

Mandel Says One-Man Rule Hurt USSR in Every Field of Endeavor

Editor's Note: We are happy to print the following communication from William Mandel, a non-Communist writer on Soviet affairs. He is the author of "The Soviet Far East and Central Asia" and "A Guide to the Soviet Union" and other books and pamphlets. He was a Fellow in Slavic studies at Stanford University in 1947 and was a United Press specialist on Russia, 1943-45.

NEW YORK

Dear Editor:

When Stalin died, people wept in the streets. They had gone barefoot, and now they were shod. They had starved, and now there was no hunger. Their babies had died unattended, and now there are doctors and medicines to save them. They had lived in ignorance, and now there was schooling. The worker had feared for his job, and now unemployment was forgotten. The peasant had feared for his land, and now it was his and his neighbors' forever, in their collective farm. Women had known nothing but drudgery, and now millions were in the professions. Non-Russians had been the last to be hired, the first to be fired, and now they were equals.

Yet who had done this? Stalin had stitched no boots. He had harvested no crop. He had delivered no babies. He had shot no Nazis.

It is not that he would not, but he could not. Leaders make nothing. It is the people who make history, always and everywhere. Look at our own country.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was a great man, but we do not speak of the Roosevelt standard of living. We speak of the American standard of living, created by the labor and genius of the American people under presidents who will be forgotten when Roosevelt is remembered with Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. As a matter of fact, Roosevelt's administration was spent largely in trying to regain that living standard, and it was not successful. There were still ten million unemployed in 1940, when the calamity of war reopened the factories. Yet we do not blame Roosevelt. We know that capitalism—private ownership of industries that produce for the public—caused unemployment and will cause it again. We honor Roosevelt because he supported the workers' bitter fight to organize unions, the farmers' fight to keep their land, the Negro's fight for jobs and dignity, the whole people's fight for some security in unemployment and old age, the world's fight against fascism and for democracy.

The job of leaders is to try to see ahead. They organize. They make decisions which help or hinder the people as the people makes history.

How, then, to judge Stalin? Did he help or did he hinder? We cannot credit him with the

fact that his socialist country made progress, any more than we can blame Roosevelt for the fact that his capitalist country, under his years of peacetime administration, failed to regain the prosperity it had under Harding, or Coolidge, or Nobody. Socialism must make progress, because its principles is producing what the people need. Capitalism must have depressions, and at best, as today, lag behind the progress of socialism, because its principle is producing what people can afford to buy.

What gives socialism its advantage? The fact that industries producing for the public are owned by the public. Until about 1934, Stalin led as though he knew that, and he helped. But Stalin acted since 1935, as far as he was able, as though he owned the factories and the farms, and the scientists' brains, and the Party and unions and the other people's organizations. One-man rule of everybody's property is a contradiction, just as is ownership, in our country, by a few, of plants in which thousands work.

Progress continued in the USSR, because the means of production remained every-



body's property, but it was slower than if there had been democratic leadership. There is ample proof of this. In 1952, the last year of Stalin's life, there were two million head of cattle less than the year before, due to a farm price and tax policy on which the farmers had not been consulted. For years now, the rise in labor productivity has failed to be as great as planned, because the government thought it knew what the workers wanted better than the workers did. This is shown by the fact that the rising living standard created by the people was returned to them solely in price cuts. We learn now that the workers were more interested in a reduction of the exhausting six-day week of eight-hour days originally introduced to stimulate defense production.

Science was hindered in its advance because Stalin chose to decide who was right and who was wrong. In biology, there was Lysenko's dictatorship

thanks to Stalin's support, reinforced, as Pravda has revealed, by falsified scientific evidence and brow-beating the highest college authorities to grant doctors' degrees to Lysenko's stooges.

In culture, the atmosphere of orders from above caused the once-wonderful Soviet stage to decay until today, Ralph Parker tells us, the Moscow theaters are half empty. The need for top-level approval of all scripts slowed movie output to a fraction of that in a country like India. We learned from last year's Writers' Congress that novels could not get printed unless they were political pamphlets. It is to the credit of the one great Soviet novelist, Sholokhov, that he chose not to publish under these conditions, and it is to the everlasting honor of the Soviet Tom Paine, Ilya Ehrenbourg, that he undertook to expose these conditions in a novel, "The Thaw," as soon as this became politically possible.

Nowhere was the degeneration caused by one-man rule clearer than in the treatment of minority peoples, which had been one of Stalin's great personal contributions to Soviet society in earlier years. Could anyone have dreamed, say in 1930, of the kind of frameup of Jewish doctors that took place in 1953? Would one believed that a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Ignatyev, could have been so blind to this anti-Semitism that he had to be fired (after Stalin's death) for having let it happen under his jurisdiction? Could one have believed that, after 35 years of Soviet rule, the head of the Communist Party in the Ukraine, a country as populous as France or Italy, would have to be removed for trying to ram the Russian language down the throats of the West Ukrainians?

Thus, Stalinism—one-man rule in a socialist country—was bad in every field of life: labor policy, the farmer-labor alliance that is the bedrock of the Soviet government, policy toward minorities, science, culture. It must be bad, because it violates the dignity of man, holds back his powers of creation, and contradicts the very nature of socialism. It is equally bad when it crops up in Communist and socialist movements outside the Soviet Union, which are successful only so far as they are based on the combined experience, intelligence and strength of the working class, democratically expressed.

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