

REEVALUATION AND CORRECTION

The Special Khrushchev Report

The contents of the report made by Khrushchev to a closed session of the delegates to the 20th Congress have by now been read to millions and millions of the Soviet people, and widely discussed. It has not yet been made public to the outside world, and it is difficult to know exactly what is true in the numerous published rumors and reports. We shall therefore limit ourselves to dispatches with a Moscow dateline which we can assume to be in the main reliable. The most enlightening of these was the March 31 dispatch by UP correspondent Henry Shapiro. Shapiro made clear that it was not possible to publish all details because "owing to the sensational character of the revelations and the obvious painfulness of its implications, the Soviet leadership apparently decided to treat the speech as a purely domestic matter."

Shapiro said a dogged campaign was under way to erase the Stalin cult, and the leaders were content to have it move cautiously. He said Khrushchev had emphasized Stalin's extraordinary merits as a revolutionary leader before his assumption of personal dictatorship, and then went on to "a condemnation of tyrannical, one man absolute rule with its attendant evils," citing Stalin's misdeeds and making it clear they would not be repeated.

Shapiro wrote that the campaign had begun after Stalin's death, reportedly initiated by Malenkov, and included a re-examination of the trials of the mid-thirties. Many victims were rehabilitated and released, and it was understood that by the

end of 1954 most political prisoners had been freed and given topmost priority in housing, pension and health facilities. The campaign was also directed against local party leaders who were a law unto themselves. He quoted Khrushchev as having said that the cult of the individual had meant isolation of the leaders from the masses, the stifling of popular initiative, and that the leaders were now going to the people and telling them, "No more miracle workers, no more sacred cows." Shapiro continued:

Floodgates of discussion and criticism have been opened as never before, so that every Soviet citizen is beginning to enjoy a feeling of freedom from fear. Never in more than 20 years residence in Russia has this correspondent heard so much open and uninhibited talk as now goes on wherever two Soviet citizens gather . . . the Soviet citizen . . . is now encouraged to talk and criticize.

Shapiro concluded by saying that while there were many questions, especially "why didn't we hear it before," the reaction of the Soviet public appeared to be "of general relief-breeding optimism," that the Georgian situation seemed to be completely under control and that chances of internal disorder apparently are minimal.

Other correspondents wrote that Khrushchev had criticized Stalin's conduct of the war; that Stalin refused to heed warnings from Winston Churchill and several other sources of the impending Hitlerite attack and that many thousands of lives were needlessly lost because of failure to prepare for it.

A Welles Hangen Moscow dispatch to the *New York Times*, April 30, said reports were circulating of the early release of a war film entitled "The Immortal Garrison" depicting the unpreparedness of a Soviet border city against the German attack. It should be noted that these criticisms evidently do not, as some have concluded, refer to the Soviet-German non-aggression pact itself, but only to Stalin's refusal to believe that Hitler would violate it.

It is also clear that the decimation of the top ranks of the Red Army of some of its leading generals, now rehabilitated, must have had a weakening effect. The actual military conduct of the war by Stalin, putting his own opinion above that of his generals, seems also to have been strongly questioned. Since the Congress, leading Soviet military organs have sharply criticized Stalin for minimizing Lenin's military knowledge and exaggerating his own, and for preventing the development of new ideas in military science.

The Process of Rehabilitation

The extent of the unjust executions and imprisonments is partly revealed by the rehabilitations, freeing of the living, and clearing of the names of those who died. This process began very soon after Stalin's death, when many were given amnesty and old Bolsheviks and others not seen for many years reappeared. B. J. Cutler reported in the *N. Y. Herald Tribune*, April 12, that since the Beria reign of lawlessness had been brought to an end and principles of socialist legality restored, "a great work was carried on and is still continuing in the review of the cases of many people who were condemned at that time as enemies of the people."

Among those from earlier years whose names have been cleared according to press reports are Stanislav Kossior, Vlas Chubar, Yan E. Rudzutak, Pavel Postyshev and Bela Kun, Hungarian revolutionary leader branded as a Trotskyist agent in the 30's.

An article in *Pravda*, February 21, announced that a Commission from the Parties of the USSR, Italy, Bulgarian and Finland, had examined the materials on the dissolution of the Executive Committee of the Polish Communist Party in 1938, and found that the action had been taken on the basis of falsified charges of its penetration by "enemy agents."

Among those of the postwar period reported posthumously rehabilitated are Nicholas Voznesensky, former head of the State Planning Bureau, and geneticist Nikolai Vavilov, former head of the Academy of Sciences, who was removed from this post and died in disgrace. A strong opponent of Lysenko's theories, his works are to be republished by the Academy of Sciences.

The process of reviewing history and restoring the good names of many wrongly branded enemies of the people, called for at the 20th Congress, has been going forward. According to a dispatch in the *N. Y. Herald Tribune*, an editorial in the *March Questions of History* praised nine military men who had been purged or later branded as traitors. Marshal Vassili Bluecher, one of the Soviet Army's famous field commanders of the Far East headed the list. The others listed were Marshal Alexander I. Yegorov, Chief of the Soviet General Staff before 1938; Vladimir A. Antonov Ovseyenko, a member of the "committee of five" at the time of the Petrograd uprising in 1917; Andrei S. Bubnov,

another member of that Committee and of the Political Bureau of the Party (who is still alive): Marshal Y. B. Gamarnik, who was reported to have committed suicide in 1936; S. S. Kamenev, one-time Chief of Chemical Defenses; M. S. Kedrov, Chief of the Defense Section of the State Planning Commission; M. L. Rukhimovich, Commissar of the Defense Industry; and I. S. Unschlicht, Chief of the Air Force.

The Jewish Tragedy

It is with the deepest anguish that we must record the terrible fate that befell the Jewish cultural and political leaders in the Soviet Union, as among the most dastardly of the many excesses that came about as a result of Stalin's one-man rule and pathological suspicions regarding plots against himself and the Soviet state. We had not previously believed these reports because they were in such absolute contradiction to Soviet policies and practices in the past, and in complete violation of the Soviet constitutional provision making anti-Semitism a crime. Since the story of the shocking executions and imprisonments of so many members of the Jewish community of the Soviet Union was published in *Folks-shtimme*, the Warsaw Jewish newspaper, of April 4, there seems no reason to doubt its authenticity. The New York Morning *Freiheit* published the text of the article April 12. *Jewish Life* is publishing an English translation in its May issue, from which the following facts are drawn.

The article reviews the great inspiration to the Jewish people everywhere of the original Leninist national policy which had opened the doors of all levels of community and government life to the Jewish people

persecuted under Tsardom. "*The Jewish problem at that time was completely solved*" said the article, recounting activities of Jews in industry and agriculture, in the social and political life of the country, the development of national Jewish regions, the unprecedented flowering of Jewish culture and the creative work of the Jewish writers and poets, then widely published.

Later, gradually, the repressive influences which began to infect all aspects of Soviet life began to affect the Jewish community as well. The Polish paper mentioned some of the first victims of this plague back in the 30's—political and literary figures such as S. Dimenshtein, Maria Frumkin, Rakhmiel Weinstein, Yan-kele Levin, Merezhin, Moshe Litvakov, Mikhail Levitan, Hersh Brill, Izi Kharick, Moshe Kulbak, Max Erik, Yasha Bronstein, C. Daniets. These and many other honest and talented people, the paper reported, were cut down.

Yet even so, because the basic law of Soviet society remained, a considerable amount of Jewish cultural activity continued, especially in Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine when they became a part of the Soviet Union, where Yiddish schools and publications and theaters came into being.

When Hitler marched into the Soviet Union, *Folks-shtimme* said, the whole Soviet Jewish community joined with the efforts of the entire Soviet people to repel him, in an effort which saved the lives of many millions of Jews from destruction. This the paper said "remains forever the historic achievement of the Soviet Union which the Jews of the entire world will never forget." Indeed, no greater service could have been performed for the Jews of the

world than the defeat of Hitler.

The paper asks how it could happen that after war, the Jewish anti-fascist committee which had headed the heroic efforts of the Jewish people, could suddenly have been liquidated and its leaders executed? While placing prime responsibility on "the Beria gang," it makes clear that the latter could have existed only in the atmosphere of the "cult of the individual."

Victims of the post war assault named were: David Bergelson, Der Nestor, Peretz Markish, Leib Kwitko, David Hoffstein, Itzik Feffer, Benjamin Zuskin, Itzhok Musinov, Eliku Spivak and S. Persov.

The article states that Communist Party leaders are making determined efforts to tear out this evil by the roots and that long before the 20th Congress steps were taken to clear the names of the innocent and to make their works available. The slandered name of Mikhoels, [reported killed in an automobile accident] was cleared, and the names of all the innocent writers who perished rehabilitated. Living Jewish artists and scientists have returned to their interrupted work, more than 60 writers are preparing work for publication. The Jewish State Theater is to be restored and other Jewish institutions. "In all this," the article states, "we find our consolation, our hope and our certainty of the future."

To this tragic story must nonetheless be added that while the flower of Jewish culture was cut down in the over-all assault on those wrongly called "enemies of the people," there was never anything in any way comparable to what happened in Germany, no mass assault against the Jewish people, no manifestations of racism as such except as they were revived in the regions occupied by

Hitler. The evil of anti-Semitism, outlawed under the Soviet Constitution, remained outlawed in the hearts of the overwhelming majority of the Soviet people.

Dogma and Freedom of Thought

Efforts to correct the stifling effects of dogmatism, have been apparent ever since the death of Stalin. Many steps are being taken to eliminate any sort of paralyzing orthodoxy in all branches of science.

It is now clear that Lysenko's ideas about the development of new species as a result of characteristics acquired through environmental conditions, had become enshrined in Soviet doctrine because Stalin himself approved them. For some time opposing views have been taught and published in Soviet scientific journals. Many of Lysenko's methods which had been widely applied in agriculture have been abandoned. Growing of hybrid corn, which he had opposed, is being introduced on a wide scale.

On April 10 it was announced that Lysenko's request to be relieved of his post as President of the All-Union Academy of Sciences had been accepted. That Lysenko's practical and scientific abilities are nonetheless recognized is apparent from the fact that he still retains a number of important scientific posts within the Academy of Sciences.

On March 26, the *Times* correspondent quoted from an article in *Literary Gazette* which said that Soviet economists had avoided exposing shortcomings of agriculture, though aware of them; that Soviet jurists had known the pernicious effect of illegal abortion, but did nothing to promote its legalization (this was done some months ago).

It pointed out that no statistical manuals had been published since the 30's, that the 1939 census was still the source of all demographic data about the USSR, and called for systematic publication of statistical information as an aid to overcoming the "sterile dogmatic treatises by many Soviet social scientists."

The very nature of music has prevented as pervasive damage as in other fields, but here, too it is clear that much harm was done by the fact that in many cases the main criterion for a composer's work was merely Stalin's taste. The new freedom that has swept this field has been indicated by a number of articles in the last few years by leading Soviet composers. At a Ukrainian composers conference in early April the extent to which the Stalin cult had harmed music was discussed.

The Writers' Congress held last year, was the occasion for searching reexamination of past unhealthy tendencies, although the source was not frankly faced at the time. At the 20th Party Congress Mikhail Sholokhov made a scathing attack on the separation of Soviet writers from the realities of life. B. J. Cutler reported to the N. Y. *Herald Tribune* (April 4) on an article by Leonid Novichenko published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. The author said that the excessive adulation of Stalin had caused a "dreadful sickness" in Soviet literature, drama and films, in the past 15 or 20 years. He cited as examples of harmful films, (liked very much by Stalin himself), "The Vow," showing Stalin faithfully carrying out Lenin's behests, and "The Fall of Berlin" showing Stalin master-minding the war.

The stultifying influence of the Stalin cult on Soviet art have long been evident. The new healthy turn

is testified by a long article by Alexander M. Gerasimov, President of the Soviet Academy of Fine Arts, in the latest issue of *Soviet Culture*. Gerasimov acknowledged that the cult had debased the work of painters and sculptors of both old and new generations, leading to the multiplication of "pompous pictures bearing the imprint of machine production." He added: "thinking of some of my own works in recent years I must confess that they reflected the negative influence of the cult of personality."

In the People's Democracies

When, last year, measures were taken by the Soviet leaders to restore the ruptured relations with Yugoslavia, and statements were made at the time of the Bulganin-Khrushchev visit that charges against Tito were fabricated, the question inevitably arose as to what this meant in relation to the trials of those who were supposed to have plotted with Tito.

Many of us had had great difficulty in accepting the charges. But when numerous people in different countries made detailed coherent confessions about various aspects of the supposed plot all fitting into each other, the only explanation that seemed to make any sense was that the trials and confessions were genuine. The mind reeled under any other explanation. This was true not only in our own case, but in the case of others. Forty-seven foreign correspondents and foreign diplomatic and observers were present at the Rajk trial in Hungary. Stephen White, who attended the entire trial, wrote in the N. Y. *Herald Tribune*, August 7, 1949:

The matter of drugs and torture, for example, can be disposed of at

once. Not only is there no physical evidence to show that the eight have been subjected to unusual treatment (at least in the recent past) but there is, in addition, ample evidence to show that they have not. . . . Once the idea of drugs and torture is dismissed, it would be impossible to give a rational explanation for confessions which were made by innocent men, and which were tailored out of whole cloth.

Despite doubts widely expressed, similar statements were made by many observers by no means in sympathy with the USSR or the People's Democracies.

On March 29, this year, news came from Hungary that the Rajk trial was a frame-up. Matyas Rakosi, first secretary of the Communist Party, announced that the trial had been reviewed by Hungarian legal authorities, who cleared all the defendants. Former Foreign Minister Laszlo Rajk and four others executed with him for treason were found to have been falsely accused. The three remaining defendants, had been released from jail along with a group of Social Democrats.

Rakosi said the false charges had been prepared by Gen. Gabor Peter, former chief of Hungary's security police (himself sentenced to life imprisonment in 1954), in collusion with Beria.

This was followed by news from Bulgaria that former Deputy Premier Traicho Kostov, had been cleared of the charges of high treason and plotting with Tito for which he had been executed in 1949 and that other defendants of the trial had been released from prison and rehabilitated. First Secretary Todor Zhikov of the Bulgarian Communist Party said the evidence had been faked. Bulgarian Premier Vulko

Chervenkov, according to newspaper reports, was attacked for having been mainly responsible for the trial and for having practiced Stalin-like methods of one man rule which had done much damage. Chervenkov submitted his resignation to the Bulgarian Parliament on April 16. And Anton Yugov, former chief Deputy Premier, was elected Premier, while Chervenkov became a Deputy Premier.

From Poland was reported the release and rehabilitation of former deputy Premier Gomulka, imprisoned on charges of implication in the supposed Titoist plot, and several dozen others, including former deputy premier Morgan Spichalski, former deputy defense minister Waclaw, and a number of officers.

In Czechoslovakia, the cases of former Party first Secretary Rudolf Slansky and former foreign minister Vladimir Clementis, tried with 13 others, include wider charges than the other trials. Premier Viliam Siroky, according to a *Times* dispatch from Prague, April 14, said that while charges of Titoism had admittedly been wrongly introduced, the main charges against Slansky, which included an attempt to take over the Czechoslovak government as an agent of the imperialists, still stands and that "there is no doubt that Dr. Clementis was in the service of foreign agents," Premier Siroky also said that "certain manifestations of anti-Semitism had been wrongly introduced into the trial and that the prosecutor had erred in bringing out that most of the defendants were Jewish." Others imprisoned as a result of the trial have been released.

Anton Novotny, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia according to another *Times*

dispatch, criticized the Party Central Committee as a whole for propagating a cult around Premier Gottwald, (who died in 1953), which led to a weakening of collective leadership. While referring to the modesty of Gottwald himself, he declared: "What happened was that we have taken over, imitated and developed the system, harmful to the Party, which for many years was created in the Soviet Communist Party by Stalin."

The Czechoslovakian paper *Rude Pravo* said that an investigation had disclosed abuses of the security system for which Slansky had himself been responsible, and that as a result some police officials had been discharged and others would be tried for "inadmissible" methods.

The question, of course, of how framed trials and false confessions could ever have taken place in socialist countries, and by what means, remains to be answered.

The Pravda Editorial

The editorial article printed in *Pravda* on March 28 presumably contains some of the material from Khrushchev's speech to the closed session of the 20th Party Congress; but omits concrete details of some of the most shocking to the excesses of the Stalin period. Its main point is to make clear that such excesses were in absolute violation of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and retarded their application. The emphasis is on the harmfulness of the cult of the individual, (better expressed in American terminology as one-man leadership) which gave rise to these evils and on laying a sure foundation to prevent the recurrence of such a situation.

The editorial opens by stressing the decisive role of the people "in

the majestic program for the further advance of our country toward communism" drawn up by the Twentieth Congress, and the harmfulness of the cult of the individual. It said the Party had launched a vigorous struggle against the cult because

. . . the cult of the individual means inordinately exalting individual persons, endowing them with supernatural features and qualities all but turning them into miracle workers and worshipping them. Such incorrect conceptions concerning a human being, namely J. V. Stalin, although alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, arose and were cultivated in our country over many years.

Pravda was careful to make a distinction between Stalin's earlier years when he won support by correct policies, and the later period of his life. This section we quote in full:

It is indisputable that Stalin rendered great services to our Party, to the working class, and to the international working class movement. Universally known is his role in the preparation and carrying through of the socialist revolution, in the Civil War, in the struggle for the building of socialism. Occupying the important post of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, J. V. Stalin became one of the leading figures in the Party and the Soviet state. He fought actively, especially in the first years after Lenin's death, along with other members of the Central Committee, for Leninism, against the distorters and foes of Lenin's teaching. Stalin was one of the strongest Marxists; his works, his logic and will exerted a great influence on the cadres, on the activities of the Party.

Guided by the teaching of the great Lenin, the Party, with the Central

Committee at its head, carried on extensive work for the industrialization of the country, for the collectivization of agriculture and the carrying out of the cultural revolution, achieving historic victories which are known to all. These victories were won by the Party in an irreconcilable ideological struggle against various political trends hostile to Leninism—the Trotskyites, Zinovievites, right wing opportunists bourgeois nationalists and all those who tried to divert the Party from the only correct Leninist path. At that time Stalin attained popularity in the Party, earned its sympathy and support, and became known to the people.

But gradually there began to appear in Stalin's practice of leadership those features and characteristics which later developed into the cult of the individual. This cult arose and developed against the background of the majestic, historic achievements of Marxism-Leninism, the enormous successes of the Soviet people and the Communist Party in the building of socialism, the victorious conclusion of the Patriotic War, the further strengthening of our social and state system and the growth of its international prestige.

These gigantic achievements in building a new society, scored by the Soviet people under the leadership of the Communist Party and on the basis of the laws of history discovered by Marxism-Leninism, did not receive in sufficient measure, a correct Marxist-Leninist interpretation, but were unjustifiably attributed to the merits of one man—Stalin—and explained by his special merits as a leader. Lacking personal modesty, he not only did not cut short the praises and adulation addressed to him, but rather supported and encouraged them in every way. As time passed, this cult of the individual assumed ever more monstrous forms and did serious harm to our cause.

It goes without saying that such

a practice on the part of Stalin represented a violation of Leninist principles of leadership and was at variance with the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.

Pravda then gives a number of quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin condemning personal adulation in relation to themselves or to anyone else and showing that they all carried on an ideological struggle against the concept of "the hero and the mob," maintaining "The people are the real creators of history."

While emphasizing that Marxism "does not deny the role of outstanding persons in history," *Pravda* declared that Lenin had above all demanded adherence to the principle of collective leadership, and that violations of this principle in the later period of Stalin's life and work caused great harm, adding:

... his disregard of the standards of Party life and of the principle of collective Party leadership, his frequent personal decisions of questions, led to a distortion of Party principles and Party democracy, to violations of revolutionary law and unwarranted acts of repression.

Only due to such violations, *Pravda* continued, were Beria and his accomplices able to worm their way into leading positions in the Party and the State; their exposure and punishment had made it possible to put an end to the violations of socialist law. Within the Party organization the practice of regular congresses, conferences and meetings, broad discussions at all levels from top to bottom, the collective working out of decisions, the rule of elections from below and right of recall, have now been restored.

Some results of the "vicious

method of leadership of Party and economic work" noted by the article were: administration by "mere issuing of orders"; fostering the disdain for initiative from below; neglect of important branches of agriculture; "the growth of such ugly practices as the covering up of shortcomings, the varnishing of realities and bluffing." While much has been done in the correction of these mistakes, *Pravda* declared:

We have still not a few fawners and sycophants, people who are accustomed to delivering speeches prepared in advance and who were brought up on servility and subserviency. It is our urgent task to eradicate these most harmful survivals of the cult of the individual.

As examples of the harm done in many works on philosophy, political economy, history and other social sciences, given over in large part to

glorification of Stalin and quotations from his works, the "Short Biography of Stalin" and the "History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," both written with Stalin's direct participation, were cited. All this led to the flourishing of dogmatism, learning by rote, the idea that only Stalin had anything of importance to say; art, literature and films all suffered from this pervasive stifling influence.

The article ends with a call for the eradication of all survivals of the cult as an urgent task that must be carried out in order to preclude any possibility of its revival "in any form whatsoever." This task, said *Pravda* cannot be accomplished by administrative measures, or with "haste and precipitancy." It requires the most thoroughgoing educational work.

The process of profound moral regeneration is now under way throughout the Soviet Union.