

Questions Answered by Togliatti

The Italian publication *Nuovi Argomenti* (New Trends) submitted a series of questions on the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti. The *Daily Worker* has just received the translation which it arranged for Togliatti's replies. Beginning today we publish the greater part of the questions and answers:

QUESTION: What, in your opinion, is the significance of the condemnation of the cult of the individual in the USSR?

ANSWER: The condemnation of the cult of the individual made by the Communists of the Soviet Union and the criticisms of Stalin mean, in my opinion, exactly what the Soviet Communists have said repeatedly, neither more nor less. We must guard against two wrong tendencies. The first is crude and even ridiculous, maintaining, or seeming to maintain, that the Soviet Communists have gone over to a position, if not of anti-communism, to at least that of those who have never understood or approved their action. That means saying that they have thrown overboard, or are preparing to throw overboard, everything they have affirmed, sustained, defended and accomplished in the many decades of their work.

I understand very well that this is the interpretation of the 20th Congress given by the flag-bearers of anti-communism, but there is no reason why we should pay any more attention to them today than we did yesterday. But these people give their own game away by overplaying their hands, as always, proving their bad faith once more.

I do not deny, and in fact I desire to say openly, that there are also sincere people who have fallen into similar positions, and who have begun to ask whether, considering the criticisms of Stalin, and considering that Stalin was the leading exponent of Communist policy for a whole period of history, we are not justified in doubting the correctness of the basis of that policy, beginning, let us say, with the decisive opposition to the plans of imperialism in the postwar period, going back through Yalta and Teheran, to the 1939 non-aggression pact with Germany, the war in Spain, etc., and in another area, to the policy of socialist economic construction and to the struggle against those who obstructed it; and finally, once started down this road—why not?—to questioning the fundamental facts of the October Revolution, which consisted in the seizure of power by the Soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and the creation of a new political structure for society.

To those people who are in good faith and who indicate that they understand these things in this fashion, we say that they are mistaken. Naturally, it is always possible to discuss the actions of the Soviet Communists in their conquest of power and in the creation of their present-day social order—and for a long time to come they will undoubtedly be discussed—with the objective of determining their character, content and consequences, for the purpose of an exact historical evaluation.

Today, the Soviet comrades are freeing their historiography from the errors and exaggerations which were introduced by the excessive exaltation of the personality of Stalin; and this will result in a more balanced historical analysis.

At the same time, we may confidently expect many ideas to be corrected; specific criticisms will be made of weaknesses, errors and the negative side of past actions.

It would therefore be a great mistake to believe that, in this particular revision which aims at placing men and events in a proper



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light, the Soviet Communists are involved in a radical rejection or a radical, destructive criticism of their actions of almost a half-century. That action remains, in its development through successive stages that are familiar to everyone, the first great historical model of consistent, revolutionary activity for the accession of the working class to the leadership of society, and for the construction of a socialist society.

THE DEBATE IN THE LEADING SOVIET ORGANS

The second mistake consists in considering the criticism of Stalin and the denunciation of the cult of personality as basically nothing more than a struggle for power which supposedly developed among the leaders of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet state.

Most of the newspapers of the capitalist countries have gone heavily into this kind of interpretation, which they apply to everything the Soviet Union does. They have their own specialists in this sort of thing, who have the ability, whenever a leading figure is transferred from one department or organization to another, to weigh exactly how many grams of political influence have been gained or lost by the transfer, or how many steps this or that group of leaders have advanced towards exclusive power, and so forth.

The most absurd part of the nonsense based on these shaky, hypothetical evaluations are those that attempt to find differences, and even struggles, between civilians and the military, for example, or between technicians and party men, etc.

The technicians and the party men are very often the same people in the Soviet Union. As far as the military men are concerned, they have been involved in all the internal party struggles from the revolution on, and there has never been a separate military position, as such. We may therefore leave things to the lovers of bric-a-brac and to the political gossips.

We do not wish to deny that in the elaboration of most recent actions, and in the corrections of policy made by the Soviet leaders, there have been points of divergence, debates and sharp discussions within the leadership. This must occur in any living political organism whose internal life is not suffocated by the cult of a single person. However, there exists no evidence to prove that there has been a sordid struggle for power

carried out by way of criticism of Stalin and the cult of his personality. Everything indicates the exact opposite.

To understand how difficult the situation was after Stalin's death, it is sufficient to have even a superficial knowledge of the attitude towards him, not only of the leaders and members of the party, but of the masses of the people; above all, there was the grave and thorny problem of correcting the errors he had committed, of denouncing those errors, and of striking out along a path that was in many ways new. This obvious difficulty explains why the open denunciation of previous errors was not possible until after Stalin's death. Not only was the preparation inadequate, but it might have provoked a dangerous and negative response.

The correction of these errors, however, began at once, first in the methods of leadership and then in other fields. It is likewise evident that this correction could not have stemmed from an individual or group engaged in a bitter struggle for power. The elimination of Beria, one of those most responsible for the errors committed under Stalin's leadership, proves the point. It made possible a rapid change without a schism in the leading group and without conflict between different sections of the public administration.

We must therefore realize, once and for all, that the criticism of Stalin and the cult of personality means exactly what our Soviet comrades say it means. And what precisely do they say? That as a consequence of Stalin's errors and the cult of his personality, many negative features were accumulated, unfavorable and even bad situations were created in various aspects of Soviet life and society, in different aspects of the activity of the party and the state.

However, it is not easy to bring all these negative features under a single general classification; to do so would be to risk making an excessive, arbitrary and false generalization; it would risk making a poor and unacceptable appraisal of the real economic, social and cultural situation in the Soviet Union, thereby slipping back into the customary reactionary idiocies.

The least arbitrary of these generalizations sees in Stalin's errors the progressive extension of a personal power over collective institutions of democratic origin and nature, and, stemming from this, the extension of such things as bureaucracy, violations of legality, stagnation, and even a partial degeneration of various sections of the social organism. It should be immediately added that such aberrations have been partial and have probably had their most serious manifestations at the summit of the leading organs of the party and the state.

From these places came a tendency to restrict democratic life, initiative and freedom of thought and action in numerous fields (technical and economic development, cultural, literary and artistic activity, etc.); but this does not furnish the slightest basis for saying that the result was the destruction of those fundamentals of Soviet society from which are derived its democratic and socialist character, and which make this society qualitatively superior to modern capitalist society.

Soviet society cannot be at ease in such errors, as can bourgeois, capitalist regimes which are at ease in much worse errors and situations. These errors could not become permanent elements in civil, economic and political life. If they had persisted much longer they might have led to a split, though this hypothesis must be utilized with caution, because a split certainly would have done more harm than good to the masses of the people and to whole socialist movement; and this is something of which the men who might have engineered such a split must have been aware, being the most aware section of the population.

I do not mean to say by this that the consequences of Stalin's errors have not been serious. They have been extremely serious, and have extended to many areas, and correcting them will be no easy task, nor can it be done rapidly. In substance, it can be said that a great part of the leading section of Soviet society (party, state, economy, culture, etc.) was caught up in the cult of Stalin, with resultant torpidity, losing, or having had removed, the capacity for creativity and criticism of thought and action. Because of this it was absolutely necessary to denounce Stalin's errors so sharply as to shake up the minds of the people and to reactivate every organism in the complex system of Soviet society. If this is done, we shall see a new democratic progress for this society, and this will be a mighty contribution to better understanding among all peoples, to a relaxation of international tensions, to the advance of socialism and peace.

LEGITIMACY OF POWER

QUESTION: Do you think that the criticism of the cult of personality must be accompanied by institutional changes in the USSR?

QUESTION: The legitimacy of power is the great problem of public law; and modern political thought tends to regard the will of the people as the source of such legitimacy. Western parliamentary democracies maintain that the people's will can only be expressed through a plurality of political parties. Do you believe that there is a legitimate claim to power in a country where there is only one political party and where elections leave no choice between the government and an opposition?

ANSWER: I may be mistaken, but in my opinion, no institutional changes are in prospect in the Soviet Union, and no such changes are implied by the criticisms brought out by the 20th Congress. This does not mean that there should not be profound modifications, some of which are already in process.

First of all, what is meant by institutional changes? I believe that those using the term mean changes of political structure which would bring Soviet society back to some, at least, of the forms of political organization characteristic of the so-called western regimes, or would give a new aspect to the institution of the USSR. When the question is put in this way, my answer is no.

We may, if we will, begin by examining the legitimacy and source of power, but let us try to keep free of the hypocritical formalism with which the problem is treated by the apologists of "western civilization."

We have read *State and Revolution*, and criticism of Stalin's errors will not make us forget it. The fact is that in the so-called western civilizations the course of their legitimacy of power is not the will of the people. The will of the people is, at best, one of the factors which, expressing itself periodically through elections, determines a part of the governmental directives. In the elections, however (we may take Italy as in some ways typical), a complicated system of oppression, intimidation, coercion, falsification and legal and illegal artifices enters into the picture and serves to limit and falsify the popular will.

This system not only favors those who are at present in control of the government but also those who hold the real power in society, those who have accumulated wealth from their ownership of the means of production and exchange, and what follows from such ownership, from the effective direction of the political life to the unswerving protection of the religious authorities and of all the other appendages to the ap-

paratus of the capitalist society.

We maintain that today, given the development and the present strength of the democratic and socialist movement, it may be possible to make extensive breaches in this system which suppresses the free expression of the popular will, thereby widening an already large gap for the manifestation of this will. For this reason, we are moving on democratic terrain, and without leaving this terrain we are prepared for the possibility of ever-new developments.

That does not mean, however, that we do not see things as they are in the democratic life of the Western world (consider the situation in Spain or Turkey or South America or Portugal or the discriminating electoral system of the U.S.A.), or that we are making a fetish of Western democracy, viewing it as a universal and absolute model of democracy. On the contrary, we continue to think that democracy of the Western type is limited and imperfect because of many false features, which require a series of economic and political reforms.

If therefore we arrive at the conclusion that the 20th Congress opened a new process of democratic development for the Soviet Union, we are quite far from thinking that this development could or should be a return to institutions of a "Western" type.

The legitimacy of power in the Soviet Union has its principal source in the Revolution. This gave power to the working class, which was a minority, but which succeeded in solving the great national and social problems with which it was faced by rallying the masses of the people to its banner, transforming the economic structure of the country, creating and carrying forward a new society on socialist principles. To forget the Revolution, to ignore the new socialist structure, to forget, that is, all that is essential to the Soviet Union and then to impose a purely exterior comparison with the capitalist countries is a fraud and nothing more.

THE DEBATE ON SOVIET PROBLEMS

But these preliminary observations are not enough. From the beginning Soviet society has had a democratic political structure, rooted precisely in the existence and functioning of the Soviet (Congresses of workers, peasants and soldiers). The system of Soviets is much more democratic and progressive than any traditional democratic system for two reasons. First, it makes democracy penetrate every part of society, providing a workingclass unity that rises stage by stage to the great assemblies on a municipal, regional and national level. Second, it brings the basic elements of democratic life closer to the productive entities, and hence it frees them from a negative feature of a traditional democratic organization, the separation of politics from the world of production and the resulting exterior, formal character of liberty.

Is it possible that in the functioning of the Soviet system there was a barrier or stoppage, which led to a limitation of Soviet democracy? It is not only possible, but at the 20th Congress the fact was openly acknowledged. Soviet democratic life has been limited, to a certain extent suffocated, by the super-imposition of methods of bureaucratic, authoritarian direction, and of violations of the legality of the regime. From the point of view of theory this is quite possible because a socialist regime is not guaranteed against errors and dangers. Anyone who denies this is childishly naive.

Socialist society is not only a society composed of men, but a society in the process of development in which objective and subjective vestiges continue to operate;

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and it is subject to the vicissitudes of history. From the point of view of fact we have to see how and why a limitation of Soviet democratic life could take place. But whatever the answer given to this question, there can be no doubt that there can never be any justification for concluding that a return to the capitalist organization of society is necessary.

SEARCH FOR CORRECTIVES

The presence of several parties or one party cannot be regarded as an intrinsic feature which distinguishes bourgeois or socialist societies; nor can it constitute the line of demarcation between a democratic and an undemocratic socialist society. In the Soviet Union for a certain period of time after the Revolution two parties shared political power under a Soviet regime and a proletarian dictatorship. There is a plurality of parties in power in present-day China, and the regime is still defined as a democratic dictatorship. There are other parties alongside of the Communist parties in the People's Democracies.

In the countries which are still capitalist, and where there is a strong and developed workingclass and people's movement, it is impossible to exclude the hypothesis of profound socialist transformations brought about in the presence of a plurality of parties and by the initiative of some of these parties.

In the Soviet Union today, however, it seems impossible to conceive of a plurality of parties. From where will they arise? By decision from above? That would be a fine democratic process!

We must recognize that there is not only a social homogeneity rising out of the overthrow of the capitalist classes, and a political homogeneity expressed by the alliance of workers and peasants, but there is a form of unity of civil life and of political leadership that has been unknown and perhaps not even understood in the "Western" world.

The very idea of "party" in the Soviet Union is something quite different from that which we understand in our traditional terms. The party works and fights for the realization and development of socialism; but its work is essentially positive and constructive, not polemical, geared to combat a hypothetical internal political opposition. The "opposition" against which it fights is the objective difficulty to be overcome, the challenge of a definite job to be done, the survivals of the old order which must be uprooted to make room for the new, etc.

The dialectics of opposition, which is essential to the development of society, is not expressed in the competition between different parties, governmental and opposition, because such competition does not have an objective basis (in things), nor a subjective basis (in the spirit of man). This dialectic is expressed in the internal workings of the one-party system, comprising a whole series of coordinated organizations (party, Soviet, trade union, etc.).

The criticism made of Stalin is that he repeated the manifestations of the internal workings of the system. The correction consists in the restoration of normality, not in negating the system or blowing it up.

But if I regard it as absurd to think that the system should be blown up and a backward step taken, I believe that profound modifications can and must be introduced, based on the experiences under discussion, based on successes in all fields and based on the necessity for establishing better guarantees against a repetition of errors such as Stalin's. This is the point on which attention should be concentrated, and that is why we should follow and study the new measures which are rapidly being taken in the Soviet Union by the party and the government.

The most interesting and signi-

ficant measures taken so far are those which decree an extensive decentralization of economic management. An extreme form of centralization was a necessity for periods in which it was necessary to work quickly, making profound changes, destroying the basis of capitalism, laying the foundations of a socialist economy, operating under economic, political and military urgency.

Centralization, therefore, is not of itself an obligatory form of socialist economic direction—and certainly not in its extreme form. Whether there should be more or less centralization—and hence direction from above—is dictated by the totality of objective conditions; but it determines a greater or lesser degree of peripheral democratic life, the activity and initiative of the masses; and for us, the activity of the masses, their effective participation, their criticism, their control and management of economic and social organism, are the true signs of democracy.

For us, in a regime with a plurality of parties, with dialectical interplay between government and opposition, etc., this activity of the masses does not exist in any form and to any extent, or at best, only in very limited and indirect forms and extent. Hence we say that this is not true democracy, and we see no reason why the Soviet people should relapse into it in order to correct the bad things Stalin has done.

INDEPENDENCE OF JUDICIARY

We must say something about guarantees against a repetition of errors such as Stalin's. Some has advanced the idea of an "independent judiciary" (i.e. a separation of powers) as a sure remedy for violations of legality. I honestly do not believe that this is a remedy.

The judiciary must have an independent position, and the Soviet constitution guarantees just that, as many other constitutions do. But the violations of this norm happen despite the constitution, not because of it. Besides, the judge is not, and cannot be, a citizen who lives outside society, above its conflict of ideas, and above the currents that run through it and dominate it.

Ten years ago no judge could have dreamt of condemning to the penitentiary—to the penitentiary! an heroic partisan leader who was accused of suppressing a person marked as a spy under wartime conditions. Today this has been done. By "independent" judges? Formally independent of the Ministry of Justice, but not independent of the ten-year campaign by De Gasperi and others to defame the partisan movement, placing it in a defendant's box and sentencing its members.

The judges are part of the ruling class and do not rise above its current of opinions, just or unjust.

It is now said that during the Stalin period there were trials in the Soviet Union that ended in illegal and unjust sentences. The judges who meted out those sentences were probably not citizens who betrayed their consciences; they were citizens who believed in Stalin's mistaken doctrine, then widespread among the whole people, that the "enemies of the people" were present everywhere; that justice demanded their destruction. Therefore, while formally "independent" they judged in that way.

A true guarantee can consist only in the justness of the political leadership of the party and the government, and this is assured by democratic life in the party and the state and by permanent and strict contact with the masses of the people in every area of public life. The judge will be only as just as his ties with the people are strong.