the subjection of the lower classes to the vanguard party, of the party to its higher echelons, and, ultimately, of all to a single individual. Recently, advocates of this theory have added a sociological explanation to account for the durability of the Leninist-Stalinist system: it creates a new class of officeholders with a vested interest in maintaining the rigid pyramid of power.

3. Another theory arose concomitantly with Stalinism, as part of a Marxist effort to explain the anomaly of backward Russia leading the way to socialism. The theorist may begin with Trotsky's doctrine of "permanent revolution," or with Stalin's metaphor of world imperialism breaking at its weakest links. In either case, a socialist state is assumed to be irreversibly in charge of a backward country, which must then be forced through a period of "primary accumulation." The huge peasant class must be "proletarianized," and great industrial and military power must be rapidly built up to hold off hostile capitalist powers. In short, the reversal of the sequence that Marx expected—the socialist revolution coming before industrialization—obliges the socialist state to

become despotic in order to do the dirty work of capitalism and to do it with special haste.

4. Recently a non-Marxist analogue to number 3 has gained popularity, as many people have noted the extreme difficulties of industrialization in the twentieth century. The prevalence of one-party states and military regimes in backward countries gives rise to the argument that Stalinism is a Communist species of a general type: the backward nation-state trying to force industrialization, while in almost hopeless competition with the nation-states that acquired industrial power in an earlier and easier time. Sometimes internal difficulties are emphasized, such as increases in peasant populations outstripping industrial growth rates; sometimes foreign difficulties, such as the tendency of international terms of trade to move against the sellers of raw materials, and the tendency of capital to flow toward advanced countries. Optimistic versions of this theory echo Herzen's prophecy of Russia moving to freedom through socialism, while the West moves to socialism through freedom. Pessimistic versions predict a widening gap between advanced and backward nations, with a consequent intensification of despotism in the backward states.

5. Extreme pessimists consider Stalinism a species of a more general type. The universal urge to industrialize, with rapidly swelling populations mobilized for nationalist conflict, is seen as a universal push toward totalitarianism. Some emphasize total war and the rise of the garrison state as the chief cause of the process; others stress such internal factors as the technological juggernaut, the population explosion, and "mass culture." In any case, the conclusion is that we are all on the way to highly regimented societies under despotic regimes. Stalinism is seen as an early, extreme, and rather inefficient variety.

6. Some have denied a universal pattern in Stalinism, interpreting it as the product of uniquely Russian traditions, or, at most, of a supposed Asiatic pattern of an amorphous society under a despotic state. This is in effect a continuation of a view that was common among earlier generations of Western observers, who contrasted tsarism, or "Asiatic despotism," with the supposed tradition of constitutional representative government in the West.

Medvedev gives brief consideration to a few versions of these theories toward the end of his book, when he criticizes "bourgeois" and "revisionist" analyses of Stalinism. However, he is not well acquainted with the Western literature on the subject. His thinking is shaped overwhelmingly by Soviet sources, including an array of interpretations that have been circulating by word of mouth. (Another invaluable service of this book is its systematic catalogue of that oral

tradition.) Of course, there are unintentional similarities between Soviet and Western thinking on Stalinism. In reviving discussion of "bureaucratic degeneration"—which was a hotly debated issue among Soviet Marxists of the twenties—Medvedev is reviving a Leninist treatment of the historical tendencies that are hypostatized in theories 1, 2, and 6. His comments on the Stalinist aspects of industrialization, collectivization, and the cultural revolution will evoke familiar lines of thought among students of Western monographs on those subjects. In recalling Marx's critique of "barrack socialism" and Gorky's biting characterization of the vindictive revolutionary, Medvedev is discussing socialist reactions to the problem that theory 1 treats from an anti-socialist point of view. Except for theories 4 and 5, which postulate trends that Medvedev has entirely overlooked or ignored, many such coincidental points of correspondence can be discerned between his and Western studies of Stalinism. The most important lies in his insistence that historical trends made Stalinism possible, not inevitable; Stalin's hunger for limitless power was fed by difficulties, not fatalities. Constantly returning to this theme, Medvedev is persistently examining the interaction between individual leaders and the evolving social process, correlating political accident with socio-economic essence, a procedure that historians of all countries and schools will recognize as the fundamental method of their discipline.

Of course, there is a pronounced biographical element in this book, for Medvedev insists that Stalin's criminal character was the main cause of Stalinism. And of course some readers will cavil at the one-sided vehemence of the biography. Olympian detachment comes easily to outsiders. If it is used without Olympian arrogance, it can assist the discussion that Medvedev is trying to start. It is pointless to charge Medvedev with ignoring Stalin's good traits. He argues, with considerable effect, that the traits which have often been praised—the spartan quality of Stalin's private life, the overwhelming will to make "his" country strong, the concern for scholarship and the arts—are further evidence of a fanatical concentration on becoming god.

Useful criticism would focus on the greatest problem that Stalin presents to his biographers: his cagey reticence, which grew the more extreme as he became the man whose every word was law. It is therefore very hard, some would say impossible, to ascertain whether important changes of character accompanied his successive transformations: from Lenin's "wonderful Georgian" in 1913—whose name slipped Lenin's mind in 1915⁷—to the "gray blur" among the revolutionary leaders of 1917, to the chief of the moderates in the mid-twenties, finally, at the age of fifty, to the wild "revolutionary

⁷ See below, p. 327.

from above" and the bloodthirsty despot of the thirties. Medvedev tries to get around the paucity of psychological evidence, which becomes crippling precisely during the last and most important transformation, by drawing analogies with the personalities of famous despots and scoundrels of the past. Some of the analogies are quite suggestive, but they are heaped up in such diversity that they finally confuse the issue. It is hard to conceive how Stalin's personality could have contained both Nechaev and Azev, Fouché and Napoleon, Sulla and Nero, Ivan the Terrible and Hitler, all rolled into one.

Perhaps the best way out of the tangle is to note the conspicuous omission of Peter the Great, with whom Stalin liked to be compared. Medvedev denies to Stalin the tribute customarily given to Peter, that he "accelerated the Westernization of barbarous Russia by his readiness to use barbarous methods of struggle against barbarism."⁸ Medvedev insists that Stalin intensified barbarism, and critics would be well advised to concentrate on that major problem, Stalin's influence, rather than the relatively minor issue of his psychopathology. With respect to psychology, Medvedev's greatest contribution is his analysis of the upper strata of Soviet society: Party members at various levels, managers and specialists, writers and scholars, who alone might have prevented or stopped their country's descent into utter lawlessness. Instead, they submitted or cooperated, though they were the chief victims after the peasants. The most astonishing aspect of the process is their tendency to worship the man in charge of their torment. Medvedev has studied their mental processes from within, as expressed in a multitude of reminiscences, oral as well as written, self-condemnatory as well as self-justifying. He has produced the first reliable study of one of the most disturbing puzzles in social psychology.

The level of analysis in Medvedev's book is especially remarkable when one considers the background from which it emerges: the official school of thought on Soviet history. Within that school, Stalinism is brushed aside as an anti-Soviet fiction, created by bourgeois and revisionist propagandists to obscure the essential continuity of Soviet development from the Leninist beginnings to the Leninist present. The basic formula enjoined on Soviet historians might add a seventh theory to the foregoing list of six, if it were not so completely anti-intellectual. The history of Bolshevism must be viewed as the utterly admirable record of correct policies formulated by wise leaders and carried out by the virtuous people (*narod*). Anything not admirable must be brushed aside as the mistakes of leaders who proved unworthy of their posts, or ascribed to residues (*perezhitki*) of the prerevolutionary past, or to the influence of foreign enemies. The definition of the admirable and the unadmirable changes from time to time to suit the present policies of current leaders, who are always wholly admir-

⁸ Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XXVII, p. 307.

able. Historians must elaborate and illustrate the received truth of the moment; they must not question it.

Medvedev is by no means the first Soviet scholar to challenge this rigid subordination of the historian to the politician. He repeatedly draws on the work of other critical historians, some that have managed to get into print, others as yet unpublished. But it seems fair to say that the present book is the most ambitious effort to date to start an autonomous academic discussion of the most vital issues in Soviet history. His title expresses his central appeal, and throughout the book the reader will find him continually challenging the official school, sometimes derisively, sometimes sorrowfully, always pleading that genuine patriotism requires study of the homeland's failings as well as its accomplishments. The most important failing, he insists, is the imperfect development of a socialist version of constitutional government.⁹ By writing and publishing this book he has offered more than historical arguments in favor of constitutionalism. As a pledge of his faith in the triumph of constitutional principles, he has offered himself.

This translation is substantially full and faithful; it is not absolutely complete. The best way to explain that distinction is to tell how the translation was made. First, Georges Haupt and I did preliminary editing of the Russian manuscript. Our main effort was to reduce the number of excessively long quotations and repetitious passages, either by deleting them, if we thought them superfluous, or by summarizing them, if we thought them essential to the author's argument. Colleen Taylor then performed the enormous labor of translation, eliminating some redundant verbiage in the process. Finally I checked her translation against the Russian, making extensive changes as I did so, not so much to correct what I considered errors, as to eliminate still more redundancy and to bend the English toward my notions of style. In many places I also altered Georges Haupt's preliminary editing—eliminating or abridging what he had let stand, or restoring what he had marked for deletion. I also checked, corrected, and completed such assertions and references as I thought dubious or incomplete, and I wrote the footnotes indicated by *Ed*. Any criticism of the translation or the editing should therefore be directed against me, the "responsible editor," as the Russians say.

Virtually no liberties were taken with the long extracts that Medvedev has culled from unpublished manuscripts and from archival materials. (He had no access to archives, yet he quotes such finds as a previously unpublished letter of Lenin's, one of Stalin's, and correspondence of the tsarist police concerning Stalin.) These original

⁹ See the public letter that Medvedev, together with the physicists Sakharov and Turchin, sent to the Central Committee. An English translation appeared in *Survey*, Summer, 1970.

materials were not only translated in full; an effort was made to find English equivalents for their stylistic idiosyncrasies, prolixity included. In translating quotations from published works, I made the same effort at mimicry. Many quotations from Stalin, for example, and from other Soviet authors who absorbed his heavy, repetitious Russian, are rendered into heavy, repetitious English. When, to take a different example, I found a mixed metaphor in the purple prose of Bukharin's last letter—or in his widow's memorized version of it—I reproduced it in English.

Perhaps Colleen Taylor and I should have attempted the same mimicry in translating Medvedev's prose. We decided not to because we regard him as a contemporary scholar whose work deserves the best English we could give it. His book is not an exotic or antique source that must be translated verbatim to preserve its special flavor. I hope that it will soon be possible for him to publish it at home, so that he can either rebuke the presumptuous liberties we have taken with his style, or streamline the Russian as we have tried to do the English. In any case, the present Russian text is being published along with this translation for the benefit of specialists. They may accuse me of making the style worse rather than better, or of failing to improve it sufficiently, but I am confident that they will not accuse me of omitting or altering anything of substance.

I have corrected a few errors that seemed to me obvious slips of the pen; for example, the statement that Trotsky *began* publication of *Pravda* in 1912, when the author meant to write *ceased*. There were many other places where I felt inclined to insert an editorial note of disagreement with the author, but in almost every case I refrained. I was tempted, for example, to point out an inconsistency in the matter of alternative leadership after Lenin. At the end of Chapter II Medvedev states that the Party was in the tragic position of having no acceptable alternative to Stalin. Toward the end of the book he says that there were many alternatives. But it is not the editor's function to call attention to inconsistencies and dubious arguments; that is the job of the whole community of scholars who are summoned by Medvedev to reasoned discussion. As the editor I felt obliged to complete references that lacked publication data, page numbers, or even titles. In some cases I was able to complete the references; in some I surmised that the works were unpublished; sometimes I was completely baffled. I also made a spot check of the complete references, and corrected such errors as I found. I traced quotations from English, French, and German sources back to the originals and quoted or translated from them instead of Medvedev's Russian versions. I made an exception, however, for Marx and Engels, who are quoted from the Russian.

The editorial notes are mostly explanations and clarifications for

the benefit of the reader who is not familiar with Soviet history and terminology. Some terms are used so frequently that they are explained in a separate glossary. Others raised problems by seeming to have exact English equivalents, when in fact they do not. *Administrirovanie*, for example, seems to mean "administration," and that is the way it is rendered in many translations from Soviet Russian. In fact it means something like "rule by fiat," and that is the way it is usually translated here. Using analogous logic, Colleen Taylor translated *diversant* as "subversive," which is indeed the American term that confounds the dissemination of disapproved ideas with acts of treason. In this case I perversely held out for "diversionist," hoping that the American reader will be jarred by the foreign quality of the word into realizing that even Roy Medvedev is not always aware of its ugly ambiguity. Subversive would have been calmly accepted by many Americans as a matter-of-fact description of something genuinely criminal. It is impossible to be completely consistent in such matters. *Inakomyshchii* (literally: "one who thinks differently") has been translated as "dissident," even though the English word carries a load of historical significance that is lacking in the Russian. The protracted troubles that transformed dissidence from a crime into a right are not yet completed in the Russian-speaking community.

One could go on forever about such problems of translation. I will add only two more, of considerable importance in this history. *Vozhd'* has been translated as "chief" rather than "leader," because *vozhd'*, like chief, has the slightly florid quality of an archaism, and mainly because Soviet Russian makes a distinction between an ordinary leader (*rukovoditel'*) and a *vozhd'* such as Stalin. The single most troublesome word was probably the homely adjective *grubyi*, which Lenin used to describe Stalin when urging his dismissal from the post of General Secretary. "Rude" or "coarse," the usual translations, are too mild to carry the charge that Medvedev puts into the word, which he repeats incessantly. Colleen Taylor and I have used "nasty," "mean," "dirty," or even "vicious," the analogous terms in American political discourse.

Finally, I wish to thank Northwestern University for paying the considerable cost of typing this long book twice, first in Colleen Taylor's translation, then in my edited version. I also wish to make it known that the usual royalties are being set aside for the author in a trust fund.

DAVID JORAVSKY

Evanston, Illinois
June 18, 1971

Foreword

THIS BOOK was conceived after the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 and written after its XXIInd Congress in 1961. After the XXth Congress there were many who asked what was the point of stirring up the past, exposing Soviet infirmities to the world and causing our enemies to rejoice. Wasn't it better to keep Stalin's image as it had been presented to the Soviet people in the past? Wasn't it better to concentrate on current problems of Communist construction, leaving the analysis of Stalin's crimes to future historians? In other words, wouldn't it be better to forget about the "multitude of base truths" and preserve the "illusion that uplifts us"?

Even today we hear such questions. However, we now know that Stalin's crimes were so great that it would be a crime to remain silent about them. "The pharisees of the bourgeoisie," Lenin wrote, "like the saying: 'Either be silent about the dead or speak well of them.' But the proletariat needs the truth about all those involved in politics, whether alive or dead. For those who are genuine political leaders live on in politics even after their physical death."¹

In her book on Stalin, the American journalist Anna Louise Strong makes the following appraisal of the 1930's and 1940's:

This was one of history's great dynamic eras, perhaps its greatest. . . . It gave birth to millions of heroes and to some devils. Lesser men can look back on it now and list its crimes. But those who lived through the struggle, and even many who died of it, endured the evil as part of the cost of what was built.²

Such an appraisal of these tragedies is natural for an ardent follower of Mao Tse-tung, who several years ago took up permanent residence in China and in 1966 was proclaimed an "honorary Red Guard." But we cannot agree with such a judgment.

¹ *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XXXVI, p. 545.

² A. L. Strong, *The Stalin Era* (New York, 1956), p. 9. Russian translation (Moscow, 1957), p. 6. *Ed.*: Anna Louise Strong died in Peking in 1970.

Of course, under the conditions prevailing in a backward country such as Russia, it was not only possible but even inevitable that the liquidation of the old society and the building of a new socialist one would be accompanied by petty-bourgeois and anarchistic outbursts, by the violation of revolutionary legality and the abuse of power. Still, these deviations from a correct revolutionary line could have been fewer; it was not inevitable that lawlessness and the abuse of power would become state policy for several decades of our history. What is more, the historical inevitability of petty-bourgeois and anarchistic tendencies is no reason to excuse or to justify them. The true Marxist must fight such shortcomings in his movement as resolutely as possible. He must insistently expose them, in order to avoid them in the future.

Though the crimes and faults of Stalin's era should be criticized and condemned, I have no desire to paint it only in dark colors. It was a time of great accomplishments both at home and abroad. Soviet historians have neglected neither the great dam on the Dnepr nor the metallurgical complex at Magnitogorsk, nor the battles of Stalingrad and Berlin, nor the many other heroic feats of the people. They remain a central theme of Soviet literature and history, and justifiably so. However, we see clearly now that it is impossible to understand our past and our present if we continue to ignore the completely unjustified tragedies that were so abundant in the era of Stalin's cult, if we forget how much Stalin's crimes hampered the development of the Soviet Union and the entire world Communist movement.

The significance of Stalin's cult should not be exaggerated. The history of the Party during those decades cannot be analyzed only in terms of Stalin's crimes and lawlessness. But it would be just as serious an error to ignore or to minimize their grave consequences. We must respect the memory of our fallen fathers and brothers, the hundreds of thousands and millions of people who were the victims of Stalin's lawlessness. For if we are unable to learn all the necessary lessons from this tragedy, then the destruction of an entire generation of revolutionaries and millions of other innocent people will remain nothing more than a senseless catastrophe.

The dangerous effects of Stalin's cult cannot be overcome unless they are discussed openly and honestly. Only by open and honest self-criticism, not by secret instructions through hidden channels, can the Party generate the movement, the feelings, the social indignation capable of destroying all the effects of Stalin's cult and of preventing the revival of new cults and new arbitrary rule.

At its XXth and XXIIInd Congresses, the Communist Party resolutely exposed Stalin's crimes and began to restore Leninist norms.

Victims of bloody arbitrary rule were rehabilitated. An extensive critique of the cult of personality began in literature, art, and science. The political atmosphere of the USSR began to be cleansed of the filth of adventurism and despotism. Soviet people could breathe and work more easily.

Nevertheless, none of us can or should forget our past, and not only because the ashes of our tortured fathers and brothers continue to burn in our hearts. Unfortunately, in some socialist countries Communist parties are reviving the same spirit of sectarianism, dogmatism, and lawlessness that did such harm to the Communist movement in the past. Even within the Soviet Union there is a movement to rehabilitate Stalin. Since the spring of 1965, Stalin's name has appeared increasingly often in Soviet journals and newspapers, not as a criminal, but as a "great general," a "great revolutionary," an "outstanding theorist," a "wise statesman" or even a "prudent manager, who knew how to take care of state funds." His name has been mentioned even from official tribunals, and a considerable part of the audience has applauded. Some Party officials openly and proudly call themselves Stalinists, without risking expulsion from the Party. Stalinism is not yet a mere bogeyman, as one of the orators at the XXIIIrd Party Congress tried to argue.

Stalinism remains a real threat, in open as well as disguised forms. Thus it is especially important to continue the discussion that began at the XXth Congress. We must know the whole truth, and not only to prevent the return of that arbitrary rule which the Party has rejected. If we do not study our past, we will be in no condition to move forward in the necessary direction.

"Truth is revolutionary," wrote Antonio Gramsci in a fascist prison. Truth was the main weapon of Lenin and the Leninist party in their struggle for socialism. And this meant truth not only about the enemies of the Revolution but about our own shortcomings and mistakes as well.³ Of course our enemies try to use our self-criticism to their own advantage. That is one of the more serious consequences of Stalin's cult. But it too can be overcome, not by silence but by a frank explanation of the truth.

Inevitably the study of the genesis of Stalinism creates scholarly and psychological difficulties. A serious disease has left many lesions that have not yet healed. And there are people who tell us "Why pour salt, why rub wounds, if they are still bleeding?" We should not pour salt on unhealed wounds. But it would be naïve to think that they will heal by themselves. We must heal them, and to do this we must know

³ For Lenin's stress on the need of public discussion of our faults, see his *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XXXII, p. 453, and XXXIII, p. 70.

stricken. It was people of my generation that were stricken."⁴ That is not true. In reality, for millions of people the very idea of socialism was damaged. It is our job to restore the idea of socialism by undoing the results of the cult of personality. Above all, we must eliminate in ourselves the most dangerous consequence of the cult—fear of speaking the truth.

We talk a great deal about educating youth in the traditions of revolution and battle, of conscientious labor, of the fight against capitalism and resistance to bourgeois propaganda. But it is no less important to encourage implacable resistance to injustice and arbitrary rule, to lying and bureaucratism. We should encourage initiative, independence, political awareness, and responsibility. Not one of these qualities can be developed if the truth is hushed up. If we dodge the questions asked by the young, we will inevitably alienate them. Of course many of our students will manage to find their own way to the truth even without our help. But hypocrisy, political indifference, and cynicism are spreading among other sections of our young people. Thus we have every reason to declare that the Leninist revolutionary spirit will be fostered in our youth by books that reveal certain ugly pictures of our past truthfully, and from correct Party positions, much more than by books that deliberately conceal our difficulties or errors.

In recent years the Chinese and Albanian press has repeatedly demanded that our Party restore the political "reputation" of Stalin. In 1963 the Peking *People's Daily* wrote that the attitude toward Stalin was the "demarcation line" between true Marxist-Leninists and contemporary revisionists. When it refused to participate in the XXIIIrd Congress of the CPSU, the Chinese Communist Party, in its letter of March 22, 1966, again asserted that our Party, by attacking Stalin, was attacking Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union, China, Communist parties, and Marxist-Leninists of all countries. Admittedly, at the beginning of the cultural revolution the Chinese press changed some of its former pronouncements on this "demarcation line." In an article of July 11, 1966, *People's Daily* declared that "the ideas of Mao Tse-tung are the apogee of Marxism-Leninism of our time"; support of Mao or opposition to him is "the dividing line between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism, between the revolution and the counter-revolution." Even today, however, the Chinese press, while heaping boundless praise on the ideas of Mao Tse-tung, continues to praise the "services" of Stalin also. That is another reason this book was written. Let the facts show who are genuine Marxist-Leninists, those who are openly the defenders and heirs of Stalin's cult or those who wish to eliminate the cult and its aftereffects once and for all.

Some who have been kind enough to review this work have said that it examines Stalin's activity in a partisan spirit, solely from a

⁴ *Novyi mir*, 1962, No. 5, p. 154.

negative standpoint. We recognize the justice of this opinion. This work is indeed one-sided, and not only because what is negative in Stalin's deeds far outweighs what is positive. This book is not a history of a certain period in the life of our country or Party. It could be called the "history of a disease," to be precise the history of that serious and prolonged disease which has been termed the "cult of personality" after one of its symptoms (by no means the chief one). Naturally we will be concerned only with facts related to the origins and the course of this disease. This does not mean that we wish to depreciate other facts and other phenomena. All the same, one cannot help observing that hundreds and thousands of books have been written about those other facts, about the positive aspects of our history. Many of those books are undoubtedly of value. But historical scholarship cannot examine the past only from the bright side. In this discipline there is also room for works that analyze the darker pages of the past. Unfortunately, as Victor Hugo remarked, history does not have a wastebasket.

It is also natural that the author's attention should be focused on Stalin. But this book is not a biography of Stalin; it was not written about him alone. Although his rise to power was not inevitable, it did reflect certain tendencies that existed in our country and our Party before the period of terror and then flourished because of Stalin. However great the role of Stalin himself may have been in the tragic events we describe, one cannot help seeing that he relied on certain people and on certain historically determined political and economic conditions.

Socialist revolutions can develop along various paths. It is mistaken to imagine that Stalin knew how to lead his people to socialism by a road that was difficult, even bloody, but nevertheless very short. By his crimes Stalin did not help, he hindered, he did not accelerate, he slowed the people's movement to socialism and communism in the Soviet Union and in the whole world. In some respects Stalin even turned this movement backward.

The world Communist movement still contains a variety of possibilities and tendencies. Many forces are pushing that movement onto a wrong road full of new tragedies, new dangerous gambles, adventures, new cults of personality. The road to disaster can be by-passed only if the dogmatists and sectarians can be confronted with the united will of the Communists of all countries, a will guided by a clear understanding of the enormous damage done to the world Communist movement by the arbitrary rule and the crimes of the cult of personality.

The problem of sources is critical. Not all the documents in Soviet archives are accessible for unclassified historical research. Moreover, many documents on the history of the Party, including those connected

with Stalin's activities, have been destroyed. According to S. M. Dubrovskii, as early as 1924 Stalin ordered his assistant I. P. Tovstukha to go through the archives of the Central Committee and destroy all "useless" (*nenuzhnyi*) material. In the thirties when leaders were arrested their personal papers were usually destroyed. Even many of Lenin's letters vanished in this way. Numerous documents vanished from the archives of Gorky, Krupskaja, Ordzhonikidze, and other prominent leaders. Some documents disappeared from the archives of the Central Committee and from Stalin's personal archives just after his death, when these and other archives were still controlled by the Minister of State Security—that is, by Lavrentii P. Beria. Besides, it is now known that throughout the period of Stalin's cult, historical documents were deliberately falsified.

After the XXth Party Congress in 1956, the Central Committee ordered a careful investigation of Kirov's murder, which precipitated the mass repression of the late thirties. The findings of the special commission created for this purpose have not yet been made public. At the same time, all the materials relating to the political trials of 1935–38 were re-examined, proving that most of the accusations were false. Nevertheless, apart from a short notice to that effect at the All-Union Conference of Historians in 1962,⁵ nothing new has been published about those trials. Neither have the court records in the cases of Beria (1953) and his chief henchmen—Abakumov *et al.* in Leningrad, Rukhadze *et al.* in Tbilisi, Bagirov *et al.* in Baku. All this naturally makes the historian's job very difficult.

Of course there is a considerable historical and political literature about Stalin and his era; indeed, it was already massive during his lifetime. But this literature is uneven in quality. For example, all the apologetics about Stalin and his "labors," which appeared in huge quantities during the years of the cult, have practically no scholarly value. And foreign bourgeois literature about Stalin and the history of the CPSU has little value. For all their show of objectivity, bourgeois historians analyze Stalin's crimes from plainly anti-Soviet viewpoints. They use the crimes not so much to discredit Stalin as to defame the ideas of socialism and communism. And many foreign publications mix invention and rumors, factual inaccuracies and distortions, in their accounts of Stalin's real crimes and mistakes. I am not even speaking here of the writings of White émigrés; most of them are filled with such blind malice against everything Soviet that they are incapable of a scholarly analysis of our reality. Tendentiousness and one-

⁵ Ed.: For the record of the conference, see *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie o merakh uluchsheniia podgotovki nauchno-pedagogicheskikh, kadrov po istoricheskim naukam, 18–21 dekabria 1962 g.* (Moscow, 1964). Hereafter referred to as *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie istorikov*.

sidedness are also characteristic of émigré Trotskyite writings about Stalin and his time.

This work is based on the numerous Soviet publications that have followed the policy of the XXth and XXIIInd Party Congresses in examining Stalin's cult honestly and truthfully. I have also used many unpublished manuscripts—documents, memoirs, and eyewitness accounts—belonging for the most part to older Party members who survived the lawlessness of the 1930's and 1940's. These sources are especially important because many of Stalin's illegal orders and actions were not recorded in any documents during his lifetime. Some of the manuscripts I have used report deathbed testimony passed on to Party comrades in Stalinist camps and prisons. In the tortuous journey of such testimony, sometimes measured in decades, distortions and inaccuracies were inevitable. But it would be irreverence to the dead to cast aside their testimony as unreliable or unobjective, instead of carefully compiling and comparing their various accounts.

I would like to thank the following old Bolsheviks who placed valuable historical documents and memoirs at my disposal: I. P. Gavrillov, S. O. Gazarian, L. M. Portnov, E. P. Frolov, A. M. Durmashkin, S. I. Berdichevskaia, D. Iu. Zorina, P. I. Shabalkin, A. V. Snegov, A. E. Evstaf'ev, Ia. I. Drobinskii, A. I. Todorskii, B. I. Ivanov, S. B. Brichkina. I also wish to express gratitude to the following people, who, along with many other comrades, helped me with their documents and comments: I. G. Ehrenburg, V. A. Kaverin, M. P. Iakubovich, L. P. Petrovskii, Iu. Kariakin, D. I. Lev, I. Nikolaev.

Naturally I also made use of the many materials on Party history published before the period of Stalin's cult, and also of the stenographic records of Party congresses and conferences and of plenary meetings of the Central Committee. The study that resulted is to a certain extent private research. I am not an historian by profession and have never worked in research institutions that study historical or political problems. I have not used the materials of any state or Party archives, of any "special collection" or other limited-access depositories. Although over the past six years I have repeatedly informed many official agencies of the nature and content of this work, I have received neither help nor instructions from these or from any other organizations or institutions. By the same token, I have not encountered any obstructions or difficulties on the part of official agencies during the course of the research.

The first drafts of this book were called *Before the Court of History (Pered sudom istorii)*. This title was criticized as being too pretentious. Historical scholarship is only beginning a genuine study of the period of Stalin's cult. I was told that I am still too subjective, that I am judging Stalin in a party court rather than in the tribunal of

history, which will give its evaluation in the future, not only of individual personalities but also of all the parties and movements of our time. Therefore I have decided to call the book *Let History Judge*, or *Toward the Court of History* (*K sudu istorii*). I hope that future historians will not overlook the material I have collected and the judgments I have made. However inadequate historical scholarship may be when directed to the recent past, the available facts are enough to obtain a basically correct understanding of the origins of Stalinism, to show the historical conditions and political mistakes that made for all these deviations from the correct Marxist-Leninist revolutionary line.

In conclusion, the author wants to emphasize once again that it is Communists who should be the strictest judges of their own history. Otherwise it will be impossible to restore the unity, moral purity, and strength of this great movement. And that has been the prime motive of my work, which in all respects has been far from easy.

ROY A. MEDVEDEV

Moscow, 1968

stories are told of young Dzhughashvili's nastiness toward his Party comrades, his mother, his family, and his acquaintances. When on the Batum Committee of the Party, Stalin was capable not only of cursing a fellow committeeman but even of throwing a stool at him. When he was arrested and exiled to eastern Siberia in 1903, Stalin cursed a fellow exile simply because the other man had become upset upon receiving bad news from home.

During the Revolution of 1905, Stalin was a "practical" leader. He organized a number of demonstrations, strikes, and underground presses, and took part in several armed expropriations. However, he also devoted attention to theoretical problems, as can be seen from his articles in Georgian Bolshevik newspapers. Later, in the foreword to his collected works, Stalin himself pointed out a number of serious errors he made during this time. He took an incorrect position on the agrarian question when he opposed Lenin's program of land nationalization. He also believed at that time that the victory of socialism was impossible in countries where the proletariat did not constitute a majority of the population. Stalin writes indulgently about these mistakes, attributing them to "a young Marxist who had not yet acquired the final shape of a Marxist-Leninist."¹ The clear implication of this statement is that subsequently he made no more mistakes, which is of course far from the truth.

After the Revolution of 1905, Stalin assumed a conciliatory attitude toward attacks on the philosophy of Marxism and vacillated in the struggle against *otzovism* and liquidationism.² Before the Prague Conference in 1912, he sneered at Lenin's agitation against these deviations: "What is the source of this tempest in a teapot?" he wrote to Mikha Tskhakaia. ". . . 'Philosophical' disagreements? Tactical disagreements? Questions of organizational policy (relationships with the left Mensheviks, etc.)? The self-esteem of various 'egos'? . . . Our Party is not a religious sect, it cannot divide into groups on the basis of philosophical tendencies."³

In 1909, following the arrest of S. G. Shaumian, Stalin persuaded the Baku Party Committee to adopt a special resolution on the disagreements within the editorial board of the main Bolshevik newspaper, which was then the central political organization led by Lenin. Though supporting the ideological position of the Leninist majority on

¹ Stalin, *Sochineniia*, I, p. xi.

² *Ed.*: *Otzovism* was the view that the Bolsheviks should recall (*otzvat'*) their deputies in the newly created national legislature (the Duma) and concentrate solely on underground preparation for a new revolution. Liquidationism was the opposite belief of moderate Marxists, who wanted to liquidate all underground organizations and concentrate on legal forms of political activity.

³ See S. Shaumian, *Sochineniia*, I, p. 267; I. Dubinskii-Mukhadze, *Ordzhonikidze* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 92-93.

the editorial board, the Baku Committee's resolution, which was written by Stalin himself, sharply opposed Lenin's organizational policy: "The Baku Committee protests against any 'ejection from our midst' of those who support the minority of the editorial board."⁴ The newspaper replied with a special article, written by Lenin, in which he rebutted the charge that his organizational policy was "splitting" the Party.⁵

Stalin clearly did not understand the essence of the decisions that the Prague Conference adopted on the liquidationists; he stubbornly called for greater concessions to them. Stalin also sharply deviated in editing *Pravda*. Though Lenin demanded that the workers be given an honest and straightforward exposé of liquidationist demagoguery, Stalin, in his first article as editor of *Pravda*, called for unity "at all costs," a unity of Bolsheviks and liquidationists "without distinction as to factions."⁶ In further defiance of Lenin, Stalin endorsed a proposed boycott of the 1912 elections to the Duma. He called the Bolshevik rejection of the boycott an "accidental deviation from the old Bolshevism." "But does it follow," Stalin wrote in a letter, "that we must 'go the limit' in these accidental deviations, making a mountain out of a molehill? . . . Lenin somewhat overestimates the importance of such [legal] organizations" as the Duma.⁷

Stalin's lack of restraint and good manners, his nastiness, were frequently displayed during his exile in Turukhanka. For example, R. G. Zakharova (*née* Rose Brontman), the wife of the Bolshevik Philip Zakharov, who was in Turukhanka from 1903 to 1913, recalls her husband's account of Stalin's arrival in 1912:

It was an unwritten law that each new arrival would report on the situation in Russia. And whom would you expect to give a more interesting and profound elucidation of what was happening in far-off Russia, left so long ago, than a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee? A group of exiles, among them Ia. M. Sverdlov and Philip, were at that time working on construction [of a home] in the village of Monastyrskoe. . . . Stalin was to arrive there soon. Dubrovinskii was no longer alive. Philip, who was not inclined by nature to set up idols for himself and who, moreover, had heard Dubrovinskii's unbiased evaluation of the leading revolutionary activists of the time, was not especially delighted over Stalin's impending arrival. Sverdlov, on the contrary, . . . tried to do everything possible under the conditions to give Stalin a grand welcome. They prepared a separate room for him, saved up some food for him from their

⁴ See Stalin, *Sochineniia*, II, p. 168.

⁵ *Proletarii*, Oct. 3 (16) 1909, No. 49. *Ed.*: The chief point in dispute was whether those who disagreed with Lenin's ideology should be driven out of the Bolshevik Party.

⁶ See V. T. Loginov, *Lenin i "Pravda," 1912-1914 godov* (Moscow, 1962).

⁷ *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1965, No. 2, p. 39.

Dzhugashvili represented a tiny minority of the exile community, if you don't count the anarchists, members of the Polish Socialist Party, and the Menshevik Toponogov, who inclined toward their side. When Dzhugashvili arrived at Monastyrskoe from Kureika, he stayed with Maslennikov and as before kept aloof from all the other political exiles. He did not resume Party ties with the two members of the Russian Buro of the Central Committee who were there, Sverdlov and [F.] Goloshchekin, or with the leading members of the Party underground. . . . The necessary reconciliation did not take place. Dzhugashvili remained as proud as ever, as locked up in himself, in his own thoughts and plans. . . . As before, he was hostile to Sverdlov, and would not move toward reconciliation, although Sverdlov was prepared to extend the hand of friendship, and was willing to discuss problems of the workers' movement in the company of the three members of the Russian Buro of the Party's Central Committee.

Stalin's behavior in exile at Turukhanka was indirectly censured in the Russian Buro of the Central Committee, which maintained general leadership of Party work up to Lenin's return to Russia. On March 12, 1917, Stalin, M. K. Muranov, and L. B. Kamenev returned from exile to Petrograd. On the same day a meeting of the Buro was held. The minutes of that meeting contain the following item:

Next the question of comrades Muranov, Stalin, and Kamenev was decided. The first was invited by a unanimous vote [to join the Buro]. Concerning Stalin, it was reported that he had been an agent of the Central Committee in 1912, and therefore it would be advisable to have him as a member of the Buro of the Central Committee. However, in view of certain personal characteristics, the Buro decided to give him only a consulting vote. As for Kamenev, in view of his behavior at the trial [that is, the trial of the Bolshevik deputies of the Duma described below, p. 42] and in view of the resolutions passed in Siberia and in Russia, it was decided to add him to the staff of *Pravda* if he offers his services, but to demand from him an explanation of his behavior. His articles are to be accepted for *Pravda*, but he is not to get a by-line.¹¹

However, on the following day Stalin was made a member of the Buro. On the same day the Buro named the editorial board of *Pravda*: M. S. Ol'minskii, Stalin, K. S. Eremeev, M. I. Kalinin, and M. I. Ul'ianova. Once he was on the board, Stalin in fact seized control of the paper. On March 15 *Pravda* was already listing Stalin, Kamenev, and Muranov as editors. The other members of the editorial board, who had been named by the Buro, were not even mentioned. As a result of Stalin's activity, the Buro on March 17, 1917, adopted

¹¹ Central Party Archive, Institute of Marxism-Leninism (*F. 17, op. I., ed. khr. 385, l. 11*).

another resolution, proposed by Ol'minskii: "The Buro of the Central Committee and the Petrograd Committee, while protesting the annexationist procedure by which Comrade Kamenev was placed on the editorial board, postpone the question of his behavior and his participation in the editorial board of *Pravda* until the next Party conference."¹²

Once they had taken over *Pravda*, Stalin and Kamenev began to publish articles and other material that did not reflect Lenin's line on the basic problems of the revolution but actually contradicted that line. The arbitrary rule of Stalin and Kamenev reached the point where they refused to print three of Lenin's four "Letters from Afar." The one they did publish appeared in a distorted and abridged form.¹³ In fact, during the second half of March and the beginning of April, *Pravda* under Stalin and Kamenev took a semi-Menshevik position on many important questions. The paper then came out in favor of putting "pressure" on the Provisional Government rather than overthrowing it, and of uniting with the Mensheviks. Stalin declared outright that the "petty" differences with the Mensheviks could be overcome within a single Party. Moreover, in his speech at the All-Russian Conference of Party Officials, which met in Petrograd from March 27 to April 2, 1917, Stalin made a clearly incorrect evaluation of the "dual power" (the simultaneous existence of the Provisional Government and the Soviets). Not only did he fail to urge complete Bolshevik mistrust of the Provisional Government; he even called for support of the Provisional Government "as long as it aids the progress of the revolution."¹⁴ Even after Lenin's return to Russia, Stalin and Kamenev continued for some time to oppose his celebrated April theses. The theses were published in *Pravda* on April 7, and on April 8 the paper carried an article by Kamenev that, with Stalin's complete support, harshly and dogmatically criticized Lenin's brilliant ideas. When Lenin reached Petrograd, he was obliged to make decisive changes in the line that Stalin and Kamenev had established for *Pravda*.

Before the VIth Party Congress in July, 1917, Stalin committed a number of errors in evaluating the current situation and even tried to conceal important theses of Lenin's from the Party activists. (Lenin, outlawed by the Provisional Government, was hiding in Finland.) Party officials in Petrograd knew of the existence of Lenin's theses. On July 16, 1917, when Stalin spoke to the Second Petrograd Conference of Bolsheviks, a group of dissatisfied delegates demanded that

¹² *Ibid.*, I. 26.

¹³ See N. Krutikova, *Na krutom povorote* (Moscow, 1965).

¹⁴ *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1962, No. 5, p. 112 and *passim*; *Voprosy istorii*, 1966, No. 2, p. 67 and *passim*.

Lenin's theses be read into the record. In reply to this demand, according to the minutes of the Conference, "Stalin reported that he did not have these theses with him, but that they could be summed up in three propositions: 1) the counterrevolution was victorious, 2) . . . [RM: illegible], 3) 'All power to the Soviet' is, under present circumstances a quixotic slogan; power must be transferred to classes, not to institutions."¹⁵ So it was with Stalin's active participation that the Conference practically rejected the theses that Lenin had prepared for the forthcoming VIth Congress.

Stalin also made a number of errors in his report to the VIth Party Congress. He declared that during the July days¹⁶ the Bolsheviks had been isolated; that, were it not for the war, it would be utopian to raise the question of a socialist revolution in Russia; and that Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets" meant a bloc ranging from Social Revolutionaries to Bolsheviks. Stalin did not take a correct position on the Provisional Government's order that Lenin appear before a court for trial. Stalin thought it possible for Lenin and the other indicted leaders to appear before the court of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie, if guarantees of safety were given, and if the authorities would have "some honor." Stalin's proposal met with resolute opposition from most delegates at the VIth Congress. "The resolution Stalin put forward," said N. A. Skrypnik, "includes a condition by which our comrades could end up in a republican prison—after all, prison is a guarantee of safety. I think that the resolution should be based on a different proposition: we will not surrender our comrades to the class-oriented, prejudiced court of the counterrevolutionary band." M. M. Volodarskii concurred: "One point of Stalin's resolution is unacceptable—an honorable bourgeois court." As a result of this opposition, Stalin's proposal was rejected. By an overwhelming majority and then unanimously, the Congress adopted the resolution that N. I. Bukharin proposed on this issue.

The problem of Stalin's behavior and political position in the decisive days and weeks of October, 1917, is not yet sufficiently clear. During the years of the cult, historical analyses of the October Revolution invariably asserted that, while Kamenev and Zinoviev opposed the armed insurrection and Trotsky wavered badly, Stalin was virtually the main practical leader, Lenin's closest aide, the second supreme chief and demiurge.

¹⁵ As quoted by Dr. A. L. Fraiman, at the All-Union Scholarly Conference on the History of the October Revolution (Nov. 13-16, 1962, in Leningrad). See *Lenin i Oktiabr'skoe voozuzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow, 1964), p. 44.

¹⁶ *Ed.*: A few weeks before the VIth Congress, armed supporters of the Provisional Government dispersed an armed demonstration of Bolsheviks.

With the help of Eino Rakh'ia and at the risk of his life, Lenin on the evening of the twenty-fourth went to Smolny and took command of the insurrection, which began a day before the opening of the Congress of Soviets. By the morning of the twenty-fifth, the Provisional Government was overthrown and power passed to the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

Even when the armed insurrection had become a fact, Stalin's role was modest. An analysis of the documents and source materials of the "ten days that shook the world" shows that the real organizer of the October Revolution was Lenin. An important role in its practical success was played by the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, then headed by Leon Trotsky. His services in organizing the October insurrection were acknowledged by Stalin himself, in an article written in 1918. (Until the early 1930's, this article was always included in collections of Stalin's writings.) Other Bolsheviks who played crucial roles during the armed insurrection and during the first days of the Soviet regime were N. V. Krylenko, P. E. Dybenko, V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, A. S. Bubnov, F. E. Dzerzhinskii, N. A. Miliutin, and Sverdlov. As for Stalin, we barely see him during those days, whether among the armed workers and sailors or at meetings of soldiers and workers. It is not surprising that the American Communist John Reed, an eyewitness, did not give Stalin a single line in his remarkable book on the October Revolution.²²

Stalin also made a number of mistakes in the first months and years after the October Revolution. For example, he vacillated when the peace of Brest-Litovsk was discussed in the Central Committee. Later, in the summer of 1918, he was sent to Tsaritsyn as extraordinary commissar for food supply. In fact he took over all power in the Tsaritsyn region, squeezing out and subordinating to himself all local, Soviet, Party, and military organs. Undoubtedly Stalin did accomplish much in Tsaritsyn, supplying the industrial centers of Soviet Russia with food. But even then his main technique for running things in the city and at the front was mass terror. He not only ordered dozens of real enemies shot; he also destroyed many people who were only suspected of having connections with the White Guards.²³

Contrary to Lenin's instructions and the decrees of the Central Committee, Stalin began to vilify military specialists indiscriminately, to remove them from their jobs, and even to shoot some of them. In one of his telegrams from the Southern Front, Stalin demanded from

²² In a foreword to *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Lenin expressed a very high opinion of it and recommended publication in millions of copies in every language. But Stalin banned it. During the years of the cult it was removed from libraries, and was reprinted only after the XXth Party Congress. In 1937-38 Party members were sent to prisons and camps for "keeping John Reed's book."

²³ See K. E. Voroshilov's account in *Izvestiia*, Jan. 3, 1935.

the Central Committee nothing less than re-examination of the whole "question of the military specialists [who have been recruited] from the ranks of nonparty counterrevolutionaries." Dogmatic and sectarian, Stalin did not want to consider the great role that nonparty military specialists were called upon to play in building the Red Army. He was hostile and distrustful, in particular toward the military leader of the North Caucasus, A. E. Snesev.²⁴ A general of the old tsarist army and also an outstanding orientalist, Snesev was one of the first to volunteer for the Red Army; he devoted his knowledge and experience to defense of the young Soviet republic. His energetic leadership helped to beat the enemy back from Tsaritsyn. Nevertheless, just at this time Stalin sent a telegram to Moscow accusing the general of sabotage. "Military leader Snesev," Stalin wrote, "in my opinion is very skillfully sabotaging the operation." Stalin demanded that Snesev be recalled, because he allegedly could not and would not make war against counterrevolution. Stalin declared Snesev's strategy for the defense of the city to be a "wrecker's" plan on the grounds that it was "defensist" rather than aggressive. In mid-July, 1918, when the position at Tsaritsyn had just been stabilized, Stalin arbitrarily removed almost the entire military staff of the district and had them arrested and placed on a barge on the Volga. This prison barge then unexpectedly sank with all on board. An inspection committee of the Supreme Military Soviet, headed by A. I. Okulovyi, went to Tsaritsyn in the summer of 1918 to investigate these arbitrary actions. Snesev was set free and on September 11 appointed the chief of defense of the western region. Later he worked as director of the Academy of the General Staff of the Red Army—until he was arrested again in 1930.

The same hostility was shown to another leading military specialist, N. N. Sytin, appointed commander of the Southern Front in the fall of 1918. On Stalin's suggestion, the Revolutionary-Military Soviet of the Southern Front changed Sytin's first orders of operation and then removed him from his command. Stalin was thereby defying the instructions of the Revolutionary-Military Soviet of the Republic, the demands of the Central Executive Committee, even the orders of the Party's Central Committee, not to interfere in the orders of a front commander. As a result of these arbitrary and completely unjustified actions, Stalin was finally removed from the Revolutionary-Military Soviet of the Southern Front, while Sytin remained commander of that same front.²⁵

It must also be noted that Stalin and Voroshilov were hardly ideal leaders of the military operations at Tsaritsyn, the city later named

²⁴ See *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1955, No. 1.

²⁵ Later Sytin worked in the Revolutionary-Military Soviet of the Republic. See *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1962, No. 2.

for Stalin (Stalingrad) and renamed once again after his death (Volgograd). Although Tsaritsyn managed to hold out in 1918, the army suffered enormous losses there. In a speech to the VIIIth Party Congress (March, 1919), which has not been published,²⁶ Lenin sharply criticized the Revolutionary-Military Soviet of the Tenth Army, which was in charge of the Tsaritsyn operation. Participants in the VIIIth Congress recall Lenin's condemnation of the anarchistic behavior of many of the Red Army units at Tsaritsyn, their refusal to follow the orders of military specialists and their enthusiasm for guerrilla tactics. Lenin declared that the military specialists

will be in charge, though we will place our own people alongside them. And we know from experience that this will lead to successful results. [I. A.] Akulov carried out the line of the Central Committee, yet they are saying that he destroyed the army. Akulov informed us that the Third Army indulged in guerrilla tactics even at Tsaritsyn. Akulov proved this by objective facts. It is permissible to sacrifice 60,000 men, but from the standpoint of our general line, can we simply throw away 60,000 men?

I am fully aware that you have killed many of the enemy. But we would not have had to throw away 60,000 men if the specialists had been there, if it had been a regular army. We must not do this again.

The absence of a commanding staff at the front means that soldiers do not go into battle but into a slaughterhouse.

A regular army can exist only on condition that the most rational use is made of the work of specialists.²⁷

This issue was part of the clash between Lenin and the "military opposition," which was explicitly supported by Voroshilov and indirectly by Stalin as well. The problem of this "military opposition" has not been properly studied by our historians. It is known that the following were open adherents: A. Z. Kamenskii, Voroshilov, E. M. Iaroslavskii, G. I. Safarov, F. I. Goloshchekin, and S. Milin. But behind them stood Stalin, clearly sympathizing with this opposition and trying to create the impression that Lenin and the Central Committee did not understand military affairs, which they entrusted to Trotsky. The basic point of disagreement was the recruiting of military specialists for the Red Army; the "military opposition" resisted that

²⁶ Ed.: See *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b): protokoly* (Moscow, 1959), p. vii: the closed session of the VIIIth Congress, devoted to military problems, is omitted from this record "because the Secretary's notes are utterly crude."

²⁷ See S. A. Fediukin, *Sovetskaia vlast' i burzhuaznye spetsialisty* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 63-64; S. I. Aralov, *Lenin vel nas k pobede* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 102-103; and *Vos'moi s'ezd . . .*, pp. 412-23 and 538-40. Ed.: None of these citations contains the actual words that Medvedev quotes from Lenin's unpublished speech. Neither does the little biography, A. S. Blinov, *Ivan Akulov* (Moscow, 1967). Apparently Medvedev was able to consult the unpublished minutes of the closed session.

recruitment. Later Stalin issued an order "not to consider the military opposition as an opposition." He tried in every possible way to emphasize that it was an opposition not against Lenin and the Central Committee but against Trotsky. But the facts show a different picture. The VIIIth Party Congress reprimanded Kamenskii, and a resolution of the Central Committee explained that there was no military policy of Trotsky's but a policy of the Central Committee, which Trotsky was carrying out.²⁸ It must be noted that Stalin, while continually agitating against Lenin, never took part in one of the open and "official" opposition groups. At the decisive moment he always withdrew his objections and invariably appeared among the majority. It is difficult to believe this was due only to the persuasiveness of Lenin's arguments.

Stalin behaved badly not only with the military specialists but also with many Communists who were his subordinates. Even at that period he demanded from his subordinates unquestioning obedience. He removed people he found objectionable and chose workers who were capable of acting only according to the principle of "Pay attention; do what you're told; report when you're through." His cruelty and lack of self-restraint were clearly shown in the letter he sent from Tsaritsyn to Stepan Shaumian in May, 1918: "With respect to the Dagestanian and other bands who are obstructing the movement of trains from the North Caucasus, you must be absolutely ruthless. A number of their villages should be set on fire and burned to the ground, to teach them not to make raids on trains."²⁹ Twenty years later, the experience of terror that Stalin acquired in Tsaritsyn was applied to the entire country.

In 1920, when Stalin was a member of the Military Council of the Southwest Front, he refused to submit to a decision of the Politburo concerning his area of operations and sent a letter to Lenin which contained harsh and nasty expressions. Stalin's arbitrary behavior delayed the transfer of the First Cavalry Army and other units to the Western Front, and was one of the reasons for the failure of the Soviet advance on Warsaw.

One cannot help asking how Stalin got away with such abuses of power and arbitrary actions. It is not easy to answer this question, but certain factors do stand out. Stalin was already powerful in the years of the Civil War. He had many supporters and knew how to stick up for himself. Under the conditions of the savage Civil War, when the Soviet regime was often placed in a critical situation, Lenin had to make use of every available force that supported the revolution.

²⁸ One of the older Communists, D. Iu. Zorina, several years ago wrote an interesting article, still not published, "On the Problem of the Military Opposition."

²⁹ *Pravda*, Sept. 20, 1963.

the Central Committee, which, on April 3, 1922, set up a new post, General Secretary of the Central Committee, and elected Stalin to it.

At that time the General Secretary was not considered the main official in the Party. The Secretariat was only one of the organs of the Central Committee that were subordinated to the Politburo. The secretaries of the Central Committee, who were in charge of the current work of the Party *apparatus*, were not members of the Politburo, which was one of the reasons for the inadequate authority and the poor work of the Secretariat. In order to improve the work of the Secretariat, the decision was made to name a Politburo member General Secretary of the Central Committee.

In 1922 Stalin was the least prominent figure in the Politburo. Not only Lenin but also Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and A. I. Rykov were much more popular among the broad masses of the Party than Stalin. Closemouthed and reserved in everyday affairs, Stalin was also a poor public speaker. He spoke in a low voice with a strong Caucasian accent, and found it difficult to speak without a prepared text. It is not surprising that, during the stormy years of revolution and civil war, with their ceaseless meetings, rallies, and demonstrations, the revolutionary masses saw or heard little of Stalin. He was generally to be found somewhere behind the scenes. But within the Party *apparatus* Stalin was a fairly prominent official, well known for his organizational abilities and his harsh manners. Evidently it was assumed that appointing a man such as Stalin to the post of General Secretary would bring some order into the working organs of the Party, which, to judge from many of Lenin's letters and remarks, were not operating very efficiently in 1921-22.

Thus there was nothing unexpected in Stalin's appointment to the new post. It was accepted by the Party as routine. "It was one of a number of such events to which no one ascribed any special significance," writes E. Ia. Drabkina in her memoirs, "and even in Party circles no one paid any attention to it."³¹ In April, 1922, Lenin was still at the head of the Party and the government; he was the universally recognized chief of the revolutionary masses. Therefore Stalin's election in 1922 to the post of General Secretary was not, despite the legends that were created later on, the promotion of a new Party chief; it was not Lenin's designation of his successor.

Although the post of General Secretary was not the most important office in 1922, some people have reproached Lenin for entrusting it to Stalin, whose shortcomings were well known to the majority of Party leaders. But there is no proof that Lenin proposed the creation

³¹ E. Ia. Drabkina, *Zimnii pereval*. Ed.: Medvedev gives no place or date of publication. Neither does the French translation: Drabkina, *Solstice d'hiver. Le dernier combat de Lénine* (Paris, 1970). I have been unable to locate the Russian original.

of the new post, or that he nominated Stalin for it. The plenary meeting of the Central Committee that convened immediately after the XIth Party Congress was presided over by Kamenev at its opening session. It was Kamenev, according to eyewitness reports, who proposed that Stalin be chosen as General Secretary. Furthermore, even before the beginning of the Plenum, pressure was applied to the newly elected Central Committee. According to Snegov, a member of the Elections Committee of the XIth Party Congress, during the election of the Central Committee some delegates wrote "General Secretary" on their ballots after Stalin's name. This angered Skrypnik, chairman of the Elections Committee, who demanded that these ballots be declared invalid. Kamenev had to explain to the Congress that it was not the Congress but the Plenum of the Central Committee that elected the Secretariat of the CC. Thus it may be argued that the election of Stalin as General Secretary was presented to Lenin as a *fait accompli*. Furthermore—and this is the most important aspect of the matter—Lenin never had (or sought) the plenitude of power that Stalin subsequently possessed. Thus Lenin could not by himself decide important questions of policy, or even questions of appointments. He was often obliged to give in to his comrades on the Central Committee, and it would appear that this was the case with Stalin, who was actively supported by such prominent members of the Politburo as Zinoviev and Kamenev, to say nothing of influential members of the Central Committee, including Ordzhonikidze and Voroshilov.

Many letters and memoranda, a large part of which have been published only in the last few years, reveal Lenin's sometimes difficult position during 1921 and 1922. Some of Lenin's letters, although they do not have a direct bearing on Stalin's appointment, show how hard it was for Lenin to obtain any appointment he desired during that period or to prevent one. In the spring of 1921, the old Bolshevik G. L. Shklovskii, whom Lenin had known well in émigré days, asked for a job in one of the trade delegations of the USSR abroad. Lenin supported his request. However, the Orgburo of the Central Committee turned down Lenin's proposal. Lenin took this rather unimportant matter to the Politburo and won his point. Even then the Commissariat of Foreign Trade, or more likely some of its leading officials, did not want to implement the Politburo's decree. Shklovskii sent a letter to Lenin, asking for his assistance. Lenin immediately wrote to V. M. Molotov, who at that time was in charge of the Central Committee Secretariat. In this note he accused Iu. Kh. Lutovinov and B. S. Stomoniakov of sabotaging the Politburo's decision to appoint Shklovskii. Anyone who really believed that Shklovskii did not deserve the appointment, Lenin wrote, should make an open appeal to the Central Committee and stop whispering about "Lenin's favoritism."³²

³² *Polnoe sobranie*, LII, pp. 249–50.

At the same time, Lenin sent a note to Shklovskii:

June 4, 1921

Comrade Shklovskii:

I received your long letter after sending you my note. You are completely right: to accuse me of "favoritism" in this case is utterly outrageous and disgusting. I repeat, there is a complicated intrigue here. They are taking advantage of the deaths of Sverdlov, Zagorskii and others.

You will have to start from scratch. There is both prejudice and stubborn opposition and deep distrust of me in this problem. I am extremely pained by this. But it's a fact. I don't blame you for your letter. I understand that things are very difficult for you. I have seen other such examples in our Party nowadays. New men have come in and don't know the old men. You recommend and they don't trust you. You repeat your recommendation—their distrust is redoubled, and they begin to get stubborn. "But we don't want it!!!"

Nothing else remains but this: starting from scratch, by struggle, we must *win* the *new* youth to our side.

Greetings,
LENIN³³

Shklovskii's problem was settled a month or so later, according to a note that Lenin sent in the middle of July:

Comrade Shklovskii:

I spoke with Stomoniakov and [L. B.] Krasin, and am enclosing Krasin's note. He promised to see you. Lutovinov gave me his "word of honor" that he will treat you in "an unbiased manner." I did all I could. I repeat what I said to you personally: in Berlin you must "start from scratch" and win yourself a position by your performance. This has happened to several old Party members since 1917. Best wishes to you and all your family.

LENIN³⁴

And there were not a few such cases. "You are mistaken," wrote Lenin to the Soviet diplomat A. A. Ioffe,

to repeat continually: "the Central Committee—that's me" [*TsK, eto ia*]. This could have been written only in a state of great nervous tension and exhaustion. The old Central Committee (1919–1920) beat me on one of the immensely important questions, as you know from discussions. On organizational and personnel questions, there is no counting the times when I was in the minority. You yourself saw examples of this many times, when you were a member of the CC. Why then do you get so nervous that you write the *COM-*

³³ Unfortunately, this note of Lenin's, extremely interesting both as an historical document and from a psychological point of view, has not yet been published even in his "complete" collected works (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*).

³⁴ *Polnoe sobranie*, LIII, pp. 30–31. In 1937, Shklovskii, for whom Lenin went to so much trouble, was shot as an "enemy of the people."

in the national question. During Lenin's illness, in September, 1922, Stalin persuaded a commission of the Central Committee to endorse his proposal for "autonomization," that is, for unifying the republics of non-Russian nationalities by incorporating them in the Russian Republic with rights of autonomy. According to Stalin, what was needed was not a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics but a Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, which would include all the other nationalities. Thus Stalin did not take into consideration the Leninist view of federation, which had been formulated at the Xth Party Congress in 1921. He was in fact proposing to liquidate the independence of the union republics. Lenin sharply criticized Stalin's position in a letter of September 27, 1922, and proposed a completely different solution: the creation of a new kind of state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, based on the complete equality of these republics. This solution was accepted by the Party.

Nor did Stalin take a correct position in the conflict that broke out in 1922 between G. K. (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze and the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. Lenin was deeply disturbed by this conflict, which prompted him to dictate his memorandum "On the Nationality Question" at the very end of 1922. In it he expressed great alarm at Ordzhonikidze's readiness to use force against the local leaders in Georgia:

I think that a fatal role was played here by Stalin's impatience and his infatuation with administrative fiat, and also by his hostility towards notorious "social nationalism." . . . But hostility generally plays the worst kind of role in politics. . . . In this case, our relations with the Georgian nation, we have a typical example of the need for extreme carefulness, a conciliatory and permissive spirit, if we are to handle this matter in a truly proletarian manner.

Later, with Stalin foremost in his mind, Lenin wrote:

That Georgian who takes such a scornful attitude toward this aspect of the matter, who scornfully hurls accusations of social nationalism (while he himself is a real genuine "social nationalist," and even a crude Great Russian Derzhimorda [a policeman in Gogol's *Inspector General*])—that Georgian is in reality violating the interests of proletarian class solidarity. . . . It is Stalin and Dzerzhinskii who must be held politically responsible for this entire Great Russian nationalist campaign.³⁷

A month later, Lenin returned to the conflict of Ordzhonikidze, Stalin, and Dzerzhinskii with the leadership of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. In the "Diary of the Office Secretaries of V. I. Lenin"³⁸ there is the following note made by L. A.

³⁷ *Polnoe sobranie*, XLV, pp. 356-60.

³⁸ *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1963, No. 2, p. 80.

proposed publication not only of the letter called the "Testament" but also of other unpublished letters by Lenin dealing with intra-party problems; the so-called "Testament," he said, should be appended to the minutes. The Congress supported his motion and unanimously decided to publish both the "Testament" and the letters on intraparty problems.⁴⁷

However, the "Testament" did not appear in the minutes of the Congress, which were published in 1928, or in the *Leninskie sborniki*. Many other letters of Lenin were also not published. But the delegates of the XVth Congress (1,669 strong) could read the "Testament" in the *Bulletins* printed during the Congress "only for members of the All-Russian Communist Party."⁴⁸ These *Bulletins* were printed, according to the information on the title page, in an edition of 13,500 copies. How the 11,831 surplus copies were distributed is unknown; in any case, the *Bulletins* did not reach the Party organizations.

Thus, after the XVth Congress of 1927 Lenin's "Testament" became somewhat more widely known among the Party *aktiv*. But in the 1930's all talk about the "Testament" was suppressed. First it became a secret document, which young Party members knew nothing about. With the beginning of mass repression, Lenin's "Testament" was declared to be a fabrication. Those who owned copies of the *Bulletins* of the XVth Congress were, with few exceptions, among the repressed, and many of those who escaped arrest preferred to destroy the "criminal" document. According to some old Bolsheviks who were imprisoned during the years of Stalin's cult, in the prisons and camps there were Communists condemned to long terms and even to execution for possession of "a counterrevolutionary document, the so-called Testament of Lenin."

⁴⁷ From the personal papers of E. P. Frolov.

⁴⁸ See Appendix I to *Bulletin* No. 30, pp. 35-37.

II

Stalin's Struggle with the Opposition

1

THE RISE OF STALINISM cannot be understood without examining, if only briefly, the struggle within the Party during the middle and late 1920's. Many episodes connected with that struggle need to be reconsidered in light of the tragic events of the 1930's. No problem of Party history was so blatantly falsified for twenty to thirty years as the fight with the oppositions. Even a superficial acquaintance with the most readily available source materials—the records of Party congresses and conferences, the speeches, platforms, and forecasts of the quarreling groups—makes it clear that many episodes, and indeed the trend of the struggle as a whole, were already presented in a subjective and tendentious way in the publications of the 1920's. From the start the intraparty struggle was bitter, with each side trying to portray its opponents in the most unattractive light. Often statements were distorted beyond recognition and mistakes were exaggerated out of all proportion. Viciousness and disloyalty were stimulated on both sides. And after the defeat of the successive oppositions, the interpretations of the events of the twenties that appeared in official publications and in émigré Trotskyite literature grew even more unobjective and tendentious—culminating in *The History of the CPSU (Short Course)*,¹ which depicts the opposition leaders as masked traitors and imperialist spies, who were recruited by foreign intelligence services in the earliest years of the Soviet regime. Unfortunately, many recent

¹ Ed.: Published in 1938, without any authors listed on the title page, this book was quickly established as the most authoritative text for the world Communist movement, and remained so for fifteen years. See below, pp. 499 ff.

works on the intraparty struggle of the twenties are not free from bias.² Although these works do not accuse the opposition leaders of espionage or premeditated betrayal, they do not correct many other inaccuracies. Stalin is hardly mentioned as the leader of the struggle with the oppositions, nor do the names of Molotov, L. M. Kaganovich, and Stalin's other aides appear. This makes the history of the intraparty struggle incomprehensible to the uninitiated reader.

Almost all those who took an active part in the opposition movements of the twenties perished in the mass repression of the thirties. Only a few of the rank-and-file participants returned to their families after the XXth Party Congress in 1956. Some are now trying to vindicate certain opposition leaders, on the grounds that they were correct and bold, though unsuccessful, in their criticism of Stalin. Their point of view is understandable but not accurate. Because Stalin, after winning the fight with the opposition, usurped all power in the country and then wiped out most of his former opponents and allies, it does not follow that Stalin was completely wrong in his struggle with the opposition or that his opponents were completely right. It would also be wrong to imitate bourgeois historians who depict the fight between the different groups as only an unprincipled struggle for power, masked by theoretical arguments to deceive the workers. In the twenties there was not only a struggle for power within the Party; there were also serious theoretical and practical disagreements and a contest of ideas, especially over the methods and possibilities of building socialism in the Soviet Union, which at that time was the only socialist country in the world.

It is impossible to trace all the complicated twists and turns of this conflict, but certain episodes must be examined here.

There have been ideological and political struggles within the Party at practically every period of its development. In the post-October period alone, Lenin had to fight the so-called "left" Communists, the "military" opposition, the "workers'" opposition and the "democratic centralist" group, while in 1920–21 a heated discussion arose within the Party on the problem of the trade unions. Lenin was always at the center of the struggle. But however embittered the polemics may have become, Lenin never brought into the ideological battles among Party members the methods that were used against the Party's enemies, its ideological and political opponents.

² See, for example, the following: A. Ia. Viatkin, *Razgrom Kommunisticheskoi partii trotskizma i drugikh antileninskikh grupp* (Leningrad, 1966); V. M. Ivanov, *Iz istorii bor'by partii protiv "levogo oportunizma"* (Leningrad, 1965); B. I. Makarov, *Kritika trotskizma po voprosu o stroitel'stve sotsializma v SSSR* (Moscow, 1965); Iu. V. Voskresenskii, *Razgrom Kommunisticheskoi partii trotskistskoi men'shevistskoi "novoi" oppozitsii* (Moscow, 1962). See also numerous articles in the journal *Voprosy istorii KPSS*.

sider them my comrades, and I will fight with all my strength, in the CC and at the Congress, to have them expelled from the Party.⁶

But Lenin was congenitally incapable of the thought of revenge; he never persecuted people who recognized their errors, never demanded public confessions from them. His treatment of Zinoviev and Kamenev shows this quite clearly. Soon after October, 1917, Zinoviev and Kamenev admitted their error in opposing the insurrection and immediately were assigned to important positions in the Soviet regime. Kamenev was chairman of the Second Congress of Soviets at the very moment of the insurrection and was elected chairman of the Central Executive Committee. It is true that for several days Kamenev tried to achieve "unity" with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, hoping to create a coalition government of all "socialist" parties. When the CC of the Bolshevik Party objected, Kamenev together with seven commissars handed in their resignations. But then they admitted their error, and Lenin again drew them into responsible work. In a letter to Italian Communists in 1921, Lenin described such experiences as a norm of Party life.

To be sure, Lenin noted in his "Testament" that the October episode was not accidental for Zinoviev and Kamenev. But in no way did he question the right of these two prominent Bolsheviks to be leaders of the Party. Even in his relations with Mensheviks, Lenin showed no sectarian narrow-mindedness or blind distrust. "Comrades," he declared at the VIIIth Congress of Soviets in December, 1919,

I have followed the activities of the Mensheviks, I daresay, more closely than anyone. On the basis of this fifteen-year period of observation, I maintain: . . . The development of the Mensheviks, especially at such a great moment as has begun in the history of the Russian Revolution, shows the greatest vacillations among them. On the whole they have reached the point where, against their will, with the greatest difficulty, they are beginning to leave the bourgeoisie and its prejudices. Although they resisted many times, they are beginning [1919] to draw nearer to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and in a year will have come a few steps closer—of this I am completely sure.⁷

Lenin was not a liberal. When necessary he was tough on his opponents, including Party members. But Lenin's toughness did not strike at people's self-respect or insult them.⁸ Stalin treated his opponents and critics in a completely different manner. Even in the period from 1918 to 1923, when Lenin was still alive, Stalin distinguished himself by his unpleasantness and harshness toward those

⁶ *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XXVI, p. 186.

⁷ *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XXX, pp. 210-11.

⁸ Lenin's sister gave a good description of his ability to criticize without offending. See M. I. Ul'anova, *Iz vospominanii o Lenine* (Moscow, 1928).

the Party—was Leon Trotsky, who had a considerable following at that time. Since we shall frequently come across Trotsky and Trotskyism in these pages, something should be said here about this complex and contradictory political figure.

Trotsky joined the Social Democratic Party when its first organizations were being formed. He was arrested and sent to Siberia when he was only nineteen, and escaped abroad in 1902. At the IInd Party Congress in 1903, he sided with the Mensheviks. In the 1905 Revolution he became chairman of the Petersburg Soviet, where he made a number of political and theoretical mistakes. Still, it is impossible to deny the important revolutionary activity performed by the Petersburg Soviet and its chairman in 1905. When the Soviet was arrested, Trotsky was again sent to Siberia but escaped en route, and in 1907 attended the Vth London Congress of the Party.

In 1912, Trotsky, who was based in Vienna, organized the "August Bloc" and ceased to publish *Pravda*.¹⁰ The prime goal he set himself was to reconcile all the Social Democratic groups, especially the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Thus he fought mainly against the Leninist Bolsheviks, who did not want to reach an agreement with the liquidationists and the *otzovists*. Obviously Lenin gave as much as he got. It was in 1912–13 that he expressed those extremely derogatory opinions of Trotsky which were constantly quoted during the 1920's and subsequent years. Lenin accused Trotsky of deliberately misleading the workers by concealing the truth about the liquidationists. He referred to Trotsky as a "vile careerist," an "adventurist," an "intriguer," and so on. That was when Lenin used the expression "Little Judas" (*Iudushka*), comparing Trotsky's efforts at peacemaking with the hypocritical attempts of Iudushka Golovlev, in M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's novel *The Golovlevs*, to reconcile his family.

In the twenties, historians and politicians assiduously collected these derogatory comments, many of which were expressed in private memoranda and letters not intended for publication. Lenin was often harsh and merciless in polemics. But it would be unreasonable if words said in anger or in the heat of argument, not only to political opponents but even to close friends and family, were attached to them as lifelong nicknames or labels. And Lenin above all never intended such a thing.

After the February Revolution of 1917, Trotsky returned to Russia and sided with the internationalist group called the *mezhraiontsy*, who were drawing close to Lenin's outlook. Thus it was not accidental that the *mezhraiontsy* were admitted into the Party at the VIth Congress in August, 1917, and Trotsky was elected to the CC. After the Bolshe-

¹⁰ Ed.: Trotsky had founded *Pravda* in 1908. In 1912 the Bolsheviks began to publish a newspaper with the same name, edited by Stalin, and Trotsky's paper lapsed.

viks won a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky became its chairman once again.

Like Stalin, Trotsky also made many mistakes during that period. However, whatever one may think of Trotsky's subsequent political career, one cannot overlook the eminently useful work he did in the decisive months before the October Revolution. "Generally speaking," writes the old Bolshevik A. P. Spunde,¹¹

Trotsky displayed his best qualities in 1917. He was the idol of mass meetings in Petrograd; his political line aroused a great feeling for him. In his actions one sensed a 1917 version of Danton. Determination and boldness showed in everything he did. No one then noticed that he lacked Lenin's depth and Lenin's ability to subordinate all his human feelings to the victory of socialism. . . . Trotsky was one of the best orators of the Revolution. He always spoke with amazing brilliance and had the ability to popularize even difficult ideas, though the foundation of principles was often incommensurate with the oratorical skill.

Another such testimonial occurs in a speech that Lenin made in October, 1917, to the Petrograd conference of Bolsheviks on the choice of candidates for the Constituent Assembly. "No one would argue against a candidate such as Trotsky," Lenin declared, and continued:

Firstly, because right after his arrival he took the position of an internationalist; secondly, because he campaigned among the *mezhraiontsy* for a fusion [with the Bolsheviks]; and thirdly, because he rose to the occasion, during the difficult July days, as a devoted supporter of the Party of the revolutionary proletariat.¹²

There are many legends about Trotsky's role in the organization of the insurrection in Petrograd. (Trotsky himself was the author of some of these legends.) But just because there is a tendency to exaggerate his importance,¹³ it should not be underrated. Trotsky was, after all, the leader of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, to which all power passed in the first day after the overthrow of the Provisional Government. There are many eyewitness reports of the great role he played in the revolutionary events. Suffice

¹¹ Spunde was Deputy Commissar of Finance in the first Soviet government. Later he was a member of the Council of Labor and Defense and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, deputy chairman of the State Bank, and director of the foreign-currency division. He was not arrested in 1937-38 but was expelled from the Party, and worked as bookkeeper, cashier, and accountant in the Moscow Trading Company. After the XXth Party Congress he was completely rehabilitated. Spunde wrote his memoirs of the revolution in 1947-49. They remain among his family's papers.

¹² *Polnoe sobranie*, XXXIV, p. 345.

¹³ For example, in Professor I. K. Dashkovskii's letter to the editor of *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, Ed.: This seems to be an unpublished manuscript.

Politburo. Thus it is understandable that many of Trotsky's supporters considered him the most likely and the most desirable successor to Lenin as leader of the Party and the government. Their expectations were based not only on Trotsky's ambition but also on his great popularity among sections of the Party intelligentsia, the army, and the youth. Trotsky and his group cloaked their attacks on other members of the Politburo—especially Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, and Bukharin—with the slogan of democracy. "The most dangerous of all dangers," Trotsky wrote, "is the regime within the Party." In his book *The Lessons of October*, Trotsky exaggerated his services to the revolution, thereby distorting the position and role of Lenin. Trotsky's main targets were Zinoviev and Kamenev, whom Lenin in 1917 had called strikebreakers of the revolution. Trotsky also sharply criticized Zinoviev for his leadership of the Comintern, insisting that the 1923 insurrection in Germany would have succeeded if the Comintern and the German Communists had been bolder.

This concern for democracy smelled of demagoguery. Even many of Trotsky's supporters called him "the lord" (*barin*), for his arrogance and conceit were famous. Trotsky's scorn for Party discipline and the preemptory, bureaucratic style of his work were obvious during Lenin's lifetime. It was Trotsky who coined the slogans "shake up" (the trade unions) and "tighten the screws." At that time he was starting, among his supporters, a cult of his own personality.

Trotsky's famous theory of permanent revolution was also wrong; it resembled Marx's and Lenin's theories of uninterrupted revolution in name only. This theory, which Trotsky tried to defend for the rest of his life, was associated with one of his major errors: underestimation of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, as the main ally of the proletariat not only in the bourgeois democratic period of the Russian Revolution but also, in the case of the poorer peasants, during the socialist period. Since he did not see the possibilities for building socialism in the countryside and did not understand Lenin's cooperative plan, he accused the Party of a "kulak deviation." He pinned his hopes largely on the speedy victory of the world proletarian revolution. He demanded that the work of Soviet Russia be subordinated to this goal, and did not care if the peasantry was sacrificed in the process. Thus in 1922 Trotsky wrote:

After seizing power the proletariat will conflict not only with the bourgeois groups that supported it in the early stages of the revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry which helped it come to power. The contradictions in the situation of a workers' government in a backward country, with an overwhelming peasant majority, can be solved only . . . in the arena of the world proletarian revolution.¹⁸

¹⁸ Trotsky, *1905* (Moscow, 1922), pp. 4-5.

Russia could begin the socialist revolution, but could not continue it—not to speak of achieving a complete socialist society—without the aid and support of a socialist Europe. Trotsky was not alone in this belief. In the early years of the revolution this opinion was shared by Lenin. For example, on March 12, 1919, Lenin told the Petrograd Soviet:

Only by appraising the role of the Soviets on a world scale can we achieve a correct understanding of the details of our internal life and a proper regulation of them. *The job of construction is completely dependent on how soon the revolution will succeed in the more important European countries. Only after it succeeds there can we seriously get down to the job of construction.*²⁴

On November 6, 1920, Lenin said to the Moscow Soviet:

If we take a look at international relations at this time—and we have always emphasized that we look at things from an international point of view, *and that in a single country it is impossible to complete such a thing as a socialist revolution*—and if we look at the history of the wars waged against Soviet Russia, then we will see. . . .²⁵

In 1921–22, when it became clear that the socialist revolution in Europe would be delayed and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was beginning in the USSR, Lenin re-examined his position on building a socialist society. Analysis of his last works makes this clear, especially the articles “On Cooperation” and “On Our Revolution.” But many Party leaders did not pay proper attention to Lenin’s new approach to this problem, and continued as before to assert that it was impossible to build a socialist society in a single country, and a backward one at that. Stalin was a leader of this type. In the first versions of his *On the Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin wrote that for “the organization of socialist production, the efforts of one country, especially a peasant country like Russia, are not enough. For this, the efforts of the proletariat of several developed countries are needed.”²⁶ Later, in 1925, Stalin reconsidered his point of view, and made certain changes in editing this work. But Zinoviev and Kamenev still clung to confused and for the most part incorrect views on this question.

²⁴ *Severnaia Kommuna*, No. 58, Mar. 14, 1919. In the third edition of Lenin’s collected works, a footnote informs us that this speech is printed according to the text of the newspaper *Severnaia Kommuna*. But the two sentences italicized here have been omitted.

²⁵ *Stenograficheskie otchety Moskovskogo Soveta rabochikh, krest’ianskikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov, Biulleten’*, No. 15. (In the second and third editions of Lenin’s collected works, this speech was printed exactly according to the text of the *Bulletin*. But in the fourth and fifth editions, the part we have italicized is missing, although the reference to *Bulletin* No. 15 is preserved.)

²⁶ See *XIV s’ezd VKP(b)*, p. 429. Ed.: See E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum* (New York, 1954), p. 359, for full bibliographical information on this passage.

Military Soviet, and at the same time was appointed Chief of Staff of the Red Army. In January, 1925, Frunze replaced Trotsky as Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs and as chairman of the Revolutionary-Military Soviet.

An able, determined, and intelligent man, Frunze enjoyed considerable influence in the Party as well as the army. (It has been suggested that Lenin had Frunze or Ia. E. Rudzutak in mind when he suggested the replacement of Stalin as General Secretary.)

Frunze suffered from a stomach ulcer that at times incapacitated him. But a stomach ulcer is not malignant; it does not threaten the patient's life, and the prognosis is generally good. Even in 1925 an experienced doctor knew that a special diet should be tried, and only if this was unsuccessful would there be need of surgery.

The evidence suggests that Frunze did not want an operation, for he was improving without it. On October 26, 1925, the day before entering the hospital, he wrote to his wife:

I am feeling absolutely healthy and it is somehow ridiculous not only to go to the hospital, but even to think about an operation. Nevertheless both consultations brought the decision to operate. [My italics.—R.M.] I am personally satisfied with this decision. Let them once and for all take a good look at what's there and try to decide on a real cure. In my own mind the thought constantly recurs that there is nothing seriously wrong with me, since, if the opposite is true, it is difficult to explain my speedy recovery after rest and treatment.³⁰

There is reason to doubt that Frunze was really satisfied with the decision to operate, which had been discussed in the Politburo with Stalin and Voroshilov insisting that it be done. Frunze was a soldier and did not want to appear cowardly, but he spoke freely to an old friend, who writes:

Not long before the operation, I went to see him. He was upset and said he did not want to lie down on the operating table. . . . The premonition of some trouble, of something irreversible, oppressed him. . . . I tried to persuade Mikhail Vasilievich to refuse the operation, since the thought of it depressed him. But he shook his head: "*Stalin insists on the operation,*" he said, "to get rid of my ulcers for good. So I decided to go under the knife."³¹

Chloroform was used, although ether was known to be a better anesthetic for the purpose. Worse yet, Frunze was given more than a normal dose of chloroform, which was clearly dangerous for his heart. No stomach ulcer was found, only a little scar tissue at the site of a

³⁰ See S. Sirovinskii, "Poslednie dni," *Krasnaia zvezda*, Oct. 31, 1930.

³¹ I. K. Gamburg, *Tak eto bylo* (Moscow, 1962).

healed ulcer. Very soon after the operation, Stalin and A. I. Mikoian came to the hospital but were not admitted to the patient's room. Stalin sent Frunze a note: "Dear Friend: Today at 5.00 P.M. Mikoian and I saw Comrade [Doctor] Rozanov. We wanted to visit you, but he wouldn't let us—ulcer. We were obliged to give in. Don't worry, old buddy. Greetings. We'll come again, we'll come again . . . Koba."³²

Neither Stalin nor Mikoian was obliged to see Frunze alive. Thirty hours after the operation, his heart stopped. The autopsy and other medical reports published in *Pravda* (November 1, 1925) were confused, inconsistent, and evasive. On November 3, 1925, *Pravda* carried several articles dedicated to Frunze's memory. ("Can we reproach his poor heart," wrote Mikhail Kol'tsov, for example, "for giving way to sixty grams of chloroform after it had endured two years of a death sentence, with the hangman's noose around its neck?") An official article was included—"On the History of Comrade Frunze's Disease." "In view of the interest that the question of the history of Frunze's disease has for his comrades," the introduction said, "and the associated question of his operation, the editors consider it appropriate to print the following document." Then came the records of the two consultations at Frunze's bedside and the concluding report about the operation. The records asserted that an operation was required because Frunze's life was endangered by recurrent hemorrhaging from a bleeding ulcer. Yet the concluding report of the operation spoke only of "a little scar . . . evidently on the site of a healed ulcer."

On November 3, *Izvestiia* published an interview with one of the surgeons, Professor Grekov. His account, which pictured Frunze as smiling joyfully at the news of Stalin's visit, was inconsistent with the other medical reports, and gave no evidence to support the final declaration: "All the changes revealed by the operation undoubtedly support the view that, without the operation, Comrade Frunze was incurable, and was threatened by inevitable and possibly sudden death." The circumstances surrounding Frunze's death were so unclear and contradictory that at the end of 1925, the Communists of Ivanovo-Voznesensk—with which Frunze's revolutionary activity had been closely connected—demanded the creation of a special commission to examine the causes of his death. In *Novyi Mir*, No. 5, 1926, the writer Boris Pilnyak published a story, "The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon," in which he unambiguously accused Stalin of the death of Frunze.³³ The entire issue of the journal with Pilnyak's story was quickly confiscated. A few subscribers received the journal, but some hours later the postmen took back the copies they had delivered.

³² See Sirovinskii, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ed.*: For an English translation see Boris Pilnyak, *Mother Earth and Other Stories* (Garden City, N.Y., 1968), pp. 181–211.

Frunze was succeeded as Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs by Voroshilov, who could claim certain services to the Party and the revolution, but utterly lacked Frunze's intellect and was heavily under Stalin's influence.

July, 1926, saw the sudden death of F. E. Dzerzhinskii, the "knight of the revolution," chief of the punitive organs of the young Soviet state. He succeeded Trotsky as Commissar for Communications, and from 1924 was chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy. At the same time he remained the chairman of the Cheka, and later of the OGPU. Many books have been written about this outstanding revolutionary and we will not give here any facts from his biography. "Dzerzhinskii," said V. R. Menzhinskii, "had his own special talent, which sets him apart. That was a moral talent, a talent for unwavering revolutionary action and for creativity that was not stopped by any obstacles, and was not guided by any goals except one—the triumph of the proletarian revolution."³⁴ Dzerzhinskii's enemies hated him, but in the Party he was not only respected but loved. According to some reports, in 1925, before the XIVth Party Congress, a semilegal meeting of some CC members was held at the apartment of G. I. Petrovskii, to discuss the need to remove Stalin from the position of General Secretary. Dzerzhinskii was suggested for the position. Ordzhonikidze spoke against the change, claiming that the Party would interpret it as a concession to Trotsky. The bitterness of the intraparty conflict upset Dzerzhinskii very much and hastened his end.

For a short while the death of Dzerzhinskii united all the groups of the Party. According to the evidence of M. P. Iakubovich, his coffin was carried to Red Square by Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, Bukharin, and Rykov. But that was a last demonstration of Party solidarity over the grave of a Party favorite and hero. For it was in that same summer of 1926 that the intraparty struggle flared up with new force. The position of chairman of OGPU was filled by Menzhinskii, one of Dzerzhinskii's leading colleagues. For all his good points, Menzhinskii could not really replace Dzerzhinskii in that responsible post. Besides, he was often ill and could devote little time to OGPU business. Thus an ever greater role was played by the deputy chairmen of OGPU, one of whom soon came to the fore—Iagoda, who enjoyed Stalin's protection.

5

AT THE XIVth Party Congress in December, 1925, Trotsky took no part in the conflict between the majority and the "new" opposition.

³⁴ *Pravda*, May 11, 1934.

Zinoviev's thesis about Miliukov's "ambassadors" in the economic *apparat* served Stalin well a few years later, when he tried to throw all the blame for the faults of his own economic leadership onto the "wreckers" among the specialists. "The ruling circles," declared Trotsky,

are increasingly growing together with the upper strata of Soviet-nepman society. Two strata are being created, two life styles, two types of attitudes, two types of relationships, or, to put it more strongly, the elements of a dual power⁴⁸ in everyday life are being created. Further development may transform it into a political dual power, and a political dual power would be a direct threat to the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . . The proletariat must understand that in a certain period of history, if its policy goes wrong, the Soviet state could become an apparatus through which power could be moved from its proletarian base and put into the hands of the bourgeoisie, which would then kick aside the Soviet "footstool" and convert its power into a Bonapartist system.⁴⁹

It goes without saying that the upper echelons of Party and state were not growing together with the upper levels of the nepman bourgeoisie in 1926. The degeneration of a section of the Party was far more complex and concealed.

The opposition leaders were right to criticize the policy of lowering retail and wholesale prices when there was a shortage of goods, but some of them suggested that prices on industrial goods be raised by 30 per cent, which was incorrect. It was typical of them to denounce the seven-hour working day, which was introduced in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The desire of the workers to mark this occasion by some major social reform was entirely natural. Of course one might claim, in view of the economic difficulties of 1926-27, that the seven-hour day was premature. But Zinoviev was exaggerating when he said, "I maintain that there has never yet been a more demagogical and reckless proposal in the history of our Party than this proposal for a seven-hour day." And some of the most "left-wing" oppositionists reported to the XVth Party Congress that the CC had already taken the road toward overturning the state and liquidating the Party.

The opposition resorted to exaggeration to discredit the CC majority and remove Stalin from the Party leadership. This might have been a worthy goal, in view of the harm Stalin later did the Party. But Stalin's political opponents were too hasty with their attack, striking at Stalin in conditions unfavorable to themselves. The problem was that the real shortcomings, faults, and potential effects of Stalin's

⁴⁸ *Ed.*: A reference to the dual power of the Provisional Government and the Soviets in the period between March and November, 1917.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

and Zinoviev. Realizing his advantage, Stalin sought to smash his political rivals completely and to establish one-man rule over the Party. Not only the opposition but Stalin as well frequently committed very serious violations of Leninist norms in Party life. He did everything possible to obstruct Party discussions of theoretical and practical problems. While exhorting the opposition to be sincere and condemning its hypocrisy, he was himself a hypocrite who deceived the Party and concealed his true goals. By first supporting Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky, then Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomskii against Zinoviev and Kamenev, Stalin did not unite the Party. He split it; he intensified existing disagreements, pushing toward the suppression and expulsion of those who disagreed with him.

Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, E. M. Iaroslavskii, and some of their supporters made the intraparty struggle of the twenties dirtier and harsher than it had been previously—and so, for that matter, did Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and some of their supporters. The clash of ideas was increasingly replaced by organizational conflict; the least mistake or vacillation was blown up to huge proportions and many statements were willfully distorted and misinterpreted. The slightest disagreement with the Central Committee majority was immediately turned into “an enemy outburst,” or “subversion of the proletarian dictatorship and the Soviet regime,” and the opposition was declared to be an “active counterrevolutionary force.” Such criticism was not designed to win over the oppositionists or to draw them back to united work in the Party. It was primarily intended to terrorize opposition members and the “conciliators” who sympathized with them. This kind of fight among the Party leaders, who enjoyed great prestige in foreign Communist parties, weakened the Comintern and caused some leaders of Western Communist parties to protest. Antonio Gramsci, for example, tried to send a letter from a fascist prison to the Soviet Central Committee, expressing his dismay at the intraparty struggle in the Soviet Union.

It is not surprising that a “truce” would not last for long. And, in fact, in 1927 just before the XVth Congress, the intraparty struggle was taken to the streets. There was a demonstration when I. T. Smilga was banished from Moscow for factional activity. When the train for Siberia left the Iaroslav Station, about a thousand people gathered to protest the policy of banishment. The opposition leaders, constantly obstructed in their efforts to bring their program to the Party’s notice, secretly mimeographed their documents and Lenin’s “Testament,” and even tried by conspiratorial methods to gain control of a Moscow publishing house. This enabled Stalin to bring the GPU as well as the Party machine into the fight against the opposition. GPU agents infiltrated the ranks of the opposition without much difficulty, and one of them became an operator of an illegal Trotskyite printing press—

It must be remembered that Stalin raised the slogan of kulak liquidation suddenly, causing confusion among many Party organizations. Even in terms of form, this decision was a clear violation of the collective principle (*kollegial'nost*) in the leadership of the Party.

It must also be borne in mind that, after the Second World War, the new socialist countries moved toward the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, but they did so by restricting and squeezing out the kulaks, not by totally expropriating them. In Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic, kulaks were allowed to join collective farms and prove their transformation by honest labor.⁶⁰ One author attributes this development to the consolidation of the world socialist system and the strength of the regimes in the peoples' democracies. But such an explanation is incomplete. The main difference is that the transformation of agriculture in the people's democracies was not accomplished with so many mistakes as in the USSR.

6

THE SERIOUS MISTAKES and the misuse of power in collectivization have often been criticized in Soviet historical, political, and artistic literature.⁶¹ Much less study has been made of the industrialization of the USSR in the late twenties and early thirties. It is widely believed that the situation was different in the cities during this period; that Stalin, though he made many mistakes in agriculture, achieved successful industrialization with his firm leadership. This view is wrong.

No one will deny, of course, the successes achieved by the people under the leadership of the Party in building modern industry. Colossal work was accomplished by the working class, by the intelligentsia, by all Party organizations. During the first Five-Year Plan alone, approximately 1,500 big enterprises were built, including Dneproges, the Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk metallurgical complexes, the Ural machine factory, the Rostov agricultural-machinery plant, tractor factories at Cheliabinsk, Stalingrad, and Kharkov, automobile factories in Moscow and Sormovo, the Ural chemical works, the Kramator factory of heavy machinery, and so on. New sectors of industry were established, which

⁶⁰ See L. I. Krylov, *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1966, No. 1, p. 8.

⁶¹ Among artistic works of recent years, S. Zalygin's interesting and profound story "On the Irtysh" is especially worthy of note. The most significant historical work is undoubtedly *The Collectivization of Agriculture in the USSR, 1927-32*, a monograph written by a group of scholars in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, with V. P. Danilov as editor. This work was endorsed by the Institute's scholarly council (*uchenyi sovet*) and accepted (*podpisana k pechati*) by the publishing house Mysl' in 1964. But publication has been held up since October, 1964, for political reasons that have nothing to do with scholarship.

IX

The Problem of Stalin's Responsibility

1

TO MANY PEOPLE in the Soviet Union, the mass repression of 1937–38 was an incomprehensible calamity that suddenly broke upon the country and seemed to have no end. Explanations abounded, some of them representing a search for the truth, but more attempting to escape the cruel truth, to find some formula that would preserve faith in the Party and Stalin. Some of these legends and stories are worth examining, especially since many people still believe them.

One widespread story was that Stalin did not know about the terror, that all those crimes were committed behind his back. Of course it was ridiculous to suppose that Stalin, master of everyone and everything, did not know about the arrest and shooting of members of the Politburo and the Central Committee, about the killing of most commissars, about the devastation of almost all *oblast* Party committees, about the arrest of the military high command and the Comintern leaders, about the death of leading writers and scholars, of his own relatives and friends. It was naïve and ridiculous to picture Stalin as a man completely cut off from reality, ignorant of what was happening on this earth, and still to worship him. But that is a peculiarity of the mind blinded by faith in a higher being, following a logic that has nothing in common with normal human logic, living in a world of illusions and fantasies. It is this peculiarity of the religious mentality that explains the stories about Stalin's ignorance of what was going on.

"We thought," wrote Ilya Ehrenburg, "(probably because we wanted to think so) that Stalin did not know about the senseless ravaging of Communists, of the Soviet intelligentsia."¹ Many people thought

¹ *Novyi mir*, 1962, No. 5, p. 152.

that wreckers, headed by Ezhov, had wormed their way into the NKVD, and were destroying the Party's best cadres without Stalin's knowledge. A typical conversation occurred between the commissar of the 29th Rifle Division, F. A. Stebenev, and the commander of the Viazemskii Military District, A. Ia. Vedenin, the future commandant of the Kremlin.²

"What's going on, Andrei Iakovlevich?" Stebenev asked me. "What's going on?" He walked nervously about the room. "I don't believe there are so many enemies in the Party. I don't believe it. Can it be that in some high Party office, in the security organs, there are alien people? It's as if they are deliberately destroying the Party's cadres. I would bet my head that Joseph Vissarionovich doesn't know about this. Warnings, complaints, protests are being intercepted and don't reach him. Stalin must be informed. Otherwise, disaster. Tomorrow they'll take you, and after you me. We can't keep quiet."

That was the opinion of hundreds and thousands of officials, rank-and-file Party members, even many prisoners and their relatives. D. A. Lazurkina, an official in the Leningrad *obkom*, survived to tell the XXIInd Congress:

When they arrested me . . . I felt such a horror, not for myself but for the Party. I couldn't understand why they were arresting old Bolsheviks. For what? . . . I told myself something horrible was happening in the Party, probably wrecking. And this gave me no rest. Not for one minute, though I spent two and a half years in prison, then was sent to camp, then into exile, . . . did I ever accuse Stalin. I always stood up for Stalin when other prisoners cursed him. I would say: "No, it cannot be that Stalin has permitted all that has happened in the Party. It cannot be."

This naïve conviction of Stalin's ignorance was reflected in the word *ezhovshchina*, "the Ezhov thing," the popular name for the tragedy of the thirties. The sudden disappearance of Ezhov seemed to confirm this story, which was only a new version of the common people's faith in a good tsar surrounded by lying and wicked ministers.

But it must also be acknowledged that this story had some basis in Stalin's behavior. Secretive and self-contained, Stalin avoided the public eye. Although his name was on everyone's lips, he acted through unseen channels. He tried to direct events from behind the scenes, making basic decisions by himself or with a few aides. He rarely addressed meetings in 1936-38, and never advertised his part in the mass repression, preferring to put the spotlight on other perpetrators of these crimes, thereby retaining his own freedom of movement. More-

² Reported in A. Ia. Vedenin, *Gody i liudi* (Moscow, 1964), p. 55.

where he was fired from his job and deprived of his apartment and *dacha*.¹⁶

On occasion Stalin even gave orders about what kind of torture was to be used on one or another Party official. And if the investigator still could not obtain the desired testimony, Stalin reprimanded the NKVD agents for "defects in their work." When the depositions of tortured prisoners included the names of their "accomplices," Stalin, without seeking any further proof, wrote on the record "Arrest," or "Arrest everyone."¹⁷ When Ezhov, in one of his reports, told about the arrest of a group of officials—with the list attached—and declared that information on other persons was being checked, Stalin underlined Ezhov's final words and wrote: "No need to check, arrest them."¹⁸

The old Communist P. I. Shabalkin met, in a camp, a Chekist who had been in Stalin's personal bodyguard in 1937–38. He told Shabalkin that Ezhov came to Stalin almost daily with a thick file of papers. Stalin would give orders about arrests and tortures, and when an investigation was finished, he would sanction the punishment recommended by the NKVD, *before the trial*. Thus the court needed only a few minutes to rubber-stamp the sentence approved by Stalin.

In 1935–38 Stalin almost never made public pronouncements on scholarly questions. But his interference determined the tragic outcome of many scholarly discussions. The most outstanding Soviet writers who perished in the years of terror were arrested on Stalin's orders.

Many officials repeatedly appealed to Stalin to put an end to the lawlessness. He responded in various ways. Sometimes he promised to look into the matter but did nothing; other times he sent the petitioner to Molotov and Ezhov. Usually he cut these appeals short, telling people not to meddle in the affairs of the NKVD, which knew what it was doing. A typical conversation occurred in September, 1937, between Stalin and the secretary of the Far East *kraikom*, Vareikis.

"What did he tell you?" Vareikis' wife asked him. "It's terrible even to say," Vareikis replied. "At first I thought it wasn't Stalin but someone else on the phone. But it was him. . . . Yes, him. Stalin shouted: 'It's none of your business! Don't mix in where you don't belong. The NKVD knows what it's doing.' Then he said that only an enemy of the Soviet regime could defend Tukhachevskii and the others, and he slammed down the receiver."¹⁹

¹⁶ From the archive of the Petrovskii family.

¹⁷ N. R. Mironov, *Programma KPSS i voprosy dal'neishego ukrepleniia zakonnosti i pravoporiadka* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 7–8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Pravda*, Sept. 18, 1964.

A few days later Vareikis was urgently summoned to Moscow and arrested. Four days later his wife was also arrested in Khabarovsk.

As for torture, Stalin not only knew about it; he initiated that method of "investigation." After the removal of Ezhov, many local Party leaders began to criticize NKVD agents for using torture, whereupon Stalin sent a coded telegram to *obkom* and *kraikom* secretaries, and to officials of the NKVD, saying:

The Central Committee explains that from 1937 on the NKVD was given permission by the Central Committee to use physical influence. All bourgeois intelligence agencies use physical influence against representatives of the socialist proletariat. . . . Why should the socialist intelligence agency be more humane in relation to dedicated agents of the bourgeoisie, sworn enemies of the working class and the collective farmers? The Central Committee believes that the method of physical influence must necessarily be used in the future too, as an exception, against obvious and stubborn enemies of the people, as a completely correct and expedient method.²⁰

Stalin was also the initiator of the inhuman conditions in the prisons and camps. Early in 1938 a group of officials in the Kolyma region sent Stalin a telegram complaining about the lawless regime of Pavlov, the new chief of Dal'stroi, and his aide, Garanin. Stalin replied:

To Nagaev. The newspaper *Sovetskaia Kolyma*. To Os'makov, Romashev, Iagnenkov. Copy to Pavlov of Dal'stroi. . . . Received long telegram of Os'makov, Romashev, and Iagnenkov with complaint about the regime in Dal'stroi and the shortcomings in the work of Pavlov. The telegram does not take into consideration the difficulties in the work at Dal'stroi and the specific conditions of Pavlov's work. I consider your telegram demagogical and unfounded. The newspaper should help Pavlov, not throw a wrench in the works.

STALIN²¹

This telegram provoked an even greater orgy of terror in the Kolyma region, against Chekists as well as prisoners.

Of course Stalin did not and could not know about all the lawlessness. Much of it was the result of "local initiative." But the fundamental arrests and directives originated from Stalin. He created and encouraged the system of arbitrary rule and terror that caused the death of millions. In other words, we have no reason to place the main responsibility on Ezhov or any other official supposedly acting without Stalin's knowledge. The main responsibility lies unconditionally with

²⁰ *Ed.:* Khrushchev quoted this telegram to the XXth Party Congress.

²¹ *Sovietskaia Kolyma*, Jan. 17, 1938.

Stalin—which does not relieve his aides of responsibility. Ezhov did not deceive Stalin; Stalin deceived Ezhov, using him to carry out his plot and then, as was his wont, destroying him.

What drove Stalin to such unprecedented crimes, to the mass destruction, not of “class hostile” elements but of the basic cadres of the Soviet state and the Communist Party?

2

THE CONTRAST between the people’s image of Stalin and the terrible truth revealed after the XXth Party Congress was so great that it was only natural for people to try to soften that contrast, to ease the pain a man feels on suddenly learning that his father, his best friend, or his favorite teacher is a criminal. This natural human desire gave rise to a new story, which many people still believe: the tragedy of the “deceived” Stalin. Conceding that Stalin killed tens of thousands of innocent people, that he was personally responsible for the mass repression of the thirties, these people argue that he intended no evil, that he was led astray by careerists, adventurers, and foreign intelligence agents, who wormed their way into the NKVD, in order to wipe out the best cadres and demoralize the people. Stalin, in this legend, believed to the end of his days that he was fighting real enemies of the revolution.

Anna Louise Strong, for example, finds

the key [to the terror], most probably, in actual, extensive penetration of the GPU by a Nazi fifth column, in many actual plots and in the impact of these on a highly suspicious man who saw his own assassination plotted and believed he was saving the Revolution by drastic purge. . . . Stalin engineered [the country’s modernization] ruthlessly, for he was born in a ruthless land and endured ruthlessness from childhood. He engineered suspiciously, for he had been five times exiled and must have been often betrayed. [As if other Bolsheviks had not gone through the same hard experiences. —R.M.] He condoned, and even authorized, outrageous acts of the political police against innocent people, but so far no evidence is produced that he consciously framed them.²²

Even after the XXIIInd Party Congress this legend was repeated. I. Verkhovtsev, for example, pictured “Stalin’s nasty and sick suspicious nature playing into the hands of foreign intelligence agencies, and also careerists, adventurers, and hostile elements, who wormed their way into the security organs and fabricated cases against leading Party and state officials.”²³ M. I. Petrosian adds “historically unavoidable limitations” of democracy as conditions that enabled such

²² A. L. Strong, *The Stalin Era* (New York, 1956), pp. 68, 125.

²³ I. Verkhovtsev, *Leninskie normy partiinoi zhizni* (Moscow, 1962), p. 29.

wicked people to do their dirty work.²⁴ And V. Tarianov follows the same line to conclude that Ezhov, Merkulov, Beria, and Abakumov were responsible, not Stalin.²⁵ Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana, puts up the same defense of her father. Listing the many relatives and friends who were arrested and shot with his knowledge and consent, she exclaims:

How could father have done that? I know only one thing: he could not have thought it up by himself. . . . I believe that Beria was craftier, sneakier, more treacherous, more brazen, clearer in his goal, firmer and consequently stronger than my father. My father had his weak points—he could feel doubts, he was more gullible, coarser, and rougher; he was simpler and could be taken in by a trickster like Beria.²⁶

Some Western Communists have indulged in even wilder fancies, picturing Ezhov and Beria as the leaders of deep conspiratorial organizations, which systematically deceived Stalin on the direct orders of bourgeois intelligence agencies. The primitive quality of such explanations is obvious. In the final analysis they are attempts to preserve somehow former illusions.

Of course Stalin was not clairvoyant. He was a very limited and suspicious man. Thus it is not surprising that at Stalin’s “court,” as at the court of every despot and tyrant, all kinds of intrigues and a fierce struggle for power and influence were constantly in progress among his retinue. Cut off from the people by a wall of armor, Stalin was ill informed about the state of affairs in the country and the Party. This made it easy to lead him astray and to deceive him. Thus it is probable that some of his aides used slander and provocation to rouse his suspicions of individuals whom he had trusted, so as to obtain his sanction for their arrest and execution. Beria was a master of such provocations. The 1955 trial of Beria’s creatures in Georgia established, for example, that an attempt on Beria’s and Stalin’s lives during a boat ride on the Black Sea was organized by Beria himself, and that Stalin’s life was not actually threatened. Some hoodlums hired by Beria shot in the air from the mountains, deliberately missing the target—and when they came to collect their reward, they were killed. This gave Beria the pretext he wanted to take vengeance on Lakoba, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia, and on other devoted Communists.

Some foreign intelligence agencies tried similar provocations. Raskol’nikov, for example, tells how Bulgarian counterintelligence palmed off forged documents on Ezhov’s agents, and succeeded in

²⁴ M. I. Petrosian, *Gumanizm* (Moscow, 1964), p. 228.

²⁵ V. Tarianov, *Nevidimye boi* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 74–75.

²⁶ Ed.: S. Allilueva, *Dvadtsat’ pisem k drugu* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 74, 130.

"reliable information" about Tukhachevskii's "treason" at the very beginning of 1937, but he let him continue as Deputy Commissar of Defense. Moreover, the forged letters did not figure either in his trial or in the pretrial Military Soviet that met June 1-4, 1937, to examine the case. At this meeting Stalin made unsubstantiated charges against Tukhachevskii, Iakir, and others, simply expressing his desire to get rid of them. The members of the Military Soviet were given fraudulent "depositions" by officers who had already been arrested, accusing Tukhachevskii and the others of planning a coup d'état. The forgeries made by the Gestapo were tacked onto the Tukhachevskii case only after Tukhachevskii and his comrades had been shot.

Stalin never told anyone of his true intentions and plans. In this sense—and only in this sense—he had no accomplices or trusted friends. This opens the door to all sorts of speculation about his motives. To the end of his days he insisted both in conversation and in his writings that all the people he destroyed were enemies of the people. Actually, Stalin was totally preoccupied with the preservation of his unlimited power, and contemptuous of almost everyone around him and of human life in general. The elimination of hundreds of thousands of people posed no moral problem to him. He undoubtedly knew that thousands of Party leaders arrested on his orders were neither spies nor traitors. All his behavior shows that his accusations against these people were deliberate slander.

After Stalin's death huge amounts of slanderous materials were discovered in the NKVD offices. If one goes by these materials, far-flung networks of "right-Trotskyite, spy-terrorist, diversionist-wrecking organizations and centers" existed in almost every *krai*, *oblast*, and republic, for some reason always headed by the local First Secretaries of the Party organizations.³⁰ It was not hard to see that the great bulk of these false accusations did not come to the NKVD from without; they were fabricated by its own investigators. A real factory of lies was in operation, turning out hundreds of thousands of false stories about all kinds of "plots," "terrorist acts," "espionage," and "diversions."

It would be a mistake to think that these false accusations were the main cause of the destruction of the best cadres. They were only a pretext. The real causes of the mass repression go much deeper. Any serious investigation would have exposed the Nazi forgery against Tukhachevskii, but Stalin did not order an expert investigation. It would have been even easier to establish the falseness of many other

³⁰ For example, the Sverdlovsk *oblast* NKVD "uncovered" the "insurrectionary staff of the Urals—the organ of a bloc of rightists, Trotskyites, S-R's, and church people," headed by Kabakov, the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk *obkom* and a member of the All-Union Central Committee.

troiki? Why were individuals labeled enemies of the people and expelled from the Party as soon as they were arrested, long before investigations were finished? Why did Stalin establish the illegal system whereby the NKVD all by itself did the arrests, the investigations, the trials, the sentencing, and the executions? Such questions can never be satisfactorily answered if we start with the story of a "deceived" Stalin.

In some *oblasti* the NKVD, unable to handle its huge quota of repression, drastically simplified the investigation. M. M. Ishov, the former military procurator, tells how NKVD agents in Novosibirsk not only made up stories themselves; they even signed for the prisoners. Then the sentence was pronounced *in absentia*, often a death sentence. And people were shot, without being tortured, without even being interrogated. Very frequently arrests were made without the sanction of the procurator's office.

In Moscow, however, as in many large cities, and also in most big cases the NKVD tried to preserve some legality. Forcing prisoners to tell lies against themselves and to invent all sorts of conspiracies, NKVD investigators demanded that they sign depositions in their own hand. In case of resistance, the signature would be secured by days, even months, of torture, a procedure that seems strange to some commentators. The idea was not only to break the prisoner's will, to degrade him, but also to cover up the crime, to give murder some semblance of legality. That is why torture was introduced in the NKVD on Stalin's insistence.

Only the same motives can explain the terrible conditions that were created on Stalin's orders in the camps. When the Nazis sent millions of people to Auschwitz and the other death camps, they would write on the accompanying documents: "Return undesirable." Stalin and his aides behaved more hypocritically. On many files is the inscription "Use only for hard physical labor." But the meaning was the same, since "hard physical work" under existing conditions meant death 99 per cent of the time. All this shows that Stalin deliberately tried to erase all traces of his crimes.

In 1955-58 some open trials of former NKVD executives were held in various cities. The trials revealed that the NKVD leadership became, in the years of the cult, a rallying point for all sorts of adventurers and careerists, some with dark political and criminal pasts. The low moral character of many was matched by their low intellectual level. Khrushchev described one such person—Rodos, who had interrogated Kosior, Chubar', and Kosarev—as

an insignificant man with the mental horizon of a chicken, and the morality, literally, of a degenerate. . . . Could such a man on his own possibly have carried out an investigation to prove the guilt

of men such as Kosior? No, he could not have done much without appropriate instructions. He said to the Presidium [i.e., the Politburo]: "They told me Kosior and Chubar' were enemies of the people; therefore I, as the investigator, had to extract from them the confession that they were enemies."³³

One of Beria's closest assistants, Paramonov, long chief of the investigation section of the NKVD, had only a fourth-grade education. Someone once played a joke on him by sending in a denunciation of Georgii Saakadze, a famous Georgian of the seventeenth century. According to S. O. Gazarian, Paramonov ordered a search for Saakadze. There were, of course, some NKVD officials with well-developed intellects, such as Vyshinskii and L. Sheinin, an investigator for special affairs who even did some creative writing. But morally they were hardly different from Rodos.

How did the NKVD, which was under Stalin's personal control, fall into the hands of adventurers, careerists, and semiliterates? It was not by accident. Stalin needed precisely such people in the punitive organs. They had one priceless virtue: they were completely dependent on the man who gave them almost unlimited power, and they were ready to do anything he ordered without thinking, without pangs of conscience. There was nothing new in this situation. Louis XI, for example, the founder of absolutism in France, chose his chief of police, Tristan the Hermit, for the same reasons. There was Ivan the Terrible and his *oprichniki*, especially his favorite *oprichnik*, Maliuta Skuratov, who took part in almost all the tsar's crimes. It is not surprising that Ivan was Stalin's favorite among the tsars. Stalin kept firm control of the punitive organs, removing some officials and promoting others. And all these facts lead once again to a single conclusion: Stalin's orders and actions were deliberate crimes.

It is not hard to imagine a man with weak nerves, mistrustful and fearful, finding himself at the head of the only socialist state in the world. Such a man would begin to see enemies and conspiracies everywhere. He would thrash about, not knowing what to do, wind up killing his best and most devoted friends, surrendering the country to a small group of incompetent but ambitious adventurers who knew how to win his confidence. But Stalin bore no resemblance to such a leader. He was unquestionably a man of strong nerves, inflexible will, and iron self-control. He had a forceful personality, which was, to a great extent, the secret of his influence over those around him. His fundamental actions and orders were not the product of fear or deception; they were the well-calculated moves of a man determined to stop at nothing to reach his goals. "It's not so easy to fool Comrade Stalin," he once said about himself.³⁴

³³ Khrushchev's speech to the XXth Congress.

³⁴ *Sochineniia*, XII, p. 113.

3

HISTORIANS HAVE OFTEN been obliged to turn to psychiatry, for history offers many cases of rulers with abnormal minds. Obviously pathological traits, developing as a result of hereditary predisposition and unlimited power, can be detected in the behavior of such despots as Sennacherib, Nero, Caligula, Philip II, Ivan the Terrible, and Paul.³⁵ Pathological traits are apparent in the behavior of Hitler and some of his colleagues. It is therefore not surprising that Stalin's behavior is also attributed to acute mental illness. For example, at a meeting of old Bolsheviks with delegates to the XXIIInd Party Congress in 1961, N. A. Alekseev, a Party member since 1897 and a physician by profession, argued that Stalin was mentally sick and incompetent (*nevmeniaemyi*). Another old Party member, I. P. Aleksakhin, who returned to Moscow after seventeen years in confinement, propounded the same story to the Party *aktiv* of Krasnopresnenskii raion in 1961. Many foreign Communists argued the same way after the XXth Party Congress obliged them to face the facts of Stalin's terror. For example, the American Communist Hershel Meyer, denying that the development of socialism necessitated terror, tried to show that an accident was to blame: Stalin's paranoid psyche. In this interpretation Stalin was convinced that he was destroying real enemies and saving the Revolution from those who sought to restore capitalism.³⁶

According to medical textbooks, paranoia is a psychological disorder characterized by wildly distorted, frenzied ideas, which, however, affect only a limited area of perceptions and develop with little or no hallucinations and without a marked change in personality.³⁷ Paranoia develops primarily among men in their early forties, of strong but uneven temper. The sickness is accompanied, as a rule, both by megalomania and by a persecution mania. Other typical symptoms are egocentrism, grudge-bearing, unsociability, obstinacy, and a striving for dominance. Paranoiacs get special satisfaction from unmasking their "enemies." They hate people who once helped them and to whom they are somehow obligated. "A paranoiac," writes psychiatrist P. I. Kovalevskii, "has no friends. . . . Suspiciousness, mistrust, secretiveness, and cruelty show through all his actions. . . . Often the

³⁵ *Ed.*: Paul was a Russian emperor, 1796-1801, who was overthrown and killed by a palace revolution.

³⁶ See Meyer, *Doklad Khrushcheva i krizis levogo dvizheniia v SShA* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 15-20. The original is Hershel D. Meyer, *The Khrushchev Report and the Crisis in the American Left* (New York, 1956).

³⁷ *Bol'shaia meditsinskaia entsiklopediia*, XXIII (1961), p. 224. The story that Stalin had schizophrenia must be rejected out of hand, for the symptoms—splitting of the psyche, atrophy in the emotional and volitional sphere, disintegration of the logical thought processes, aural and other hallucinations—were clearly absent.

he was finally arrested.⁴⁰ Postyshev was sent, before his arrest, to be the *obkom* secretary in Kuibyshev, Chubar' to be *gorkom* secretary in Solikamsk. Tukhachevskii, a few weeks before he was shot, was sent from Moscow to Kuibyshev, as commander of the Privolga military district. Kosior, dismissed as First Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, was moved from Kiev to Moscow to be Deputy Chairman of the All-Union Council of Commissars. Iagoda, after he ceased to be Commissar of Internal Affairs, became Commissar of Communications. On September 27, 1936, his picture appeared in all the newspapers beside that of Ezhov. A. Kosarev was not arrested right after the VIIth Plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee, which practically declared him an enemy of the people. His wife says that he was watched from behind every tree at his dacha but for some time was not touched. Even Ezhov, dismissed from the NKVD in December, 1938, was arrested only many weeks later, during which time he was Commissar of Water Transport and even appeared together with Stalin.

These maneuvers also have little resemblance to those of an incompetent man.

It is also significant that many people who had been close to Lenin were not arrested, though they were out of Stalin's favor and had been close friends with those already condemned as enemies. These individuals were merely demoted. Stalin did not arrest Podvoiskii, Kon, Petrovskii, Stasova, Mikha Tskhakaia, F. Makharadze, or many other once prominent leaders whose names often were mentioned in slanderous denunciations and confessions.

Why did Stalin order the destruction of some old Bolsheviks but spare others? Why did he sometimes cross out names on the lists of people to be arrested? Why, looking over interrogation records that named dozens of "accomplices" and "accessories," did Stalin refrain from noting that this, that, or the other individual should be arrested? Did Stalin, like many tyrants, enjoy his unlimited power not only to break and kill people but also to leave some alive, to show that he was free to "execute and to pardon"? This does not seem to be the chief factor. Stalin's main considerations were political. He had identified himself as Lenin's closest friend and colleague. It was therefore necessary and desirable that genuine friends and colleagues of Lenin remain alive, to demonstrate the continuity between the time of Lenin and the epoch of Stalin. These people were continually forced to praise Stalin; on his birthday they signed collective congratulations to Stalin, "the true Leninist." All this shows that Stalin was not guided by the frenzy of an abnormal person but by clear-cut political calculations.

An illuminating case in point is the fate of M. M. Litvinov, Com-

missar of Foreign Affairs and a close comrade of Lenin. Litvinov was not arrested, unlike nearly everyone else in his Commissariat. The story goes that in 1907 during the Vth Party Congress in London, Stalin got in a fight with some dock workers and Litvinov helped him out. In 1937-38 Litvinov expected to be arrested any night and even had a suitcase with underwear ready. But arrest did not come. Later on Litvinov asked Stalin the reason for this "indulgence." "I haven't forgotten that time in London," answered Stalin. Even if this story is authentic, Stalin was not sincere. Gratitude was never one of his characteristics, but he realized that he needed Litvinov (as well as I. Maiskii) as a diplomat. Litvinov could not be replaced as easily as other commissars or *obkom* secretaries.

The same was true of many cultural leaders. In the fabricated depositions of arrested artists, writers, and film workers there were allegations against hundreds who were not arrested. For example, Boris Pasternak and Iurii Olesha were named as accomplices of Babel and Meyerhold in the so-called diversionary organization of literary people. But Stalin did not order the arrest of Pasternak and Olesha. Nor did he permit the arrest of many leading film directors, although the NKVD prepared more than one case against them. Stalin liked to watch films when he was relaxing; he saw some favorites fifty or a hundred times—and forced his retinue to watch them too.⁴¹ His weakness for the cinema obviously saved many Soviet directors.

The careful calculation in Stalin's crimes is also apparent in those cases where he arrested the wife or some other close relative of a leader, but kept the leader in his important job and continued to meet him both officially and socially. We have already mentioned the arrest of Kalinin's wife in 1937, and of Molotov's after the war. Similarly arrested were two of Mikoian's sons, Ordzhonikidze's brother, the wife and the son of Otto Kuusinen,⁴² the wife of A. V. Khrulev, and others. Sometimes Stalin made a show of mercy by releasing one of his aides' relatives. Kalinin's wife, for example, was released a few days before he died—and later was exiled once again. Iu. K—— says that one day Stalin, while talking with Kuusinen, asked him why he didn't try to get his son freed. "Evidently there were serious reasons for his arrest," he answered. Stalin grinned, and ordered the release of Kuusinen's son. The case of Poskrebyshv, Stalin's personal secre-

⁴¹ Stalin's favorites, according to M. I. Romm, were *The Great Waltz*, *Lights of the Big City*, *Lenin in October*, and *Volga, Volga*.

⁴² Aina Kuusinen, like Otto, was a Comintern official. M. A. Solntseva tells how she shared bunks with Aina and moved through the same transit prisons with her in 1938-41. She used to receive parcels from Otto, addressed by a domestic servant. "Once," Solntseva writes, "on New Year's Eve they put a screechy radio receiver in our barracks. Aina Kuusinen, dressed in rags, listened to a New Year's speech by Otto Kuusinen in the Kremlin."

⁴⁰ See *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, No. 10.

tary, is instructive. His wife was the sister of Sedov's wife, and Sedov was Trotsky's son. But that did not prevent Poskrebyshev from being one of the closest people to Stalin. Stalin did finally order the arrest of Poskrebyshev's wife but kept him as his secretary. Poskrebyshev was fired only a few months before Stalin's death and still was not arrested.

Neither did Lazar Kaganovich's relatives escape Stalin's attention. Mikhail Moiseevich, Lazar's brother, was Minister of the Aviation Industry before the war. He was a Stalinist, responsible for the repression of many people. But after the war he fell out of Stalin's favor. As a result, some arrested officials, who had allegedly set up an underground "fascist center," named Mikhail Kaganovich as an accomplice. They made the obviously inspired (and utterly preposterous) assertion that he (a Jew) was to be vice-president of the fascist government if the Hitlerites took Moscow. When Stalin learned of these depositions, which he obviously expected, he phoned Lazar Kaganovich and said that his brother would have to be arrested because he had connections with fascists. "Well, so what?" said Lazar. "If it's necessary, arrest him!" At a Politburo discussion of this subject, Stalin praised Lazar Kaganovich for his "principles": he had agreed to his brother's arrest. But Stalin then added that the arrest should not be made hastily. Mikhail Moiseevich had been in the Party many years, Stalin said, and all the depositions should be checked once more. So Mikoian was instructed to arrange a confrontation between M.M. and the person who had testified against him. The confrontation was held in Mikoian's office. A man was brought in who repeated his testimony in Kaganovich's presence, adding that some airplane factories were deliberately built near the border before the war so that the Germans might capture them more easily. When Mikhail Kaganovich had heard the testimony, he asked permission to go to a little toilet adjoining Mikoian's office. A few seconds later a shot was heard there.⁴³

These accounts reveal Stalin's great contempt for his aides, not any fear of them. And they simply cannot be reconciled with the notion of Stalin's incompetence.

Equally incompatible with that view are the cases of people arrested on Stalin's orders, but a few months or years later, after torture and severe sentences, released—again on Stalin's orders, often without explanations—and appointed to high offices. Consider, for example, Stalin's strange behavior towards his old comrade Sergei Ivanovich Kavtaradze, who had once helped him hide from detectives in St. Petersburg. In the twenties Kavtaradze joined the Trotskyite

⁴³ Mikoian recounted these events to A. V. Snegov, who does not remember the name of the false witness.

Stalin was a morbidly suspicious man who could not understand the sincere, honorable, and simple personalities of many old Leninists. "If one's heart is so constructed," Krylov wrote long ago, "that it feels neither friendship nor love, . . . one sees everyone as an enemy." Many criminals, afraid of exposure, begin to fear those around them, and the result may be more and more crimes. Something of this sort must have happened to Stalin. Having wiped out most of the Leninist old guard, and almost all his erstwhile friends and comrades, having cast aside all laws, of the Party and state, of friendship, of simple humanity, Stalin had good reason to be afraid of people. And this fear steadily increased throughout his life. "Evil rulers," says an Eastern proverb, "are always haunted by fear of their subjects." Stalin's fear of exposure and retribution drove him to commit more and more crimes. But we should not attribute the tidal wave of repression in the thirties to maniacal suspiciousness. Every despot is suspicious, but suspicion does not explain despotism.

4

IN THE LATE 1950's the author first heard, from a high-placed official, a strange explanation of the blood purges of the thirties. Yes, he said, Stalin knew very well that his victims were not spies and wreckers. All those charges were deliberately fabricated. Judged by the usual moral and state rules, Stalin's actions were of course lawless. Still they were necessary for the further development of the Revolution. The people Stalin got rid of were powerful and popular. They could not have been simply fired from their jobs or expelled from the Party. They had to be accused of monstrous crimes, of plotting against the Soviet regime and attempting to restore capitalism, of espionage and conspiring with the imperialists. Then, with the masses deceived, those people could be destroyed.

"But why," I asked, "was it necessary for the Revolution to get rid of its active participants?"

That is the logic of all revolutions, he answered. Many of the people Stalin destroyed had stopped being revolutionaries by the mid-thirties. They had degenerated into officeholders and bureaucrats. They were pushing the Party and state machine not toward socialism but toward state capitalism. Stalin had to get rid of those who were interfering with the further development of the socialist Revolution; he had to push up⁵⁰ young officials who were capable of leading the revolution forward.

This story is essentially the same as the appeal of the Maoist Red

⁵⁰ Ed.: The verb *vydvinit'*, to push up or advance, and the noun *vydvizhenets*, the person pushed up or advanced, were endlessly used in the thirties to describe the official policy of placing lower-class people in top jobs.

—were the most complete degenerates, the real renegades from Marxism-Leninism.

The enormous scale of repression resulted in a grave shortage of cadres. Hundreds of thousands of officials had to be pushed up from below. Tens of thousands of Stakhanovite workers became factory directors. Ordinary soldiers became platoon and company commanders, company commanders were placed in charge of battalions and regiments, battalion and regimental commanders rose to command divisions and entire armies. Many rank-and-file scientists took over laboratories and big institutes. Most of these *vydvizhentsy*—"pushed-up people"—were subjectively honest; they wanted to work for the good of the Soviet regime. But the situation created by the repression was hardly conducive to honesty. Many *vydvizhentsy* were soon corrupted by power, as will be shown in detail later.

5

THE TSARIST SECRET POLICE fought the revolutionary movement, especially the Bolshevik Party, with agents and provocateurs, including Party members who made deals with the police out of fear or some base motive. Many local and even central Party organizations were penetrated by such agents. In 1918 a Moscow publishing house brought out a collection of documents on the history of Bolshevism, taken from the archives of the secret police.⁵² Twelve agents who had operated in the Social Democratic Party were named:

M. I. Brandinskii, Ia. A. Zhitomirskii, I. G. Krivov, A. I. Lobov, R. V. Malinovskii, A. K. Marakushev, A. A. Poliakov, A. S. Romanov, I. P. Sesitskii, M. E. Chernomazov, V. E. Shurkhanov, and a "Vasilii" whose identity was not disclosed.

According to these police files, agents had even participated in the Prague Party Conference of 1912, sending in reports of its resolutions and practical decisions.⁵³

Most of the police spies were exposed right after the February Revolution of 1917. But some were exposed only much later. For example, Serebriakova, who had betrayed many Bolsheviks to the tsarist secret police, was the center of a celebrated case in the twenties. In the mass repression of the thirties Stalin and the NKVD made use of the popular hatred for police spies. False accusations of this kind were directed against such respected Party members as Zelenskii,

⁵² *Bol'sheviki (Dokumenty po istorii bol'shevizma s 1903 po 1916 gg byvshego Moskovskogo Okhrannogo Otdeleniia)* (Moscow: Zadruga, 1918).

⁵³ *Ed.*: At the Prague Conference Stalin was nominated for membership in the Central Committee. For the possible significance of "Vasilii," see pp. 318-20.

Piatnitskii, Razumov, and many other officials who have now been completely rehabilitated. Even Meyerhold was accused in 1938 of having worked for the tsarist secret police under the name Semenykh. Few realize that similar accusations have repeatedly been made against Stalin himself.

As early as the twenties, émigré papers carried reports that Stalin had been an agent of the tsarist secret police. One of the first to make this charge was the leading Georgian Menshevik Noah Zhordania, who recounted what Stepan Shaumian had told him about his, Shaumian's, arrest in Tiflis. He was apprehended on the first day of an illegal visit to that city, when only one person knew the date of his arrival and the address where he was supposed to stay. That person, if we can believe Zhordania's report of what Shaumian said, was Stalin.⁵⁴ In the late thirties such reports were retailed by Trotskyite publications. In 1952 a collection of such stories appeared in Paris.⁵⁵ Still more publications of this sort came out in the West after the XXth Party Congress of 1956. Some authors even tried to attribute Khrushchev's unexpected speech, "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences," to the pressure of army officers who showed him supposedly irrefutable proof of Stalin's former treachery. That was the story told, for example, in "Stalin's Sensational Secret," published by the American magazine *Life* for April 23, 1956.

The author, Alexander Orlov, had been a leading NKVD official in the first half of the thirties, spending much of his time abroad as a resident of Soviet intelligence. At the height of the repression, Orlov decided not to return to the USSR. Until 1953 he made no exposés, but after Stalin's death he published a series of articles, later incorporated in a book, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* (New York, 1953). In these publications Stalin was accused of killing Kirov and organizing mass repression, but there was no mention of his working for the tsarist police. Then, in the 1956 article, Orlov tried to explain the mass repression by Stalin's fear of being exposed as a former police spy.

In February, 1937, when Orlov was in a French clinic with a bad back, he was visited by his cousin Zinovii Borisovich Katsnel'son, an NKVD plenipotentiary in the Ukraine and a member of the Central Committee. Katsnel'son was a great friend of Kosior and often met with Stalin. He said to Orlov that Stalin told Iagoda, when they were preparing the first Moscow trial, that it would be useful to connect some of the intended victims with the tsarist secret police. Iagoda

⁵⁴ Similar materials were published in the early thirties by the Dashnak journal *Airinik*, in Boston, Mass. Ed.: Dashnak refers to an Armenian nationalist party that held power for a time during the Civil War.

⁵⁵ *Byl li Stalin provokatorom tsarskoi okhrany?* Ed.: I have been unable to locate or authenticate this reference.

decided to try and find a former officer of the secret police, which at that time was not an easy matter. The largest collection of police archives was kept in the Lubianka office of Iagoda's predecessor, Menzhinskii. An NKVD official named Shtein was told to search these archives. He discovered a file in which a police official named Vissarionov had kept his papers. "There," wrote Orlov in his 1956 article,

were reports and letters in longhand, addressed to Vissarionov, in the handwriting of the dictator that was so familiar to Shtein. The file, as Shtein discovered, concerned Stalin all right—not Stalin the revolutionary but Stalin the *agent provocateur* who had worked assiduously for the tsarist secret police.

Shtein then went to the Ukraine, to his former chief and friend, V. A. Balitskii, head of the Ukrainian NKVD. Balitskii submitted the papers to expert analysis and established their authenticity. Then Balitskii informed Katsnel'son, Iakir, Kosior, and other high-placed officials. Many photocopies of the documents were made, and Iakir flew to Moscow and told Tukhachevskii, Gamarnik, Kork, and others. The military commanders drew up a plan to destroy Stalin. They proposed to pick two Red Army units loyal to them to accomplish an overturn in the Kremlin, without any disturbances in the country. All this Katsnel'son is supposed to have told Orlov in February, 1937, four months before the arrest of Tukhachevskii and his friends. Orlov wrote that he went to Spain soon after receiving this report, and there he heard the news of Tukhachevskii's arrest over the French radio. Subsequently everyone who could possibly have been involved in the affair was arrested and shot. In short, a large part of the repression was due to Shtein's accidental discovery.

In fact, Orlov's allegations do not withstand even superficial criticism. Katsnel'son, to begin with, was neither a member nor a candidate member of the Central Committee in 1937. The "conspirators" Orlov names were not arrested all at once but over a long period of time, and none of them tried to hide on learning that their "plot" had failed. Kosior was arrested and shot almost a year after Tukhachevskii's arrest. As for the many photocopies that were allegedly made of the "Vissarionov file," not one is extant, although many of the "conspirators" could easily have sent them to friends abroad. We know the details of the arrest of the military leaders and these facts are utterly incompatible with the existence of a widespread conspiracy to kill Stalin. It is also improbable that no one had searched the archives of the tsarist secret police before 1937. Also, many of the Ukrainian officials who were close to Kosior and Iakir—G. Petrovskii, for example—were not arrested. Orlov is even wrong in his account of Khrushchev's speech to the XXth Party Congress. Khrushchev said nothing in that speech about the case of Marshal Tukhachevskii and

the other generals, who were rehabilitated only in 1957. There are many more such distortions and errors in Orlov's article. His explanation of why he was silent for so long, and why, even in his 1953 book on Stalin's crimes, he did not mention Katsnel'son's story, sounds unconvincing. It is obvious, in short, that Orlov's 1956 article is a clumsy fabrication.

That same year, 1956, Isaac Don Levine, who had written the first foreign biography of Stalin, published another book, containing a letter dated July 12, 1913, from a certain Eremin to the chief of the Enisei department of the secret police, A. F. Zhelezniakov:

Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin, who has been administratively exiled to the Turukhansk region, gave the head of the Tiflis Agency of S[tate] G[endarmes] valuable undercover information when he was arrested in 1906.

In 1908, the Head of the Baku Secret Police got a number of reports from Stalin, and later, when Stalin arrived in St. Petersburg, Stalin became an agent of the Petersburg Division of the Secret Police.

Stalin's work was distinguished by precision, but it was sporadic.

After Stalin's election to the Party's Central Committee in Prague, Stalin, upon his return to Petersburg, became completely opposed to the government and entirely broke off his connection with the Secret Police.⁵⁶

This letter contradicts Orlov's claim that Stalin worked for the police *after* the Prague Conference of 1912. Levine's attempt to explain the discrepancy, without disavowing Orlov's material, is unconvincing. His account of the document's history fails to explain how it could have passed through several owners over a thirty-year period without being published. The reference to Stalin's arrest in 1906 is entirely unsubstantiated. Levine argues that Stalin could have been arrested when the Avlabar secret printing press was destroyed in April, 1906. But Stalin was not involved in that affair, many Caucasian Bolsheviks tell us. Anyhow, in April, 1906, he was participating in the IVth Unity Congress of the RSDLP in Stockholm. Levine tried to authenticate Eremin's signature, but the evidence he offers, largely based on his amateur expertise, is not convincing.⁵⁷ A similar lack of credibility marks all the materials published abroad purporting to establish Stalin's connections with the secret police.

Following the XXth Party Congress, stories on this subject began to circulate in the USSR. As the reader has already seen, a 1918 collection of police documents indicated that an unidentified Vasilii was

⁵⁶ Ed.: See frontispiece of Levine, *Stalin's Great Secret* (New York, 1956), for a photograph of this document.

⁵⁷ Ed.: For further evidence that the document is a fabrication, see Edward Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin* (New York, 1967), pp. 306-309.

There was undoubtedly a special file on each Bolshevik leader in the central offices of the gendarmerie. But during the February Revolution a crowd of workers and soldiers broke into the Petrograd police archives, threw a lot of papers from cabinets and safes into the courtyard, and burned them. Many documents were thereby irretrievably lost. There is, it is true, a report to the effect that a principal archive dealing with the leaders of the RSDLP was stolen by the former Russian Ambassador to France, Maklakov, and taken abroad, and that he gave it to the Hoover Institution Library in the United States. The future will tell how much truth there is in this report.⁶⁴ In any case, we have at our disposal almost no essential police records relating to Stalin: protocols of his interrogations, denunciations of him, and so on.

The few such documents that have been unearthed in the archives have not confirmed the story of Stalin's connections with the tsarist secret police. Here, for example, are two letters that passed between the chiefs of the Moscow and the Vologda branches of the secret police in 1911:

Absolutely Secret
Personal

M.V.D. Chief of the Division
for the Preservation of Social
Safety and Order in Moscow
August 17, 1911

To: The Chief of the Vologda *Guberniia* Gendarme Administration

According to repeated and trustworthy information given to my Department by secret agents, at the present time an active and very serious member of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, bearing the pseudonym "Koba," is living in Vologda, where he is serving, or has already served, a term of administrative exile.

The above-named "Koba" has been in direct touch with the Party center abroad and has now been told to go abroad for the necessary instructions to fulfill the obligations of a traveling agent for the Central Committee.

The following address is used for communication with the above-named "Koba": Peter Alekseevich Chizhikov, Ishmematov's Store, Vologda; money for Koba's traveling expenses will be sent to this address.

Absolutely Secret

Chief of the Vologda *Guberniia* Gendarme Administration
To: The Chief of the Moscow Branch of the Secret Police
August 21, 1911

⁶⁴ Ed.: See Edward Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin* (New York, 1967), p. vii, for confirmation by a man who searched this archive. In the main text Smith makes it seem that the archive conclusively proves Stalin's connection with the tsarist police. Smith's notes reveal something quite different: he found few documents relating to Stalin, and none of them asserts or even suggests that Stalin was an informer.

It is hard to suppose that such letters would be exchanged concerning a provocateur. Thus we cannot accept the insistent story that Stalin had connections with the Tsarist secret police, that fear of exposure drove him to mass repression of Bolsheviks. Stalin did not serve the tsarist secret police; he served only himself and his insatiable ambition.

Nevertheless, even if we leave to future historians the final settlement of this question, we must note that Stalin was a typical provocateur, though in another sense of the word. In his struggle for power, provocation was his favorite weapon, and he used it with great skill. As early as the intraparty struggle of the twenties he inflated disagreements, set leaders against each other, encouraged enmity among them. Whatever is believed about Kirov's murder, it cannot be denied that Stalin used the murder for provocative ends, cleverly directing popular anger against the former opposition. And the "open" political trials of the thirties were beyond all doubt one of the most monstrous provocations in history.

In 1937 Stalin announced to a meeting of the Military Soviet of the USSR that he had received a denunciation of Bliukher signed by one of his deputies. Stalin added that he did not believe the denunciation. In fact he had not received it; he merely wanted Bliukher to quarrel with one of his colleagues, who was soon arrested with Bliukher's tacit consent.⁶⁶ Stalin often gave his agents and subordinates criminal orders—verbally, of course—and then punished them for carrying them out. And it was impossible to refer to Stalin during an investigation; if one did, one would have had to answer for slander as well as for everything else.

Under Stalin's influence, NKVD investigators used provocation as well as torture. Playing on the blind fanaticism and patriotism of citizens who were not too bright, they would ask for help in exposing dangerous "enemies of the people," and thus would obtain false depositions.⁶⁷ NKVD officials who became useless to Stalin were frequent victims of provocation. For example, an NKVD general was told to go at once to a certain border point in order to capture a dangerous spy who was supposed to be crossing there. When the general arrived, he was arrested and accused of trying to flee abroad. The postwar "Leningrad case" and the "doctors' case" were typical provocative actions organized by Stalin and some NKVD executives.⁶⁸

Actions of this kind have caused Stalin to be compared not only to Ivan the Terrible and other tyrants but also to famous provocateurs. G. S. Pomerants, for example, compares Stalin to E. F. Azev, the

⁶⁶ Recounted by P. Iakir.

⁶⁷ E. S. Ginzburg tells of one such provocation in her *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York, 1967). See the chapter "Pugachev Tower," pp. 180-88.

⁶⁸ *Ed.*: For these cases, see below, pp. 480-95.

leader of the fighting organization of the Social Revolutionary Party, who was at the same time an agent of the secret police.⁶⁹ M. P. Iakubovich makes the same comparison in his interesting notes on Stalin. "Why," Iakubovich asks,

did Azev play with human lives, destroying people on both sides—his revolutionary comrades and his superiors in the police? I believe that such activity was above all his way to satisfy his love, his lust for power, in the manner available to him in those times. The power of life and death is the greatest power, of all its possible variations; to kill people is the sharpest and fullest satisfaction of this lust for power. Of course, if a power-hungry man is characterized by blood-thirsty cruelty as well, by a capacity for ruthlessness, by contempt for people and lack of faith in any ideas, then he has the capacity to play with ideas and juggle them at will, just as pragmatism requires.

All these qualities were possessed in full by E. F. Azev and likewise by J. V. Stalin. In the same cold blood, without any regret or pangs of conscience, Stalin sent his Party comrades to be shot, just as Azev sent them to the tsarist gallows. And the motives of both were the same—an unchecked, boundless thirst for power, which was satisfied most fully by the murders they committed. The only difference between them was that they lived in dissimilar historical contexts: Stalin realized his power through the *apparat* of the organs of state security subordinated to him, while Azev did so through the *apparat* of the tsarist courts and the tsarist police, or by the hands of the "fighting organization." . . . The psychological similarity between them is remarkably great. They are soul brothers.⁷⁰

6

THUS WE HAVE COME to the conclusion that neither the intrigues of Stalin's aides nor his own morbid suspiciousness played the decisive role in the events of 1936–39, although it would be wrong to deny the significance of these factors altogether. What, then, were the basic motives of Stalin's crimes?

The first and most important was undoubtedly Stalin's *measureless ambition*. This incessant though carefully hidden lust for unlimited power appeared in Stalin much earlier than 1937. Even though he

⁶⁹ G. Pomerants, "Nravstvennyi oblik istoricheskoi lichnosti," an unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁰ M. P. Iakubovich, "Zapiski o Staline," unpublished manuscript. *Ed.*: Medvedev's four-page quotation from this manuscript has been greatly abridged here, for much of it tells the familiar story of Azev.

hands," he once said to me, "I am a gradualist." In the silence of his office, in deep solitude, he carefully figures out a plan of action and with fine calculation strikes sudden and true. Stalin's strength of will suffocates, destroys the individuality of people who come under his influence. He easily succeeded in "crushing" not only the soft and weak-willed M. I. Kalinin but even such willful people as L. M. Kaganovich. Stalin does not need advisers, he needs only executors. Therefore he demands from his closest aides complete submission, obedience, subjection—unprotesting, slavish discipline. He does not like people who have their own opinion, and with his usual nastiness drives them away.

He is poorly educated. . . . He lacks the realism that Lenin possessed and, to a lesser degree, Rykov. He is not farsighted. When he undertakes some step, he is unable to weigh its consequences. He is after-the-fact. He does not foresee events and does not guide the spontaneous flow, as Lenin did, but drags at the tail of events, swims with the current. Like all semi-intellectuals who have picked up scraps of knowledge, Stalin hates the genuine cultured intelligentsia, Party and nonparty in equal measure. Stalin lacks the flexibility of a man of state. He has the psychology of Zelim Khan, the Caucasian robber, who greedily seized one-man rule.⁷⁷ Scorning people, he considers himself complete master over their life and death. A narrow sectarian, he proceeds from a preconceived scheme. He is the same kind of schematist as N. I. Bukharin, with this difference, that Bukharin was a theoretically educated man. Stalin tries to force life into a ready-made framework. The more life resists being forced into the narrow Procrustean bed, the more forcefully he mangles and breaks it, chopping limbs off it. He knows the laws of formal logic, and his conclusions logically follow from his premises. But against the background of more outstanding contemporaries, he has never shone intellectually. Instead he is unusually tricky . . . [sic]. No one can compete with Stalin in the art of tricking. At the same he is sneaky, treacherous, and vengeful. "Friendship" is an empty word for him. He flung aside and sent to execution such a close friend as Erukidze. In his home life Stalin is a man with the requirements of an exile. He lives very simply and modestly, because with the fanaticism of an ascetic he scorns the good things of life: life's comforts, such as good food, simply do not interest him. He does not even need friends.

Raskol'nikov knew Stalin well, and he drew a basically accurate portrait of the man's psyche. But the portrait is not exhaustive. Of course, Stalin was a strong-willed man, unwavering in attaining his goals. His quiet firmness and taciturnity impressed many Bolsheviks,

⁷⁷ Here Raskol'nikov is mistaken. Zelim Khan was not a Caucasian robber. He was one of the active, though peculiar, participants in the national liberation struggle of the Caucasian peoples against tsarism.

won him the reputation of an unflinching fighter, even gave him a certain attraction in the eyes of many Party members. But his strong will is not a sufficient explanation of his ascendancy. An assassin who shoots from ambush hardly needs a stronger will than his victim. An honorable man abstains from crimes not because he lacks a strong character; his character is simply directed towards other goals. Too often we call a man strong who violates all the accepted norms of human relations and all the rules of honorable struggle; the more he flouts these rules, the stronger and more resolute he seems to some people. In fact, most crimes evince not strength of will, only weakness of moral principles.

Stalin was in his way a strong man. But he did not have the superhuman strength of will that some of his contemporaries attributed to him. He simply lacked firm moral principles and Communist convictions; he never loved or respected people, never tried to serve them, never was a true Communist. And he never recognized any rules of honorable political struggle. Taking advantage of his superior position in the Party, striking from ambush, he could break and destroy a great many people. But we do not know how he would have behaved if *he* had been tortured in the cellars of the NKVD. What would have happened to his superhuman will and firmness? His victims perished not because their will power was weaker than Stalin's. The weakness was in the guarantees and barriers that should have been set up in our Party and state against the rise of leaders like Stalin.

Raskol'nikov is also inadequate on Stalin's cunning. Stalin was not simply crafty; he was a man of unusual hypocrisy. He achieved a great deal by his ability to put on any mask. He was also extraordinarily cruel, even to those closest to him. One of the first victims was his wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, a charming and honorable woman, who committed suicide in 1932. Zinaida Ordzhonikidze used to tell her friends that she always found it unpleasant to visit Stalin, who liked to make fun of his "friends." His personal secretary Poskrebyshv was a frequent butt. One New Year's Eve Stalin rolled pieces of paper into little tubes and put them on Poskrebyshv's fingers. Then he lit them in place of New Year's candles. Poskrebyshv writhed in pain but did not dare take them off.

Yet Stalin could also be the most charming host, even tender, offering his guests compliments, serving them a Caucasian dish with his own hands or bringing them roses from the garden. (We may note, only as a chance coincidence, that Hitler also liked to make gifts of flowers and to smell roses.) Stalin played this role especially with foreign guests, which misled many of them. We have already cited Lion Feuchtwanger's enraptured comments on Stalin. H. G. Wells also failed to understand Stalin, who received him in 1934.

I confess that I approached Stalin with a certain amount of suspicion and prejudice. A picture had been built up in my mind of a very reserved and self-centred fanatic, a despot without vices, a jealous monopolizer of power. I had been inclined to take the part of Trotsky against him. . . . All such shadowy undertow, all suspicion of hidden emotional tensions, ceased for ever, after I had talked to him for a few minutes. . . . I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest, and to these qualities it is, and to nothing occult and sinister, that he owes his tremendous undisputed ascendancy in Russia. I had thought before I saw him that he might be where he was because men were afraid of him, but I realize that he owes his position to the fact that no one is afraid of him and everybody trusts him. The Russians are a people at once childish and subtle, and they have a justifiable fear of subtlety in themselves and others. Stalin is an exceptionally unsubtle Georgian. His unaffected orthodoxy is an assurance to his associates that whatever he does would be done without fundamental complications and in the best possible spirit. They had been fascinated by Lenin, and they feared new departures from his talismanic directions.⁷⁸

This is obviously a portrait of Wells rather than Stalin.

Many Soviet politicians and cultural figures also succumbed to Stalin's favors, especially the younger ones who rose during and after the war. A marshal, for example, resting at his dacha in 1947, was invited by phone to dinner with "the boss." The dinner was quite relaxed, with Stalin often rising and walking about the room. At one point he went up to the marshal and asked: "I heard recently that you were in confinement?" "Yes, Comrade Stalin," was the reply. "I was in confinement. But, as you see, they figured out my case and let me go. But how many good and remarkable people perished there," the marshal unexpectedly concluded.

"Yes," said Stalin slowly. "We have a lot of good, remarkable people." He turned quickly and went out into the garden. Everyone at the table fell into a frightened silence. "What did you say to Stalin?" Malenkov whispered indignantly. "Why?" A few minutes later Stalin came back, carrying roses. He gave one bouquet to the marshal, another to his wife. The marshal, who had been preparing himself for the worst, was overcome, and never again reminded Stalin of his fallen comrades.⁷⁹

For people he wanted to impress, Stalin sometimes put on elaborate acts. After the war, for example, when he was receiving an admiral in his office, he suddenly called Poskrebyshchev, who put on his desk a pile of books on linguistics, and running down a list, which included prerevolutionary works, said that he had been unable to get to some

⁷⁸ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (New York, 1934), pp. 684-89.

⁷⁹ Ed.: Medvedev does not cite the source of this reminiscence.

of them as yet. "What doesn't Stalin study!" thought the admiral.

In 1935, at a banquet for the graduates of the military academies, Stalin proposed a toast to Bukharin. "Let us drink, comrades, to Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. We all know and love him, and whoever remembers the past—get out of my sight!" Another typical example of this hypocrisy was recalled by Kosarev's widow, at the meeting dedicated to his memory.

When Papanin's group⁸⁰ returned to Moscow in the summer of 1938, there was a reception and a big banquet in the Kremlin. Molotov proposed a toast to those present, including Kosarev. Everyone who was toasted went up to Stalin to clink glasses. Sasha also went up. Stalin not only clinked his glass but embraced and kissed him. Returning to his seat, Sasha, pale and agitated, said to me: "Let's go home." When we had left, I asked him why he was so upset. He replied: "When Stalin kissed me, he said in my ear, 'If you're a traitor, I'll kill you.'" Some months later Sasha was in fact killed, although he had not acted against Stalin.⁸¹

While it is a mistake to consider Stalin a superman of invincible will, it is also wrong to regard him simply as an ambitious, sadistic hypocrite who gained control of the Party by intrigues and crimes. Both as a person and as a leader, Stalin was a much more complex and contradictory figure. We must face the question whether he was guided by Marxist principles, as the Chinese leaders and some Soviet historians and officials still insist.

In fact Stalin was not a Marxist, though he wrote such things as *Marxism and the Nationality Question* and *The Foundations of Leninism*. The schematism evident in all his published works is alien to Marxism-Leninism. If Lenin could write that it was highly doubtful whether Bukharin's theoretical views were entirely Marxist, Stalin's works deserve such an appraisal even more. Of course, Stalin often wrote and spoke like a Marxist. He could not ignore the Party's ideology or avoid the use of Marxist terminology. But he was never a Marxist in essence, especially during his last twenty-five years. For Marxism represents not only a certain system of concepts; it is also a system of convictions and moral principles, and devotion to the achievement of happiness for all working people is one of the fundamental principles. Those moral qualities are precisely what Stalin lacked. At the outset his political views were formed under the influence of Marx and Lenin, but they did not grow into convictions, into a system of Communist moral principles. Thus, when he came to

⁸⁰ Ed.: I. D. Papanin directed an Arctic expedition, which determined ocean currents by drifting on a floe for an extended period.

⁸¹ See the stenographic report of the meeting in the Museum of the Revolution on the sixtieth anniversary of A. V. Kosarev, Nov. 21, 1963, p. 49.

power, he easily degenerated and quickly lost even the superficial traits of a Marxist and a proletarian revolutionary. We say "superficial" because Stalin can hardly be considered a revolutionary in essence. He was only a fellow traveler [*poputchik*] of revolution.

There are many historical examples of unstable and dishonorable people who join a revolutionary movement and later degenerate into tyrants. Joseph Fouché, for example, the all-powerful Minister of Police in Napoleon's government and in the Bourbon restoration, one of the richest men in France, began as one of the most radical Jacobins. When he was proconsul of a province he threatened moderates, confiscated the property of the rich, and attacked the Church. In Lyons he had hundreds of people shot, on accusations of being enemies of the people. In 1794 he was elected president of the Jacobin Club. But ten years later the same Fouché hunted down Jacobins, and ten years after that he pursued Bonapartists. Stalin referred to Fouché with respect: "There was a man for you. He outwitted everyone, made them all look like fools." Mussolini is another case in point. He began as a member of the most radical wing of the Italian Socialist Party and wound up as a fascist dictator.

In his novel *Devils* (also known as *The Possessed*), Dostoevsky gives a distorted picture of the Russian revolutionary movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, but some of the types he portrays deserve scrutiny. The Russian revolutionary movement included not only the heroic types pictured in Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?* but also people like Dostoevsky's Liputin, a petty provincial official, envious, a coarse despot, a miser and a usurer; and like his Verkhovenski, a cheat, scoundrel, and murderer, who wanted to unite his few followers not by common ideals but by joint responsibility for the crimes they committed. That such "socialists" did exist is proved by the activity of Nechaev in the late 1860's. He sincerely believed that he was a socialist, which he understood as follows:

To become a good socialist, one must reject all tender, soft feelings of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude, and even honor itself. . . . He is not a revolutionary who pities anything in this world. . . . A revolutionary knows only one science—the science of destruction and extermination. He lives in the world with this sole aim. To leave not one stone on another, as many ruins as possible, the extinction of most of the revolutionaries—that is the perspective. Poison, the knife, the noose—the Revolution consecrates everything.

Blind obedience to the chief, a system of mutual spying and involuted deception of all members of the organization—such were Nechaev's methods for the triumph of socialism. He murdered Ivanov, a student in the Agricultural Academy, accusing him of betrayal, although Ivanov had only opposed Nechaev's arbitrary ways. In an

interesting article on Dostoevsky,⁸² Iu. Kariakin has drawn an analogy between Stalin and Nechaev that has some validity. Kariakin has also informed the author of a suggestive fact: Nechaev's archive, thought to be lost, was returned to its place after 1953, "from Stalin's office."

In 1917–18 Maxim Gorky often wrote in the semi-Menshevik paper *Novaia zhizn'*, which was opposed to the October Revolution. But some of his remarks were quite penetrating. He distinguished, for example, two types of revolutionary: the revolutionary for all time and the revolutionary for this day. The first type is eternally Promethean, dissatisfied in any social system, because he believes humanity can go on creating the better out of the good forever. The second type has a keen feeling for the wrongs of contemporary society and accepts current revolutionary ideas, but

in the whole structure of his feelings he remains a conservative. He presents the sorry, often tragicomic spectacle of a being who seems to have been put on earth only to take the cultural, humanitarian, all-human content of revolutionary ideas and to distort and degrade them, to make them ridiculous, repulsive, and stupid.

He feels offended above all for himself, for the fact that he is not talented, not strong, that he has been insulted, even for the fact that he has been in jail. . . . He thinks he is completely emancipated, but inside he is chained by the heavy conservatism of zoological instincts, fathered by a thick mesh of petty grudges, which he has no power to rise above. The habits of his thought drive him to seek in life and in man above all the negative phenomena; in the depths of his soul he is full of contempt for man, on whose behalf he suffered once or a hundred times, but who has himself suffered too much to notice or appreciate the torment of another. . . . He has toward people the attitude that an untalented scientist has toward the dogs and frogs picked for cruel scientific experiments, with the difference that the untalented scientist, though uselessly tormenting the animals, does it in the interests of man, while the revolutionary for this day is not constantly sincere in his experiments on people.

People for him are material: more suitable the less exalted it is. . . . He is a cold fanatic, an ascetic; he emasculates the creative force of the revolutionary idea.⁸³

Gorky's definition of a revolutionary for this day, astonishing in its pointed precision, is completely applicable to Stalin.⁸⁴ It is strange

⁸² See *Problemy mira i sotsializma*, 1963, No. 5. An English translation is in *World Marxist Review*, 1963, No. 5.

⁸³ Ed.: See Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts* (New York, 1968), pp. 229–33, for the complete essay. The translation given here is by Taylor and Joravsky.

⁸⁴ The degeneration of a revolutionary socialist into a tyrant has been treated in science fiction, notably in H. G. Wells, *The Holy Terror* (London, 1939), which was obviously influenced by contemporaneous events in the Soviet Union. See Iu. Kagarlitskii, *Gerbert Uells; ocherk zhizni i tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 263–65.

an equal among equals, with whom he was joined by every fiber of his being."⁸⁷

Stalin treated the Party cadres quite differently. It was not love for suffering humanity, for the working class, that brought Stalin to the Revolution, but his thirst for power, his vanity, his desire to rise above people and subject them to his will. The son of a shoemaker and a peasant woman—even today in Georgia there are rumors that attempt to give Stalin higher status, as the illegitimate son of some aristocrat or high-placed clergyman—he clearly saw the impossibility of “making a career” in the Russian Empire. That, at bottom, is what drove Stalin into the ranks of the revolutionaries. When he joined the most radical wing of the revolutionary movement, he already believed in his special mission. The son of a famous Bolshevik tells this revealing episode. In 1912, when he was only nine, a Caucasian came to his parents' apartment in Moscow. After a little talk his father went out, leaving the Caucasian, who was pleased by the boy's conversation. Four hours later the doorbell rang. The boy jumped up but the man stopped him. “Wait, wait,” he said, taking him by the shoulder and hitting him on the cheek as hard as he could. “Don't cry,” the Caucasian said, “don't cry, little boy. Remember, today Stalin talked to you.” When the boy told his parents about their guest's strange behavior, they were outraged and baffled, until, later on, they heard of a custom in many mountain villages of Georgia: If a prince came to a peasant's hut, the peasant would call in his son and hit him hard on the cheek, saying, “Remember that today Prince So-and-so visited our house.”⁸⁸

For Stalin, the Party was always just an instrument, a means of reaching his own goals. To be sure, the propagandists of his cult pictured him as a man who constantly thought of the people's needs, as a simple, accessible, sensitive man. In reality, Stalin was inaccessible to rank-and-file workers; he met no ordinary people and felt no need to do so. He did not visit the factories and farms where socialism was being built. He was indifferent to the fate of individual people; for him they were merely cogs in the enormous, soulless state mechanism. Thus the ideas of socialism lost the meaning given them by Marx, Engels, and Lenin; they were only arid dogma for Stalin. His socialism took on many features of Nechaev's. “What a splendid model of barrack communism!” Marx exclaimed about Nechaev's *Bases of the Future Social Structure*, where people must “produce as much as possible and use as little as possible,” and where all personal relations are strictly regimented.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Klara Tsetkin, *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1955), pp. 9–10. Cf. the comments of *Novyi mir*, 1963, No. 7, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Recounted by M. I. Romm, a friend of the one who got slapped.

⁸⁹ Marx and Engels, *Sochineniia*, 2nd edn., XVIII, pp. 414–15.

X

Other Causes of Mass Repression

1

BESIDES DESTROYING the old Leninist guard, most of whom were well known to Stalin, the repression of 1936–38 struck millions of people who were unknown to him and were no serious threat to his power. Only the intertwining of many causes and processes can explain this mass repression. I shall try to unravel some of them.

The most widely used formula during Stalin's lifetime, to help justify the unjustifiable, was the old Russian saying "When you chop wood, chips fly." In other words, there really was a far-reaching counterrevolutionary organization, based on the former oppositions, with many "degenerated" officials in it. And the further implication is that some excesses and distortions were unavoidable in the decisive assault on this counterrevolutionary organization.

Ezhov, for example, in a speech to NKVD executives, declared that the Soviet Union was going through a dangerous period, that a war with fascism was imminent, and therefore the NKVD had to destroy all the nests of fascists in the country. "Of course," Ezhov said,

there will be some innocent victims in this fight against fascist agents. We are launching a major attack on the enemy; let there be no resentment if we bump someone with an elbow. Better that ten innocent people should suffer than one spy get away. When you chop wood, chips fly.¹

There is a certain weird sense in this argument. As we have seen, the destruction of every Party leader was accompanied by the arrest of hundreds, even thousands, of people directly or indirectly connected

¹ Recounted by the old Bolshevik E. P. Frolov.

with him. Stalin spread the story of a vast fascist underground, a fifth column permeating every pore of Soviet society. By means of terrible tortures, arrested people were obliged not only to confess their own guilt but also to reveal their "accomplices" and "confederates." In some NKVD agencies there were even norms: if the second secretary of an *oblast* committee had to name at least twenty "confederates," then the first secretary had to implicate at least forty.

Some of those arrested conceived a peculiar theory, which they tried to pass on to other prisoners. If, they argued, we confess to any and every imaginary crime, and name hundreds of innocent people as our "confederates," more and more innocent people will be arrested, until the Party wakes up to the monstrous stupidity of the whole process and restrains the NKVD. Evgeniia Ginzburg tells how one of Bukharin's students, the biologist Slepkov, named 150 people as his "confederates" in Kazan alone. "You must disarm yourselves before the Party!" he would shout at the confrontation with the people who had been arrested because of him, although none of them had ever armed themselves in the first place.² General Gorbatov tells of a fellow prisoner who denounced more than three hundred innocent people.³ And S. O. Gazarian writes of a prisoner who on his own initiative denounced all the Party officials and even all the ordinary Communists he knew in his *raion*. He too believed that the more people arrested, the sooner the absurdity of his depositions would come to light. But his expectations were disappointed. A court accepted his depositions and sentenced him to be shot. The people he denounced were also severely punished.

"In the Minsk central prison at the end of 1937, . . . there were two conflicting points of view," writes Ia. I. Drobinskii in his memoirs.

The first was: "Write more, fulfill and overfulfill the investigator's demands. The repressions are a provocation, a festering boil; the faster it grows, the sooner it will burst. To make it grow, drag in more people. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction." . . . The other point of view was to fight, to make no compromises. Do not bear false witness against yourself or against others. Endure all tortures, torment, hunger; if you have not endured, if you have slipped, rise again, tear into them, even if they rip your skin off; to your last ounce of strength, fight, fight, fight.

The same arguments went on in other prisons. N. K. Iliukhov tells how he met Sokol'nikov, who urged him not only to sign the interrogation records but to think up denunciations against all those who were helping Stalin—against Postyshev, against the Party *apparatchiki*, against NKVD officials. "Drag down with you as many bad people

² E. S. Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York, 1967), pp. 135-36.

³ A. V. Gorbatov, *Years Off My Life* (New York, 1965), p. 127.

the country's enemies by some theoretical or practical mistake, then he had to be considered an enemy of the Soviet people, regardless of his subjective motives. "Conciliators," people who themselves committed no mistakes but called for leniency toward those who were being criticized and repressed, were also cruelly persecuted.

3

BY CREATING a mass psychosis about enemies, Stalin was able to destroy inconvenient people. Many of his aides took the same advantage of the same situation, advancing their careers by removing people they disliked. As Stalin drew these careerists into his crimes, he had to give them *carte blanche* to deal with people they found inconvenient. And they took full advantage. In Georgia, for example, thousands of people Beria and his gang found objectionable were destroyed. In Azerbaijan more than ten thousand people were shot on the charge of attempting to murder Bagirov. (Both in Georgia and in Azerbaijan the mass repression of 1937–38 was probably worse than in the other republics, which makes it all the more strange that today the most stubborn attempts to restore the cult of Stalin are being made in those republics.)

It is axiomatic that the system of personal dictatorship could not be limited to the higher organs of power. Thousands of people exercised extraordinary power during the years of the cult. New commissars, directors of major enterprises, *obkom* and *raikom* secretaries, state security officials, heads of "special departments," and so on, got the right to decide the fate of Soviet citizens. Each of them was almost absolute master of his domain, and many used their power to get rid of people they did not like. Cliques of unprincipled careerists took shape, dedicated to the preservation of their power. Imitating Stalin, they set up little cults of their own personalities, turning any criticism into a state crime. Thus a basis was created for ceaseless mass repression.

In this connection, the roles of Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, and some other close aides of Stalin must be stressed. The whole truth was not told at the XXth Party Congress, where the impression was given that only Stalin, Ezhov, and Beria were responsible for the repression of the thirties. Moreover, right after the Congress the word went out that the other Politburo members took no part in the mass lawlessness but tried as much as possible to restrain Stalin. This story was reflected in the Central Committee Resolution of June 30, 1956, "Overcoming the Cult of Personality and its Consequences." Written jointly by Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and

Voroshilov, who were still members of the Politburo (or Presidium), this resolution declared that the basic Leninist nucleus of the Central Committee was preserved even under Stalin, and tried to restrain him although it was not able to remove him.

It would be ridiculous to repeat this story today. The speeches at the XXIInd Congress contained a multitude of facts irrefutably proving that Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Voroshilov not only did not restrain Stalin but actively helped his lawlessness. A. N. Shelepin, for example, told the Congress of documents showing that Molotov and Kaganovich together with Stalin sanctioned the arrest and shooting of many outstanding leaders. When Iakir wrote to Stalin protesting his innocence, Stalin inscribed the letter: "A scoundrel and a prostitute," to which Voroshilov added: "A completely precise description." Molotov signed his name underneath, and Kaganovich added: "For this traitor, bastard [*svoloch'*], and ——— [an obscene word] [insertion by R. M.] there is only one punishment—execution."

These three, and also Malenkov, Shkiriakov, Mekhlis, Poskrebyshchev, and several other close aides of Stalin, often took the initiative in the destruction of Party cadres. Molotov's role was especially prominent and venomous. Early in his career he was noted for his inclination to intrigue, demagoguery, and bureaucratic methods. In July, 1920, the Nizhnii Novgorod *guberniia* Party conference adopted a resolution censuring Molotov, then chairman of the *guberniia* executive committee, because he had indulged in rumormongering and character assassination in an effort to block the election of people he disliked to the committee.⁷ In 1922, when Molotov was the CC secretary responsible for assignment and registration in the Central Committee *apparat*, Lenin wrote him a letter demanding immediate action to improve his work. "Otherwise," Lenin wrote,

we ourselves ("in struggle with bureaucracy") are producing the most stupid and shameful bureaucracy right under our own noses.

The Central Committee's power is enormous. The possibilities are gigantic. We assign 200,000–400,000 Party officials, and through them thousands and thousands of nonparty people.

And this gigantic Communist process is completely ruined by obtuse bureaucracy.⁸

When Molotov became Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars at the beginning of the thirties, he quickly revealed himself in this high post as the same heartless and obtuse bureaucrat. He was a worthy adjutant to Stalin in his crimes. The fate of old Bolshevik G. I. Lomov, which was discussed above, is typical. Stalin, receiving a denunciation of Lomov, wrote on it: "Comrade Molotov. What will

⁷ See the document quoted in *Stenograficheskie otchet XXII s'ezda*, pp. 351–52.

⁸ *Sochineniia*, 4th edn., XLV, p. 397.

In view of the extremely low level of theoretical work in the time of the cult, some of his articles are distinguished by originality and clarity. But in his methods of work Zhdanov was unquestionably a typical Stalinist, whose role in the repression was far from modest.

The behavior of M. I. Kalinin is confusing and unclear. As Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, then chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Kalinin obviously knew about the flood of repression. Hundreds of people passed through his waiting room every day in 1936–41, and thousands of letters were sent to him, bringing complaints and protests against lawlessness.²⁰ In a number of cases Kalinin tried to defend people. His personal intervention, for example, won the release of Johann Makhmastel', a diplomatic courier, and Theodor Nette, who defended the Soviet diplomatic pouch against an attack of White Guards.²¹ Kalinin also tried to help such personal friends as Akulov, Shotman, and E nukidze. But Stalin ordered Kalinin not to interfere in NKVD affairs. Kalinin's weaknesses, such as indecision and acquiescence, kept him in Stalin's grip. Stalin even had his wife arrested. She remained in prison seven years and was released only a few days before Kalinin's death.²² The epoch of the cult is epitomized in that situation: the country had a President whose wife was kept in a concentration camp. (Stalin used the same technique with Molotov.) On the pretext of protecting Kalinin, Stalin kept him under virtual house arrest for a long time, with NKVD agents constantly in his apartment. Kalinin completely surrendered to Stalin, covering up the dictator's crimes with his great prestige.

The old Party leader Emilian Iaroslavskii also helped Stalin a great deal.²³ In the twenties Iaroslavskii's authoritative *History of the Party* did not stress the role of Stalin; indeed, the fourth volume mentioned Stalin's incorrect position in March, 1917. It is therefore not surprising that Stalin's 1931 pronunciamento, "On the History of Bolshevism," attacked Iaroslavskii's "mistakes."²⁴ The mistakes were not specified, but the press picked up the attack, accusing Iaroslavskii of Trotskyism, Menshevism, and all the mortal sins. He wrote several letters to Stalin, arguing in one that conditions on the historical front were intolerable, that honorable Bolsheviks were being labeled falsifiers and counterrevolutionaries, that this was hurting Party work on the theoretical level, that no one was planning a new Party program.

²⁰ *Ed.*: Petitions for the redress of grievances are customarily addressed to the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

²¹ See *Neva*, 1963, No. 4, p. 187.

²² See the 1963 biographical sketch of Kalinin in the series "Lives of Remarkable People," published by Molodaia Gvardiia. After Kalinin died his widow was exiled from Moscow.

²³ Some light was shed on their relations by E. N. Gorodetskii at the All-Union Meeting of Historians in 1962.

²⁴ See Stalin, *Sochineniia*, XIII, pp. 84–102.

No reply came from Stalin and the campaign of abuse was continued, whereupon Iaroslavskii caved in. He published a letter confessing all the errors ascribed to him, and wrote a biography of Stalin in which Stalin's role was "fully reflected."²⁵ He surrendered to Stalin not only as a historian but also as a leader of the Party Control Commission. The many appeals against lawlessness that Communists sent to this Commission went unanswered. Thus, instead of protecting legality and the rights of Party members, the Commission gave "rear-guard" protection to Ezhov's and Beria's gangs.

The question of N. S. Khrushchev's role is often raised. As First Secretary of the Moscow *oblast* Committee in 1938-39, Khrushchev's services in "destroying enemies of the people" were great enough to be praised at the XVIIIth Party Congress in 1939. Thus it came as a surprise to Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov when Khrushchev took the initiative in exposing Stalin's crimes at the XXth Congress in 1956.

As a comparatively young politician, easily impressed (and not very bright), Khrushchev in the thirties was strongly influenced by Stalin, had faith in him and feared him. Of course we also know that later on, when Khrushchev was First Secretary of the Party and chairman of the Council of Ministers, he committed many serious errors; he was arbitrary and voluntaristic, especially in the economic field; he violated the principles of collective leadership and began to revive the cult of personality—his own. Still and all, in exposing Stalin's crimes, in freeing hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens, and in rehabilitating the millions who perished under Stalin's arbitrary rule, Khrushchev performed an indisputable service that will never be forgotten. It is that which obliges us to take a completely different view of his role in the repression—and also of Mikoian's—than we do of Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Stalin's other aides.

4

ONE OF THE MOST TERRIBLE FEATURES of the repression in the thirties was that the masses, trusting the Party and Stalin, were drawn into it. Hundreds of thousands of simple and essentially honorable folk, guided by the best motives, were drawn into the campaign against "enemies of the people." Millions were poisoned by suspicion. They believed Stalin's story about a ubiquitous underground and were caught up in the spy mania. The campaign against "enemies" and "wreckers" acquired a mass character, like the Stakhanovite movement. The central newspapers were especially zealous in inflaming

²⁵ See *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie istorikov*, pp. 362-63.

An anonymous denunciation of A. Ia. Vedenin, military commander of the Kirghiz Republic, said that he deliberately chose spotted horses for the army in order to spoil the camouflage of the cavalry before its future enemy.³⁰ One Communist, the head of a fire department, was asked during a political lesson who had commanded the Red Guard in Moscow in 1917. Upon answering, quite correctly, that Muralov had, he was immediately arrested as a counter-revolutionary. People were put in prisons or camps for "disseminating the verses of Pasternak or Esenin," and "for connections with Ilya Ehrenburg," although none of these writers was arrested. "Plotting to resurrect Austria-Hungary" was another charge, and even "suspicion of intending to betray the Native Land." In one of the Ufa prisons, R. G. Zakharova met a teacher who was accused of a connection with Finland: after the overthrow of the Soviet regime, she was to be proclaimed Queen of the Mari, a Finnic-speaking nationality in the Volga-Ural region. In a Minsk clothing factory, according to Ia. Drobinskii, an old cutter and Communist, Solnyshkov, was accused of fomenting discontent among the people by designing too narrow pockets in the pants of work clothes. M. Ishov tells how the military procurator of Leningrad, Kuznetsov, was charged with joining the Party in 1904 just to "disrupt it from within." In Novosibirsk a group of construction workers born in 1913-14 were accused of supporting Kolchak's armies in the Civil War of 1918-21. One of the directors of a lying-in hospital in Gomel was accused of instructing the chief doctor to infect all the babies with syphilis. The artist V. I. Shukhaev and his wife were accused of belonging to the *Borot'bist* Party. The naïve artist, poorly prepared for the new way of life, kept asking his cellmates who these *Borot'bisty* were.³¹ In Moscow a large group of stamp collectors were arrested for exchanging stamps with foreign collectors. According to L. M. Portnov they were accused of sending secret information abroad. V. T. Shalamov tells how an Esperanto society in Moscow was arrested; the name of this artificial language apparently frightened the security organs. Dozens of athletes, especially those who had participated in international competitions, were arrested on absurd charges. A denunciation to the NKVD was an easy way to get rid of athletic rivals. The world champion swimmer, Semen Boichenko, was removed from competition that way, as were the Starostin brothers, soccer players on the Spartak team.

It was enough for a Vladivostok cinema to show a newsreel that included a shot of a Moscow official arrested two months earlier, and

³⁰ See Vedenin, *Gody i liudi* (Moscow, 1964), p. 58.

³¹ *Ed.*: They were a Ukrainian peasant party, which was fused with the Bolshevik Party in 1920 on the recommendation of Lenin and Stalin. See, e.g., Stalin, *Sochineniia*, IV, p. 304.

zation in the Academy of Sciences were denounced, although there were only 130 Communists in the entire Academy.³³

The Holy Inquisition, set up in the Middle Ages to defend the Christian faith, encouraged denunciations in every way possible and persecuted everyone who refused to report "heretics."³⁴ The Stalinist punitive organs did much the same thing in 1936-39—and to a considerable degree right up to the death of Stalin. Instead of punishment for slander—the few show trials of slanderers early in 1938 were only a feint, not an announcement of basic policy—in most cases it was encouraged, as an expression of vigilance. In such conditions all sorts of careerists and scoundrels tried to use slander to destroy their enemies, to get a good job, an apartment or a neighbor's room, or simply to get revenge for an insult. Some pathological types crawled out of their holes to write hundreds of denunciations. In short, the abolition of law and justice aroused the basest instincts.

Lenin warned the Cheka about false accusations and urged the severest punishment for them. But under Stalin most slanderers went unpunished, and a flood poured into the NKVD offices, where big receptacles "for statements" were placed in reception rooms. The usual NKVD response to a denunciation was to arrest the victim and only later to bother about "checking" the charges made against him.

In fairness it should be noted that in 1937-38 there were protests against this flood of slander and encouragement of slanderers. Mikhail Kol'tsov, for example, wrote several hard-hitting articles. He distinguished three types of informers: the javelin thrower, intent on striking down as many victims as possible; the careerist, seeking domination of his institution by terrorizing it; and the coward, determined to protect himself by destroying others.³⁵ But articles like Kol'tsov's could not stop the flood of denunciation and repression inundating the land. Individual protests, expressed not in concrete action but in written reports and conversations, merely increased the number of victims, for the leaders to whom such protests were addressed were the chief organizers of the terror.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For some interesting reflections on this subject, see B. Danem, *Geroi i eretiki* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 275-78.

³⁵ See *Pravda*, Jan. 17, 1938.

Plekhanov also wrote about this several times in his arguments with the populists. If the people, Plekhanov declared, approach power when social conditions are not ripe, then "the revolution may result in a political monstrosity, such as the ancient Chinese or Peruvian empires, i.e., in a tsarist despotism renovated with a Communist lining."¹¹ Some of the people we have talked to see prophetic truth in these words. They try to prove that it was inevitable, in the Soviet Union of the twenties, for the likes of Stalin to come to power. "If Lenin had lived another ten or twenty years," the writer V. K—— told me, "he would certainly have been pushed out of the leadership by the 'new' people, whose embodiment was Stalin." "The system created after the October Revolution," said the economist I. P——,

was based on outright dictatorship, on force, to an excessive degree. Disregard of some elementary rules of democracy and lawful order inevitably had to degenerate into Stalinist dictatorship. It was Stalin who fitted this system ideally, and he only developed its latent possibilities to the maximum degree. The whole trouble was that a socialist revolution in a country like Russia was premature. In a country that has not gone through a period of bourgeois democracy, where the people in its majority is illiterate and uncultivated, in such a country genuine socialism cannot be built without the support of other more developed socialist countries. By prematurely destroying all the old forms of social life, the Bolsheviks raised up and turned loose such forces as must inevitably have led to some form of Stalinism. Approximately the same thing is happening today in China and in Albania.

This point of view, as applied to the Soviet Union, is one-sided and incorrect. If the political and social system created after the October Revolution inevitably engendered Stalinism, if history offered no other possibilities of development, if everything was strictly determined, then the October Revolution must also have been determined by the monstrous system of Russian autocracy. Thus we must conclude that the October and the February revolutions were not at all premature or accidental events. In other words, to explain Stalinism we have to return to earlier and earlier epochs of Russian history, very likely to the Tartar yoke. But that would be wrong; it would be a historical justification of Stalinism, not a condemnation.

I proceed from the assumption that different possibilities of development exist in almost every political system and situation. The triumph of one of these possibilities depends not only on objective factors and conditions, but also on many subjective ones, and some of these factors are clearly accidental.

Even Russian tsarism in the early twentieth century had various

¹¹ Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, I (1956), p. 323.

possibilities of development. With a more capable leadership, with a sensible system of concessions, the February Revolution might not have taken place. The tsarist regime took some steps in that direction. The State Duma comes to mind, where even Bolsheviks were represented; one recalls the fact that *Pravda* was established legally, for the most part, in 1912–14, and so on. But there was also the Rasputin affair, there were incompetent generals who suffered one defeat after another in the war. Thus the tsarist regime was unable to utilize the possibilities of peaceful evolution, and revolution became inevitable. There was likewise more than one possibility for the development of bourgeois democracy after the February Revolution. If the war had been ended, or the government had decided on a truce, if the Social Revolutionary Party had made greater concessions to the peasants—Kerensky's promise of land to the peasants came one or two days before October 25, when it was meaningless—if Lenin had not managed to arrive in Russia in time, then the bourgeois democratic system could have become stronger and lasted longer. But these things did not happen, and the October Revolution became inevitable.

To speak of various historical possibilities is to raise the question of probability: which line of development was more likely, which less? The question requires concrete investigation of all the objective and subjective circumstances in a given situation. Even a small possibility of a given line of development does not constitute an impossibility.

From this point of view Stalinism was by no means inevitable, despite the defects in the political conception that the Bolsheviks brought to the October Revolution and despite the defects of the new Soviet regime. It also had many merits. The contest between various alternatives began under Lenin and was bound to grow more intense. But if he had not died in 1924, the victory of genuinely democratic and socialist tendencies would have been more probable than the victory of Stalinism.

Many foreign thinkers, including Communists, have studied this problem. After the XXth Congress, in March, 1956, Palmiro Togliatti published his famous objection to a simple inversion of the cult of personality: blaming all evil on the superman who had formerly been praised for all good. Togliatti suggested that the system called Stalinist was to be explained by reference to the development of bureaucracy, deriving from prerevolutionary conditions and from the desperate need for centralized power during the Civil War. This context favored the rise of Stalin, a typical *apparatchik*.¹²

¹² See P. Togliatti, *Problemi del movimento operaio internazionale (1956–61)* (Rome, 1962), pp. 99–106. Ed.: A convenient English translation may be found in *The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism; A Selection of Documents* (New York, 1956), pp. 97–139.

Some Yugoslav thinkers have given much stronger expression to the view that the Stalinist system was foreordained. Veljko Korać, for example, follows a vivid characterization of the system—"a specific etatism and bureaucratic despotism, . . . the heartless destroying of men in the name of an ineffable mystic of the future, making politics and ideology absolute and the negation of human freedom"—with a declaration of its inevitability. He finds its causes in the occurrence of a socialist revolution without an adequate material base. The working class was too small, the culture of the masses too low. The poor peasants were an effective force for overthrowing the old order but not for self-disciplined participation in building the new. Political organization, power, compensated for the weakness of the material base.

Technical advance only enforced the ascendancy of this technobureaucracy. . . . In the name of Marxism, Stalin distorted Marx's ideas into a closed system of dogmas making of himself the sole and absolute interpreter of those dogmas. . . . [The Stalinist system did] not come into being as a historical caprice or as the pressure of tradition of tsarist despotism. Instead it appears as a necessary accompaniment to the development of an undeveloped country which has undergone socialist revolution before industrial revolution.¹³

Korać gives an accurate description of the historical and economic background, but he is wrong in his main argument. It is hard to agree that in an economically backward country, the socialist transformation of society and the industrial revolution must be accompanied by mass violence. Too many historical facts simply will not fit in this simplistic scheme. Were not the hundreds of thousands of officials destroyed in 1937–38 the best promoters of industrialization? Why did the machine of state power, which they had created together with Stalin, have to fall on them?

The mass repression of the thirties cannot be attributed to any significant resistance to Stalin's arbitrary rule. The sad fact is that Stalin's drive for unlimited personal dictatorship encountered no significant resistance, even from the officials who were being struck down. The only forces opposed to Stalin were those which had been enemies of the proletarian dictatorship all along—world imperialism and the White Russian émigrés. Feeble resistance came from the remnants of the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties, which considered themselves the defenders of democratic socialism. The comparative ease of Stalin's usurpation of power cannot be explained by theories such as Korać's.

¹³ V. Korać, "Socialism in Underdeveloped Countries," *Praxis* (Zagreb), 1964, No. 1, pp. 300–301.

It was an historical accident that Stalin, the embodiment of all the worst elements in the Russian revolutionary movement, came to power after Lenin, the embodiment of all that was best. Nevertheless, the possibility of such an accident, and the factors that transformed the possibility into reality, demand close analysis. For the Party must not only condemn Stalin's crimes; it must also eliminate the conditions that facilitated them.

We are also confronted with another question: How did Stalin manage to preserve not only power but also the respect and trust of the majority of Soviet people? It is an unavoidable fact that Stalin never relied on force alone. Throughout the period of his one-man rule he was popular. The longer this tyrant ruled the USSR, cold-bloodedly destroying millions of people, the greater seems to have been the dedication to him, even the love, of the majority of people. These sentiments reached their peak in the last years of his life. When he died in March, 1953, the grief of hundreds of millions, both in the Soviet Union and around the world, was quite sincere.

How can this unprecedented historical paradox be explained? We must look more closely at the conditions that facilitated Stalin's usurpation of power.

2

ONE CONDITION that made it easy for Stalin to bend the Party to his will was the hugely inflated cult of his personality. "For 1938," Ilya Ehrenburg writes in his memoirs,

it is more correct simply to use the word "cult" in its original religious meaning. In the minds of millions Stalin was transformed into a mythical demigod; everyone trembled as they said his name, believed that he alone could save the Soviet Union from invasion and collapse.¹⁴

The deification of Stalin justified in advance everything he did, everything connected with his name, including new crimes and abuses of power. All the achievements and virtues of socialism were embodied in him. The activism of other leaders was paralyzed. Not conscious discipline but blind faith in Stalin was required. Like every cult, this one tended to transform the Communist Party into an ecclesiastical organization, with a sharp distinction between ordinary people and leader-priests headed by their infallible pope. The gulf between the people and Stalin was not only deepened but idealized. The business of state in the Kremlin became as remote and incomprehensible for the unconsecrated as the affairs of the gods on Olympus.

¹⁴ *Novyi mir*, 1962, No. 5, p. 152.

The social consciousness of the people took on elements of religious psychology: illusions, autosuggestion, the inability to think critically, intolerance towards dissidents, and fanaticism.¹⁵ Perceptions of reality were distorted. It was difficult, for example, to believe the terrible crimes charged against the old Bolsheviks, but it was even more difficult to think that Stalin was engaged in a monstrous provocation to destroy his former friends and comrades.

The religious cult of Stalin's personality was accompanied by the belittling of everyone else, especially ordinary working people. Conformism, uniformity of behavior and thought, was implanted in the Soviet people. Serving socialism was transformed into serving Stalin; it was not he who served the people but they who served him. His praise, his encouragement, his smile were considered the highest reward. Soldiers in battle were trained to shout "For the homeland, for Stalin!"—laying down their lives not so much for socialism as for Stalin. For the sake of future beatitude, the religious believer is expected to endure without complaint any misfortune in his present earthly life.¹⁶ Just as believers attribute everything good to God and everything bad to the devil, so everything good was attributed to Stalin and everything bad to evil forces that Stalin himself was fighting. "Long live Stalin!" some officials shouted as they were taken to be shot.

This religious outlook crippled the will even of those people who had stopped believing in Stalin and had begun to see where Stalin was taking the Party. Why did Ordzhonikidze shoot himself rather than Stalin? Why was there not one real attempt to remove Stalin during his fifteen years of bloody crimes? Those who were capable of such an act were stopped not so much by fear for their lives as by fear of the social consequences, which could not be predicted in the conditions of the cult. The hero of a novel of the mid-1960's puts the case clearly:

It's terrible that we ourselves helped to strengthen blind faith in *him*, and now are powerless before that faith. Sacred truth looks like a terrible lie if it does not correspond to people's actual beliefs. You can imagine what would happen if today someone got on the radio, say, and told the entire country what was going on, told the truth about Stalin. From that instant even a person who had his doubts would believe that we are surrounded by enemies; he would believe everything. And any cruelty would be justified.¹⁷

In the time of Ivan the Terrible people created an earthly god and then could not raise a finger against the idol they had created. A

¹⁵ See Iu. Kariakin, "Epizod iz sovremennoi bor'by idei," *Problemy mir i sotsializma*, 1964, No. 9.

¹⁶ See Iu. Levada, *Sotsial'naiia priroda religii* (Moscow, 1965).

¹⁷ G. Baklanov, "Iiul' 41 goda," *Znamia*, 1965, No. 2, p. 16.

radical historian tells with horror how "Prince Repnin, impaled on a stake and dying slowly, . . . praised the Tsar, his lord and executioner." The radical historian ascribes such behavior to "the inculcation of distorted views, with the result that force of spirit served merely to stifle indignation and the natural impulse to rebel."¹⁸ A conservative historian is awed rather than horrified by the passivity of Ivan's subjects, who blamed themselves for the divine wrath that their tyrannical sovereign wreaked upon them.¹⁹

A recent student of religious psychology notes the frequency with which rulers are turned into fetishes.²⁰ And indeed the historian finds many such cases in the most diverse ages and societies, from ancient Egypt to the fascist regimes of the twentieth century. Elements of this attitude are even found in modern revolutionary movements, for example in the Russian populist theory of the hero leading the crowd. But why did the cult of personality arise and exist for so long in the Soviet Union, a strange secular variety of religious consciousness in a socialist society? Why was this cult supported by the Bolshevik Party, which grew up in battle against populist illusions about heroes and the crowd?

It has been seen that the boundless praise of Stalin did not arise spontaneously; it was organized by Stalin and his creatures. And this well-organized campaign did its job. From their earliest years schoolchildren were taught that everything good came from Stalin. But it would be naïve to attribute the success of Stalin's cult only to clever propaganda. That is what simpleminded opponents of Christianity do when they attribute its spread to deception and stupidity, instead of studying the historical conditions that explain its success.²¹

Some historians think that the success of Stalin's cult was considerably facilitated by the petty-bourgeois character of tsarist Russia, which carried over into the postrevolutionary era. They also point to the low educational and cultural level of the masses, and the absence of strong democratic traditions in a country so recently emancipated from despotism. For centuries the cult of the tsar, the ideology of absolutism, had been ingrained in Russia. While taking this notion into consideration, it would be a mistake to regard the ignorance of the masses or the religious illusions of peasants and petty artisans as the only preconditions of Stalin's cult. There were others, inherent in

¹⁸ See S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *Rossia pod vlast'iu tsarei* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 59-60. *Ed.*: This is a reprint of a famous work by a nineteenth-century populist (*narodnik*).

¹⁹ See N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, IX (St. Petersburg, 1892), p. 106.

²⁰ Iu. A. Levada, *Sotsial'naia priroda religii* (Moscow, 1965), p. 232.

²¹ Cf. Marx and Engels, *Sochineniia*, 2nd edn., XIX, p. 307.

the Revolution itself. It brought such sweeping change in such a short time that the leaders seemed to be miracle makers. Indeed, the tendency of the masses to glorify their leaders appears spontaneously in every mass revolution. It is an expression of the masses' great enthusiasm, pride in their revolution, their gratitude to the leaders who did so much for their liberation. Of course this idealization of the leaders need not inevitably lead to a cult of the leaders, or become idol worship. Much depends on concrete historical circumstances and on the character and world view of the leaders themselves.

Paradoxical as it may seem, another important factor explaining the triumph of Stalin's cult was the crimes he committed. He did not commit them by himself. Taking advantage of the people's revolutionary enthusiasm and trustfulness, the enormous power of Party and state discipline, and the low educational level of the proletariat and the peasantry, Stalin involved millions of people in his crimes. Not only the punitive organs but the entire Party and government *apparat* participated actively in the campaigns of the 1930's. Thousands of officials were members of the *troiki* that condemned innocent people. Tens of thousands of officials sanctioned the arrest of their subordinates, as required by a Politburo resolution in 1937. Commissars had to sanction the arrest of their deputies, *obkom* secretaries the arrest of Party officials in their *oblasti*, while the Chairman of the Union of Writers sanctioned the arrest of many writers. Hundreds of thousands of Communists voted for the expulsion of "enemies of the people." Millions of ordinary people took part in meetings and demonstrations demanding severe reprisals against "enemies." Frequently people demanded such penalties against their former friends.

The majority of Soviet people believed in Stalin and the NKVD in those years, and were sincere in their indignation against "enemies of the people." But many citizens, even in the NKVD, had their doubts, if not about the general trend, then at least about particular acts of repression. These people reacted to the voice of conscience in different ways. Some took a stand against the particular acts they questioned. Others resigned themselves and kept quiet. Either way, people who felt some doubts could not admit to themselves that they were in some measure accomplices in crimes. So they forced themselves to believe in Stalin, who knew everything and could not make mistakes. They found mitigation for themselves in the cult of his personality.

"Of course," says the writer A. Pis'mennyi in one of his last works,

I could not believe that Ivan Kataev, Zarudin, Guber, Pantraiger or Mikhail Loskutov, or Sergei Urnis, or many other friends of mine were spies, bomb-throwing anarchists planning to kill Stalin, loathsome poisoners of reservoirs, or enemy agents trying to restore the

power of Riabushinskii and von Mekk.²² However I might try today to ridicule my tossing and turning and—why hide it, when everything is being said?—my search for spiritual peace, the fact is that then above all I wanted to understand. Yes, yes, I repeat once again, I wanted not only to believe but to understand what was happening. . . . But in those years it was impossible to understand what was happening. You could become an informer, go mad, commit suicide, but if you wanted to live, the most convenient way for an unhappy, distraught, but honorable person clinging with his last ounce of strength to his place in society—I repeat and will go on repeating a thousand times—was to believe. To believe without reasoning, without second thoughts, without proofs, as people believe in omens, in god, in the devil, in life beyond the grave. The thought that all social actions could be prompted by the criminal designs of a single man who had appropriated the full plenitude of power, and that this man was Stalin, was blasphemous, was unbelievable.

And in fact this complex mixture of contradictory feelings was one of the main sources of strength for Stalin's cult, especially among officials, many of whom feel this way even now.

Thus there was a two-way cause-and-effect relationship between the terror and the cult of Stalin's personality. Stalin's cult facilitated his usurpation of power and the destruction of inconvenient people, while his crimes, supported by the *apparat* and also by the deluded masses, extended and reinforced the cult of personality.

The cult of personality does not automatically lead to mass repression—much depends on the personality. Not every deified emperor or pharaoh was a cruel and bloodthirsty despot. But the most dangerous feature of the cult of a personality is that the leader's conduct depends not on laws or other rules but on his own arbitrary will. The Party and state cannot endure such a situation, when the only guarantee of a citizen's rights, indeed of his very life, is the personal qualities of the leader.

3

IT WAS FAIRLY EASY for Stalin to convince the Soviet people that he was fighting real enemies, destroying traitors. The dimensions of the fraud helped it to succeed. The charges were piled so high and repeated so often that deliberate deception seemed absolutely impossible. Goebbels said that the bigger the lie and the more often it is repeated,

²² Ed.: For Riabushinskii, see above, pp. 119–20. N. K. von Mekk was a railroad tycoon who stayed in Russia after the Revolution and worked for the Commissariat of Transportation. In 1929 he was accused of counterrevolutionary activity and shot.

the easier it is for people to believe it. Stalin was a master of this cynical technique.

Secrecy was important. The investigations of political crimes were strictly *in camera*, and any attempt to penetrate this secrecy was itself regarded as a political crime. The newspapers in 1936 and the first half of 1937 published many reports on the "unmasking" of Trotskyites and Bukharinites; but later in 1937 such reports became progressively fewer in number, although the flood of repression continued to rise. A wall of silence surrounded the fate of Postyshev, Kosior, Chubar', Eikhe, and Rudzutak. The arrest of hundreds of other leaders was not reported in any newspaper, and could only be deduced from certain hints or from brief oral reports given in *raion* and city Party committees. The charges against most of Stalin's victims were never made public. Even well-informed people knew only of arrests in their own *oblast*, in their own line of work, in their own circle of acquaintances. The scale of the terror escaped them. This ignorance was heightened by the orgy of transferring officials from one *oblast* to another, from one post to another, that characterized that time of troubles. At times people did not know whether an official had been arrested or transferred. In many cases even the relatives did not know. The NKVD as a rule did not inform relatives of execution or death by other causes. Playing on hopes and illusions, the NKVD invented a formula about the exile of "enemies of the people" (even those who had been shot) to distant camps "without the right of correspondence."

Stalin and the NKVD often preferred methods of disguised terror to straightforward arrest. Many were arrested without a warrant or the sanction of the procurator. Prisoners tortured to death were reported dead of a heart attack or some other disease. Sometimes the NKVD staged "robberies," during which the intended victim would be killed. That is how the actress Zinaida Raikh, Meyerhold's wife, died, while she was struggling for her husband's release. The robbers who raided her apartment stabbed her seventeen times, took all her papers, and left many valuables untouched.²³ Agents were sent abroad to kill certain émigrés, Soviet diplomats, and intelligence agents. Some officials were murdered in their homes, in hotels, on hunting parties, in their offices, thrown out of windows, poisoned—and then were reported dead of heart attacks, accidents, or suicides. The body of Nestor Lakoba, who was supposed to have died of a heart attack, was sent from Tbilisi to Sukhumi with great ceremony.

The First Secretary of the Armenian Central Committee, A. Khandzhian, was murdered on July 9, 1936, in Beria's office in Tbilisi by Beria himself.²⁴ A. Ivanova, who was then an official in the Party

²³ Recounted by Ilya Ehrenburg.

²⁴ Reported by Shelepin at the XXIIInd Party Congress.

Stalin's name on every place and district. I don't see and I can't see why everyone praises and loves Stalin so much. I personally do not feel this love or even great respect.¹⁰⁸

The question inevitably arises about people who understood: what should they have done? After the XXIInd Party Congress in 1962 a famous poet wrote:

We are all his regimental mates,
Who were silent when
From our silence grew
A national disaster.

Hiding from each other,
Spending sleepless nights,
While out of our circle
He was making executioners.

Let our grandsons score us
With their contempt
All alike, equally,
We do not hide our shame.¹⁰⁹

The author of these lines won a Stalin Prize in the years of the cult. He was not silent at all; he heaped praise on Stalin. Now ashamed, he is trying to hide behind all of Stalin's contemporaries, all equally disgraced, or so he would have us believe. It will not work. People behaved in various ways and have varying degrees of responsibility. Much depended on their distance from the epicenter of the catastrophe, on the choices they faced. The responsibility of a commissar or even a writer cannot be equated with that of a rank-and-file Party member, worker, or collective farmer. The responsibility of the head of a concentration camp or prison cannot be equated with that of a simple guard. Much also depended on the degree of comprehension. And finally, a great deal depended on qualities of personality, on courage and sense of honor.

Many people actively helped Stalin in his crimes and made for lawlessness themselves, slandering citizens on their own initiative. Such aides to the executioner should be covered with shame and punished by a court. There were many free people, called in by the NKVD to act as witnesses, who out of fear would sign any deposition put before them. Many groveled and shouted Stalin's praise of their own free will, with genuine zeal.

But there were also individuals who in one way or other resisted. Some officials, sensing imminent arrest, fled their home towns, some-

¹⁰⁸ *Neman*, 1962, No. 4, p. 141. Molochko joined the Red Army as a volunteer during the war with Finland and died in 1940.

¹⁰⁹ *Ed.*: The poet is not identified by Medvedev.

times even became illegal and changed their names. (Iu. Borev based the scenario for "Resurrected from the Living" on one such case.) There were also many petitioners and protesters. The Central Committee, the Procurator's office, and Stalin personally received letters not only from relatives and friends of prisoners but also from leading cultural, scientific, government, and Party figures. Kapitsa's demand for Landau's release, which was granted, has been mentioned. Academician D. N. Prianishnikov was not so fortunate in his stubborn efforts on behalf of N. I. Vavilov. After having been rejected by Molotov and Beria, he decided on a desperate step; he recommended the imprisoned Vavilov for a Stalin Prize. Marietta Shaginian, in her brief note "A Page of the Past," tells how the arrested poet David Vygodskii was defended by fellow writers. At considerable risk to themselves Iurii Tynianov, Boris Lavrenev, Konstantin Fedin, M. Slonimskii, M. Zoshchenko, and Viktor Shklovskii wrote declarations and guarantees, pleading for the release of their comrade. Vygodskii, like Vavilov, was not released; both died in prison. When the old Bolshevik N. N. Kuliabko, who had recommended Tkhachevskii for Party membership, learned of his friend's arrest, he sent a letter of protest to Stalin—and was immediately arrested.¹¹⁰ The ineffectiveness of millions of analogous protests forced many people to shrink into themselves and be silent.

There were also people in the Party *apparatus*, with access to investigatory materials, who tried to oppose lawlessness. N. S. Kuznetsov, an *obkom* secretary in Kazakhstan, sanctioned the arrest of many Communists in the first months of the mass repression. Then he began to have doubts. He went to the *oblast* prison to interrogate some friends, became convinced of their innocence, sent *obkom* Party officials into the NKVD *apparatus*, and took control of NKVD operations in his *oblast*. He obtained the release of many Communists and forbade the use of torture. Gathering an enormous amount of material on the lawlessness of the NKVD and its penetration by all sorts of suspicious people, including former White Guard officers, Kuznetsov went to Moscow and obtained a meeting with Stalin. Stalin listened only a few minutes and broke off the conference, advising Kuznetsov to report the whole thing to Malenkov. Malenkov also brushed him off, telling him to go back to Kazakhstan and send in a written report by governmental courier. Returning, Kuznetsov learned that he had been transferred to another *obkom*. A few months later he was called to a meeting in Alma Ata and arrested in his hotel. The two *oblast* committees he had headed were decimated and the Communists who had been released on Kuznetsov's demand were rearrested.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See *Marshal Tkhachevskii: sbornik vospominanii* (Moscow, 1965), p. 30.

¹¹¹ From the reminiscences of N. S. Kuznetsov, kept in the archives of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.

and appeals of Communists. Rank-and-file Party members and the popular masses were entirely excluded from the control function. The whole system of *Rabkrin*—groups and cells, sections, complaint bureaus, the “light cavalry,” and so on—was dismantled.

14

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, the attitude of the masses is decisive. Sooner or later they overthrow all sorts of tyrants and despots, but at other times the same masses are the strongest support of despotism. “Every people,” said Marx, “has the rulers it deserves.” An Arab thinker and social activist of the nineteenth century expressed the idea at greater length:

The common people are the despot's sustenance and his power; he rules over them and with their help oppresses others. He holds them captive and they extol his might; he robs them and they bless him for sparing their lives. He degrades them and they praise his grandeur; he turns them against each other, and they take pride in his craftiness. And if the despot squanders their wealth, they say he is generous; if he kills without torturing, they consider him merciful; if he drives them into mortal danger, they submit, fearing punishment; and if some of them are reproachful, rejecting despotism, the people will fight the rejectors as if they were tyrants. In short, the common people cut their own throats through fear, which derives from ignorance. If ignorance is destroyed, fear will disappear, the situation will change.¹⁴⁰

This interpretation can be applied to the Soviet Union only in part. We have already argued that Stalin was supported by the majority of the Soviet people, not only because he was clever enough to deceive them but also because they were backward enough to be deceived. The severe oppression that made the population of the tsarist empire revolutionary also kept them on a low cultural level. As the novelist V. G. Korolenko wrote in a letter to Lunacharskii: “The ease with which you got our popular masses to follow you indicates not our readiness for a socialist system but, on the contrary, the immaturity of our people.”¹⁴¹ And that partly just remark was often made by Lenin in a different form: in Russia it was comparatively easy to begin a socialist revolution, but it would also be much harder to carry it through to the end, in the minds of people as well as in the economy.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Abd al Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, *Priroda despotizma i gibel'nost' poraboshcheniia* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 25–26. Ed.: Translated from an Arabic edition (Aleppo, 1957).

¹⁴¹ Ed.: The quotation derives from Korolenko, *Pis'ma k Lunacharskomu* (Paris, 1922), p. 33.

workers from each other as if with a barricade. . . . Old Social Democratic workers everywhere were not only insulted to the depth of their souls; they were infuriated. They could not forgive the Communists for this. And the Communists, gritting their teeth, carried out the order for a "battle to the death." An order is an order, Party discipline is discipline. Everywhere, as if they had gone out of their minds, Communists and Social Democrats raved at each other before the eyes of the fascists. I remember it well. I lived in Germany during those years and will never forget how old comrades clenched their fists seeing how everything was going to ruin, how the Social Democratic leaders rejoiced, how the theory of social fascism month by month, week by week, was paving the way for Hitler. They clenched their fists as they submitted to the "mind" and "will" [of Stalin], and went to meet the death awaiting them in S.S. prisons.

In August, 1935, the VIIIth Comintern Congress corrected many of these mistakes, largely on the initiative of Georgii Dimitrov. But even then the Stalinist sectarian attitude interfered with the practical implementation of the united front in many countries. It is revealing that Stalin never spoke at the VIIth Comintern Congress. Nor did he publicly express his attitude toward the new Comintern line. Even in his report to the XVIIIth Party Congress in 1939, he said nothing about the decisions of the Comintern.

In August, 1939, antifascists around the world were stunned by the news of Stalin's nonaggression pact with Germany. The complex origins of this treaty, which have not been adequately clarified in Soviet historiography, are presented here in a preliminary outline.

The prologue to the sharp change was the dismissal of Maxim Litvinov. On April 16, 1939, Litvinov received the British ambassador and gave him a formal proposal for a mutual-assistance pact among Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. At the May Day parade that year, Litvinov still stood beside Stalin, which was duly noted by diplomats in Moscow. But on May 3 the newspapers contained a short notice: "M. Litvinov at his own request is being relieved of his duties as People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs." To Hitler this was "a gun shot, a sign of change in Moscow's relations to the Western powers."⁶ In the month that followed, many Soviet ambassadors were recalled and a good number of them, along with many officials of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, were arrested. Molotov was put in charge. At the same time the Soviet Union moved toward a change in relations with Germany. On May 5, the Soviet chargé d'affaires, G. Astakhov, called on Julius Schnurre in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁶ From a speech in August, 1939. Quoted in W. L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), p. 531.

to explain how Litvinov's retirement could have a positive effect on German-Soviet relations. The conversation was repeated on May 17. In Moscow the same topic was discussed by Molotov and the German ambassador, Count Werner von der Schulenburg, on May 20 and June 28. The purpose of these moves was to put pressure on the French and British, and to have some insurance in case the negotiations with their countries failed to achieve a mutual-assistance pact.

In July and early August, Germany showed great eagerness for a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union. Hitler pressed his diplomats to hurry. He had not stopped thinking about aggression against the USSR, but he wanted to postpone it until he had defeated his Western enemies and Poland. For the Soviet Union and the peaceful forces of the world, a German-Soviet nonaggression pact was far from ideal; it would have been preferable to conclude a collective-security agreement among all the antifascist powers. But the United States at that time was isolated from European affairs, while Great Britain and France were playing a dangerous political game: they were still hoping for an agreement with Hitler and were trying to direct German aggression eastward. In the summer of 1939, they were conducting their negotiations with the Soviet Union in such a way as to ruin them.⁷ The Soviet Union had to choose the lesser of two evils by accepting Germany's proposal for a nonaggression pact. Stalin made the decision on August 19. That same day Molotov finally agreed to receive Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Moscow. On August 23 the German delegation arrived and the pact was signed.

Many biased Western writers make it seem that the Soviet Union unleashed Hitler by signing this pact. I do not intend to justify Stalin's entire policy. I have already shown how he obstructed a united front in Germany, decimated the Comintern, dissolved the Polish Communist Party, killed the best Red Army commanders. All this greatly facilitated Hitler's drive to war. But the nonaggression pact should not be added to this list of Stalin's errors and crimes. The Soviet government was compelled to sign the pact because Britain and France had been encouraging German fascism, and were frustrating the negotiations for a mutual-assistance pact with the Soviet Union. It was the British and French ruling circles, and also some in the United States, that had helped Germany re-create a strong military machine, in the hope that it would be used against Bolshevism. It was Britain and France that allowed Germany to seize Austria, betrayed Czechoslovakia by the infamous Munich agreement, and by their policy of nonintervention helped Hitler and Mussolini crush the Spanish Republic. These cir-

⁷ For details of the negotiations, see P. A. Zhilin, *Kak fashistskaia Germaniia gotovila napadenie na Sovetskii Soiuz* (Moscow, 1966).

cumstances compelled the Soviet Union to protect itself by taking advantage of the conflicts among the imperialist states. In 1939 the nonaggression pact with Germany could serve such a purpose.

Stalin's blunder was not the pact itself but the attendant psychological and political atmosphere that he created. He put too much trust in his pact with Hitler. As Konstantin Simonov has written:

It still seems to me that the pact of 1939 was founded on *raison d'état*, in the almost hopeless situation we were in back then, the summer of 1939, when the danger of the Western states pushing fascist Germany against us became immediate and real. And yet, when you look back, you feel that for all the logic of *raison d'état* in this pact, much that accompanied its conclusion took away from us, simply as people, for almost two years, some part of that exceptionally important sense of ourselves, which was and is our precious peculiarity, connected with such a concept as "the first socialist state in the world." . . . That is, something happened which was in a moral sense very bad.⁸

Another mistake was the signing, on September 29, 1939, of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Pact. The public articles were quite unnecessary.⁹ The secret protocols were quite unprincipled. In the second, for example, each party pledged to suppress any agitation against the other, and to keep each other informed of efforts in this direction.¹⁰ The result was a complete halt to all antifascist propaganda in the USSR. Worse yet, Soviet leaders began almost to justify Germany, as if she were being attacked by England and France: Molotov, for example, declared in the fall of 1939:

During the last few months such concepts as "aggression" and "aggressor" have acquired a new concrete content, have taken on another meaning. . . . Now . . . it is Germany that is striving for a quick end to the war, for peace, while England and France, who only yesterday were campaigning against aggression, are for continuation of the war and against concluding a peace. Roles, as you see, change. . . . The ideology of Hitlerism, like any other ideological system, can be accepted or rejected—that is a matter of one's political views. But everyone can see that an ideology cannot be

⁸ *Ed.*: Medvedev seems to be quoting from an unpublished manuscript, probably the same as that cited on p. 375 or on p. 454.

⁹ A month earlier, when Ribbentrop had proposed that a preamble on the friendly nature of German-Soviet relations be added to the nonaggression pact, Stalin himself categorically refused. "The Soviet government," he declared, "could not honestly assure the Soviet people that friendly relations exist with Germany, when for six years the Nazi government has been pouring buckets of slop on the Soviet government." Quoted in P. A. Zhilin, *Kak fashistskaia Germaniia gotovila napedenie na Sovetskii Soiuz* (Moscow, 1966), p. 61.

¹⁰ Shirer, p. 631.

German attack on Yugoslavia is also revealing. At the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, German troops entered Hungary, Bulgaria, and Rumania with the consent of their reactionary governments. The pressure on Yugoslavia increased, until in March, 1941, Yugoslav Premier Dragiša Cvetković signed an agreement to join the Tripartite Pact. The result was a national uprising; a group of patriotic officers overthrew the pro-German government. The Soviet Union not only recognized the new government but, on April 5, 1941, signed a treaty of friendship and nonaggression with it. Less than twenty-four hours later, German troops invaded Yugoslavia and subjected Belgrade to savage bombardment. Stalin did not condemn this aggression against a fraternal Slavic country. The report of German war against Yugoslavia appeared on the last page of *Pravda*, on April 7. Nothing was said about the bombardment of Belgrade. Moreover, the Soviet government closed the embassies of Yugoslavia, Greece, and Belgium, which signified recognition and encouragement of German aggression.

The massing of the German Army on Russian borders worried the Soviet command so much—they even knew the numbers of the German divisions—that they sought permission to move troops to defensive positions and put them on military alert. Stalin refused. Indeed, all military organizations and industry were unprepared for the attack both psychologically and materially. Most divisions were short of their full wartime staffs. Many tank units did not have their full complement of men and equipment. There was a general shortage of spare parts and repairs were slow. Airplane, tank, and artillery factories were producing obsolete models. A large part of the military equipment was stored not in the rear but in the threatened districts. The network of roads in border areas was inadequate. Airfields had to be enlarged for new types of planes, so construction companies of the NKVD went to work on most military airfields all at once, putting them out of use until the late fall. As a result most military planes were transferred to civilian airports, which were located near the border and poorly defended against bombing attacks. A major reorganization of tank divisions was also undertaken in the first months of 1941. At the end of June many tank troops did not have their tanks, and many tanks were without crews.²⁶

²⁶ Such examples could be greatly multiplied. See such books as *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, I–VI (Moscow, 1962–64); *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, *Kratkii ocherk* (Moscow, 1965); *Vsemirnaia istoriia*, X (Moscow, 1965); *Istoriia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR*, II (Moscow, 1962); A. M. Nekrich, *22 Iiunia 1941 g.* (Moscow, 1965); et al. Nekrich's book has been subjected to harsh and tendentious criticism, which is surprising since most of the facts in it are no different from those adduced by other Soviet historians or by diplomats, military leaders, and intelligence agents. The book has its faults, but they cannot justify the savage attacks published by *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1967, No. 9.

of state the extent of the danger, and did not have the right to take sufficient measures to avert it.³⁶

Inability to understand may well have been reinforced by fear. Afraid of a great war with Germany, Stalin shunned any display of vigilance that could be used by the Nazis as an excuse for war. He did not understand that a Germany determined on war would always find an excuse, or would do without one altogether.

But the main cause of Stalin's mistakes in 1941 was the system of one-man rule combined with the one man's limitations. Unlimited power was in the hands of a limited tactician and a limited strategist. He did not perceive all the weaknesses of the Red Army, which he had caused to lose its finest officers. He did not perceive many of the difficulties still troubling the cities and villages. He overestimated Soviet strength and therefore hoped that Hitler would not dare to attack the USSR. Of course attacking the USSR *was* a risky adventure for Germany, especially since Hitler gambled on victory within a few weeks, in any case before winter. The German war plan did not provide for adequate reserves of manpower or industrial production. The Nazi Army could beat the Red Army in some battles, but Germany could not enslave the whole Soviet people in addition to all the nations of Europe. Considering that the German Army suffered defeat in spite of its unbelievably favorable situation in 1941, it is useful to imagine what would have happened to it if the Soviet government had been properly prepared. Hitler was also a dictator; he too based his actions on imaginary rather than real factors. Intoxicated by the German victories in the West, he overestimated the strength of the German Army, and underestimated the strength of the Soviet people and the cohesion of Soviet society. He thought that after early defeats the USSR would collapse like a house of cards. Hitler was an adventurer and a reckless maniac, but Stalin perceived him as a rational statesman. Stalin's tendency to mistake illusions for reality prevented him from seeing the same fault in Hitler.³⁷ That is one of the main reasons why both Hitler and Stalin miscalculated in 1941.

4

IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED by historians of all persuasions that Stalin was responsible for the Germans' great advantage of surprise and for the

³⁶ Konstantin Simonov, "Uroki istorii i dolg pisatel'ia." Ed.: This seems to be an unpublished manuscript.

³⁷ The lesson of 1941 must not be forgotten today in our relations with China. Mao Tse-tung also has a tendency to confuse reality and his frenzied perceptions of it. Thus we should consider the possibility of irrational adventures being attempted by the Maoist leadership.

Soviet troops' unpreparedness. It is also generally acknowledged that the Soviet Union entered the worst war in history with its best military and civilian leaders recently destroyed. Yet some authors try to salvage Stalin's reputation by arguing that whatever his faults before the war, *during* it he proved to be an excellent commander in chief. This partial rehabilitation became especially insistent in memoirs published in 1967-68.³⁸

In 1969 the authoritative journal *Kommunist* carried a review article that endorsed this argument: "For all the complexity and contradictions of his character, Stalin emerges from the generals' memoirs as an outstanding military leader."³⁹ The historian who wrote this review-article is obviously polemicizing with Khrushchev, in particular with the section of his speech to the XXth Party Congress that harshly yet fairly demolished the myth of Stalin's military genius. The facts cited by Khrushchev in 1956 have not been disproved; in the decade following his speech they were supplemented by hundreds of authoritative accounts, most of them published in the Soviet press. The case against Stalin's military record has become so overwhelming that pervarication and sophistry are the only recourse of his apologists.

They also exploit a widespread feeling derived from the cult of personality. Stalin's name became a sort of symbol existing in the popular mentality independently of its actual bearer. During the war years, as the Soviet people were battered by unbelievable miseries, the name of Stalin and faith in him to some degree pulled the Soviet people together, giving them hope of victory. The logic of any cult was at work, attributing all defeats to other commanders or to treason, all victories to Stalin. To this day, many of the soldiers and officers who went into battle with Stalin's name on their lips find it hard to reconsider their attitude toward him and the wartime events connected with his image. The historian may sympathize with this primitive psychology, but inexorable facts oblige him to oppose it.

Stalin was in fact a mediocre commander. He did make correct decisions, gave his subordinates correct orders, and accepted from them—often after arguments and resistance—much good advice. But his personal qualities—his nastiness and narrow-mindedness, his contempt for people and boundless love of power, his suspiciousness and his bureaucratic style of leadership—were bound to affect his behavior as a commander. The result was something much worse than the mistakes that cannot be avoided in any war. Most of Stalin's wrong decisions were so extravagantly and senselessly costly that they cannot be condoned.

³⁸ See those of Marshals A. Grechko, I. Konev, K. Meretskov, K. Rokossovskii, General S. M. Shtemenko, and the second installment of N. Kuznetsov's reminiscences.

³⁹ E. Boltin, writing in *Kommunist*, 1969, No. 2, p. 127.

crucial days? An answer has recently been given in a documented tale that was passed by special military censorship.⁴³

... Late in the evening Stalin, accompanied by some members of the Politburo, unexpectedly appeared at the Commissariat of Defense on Frunze Street. As he entered the Commissar's office, Stalin was calm and self-assured. However, it was there at the directing center of the country's military effort that he first sensed concretely the magnitude of the growing danger. Enemy tank groups were forming a pincers on Minsk and it seemed that nothing could stop them. Contact with our retreating armies had been lost. ... Stalin, usually so outwardly calm and deliberate in his speech and motions, this time could not restrain himself. He burst out with angry, insulting scolding. Then, without looking at anyone, head down and stooped over, he left the building, got into his car, and went home. ...

No one knew what was going on in Stalin's mind during the next few days. No one saw him. He did not appear in the Kremlin. No one heard his voice on the telephone. He summoned no one. And none of those who hour by hour waited for his summons dared go to him unsummoned. ... The members of the Politburo, the Peoples' Commissars, the leaders of the Commissariat of Defense, of the General Staff and the Army's Political Administration, were overwhelmed with thousands of matters, great and small, connected with the implementation of military measures throughout the country and at the fronts. But as they worked on these problems from morning to late at night, they asked themselves time and again: Where is Stalin? Why is he silent? What was he doing, what was he thinking about, this apparently omnipotent and omniscient man, in those long terrible hours?

The author goes on to guess the answers, rather unconvincingly. In an unofficial conversation Khrushchev once said that Stalin simply drank, and that sounds more like the truth. And when the Politburo members came to see him, he was frightened, thinking they had come to arrest him. It must be borne in mind that the management of the war could not proceed normally without Stalin. Because of the strict centralization he had established, neither Zhukov nor Timoshenko nor Molotov nor Beria had the authority to give certain necessary orders. Stalin's absence from his post as head of the state and the Party from June 23 to the beginning of July was an important reason why the Nazis penetrated so swiftly and deeply into the USSR.

The terrible losses suffered by Soviet forces in the opening hours and days of the war are attested by both Soviet and German historians. There is accordingly a painful irony in an order, issued on the evening of June 22, calling for counterattacks in depth, with the aim

⁴³ See A. Chakovskii, "Blokada," *Znamia*, 1968, No. 11, p. 49.

gence and the Gestapo did send many spies into rear lines, and tried to recruit traitors. But the reports of SMERSH, which tell of uncovering huge numbers of foreign agents, anti-Soviet elements, and plots and betrayals, leave the impression that many such discoveries were deliberately contrived.

The home front was also subjected to repression. For example, a group of philosophers—F. Gorokhov, I. M. Kulagin, and others—were arrested on the charge of defeatist tendencies. Before the end of the war the NKGB also subjected some commissariats to savage “purges,” especially the Commissariat of Means of Communication, which was ravaged on March 16, 1944, with the knowledge of Stalin and Kaganovich.⁷¹

Stalin's attitude toward prisoners of war is one of the grimmest pages in his record. In the first two years of the war at least two million Soviet soldiers, perhaps three million, were taken prisoner. Many surrendered only when they found themselves in a hopeless position: surrounded, without arms or supplies, without food, wounded. And Stalin himself was largely to blame for the disastrous experience of large Red Army units. It is quite possible that he sensed his responsibility—if only subconsciously—and this may have inspired his savage attitude toward prisoners of war. He refused to sign the Hague Convention, with the result that Soviet prisoners received no help through the International Red Cross. Many of the Soviet prisoners who joined General A. A. Vlasov's “Russian Liberation Army” were only trying to save themselves from starvation, hoping at a suitable moment to cross over to the Soviet Army or the partisans.

When the war ended, special officers visited the prisoner-of-war camps in the Anglo-American zone, and read to the inmates an official letter, which declared that prisoners of war would not be prosecuted in their native land. This promise was not kept. Returning prisoners of war were treated like traitors. Into the concentration camps went not only real traitors but also many war heroes, defenders of Sevastopol, Odessa, and Brest, partisans, people who had been tortured in Nazi camps. The fate of Major N. S. Tkachuk is typical. A tank officer, seriously wounded near Drogobuzh during a desperate attack on an enemy breakthrough, he was hidden and nursed by collective farmers. When he was barely recovered, Tkachuk tried to pick his way eastward but was captured by the Nazis and put in a prisoner-of-war camp. In February, 1942, he escaped but was recaptured. After a third flight, Tkachuk made contact with French partisans, and for two

⁷¹ It is noteworthy that the victims in this commissariat were rehabilitated only in 1959, i.e., after the defeat of the antiparty group, Kaganovich included. *Ed.*: “The antiparty group” refers to Khrushchev's opponents in the Politburo who were removed from office in 1957 by action of the Central Committee.

Not only Eastern but also Western Europe would have been liberated by the Red Army. The face of Europe today would be quite different. In actuality Soviet troops came to free neighboring countries from Nazi tyranny only in 1944. By then Britain had rebuilt a large and strong army, and the United States was in the war with a huge, well-equipped military machine. In 1943 Anglo-American forces entered Italy and in June, 1944, landed in France. In the same year British troops also landed in Greece. Thus a situation arose that was much more complicated for the Soviet Union and for the national liberation movements than would have been the case if the Soviet-German War had followed a different course.

In the countries liberated by the Soviet Union, people's democracies were set up, which was a great victory of the world socialist revolution. For the progressive and socialist movements in countries liberated by Anglo-American forces, the situation was difficult. The revolutionary movement was strong in some of these countries. In Italy it was stronger than in Hungary, in France stronger than in Poland, in Greece stronger than in Rumania. In France, for example, all antifascist parties were joined in a powerful resistance movement. Communists played a major role, especially in the organization of the August insurrection that liberated Paris before the arrival of the Anglo-American troops and de Gaulle's forces. As the Germans beat a hasty retreat from France, real power in the localities passed to the units of the Resistance. In the last ten days of August the situation was favorable for the assumption of all power by the National Front of Resistance. But the Front did not even try to form its own government during those days. It supported de Gaulle as he moved into power, helping him form a coalition government that included Communists.

What if the forces of the Resistance had tried to take power in August of 1944? This question was discussed at the first postwar conference of Communist and Workers' parties in 1947.⁷⁸ Some speakers, particularly Wladyslaw Gomulka of Poland, reproached the French Communist Party for its indecision. Analogous charges were made in 1952 by one of the French leaders, André Marty. Together with Charles Tillon, he had headed detachments of the maquis during the war, but in 1952 both were declared to be enemies of the French Communist Party and expelled, in part, no doubt, because of Marty's charges against the other French leaders, and indirectly against Stalin. (Marty died shortly after; Tillon was reinstated in the Party after 1956.) The same charges are made today by some historians, who accuse Stalin of withholding the signal for insurrection in 1944,

⁷⁸ Ed.: Medvedev is referring to the conference of nine European parties that met in Warsaw in September, 1947, and founded the Cominform. The major speeches were published in various languages, e.g. *Informatsionnoe soveshchanie nekotorykh . . . partii . . .* (Moscow, 1948). See also *For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy*, the newspaper of the Cominform.

staged, clearly imitating the Soviet originals of 1936–38. Most of the accused were brought by torture to make obedient confessions of monstrous crimes. Lászlo Rajk, for example, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Internal Affairs in the Hungarian People's Republic, and long before that a leader of the Hungarian workers' movement and of the resistance to Admiral Horthy's fascist regime, confessed that he had been an agent provocateur of that regime. From 1931 on he had allegedly betrayed more than two hundred Communists to the police. He declared that he was in the service of Yugoslav and British intelligence services, that he was not a Hungarian Jew but a German, and so on.

The same kind of ridiculous fabrications were recited in Bulgaria. Tribute should be paid to the behavior of the chief defendant, Traicho Kostov, who flatly denied the charges against him. When the procurator saw that it was impossible to force a confession out of Kostov in open court, he stopped direct questioning and began to read the depositions that Kostov had allegedly signed during the pretrial investigation. After hearing these fabrications, which took three hours to read, the court turned to the examination of other defendants, though Kostov categorically denied the authenticity of the depositions attributed to him. In his final speech he tried to expose the whole shameful production. In Poland the big show concerned an "espionage diversionary organization" allegedly operating in the Polish Army. The defendants were military leaders, headed by Marian Spychalski, Minister of Defense. Perhaps the biggest surprise was his replacement by the Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovskii.

In Czechoslovakia many leaders were jailed—such as Vladimir Clementis, Gustav Husak, Josef Smrkovsky, Eduard Goldstücker, Maria Svermova, Josef Goldman, and Eugen Loeb. General Ludvik Svoboda, one of the main organizers of the Czechoslovak Army, was sent to a village to be the chairman of an agricultural cooperative. Much of this repression was done under pressure from Stalin and with the knowledge of Klement Gottwald. Antonin Novotný took an active part, and so did Rudolf Slanský, General Secretary of the Party. But then Slanský himself was arrested and brought to trial.

The Slanský trial is worth considering in detail. We have a thorough knowledge of its mechanics, which, we may assume, were essentially similar in the other trials. The principal source is Eugen Loeb, Party member since 1931 and Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade at the time of his arrest in November, 1949. Loeb survived to win complete rehabilitation in 1963, and in 1968 published an account of his experiences.⁸² He describes the treatment that got him to the

⁸² Ed.: See Eugen Loeb and Dusan Pokorny, *Die Revolution rehabilitiert ihre Kinder. Hinter den Kulissen des Slansky-Prozesses* (Vienna, 1968). Translated into English as *Stalinism in Prague* (New York, 1969).

of a monument to Marx, to Engels, or even to Lenin, while a statue of Yurii Dolgorukii, a stupid and cruel twelfth-century prince, went up on Soviet Square, replacing the Obelisk of Freedom that had been erected at Lenin's suggestion.

At the same time the rights of the union republics were increasingly curtailed. As a reaction to this policy, and also as a result of the petty-bourgeois degeneration of some local cadres, there was a revival of nationalist feelings, which had almost vanished in the thirties. Manifestations of national dissension reappeared, especially in the Caucasus.

Great damage was done to the country's international reputation by the resurgence of anti-Semitism. In 1931 Stalin had declared that anti-Semitism, as an extreme form of racial chauvinism, was a dangerous survival of cannibalism.

Anti-Semitism is dangerous for the workers as a false path, leading them off the correct road and taking them into the jungle. Therefore Communists, as consistent internationalists, cannot but be consistent and sworn enemies of anti-Semitism.²²

Stalin forgot his own words. During the war he studiously ignored anti-Semitism. Every month, for example, the Chief Political Administration of the Soviet Army sent out to the Army's political *apparatus* themes for political studies and lectures. Not once in the four years of the war was one lesson or one lecture devoted to anti-Semitism, its role in Nazi policy, or the Nazis' murder of almost the entire Jewish population of Europe.

After the war Stalin began to exclude all Jews from the Party and government *apparatus*, covering his actions with talk about the counterrevolutionary activities of international Zionist organizations, ignoring the existence in foreign parts of many White Guard Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, and other nationalist organizations. In 1948 almost the entire staff of the Jewish Antifascist Committee was arrested, though it had been set up during the war on the initiative of the Central Committee. Of course the members of this committee had had various contacts with Jewish nationalist organizations abroad. But there was nothing illegal about that; the Committee had been set up to establish such contacts.

After the arrest of the Committee members, anti-Jewish measures increased. For "prophylaxis" a limit was placed on the admission of children of Jews to many university faculties and to many other institutions of higher education. Jews were barred from the diplomatic service and were gradually squeezed out of the courts and the procu-

²² *Sochineniia*, XIII, p. 28. The statement was made in response to a question from the Jewish Telegraph Agency in the United States.

ratorial agencies, except as defense lawyers. In most higher educational institutions, in scientific institutes, even in many factories, a secret quota was introduced for Jews, like the one that the tsarist government established at Pobedonostsev's request.²³ Even in the defense of academic dissertations Jews were admitted only as a certain percentage of Russians and other nationalities. Though Jews had played a great role in the Revolution and the Civil War—Sverdlov and many other members of Lenin's Central Committee were Jews—under Stalin in the forties and early fifties there was hardly a single Jew even among *raikom* secretaries. Anti-Semitism was plain to see in the campaign against "cosmopolitanism," which was used to close down Jewish schools, theaters, newspapers, and magazines.

Most anti-Jewish measures were not given publicity; they were usually carried out on oral instructions. But the anti-Semitic feelings of Stalin and his retinue, including Kaganovich, a Jew, were no secret. And then, in the last years of his life, Stalin cast aside almost all ideological screens and made anti-Semitism an open, obvious part of state policy. Everything indicated that he was beginning preparations for a mass deportation of Jews to remote districts. They were to be another one of the scapegoats that Stalinist despotism constantly sought to shed responsibility for its blunders.

At the end of 1952 the "doctors' case" was organized. Lidia Timashuk, a radiologist in the Kremlin Hospital and a secret agent of the MGB, wrote Stalin an obviously inspired letter, saying that she had observed many eminent doctors applying wrong methods of treatment.²⁴ Her letter alarmed some MGB officials, who feared that they might be accused of insufficient vigilance. The Minister of State Security (MGB), V. S. Abakumov, ordered the head of the Investigation Department, M. D. Riumin, not to investigate the letter and even arrested him. But Stalin ordered Riumin's release, dismissed Abakumov, and appointed S. D. Ignat'ev Minister of State Security. Moreover, Stalin took personal charge of the investigation of the Kremlin doctors' case, summoning and instructing the agents. "If you don't get the doctors' confessions," he told Ignat'ev, "you'll lose your head."

After that warning, the MGB went to work in earnest on the doctors. On January 13, 1953, the central newspapers reported the "unmasking" of an organization of wrecking doctors, including such major physicians as V. N. Vinogradov,²⁵ M. S. Vovsi, M. Kogan, B.

²³ *Ed.*: Konstantin Pobedonostsev, chief bureaucrat of the Russian Church and adviser to the last two tsars, is generally regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of reactionaries.

²⁴ She was given the Order of Lenin for her "heroic feat." After Stalin's death, and even after the XXth Party Congress, she continued to work as a radiologist in the Kremlin Hospital. When some old Bolsheviks learned of this, they refused to be X-rayed.

²⁵ According to Stalin's daughter, he had treated Stalin for more than twenty years.

were almost always organized campaigns ending in the "rout" of dissidents (*inakomyshchikh*).

In most of the social sciences Stalin alone had the right to make discoveries and draw major conclusions; everyone else was assigned the role of a popularizer or a commentator. Dogmatism, rote learning (*nachetnichestvo*), stagnation, and inertia were the results. Between 1946 and 1952 no less than six hundred books and pamphlets, in a total printing of twenty million copies, were devoted to Stalin's speeches and articles.

The deification of Stalin, the creation of stories about his infallibility and omniscience, generated a quasi-religious perception of reality in the scholarly community. The truth was not what corresponded to facts, to empirical research, but what Comrade Stalin had declared to be true. Quotations from "the classics of Marxism-Leninism," and above all from the newly canonized classics of Stalin, became the main proof that a given proposition was true. Inconvenient facts were juggled, distorted, or simply ignored.

The study of history was already near a standstill in the early thirties. What happened thereafter is well described in a recent work on Soviet historiography.³

Toward the mid-thirties the possibility of scholarly investigation of contemporary history was reduced to a minimum. The increasingly limited amount of publishable information no longer permitted a scholarly analysis of industrial and agricultural development. Critical verification of this information became impossible. The investigator was deprived of information about the standard of living in the city and the countryside, the social structure, and many other aspects of sociopolitical life. The accessible area of archival sources was sharply limited.⁴ At the same time the fight against "vulgar sociology," "the antihistorical school" of M. N. Pokrovskii, conditioned the historian against independent theoretical work. Theoretical analysis and generalization became the monopoly of one man—J. V. Stalin. . . .

The biggest event in the development of the historiography of Soviet society was the publication in 1938 of *The History of the CPSU; Short Course*. The extremely one-sided and schematic conception of this book was subordinated in the final analysis to the task of exalting and glorifying Stalin, validating and justifying all his actions. . . . The truly outstanding triumphs and achievements of the Soviet people, of the Communist Party, were recounted in a panegyrical spirit, were represented as one undiluted triumph, with difficulties, mistakes, and shortcomings virtually excluded. The

³ *Ed.*: Medvedev does not give a precise citation. He may have in mind the item cited below, p. 518, n. 58.

⁴ Note by Medvedev: In 1938 all major archives came under NKVD administration. The publication of documents on the history of Soviet society virtually ended.

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narrative itself . . . was accomplished by stringing together quotations from Stalin's works or paraphrases of them. . . . The final chapters of the *Short Course*, which reflect most fully the characteristic features of the ideology of Stalin's cult, are a monstrous blend of whitewashing and mudslinging, of panegyrics and slander. Since this book was not meant to give a scholarly elucidation and explanation of the historical process, it was written in the form of expounding axioms, which required no proof and did not have to be understood but memorized, learned by heart. The moment the *Short Course* appeared it was proclaimed "an encyclopedia of basic knowledge in the field of Marxism-Leninism," "a means of heightening political vigilance," . . . the sole and official "guide to Party history," "permitting no willful interpretations." . . . Historical science was denied the opportunity to examine the phenomena of social life, to analyze facts creatively. The loss of many historians in the mass repression of the thirties and the postwar period also left its mark. . . . The result of all this was a sharp drop in the number of works on the history of Soviet society, and a shift from scholarly research to mass agitation, at best to works of popularization.

Almost all the previous achievements of Soviet historians were canceled out. The value of source material was put in doubt; original sources ceased to be studied. Stalin and his obedient historians were brazenly voluntaristic in writing the history of the USSR and the CPSU, willfully twisting facts and crossing out inconvenient names. For example, the *Short Course* declared that the slogan "Make all *kolkhozniki* prosperous," which Stalin formulated in 1933, was realized by 1937. All the officials who had fallen victim to repression were pictured as agents of foreign powers who had been plotting against the Soviet state "for twenty years." No proofs or arguments were given, only invective and labels: "Trotskyite-Bukharinite outlaws," "a band of murderers and spies" "White Guard insects," "useless trash," "fascist lackeys," "the dregs of the human race," and so on.⁵

The short biography of Stalin published after the war was an equally glaring example of fraudulence. Indeed, it is impossible to list all the distortions contained in this little book. Here is only one example:

In the second half of 1911 the Petersburg period of Comrade Stalin's revolutionary activity began. On September 6, 1911, Comrade Stalin illegally left Vologda for Petersburg. In Petersburg

⁵ Thirty million copies of this book were published in the first ten years of its life, despite four years of war and such economic problems as the paper shortage. See G. Malenkov, *Doklad na soveshchanii predstavitelei nekotorykh kompartii v Pol'she v 1947* (Moscow, 1947), p. 27.

Comrade Stalin made contact with the Petersburg Party organization; he directed its attention to the fight against the Menshevik liquidationists and the Trotskyites, to uniting and strengthening the Bolshevik organizations of Petersburg. On September 9, 1911, Comrade Stalin was arrested in Petersburg and exiled to Vologda province.⁶

If Stalin left Vologda on September 6, he could have arrived in Petersburg no earlier than the seventh, and on the ninth he was already arrested. In those two days, his biographers would have us believe, he managed not only to make contact with some Petersburg comrades, but to direct, unite, and strengthen them.

Such crude falsification became a matter of course. Zhdanov, for example, told a conference⁷ that the exiled Chechentsy and Ingushi had been the chief obstacles to friendship among the North Caucasian peoples as far back as the Civil War period. Some photographs allegedly portraying Stalin's life were pure montage. Genuinely historical photos were subjected to careful retouching, so that inconvenient people would disappear. Some figures were even removed from the negatives. Stalin's relationship with Lenin was transformed into a tale that "surpasses all the most touching fables of the ancients concerning human friendship."⁸

And all the time that Stalin's obedient historians were creating these brazen fabrications, Stalin was making public attacks on vulgarizing, oversimplifying, and varnishing history. Those were the years when it was standard form to denounce the thesis ascribed to Pokrovskii and his school: "History is politics projected into the past."

Economics was also in deep trouble. The central problems of this discipline, especially those involved in the political economy of socialism, were hardly worked on. The publication of books on concrete issues was sharply curtailed, many research institutes were closed, scholarly discussions were stopped. For twenty years the country had no textbook on political economy. Agricultural economics was particularly degraded. Almost no work was done on such fundamental topics as agricultural costs and prices, accounting (*khozraschet*) and profitability (*rentabel'nost*), increasing the marketed proportion

⁶ Institut Marksa-Engel'sa-Lenina, *Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin. Kratkaia biografia* (Moscow, 1947), pp. 48-49. The authors of this book were G. F. Aleksandrov, M. B. Mitin, P. N. Pospelov, et al. Ed.: There is an English translation: Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, *Joseph Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York, 1949).

⁷ It was a conference of musical critics and composers, called by the Central Committee to criticize V. I. Muradeli's opera "The Great Friendship." Ed.: An abridged translation of Zhdanov's speech can be found in his *Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music* (New York, 1950).

⁸ S. Petrov wrote this in *Pravda*, Apr. 24, 1950.

Central Committee. *Not the reorganization of labor, but its liquidation.* This question was not discussed with engineers, agronomists, workers, collective farmers, young people. Only old teachers, instructors of various subjects, have been consulted.¹³

Stalin and Zhdanov ignored Krupskaja's letter. Under their leadership the schools were gradually transformed into "Soviet gymnasia." Not only was labor completely abolished; many long-forgotten features of the old gymnasium were revived, such as the teaching of Latin and separate schools for boys and girls. Thus basic principles of Communist education were perverted, a scornful attitude was fostered toward physical labor and toward laboring people.

2

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES were also damaged by surreptitious efforts to make Stalin seem greater than Lenin. Stalin hypocritically declared: "I am only a pupil of Lenin, and the goal of my life is to be a worthy pupil of him."¹⁴ In reality Stalin was envious of Lenin's place in history and tried to appropriate it for himself.

As early as 1920, while speaking at the celebration of Lenin's fiftieth birthday, Stalin unexpectedly remarked—"no one," he said, "has yet spoken" about this—that "Comrade Lenin acknowledged his shortcomings in matters of enormous importance." He portrayed Lenin as a theorist with a poor idea of what was going on in the country, who gave the Party incorrect instructions at the most critical moment before the October Revolution. Twisting the facts, Stalin claimed that he, Stalin, had seen more clearly than Lenin the "pitfalls and abysses on our way." He made it seem that Lenin, who was hiding in the fall of 1917, had left the armed insurrection to the "practical leaders," presumably Stalin above all. He pictured Lenin as saying "Yes, you were right," when he emerged from hiding to greet the victorious Congress of Soviets.

In 1946, when Stalin's collected works were being published, the part of this speech that dealt with Lenin's mistakes was made significantly stronger. B. V. Iakovlev has counted more than a hundred changes that Stalin made in the text. He inserted, for example, this extremely misleading remark: "Despite all Lenin's demands, we did not listen to him; we kept to the path of strengthening the Soviets and arrived at the Congress of Soviets of October 25, at a successful insurrection."¹⁵

¹³ Quoted in *Uchitel'skaia gazeta*, Feb. 20, 1962.

¹⁴ Stalin, *Sochineniia*, XIII, p. 105.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 317. The original text was published in the *sbornik, 50-letie V. I. Lenina* (Moscow, 1920).

experience, says: "The history of the Party teaches that without the destruction of the petty-bourgeois parties that operate within the ranks of the working class, pushing the backward sections of the working class into the embrace of the bourgeoisie, thus splitting the unity of the working class, the victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible. . . . Unless such parties are overcome and driven out of the ranks of the working class, it will be impossible to achieve the unity of the working class."

In the field of Russian history, Stalin not only completely justified Ivan the Terrible and his *oprichnina*; he even considered Maliuta Skuratov a great, progressive statesman.⁶⁰ Ivan's only mistake, according to Stalin, was that he let his conscience bother him too much; he spent too much time praying for forgiveness after destroying each big feudal family. Thus he was unable to wipe out all the boyar families completely. (History repeats itself. Today in China Genghis Khan, a tyrant as monstrously cruel as Ivan, is being rehabilitated.) Under Stalin's influence, works of history and art glorified many other tsars and princes, portrayed in an extremely distorted fashion. Thus the legend of Alexander Nevskii was revived. The tsars and the Orthodox Church had accounted him a divine protector of the imperial throne, hushing up the fact that he called the Tartars into Novgorod to suppress a popular rebellion. Many of the tsarist wars of conquest were justified in Stalinist historiography, including Nicholas I's wars in the Caucasus. At the same time Shamil, the hero of the national liberation struggle of the Caucasian peoples, was depicted as an agent of British imperialism and of the Ottoman Empire.

Finally, one must note Stalinist misinterpretation of the feudal and the slaveholding social formations. The diversity in forms of land use and landownership under feudalism was ignored, in favor of simplistic generalities about the feudal lords' monopoly of landownership and their proprietary relationship to peasants. Stalin simply identified the feudal formation with one of its variants—serfdom. It was also wrong to insist that slaves in revolt struck the fatal blow at the slaveholding social formation.

In philosophy Stalin was at best a dilettante. He lacked both systematic training and genuine self-education. He never made a real study of Hegel, Kant, Ludwig Feuerbach, the French materialists, or, judging by his pronouncements, the philosophical works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. All his philosophical writings are marked by primitivism, oversimplification, superficiality, and a penchant for dogmatic schematization. In his first philosophical pamphlet, *Anarchism and Socialism*, he contrasted the two outlooks as follows: The

⁶⁰ Ed.: The *oprichnina* was Ivan's agency of terror. Skuratov was a particularly violent official of it.

an uninvited arbiter, giving scientists instructions that as a rule were quite incompetent. He told geologists where and how to look for oil, advised doctors on their specialties,⁶⁴ instructed biologists on problems of heredity. Frequently his stupid example was followed by Zhdanov, Malenkov, Molotov, and others in his entourage. The bureaucratic system in many scientific institutions fostered little specialized cults on the model of Stalin's big one. A particular scientist would be proclaimed the only source of basic truth, immune to criticism. Great damage was done by the savage character of scientific discussions, the constant attempts to politicize science, to divide it into Soviet and bourgeois camps. Not only philosophers but many scientists picked up the habit of pasting defamatory labels on their rivals. These conditions guaranteed the rise of adventurers and careerists, who used the support of powerful but ignorant administrators to push true scientists into subjection.

Biology was the most severely damaged.⁶⁵ The tragic history of the thirty-year war in biology and agronomy has been presented in detail in Zhores A. Medvedev's book, to which I refer the reader.⁶⁶ I shall note here only that Stalin's support enabled Lysenko to set up the August, 1948, session of the Agricultural Academy, which started a pogrom in biology. The existence of two biologies was proclaimed—proletarian and bourgeois—and the most promising developments were assigned to the bourgeois camp. The majority of foreign and Soviet biologists were labeled idealists and lackeys of imperialism, just as in Nazi Germany physics had been divided into "Aryan" and "non-Aryan" schools. Not only was truth banned; illiterate fantasy was officially enthroned. Heredity became a mysterious property unattached to any material structure but "permeating" all the "granules" of a living being. Vitality was a no less mysterious property, invoked to explain the growth and development of organisms, and their equally mysterious capacity to remove themselves for the good of the species. The Darwinian thesis of intraspecific competition was denied, and sudden transformations of species were proclaimed—wheat turning into rye, pine into spruce, oats into wild oats—along with the Lamarckian pattern of species transformation. Lysenko's fantasies became absolute truths, immune to criticism, as soon as he announced

⁶⁴ See *Novyi Mir*, 1966, No. 8, p. 282.

⁶⁵ Stalin considered himself practically a specialist in this field. In an article on Stalin's seventieth birthday, his secretary, Poskrebyshev, declared him not only the organizer of citrus cultivation in the Black Sea district but the researcher who investigated the possibility of such cultivation—and that of eucalyptus trees in the Moscow region, the breeding of branched wheat, etc.

⁶⁶ *Ed.*: It has been published in the West—*The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko* (New York, 1969)—but not yet in the Soviet Union. Cf. D. Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 184–85, for the publication history.

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