

Anna Louise Strong Evaluates Stalin Era

LOS ANGELES.—In a personal news letter, "Today," which Anna Louise Strong edits on the Pacific Coast, Miss Strong suggested that the late Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin directed the false accusation of "espionage" against her.

At the same time, this author and journalist underscored the historic achievements of "the Stalin era" and Stalin's role in bringing them about.

Defining "Stalinism" as "the strategy of building socialism in one country under 'capitalist encirclement,'" Miss Strong said it was replaced at the recent Soviet Communist Party congress "by the new strategy concerned with: (a) relations between socialist states; (b) relation of the socialist bloc to the rest of the world."

Turning to the party congress assessment of the Stalin era, Miss Strong wrote:

The basic criticisms are already known. They seem to be:

- Foreign policy was too rigid, isolationist, "iron curtain;

- The break with Yugoslavia was a mistake;

- The armed forces were "inadequately prepared" for Hitler's invasion;

- MOST IMPORTANT, "Soviet Democratic Rights" were trampled by the arbitrary rule of the political police, condemning many innocent people.

An important cause for these errors is found in Stalin's "one man rule," whereby "the cult of the individual" replaced "collective decision."

Worldwide discussion breaks out over this. My readers ask me to add my bit. I do so, first stating that the present leaders of Russia knew Stalin better than I do, but that neither they nor I, nor this generation will pass final judgment. Stalin is one of those who are judged by long history.

FIRST, I think the list of errors a basically true list. I reserve judgment on the "preparation against invasion" for I am no military expert and am uninformed on the armed forces, but I think Stalin's whole policy for 20 years did much to prepare the entire country against invasion. Otherwise the list stands as true. They were serious errors, of which the excessive powers of the political police was most grievous evil of all.

But secondly, I think that to blame Stalin alone for all this, is to fall for the "cult of the individual" in reverse. Stalin, as leader, shares both blame for the evils and credit for achievements.

But does anyone think that Stalin did all of this alone?

FROM WHAT I saw of Stalin in the early 30s, I felt that he was expert in committee action, in getting unanimity without pressure. He proclaimed "collective decision" long before Khrushchev; his rise to power was precisely the rise of the party collective over the erratic individuals like Trotsky. Ambassador Davies found Stalin "perfectly modest," with this I agree.

When Emil Ludwig tried to get Stalin to tell how "the great man" made decisions, Stalin impatiently replied: "With us individuals cannot decide; there is a large percentage of error in individual decisions" . . . He said that the USSR "avoided error" by "collective decisions" of many capable minds.

Stalin was the architect of the "collective decision technique." He gave the classic criticism of the "cult of the individual" long ago.

His successors say that Sta-



ANNA LOUISE STRONG

lin became in later years a personal tyrant. This may be true. I quote two proverbs. The first from a British realist: "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." The second from Stalin: "There is a logic in things that may override the logic of human intentions."

I SAW no sign that Stalin "intended" to become a dictator, but signs were not lacking that arbitrary dictation was going on . . . I often wondered whether Stalin ruled the political police or was ruled by them, or whether such institutions end by enslaving all in a mutual servitude. Stalin wrote the freest Constitution to his day; but it was never applied in his lifetime. It stands as an imperishable ideal yet to be applied.

The "cult of the individual" will not be abolished by orders from Khrushchev. This is a struggle of generations. Collective rule will come only when the millions of John Does are willing to take on the burdens of public tasks. They do this as well in the USSR as elsewhere; in some ways better. But nowhere on earth are the John Does willing yet.

Insofar as the present discussion leads Russian citizens to criticize, plan and govern, democracy and socialism advance. Insofar as they take it out in blaming Stalin as personal devil, democracy and socialism fail.

IT MAY PROFIT us to turn from Stalin, the person, and consider the economic and social basis from which the Stalin era grew. Stalin set out to "build socialism in one country," a backward peasant land encircled by a stronger, hostile world. Stalin's "line" was adopted in 1927. BUT . . .

(1) For years thereafter many of the world's ablest of Marxists, inside and outside of Russia, still said it couldn't be done.

(2) Russians said to me in the early 30s: "It is too bad for the world that the first socialism comes in our dark land. If you Americans began it, with your democratic habits and technical know-how, you might do a proper job. Or even those industrious Germans. But we, dark people, two hours late to every meeting, illiterate, feudal, worshipping the 'little Father' while whipped by his own 'Black Hundreds,' what socialism shall we build?"

Stalin said: "Build or be crushed in 10 years by foreign invaders."

They built it, as Stalin him-

self said, "under the whip." It stood when the foreign invasion came. So Stalin proved to be right, but those critics were partly right. For the socialism thus built was never the socialism the generations had dreamed. It was speckled by grievous flaws.

How far those flaws derive from Stalin's personal faults, how far from the forty year threat of capitalist war—this will be a theme for all future historians and all will differ in apportioning the blame.

BUT ON ONE THING they will not differ. As far as any individual may claim the events he led, Lenin made the Russian Revolution, Stalin built the world's first socialist country. Its faults can be corrected now.

Of one thing I am sure: This present discussion is the best thing that has happened to the Communists for years. Not only because it makes friendship with neutral countries easier, and united actions of Socialists and Communists easier in the Western lands. These benefits already begin.

The chief benefit is that it knocks shackles from the Communists' own minds. All over the world the Communists discuss Stalin, and all of them loyally disagree. When the People's World of San Francisco had an editorial telling Moscow to explain the fate of certain Jews, I felt like shouting "At last, at last, at last!"

BUT IF ANYONE asks, as many are asking: "Why didn't the present leaders speak out on Stalin sooner?" I reply "They might have been shot for it . . . and they might have been rightly shot." All who take a part in collective struggle, whether a strike or a war, know there are times to criticize and times to shut up and take orders, that to attack leaders at the wrong time is to lose the war.

Many times I myself, in some American meeting, began to mention something wrong in the USSR, saw the audience's faces grow worried, angry and stopped the subject, thinking: "This is no time to spread suspicion of the first Socialist state." When that false accusation in Moscow destroyed my world-wide work at its height, I wondered if Stalin knew it and even ordered it.

I was boosting Mac-Tse-tung and the Chinese Revolution all over the world BEFORE Stalin recognized them and gave the green light. I even indiscreetly let Russians know that I thought the Chinese Revolution was improving on the Russian. . . . I wondered whether Stalin had smashed me for that. I hardly dared think of it, much less voice it. . . . I know nothing to prove it but I think it quite possible now. . . . Anyway, I am glad that, if I ever get to Moscow, I shall no longer be afraid to ask.

LET US REJOICE in all new freedoms; they were bought at a great price, not only by the death of heroes in battle but by death of men unjustly and in mistakes. Let us rejoice in all new friendships and in all signs of peace. But, as Khrushchev and Bulganin jaunt cheerfully and freely to India and Britain, and as San Francisco is emboldened by Stalin's demerits to tell Moscow the proper path, let us also give tribute to that harsh, even unjust discipline which in 30 years, "whipped up" a peasant land to a role it was not yet fit for, and thus built the economic base on which freedom can be safe and at peace today.