

# COMBAT

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## Stalin; The Myth and the Reality.



STALIN :

THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

(A lecture given at a Communist League Weekend School)

Introduction

As you know, the Communist League is in process of publishing a series of reports covering the whole history of the Soviet Union, and these reports will make clear the precise role played by Stalin during the long period in which he held the post of General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

However, comrades have asked that this lecture on the role of Stalin be given. You will appreciate, however, that this must necessarily be an interim and provisional analysis, pending the completion of this section of the research programme.

I must say at the outset that the Communist League does not regard the role of Stalin as a subject of paramount importance.

There can, of course, be no doubt that during the period that Stalin was General Secretary of the CPSU -- from 1922 until his death in 1953 -- certain criminally wrong policies were pursued both in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and (until its dissolution in 1943) in the Communist International. It is certainly vital that we recognise the incorrectness of these policies, draw the necessary lessons from them and incorporate these lessons in a programme for socialist revolution in Britain.

But the question of the role of a particular individual -- even one who played so prominent a role as Stalin -- in the policies of the CPSU -- correct and incorrect -- is, as we see it, not a subject of the first importance.

Nevertheless, there is so much confusion, even among those who regard themselves as loyal to Marxism-Leninism and opposed to revisionist trends, on this question, that it is understandable that comrades should wish for a sketch to be given of the role of Stalin so far as our research to date makes this possible.

The Myth of the "Bloodthirsty Dictator"

It is, I think, fair to say that to the great majority of people throughout the world the name of Josef Stalin conjures the picture of a "vain, paranoid, bloodthirsty dictator".

The nearest comparable figure in English history is, perhaps, Richard III who, as we "know" from our school history books and from Shakespeare, was a hunchbacked monster who murdered the little princes in the tower, and so on, and so on.

It is only in the last few years that some historians have noticed that the nearly contemporary documents on which this picture is based all date from after Henry Tudor had overthrown Richard and established a new dynasty. These historians recognised that the Tudors had an interest in presenting their seizure of power as "liberation from a tyrant" and drew the conclusion that what had been taken for authentic history was in reality mere political propaganda -- that there was, in fact, no evidence that Richard III committed the crimes attributed to him, no evidence that he was any worse than any other king of that time, no evidence even that he was deformed.

If, therefore, we wish to analyse the role of Stalin objectively, we must look very carefully at the evidence on which the generally accepted picture is based and decide whether that picture is authentic or whether it is, partly or wholly, a myth based on political



propaganda.

In this connection, we must not forget that the elements which have fostered, and foster, this picture -- bourgeois historians, the leaders of the revisionist Communist Parties who have espoused the "peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism", the trotskyites who reject the possibility of building socialism in a single country -- are all opposed to the political principles on which Stalin stood.

Certainly, as scientific socialists, as Marxist-Leninists, we have not the slightest interest in covering up the crimes of any individual -- if such crimes have indeed occurred.

But if we want to build a Marxist-Leninist Party with a correct, scientific programme for the construction of socialism, we need to know and understand just what really happened in the Soviet Union -- where a socialist society was built and has now been destroyed -- and such a programme can be based only on the truth.

Obviously, we cannot know all the facts of the history of the Soviet Union. But we know some facts; and if the generally accepted picture of the role of Stalin cannot be made to fit those known facts, then we are forced to reject that generally accepted picture.

One contradiction strikes us immediately.

Stalin is alleged to have been responsible for the murder and imprisonment of at least hundreds of thousands of honest socialist-minded citizens, so that -- if this allegation be true -- there could hardly have been a single-family in the country which did not have a member, a friend or a neighbour as the "victim" of Stalin's "arbitrary tyranny".

Yet it is undoubtedly true that the mass of Soviet working people mourned Stalin's death deeply and genuinely. So much so that it was three years after his death before his successors felt able to attack his alleged "crimes", and even then only in a secret speech which has never been published in the Soviet Union to this day.

#### "The Cult of Personality"

The only criticism of Stalin made publicly at the 20th. Congress of the CPSU in 1956, three years after his death, was that implied in the criticism of "the cult of personality".

Now there undoubtedly was a "cult of personality" built up around Stalin during his lifetime, and Marxist-Leninists are the first to maintain that such a cult is completely wrong in principle.

The prime reason given by Khrushchov for the building up of this "cult of personality" was Stalin's alleged "vanity".

Now vain people, who are only happy when they are being praised, are very little-minded people. And here again we have a contradiction, for there is an abundance of evidence from Stalin's life as a revolutionary that, whatever he was, he was not little-minded.

What, in fact, was Stalin's own expressed attitude to the "cult of personality" that was built up around himself? Time and again he condemned it, denounced it and ridiculed it. I quote from one letter out of a great number of Stalin's writings and speeches against the "cult". It was written in February 1938 to the Children's Publishing House, which had sent him the draft of a book entitled "Stories about Stalin's Childhood":

"I am strongly opposed to the publication of 'Stories about Stalin's Childhood'. The book is filled with a mass of factual distortions, untruths, exaggerations and undeserved praise. The author has been misled by lovers of fairy tales. . . But that isn't the main thing. The main thing is that the book has the tendency to inculcate in Soviet people (and people in general) the cult of the personality of chiefs and infallible heroes. That is dangerous,



harmful. The theory of 'heroes and the mob' is not Bolshevik Socialist-Revolutionary. . . My advice is to burn the book'.

The revisionists are, in fact, compelled to admit that Stalin consistently opposed the "cult of personality" in public. They attribute the fact that the "cult" continued despite this to Stalin's alleged "hypocrisy", suggesting that he "encouraged" the "cult" in private.

But from what sources did the nauseating adulation of Stalin come? The originator of the "cult" was Karl Radek, who confessed to treason at his public trial in 1937. One of its most fervent and flowery exponents was Nikita Khrushchov, who was given in 1956 the main role in the denunciation of the "cult". Of course, once the "cult" had become a fashion, many honest Communists joined in; but the speeches of, say, Vyacheslav Molotov are significantly lacking in the kind of excessive praise of Stalin which were a feature of Khrushchov's orations during Stalin's lifetime.

What is of particular interest in this connection is Stalin's shrewd observation to Lion Feuchtwanger that the "cult of personality" was being deliberately fostered by "wreckers" for the purpose of discrediting him at a later date. Which, of course, is precisely what occurred. And if Stalin was conscious of this, then it becomes virtually impossible to believe that his public opposition to the "cult of personality" was other than completely genuine.

The conclusion to which we are forced by the facts, therefore, is that Stalin was absolutely genuine in his opposition to the "cult", but was unable to stop it!

But if this inescapable conclusion is correct, it follows that the entire picture of Stalin as a "dictator" is a myth, however many people may sincerely believe it. It follows that Stalin and those who stood with him politically were in a minority in the leading bodies of the CPSU over a long period, and that his political opponents were in a majority. It follows that the "cult of personality" around Stalin was built up, against his opposition, for the purpose of disguising the true situation, for the purpose of lending Stalin's revolutionary prestige to policies which he might well have opposed, as well as for the purpose of discrediting him at a later date.

#### The Prisoner in the Kremlin

In considering this unorthodox picture of Stalin as the "prisoner" of a concealed revisionist majority in the leadership of the CPSU, it must be remembered that Marxist-Leninists stand firmly on the principle that the Marxist-Leninist Party, as the General Staff of the working class, must be based on unity of policy -- a unity obtained by the organisational principle of democratic centralism, a feature of which is that decisions of majorities are binding on minorities, and on individual members (not excluding the General Secretary).

Of course, a Marxist-Leninist considers himself bound by the principles of democratic centralism only so long as the Party continues to be essentially a party based on Marxism-Leninism, on the interests of the working class. It is significant in this respect that during Stalin's lifetime the CPSU took no steps of the kind which were taken after his death -- steps which have now restored a capitalist economic system in the Soviet Union. Certainly measures were taken by the CPSU during Stalin's lifetime which were politically wrong -- measures which laid the foundations for the emergence of a new class of state capitalists. But these measures differed qualitatively from those which followed his death; they were not of such a character which could enable a Marxist-Leninist to say categorically: "The CPSU is no longer a Marxist-Leninist, but a revisionist party, so that loyalty to Marxism-Leninism compels me to repudiate democratic centralism".



and denounce its policies publicly".

If, however, we look at the composition of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU we find that, for most of the period from 1934 on, a majority of its members later revealed themselves as revisionists. Of course, one may say that these people were then genuine allies of Stalin and only became his political opponents after his death. We have, however, their word that they had long been political opponents of Stalin but did not consider it expedient to say so publicly.

The most striking evidence for the view that Stalin was a prisoner for a long period of a crypto-revisionist majority is shown by the known facts of the 17th. Congress of the CPSU in January 1934. At this congress there appeared on the surface to be complete political unanimity around the General Secretary. Never at any previous congress had so many speakers praised Stalin for his "genius". The open opposition groups had admitted their errors, had pledged themselves to dissolve their factions, and had joined in the fulsome praise. But when, at the congress, elections were held for the new Central Committee of over 100 members, Stalin received the lowest vote of any nominee.

Clearly, there is a prima facie case for the hypothesis that the CPSU was dominated by revisionists (then concealed), not from 1956 but from as early as 1934.

In fact, this hypothesis is the only one which makes sense of the known events in the Soviet Union.

#### The Excessive Differentials

For example, Lenin and Stalin always publicly took their stand on the principle that, while the remuneration of workers under socialism must be based on the quantity and quality of work performed, the wage differentials should be strictly limited. Until the 1930s this principle was strictly adhered to.

The campaign to change this position began with the application by a number of factory directors and trade union officials of equality of wages in a number of sectors between all workers. In June 1931 Stalin correctly condemned wage equalisation.

On this basis, from 1934 onwards the revisionist majority in the leading bodies of the CPSU began a gradual process of introducing greater and greater wage differentials -- citing hypocritically in support of this process Stalin's denunciation of wage equalisation. A state official was eventually getting more than 40 times the remuneration of a worker; his chauffeur-driven car came to be regarded virtually as his private property, to be used to take his family to their dacha for the week-end. A factory manager received in salary and bonuses up to 30 times the wage of a worker in his plant. And instead of being, as before, financially penalised for the honour of Party membership, members of the CPSU were given all kinds of privileges -- such as the provision of special shops, staffed above the average so that queuing was unnecessary and containing goods not available in shops open to the public.

These excessive differentials did not in themselves destroy the socialist character of the social system. But they laid the basis for the emergence of a highly privileged stratum of the working people -- a stratum which enthusiastically accepted revisionism and capitalist principles after Stalin's death -- and for the eventual emergence of a new exploiting class of state capitalists.

Now if Stalin had for some reason changed his mind on the question



one might have expected him to say so. I can, however, find no record of any such statement. On the other hand, if he remained opposed to it but was bound by a decision of a majority; one might have expected him to say nothing publicly but to keep his opposition within the organs of the Party.

Thus, the existence of the "cult of personality", together with the democratic centralism of the Party, enabled it to be implied that Stalin supported the policy of outrageously excessive differentials -- indeed, taking into account his expressed opposition to equalitarianism in wages, that he was its initiator.

#### The Situation in the Communist International

Let us look now at the hypothesis in relation to the Communist International.

The typical picture presented of the Comintern is that it was an instrument "controlled by Stalin", and that its policies veered from right to left more or less in accordance with the state of Stalin's digestion.

But this picture cannot be reconciled with the known facts.

At the 4th. Congress of the CI in 1922, for example, Lenin's health was already so poor that the leading role at the congress was played by Trotsky. It was this congress which imposed on the CI the revisionist line of working for the formation of so-called "workers' governments" -- composed of Ministers drawn from the Communist Party, the social-democratic party and the mass trade unions -- which would proceed to arm the workers, destroy the power of capital, establish workers' control of production and transform the capitalist state into a workers' state.

At the 5th. Congress of the CI in 1924, Stalin intervened in Comintern affairs for the first time, and it was largely on his initiative that the revisionist line of the previous congress -- that of fostering the illusion of a parliamentary road to socialism -- was repudiated in favour of the correct Marxist-Leninist line of working to mobilise the workers for the revolutionary smashing of the capitalist state.

For the next four years Stalin certainly playing a leading role in the conduct of the Comintern, and his "Works" of this period are filled with speeches on Comintern affairs. But the 6th. Congress of the CI in 1928 adopted a political line on a number of important questions to which Stalin had expressed strong opposition, and over the next few years the CI adopted an increasingly "leftist" course which brought increasing harm to the international movement -- especially in Germany, where the line imposed by the CI on the Communist Party of Germany effectively disrupted the key task of building a united front against the growing menace of fascism. But now, after 1928, we find no more speeches by Stalin on Comintern affairs; Stalin was not elected to the leading body of the Comintern, its Political Secretariat. Control of the CI had passed to a group of concealed revisionists, headed by Dmitri Manuilsky and Georgi Dimitroff.

In other words, it was after Stalin had been excluded from effective influence in the Comintern that this body imposed on the Communist Parties the "leftist" tactics of the 1929-34 period -- that Communists should leave the mass trade unions in order to form separate little "red" trade unions, that there was no essential difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism, that in Germany the prime enemy of the working class was not fascism but social-democracy -- tactics which played an important role in the victory of fascism in Germany.



And it was under the leadership of the revisionists that the 7th. Congress of the CI in 1935 returned to the right revisionism adopted on Trotsky's initiative in 1922 -- the line that, through "parliamentary democracy", Popular Front governments could be elected which could make revolutionary inroads into the power of capital, establish workers' control of production and transform the state into a workers' state.

It is, of course, possible to hold that by this time Stalin had abandoned Marxist-Leninist principles. But it could only have been of benefit to the proponents of the revisionist line of the 7th. (and last) congress of the CI to have had Stalin's public endorsement of this line. The fact that such endorsement never came thus provides strong circumstantial evidence of Stalin's personal opposition to it.

#### The Open Opposition within the CPSU

Let us now return to the Soviet Union itself.

Both Lenin and Stalin consistently emphasised that the class struggle continues after the working class has established its political power and proceeded to construct a socialist society. The revisionists are fond of criticising Stalin for "self-contradiction" in saying on the one hand that this was so, and on the other hand that the capitalist class had been abolished.

But when the principal means of production have been socialised, the capitalist class, the class of owners of means of production who exploit the working people, has been abolished. The members of this ex-class, however, continue, for the most part, to exist; when their savings are exhausted, they may be compelled to work, to become members of the working class. But they do not necessarily thereby acquire the outlook of the working class. They yearn to recover the property and status they enjoyed under the former system, and they naturally get together and plot how they can recover the things of which they have been "robbed" -- believing that they are doing so, not from motives of greed and selfishness, but in the interests of "freedom", "democracy" and "civilisation".

Nor does this political opposition cease when the original expropriated capitalists die. They may pass their outlook to their children, and to their children -- teaching them to long for, and work for, the restoration of the "good old days" when the family had a mansion and servants.

In the early years of Soviet rule this counter-revolutionary political opposition took the form of armed civil war, in which the participants were assisted by foreign armies of intervention from most of the capitalist world. It also took the form of political opposition on the part of pro-capitalist political parties -- the Kadets, the Mensheviks, and so on -- until these parties were suppressed for supporting counter-revolution against the Soviet power.

When, for these reasons, the Communist Party became the only legal political party, the political opposition to Soviet rule still took an open form, carried out by opposition factions within the Communist Party. But within the Party this political opposition naturally took on a different form to that of the anti-Bolshevik parties: this opposition professed themselves to be "socialists" and "Marxists" -- claiming, indeed, to be better Marxists than Lenin or Stalin. But the political line which they put forward in opposition to that of Lenin and Stalin was, in each successive case, one which, had it been put into effect, would have disrupted the building of socialism.



Of course, this factional opposition within the Russian Communist Party was not carried out by ex-capitalists themselves -- these being for the most part excluded from Party membership. But within every Marxist-Leninist Party there are, in addition to the mass of members with a working class outlook, a number who have brought into the party and retain a petty-bourgeois outlook -- an outlook, that is, which is basically a bourgeois outlook. There will also inevitably be a small number of undercover agents who have entered the Party with the conscious aim of disrupting it: the Party members with a petty-bourgeois outlook provide the soil on which these agents work.

Factional struggles within a Marxist-Leninist Party thus reflect, at bottom, a class struggle between the working class and the capitalist (or ex-capitalist) class,

A key point in the line of the opposition within the CPSU in the 1920s, for example, was that it was impossible to construct a socialist society within a single country, so that the Soviet government should fulfil its "international revolutionary duty" by sending the Red Army into Western Europe to "assist" the workers there to overthrow capitalism.

It was Stalin who led the attack upon this criminal policy -- which, had it been put into effect, could only have led to the destruction of working class power in Soviet Russia -- and secured its rejection by an overwhelming majority of the Party.

#### "A Conspiratorial and Terrorist Organisation"

This defeat, and the expulsion of the main opposition leader Leon Trotsky from the Soviet Union, forced the remaining members of the opposition to the view that open political opposition to the policies of the leadership around Stalin was unlikely to be successful in the near future. They therefore changed their tactics. They ceased openly to oppose, they condemned their former mistakes, they promised to cease all factional activity. For the first time since its foundation there appeared to be political unanimity within the Communist Party.

Under its new tactics the opposition worked to get its members into leading, influential positions in the Party and state apparatus, and to eliminate by methods of terrorism those Party members they considered to be irreconcilable opponents of the revisionist political line they wished to pursue. The political opposition became, as Stalin expressed it, "a conspiratorial and terrorist organisation".

In any state the security police form an important part of the state apparatus. A key facet of the plans of the opposition conspiracy was, therefore, to gain control of the security police.

In 1934 the head of the Soviet security police, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, died, and was replaced by his former deputy, Henrikh Yagoda. At his trial for treason in 1938 Yagoda admitted having been a member of the underground conspiracy and of having arranged for the murder of Menzhinsky, which was made to appear as from natural causes.

For the next four years the NKVD was in the hands of the opposition, who at first used it mainly to protect the members of the opposition conspiracy. Meanwhile, the latter were engaged on an extensive campaign of the assassination of Party and state leaders regarded as their irreconcilable opponents. The principal method selected for these murders was to utilise doctors in attendance on those leaders -- medical men who were either already members of the opposition conspiracy or who could be pressurised or blackmailed into serving it. A leader fell ill; the doctor was called in; the wrong treatment was given; the patient died; and the doctor signed the death certificate



to the effect that death was due to natural causes. The opposition leaders wrote heart-broken, effusive obituaries for the press.

Among the prominent figures removed in this way (apart from Menzhinsky) were Valerian Kuibyshev (Chairman of the Supreme Council Economy and a member of the Political Bureau of the Party) and the writer Maxim Gorky.

Stalin -- now in a minority on the Political Bureau -- replied by using his limited powers as General Secretary of the Party to reorganise his personal bodyguard into an intelligence service, headed by Aleksander Poskrebyshev, under his control.

Then, in December 1934, Sergei Kirov (Secretary of the Party in Leningrad and a member of the Party's Political Bureau) was shot by one Leonid Nicolayev, an associate of the leading opposition members Grigori Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, (remembered for having revealed the planned date of the October Revolution to the capitalist press). The NKVD, headed by Yagoda, arrested a number of aristocrats for alleged conspiracy in Kirov's murder.

Stalin's intelligence service, however, investigated the murder independently, under Stalin's personal supervision. It discovered Nicolayev's membership of the opposition circle in Leningrad headed by Zinoviev and Kamenev; it discovered that Nicolayev had been arrested by the NKVD a few days before the murder with a revolver in his possession, together with a map of the route used by Kirov used to travel to and from his office, and had been released. As a result of the report made by the General Secretary's intelligence service, the NKVD was forced to arrest the local NKVD head, together with Zinoviev and Kamenev. The latter were found guilty of having fostered an atmosphere which had encouraged Nicolayev to carry out the assassination, and were sentenced to a short term of imprisonment.

However, Stalin's intelligence service continued its investigations into Kirov's murder, and discovered that Zinoviev and Kamenev had not merely been "morally responsible" for it, but had participated directly in its planning. As a result, they were retried on the more serious charge, admitted their guilt and were sentenced to death.

In 1935-6 Stalin made a number of criticisms of the "lack of effectiveness" of the state security police. In consequence Yagoda was eventually (in September 1936) dismissed as head of the NKVD, to be replaced by his deputy Nikolai Yezhov -- who, it later transpired, was also a member of the opposition conspiracy.

Under Yezhov, during 1937 and 1938, the NKVD -- taking Stalin's criticism into account -- was extremely "active". While continuing to cover up genuine conspirators, it proceeded to arrest and imprison large numbers of perfectly honest Communists on trumped-up charges.

### The Trials

In 1937 and 1938 Stalin's own intelligence service continued its independent investigations and presented to the NKVD incontrovertible evidence of treason in relation to a number of leading members of the opposition conspiracy -- including Karl Radek, Yuri Pyatakov, Henrikh Yagoda (the former head of the NKVD) and a number of Red Army senior officers, including Chief of Staff Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky -- forcing the NKVD to arrest them and put them on trial.

The civilian defendants were tried publicly, admitted their guilt and were sentenced either to death or to long terms of imprisonment.

The conspirators in charge of the NKVD, while forced by circumstances beyond their control to bring the defendants to trial, assisted in enabling some doubt to be thrown on the authenticity of the tri-



als by permitting the defendants to make, unchallenged by the prosecution, one or two minor errors in their testimony which elementary checking could easily have uncovered. For example, Eduard Holtzmann (one of the defendants in the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial of August 1936) admitted to a conspiratorial meeting with Trotsky's son, Lev Sedov, but placed it at the "Hotel Bristol, Copenhagen". From his exile Trotsky was able to point out that the Hotel Bristol had been demolished many years before the alleged meeting, thus suggesting that the entire trial could be dismissed as a "frame-up".

Now, of course, evidence can be fabricated, witnesses can commit perjury, false charges and frame-ups are by no means unknown.

A feature of these public trials was, however, that the defendants confessed to all the charges of treasonable conspiracy, including espionage in cooperation with the German and Japanese intelligence services. It is, above all, these confessions which make it difficult to accept Trotsky's claim that the defendants were "good Communists" who had been "framed".

Let us look for a moment at the theories which have been put forward to account for this difficulty.

Firstly, torture. Now it is certainly possible to force some honest Communists to sign false confessions of treason by means of torture. But the opportunity to expose this comes in open court. Not one of the many defendants did so -- indeed, those who were explicitly asked if they had been placed under pressure while awaiting trial, answered in the negative.

Secondly, drugs. But there is no drug known to medical science which can make people confess to completely false charges and, at the same time, behave perfectly normally in other respects -- even to the extent of arguing with the prosecutor.

Thirdly, the promise of a reprieve if they falsely confessed. This might hold water in relation to the first of these trials. But, after Zinoviev and Kamenev had been executed, it could hardly apply to the later trials.

Fourthly, loyalty to Stalin. Considering that almost all the defendants had been openly campaigning against Stalin for many years, this is the most incredible theory of all.

In April 1937 the Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky held a "Commission of Inquiry" into the Soviet trials in Mexico, where Trotsky was then living. Asked why, if they were innocent, honest veteran revolutionaries should not have taken advantage of the open court proceedings to proclaim their innocence, Trotsky could only reply: "I am not obliged to answer these questions".

It is significant that the great majority of experienced journalists, lawyers and diplomats who attended the trials had no doubts about the authenticity of the proceedings and the guilt of the accused. For example, Joseph Davies, himself a lawyer before his appointment as US Ambassador to Moscow, wrote:

"All the fundamental weaknesses and vices of human nature -- personal ambitions at their worst -- are shown up in the proceedings. They disclose the outline of a plot which came very near to being successful in bringing about the overthrow of this government. . .



It is my opinion, so far as the political defendants are concerned, sufficient crimes under Soviet law . . . were established . . . beyond a reasonable doubt to justify the verdict of treason. . . . The opinion of those diplomats who attended the trial most regularly was general that the case had established the fact that there was a formidable political opposition and an exceedingly serious plot, which explained to the diplomats many of the hitherto unexplained developments of the last six months in the Soviet Union".

(J. E. Davies: "Mission to Moscow", Volume 1; London; 1942; p. 177, 178-9).

Because of the military character of the evidence, Tukhachevsky and the other prominent generals were tried by court martial in camera. In recent years, therefore, allegations of a "miscarriage of justice" have tended to focus on this trial. It is admitted that both the British and Czechoslovak intelligence services sent earnings to Moscow about the treasonable activity in relation to Nazi Germany on the part of Tukhachevsky, but this is "explained" by the theory that he was in fact loyal to the Soviet state and the victim of a "frame-up" engineered by the German intelligence service in order to weaken the military strength of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately for this theory, there is ample evidence that in his trips abroad Tukhachevsky made no secret of his pro-Nazi sympathies. For example, the French journalist Geneviève Tabouis wrote in her book "They Called Me Cassandra":

"I was to meet Tukhachevsky for the last time on the day after the funeral of King George V. At a dinner in the Soviet Embassy, the Russian general had been very conversational. . . . He had just returned from a trip to Germany and was heaping glowing praise upon the Nazis. Seated at my right, he said over and over again . . . 'They are already invincible, Madame Tabouis!' . . .

I was not the only one that evening who was alarmed at the display of enthusiasm".

To sum up, no other explanation of the known facts concerning the Soviet trials of 1936-38 has been found except that the defendants at these trials were guilty as charged. What is now clear, however, is that only the more obvious of the leading conspirators were detected and eliminated; those in the main who had had a previous history of open political opposition. Undoubtedly there was a pre-arranged agreement that any members of the conspiracy who were arrested should strive to protect their undetected partners by admitting to just so much as the authorities had discovered and no more. Thus, at their first trial Zinoviev and Kamenev admitted that their speeches could have created an atmosphere which encouraged the assassination of Kirov, and they expressed great regret at this. Only at their second trial, after further evidence had been uncovered, did they admit complicity in the crime.

#### The Role of Beria

During 1937 and 1938, as the record shows, Stalin continued to criticise the NKVD, alleging that it was not only protecting genuine traitors but was criminally arresting numerous honest comrades. It was as a result of Stalin's personal initiative that, in December 1938, Yezhov was dismissed as Chairman of the NKVD and replaced by an old colleague of Stalin's, Lavrenti Beria.

By the revisionists who became the unchallenged leaders of the CPSU after Stalin's death, Beria is regarded as an "arch-criminal" second only to Stalin in his abuse of power as head of the state security police.



However, during the whole period in which Beria held the post of Chairman of the NKVD -- from December 1938 until January 1946 -- there was not one case of any prominent person being arrested by the security police. In the light of later events, one may say that there ought to have been. But in fact, under Beria, until the outbreak of war, the NKVD was busy reinvestigating the case of every prisoner arrested under Yagoda and Yezhov. As a result (as the correspondents of British newspapers testified at the time), thousands of political prisoners were cleared and released to return to their homes.

The truth is indeed very different from the picture of Beria presented by Khrushchov in his secret speech to the 20th. Congress of the CPSU. If, however, one recognises the post-Stalin leaders of the CPSU as the undetected elements of a great anti-socialist conspiracy, their hatred of Beria -- who assisted Stalin in holding up the plans of this conspiracy -- their hatred for both becomes explicable.

For, while the building up of the "cult of personality" around Stalin had great advantages for the revisionists, it also had two serious disadvantages.

First of all, so long as Stalin was alive and politically active, it effectively prevented them, even though they held a majority in the leading organs of the CPSU, from taking any measures which clearly undermined the foundations of socialist society, which clearly restored any of the features of a capitalist society. It prevented them from doing so because a party which took such measures would then be revealed as no longer a Marxist-Leninist Party, in which case a Marxist-Leninist would no longer feel bound by the discipline of democratic centralism. The result of the "cult of personality" would then be to add great weight to a denunciation of the revisionist majority by the Marxist-Leninist minority, headed by Stalin, and assist any appeal which that minority might make to the Soviet working people for the reconstitution of the party on Marxist-Leninist lines in order to save the socialist society from destruction.

In this connection, it is significant that the first clear measure undermining the leading role of the working class in Soviet society -- the handing over of the State Machine and Tractor Stations to the collective farms, the campaign for which was denounced by Stalin in his "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR" in 1952 -- was adopted only after Stalin's remaining Marxist-Leninist colleagues -- Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich and Lavrenti Beria -- had been removed from any position of influence (or, in the case of Beria, shot).

Secondly, the fact that Stalin, as General Secretary of the party, had been able to surround himself with a small but efficient apparatus of force, meant that he could be removed only through some kind of military coup. And the "cult of personality" which the revisionists had built up around Stalin would be likely to give such a coup a clear counter-revolutionary character. Such a coup would be likely to receive the support of the Soviet working people only in some extraordinary conditions of crisis in which the mass of the working people had become disgusted and angry with Stalin.

There is ample evidence to show that the plans of the opposition conspiracy in relation to the coming war with Germany were framed with the aim of creating precisely such circumstances.

At the trial of Nikolai Bukharin and others in March 1938, the defendants admitted that they had reached agreement with the intelligence service of Nazi Germany that, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the revisionists in the Soviet High Command would open the



front to the German armies, allowing them to advance rapidly to the gates of Moscow. The revisionists would then stage their military coup, backed by the revisionist majority in the leading organs of the CPSU. Stalin and other leading Marxist-Leninists would be arrested on charges of having sabotaged the defence of the Soviet Union -- for, according to the "cult of personality", Stalin was personally in control of everything. The new Soviet government would then make peace with Germany, which would be rewarded by the cession of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, using Lenin's tactics of 1918 in relation to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as the "Leninist" precedent for this. The new Soviet government would then, in what remained of the Soviet Union, "expose" the "crimes" of the Stalin era and introduce "reforms" which, while retaining the flag of "socialism", would transform the socialist economy into a form of state capitalism.

Such, according to the defendants at the 1938 trial, was the plan. Let us compare this with what actually happened in 1941.

#### 1941

During the spring of that year, the German High Command moved millions of troops to the Soviet frontier. Soviet intelligence agents reported accurately to Moscow the details of Hitler's projected "Operation Barbarossa", even down to the exact date on which the invasion was to be launched. The British and other foreign intelligence services sent almost identical warnings. Yet the Soviet government took not the slightest step to mobilise the Soviet armed forces, not even to put the frontier forces in a state of alert.

As a result, when the German mass invasion began on June 22nd., 1941, the Soviet soldiers were taken completely by surprise and were overwhelmed. The greater part of the Soviet air force was destroyed on the ground. Within a matter of days, the German army -- equipped with the industry of the whole of Western Europe -- was indeed hammering at the gates of Moscow.

Such a course of events cannot be explained on the basis of "inefficiency". They can be explained only on the basis of treason. They fit in perfectly with the plans of the conspirators revealed at the March 1938 trial.

This analysis explains one of the great mysteries of the Second World War -- that the German armed forces, which were undoubtedly extremely efficient, went into the Soviet Union without winter clothing, without anti-freeze in its vehicles, both of which contributed to the military disaster suffered by those forces in the winter of 1941-2. In purely military terms, no corporal could have expected that Germany would be able to conquer and occupy the vast territory of the Soviet Union before winter fell. But, of course, if everything had been arranged for a military coup to take place in Moscow within a few weeks of the outbreak of war, to be followed by an armistice and a peace treaty, then the whole picture makes sense for the first time.

The revisionists who now dominate the Soviet Party and State do blame Stalin for the debacle suffered by the Soviet army in June 1941 on Stalin. According to the official history of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin was so "politically naive" that he rejected all intelligence reports concerning German plans on the grounds that the Nazis could be "trusted" to keep the non-aggression pact they had signed with the Soviet Union in the spring of 1939.

But this too cannot be made to fit the known facts.

Whatever Stalin may have been, he was hardly "politically naive". In 1931 Stalin warned the Soviet people that they had ten years to



build up Soviet heavy industry if the Soviet Union was not be destroyed in inevitable war. At the 18th. Congress of the CPSU in 1939 he correctly analysed the whole "appeasement policy" of the Western European imperialist powers as designed to encourage a German attack upon the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1941 he made a number of speeches, mainly to officers of the Red Army, warning of the imminence of a German invasion. At a meeting of graduates of military academies on May 5th., 1941, for example, he declared that a German attack was "almost inevitable" by 1942, with the most dangerous period falling "from now till August 1941".

If this analysis is correct -- and I believe it to be the only one which fits the known facts -- one must ask why the plans of the conspirators who were responsible for the terrible defeats suffered by the Soviet Union in 1941 did not proceed to their intended conclusion -- to a military coup. The answer is, I suggest, to be found in the fact, to which all observers in the Soviet Union at the time testify unanimously, that the shock of the defeats did not produce in the Soviet working people a desire to find an internal scapegoat for these defeats, a desire for peace at any price. They produced disgust, anger and hatred certainly -- but directed not at Stalin, but at the German invasion forces. This feeling was so universal and so intense that any group of politicians or officers who had attempted to arrest Stalin and sue for peace would literally have been torn to pieces.

During the first fortnight of the war, Stalin made no public statement, no public appearance. In his secret speech of 1956, Khrushchov alleged that this was because Stalin was "demoralised" by the immensity of the military disaster. But there is nothing in Stalin's behaviour before or after this period which supports the view that Stalin was demoralised by setbacks, however serious.

But there is another possible explanation for Stalin's seclusion from public life during those first two weeks of the war, one which fits the known facts far better than the theory of Stalin's "demoralisation". This explanation is that Stalin had judged the situation very correctly, that he was, so to speak "on strike", conscious that the revisionist majority would, in the situation they had created, be forced by the undamnable flood of public pressure to seek the cooperation of himself and the other Marxist-Leninists, and determined that the price of that cooperation would be the handing over of the conduct of the war from the revisionist majority in the leadership of the CPSU to a body dominated by Marxist-Leninists.

There is, therefore, no reason to disbelieve Khrushchov's statement in his secret speech of 1956 that Stalin came out of his seclusion as the result of a deputation to him from the leadership of the CPSU.

At any rate, on June 30th., 1941 all power in the Soviet Union was transferred for the duration of the war to a small extraordinary body, the State Defence Committee, headed by Stalin and with a majority composed of Stalin's trusted Marxist-Leninist colleagues -- Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich and Lavrenti Beria. Shortly afterwards, Stalin was made Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet armed forces.

On July 3rd., 1941 -- twelve days after the outbreak of war -- Stalin spoke to the country on the radio -- a speech admitted by his political opponents to have been the finest speech of his life. He outlined the serious military situation; he described the "scorched earth" policy, whereby in the event of retreat, every building, every crumb of food, must be destroyed to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy; he gave instructions on the formation of guerilla units behind the enemy's lines, on the need to begin the colossal task of moving every war factory in the threatened west brick by brick to the safety of Siberia. And, without in the least minimising the sacrifices and sufferings which would be inevitable, he maintained



with quiet confidence: "Victory will be ours!".

Konstantin Simonov's novel "The Living and the Dead" was written in 1958, when the Soviet intelligentsia were virtually unanimous in their attacks upon Stalin. It is, therefore, interesting to note the passage in which he describes the effect of Stalin's speech in a field hospital near the front:

"Stalin spoke in a toneless, slow voice, with a strong Georgian accent.

There was a discrepancy between that even voice and the tragic situation of which he spoke; and in this discrepancy there was strength. People were not surprised. It was what they were expecting from Stalin.

They loved him in different ways, . . . and some did not like him at all. But nobody doubted his courage and his iron will. And now was the time when these two qualities were needed more than anything else in the man who stood at the head of a country at war.

Stalin did not describe the situation as tragic; such a word would have been hard to imagine as coming from him. . . . The truth he told was a bitter truth, but at last it was uttered, and people felt that they stood more firmly on the ground.

And the very fact that Stalin should have . . . spoken in his almost usual way about the great but not insuperable difficulties that would have to be overcome -- this, too, suggested not weakness, but great strength".

Since it is incontestable that, during the war of 1941-45, Stalin and a group of his closest colleagues were called upon to control the prosecution of the war, let us look at some of the criticisms that have been levelled at him in connection with that war.

In his secret speech to the 20th. Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchov alleged that Stalin directed the military operations of the Soviet Army on "a globe". Such statements must be dismissed as sheer fantasy, for all the foreign military experts associated with Stalin during the war have testified to his firm grasp of military affairs in detail.

Khrushchov's only other reference to Stalin's military direction is a reference to a particular battle which the Soviet army lost. The fact that the Soviet army defeated the German army in the war is placed to the credit of "the leadership of the Party". But you cannot have it both ways. If Stalin was in effective command of military operations, then just as an individual lost battle must be debited against him, so victory in the war must be placed to his credit.

In fact, Stalin had already proved his ability to master military strategy during the Civil War of 1919-20, when he operated as a "trouble-shooter" on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party on one front after another. He developed this mastery further in the war of 1941-5, making a considerable contribution to military science. He detailed the military strategy evolved in this war in 1947: When one is faced with an enemy who is superior in strength and one has a large space in which to fight, the correct strategy is to carry out a strategic retreat, destroying in this retreat everything which could be of service to the enemy and which cannot be carried away, decimating the enemy forces as one retreats, lengthening his lines of communication while shortening one's own, making the enemy fight in unfamiliar hostile country while one fights in friendly, familiar territory. Then, when one's own forces have been strengthened and the enemy forces weakened to the point where the enemy is now inferior in strength, one must wage a determined counter-offensive to encircle and destroy the forces of the enemy.

It was this strategy which was effective in bringing about the victory of the Soviet Union in the war.



Again, Stalin is sometimes criticised, as the leader of a socialist state at war with an imperialist state, in having placed the prime emphasis on patriotic slogans rather than on revolutionary socialist slogans, and of "pandering to" Russian national sentiment.

But Stalin and the Soviet Marxist-Leninists were faced with the task of waging a war in which it was necessary to mobilise the entire Russian people -- the other principal nations of the USSR, the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, being already under German occupation when Stalin took over. The mass of the Russian people consisted not of revolutionary-conscious workers, but of petty-bourgeois peasants who, for the most part were still far from being revolutionary socialists. They were, however, intensely patriotic; they resented angrily the Nazi propaganda which sneered at the "racial inferiority" of the Russian nation. In the circumstances of 1941-5, when there had already been a degree of revisionist degeneration in the Soviet Union, I suggest that this political line was correct.

Another criticism made of Soviet leadership during the war is that it reached agreement with its imperialist allies -- Britain and the USA -- on the division of Europe into military spheres of influence. But allies are very desirable in a war, and if one is engaged in a war with allies and is compelled to pursue the enemy outside one's own invaded frontiers, it is clearly essential, for military reasons, to agree on the respective spheres in which each respective army shall operate.

A final criticism is that in the areas of Eastern Europe which came under Soviet military occupation, governments were approved which included conservative elements. But Marxist-Leninists have always held that socialism cannot be exported from one country to another by force, that socialism in a particular country can be brought about only by the working class of that country when it is politically ready to do so. Thus, as early as November 1941 Stalin was saying.

"We have not, and cannot have, any such war aims as that of imposing our will and our regime upon the Slavonic or other enslaved nations of Europe. . . . Our aim is to help these nations in their struggle for liberation against Hitler's tyranny and then to leave it to them quite freely to organise their life on their lands as they think fit. No interference in the internal life of other nations!"

(J. V. Stalin: Speech of November 6th., 1941).

This course was pursued in the countries that came under the occupation of the Soviet army. National governments including representatives of all political parties which had not collaborated with the Nazis were formed, but effective state power lay in the hands of the Soviet state through the Soviet army. Without any effective state machinery of force of their own, the conservative politicians were relatively quickly exposed and removed by the progressive elements within these countries, which -- on the initiative of their own peoples -- became People's Democracies with the working class playing, for a time, the leading political role.

#### The Post-War Period

With the end of the war, the State Defence Committee was dissolved, and effective leadership of the Soviet state reverted to the leadership of the CPSU, still dominated by concealed revisionists.

The first Party Congress after the war, the 19th. in 1952, reflected this situation in the odd, unprecedented feature that the Report of the Central Committee was presented to the congress, not by the General Secretary, Stalin, but by Georgi Malenkov.



The effective leadership of the CPSU, in fact, endeavoured to confine Stalin's activities to the writing of articles such as "Problems of Linguistics", published in 1950, which, although an important contribution to the scientific study of language and its development, was not directly relevant to the principal contemporary problems of Soviet society.

Later, Stalin was allotted another task which appeared "harmless" -- to write a criticism of a projected textbook on economics. But when this appeared in 1952, in the form of "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR", it took the form of an exposure of many of the revisionist ideas which were already being openly put forward among Soviet intellectuals.

But in the international field, Stalin and the Marxist-Leninist minority were able to do much more in the struggle against revisionism. There is ample evidence to show that it was on Stalin's initiative that in 1947 the Communist Information Bureau, the Cominform, was founded as an important step towards the re-establishment of the Communist International, disbanded by the revisionists in 1943.

To those who wish to believe that Stalin "must have" supported the revisionist line of the Comintern in its final years -- the line of parliamentary transition to socialism adopted in essentials at the 7th. Congress of the CI in 1935 -- it is of relevance to note that the principal leaders of the Comintern in those years, Dmitri Manuilsky and Georgi Dimitrov, were not invited to play any part in the new international organisation, the leading role being taken by a close Marxist-Leninist colleague of Stalin's, Andrei Zhdanov. Again, it is significant that the first acts of the Cominform were to publish strong criticisms of the revisionist lines of such Communist Parties as those of France, Italy, Japan and Yugoslavia -- the latter party being expelled from the Cominform in 1948 as a revisionist party which was bent on restoring capitalism in Yugoslavia.

It was Zhdanov too who, taking advantage of the socialist facade which the revisionist majority were compelled to present, led in this period the socialist cultural revolution in the Soviet Union against the bourgeois trends in the art and culture fostered by the revisionists. Zhdanov's speeches and writings on cultural questions, on socialist realism, developed considerably the Marxist-Leninist outlook in this important field.

Meanwhile, Stalin's own intelligence service continued its investigations into the activities of the elements which dominated the leadership of the CPSU. Khrushchov's allegations of Stalin's "suspiciousness" are certainly not without foundation. It was as a result of these investigations that at the end of 1952 a number of doctors working in the Kremlin were arrested and charged with having murdered over the past few years a number of Party leaders, including Zhdanov, by the same methods as those which had been used in the 1930s. A commission of the Soviet Medical Association investigated the "treatment" given to these leaders and reported that, in the circumstances of each case, it amounted to wilful murder. Foreign press correspondents were virtually unanimous that leading Soviet personalities were involved in the charges.

But before the doctors could be brought to trial, Stalin died suddenly -- and conveniently for these "leading personalities".



Within a few days, the General Secretary's Personal Secretariat had been dissolved and its records impounded, while its former head -- Poskrebyshev -- disappeared. Then came an announcement in "Pravda" that the arrested doctors were "innocent" and had been released. By July Beria had also disappeared -- being tried, according to an indiscreet statement by Khrushchov, posthumously.

#### Conclusion

Such, in brief outline, is the role of Stalin as our research to date paints it. It is the role of an outstanding Marxist-Leninist, who fought consistently against revisionism throughout his life, although objective world conditions were to render this struggle ultimately unsuccessful.