

# The Need for a Critical 'New Look' --- 2.

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## ARTICLE II

ONCE the halo is removed from Stalin, he can be approached critically and, perhaps, objectively. Stalin did not make the era, the era made Stalin, within the concrete conditions of the time, against the specific historical and cultural background of the country, within a given world situation. That evaluation will take time, particularly since the archives, only now being unlocked, are still to be fully studied, his writings and deeds properly appraised against the events and needs of his time.

He has been removed from an exclusive pedestal in the Pantheon, and this is as it should be. It was brought about by the present collective leadership or, better said, the present collective leadership was formed in the process of a tough battle against the ideology of personal cultism, a battle brought into the open immediately after Stalin's death, and still being carried on against strong remnants of the cult and against the living, smaller Stalins that grew up in the party organization.

In pursuing this ideological battle, for which the public mind had to be prepared, the collective leadership that was being simultaneously formed had to take up the fight on many fronts. Anyone who has read the full reports and speeches at the Congress, and has pondered the changes since the death of Stalin in 1953, cannot help but be struck by the frank exposure of the distortions and miscarriages of Socialist justice connected with one-man rule in the party and the government, and its stagnating effects upon Marxist thought.

THE CONGRESS concentrated its attacks upon all this, and also upon bureaucracy in the party and the state, upon the over-concentration of economic functions to the detriment of local initiative, upon unjustified economic inequalities in wages and conditions, upon violations of the Soviet legal

code at the expense of the rights of the Soviet citizen and of the exercise of Marxist criticism, upon some tendencies to override national autonomies in the Soviet Union, upon the docility of the trade unions, upon the aloofness of the higher educational institutions from the processes of production.

The entire pressure was directed at the elements of stagnation in Soviet practice and consciousness—at the "chairwarmers," the stick-in-the-muds, the quotation-citers, the wait-and-see people, the play-it-safe executives, the do-it-by-rote managers.

This process has barely begun, it is still unfolding. But in starting it, the collective leadership took the decisive initial step, also beginning to set right some of the injustices against innocent people, the distortions of Soviet history and the deadening rigidities of theory, abnormalities in relations with other Socialist countries, as in the case of Yugoslavia, or with other parties, as in the case of Poland.

To continue this process means a constant ideological struggle against remnants of the cult, for it is impossible overnight to change popularly-held idealized concepts of a man who has had such a profound impact upon history. Everything will have to be proved, substantiated by fact and document. The changes now going on in the Soviet Union will facilitate this, because harmful approaches and concepts are changed most effectively by the new and better conditions under which people live.

THE DISCUSSION on Stalin's role in history will proceed for a long time, and no doubt this discussion will become better informed, as the Soviet Union approaches the problem from all sides, as their own estimate begins to crystallize. For many years to come, there will be different opinions, and future generations confronted with new tasks and having new insights may render other judgments. But it is important, vital-

ly necessary, to remember throughout this agitated discussion that the Stalin era was, above all, an era of the building of socialism, in a country materially and culturally least prepared for it, with consequent shortcomings and misfortune—which other countries will be able to avoid, in fact have avoided, by virtue of the Soviet mistakes and sufferings.

THE AMERICAN Marxists, as well as the non-Marxist supporters of the Soviet Union (and these were many more during the great struggle against Hitlerism) took a correct and honorable position in ideologically defending the country of socialism against the anti-Communist Big Lie, which served and still serves the purposes of reaction in our own country. It is true that, by and large, they idealized the situation in the Soviet Union, overlooking many inner weaknesses or failing to explain them, in their anxiety to prevent the immeasurably greater crime, contemplated by world reaction, of strangling socialism abroad and democracy at home.

It can now be said from the vantage point of the present, from hindsight, how much better it would have been if the advocates of socialism in this country had taken more critical positions. But it must also be recognized, in all honesty, that only now do the advocates of socialism and progress have the breathing space as well as the insights, sharpened by self-criticism, for developing a more balanced approach. For only now, after the long and hard pull, has a world sector of socialism emerged, in a strong position, with the enhanced possibilities for enduring peace.

OTHER countries have taken their own paths to socialism, setting up a community of socialist nations, bringing to bear their own national experiences and traditions, their modes, their customs, their forms of struggle. From them we can also learn, just as the Soviet Communists have been learning.

We can learn critically, assess their experiences, not in order to tell them what to do but by comparison and study to gain a clearer concept of the historical process, learn that it cannot be blueprinted or diagrammed after a model. We must learn how to stand on our own feet in the basic sense of studying the concrete conditions, history, mores, forms of struggle, class composition and political structure of our own country—a country that has all the potentials of startling the world with something else than atomic shocks, once our people take the road of progress, begin to explore our own road to socialism.

In this country the discussion of the Soviet developments will proceed without profit unless lessons are drawn that are important to us. In time, the Soviet collective leadership will clarify many questions about the Stalin era, including their own role, because it is a duty they owe, in the first place, to their own party and their own people. In the process, many questions will be clarified before the entire world.

In the meantime, it must be recognized that free and constructive criticism as between socialist countries and between Marxist movements of various countries requires at its base a change in the inner atmosphere of the parties, the return to the basic principles of collective leadership, inner-party democracy, and freedom of discussion in the formulation of policy. Without this it is impossible to speak of criticism in the Marxist sense.

The most profitable lesson to be drawn from the Soviet events, the most important lesson for the American Left as a whole, is that when basic principles of workingclass party organization are violated everything suffers. The cult of personality can take over only when these principles are undermined, obscured or forgotten. Collective leadership is not es-

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established by dictat—it must be nourished by the constant interchange and clash of opinion within the party, with the necessary self-discipline that the workingclass knows how to exert, with a constant check in discussion of subjectivism and of extremist tendencies of the Leftist and the Rightist varieties.

IT IS A SUBJECTIVE, idealist notion to think that correct policies are established from above, by the wisdom of a single individual or even a group of individuals divorced from the constant struggle of ideas around the party and within it. Policy established in this way is either one-sided, or a mixture of various positions, compromised and temporized in seclusion, in the ivory tower created by leaders who fail to take their followers into their confidence, to learn from them, to share their problems with them.

Inner-party controversy is the normal, the healthy way to form

policy. It should not be feared. For this is the only way the differences of opinion can be thrashed out constructively, drawing upon all the latent resources of the members, who will learn, despite excesses and mistakes, how to participate in the formation of policy in closest contact with the masses around them. Inner-party controversy on the basis of principle, without attempts at self-flagellation or self-justification and without mutual recrimination, placing principled positions above loyalty to this or that leader, is the only way, as experience has shown, for a party to find the correct position.

That is the major lesson to be learned by the American Left from our own experiences as much as from anything that has happened abroad. The Marxists will have learned this lesson as they proceed to a serious, systematic and thorough examination of their own programs and policies, in the light of the urgent need for the revival of the popular democratic movement in our country.