

## *The Twentieth Congress and After*

*Editors' Note:* The following three articles are the first in a series of commentaries on developments in the USSR since the 20th Congress of the CPSU, held in Moscow last February. In the first article, Merle Fainsod reports on the most important aspects of the Congress: the Stalin denigration, the innovations in ideology, and the main outlines of the domestic and foreign policies as they

emerged from the Congress sessions. The second article, by Hugh Seton-Watson, examines the class structure of Soviet society and shows its relation to several developments at the Congress. Finally, Marshall D. Shulman seeks to answer the fundamental question plaguing Soviet experts and laymen alike: Is the Soviet Union changing, and if so, in what direction?

## *The CPSU Takes Stock of Itself*

By MERLE FAINSOD

THE 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, held in Moscow in February, bore striking resemblance in its procedure to earlier convocations of the Stalin era. It was, like its predecessors, a congress without debate and without opposition. All decisions were taken by unanimous vote, and most of the speakers conveyed the impression of actors reciting their assigned scripts in accordance with cues provided by the report of the Central Committee. It is safe to say that Stalin would have approved of the stage management, if not the content of the performance.

For this time Stalin was the villain of the piece. The most dramatic highlight of the Congress was the *coup de grâce* administered to the Stalin cult. Yet the motivations for this action still remain obscure. The denigration of Stalin was well under way long before the Congress assembled. Indeed, it may be said to have begun with the funeral orations delivered over

Stalin's bier. There were signs of still sharper down grading when the Soviet press passed his birthday on December 21, 1953 without even a formal acknowledgment. A year later, however, he was partially restored to grace. On December 21, 1954 *Pravda* hailed his achievements as the 'great continuer of the cause of V. I. Lenin'; no word of criticism was permitted to mar its paean of praise. As late as the anniversary meeting of the Moscow Soviet on November 6, 1955, the portraits of Lenin and Stalin appeared side by side in equal size; the grand succession of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin was reproclaimed; and Kaganovich paid tribute to "the great Stalin." The 76th anniversary of his birth on December 21, 1955, elicited the customary press tribute.

It is against this background that one begins to sense the shock which the 20th Congress' attack on Stalin must have evoked. It may even be supposed that there were differences of view within the leadership group itself on the dimensions and timing of the assault; indeed Kaganovich implied as much in his admission to the Congress that the decision to embark on a struggle against the cult of the individual was "no easy question."

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## The Charges

The treatment of Stalin at the Congress followed a curious course. The first sign of the limbo to which Stalin was being consigned came in the opening moments of the Congress when the delegates rose to observe a moment of silence to honor the memory of "several prominent leaders of the Communist movement" who had died since the last Congress. The "prominent leaders" were Stalin, Gottwald, and the Japanese Communist Kyuichi Tokuda!

The denigration of Stalin was handled rather cautiously in Khrushchev's report on behalf of the Central Committee. Aside from a strong condemnation of the leader cult, which, Khrushchev declared, "at times resulted in serious drawbacks in our work," Stalin was ignored rather than openly condemned. Khrushchev mentioned his name only once in the course of a 50,000-word address, and then only to note that "shortly after the 19th Congress, death took Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin from our ranks."<sup>1</sup>

It remained for Mikoyan to launch the first open attack. At the 19th Congress he had hailed Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* as a work of genius, a treasure house of Communist inspiration. Now he commented, "It is doubtful that we can be helped by it, and it is doubtful if it is correct. . . ." <sup>2</sup> He sharply criticized Stalin's *Short Course on the History of the Party* and demanded new textbooks to replace it. He called for the rehabilitation of a number of Old Bolsheviks such as Kossior and Antonov-Ovseyenko who were liquidated by Stalin in the Great Purge and "wrongly declared enemies of the people." He referred obliquely but with unmistakable sarcasm to Stalin's famous "Oath to Lenin" and also to the passages in Lenin's last testament denouncing Stalin as "too rude" and calling for his removal as General Secretary of the party. Said Mikoyan:

Lenin's great anxiety about the fate of our party and our revolution before he left us is well-known. . . . How great would be Lenin's joy if he saw now . . . that we not only swear by Lenin's name but are exerting our efforts to put into practice Lenin's ideas . . . <sup>3</sup>

The Congress concluded with a sensational, though as yet unpublished, speech by Khrushchev in which Stalin was pictured as a vengeful tyrant who trusted no one, murdered and terrorized his closest associates, and was primarily responsible for the near defeat of the Soviet Union in the early years of World War II. The more or less authoritative accounts of this speech which have appeared in the Yugoslav and satellite

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, February 18, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

press make clear, however, that the indictment was not a total one.<sup>4</sup> Stalin's services during the Revolution and Civil War, his struggles against the Trotskyites, Bukharinites, and bourgeois nationalists, and his contributions to industrialization and collectivization received some recognition. The brunt of the attack was apparently centered on developments after the 17th Party Congress in 1934 when the cult of Stalin worship gathered full momentum and the collective character of the party leadership was allegedly dissolved.

The bill of particulars against Stalin included the murder of thousands of honest, innocent Communists during the Great Purge; the weakening of the Red Army as the result of the liquidation of Tukhachevsky and other high-ranking officers on the basis of slanderous and unjustified charges; Stalin's failure to take necessary defensive measures against the Nazi attack; his inept interference with the Red Army High Command during the war; his incorrect attitude toward the question of nationalities; his provocation in the case of Yugoslavia; his fabrication of the so-called "Leningrad Case" in which Voznesensky, Kuznetsov, and other high party officials lost their lives; and his final responsibility for the completely falsified "doctors' plot." The latter-day Stalin was portrayed as a morbidly suspicious paranoiac who suffered from a persecution mania, saw enemies and spies in his closest associates, and demanded servility and obsequiousness from all who served him.

How can this decision to demolish the Stalin myth be explained? What inspired the present leaders to risk the shock and confusion which these revelations would inevitably create in party ranks at home and abroad? Surely they must have been aware that their documentation of Stalin's crimes raised embarrassing questions of their own involvement and responsibility which could not lightly be brushed aside. What motivated them to open this Pandora's box of dangerous inferences and unpredictable consequences?

## The Possibilities

**I**N the absence of authoritative evidence, observers must necessarily resort to speculative hypotheses. Some have attempted to explain the attack on Stalin as a belated decision of his lieutenants to have their day of reckoning and to settle accounts for the humiliation and browbeating to which they were subjected by the Leader while he was still alive. Although such personal factors may have formed part of the background of the decision to demolish the Stalin

<sup>4</sup> See *Borba*, March 20, 1956 and *Trybuna Ludu*, March 27, 1956.

myth, they do not seem significant enough in themselves to impel the present leadership to take such a momentous step.

More persuasive are the explanations which seek to relate the attack on the cult of the individual to the problem of preserving the precarious equilibrium of collective leadership. In this view, the attack on Stalin represents a dramatic effort to bar the way to the emergence of another dictator from within the present ruling group. For the moment at least, it registers the determination of the new rulers to protect their respective spheres of activity by enforcing a vow of fealty to the principle of collective leadership. Since dependable information on the actual relations which prevail within the ruling group is unavailable, it is difficult to document this hypothesis. On its face, however, the assault on Stalin clearly raises a powerful barricade against any immediate effort to build up another *Vozhd*.

Another hypothesis sees the assault on Stalin as a reflection of the increased importance of the military on the Soviet scene. Support for this view can be found in several particulars of Khrushchev's attack—Stalin was deflated as a military leader, officers executed during the Great Purge were cleared, and it was admitted that Stalin rather than the High Command was responsible for the early defeats of World War II. Buttressing this view are the increased recognition and status accorded to Marshal Zhukov in the party high command. Clearly, the Marshals emerge from the Congress with added prestige. Should Stalin's heirs fall out among themselves, discredit each other through accusations of involvement in Stalin's crimes, and thus usher in a period of confusion, the military may well be the residuary legatee of such a struggle. The possibility appears remote, but it cannot be altogether excluded.

Still other hypotheses stress the tactical advantages which accrue to the new leadership as the result of the repudiation of Stalin. By making Stalin the scapegoat for past crimes and portraying themselves as victims of Stalin, his successors seek to dissociate the new regime from some dark and bloody pages in Soviet history and gain freedom to strike out in new directions. At home they perhaps hope that their denunciation of Stalinist methods will be understood as symbolizing the determination of the new leadership to come to terms with expectations and aspirations which were thwarted during the Stalin era. Thus the assault on Stalin is taken to signify the desire of the new rulers to court popularity among the social groups that matter in Soviet society by giving the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia some assurance of security and

some encouragement to exercise initiative without undue fear of consequences. In this perspective the attack on Stalin emerges as part of a process of correcting the overwhelming centralism of Stalinist administration by building a more efficient system of rule in which less emphasis is placed upon police terror and more on incentive, initiative and enthusiasm.

Considerations of foreign policy may also have played a not insignificant role in the decision to repudiate Stalinism. Despite the temporary disarray and confusion which the attack on the Stalin cult could be expected to precipitate in the satellite areas and in Communist parties abroad, there were important long-term advantages to be weighed in the balance. The appeal to Yugoslavia was obvious. The renunciation of the Stalinist heritage also served to remove an important road block to cooperation with Socialists and other left-wing democratic groups. For leaders of new nationalist movements in Asia and Africa whose qualms about the Soviet Union centered on dictatorial methods rather than economic policy, here was a potentially dramatic way of indicating that the new Soviet leadership was embarked on a new course which would clear the way to more intimate relations. Whether or not the gesture will have long-term significance, its tangible immediate appeal to non-Communist circles abroad should not be underrated.

It should be stressed that the views cited above are mere hypotheses. Some may appear more plausible than others, but the available evidence makes it impossible to assign a leading role to any one of them. One can only infer that on balance the new rulers were persuaded that the Stalinist legacy was an incubus which cast a shadow of distrust around the new regime and limited its ability to capitalize on the opportunities of the post-Stalin era. It can also be presumed that the new rulers felt sufficiently safely entrenched in power to take the considerable risks of unpredictable reactions which the attack on the Stalin cult might set in motion.

### The Retailing of Ideology

THE tactical flexibility demonstrated in the demolition of the Stalin myth found its reflection in the ideological arena. The Congress provided a platform for a whole series of ideological reformulations which in their collective impact manifested a capacity for fresh maneuver, in striking contrast to the rigidities of latter-day Stalinism.

The analysis of contemporary capitalism revealed a new realism. Although Khrushchev hailed the deepening "contradictions" of the capitalist economies, the thesis of capitalist "crisis" was stated cautiously.

In effect, Khrushchev's Central Committee report recognized that an upsurge of industrial output and technological innovation was underway in the West, though he sought to minimize its significance by attributing it to the arms race and other temporary stimulants. He not only warned against an oversimplified view of the rapid decay of capitalism, but went further and urged the closest investigation of Western industrial achievements in order to use them "in the interests of socialism." Here again, Stalin's prognostications in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* of a contracting volume of production for the United States, Great Britain, and France were specifically rebuffed. In the words of Mikoyan:

This assertion does not explain the complex and contradictory phenomena of contemporary capitalism and the fact that capitalist production has grown in many countries since the war.<sup>5</sup>

The restatement of the doctrine of peaceful coexistence appeared to reflect a new awareness of the dangers of thermonuclear warfare and of the realities of the atomic stalemate. The theory of peaceful coexistence was proclaimed without the usual qualifications that it could endure at the most only "for a prolonged period." Indeed, Mikoyan specifically repudiated the view that peaceful coexistence was a mere tactical expedient, "that we want peaceful coexistence for a while, until we are well prepared to attack and to impose communism by force of arms."<sup>6</sup>

In pledging the Soviet Union to peace, however, the party leadership made clear that it still retained its faith in the ultimate triumph of world communism and that it proposed to wage an ideological struggle against capitalism "with the utmost vigor and consistency."<sup>7</sup> The proceedings of the Congress as well as the actions of the new leadership indicate no disposition to relax the offensive to spread the blessings of communism throughout the world. The new Khrushchev-Bulganin arsenal of intensive industrialization, diplomatic maneuver, economic competition, cultural penetration, subversion, and indirect provocation of brush-fire wars is no less formidable than the cruder threats, pressure, and bluster which Stalin employed in the period of the Berlin blockade and the Korean adventure.

In calling for peaceful coexistence, the Congress confronted a theoretical dilemma. How could the theory of peaceful coexistence be reconciled with the Leninist thesis that wars are inevitable in the era of

<sup>5</sup> *Pravda*, February 18, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The quotation is from Shepilov's speech, *Pravda*, February 17, 1956.

imperialism? As Jerzy Morawski, secretary of the Polish Party, later noted in an article in *Trybuna Ludu* on March 27, 1956:

It is known that up to now there existed in our propaganda a certain obscurity in this respect. We called on people to increase their efforts for peace. We told them that the forces of peace were superior to the forces of war. But at the same time the thesis that wars were inevitable in the era of imperialism hung over our heads like an ominous fate.

The problem was resolved at the Congress with breathtakingly simple dialectic dexterity. The Leninist precept was proclaimed as correct when it was announced, as remaining in force until the outbreak of World War II, but as no longer applicable because of the changed correlation of forces between the camps of socialism and capitalism. According to the new formulation, "war is not fatalistically inevitable."<sup>8</sup> Thus the danger of war exists and in Mikoyan's words, "the danger that the imperialist states will attack the countries of socialism . . . will continue to exist until socialism has attained an overwhelming superiority over capitalism throughout the world."<sup>9</sup> But in Communist eyes the forces at the disposal of the Soviet Union are now so strong that, given their effective mobilization, an attack on the Soviet Union can be prevented. The intensification of peace propaganda throughout the world is designed to transform this opportunity into a certainty.

#### "Peace" Paths and Parliaments

THE desire of the party leadership to present its most pacific front to the world and to win new friends and allies for communism found striking exemplification in the new theses on "Forms of Transition to Socialism in Different Countries." Again it was the satellite press which let the cat out of the bag. In explaining the background of the new theses in *Trybuna Ludu*, Morawski observed:

The bourgeoisie has always represented the Communists as bloodthirsty people, advocates of an armed insurrection and civil war, regardless of conditions and of the situation.

The object of the new formulation is to dispel this image. "It is not true," stated Khrushchev at the Congress, "that we [Communists] regard violence and civil war as the only way to remake society."<sup>10</sup> According to the new version of Communist history, Lenin sincerely hoped to win power by peaceful means and was forced to resort to violence because of "the violence of the bourgeoisie."<sup>11</sup> Responsibility for

<sup>8</sup> See Khrushchev's speech, *Pravda*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>9</sup> *Pravda*, February 18, 1956.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>11</sup> See Mikoyan's speech, *Pravda*, February 17, 1956.

the civil war is placed on the interventionist armies and the counterrevolutionaries; the Bolsheviks themselves planned "a path of peaceful development for Russia." According to Mikoyan, the Czech *coup* was carried out "by peaceful means":

The Communists came to power after concluding an alliance not only with the working people's parties that were close to them but also with the bourgeois parties that supported the common national front. [As for] the working class of Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, Poland and other people's democracies, [they] achieved victory in the socialist revolution in their own way, but also without civil war.<sup>12</sup>

The new directive for Communist parties abroad was summed up by Khrushchev as follows:

. . . the present situation offers the working class in a number of capitalist countries a real opportunity to unite the overwhelming majority of the people under its leadership and to secure the transfer of the basic means of production into the hands of the people. . . . The working class, by rallying around itself the toiling peasantry, the intelligentsia, [and] all patriotic forces . . . is in a position to defeat the reactionary forces opposed to the popular interest, to capture a stable majority in parliament, and to transform the latter from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will. . . .<sup>13</sup>

This hint of a peaceful road to "socialism" appears clearly intended to set the stage for parliamentary collaboration with Social Democrats and others who may be amenable to Communist appeals. It has already been accompanied by a planned series of visits by prominent Socialists to Moscow and by Communist wooing of Social Democrats abroad. It signals the beginning of an effort to revive the Popular Front tactics of the mid-1930's.

Whether the new strategy will have its intended effect remains to be seen. In some respects it is disingenuous. The commitment to parliamentarism is accompanied by a reservation "that in a number of capitalist countries the violent overthrow of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the sharp aggravation of class struggle connected with this are inevitable."<sup>14</sup> It is pronounced in a context which clearly implies that the present leadership views the road to power in the so-called people's democracies as "peaceful." It is qualified by a clear affirmation that "there can be no transition to socialism" without political leadership in the hands of the "vanguard," that is, the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup> For Social Democrats who still recall the fate of the independent Socialist parties in the people's democracies, the warning should carry its own antidote.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Party in the Saddle

The 20th Congress also furnished the opportunity to reassert party supremacy at home and redirect the main lines of its activity. Despite a flurry of recent speculation abroad based on a supposed growth in the power of the managerial elite and the officer corps at the expense of the party apparatus, the Congress revealed that the party leadership is determined to assert the primacy of the party in every walk of life. This was notably true in the economic realm. Khrushchev called on the party apparatus to put economic tasks in the forefront of their activity:

The work of a party official should be judged, in the first place, by the achievements of the economic unit for the success of which he is responsible. Officials who do not appreciate this point are incapable of guiding the efforts to advance the economy, and should be replaced in good time as being insufficiently fit for party work.<sup>16</sup>

Khrushchev also called for a reorientation of party ideological work to connect it directly "with the struggle for the realization of the practical tasks of Communist construction." His insistence on practical propaganda went so far that he found it necessary to protect himself against charges of pragmatic empiricism. "Some dogmatists," he noted, "might read in the above remarks underestimation of the propaganda of Marxist-Leninist theory." But he gave no ground. "There is no need to enter into polemics with these dogmatists . . . revolutionary theory must be applied creatively, not dogmatically."<sup>17</sup>

The Congress also revealed a fear that the party had laid too great a stress in recent years on the recruitment of the intelligentsia and that it was necessary again to widen its mass base and extend its grass roots constituency. Suslov, who delivered the main speech on party organizational work, declared that "party organizations must . . . radically increase the proportion of workers and collective farmers among new recruits."<sup>18</sup> The presence of 251 production workers from industry and transport and another 187 from agriculture among the delegates to the Congress was designed to symbolize this latest turn in membership policy.

In other respects, the membership of the party showed relatively little change as compared with the situation at the time of the 19th Party Congress. As of February 1, 1956, the party had a membership of 7,215,505, of whom 6,796,896 were full members and

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, February 17, 1956.

419,609 candidate members.<sup>19</sup> These figures registered a growth of nearly 800,000 members and a loss of approximately 450,000 candidate members.

Perhaps the most striking development was the aging of the party leadership. At the 18th Party Congress in 1939 only 3 percent of the delegates were over 50 years of age. By the 19th Congress in 1952 this figure had increased to 15.3 percent; at the 20th Congress it reached 24 percent.<sup>20</sup>

### Changes on Top

**S**IGNIFICANT changes also took place in the composition of leading party organs. Out of 133 full members of the Central Committee, 53 were elected for the first time. Of 122 candidate members, 76 were newly elected. As in earlier years, the largest single bloc in the Central Committee consisted of union republic and *oblast* party secretaries.

The membership of the Presidium itself remained unchanged. Nikolai M. Shvernik retained his position as an alternate member of the Presidium and was also named chairman of the CPSU Control Committee. P. K. Ponomarenko, the present ambassador to Poland, lost his seat as a Presidium alternate but remained a member of the Central Committee. Five new members were designated Presidium alternates in the following order: Marshal G. K. Zhukov, Minister of Defense; L. I. Brezhnev, First Secretary of the Kazakhstan Party organization; N. A. Mukhitdinov, the Uzbek First Secretary; D. T. Shepilov, *Pravda* editor; and E. A. Furtseva, First Secretary of the Moscow city organization and first woman to be named a member of the Presidium group. Brezhnev, Shepilov, and Furtseva were also designated Secretaries of the Central Committee to fill out the old roster of Khrushchev as First Secretary, M. A. Suslov, P. N. Pospelov, N. A. Belyayev, and A. B. Aristov. The new appointments appeared to reflect Khrushchev's influence since all of them had formed part of his entourage in recent years.

Among changes in party organization, a special bureau of the Central Committee for the Russian federation (RSFSR) was established with Khrushchev as chairman. This was defended as a method of insuring "more concrete and operational leadership . . . of the Russian federation." Also, the party Control Committee of the Central Committee was deprived of the right to maintain field representatives functioning independently of the local party bodies in the republics, territories, and regions. This and other minor changes seemed to have a twofold pur-

<sup>19</sup> See Khrushchev's speech, *Pravda*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

pose: one, to rationalize and simplify the party structure, and two, to give the work of the party functionaries more operational content.

### The Legacy of Stalinism

**I**N many respects, the 20th Congress stands out as a congress of anomalies and paradox. Despite the striking repudiation of Stalin, the shadow of Stalinism lingered over the Congress. Calls for a revival of intra-party democracy and a return to Leninism were combined with warnings that all challenges to the monolithic unity of the party would be sternly rebuffed. Allegedly erroneous ideological formulations came in for sharp criticism. Without mentioning names, Khrushchev again took Molotov to task for his heretical pronouncement that the Soviet Union had so far laid only the basis for the foundation of socialism. The consumer goods campaign of the Malenkov era received a glancing blow in Khrushchev's denunciation of "wiseacres who counterposed light industry to heavy industry, arguing that priority for heavy industry had been essential only at the early stages of Soviet economic development, and that the only job now was to force the pace of the development of light industry."<sup>21</sup> Khrushchev also used the platform of the Congress to call a halt to those "extremists" who wished to go too far too fast:

For we also have leading workers who interpret gradual transition from socialism to communism as a signal for implementation of the principles of Communist society at the present stage. . . . On the basis of such utopian views, a negligent attitude to the socialist principle of material incentive began to take root.<sup>22</sup>

Like Stalin before him Khrushchev made clear that deviations from the party line would not be tolerated.

There were still other Stalinist reminders. The relaxation of police terror and the assurance that the new regime would put an end to lawlessness and arbitrariness were coupled with a warning by Khrushchev that ". . . distrust for the workers of the state security agencies . . . is incorrect and very harmful," that "enemies have always tried and will go on trying to hinder the big job of building communism," and that "we must in every way raise revolutionary vigilance among the Soviet people and strengthen the state security agencies."<sup>23</sup>

The Sixth Five-Year Plan approved by the Congress reasserted the priority of heavy industry and appeared basically Stalinist in its emphasis. The new agricultural decrees announced shortly after the adjournment

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1956.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Congress called for a reduction of the private garden plots of the collective farmers and for increases in the quota of compulsory work days on the collective farm. Although combined with improved incentive schemes in the *kol'choz*, the new attack on the garden plots marked further progress on a familiar road which Stalin had sketched in his last ideological testament, *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*.

Tighter agricultural controls and the new heavy industry drive conjure up memories of the past which are not likely to be lost on the Soviet population. To be sure, the bitter pill has been sweetened by new promises calculated to arouse enthusiasm among the Soviet citizenry. Thus Khrushchev pledged the regime to raise the wages and pensions of the lowest-paid workers; to put into immediate effect a two-hour cut in the working day on Saturday and before holidays; to institute a forty-hour week in the course of the Sixth Five-Year Plan; to reestablish the six-hour working day for adolescents between 16 and 18; to give more attention to the disabled and the aged; to improve the working conditions of women; to provide longer maternity leaves; and to abolish tuition fees

in all educational institutions. How these proposals will be implemented remains for the future to disclose. Soviet citizens of the older generation who remember the broken promises of the Stalinist epoch may well wait warily for general pledges to be translated into specific performance.

The changes of the post-Stalinist era should not, of course, be underrated. Willingly or unwillingly, the new leadership has found itself compelled to respond to aspirations for greater security and improvements in living conditions which were suppressed during the Stalinist era. The changes which have been made open up perspectives of which even the present leaders may be only dimly aware. But so far, concessions have been limited, and the 20th Congress shows the new leadership determined to preserve its system of rule. The reassertion of party supremacy, the insistence on the monolithic unity of the party, the refusal to permit any deviant views to be aired at the Congress—these are hallmarks of continuity with the past which promise no swift transformations in the system of governance. The Stalin myth has been demolished, but the legacy of Stalinism still casts a long shadow.

**CAST-OFF**

by **ILLINGWORTH**



—From the *Daily Mail*, London, February 20, 1956.  
 (This cartoon may be reproduced in all localities except Japan, Australia, and South Africa).

# The Soviet Ruling Class

By HUGH SETON-WATSON

IN the opinion of orthodox Marxists, economic power determines political power. A ruling class must therefore consist of those who hold economic power, or of their nominees. In industrialized countries with a system of private enterprise—say the Communists—it is the capitalists who rule, sharing power in varying degrees with the larger landowners whenever the latter are a considerable force. But when a proletarian revolution expropriates capitalists and landowners, economic power belongs to the people, and there can no longer be a ruling class. In the Soviet Union there are only two classes, which are not antagonistic but fraternal—the workers and the peasants.

So much for doctrine. In practice, it is true that there are no large private landowners and no private capitalists in the Soviet Union. It is equally true that immense political power is concentrated in the hands of a small number of Communist Party bosses, and that a larger but still small minority of the Soviet population enjoys material and cultural privileges which raise them far above the masses.

The thesis of the present article is that a new social stratum has formed at the top of Soviet society, access to which from below is still possible but is becoming more difficult; that this stratum has striking similarities to the bourgeoisie of nineteenth century Europe, and indeed can best be described by the name "state bourgeoisie"; that it is not itself a ruling class, but that it is the social group from which the ruling personnel is recruited; that it exercises social pressures which are felt within the higher ranks of the ruling Communist Party; and that the conflict between the ethos of the new state bourgeoisie and the ideological purity of the party is a principal source of tension and change in Soviet life, the political effects of which—though not

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clearly predictable—are likely to be of vital importance in the long or medium run.

## The Layer of Privilege

IN an attempt to reconcile fact and theory, Joseph Stalin introduced a modification of the Marxist class doctrine by admitting that there was in the Soviet Union a "stratum" (not a "class") distinct from workers and peasants, which he called the "toiling intelligentsia."<sup>1</sup> In 1937, according to the official report on the Third Five-Year Plan, the "toiling intelligentsia" consisted of 9.6 million persons gainfully employed. Of these, 1,751,000 were managers, great and small, in government departments, industry and agriculture. About 3,000,000 were persons belonging to what would be called in the West "the free professions," or in Imperial Russia "the intelligentsia."<sup>2</sup> Of these the most important single groups were 969,000 teachers, 822,000 economists and statisticians, 250,000 engineers and architects, and 132,000 doctors. The remaining categories of the "toiling intelligentsia," a little less than 5 million, included an unstated number of army officers, but consisted for the most part of clerical or lower-level technical personnel.

At the end of World War II, Politburo member Nikolai Voznesensky announced that the numbers of "toiling intelligentsia" had been 11.8 million in 1939. More recent references have been to 15 million, which with dependents would mean at least 30 million.<sup>3</sup> A few figures for individual groups give some impression of the rate of growth. Teachers in 1950 numbered 1,600,000 (about 65 percent more than in 1937); architects and engineers in 1947 numbered

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<sup>1</sup> Stalin, "On the Draft Constitution of the USSR," (1936), *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow, 1953, p. 702.

<sup>2</sup> These terms are not exactly interchangeable, but are near enough for the purposes of the present survey.

<sup>3</sup> In the absence of more information on the extent to which wives are employed, and on the number of small children and old people in "toiling intelligentsia" families, it is hard to provide even an approximate estimate.