

How the Stalin Cult Developed

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT to determine just what factors led to the development of Stalin's cult of the personality. This is necessary, in order to arm other Communist parties and workers' organizations against similar dangers, and also to controvert the bourgeois argument that Socialism in general must culminate in bureaucracy. Again it may be said that the ones best qualified to answer this vital question authoritatively are the men who worked most closely with Stalin; nevertheless it is possible for others with the material already at hand, to show at least some of the background forces that helped to produce this general situation.



First to be considered is the basic fact that ever since its inception in November, 1917, the Soviet Union confronting a hostile capitalist world, has had to face a whole series of profound problems of a life-and-death urgency. These called for a maximum of organization, discipline and drive on the part of the Communist Party and the whole Soviet people.

Among the more important of these struggles and campaigns were, the November revolution and the ensuing three years of civil war; the collectivization of agriculture; the rebuilding of industry from the ground up, the long mass struggles against Trotskyites and other counter-revolutionaries; the carrying through of the several five-year plans, which almost overnight transformed Russia from a very backward agricultural country into a leading industrial power; the building of a new and gigantic force of skilled workers and engineers; the waging of World War II, and the defensive struggle against militant American imperialism during the cold war.

All these great national efforts, in which the very existence

of the Soviet Union was at stake, were prosecuted with every ounce of strength that the Soviet people could muster. The consequent, long semi-military like discipline was one in which bureaucracy could readily flourish, as obviously it did.

SECOND, there is the tremendous personal prestige of Stalin won legitimately in many of the earlier of these decisive struggles to evaluate. Particularly in the historic fight around the question of building Socialism in one country, Stalin came forth as a Marxist-Leninist of high calibre. In the earlier stages of his work up to the middle thirties, Stalin although always an aggressive leader, did not yet markedly display his bureaucratic trends. Many were the times when he warned Party members and others to hearken to the voice of the masses, to practice self-criticism, to avoid unseemly boasting about personal achievements, to beware of "becoming dizzy with success" and the like. But eventually, as it has been made evident, his tendency toward one-man leadership developed, but for reasons that are not yet clear, but may have been pathological. With his already great reputation as a basis, he managed, egotistically, in the conditions of high discipline prevailing over long periods, to take unto himself undeserved credit for the many huge achievements which the Communist Party and the Soviet people were making and to reduce the practice of collective leadership to the vanishing point. The "cult" of the individual with all its grave negative consequences, was the result.

THIRD, there is the role of the Communist Party itself as a decisive factor to consider. To what extent the Party was weakened in its initiative and strength by Stalin's growing bureaucratism remains to be stated. It has also not yet been made clear as to whether or not or to what degree, the Party and its leaders were able, at least partially, to check the undemo-

cratic course of Stalin and to hold the USSR on the fundamentally correct political line which it followed over the years.

Obviously, however, the Party was not able to maintain Party democracy and self-criticism and to eliminate the enervating campaign of adulation with which Stalin surrounded himself. Admittedly, as I pointed out in a recent article, to do these things was no small matter, with the possibility, always lurking in the situation, of a Party split that could be fatal to the Soviet Union in its extremely difficult international situation.

THE FOREGOING are at least three of the major elements in the development of Stalin's overstress upon his own personality. The combination of the powerful and ambitious leader, working in conditions of a high discipline and of almost superhuman national effort, and with the Party not vigilant enough on the question of inner democracy, produced the dangerous situation which finally developed.

The Stalin cult of the individual, as is very obvious, also affected other Communist parties, as well as that in the USSR; but with a considerable difference. Communists throughout the world, through the years, developed a profound admiration for Stalin on the basis of the excellent work which he did for many years in the leadership of the CPSU. They were also supremely conscious of the correct political course of the Soviet Union generally and of the tremendous historical role that it has played since its inception in leading the world upward and onward to peace, prosperity and Socialism.

Clearly, the high estimate of Stalin held by the Communists of other countries was deeply influenced by the cult of the individual, but it lacked much of the extreme adulation of Stalin that prevailed in the Soviet Union. Naturally, foreign Communists, like those in the USSR, saw various aspects of Commu-

(Continued on Page 7)

FOSTER

(Continued from Page 4)

nist policy in various countries that should be discussed and criticized. If, however, such matters were not considered publicly, this was primarily because of an exaggerated conception that to do so would more or less injure the cause of peace and world socialism, which was already the target of bitter attack from the entire capitalist world.

AS A RESULT of the current revaluation of the role of Stalin, there will undoubtedly be a strengthening of Party democracy and of the principles of collective leadership in Communist parties generally. There must, by the same token, also be a better critical exchange generally among the respective Communist parties. Obviously inadequate has been the prevailing system up until now, especially since the dissolution of the Comintern of refraining from open criticism of brother parties. In the absence of an international, or of a strong inter-party theoretical journal, there

should be cultivated a far more extensive exchange of critical material among the Communist parties. The famous Duclos article showed how helpful such criticism, when well-based, could be.

The ultimate result of the process of reevaluating Stalin will be a great improvement in the inner-life and general effectiveness everywhere of the Communist parties. It is a difficult lesson, but we may be assured that it will be learned basically. And it will be all the more readily learned by the easing of war tensions and the development of a general situation, requiring less of the extreme, semi-military discipline which was such an important factor in producing the Stalin cult of the individual.

A sound party discipline and a thorough-going party democracy are in no way contradictory, and it is a healthful synthesis of these two indispensable elements that we must strive to achieve.

Reelect Pollitt To British CP Executive Body

LONDON, April 2.—Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the British Communist Party, is expected to be reelected to the Executive Body of the party.