

On the Reappraisal of Stalin's Role

by JESSICA SMITH

WE FULLY appreciate and share the deep concern expressed by many of our readers about the reappraisal of the role of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Yet we shall have to disappoint those who look to us for any attempt at complete analysis at this time. While there are some things that can and must be said now, too often in the past we have sought to give answers which, based on insufficient facts, later proved to be misleading or utterly wrong. The new situation requires deep thought and study not only of all the speeches at the Congress but of other material not yet available. It requires not only a sober re-evaluation of developments in the Soviet Union but of our own attitudes toward past events, whether questioned at the time or too uncritically accepted. This will take time. We shall do everything possible to throw more light on this question as more material becomes available.

We feel that our greatest service to our readers in this issue is to publish a summary of the section of Khrushchev's report dealing with the international position of the Soviet Union and peace, as of the greatest immediacy to the American people. This condensation can of course be no substitute for a careful

reading of the entire Khrushchev speech, as well as Premier Bulganin's report on the Sixth Five-Year Plan and the rest of the Congress proceedings.

We are also publishing a preliminary report by our correspondent Ralph Parker on what the Congress decisions mean to the Soviet people, and a commentary on the part of Khrushchev's report dealing with the internal situation, by Anna Louise Strong, herself once a victim of the type of policies now in process of correction.

One thing above all is clear. All the Congress speeches and discussions breathe confidence and strength. They show a frank facing up to mistakes of the past, and record vigorous measures already taken to correct them and a determination to avoid their repetition. Unquestionably such a sharp re-evaluation of Stalin's leadership could not take place without deep repercussions, without bringing in its wake confusion, disorientation and doubts on the part of many people, there and here. But this very process of bringing boldly out into the light of day many problems that have long festered beneath the surface, is in itself a tremendous testimonial to the health and strength of Soviet socialist society.

The central question in the re-evaluation of past policies at the 20th Congress was that of violations of the principle of collective leadership through the development of the "cult of the individual" around Stalin. The direct attacks on Stalin's leadership have come as a shock to the outside world as they have indubitably to the Soviet people. But it must be kept in mind that the process of re-evaluation began almost immediately after Stalin's death, when the importance of collective leadership was put forward with a new urgency, and has been implicit in many new policies that have since been inaugurated and in the new freedom of discussion in many fields. The Congress discussions, therefore, represent not a sudden new turn, but the sharpening of a process which has been going on for the last three years.

Khrushchev, in reporting on the consideration given to this question in the period since the 19th Party Congress, put it this way:

The Central Committee was concerned to develop the creative activity of Party members and all the working people, and to this end it took steps to explain widely the Marxist-Leninist conception of the role of the individual in history. It vigorously condemned the cult of the individual as being alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, a cult which tends to make a particular leader a hero and miracle worker and at the same time belittles the role of the Party and the masses and tends to reduce their creative effort. Currency of the cult of the individual tended to minimize the role of the collective leadership of the Party, and at times resulted in serious drawbacks in our work.

The full extent of those draw-

backs we do not yet know. Undoubtedly we shall in time have a more rounded picture of the Stalin period assessing the great accomplishments which laid the basis of the strength of today, as well as giving a clearer picture of the negative sides. It is understandable that the main Congress reports should have dwelt more on positive steps taken to overcome shortcomings and on plans for the future than on the details of past mistakes.

It is reported in the press that a full picture of those mistakes was given the delegates by Khrushchev in a closed session, and is now being reported to the Soviet people. No doubt much of this material will in time become available to us. The press has been indulging in the usual wild orgy of speculation. This should be understood for what it is, and conclusions withheld until we know the real facts. Meanwhile, we can only point out some of the aspects of the re-evaluation which are already clear.

The effects of one-man leadership, giving rise to bureaucratic planning from the center and individual rather than collective decisions, produced a certain stagnation and dampening of individual initiative that had adverse effects in practically every sphere of Soviet life, chiefly internal, but also had certain bad effects on international relations as well.

It must be borne in mind that the peace policy of the USSR, the principle of peaceful co-existence, has remained a constant of Soviet policy from the beginning. There is no question as to the positive contribution of Stalin to the development of this policy to a point where it received world-wide recognition as the essential basis for relations between states of differing social systems.

But it is now clear that while actively advocating and seeking peaceful co-existence, too much dependence was placed on appeals to the Western powers to change policies which were in fact the main obstacle to international cooperation, too little on active pursuit by the Soviet Union of new and bold means to further it. At the same time it is now acknowledged that in some instances the Soviet Union has itself been responsible for the aggravation of tensions. The main example given of this was the unjustified break with Yugoslavia. This, it is now clear, cannot just be laid to the door of Beria, but was the result of failure to give sufficient respect to the sovereign right of each country to work out its own particular forms of transition to socialism. The role of neutral nations was to some extent considered hostile to co-existence rather than a positive force to aid in bringing it about as it is regarded today. These and other mistakes were frankly admitted in the speeches of Khrushchev, Foreign Minister Molotov and even more sharply by Mikoyan, a First Deputy Premier of the Council of Ministers.

Molotov declared that in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the persistence of old habits had interfered to some extent with the development of bolder and more active forms of struggle against war in the post-war period, that there had been an under-estimation of the potentialities of the whole socialist sphere and the peace forces everywhere in the defense of peace, and especially of the peace role of such countries as India, Burma, Indonesia, Egypt and other countries refusing to ally themselves with any military bloc.

Mikoyan made a point of the necessity of casting aside some of the

"hidebound" forms of activity in the relations of foreign trade and economic bodies with other states and their citizens. He said that the former isolation of Soviet state and public organizations has been overcome, and contacts extended on every level.

Among the examples given of the recent more active pursuit of the policy of peaceful co-existence were the relinquishment of military bases in China and Finland, the liquidation of the mixed companies in which the USSR participated in the People's Democracies, the peace treaty with Austria, the closer relations with the neutral nations, the intensified program of economic aid to the less developed countries.

The greatest emphasis by all the speakers was on the determination to pursue the consistent Soviet foreign policy of peace with more boldness and flexibility than ever before, and on the fact that war cannot be considered inevitable and can be avoided if the peace forces everywhere are sufficiently vigilant and active.

Pending knowledge of more facts, certain of the evil effects of the emphasis on individual leadership in internal affairs in the USSR are clear from what we already know.

First of all, it must be recognized that while all the facts of the Beria situation are not known, it is clear that he sought to make the security organs he controlled the main source of Soviet power, placing them above both the Party and the Government, and that after Stalin's death he attempted to seize supreme power for himself. It is a logical assumption that such a danger could not have arisen had the principle of collective leadership been firmly established under Stalin.

It also seems clear that the cult of the individual hindered the development of full Soviet democracy in many of the republics and localities of the Soviet Union, that Republic and local leaders often maintained bureaucratic control solely on the basis of expressed loyalty to Stalin which was not challenged by others for fear of themselves being considered disloyal. Vigorous measures have been taken to correct this in both Republics and localities.

An important point that has been largely overlooked in the assessments made here of the Congress results is the extent to which the basic question of the alliance between the workers and peasants had been distorted. A big disproportion between agriculture and industry had been allowed to grow up, which not only had an adverse effect on the economy as a whole, but meant that the collective farmers were not receiving their proportionate share of the national income, while at the same time too great a disproportion had been allowed to develop in the income of different categories of workers. Vigorous measures are being taken to correct all this, to increase grain and livestock production and to bring the standard of living of the countryside closer to that of the city.

The system of economic planning, which had become too centralized, has been reorganized so that the workers and collective farmers can again play the direct part in planning from below that they were always intended to do. Greater attention is also being played to planning for better production and distribution of consumers' goods on the basis of the continued necessary emphasis on heavy industry.

The work of scientists, economists, historians, philosophers, jurists, was

sharply criticized by Mikoyan, and the extent to which dogmatism had become enthroned in place of creative scientific activity. "Most of our theoreticians," he said "are engaged in repeating and chewing over old quotations, formulae and propositions." He said it was time economists had access to statistics too long classified as secret. He and others called for a new look at historical material in which frequently events had been explained not on the basis of actual relation of forces but "by alleged subversive activity of individual Party leaders at the time who many years after these events were incorrectly proclaimed enemies of the people."

Most serious of all, are the revelations of repressive measures taken far beyond what was necessary for the security of the Soviet state. No final judgement can be made on the extent to which this occurred until more facts are known. Without condoning whatever excesses were committed, any balanced and fair judgement must take into account the extent to which the hostility of the outside world has been responsible for this. We must never forget the attempts that have been made to destroy the Soviet Union, through one method or another, until this very day. That there have been real plots to overthrow the Soviet Government and murder its leaders is a part of the incontrovertible history of our times. And if there have been far too many cases where the line has been blurred between actual treason and honest dissent, with tragic results, let us be honest in our own assessment of where the responsibility has lain. And let us look in the mirror and see what is happening in our America. The Soviet Union is doing this, is laying

bare its own mistakes before its own people and the whole world, and is very vigorously engaged in setting its own house in order. Measures to insure a much wider degree of civil liberties have been taken. A new criminal code has been completed, the judiciary reorganized. Malenkov is reported to have declared in England that not only is collective leadership firmly established, but the right to dissent outside of the collective leadership without being branded a traitor.

We believe that the question is quite justifiably being raised as to where the present Soviet leaders were when all these things happened, and why there was not more criticism of themselves. To a very great extent the Congress proceedings do contain such criticisms. They speak of "our" mistakes, not only the mistakes of Stalin. We can hope in time they will be more explicit about how it was possible for all these things to have come about. Meantime, there is a lesson to those of us here whose over-idealizations and over-simplified and often incorrect explanations of Soviet events have not proved helpful to American-Soviet understanding. Thoroughgoing criticism of ourselves is in order, too.

The main concern of Americans of course, must be with the policies of our own country. Since these policies in recent years have been built on an obsessive "anti-communism" and the long-exploded myth of Soviet aggression, rather than on a principled consideration of America's own interests and peace, our first need in determining our own policy is a clear understanding of Soviet foreign policy and what it means to us.

No one, of course, as James Reston of the *New York Times* and other

commentators points out, believed Secretary Dulles' statement that the 20th Congress proved the "failure" and "weakness" of Soviet policies, and the correctness of our own. In the first place, the Soviet leaders proclaimed not a new foreign policy, but a more vigorous pursuit than ever of peaceful co-existence. In the second, one has only to look at what is happening as a result of the policies of America and its allies in the Middle and Far East and in North Africa, to see whose policies are failing. Everywhere the U.S. policy of building military blocs is falling apart and causing increasing resentment. Mr. Dulles' trip to Asia has only served to point this up more vividly. Both French and Italian leaders have openly voiced criticism of a policy toward the Soviet Union based on military considerations alone. Premier Nehru of India has repeatedly attacked the system of military alliances as a threat to peace. Even if the change in Soviet foreign policy were as great as Dulles insists, the only logical conclusion must be a change in U.S. foreign policy, long over-due, and increasingly demanded on all sides.

The testimony of the 20th Congress speeches to the strength and determination of the Soviet peace policy, the emphasis on the desire for friendly peaceful relations with the United States and other Western nations, the readiness expressed for immediate agreement on ending H-bomb tests pending agreement on effective disarmament measures—all these point the way to new possibilities for fruitful international negotiations. It is to be hoped the more flexible attitude recently expressed by the Administration on disarmament points the way to constructive results in this vital field.