

CORRESPONDENCE — every two weeks

VOL III, NO. 12

MARCH 19, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

WHY DID STALIN BEHAVE THAT WAY?

The American people have refused to become excited about the death of Stalin. The press' discovery of the "dignity" of Stalin has the same ring in their ears as did its discovery of the "leadership" of Philip Murray when he died. One steel worker was heard to say, "Whose loss is it anyway? He was no leader to me".

Two questions stand out, 1) why does any individual behave that way? Why is such brutality necessary? 2) What did this man have in him which enabled him to become the executor of impulses from an alien class, the one he actually helped to overthrow? We will deal with the second question first because we are on familiar grounds. No knowledge of Russian is needed to understand the social type. He is all around us, and not only in management, but within the labor movement from the lowest committeeman to the top bureaucrat.

Stalin's outstanding trait was a bureaucratic attitude to the masses. He spoke of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat, but his conception of the party was that the leaders were to tell the ranks what to do and the party was to order the masses about.

Along with this bureaucratic attitude to the Russian masses went a Great Russian chauvinism towards the many nationalities which constitute the Soviet Union. Lenin's statement "Scratch a Bolshevik and you will find a Great Russian chauvinist" remains the most precise commentary on this Georgian who was as callous towards the aspirations of his native Georgia as had been the Tsarist officials.

Along with this bureaucratic attitude and chauvinism went an outright disloyalty to Lenin. But what first appeared as personal disloyalty to the founder of Bolshevism turned out to be class disloyalty to the workers. What first appeared as intrigues against other party leaders turned out to be thorough futility to the millions of Russian toilers. Once total planning became the mode of operation of the Russian economy, it found its perfect embodiment in this totalitarian personality.

In 1924 Lenin on his deathbed added a postscript to his Will asking for the removal of Stalin because he had accumulated too much power in his hands and because he was "rude and disloyal". Nevertheless in 1924 Lenin steered clear of a straight class analysis. He said, that if it was a question of a class difference, then of course the dictatorship of the proletariat would collapse. But at that time he did not think the workers state was in that danger.

Today by no psychological tricks can one escape the need to explain the objective roots of the impulses which moved this dictator. Of course

-- more --

SPECIAL FEATURE

he was ruthless. Of course he was a master planner of murder. Nevertheless it was not because he was by nature a dictator that he arose. This social type arose in history when the new administrators supplanted the old private capitalist type of managers.

The New Organizers

On a world scale its beginning only became visible after the crash of 1929. In Germany it took the form of Hitlerism. But world capitalism had broken at its weakest link in Russia during World War I. In Russia a new type of state arose. Millions upon millions set up their own committees to rule themselves. The old had been overthrown from top to bottom, inside and out. The new had just begun to appear. The masses were attempting to run both production and the state. But the Russian workers were a tiny minority in a sea of peasants. The economy was in chaos as a result of war, revolution and the attacks by world capital on all fronts.

At the last Congress at which Lenin appeared he warned, "Well, we have lived through a year, the state is in our hands; but has it operated the New Economic Policy in our way during the past year? No. But we refuse to admit this. It did not operate in our way. How did it operate? The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like an automobile that is going, not in the direction of the man who is driving it, but in the direction desired by someone else, as if it were being driven by some secret illegal hand, God knows whose, perhaps that of a profiteer, or of a private capitalist, or of both. Be that as it may, the car is not going in the direction the man at the wheel imagines. This is the main thing that must be remembered in regard to state capitalism."

Lenin warned that it was harder to build the new than to overthrow the old. He warned that unless the administrative attitude, the "passion for bossing" was rooted out of the Communists, there was no telling what would become of the new state. But it was all in vain. Once the Russian workers did not take over production and run it themselves, the bureaucracy rushed in with its Plan. The Russian name for it is Stalinism. But following the crash of 1929, we have witnessed the rise of this type of bureaucrat, organizer, administrator throughout the world.

The Plan Chose Stalin

But one may ask, didn't Stalin oppose the Plan at first? Yes, it was Trotsky who first proposed the plan and Stalin opposed him. The only ones confused by this are the Trotskyists. When capital needed total planning to discipline and enslave the workers, then Stalin was the one who carried out the Plan.

This bureaucrat wanted factories larger than anywhere in the world, bridges longer, steel sufficient to "catch up with and surpass" the capitalist lands. If to achieve these goals, the Russian workers had to work harder and eat less than anywhere in the world, if it meant that they had not an inch of privacy or a breath of freedom -- that was no signal to stop. Drive harder, make it clear that concentration camps face anyone who opposes the Plan. Human aspirations have no place in the Plan.

-- more --

Five Year Plan followed Five Year Plan and this totally planned economy fashioned itself a ubiquitous bureaucracy to correspond. The industrial managers, who differed from private capitalists only in their greater callousness and energy, recognized in Stalin their master. The state bureaucracy recognized in him their political leader, the military caste their Generalissimo. All the big and little bureaucrats saw in Stalin the perfect embodiment of the bureaucratic-administrator-leader, totalitarian type.

Tears Over Stalin?

The millions in forced labor camps are the true measure of the newer-ending resistance of the Russian workers to the Russian rulers in the state and in the factory. Had the revolt not been so continuous, the terror wouldn't have been so violent. No one wants to put millions in concentration camps.

At the end of World War II a half million Soviet citizens found themselves outside the borders of Russia. The overwhelming majority refused to return. When the British and the Americans, in alliance with Stalin, forced return upon them, there was a mass suicide movement. A quarter of a million succeeded in remaining outside the "socialist fatherland".

But the Russian workers could not escape. It is these millions who day in and day out for two solid decades have never yielded. The terror of the bureaucracy before their revolt is most clearly recorded in the laws:

1) 1929, the year of the First Five Year Plan. The workers production conference was replaced by a Workers Conflict Commission, a production conference of engineers, managers and technical intelligentsia. The Law of Jan. 24, 1929, made the workers responsible for damaged goods.

2) 1935, Stakhanovism or piecework speed-up was made the rule of the land. Rationing was abolished so that no worker was sure of his piece of black bread. Nevertheless even though the Plan specified 15.7 million laborers as its goal, the number had to be increased to 22.6 million to accomplish the goals set. The cause was the workers persistent slowdowns.

3) 1937. By the time the Second Five Year Plan was nearing its end, Russia was shaken by the trials of "Trotskyist-fascist-Bukharinist wreckers". Everybody was accused of sabotage. The workers ran away from the factories to the country in such numbers that in 1938 passports were introduced to chain them to the job, (In 1933 they had been introduced to keep peasants away from the city.) The 18th Party Congress in 1939 announced the birth and consolidation of the "classless intelligentsia". The Constitution gave official status to the technicians, time-study men, organizers, propagandists, secret police and the whole apparatus which exists to fight the revolt.

-- more --

The Moscow Purges of 1937-38 consolidated Stalin's power, but it was formed first and foremost at the point of production.

1940. The worker was forbidden to leave his job. Any infraction of factory discipline, e.g. coming 15 minutes late, was made punishable by "corrective labor", i. e. labor in the factory at 25% reduction in pay. Violation of these laws meant a corrective labor camp in the wilds of Siberia. Teen-agers were taken out of school and given six months to two years "free vocational training" at the end of which they had to work where the state directed for two to four years.

After six months operation of these laws, Pravda, (Dec. 26, 1940) reported that in coal mines especially, truancies were greater than in the previous period. At the 18th Party Conference in February 1941, it was reported that workers were constantly "absenting themselves", particularly after payday, and that fully a third do not accomplish their "norms".

Constant Revolt

1943. In the midst of war the conveyor belt system was introduced. The individual breakneck competition of Stakhanovism was replaced by "socialist emulation" or factory to factory competition. Martial law was introduced in the railroads and has not been repealed to this day.

The post war period was greeted by new purges and a new Plan. Yet the revolt in the Ukraine has assumed the proportions of actual guerrilla warfare. The workers revolt was so widespread that the state had to declare a general amnesty for all labor offenses during the war to get production going at all.

Purges are not due to a state of mind but to a state of production. The crises never cease in Russia because the revolt of the workers is continuous. This is the truth about the Russian workers attitude to their rulers. It is a truth not hard to find. But to find it you must look not at the Kremlin bureaucracy but at the workers in production.

The American press has expanded itself with stories about the Russian workers shedding tears over Stalin's death. The American workers' scepticism about this springs from their own experience with production and with the labor bureaucracy.

Routher was one of the leaders of the CIO in its early days when the workers in fact took over the plants from the capitalists. They would examine what they were told to do and decide whether it was satisfactory or not. Likewise with Stalin in the days when the Russian workers and peasants had thrown out the landlords and capitalists. Now Routher is the chief instrument whereby capital maintains its domination over the American workers. The Kremlin bureaucrats behave as they do for the same reason as the American labor bureaucrats: both of them are products of capitalist production in the epoch of state capitalism.

CORRESPONDENCE ——— every two weeks

VOL. IV. NO. 2

APRIL 16, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

THEN AND NOW 1920 AND 1953

I. The Background

An Historic Event and an
Organizational Incident

One historic event and one organizational incident have taken place in the last few weeks which illuminate the connection between the politics of the world and the practical politics of every workers' organization -- political or trade union.

The historic event was Stalin's death. The remark that was most often heard repeated in the shops both on the East Coast and the West Coast was, "I have just the candidate for Stalin's job -- my foreman". With this remark the workers brought the Russian phenomenon straight home. Stalin, they were saying, wasn't so much a Russian phenomenon as the type of labor bureaucrat they see all around them. It wasn't in fact because he was a world phenomenon that they were concerned with Stalin's personality. On the contrary, the press hullabaloo on that left them completely cold. It needed no ghost come from the grave to tell them that. It was the here, the now, the type that made them recognize the historic event as "nothing special". Far wiser than the politicians, the average worker knew that nothing in this world would change because of the death of one man. What did concern them was the daily, the hourly ordering-about to which they subjected to in the shops. That relationship to foreman, to committee-man, to machine -- that's what they wanted to know about, that is to say, that is what they wanted to change.

The organizational incident, which in its own way illustrates this same connection between the nature of the age we live in and the practical tasks of organized workers, took place among a group of friends in Denver. A report that had been given at our Winter School, dealing with the internal relations in our organization, was up for discussion. The newness of this report is this; it deals with these problems of today from the vantage point of 1920 when Russia, as a newly-formed workers state, faced a crisis in its relations to the trade unions. An impasse had been reached between the local leadership who thought the ranks should begin the discussion and the ranks who said they hadn't read the full report but the discussion should proceed in any case. The result was no one spoke. Finally, the ranks said, "What we really want to talk about is the relationship between the three different layers within our own organization -- the theoretical leadership, the trade unions, and the ranks. Let's organize our own school and discuss these."

Everyone in the group was talking about the relationship between the political party, the trade union, and the masses of Russian workers in

-- more --

Not For Sale Or Circulation

2184

CORRESPONDENCE -- every two weeks

Vol. IV, No. 2 April 16, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

1920, not as if this was something that had occurred in a far-off land some three decades ago, but something that had just taken place and concerned everyone here. No one thought it outlandish that a small workers' organization trying to clarify workers' politics in 1953 should be concerned with a problem that the workers in Russia faced in 1920. Thereby our ranks stepped far beyond anything approached by the leadership of the old radical organizations who thought they need not concern themselves with this problem because they would not face it till after they had gained power.

Our friends also reported that while their shopmates showed indifference to the death of Stalin, they were very much concerned with the conditions of work, the conflict with the foreman, the stifling of their grievances by the committeeman -- in a word, their relations at the point of production. In one shop a porkchopper who tried to bring up the question of Stalin's death -- perhaps because he himself had been a radical once -- said something about "how different our labor leaders were". A rank and filer shouted back at him: "Yes, but would Reuther be any different in Wilson's place?"

The Ex-radical and the Radical

To the ex-radical this worker "didn't understand anything". That is no different than the way this worker appeared to him when he was a radical. All the old radical organizations constantly complain that the workers "don't understand" the intricacies of politics, the complexities of "theory", and, being "backward", they ask impossible questions, just like children. The attitude of these radicals to the ranks in their own party is no different than the one they express to the average worker. It is one of arrogance. "We cannot give you a blueprint of what will happen after we gain power -- a problem we have not yet met", they say, with the thinly-concealed forbearance of parents who have stood all they can possibly stand from their overly inquisitive youngsters. "There will be time enough to see about that after we get rid of the capitalists."

Whatever this type of argumentation did to keep the small parties intact, it most definitely had no wide mass appeal. The average worker did not join these so-called vanguard groupings. He felt he had a right to demand an answer to what was a real problem. For what stood out as big as life was the fact that Stalinist totalitarianism followed upon the heels of workers gaining power in Russia. Was it Russian backwardness or was it a natural consequence of gaining state power? The workers wanted to know, had to know because that is the big question that is gripping them by the throat every time the committeeman asks them not to wildcat but to obey the contract. They want to know; what makes him behave as he does when only yesterday he was a worker like us and acted like we do?

The workers not belonging to any radical organizations are a thousand times more right than these so-called vanguard groupings when they demand an answer to the question now. And in fact, in embryo, these problems that confront us today were posed back in 1920, although the old radicals haven't grasped this yet. That is why our friends are studying a debate that took place some thirty years ago. There is nothing pedantic about that desire "to study". It arises from the fact that there isn't a problem that we face today that wasn't posed then. It is this which explains the sudden interest in the famous trade-union debate that took place in Russia in 1920.

-- more --

2185

II. The Facts

The Railroads and the Military

At the end of the first world war and the civil war that followed it in Russia, railroad transportation was in utter chaos. No modern country can exist without transportation, and here at the birth of a new society, the first workers state in history, the railroads weren't running and the whole transportation system was still plagued with sabotage from the defeated counter-revolutionary forces. Something drastic had to be done. A committee was established called the Cectran -- that is, the Central Executive Committee of Transportation. It was a merger of the railroad workers and water transport workers unions and a non-union man was put at the head of it -- Leon Trotsky, the Commissar of War. He and his Committee were granted extraordinary military powers in order to cope with the disastrous situation. Within a year not only were the railroads running again and on time but the railroad trackage had been much expanded. The country was beginning to breathe again. It was then that the water workers union, which had been merged with the railroad workers and put under this special commission called the Cectran headed by Trotsky, spoke up. They said that they had fully approved the extraordinary military measures needed to restore transportation, but now that the job was done, they demanded "our normal trade union democracy be given back to us". Trotsky reacted violently. He said it wasn't the special commission that had to be abolished. It was the trade union leaders that "had to be shaken up".

That is how the famous trade union debate began. Before it ended, the subjects in dispute ranged far and wide, 1) what is a workers' state? 2) what is the role of trade unions in a workers' state? 3) what is the relationship between workers at the point of production and the political party in such a state? 4) what is meant by an administrative attitude and how is that distinguished from the old propagandist attitude? 5) how is it possible for a Communist to display "a passion for bossing"? 6) what is the relationship between leaders and ranks, the party and the masses? 7) where do we go from here?

Here they had just overthrown the hated Tsarist autocracy and the feeble bourgeois democracy. Yet, already, within the revolutionary party itself, the Bolsheviks, different political tendencies were arising of such a serious nature that it was clear that class attitudes were involved. How could that be since the capitalists had been gotten rid of and the workers held power? As the debate unfolded, every conceivable political tendency unfolded. The three most important ones were those of Lenin, Trotsky, and Shlyapnikov, the head of the Workers Opposition Group.

The Debate Proper; A Preliminary Statement

Lenin rose to the defense of the trade unions. "Taken as a whole," he said, "Trotsky's policy is one of bureaucratically nagging the trade unions." "There is valuable military experience; heroism, zeal, etc.," he continued, "There is the bad experience of the worst elements of the military; bureaucracy and conceit."

-- more --

He criticized the Cectran for its "bureaucratic excesses", for ordering people about instead of spreading the knowledge of what the workers themselves were doing. Then he turned to his co-leader, Trotsky, and said that the trouble with him was that he had approached the problem as an administrator where he should have been a propagandist.

When Trotsky pontificated, "Workers democracy knows no fetishism. It knows only revolutionary expediency," Lenin answered sharply that the workers would be right in saying: "We, the ordinary rank and file, the masses, say that we must renovate, we must correct, we must expel the bureaucrats; but you pitch us a yarn about engaging in production. I do not want to engage in production with such a bureaucratic board of directors, chief committee, etc. but with another kind."

Shlyapnikov opposed both Lenin and Trotsky. Now that there was a workers state he could not grasp the role of the Communist Party -- that is of political leadership -- although he himself was a Bolshevik leader. It was as if all problems had faded away with the conquest of political power. He called for the convocation of a "producers' congress".

Once Again, Trotsky, Shlyapnikov, Lenin;
The Essence of the Debate

In their various ways the three leading positions contain embryonically the problems of today; what is the relationship between these three social formations -- the trade unionists, the politicians, the masses. Posed in terms of relations in a workers state, here is how the three leaders symbolically expressed them:

1) Trotsky contended that since Soviet Russia was a workers state, the workers had nothing to fear from it and hence you could incorporate the trade unions into the state and militarize labor; establish "such a regime under which each worker feels himself to be a soldier of labor who cannot freely dispose of himself; if he is ordered transferred, he must execute that order; if he does not do so, he will be a deserter who should be punished. Who will execute this? The trade union. It will create a new regime. That is the militarization of the working class".

Trotsky's callousness to the dissatisfaction of the workers with the functioning of his special commission, the Cectran, showed itself especially clearly in the attention he concentrated upon the trade union leadership. He said this must be "shaken up". According to him, it was not the extraordinary political commission with its extraordinary military powers which was at the root of the crisis. Rather, it was the trade union leadership which had failed to create a proper "production atmosphere".

2) To Lenin, on the other hand, the bureaucracy, petty tyranny, red tape of the Cectran was as oppressively real as it was to the workers themselves. He begged Trotsky to put away his "intellectual trick words (like) pro-

-- more --

CORRESPONDENCE -- every two weeks

Vol. IV, No. 2 April 16, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

duction atmosphere" and recognize that the workers not only had a right to fight bureaucratism but that that was the only concrete path to the establishment of new social relations, "It is wrong to look only to the elected persons, only to the organizers, the administrators, etc. These after all are only a minority of prominent people. We must look to the rank and file, to the masses."

But there was no way to dissuade Trotsky from his stubborn persistence in defense of the Cectran, his refusal to see that it had been guilty of any "bureaucratic excesses". His drowning himself in abstractions on the workers' state.

3) Interestingly enough, Shlyapnikov too began and ended with the abstraction of a workers' state. Since that was already established, he asked, what is the necessity for the political leadership to hold a primary place? To him it was all a simple matter -- all that was needed in the chaotic conditions of 1920 -- was to turn over industry to the corresponding trade unions. His call for a "producers congress" disregarded at one and the same time the class realities of Russia and its relationship to the capitalist world on the outside.

Lenin was the supreme realist. He asked both Trotsky and Shlyapnikov what was the use of talking about "a" workers state when the reality of the specific Russian Soviet state disclosed that the dictatorship of the proletariat existed in a country where the workers were a tiny minority surrounded by a sea of peasants. To talk of "a producers' congress" -- a term used by Marx and Engels for a classless society -- in the specific circumstances where the defeated counter-revolution was looking for ways to get back into power was to play right into its hands. At this moment in our history -- Lenin turned sharply to Shlyapnikov -- you and your "Workers' Opposition" are the greatest danger to our continued existence. Just look about you, look at the Kronstadt mutiny and see how quickly the White Guards have grabbed on to the anarchistic, syndicalistic talk of "freedom", "freedom from political leadership" and, with guns in their hands, are threatening the new workers state. Under these actual conditions for you to propose a "producers congress" means for you to ask the workers state to commit suicide.

Then Lenin turned to Trotsky and told him he must never forget that Soviet Russia is a workers state, yes, but it is a workers state "with bureaucratic distortions". Every other word on Lenin's lips these days was bureaucracy. The Soviet Union was a workers state with "bureaucratic distortions". Any attempt to plan that did not involve the masses themselves was nothing but "bureaucratic project-hatching". Any one who desired to "shake up the trade union leadership" displayed "a bureaucratic concentration on the leading strata". In fact, any political tendency that did not concentrate the whole weight of the argument on the question of working out a relationship to the masses betrayed "bureaucratic tendencies."

According to Lenin "The whole point is the method of approach to be adopted toward the masses, the method of winning the masses, of contact with the masses". (Our emphasis.)

-- more --

CORRESPONDENCE -- every two weeks

Vol. IV, No. 2 April 16, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

If talking about a "producers congress" as Shlyapnikov had done, could aid no one but the class enemy, Trotsky's kind of talk about production atmosphere" could do nothing but alienate the workers who must be protected from their own state. Lenin insisted that the workers were absolutely right when they demanded the return to ordinary trade union democracy. "We must understand the significance of this slogan in the present political situation when the bureaucracy is confronting the masses in a form they can understand and they have put the question of bureaucracy on the agenda".

That is just the point Trotsky could not grasp.

The Logic of the Trade Union Debate

What is at issue in a theoretical debate is which side expresses which class's political line. The point is that, just as in life, so in thought, there is only one fundamental division in society -- the class division. When a revolutionary begins to deviate theoretically he is expressing fundamental class forces pulling at him. The simple truth is that not only does the man on the production line act one way and the foreman another, an opposite way; the thinking of the two is as wide apart.

Marx was the first to show the relationship of the intellectual representatives of a class to the class it represents. "Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be separated from them as widely as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not go beyond the limits which the latter do not go beyond in life, that they are constantly driven theoretically to the same tasks and solutions to which material interests and social position practically drive the latter. This is in general the relationship of the political and literary representatives of a class to the class that they represent".

Marxists have always been acutely aware of the fact that a theoretical position is not accidental. That is why Lenin tried to correct Trotsky. He begged him to stop and look and take note of where his theoretical position was leading him to. Why not face the simple facts first? he pleaded. The Gestapo which Trotsky headed was guilty of bureaucratic excesses. Why not admit the error and rectify it? To persist in it can mean only one thing; it is beyond the control of the individual's will precisely because an objective force is pulling in a direction over which the individual has no control. That is what is meant by "the objective logic of a theoretical position".

It is objective -- outside of the subjective will and consciousness of the person holding it. It is solidly rooted in the stage of development of the economy and the relations of men at the point of production. Thus in Russia in 1920 the economy was in chaos and the question was what to do; would the worker on the line or the administrator in the office decide what constitutes labor discipline?

-- more --

2189

SPECIAL FEATURE

Lenin said that the only correct position was that of the trade union thesis: "Introduction of genuine labor discipline is conceivable only if the whole mass of participants in production take a conscious part in the fulfillment of these tasks. This cannot be achieved by bureaucratic methods and orders from above".

Trotsky, on the other hand, contended that "We suffer not so much from the bad sides of bureaucracy, as chiefly from the fact that we have not assimilated its many good sides".

It did Lenin no good to remind Trotsky that they had all voted for the New Program of the Russian Communist Party which directly after gaining power recognized that the new enemy was bureaucratism, that: "In the struggle against bureaucratism there will be gradual inclusion of the whole toiling population to a man in the work of running the state.... This plus simplification of the functions of the government will lead to the abolition of state authority".

Trotsky went his own way. He refused to recognize the administrator as the new enemy. Quite the contrary. He accused a Leninist of approaching "very practical questions too much from the propagandist point of view, and forgets that here we not only have material for agitation but a problem which must be solved administratively."

Lenin, on the other hand, shouted loudly and clearly that the bureaucracy was the new enemy, and that Trotsky's administrative approach made him weakest where he should be strongest; as a propagandist. That was precisely what was wrong with his whole thesis, that through them there runs like a red thread the administrative approach."

III. The Propagandist vs. The Administrative Approach

Where Lenin put the workers' attitude in the center of all his thoughts, Trotsky put the administrative plan. Where Lenin's every other word was an attack on bureaucracy, Trotsky worried over their not yet having mastered "the many good sides". Where Lenin said that what was new, what was so shocking was the "passion for bossing" on the part of Communists now that they had power, Trotsky was shadow-boxing with "the old trade unionist concepts".

There was no meeting half-way because this was a leadership divided against itself on the very solid ground of its relationship to the masses.

"We must not fear to admit the disease" -- the disease of bureaucratism, Lenin warned, lest we ourselves develop an administrative mentality. When you come down to rock bottom, there is one way, only one way, to arrive at new social relations for ever new millions of toilers and that is "gradually to draw the whole toiling population to a man in the work of running the state."

-- more --

"The toiling population to a man." "To a man." That is to say all those on the production line, every single man and woman from cook to bottle washer, from machinist to handyman, from intellectual to washerwoman. Then, only then will new social relations be established.

No planning from above, or what Lenin called "bureaucratic project-hatching" could establish the new. Only the masses from below, to a man. This total conception, and totally new attitude, was the very conception that Lenin first elaborated in his State and Revolution as the only true meaning of a social revolution. Now it had assumed new flesh and blood for now it was not only theory but the practice and not only the practice in "making" revolutions but in working out truly human relations.

Lenin was so concrete in his understanding of propagandist because his over-all conception was so magnificent. He said all that the leadership can do, all that Trotsky should do if he is to remain a propagandist and not the administrator ordering people about, is to shout from the Kremlin walls, the Pravda offices, what the workers themselves are doing. Their initiative, their activity, their attitude must become the basis of all your (the intellectual's) theory.

Lenin never moved from his position, not even after he won and the Russian Communist Party had adopted his theses and rejected those of Trotsky and Shlyapnikov. On the contrary, he continued to hammer away; "History knows all sorts of degenerations; to depend upon conviction, devotion and other spiritual qualities in politics, that is not at all a serious thing."

Trotsky, on the contrary, beginning with that fateful year of 1920 when he proposed the militarization of labor, persisted in an administrative approach. It did not matter what the economic conditions were -- his concept was administrative. Always it was the concept of Plan and the workers' initiative being circumscribed by that Plan.

He never admitted his error of 1920. On the contrary, he insisted that "the mistake was not in the demand for statification but in the fact that the economic policy did not correspond to the economic conditions." But it was not the economic conditions, either in 1920, nor in 1921, nor in 1923, that made Trotsky write as he did. It was his attitude, his attitude to the broad masses. That is why it did not matter whether the year was 1920 and his program was one of the "Single Plan"; nor whether it was 1921 and his program was "statification of the trade union"; nor 1921-2 when the New Economic Policy (modified commercial capitalism) was established and he still held that the concrete conditions "excluded the possibility of practical inclusion of trade unionists in the management of the economy". He never changed his position, not even after he was expelled and his arch-enemy Stalin put into operation the Five Year Plan which moved to its own gory conclusion in 1932. Trotsky still wrote, "The role of factory committees remains important, of course, but in the sphere of the management of industry it has no longer a leading but an auxiliary position."

-- more --

2191

SPECIAL FEATURE

If he did not "mean" what he wrote, this great revolutionary journalist wrote for two decades without finding the words necessary to express what he did mean. Yet he always found words, ~~thousands~~ and thousands of words, to express the opposite of what he "did mean".

There was always a different "reason" for the administrative approach. In 1920 it was the disorganization of the economy. In 1921 it was the inefficiency of the trade union personnel. In 1922 it was "the market economy". In 1928, 1932, 1940, it was the Plan. But whatever the "reason", the conclusion was always the same: Planning by specialists, Planning from above, workers control, yes, if it were heavily detailed by the planners. By whatever name you wish to label it, this precisely is the administrative approach—workers self-activity strictly subordinated to the Plan.

That is precisely why Trotsky, despite all his revolutionary order and devotion, could not fight the counter-revolutionary Stalin. Their theoretical basis was the same. The Plan. It happened, as it so often happens in history, that in the 1920 debate Stalin, a man who appreciated what a majority means, supported Lenin who then had the majority behind him. But in his concept of Plan and administration he was with Trotsky. And he had the complete brutality needed to carry through the Plan to the bitter end establishing the greatest tyranny on earth. How right Lenin was with his prediction "History knows all sorts of degenerations...!"

The uniqueness of 1920 is this: it disclosed that before, during and after the social revolution the problem of the conquest of power and the problem of the new society is one and the same. Its axis is the relationship to the masses. It is this which 1920 posed; the relationship of the masses to the trade unions and the political parties. This relationship has yet to be worked out. It remains the problem of today. We hope in future issues of the paper to show how we are trying to work out this triangular relationship as it is reflected in our own small organization.

-0-

Postscript

There is no need for our readers to think that because they know only English while the books on the trade union debate are mainly in Russian, thereby they must miss a single important point of the debate. The truth is that Volume IX of Lenin's Selected Works, especially the first three articles, contains not alone the summation of all positions but an analysis of the various attitudes as they changed in the course of the debate. We will be glad to obtain Volume IX for any reader who wishes to obtain a copy, \$2 the copy. It is the most remarkable book in the great library of Marxism.

-0-

CORRESPONDENCE ——— every two weeks

VOL. IV, NO. 3

APRIL 30, 1953

SPECIAL FEATURE

EDITORIAL NOTE:

The death of Stalin evoked two different kinds of responses within the leadership of our organization: (1) The Midwest thought that a social-political analysis of the phenomenon of Stalinism was what was needed. (2) The West Coast editor, on the other hand, had been so impressed with the indifference to the death of Stalin shown by the workers in general that she had felt that that phenomenon should be the central point of any editorial to be written.

Now for years we have been the only grouping that had traced the revolt of the Russian workers at the point of production, their struggle to free themselves of the stranglehold of the totalitarian bureaucracy. The Midwest leadership considered this an opportune time to summarize the analysis of the Russian bureaucracy in a way that would make clear the role of the American labor bureaucracy. Once the decision was made, the form in which this analysis would be presented depended entirely on our ranks. We are now in the process of developing a new method of writing articles that can be written only by intellectuals — everything else in our paper is written by the workers themselves. Since these educational articles are done, as everything else we do is done, from a workingclass point of view, the workers in our ranks are the ones to decide how exactly these are to be written. A theoretician writes with a member of the ranks always at his side, checking every point, writing some, deciding all. The article on Stalin's death happened to be the first opportunity we had to test this method of writing for the paper. This method was used although the article was a timely one and bore all the earmarks of having been done hurriedly to meet a deadline, because this method of writing is a principle with us.

The article, however, was not published at the place where it was written. When the West Coast editor proceeded to edit the article for space requirements, she did so, without being conscious of it, from the point of view of her own concept of what an "editorial" should be. This is seen from the very first sentence. Where the original article (below) began with what the totalitarian labor bureaucracy in and out of Russia means, hers began with the refusal of the American people to get excited over the death of Stalin. (Vol. III, No. 12)

The most unfortunate result of all was that, in the process of editing, all the specific contributions of the rank and filer with whom the author worked were lost. Thus the rank and filer had made two special points to explain her interest in Stalin and in Russia; an interest she had never before shown. These were: (1) she wanted to know what made the labor bureaucracy behave as it did — the Russian and the American; and (2) what created the totalitarian personality, that is to say, what objective forces — the economy, the world situation, the relations of men at point of production — produced a Stalin, or a Routhier. She had chosen certain sentences, certain paragraphs as things she "liked" because they made this phenomenon not a question of remembering dates, but of persons caught in a certain situation. These had been so modified in the editing that she had not recognized the article as it was published, although it had contained all the same facts.

Not For Sale Or Circulation

2193

-- more --

SPECIAL FEATURE

An exchange of letters on the subject then took place between the author and the West Coast editor. The leadership also consulted closely with the ranks because that is the kind of paper we produce. It is edited by no single person -- the organization as a whole is the editor. The unanimous decision of all concerned, and especially so of the West Coast editor, was to re-print the original article, somewhat revised, but revised on the basis of the original concept, with this introductory note to explain the reason for the republication. We invite comparison of the two articles and comment on both or on neither, but only on the method of writing and editing.

STALIN: WHY HE BEHAVED AS HE DID

Stalin's death does not end the period of ruthless totalitarianism, but it does close one chapter of a book on the labor bureaucracy in and out of Russia which can be entitled, Why Do They Behave As They Do? Stalin was once a revolutionary, a Bolshevik, which meant an uncompromising fighter for the overthrow of Tsarism. There was a time when Communism (Bolshevism) was synonymous with Marxism as the doctrine of liberation. Today everyone knows Russian Communism as the greatest barbarism on earth. Stalin is the name which symbolizes this. It was this one-time revolutionary who initiated and carried through with unmatched brutality the greatest counter-revolution in all history. But Stalin is only the Russian name for a phenomenon that is world-wide. We need not go outside of the borders of these United States to see the same social type. Look at Reuther.

Reuther was one of the leaders of the CIO in its early days when the workers in fact took over the plants from the capitalists. They would examine what they were told to do and decide whether it was satisfactory or not. In those early days Reuther challenged the stranglehold of capitalist management over the workers in production. Today he is the chief instrument whereby capital maintains its domination over the American workers.

Two questions stand out, 1) why does any individual behave like that; what objective movement in the economy, what class impulses necessitate such brutality? 2) what specific characteristics in a man enable him to become the receptacle for and the executor of class impulses from an alien class, the very one he either challenged or actually helped overthrow? We will deal with the second question first because here we are on familiar ground. No knowledge of Russian is needed to understand the social type. He is all around us, and not only on the side of management, but within the labor movement itself, from the lowest committeeman to the top bureaucrat.

The Meaning of a Bureaucratic Attitude to the Masses

Stalin's outstanding trait was a bureaucratic attitude to the masses. He claimed to be a leader of the workers but to him it meant to make the workers do as the leader wanted and told them to do. He spoke of the party as "the vanguard of the proletariat" but to him this meant that just as the leaders of the party were to tell the ranks what to do, so the party was to order the masses about. That was true even when he was a revolutionary fighting in the

-- End --

SPECIAL FEATURE

underground. Once the Communist Party got into power, his passion for "ceding" came out in full bloom. It showed itself clearest of all in his attitude to the many nationalities which constituted the Soviet Union.

In overthrowing the Tsarist monarchy, the Russian workers had fought not only to overthrow the capitalists and the landlords but to overthrow as well the Great Russian overlordship of the many nationalities that had constituted the Russian Empire. In this country we know how the Civil War had attempted to establish new relations between the nationalities and races, particularly so between the whites and Negroes, and how it failed. The Russian Bolsheviks never doubted that they would not fail. One of their first acts upon getting into power was to grant freedom to all the nationalities that now constituted the Soviet Republic. But Stalin, though himself not a Great Russian but a Georgian, ran roughshod over the aspirations of his native Georgia, displaying a chauvinism, or national arrogance, that was as rabid as that of the Tsarist officials. Lenin drew back in horror. "Scratch a Bolshevik," he wrote, "and you will find a Great Russian chauvinist." It remains the most precise commentary of this totalitarian personality in the making.

This bureaucratic attitude to the masses in general, and rudeness to the party ranks in particular, this chauvinism toward national minorities went hand and hand with an outright disloyalty to the founder of Bolshevism, Lenin. Many a loyal Bolshevik was willing to dismiss this disloyalty as "personal". But that first appeared as personal disloyalty to Lenin turned out to be class disloyalty to the workers, just as what first appeared as intrigues against other party leaders turned out to be thorough ruthlessness to the millions of Russian toilers.

Today everyone knows the social type, but in the time of Lenin no one did. Nor could they have. For this type first matured after the workers gained political power and then did not extend this so that the masses to a man ran the economy and state. Lenin was the first to sense that the new enemy of the working class was this bureaucratic social type. In 1924 as he lay dying, he added a postscript to his Will which asked for the removal of Stalin because he had accumulated too much power in his hands and was "rude and disloyal". Nevertheless, even Lenin did not state that Stalin represented an alien class. But he was prophetic in this: he stated that if the differences within the leadership reflected outright class differences, then nothing could save the workers state; it would just collapse.

By no psychological trick words can anyone today escape the need to explain the objective roots of the impulses, the instincts that guided the hand of Stalin. He was, of course, the embodiment of the totalitarian type. He was, of course, a dictator. He was, of course, ruthless. He was, of course, responsible for the liquidation of the whole general staff that led the Russian Revolution in 1917 as well as thousands of his own cohorts, and millions in forced labor camps. He was indeed a master planner of murder, of tyrannical exploitation of the whole toiling population of Russia, of the establishment of forced labor camps for those who dared challenge his rule, as well as the autocrat

-- more --

* See the Special Feature Then and Now 1920 and 1953, in Vol. IV, No. 2.

SPECIAL FEATURE

of all the satellites. Nevertheless, it was not because he was "by nature" a dictator, or "through Bolshevism" achieved this overwhelming centralization of power, that he arose.

It is true that from his early youth Stalin had been a revolutionist, and Stalin, it is true also, was a born intriguer. But it is not intrigue that won him power. It is that intrigue in 1924 coincided with the objective movement of capitalist production looking for a new form by which it could continue to keep the workers enslaved. Private capitalism no longer could, even where the workers had not won political power, capitalism laid in ruins. What would maintain the domination over the workers?

The state functionary type arose. Once the Russian workers did not organize production, the bureaucrat with the blue-print rushed in. All Stalin's famous political zig-zags served one and the same underlining purpose -- the consolidation of a new power. This new power turned out to be the new form of capitalism -- state capitalism. At the last congress at which Lenin appeared, he warned:

"Will you be able, you Communists, you workers, you class-conscious part of the proletariat who took power, will you be able to rule; will you be able to work so that the state which you took into your hands, should work for us? Here we have lived through a year, the state is in our hands, but the New Economic Policy, did it work according to our wishes? No. We do not wish to acknowledge that; it did not work according to our plan. How did it work? The machine is tearing itself out of our hands as if a person who sits at the wheel, who runs it, and the machine goes not where it is directed, but whither some illegal, illegitimate, god-knows-from-whither it came -- some speculators, some private property capitalists -- either the one or the other -- but the machine does not go as, and often not at all as the one who sits at the wheel imagines. That is the basic fact we must remember regarding the question of state capitalism."

It was harder to establish the new than to overthrow the old; Lenin continued, and unless the sudden "passion for bossing" is rooted out of the Communists, then there was no telling what would become of the new workers state; "History knows all sorts of degenerations ..." But this warning was in vain. The fledgling bureaucracy had already found its master in Stalin.

The Total Plan and the Totalitarian Personality

This bureaucrat wanted factories built larger than anywhere, bridges longer, steel sufficient "to catch up with and surpass" the capitalist lands. He wished the largest land army in the world and the biggest airpower poised for world domination. If to achieve these goals it meant that the Russian workers were ill-clothed, ill-fed and ill-housed so that they had not an inch of privacy to call their own or a breath of freedom -- then that was no signal to stop. Not at all. Drive on the harder and show concretely what awaits anyone who opposes the Stalinist Plan -- the forced labor camps. And don't let the fact that they are being filled by millions stop you from your goal; human aspirations have no place in total planning.

-- more --

SPECIAL FEATUREThe Constant Revolt of the Russian Workers

The capitalist press is now trying to give the impression that the Russian masses are shedding tears over the death of this Cain. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The history of the Russian working class since the initiation of the First Five Year Plan is the history of its struggles against the total oppression that this total planning has meant. The millions in forced labor camps are the true measure of the never-ending resistance of the Russian workers to the Russian rulers in the state and in the factory. Had the revolt not been so persistent the terror wouldn't have been so violent. No one wants to put millions of people in concentration camps. Since the end of World War II one-half million Soviet citizens found themselves outside the borders of Russia. The overwhelming majority refused to return. When Britain and the United States, in alliance with Stalin, forced return upon them there was a mass suicide movement. A quarter of a million succeeded in remaining outside the "socialist fatherland." Their stories reveal the tensions in the Soviet regime.

But the Russian workers could not escape. It is these millions who day in and day out, year in and year out, for two solid decades, have never yielded, and perform miracles of ingenuity and endurance in resisting the totalitarian stranglehold over production. The terror of the rulers in face of this revolt is recorded in their own laws. Beginning with 1929, the year of the First Five Year Plan, they met the workers' revolt by substituting production conferences of engineers, managers and "the technical intelligentsia" for the previous workers' production conferences with its Workers' Conflict Commission. Every year saw new "labor laws" enacted against labor, culminating in the vicious anti-labor legislation in 1940. The worker was forbidden to leave his job. Any infraction of factory discipline, e.g. coming 15 minutes late, was made punishable by "corrective labor," i.e. labor in the factory at 25% reduction in pay. Violation of these laws meant a corrective labor camp in the wilds of Siberia. Teen-agers were taken out of school and given six months to two years "free vocational training" at the end of which they had to work where the state directed for two to four years.

After six months operation of these laws, Pravda, (Dec. 26, 1940) reported that in coal mines especially, truancies were greater than in the previous period. At the 18th Party Conference in February, 1941, it was reported that workers were constantly "absenting themselves," particularly after payday, and that fully a third do not accomplish their "norms."

—more—

SPECIAL FEATURE

But this man of steel, we must repeat, won power not because of sheer ruthlessness but because that will and that ruthlessness emanated from an objective movement of the economy. The coming upon the horizon of the economic crisis and the intellectual planner is a world-wide phenomenon. To understand that point in history, we must take a second look at its opposite -- the 1917 revolution in Russia where capitalism had broken at its weakest link. Then millions upon millions set up their own committees to rule themselves. The old had been overthrown from top to bottom, inside and out. The new had just begun to appear. The masses were attempting to run production and the state. But the Russian workers were a tiny minority in a sea of peasants, while the economy was in chaos as a result of war, revolution and the attack of capital on all fronts. The young state began to be plagued with an administrative bureaucracy -- Communists who displayed "a passion for bossing". The backwardness of Russia and the new bureaucracy combined to stop the social revolution in its track. Once the workers did not organize production, the inevitable consequence was state-capitalism. Long, long ago Marx had predicted it would be either the self-activity of the workers that would organize production, or it would be the plan over the workers. Capitalism in its death agony has many monstrous forms. In Germany it took the form of Hitlerism; in Russia of Stalinism. But whatever the name, the concentration camp or the forced labor camp is the natural accompaniment of decadent capitalism. Thus what began in Russia when its economy was in chaos became a world phenomenon with the economic crash of 1929 in the United States that reverberated throughout the world. There is no way to keep the workers chained to the machines except by this total planning, total terror. Stalin's personal drive for power emanated from this objective movement of the economy. It was this joining of the objective movement and subjective will that won Stalin power in his own right. He had just the ruthlessness needed to introduce this new stage of capitalism. He was its perfect embodiment.

Five Year Plan followed five Year Plan and this totally planned economy was fashioned by and fashioned itself a ubiquitous bureaucracy to correspond. The industrial managers who were in no wise different from the magnates of private capitalism except by the greater callousness and drive recognized in Stalin their true master just as the state bureaucracy had recognized their political leader and the military caste its Generalissimo. The industrial managers were the right complement to the bureaucracy in the army, in the state, in the omnipresent terroristic GPU. The top echelons of the bureaucracy never comprised more than 2 per cent of the population, but everyone from these top 2 per cent to the 10 per cent that comprised all the big and all the little bureaucrats was a replica of this bureaucratic-administrator-leader-totalitarian type, for Stalin was their perfect embodiment. The Moscow Purges of 1937-1938 consolidated Stalin's power, but it was formed first and foremost at the point of production and it took two decades of unmitigated exploitation there for it to feel sure of itself.

-- more --

SPECIAL FEATURE

In the midst of war the conveyor belt system was introduced. The individual breakneck competition of Stakhanovism was replaced by "socialist emulation" or factory-to-factory competition. Martial law was introduced in the railroads.

The post war period was greeted by new purges and a new Plan. Yet the revolt in the Ukraine has assumed the proportions of actual guerilla warfare. The workers' revolt was so widespread that the state had to declare a general amnesty for all labor offenses during the war to get production going at all.

Purges are not due to a state of mind but a state of production. They have never ceased in Russia and will never cease under that regime because the crises never cease. The revolt of the working class is continuous. All the bureaucratism; ending in the one-party-state is rooted in this need to quell the rebellion, to discipline the workers in production--workers who are in ceaseless revolt against the conditions of production.

This is the truth about the Russian workers' attitude to their rulers. It is a truth not hard to find. But to find it you must look not at the Kremlin bureaucracy, but at the masses in production.

The attitude of the American workers

The American workers do not know many of the facts of this revolt of the Russian workers against their rulers. But they displayed the right class instinct when they refused to share in the excitement of the capitalist press about the death of Stalin. Its sudden discovery of "the dignity of Stalin" had the same ring to them as the press' sudden discovery of "the leadership" of Phillip Murray when he died. One steelworker was heard saying, "Whose loss is it anyway? It seems all leaders are always ganging up to protect each other's prestige. Murray was no leader of mine." So that the American workers' indifference to the tears the Russian masses were supposed to be shedding emanated from their attitude to their own labor bureaucrats, alive or dead.