

the continued existence of the state and even of a limited form of alienation. Neither of these vanishes overnight. They "wither away". Lack of space prevents full discussion of these aspects. It also prevents discussion of the contradictions which belong to the specific situation created by the existence of socialism in one country, and then in a group of countries, surrounded by capitalist states. These include the conflict between vigilance against real spies and saboteurs (backed by the Nazis in the 30s and by the CIA today) and the need for full discussion of all views, including anti-socialist views; the difference between deeds and opinions; the distinction between administrative and political measures against dissidents, etc. No doubt other comrades will have plenty to say on such topics, in addition to John Gollan's pertinent remarks. I should like to end my own contribution by pointing to one of the ways in which the basic contradiction affects us here in Britain. I have in mind the need to reconcile the leading role of the Communist Party with the requirements of left unity, or, to put it differently, the dialectical contradiction between the concept of vanguard leadership and that of a

mass party with its ears close to the ground. Nor is this music for the socialist future. It is a problem we have to tackle right now, as part of our strategy of socialist revolution. One of the weaknesses of *The British Road to Socialism* as it stands is that it is too vague on this issue. This was unavoidable 25 years ago, when *The British Road* was first written, as we were breaking new ground and had little practical experience to fall back upon. The experience we have accumulated since then should enable the Commission appointed to re-draft the Party Programme to grapple successfully with these topics. No doubt it will show convincingly and in detail how we Communists envisage our leading role (as something we *win* through hard work and the spreading of our scientific theory), our relationship to the left, and more particularly to the Labour Party, our stand on what is now known as "pluralistic democracy", the distinction we draw between democracy as understood by Marxists and the numerous varieties of bourgeois liberalism, etc., etc. The movement will certainly grow stronger as the party collectively deepens its understanding of these and related issues.

Mark Harrison

In his opening article John Gollan comments on the achievements of socialism in the USSR, and also on the ways in which Stalin's domination gravely undermined these developments. In the light of this I would like to comment on some implications for Soviet history, and for us today.

Consequences of Stalin's Domination

In the generation of Stalin's leadership (between 1929 and 1953) the Soviet *economy* went through an industrial transformation that took three generations in the advanced capitalist economies. This was achieved through a centralised, hierarchical planning system. But in the course of the breakthrough certain unplanned effects arose, some of which have lingered to the present day.

The 1930s saw an economic and demographic disaster in agriculture, which arose from the forcing of the pace in the collectivisation of the peasantry.¹

¹ As John Gollan stresses (*Marxism Today*, Jan. 1976: p. 16). But earlier he reproduces the myth that "the main source of capital for expansion came from agriculture" (p. 10). Recent work by Soviet historians have refuted this idea. See Michael Ellman, "Did the Agricultural Surplus Provide the Resources for the Increase in Investment in the USSR during the First Five Year Plan?", *Economic Journal*, Dec. 1975, an evaluation of A. A. Barsov, *Balans stoimostnykh obmenov mezhdru gorodom i derevnei*, Moscow 1969.

In industrial construction forcing the pace resulted in over-employment and years of rapid inflation. Over-ambitious planning and lack of rationality in intersectoral balance resulted in many half-finished projects and in new factories standing idle for lack of raw materials. The most vital planned goals were achieved, but at heavy cost in other respects—costs which leading Soviet historians now consider to have been avoidable.²

In addition, the mass organisations of workers and peasants were subordinated to the party, and the party to the state, a process which as John Gollan says led to loss of democratic involvement in higher-level decisions.³ Where mass initiatives broke through, they had interesting side effects: the Stakhanov movement greatly boosted labour productivity, but disrupted financial planning and led to wage and price inflation. Mass mobilisation in the service of the repressions led to the loss of many thousands of vital technical cadres, who found

² See A. A. Barsov, *op. cit.*, p. 96; V. P. Danilov, "Osnovnye itogi i napravleniya izucheniya istorii sovetskogo krest'yanstva", in *Problemy agrarnoi istorii sovetskogo obshchestva*, Moscow 1971, pp. 243-247. But it is not only a matter of hindsight; those economists and technicians who at the time foresaw the consequences of administrative haste were repressed.

³ *Marxism Today*, Jan. 1976, p. 12.

themselves the scapegoats for mass frustrations in the conditions of working life.

If one looks at the development of Soviet *ideology* one is again struck by its contradictory character. The Stalin era saw the rise of mass literacy and a mass culture based on technical, trade union and political educational institutions, and on Marxism as the dominant political ideology (i.e. all actions of the Soviet state were legitimised in terms of Marxism, or concealed). But Marxism itself took on a dogmatised character, to which Stalin made his particular contribution.⁴

The mass culture, through which the socialist aspirations of the working people were expressed, was shot through with a cult of Stalin's personality, i.e. a set of ideological relations which linked the members of the working class, peasantry and intelligentsia not collectively with each other but individually with Stalin. Dogmatic Marxism was transmitted and reproduced through these ideological links.

At the level of *political power*, the Stalin era was characterised by tremendous mass mobilisations. But these were not mobilisations around the debate on fundamental policy questions in the party and Soviets. One mobilisation built the industrial economy, spurred by ambitious goals but shackled by their lack of correspondence with real possibilities. A second mobilisation, both helped and hindered by Stalin's "strategic genius", smashed the Nazi war machine. A third mobilisation was directed towards the mass repressions, of which Medvedev describes the two-way character: repression was not simply directed by higher-level organs, but was stimulated and inspired by them⁵ to the point that mass initiative became uncontrollable, and waves of denunciations by individuals and lower-level organs in turn stimulated the zeal of the security bosses. In the outcome, those who suffered most consistently were Stalin's most devoted cadres in the party, state and above all the security apparatus.⁶

Stalinism as an Instrumental Ideology

In explaining these developments an important area of study is that of the ideological relations of

⁴ Reference is made to his theory of the harmony of the base and superstructure of socialist society, of the trade unions as the transmission belts of Soviet power, of the monolithic party and its domination of other tendencies, and of the intensification of the class struggle as socialism becomes stronger and its enemies weaker. Together these represent a peculiar combination of economism and sectarianism.

⁵ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, London 1972, pp. 306-307, 350-354, 402-412.

⁶ Roy Medvedev, *op. cit.*, Ch. VI.

Stalinism, from which I would pick out an instrumental approach to theoretical and political practice. An instrumental approach is one which sees the masses as the object of history, not as the "makers of history", i.e. as manipulable *instruments* which a dominant force (i.e. the party or state) can use to achieve its planned goals.

In the Soviet economy working people were seen as instruments for fulfilling plans, not for deciding which plan to choose. Their mass organisations were seen as instruments of compulsion—the theory of trade unions as the "transmission belt" which relayed ideas and orders to the masses. Planning targets were used as instruments of mass mobilisation, and not as means to a rational allocation of resources.

At the level of ideology, authoritarian concepts of education sought to imprint those axioms authorised by the "greatest thinker of all time" on the blank pages of the mass mind.⁷ These axioms were used to justify everything from Lysenko's "genetics" to corrective labour camps where millions learnt the "dignity of productive labour" in exhaustion and death.

Because the masses were seen as passive, unreliable, infiltrated everywhere by "enemies of the people", ideological stability and conformity had to be imposed in all areas of science and culture through the cult of Stalin's personality.

I think that this instrumental character of Stalinism requires emphasis because it brings us closest to the material explanation of the character of political power and Stalin's domination.

The cult of personality was not simply created by Stalin. It rose on the basis of a working class exhausted and decimated by the cost of winning state power: after three years of world war, a breathing space of 1917-18 and then the intervention of the armies of 21 countries. The consequent famines, the chronic unemployment and deprivations of the 1920s, the bitter factional disputes and their brutal resolution in 1927-29—all this led into the forced collectivisation and the onset of the Five Year Plans, during which the exhausted ranks of the working class that had made the revolution were immensely swollen by millions of raw recruits from the countryside, totally lacking experience of collective activity.

If I would make a criticism of John Gollan's historical account, it is that he does not adequately emphasise the material position of the working class

⁷ "How are we to educate (certain comrades) in Marxism-Leninism? I think that systematic reiteration and patient explanation of so-called 'generally known' truths is one of the best methods of educating these comrades in Marxism". J. V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR.*, Peking 1972, p. 9.

as a precondition of Stalinism.⁸ The late Isaac Deutscher always tried to make this relation.⁹ It is interesting too, that Roy Medvedev relates Stalinist revivals and tendencies in the USSR today to the material position of working people who find increasing problems in coping with a more complex, cost-conscious and skill-conscious economy which seems beyond their control; frustrated and exhausted they seek to appeal to some higher authority to settle accounts on their behalf, which will issue orders and directives and get things done.¹⁰

The point of lasting significance, however, is that the energies and initiatives of the Soviet working class of 1930 (as also today) were not exhausted, and the working class did not and could not become a mere instrument of state policy (this poses an *historical possibility* that a different leadership might have directed these energies to a different outcome). In the event, Stalin's leadership, and the instrumental approach which it embodied, did not simply solve existing problems, but in the course of their solution created new ones. For this ideology called forth uncontrollable responses. Partly they amplified the Stalinist mobilisation and swelled the flood of denunciations and arrests. Partly they resisted it, in particular in agriculture, with disastrous consequences. Moreover, those leaders who generated this ideology were subject to it themselves. Respectful towards Stalin, sectarian and suspicious towards the masses, convinced of their own place in history, they were unable to see the consequences of their own actions either as evidence of their justification, or as the malicious activity of "enemies". They saw their policies as directed in the best interests of socialism.

In other words, an instrumental ideology cannot itself be used instrumentally—precisely because it is believed. Above I suggested that an instrumental ideology is one which sees the masses as instruments whereby a dominant force (i.e. the party or state) can achieve planned goals. The result was that the dominant force was neither the party nor the state but Stalin, and that, because of the intervention of the masses, the goals achieved were not always those planned.

That is, Stalinism did not work; though I think that there are better reasons for rejecting it, such as feelings of comradeship for those who suffered

under Stalin, and of understanding for those who turn away from socialism today because of this aspect of its past and present.

Political Power under Socialism

Following the 20th Congress of the CPSU Togliatti raised his question whether or not "certain forms of degeneration" had accompanied the achievements of working class power. Following the further revelations of the 22nd Congress, Thorez suggested that one could not speak of working class power under Stalin because of the absence of working class participation in political decisions.¹¹ These questions have never been satisfactorily resolved.

In one sense the state apparatus acquired a high degree of bureaucratic autonomy from the working class, which it retains to some degree today, while the forms of its operation have changed. On the other hand it never began to acquire the unified, class-conscious character of Trotsky's "bureaucratic caste"; it has remained bound to the working class through Marxism and divided within by personality cults and specialist rivalries. It lacks the class imperatives of the capitalist state, and its domination over society is limited by "determining" ideological constraints.¹²

The problem can be put as follows. Let us say that we reject economic Marxism (i.e. that the forms of state power always correspond automatically with the economic basis of society). Under capitalism the relationship between the state and the monopoly bourgeoisie can be democratic; and we know that bourgeois democracy is something real, struggled for and won by the organised labour movement. The relationship can also be bureaucratic or fantastic. Under socialism the relationship between the state and the working class can also vary. We know that neither the abolition of monopoly capital nor the existence of Soviets guarantees socialist democracy.

We can theorise about the preconditions of bureaucratic relations under both capitalism and socialism. As Marxists we can theorise about the dynamics of fascist regimes, the role of different sections of the monopoly bourgeoisie, middle strata and working class. We can say something about the goals of such regimes: external aggression, and the destruction of the labour movement's autonomy within by means of nationalist militarism, racism and direct repression.

Today we can see the Soviet achievement. But *as*

⁸ He writes (p. 9): "The start of the problem of the cult would appear to be that Stalin, and the leadership of the party associated with him, took political decisions at critical moments in complete variance with Lenin's approach".

⁹ Isaac Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution*, Oxford 1968, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ Roy Medvedev, *Kniga o sotsialisticheskoi demokratii*, Amsterdam-Paris 1972, p. 53.

¹¹ *L'Humanité*, Nov. 22, 1961.

¹² "The economic base 'determines' ('in the last instance') which element is to be dominant in a social formation. . . ." Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 254.

Marxists we can say hardly anything about the dynamics of state power under socialism. In what sense—economic, ideological or political—was there working class power under Stalin? What were the political consequences, and how deep rooted are they still today?

To ask these questions is not to denigrate the sovereignty of the Soviet people. Its achievements have been won with great struggle, and at great cost.

Bob Morrison

British Imperialism is in deep crisis. Momentous and indeed unique developments within the British labour movement are taking place before our very eyes. The cogent need of the hour is for a correct Marxist analysis giving both leadership and unifying all that is best in the labour movement, including a self-critical examination of the role of our Communist Party in winning that unity.

But Communist leadership does not come simply from our knowledge of Marxism. It comes from our ability to correctly apply it to the specific conditions of Britain, to the specific problems confronting the majority of the British people and above all to the problems confronting the British working class. Failure to apply Marxism correctly means that despite our efforts, our Party will continue to stagnate.

The Communist National Congress met in November 1975—an event of some significance to all concerned with the British working class movement, more so with the current momentous problems. A few weeks later *Marxism Today*, the theoretical journal of our Communist Party calls for “a far reaching discussion” not—almost unbelievable—on the decisions of the recent National Congress but:

“to review in retrospect the decisions and effects of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”.

At such a time for the Communist Party to hold “a far reaching discussion” on the so obviously divisive questions of the 20th Congress of CPSU and on current matters of democracy within the Soviet Union is unworthy of Communist leadership assuming that the initiative for such a discussion came from the Executive Committee.

Stalin's Role

“Marxism requires the truth” about the repressions in the Soviet Union states John Gollan in the January *Marxism Today*. I wholeheartedly agree! I agree further that the absence of it leaves the field wide open to the enemies of the Soviet Union. But

But we have yet to understand their true significance.

As Marxists we are supposed to learn from history—in order to see the present as it is, and to change the future. Until we do this we shall fail, in small and large ways, not least because we shall fail to carry others with our arguments. The discussion which John Gollan has opened is long overdue; but his contribution has opened many doors, and will be seen as a substantial and positive step.

It does even more than that! It leaves the field wide open also to subjective un-Marxist one sided analysis—like that of John Gollan—which refuses to look at a man's whole life—ignores the great theoretical and practical contribution that Stalin made and tends to put every problem, crime and repression down to him whilst every advance was made despite his evil influence.

By 1917 Joseph Stalin, at the age of 38, had spent nine years in prison or exile. Up to that time his greatest theoretical contribution was the working out of the Marxist solution of the national question, which insisted on the right of small nations to secession if they desired it. Appointed Commissar of the Nationalities at the onset of the revolution, it was he who was sent to Finland to give to the Finnish people their right to independence. “No one else than Stalin” said Lenin “would have been trusted by the different nationalities”.

Marxism and the National and Colonial Question by Joseph Stalin is essential reading for all students of Marxism. Particularly so for British Communists at the moment with the development of the national problems. Joseph Stalin was appointed by the Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party “in charge of the uprising”. The decision of the Congress of Soviets to form a government, on that historic day of October 27, 1917, was signed by Lenin as Chairman of the Council and Stalin as Chairman of the Affairs of the Nationalities.

He was appointed General Secretary of the Soviet Party in 1922, a position he held till his death. By the following year (i.e. 1923) John Gollan claims that the seeds of the future repressions were sown. He states and I quote:

“it was in this period of 1923 to 1930 that the Party, partly through circumstances but also because of Stalin's rigid thought on the Party, became excessively centralised and discussions of fresh developments were curtailed. This led to stultification of thought with schematic Marxism replacing creative Marxism but also in creating conditions where mass repressions in the name of security could have a certain plausibility.” (*Marxism Today*, January, p. 11)