

8p

# stalin:

On an Article  
by Engels

IRISH COMMUNIST ORGANISATION

m

---

# CONTENTS

Introduction page 1

On an Article by Engels  
by J.V. Stalin page 5

On Mistakes  
by I.C.O. page 12

First Edition: July 1968.

Second Edition: February 1971.

## Introduction

"...it was only the revisionists who gained a sad reputation for themselves by their departure from the fundamental views of Marxism, and by their fear or inability, to 'settle accounts' openly, explicitly, resolutely and clearly with the views they had abandoned. When orthodox Marxists had occasion to pronounce against some antiquated views of Marx (for instance Mehring when he opposed certain historical propositions), it was always done with such precision and thoroughness

2. that no one found anything ambiguous in such literary utterances..." (Lenin. Preface to MATERIALISM AND EMPIRIO-CRITICISM)

\*

The modern revisionists, of course, have not 'settled accounts openly' with the views which they have abandoned. In this respect they have been a hundred times more dishonest than the Bernstein revisionists. However, it is not the modern revisionists that this pamphlet is directed towards, but the anti-revisionist 'critics' of Stalin.

It would seem obvious that the starting point of anti-revisionism lies in a thorough historical analysis of the movement which gave rise to it - the development of revisionism - and that the modern opposition to revisionism would in the first place carry out a thorough analysis of Titoite and Khrushchevite revisionism.

Though there has now been a public anti-revisionist movement in Britain for eight years, there has been no serious attempt - except by one or two groups - to analyse the development of revisionism. And in particular there has been no serious attempt made - outside the publications of the Irish Communist Organisation, and the Communist Workers' Organisation, and one anonymous pamphlet, IN DEFENCE OF STALIN, published in 1964 - to form an estimate of the part played by Stalin in the struggle between Marxism and revisionism during the last twenty years of his life.

This does not mean that no statements have been made about Stalin. It means that the statements which have been made have not been based on historical analysis, have not been supported by concrete evidence, and have striven after vague and ambiguous forms of expression. They have explained nothing

Phrases which express purely subjective impressions have taken the place of historical analysis. And in certain cases the analysis of actual history has been more or less consciously subordinated to the tactical needs of the moment (and these 'tactics' do not relate to any scientifically worked out strategy. They relate to the subjective inclinations of this or that group.)



3. We are of the opinion that a clear explanation of actual history is required, and that what is not required is ambiguous formulation which strives to conceal our ignorance of actual history.

We are not concerned, in the first place, to justify Stalin. We are not of the opinion that, if Stalin made serious mistakes in theory or practice, the working class movement will gain if those mistakes are hushed up. We have heard it suggested in one section of the British anti-revisionist movement that it was correct during Stalin's lifetime to cover up Stalin's errors since any criticism of these errors from within the Communist movement would be exploited by imperialism. (A similar justification has been made by certain modern revisionists for their silence during Stalin's lifetime.) But surely it must be the case that, if Stalin in actual fact made serious errors, a failure by Communists to criticise those errors would not prevent them from doing considerable damage to the revolutionary movement which based itself on them, would not prevent imperialism from exploiting them. The defence of the ostrich is no defence: it is only an exceptional expression of subjectivism.

And certainly, now that Stalin has come under open criticism from both the revisionist and the anti-revisionist movements, there can be no excuse for anti-revisionists who, when criticising Stalin, fail to base their criticism on scientific historical analysis. The 'errors', if they exist, must be clearly identified and analysed. If that cannot be done, 'criticism' of 'Stalin's errors' expresses nothing more than subjective hostility to Stalin.

Perhaps our inability to discover Stalin's errors, or to find historical substantiation for those errors attributed to him by sections of the anti-revisionist movement, only indicates that we cannot see what actually exists. But it is certain that the Stalin-criticism that has so far expressed itself in the British anti-revisionist movement has been incredibly subjectivist.

To give one instance: the London Workers Committee (now the Working Peoples Party of England), asserted that in his speech to the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of the

4. Soviet Union Stalin "failed to understand that the class struggle necessarily continues and is therefore reflected in the Party throughout the whole period of the proletarian dictatorship right up to the development of Communism..." (WORKERS BROADSHEET, Jan-Feb 1968).

In fact, Stalin specifically refuted the position that the LWC attributes to him in his speech to the 17th Congress. He opposed the theory of the dying away of the class struggle, and showed that "a classless socialist society...has to be achieved and built by the efforts of the working people, by the strengthening of the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat, by intensifying the class struggle, by abolishing classes, by eliminating the remnants of the capitalist classes, and in battles with enemies both internal and external". And he showed that this continuing class struggle was manifesting itself in the Party.

Another horrible example of how objective criticism should not be approached is found in an article wby William Ash, the most eminent intellectual of the "Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)" group. In this article ('Class Struggles in France', published in NEW ZEALAND COMMUNIST REVIEW and in PROGRESSIVE LABOR(1968/9), Mr. Ash observes: "Of course, Stalin made some serious mistakes, otherwise the revisionists could never have taken over so soon after his death to lead the Soviet Union back to capitalism." And that is all that Mr. Ash tells us. The statement is empty of any concrete historical content. It is a gross violation even of formal logic (and Mr. Ash is a writer of philosophy), confusing succession with causation.

It is clear that the LWC did not even bother to read the speech which it 'criticised', and that in order to contrive a criticism the philosopher Ash had to throw even elementary logic to the winds. That is typical of Stalin-criticism as a whole.

We suggest that comrades who think that Stalin made fundamental errors should, in their treatment of those errors, deal with them openly, consisely and thoroughly: in short scientifically - in the manner recommended by Lenin in the quotation given at the head of this introduction, and in the manner in which Stalin, in the article which

5. follows, dealt with a number of mistakes made by Engels in an agitational article on Russia.

Stalin disagreed with certain statements made by Engels in this article. And there is no ambiguity in his manner of dealing with them. He clearly identifies what he considers are mistakes, and he states clearly why he considers them to be mistakes. That is the Marxist approach.

The mistakes attributed to Stalin are of infinitely greater significance than those made by Engels in this article. A Marxist analysis of them is therefore of far greater urgency. Perhaps the Stalin-critics will learn from this article of Stalin's how to approach the criticism of Stalin's errors in a Marxist manner.

## On an article by Engels

Comrade Adoratsky proposes to print in the next number of BOLSHEVIK, devoted to the 20th anniversary of the imperialist world war, the article by Engels entitled 'The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom' which was first published, abroad, in 1890. I should consider it a completely ordinary matter if it were proposed to print this article in a collection of Engels' works or in one of the historical journals. But the proposal is made to print it in our fighting journal Bolshevik, in the number devoted to the 20th anniversary of the imperialist world war. This means that those who made this proposal consider that the article in question can be regarded as an article which gives guidance, or which at least is profoundly instructive for our Party workers, in the matter of clarification of the problems of imperialism and of imperialist wars. But Engels' article, as is evident from its contents, is unfortunately lacking in these qualities, in spite of its merits. Moreover, it has a number of weaknesses of such a

6. character that, if it were to be published without critical notes, it could mislead the reader.

Therefore I consider it inexpedient to publish Engels' article in the next number of Bolshevik.

What are the weaknesses to which I have referred?

1. Characterising the predatory policy of Russian Tsarism and correctly showing the abominable nature of this policy, Engels explains it not so much by the 'need' of the military-feudal-mercantile upper circles of Russia for outlets to the sea, sea-ports, for extending foreign trade and dominating strategic points, as by the circumstance that there stood at the head of Russia's foreign policy an all-powerful and very talented band of foreign adventurers, who succeeded everywhere and in everything, who in wonderful fashion managed to overcome each and every obstacle in the way of their adventurist purpose, who deceived with astonishing cleverness all the Governments of Europe and finally brought it about that Russia became a most powerful state, from the standpoint of military strength. Such a treatment of the question by Engels may seem highly improbable, but it is unfortunately a fact. Here are the relevant passages from Engels' article:

"Foreign policy is unquestionably the side on which Tsardom is strong - very strong. Russian diplomacy forms, to a certain extent, a modern Order of Jesuits, powerful enough, if need be, to overcome even the whims of a Tsar, and to crush corruption within its own body, only to spread it the more plentifully abroad; an order of Jesuits originally and by preference recruited from foreigners, Corsicans like Pozzo di Borgo, Germans like Nesselrode, Russo-Germans like Lieven, just as its founder, Catherine II, was a foreigner.

Up to the present time, only one thoroughbred Russian, Gortchakov, has filled the highest post in this order, and his successor Von Giers again bears a foreign name.

It is this secret order, originally recruited from foreign adventurers, which has raised the Russian Empire to its present power. With iron perseverance, gaze fixed resolutely on the goal, shrinking from no breach of

7. faith, no treachery, no assassinations, no servility, lavishing bribes in all directions, made arrogant by no victory, discouraged by no defeat, stepping over the corpses of millions of soldiers and of, at least, one Tsar, this band, unscrupulous as talented, has done more than all the Russian armies to extend the frontiers of Russia from the Dnieper and Dvina to beyond the Vistula, to the Pruth, the Danube and the Black Sea; from the Don and the Volga beyond the Caucasus and to the sources of the Oxus and Jaxartes; to make Russia great, powerful and dreaded, and to open for her the road to the sovereignty of the world."

One might suppose that in Russia's external history it was diplomacy that achieved everything, while Tsars, feudalists, merchants and other social groups did nothing, or almost nothing.

One might suppose that if at the head of Russia's foreign policy there had stood, not foreign adventurers like Nesselrode or Von Giers, but Russian adventurers like Gortchakov and others, the foreign policy of Russia would have taken a different direction.

It is hardly necessary to mention that the policy of conquest, abominable and filthy as it was, was by no means a monopoly of the Russian Tsars. Everyone knows that a policy of conquest was then the policy, to no less a degree, if not to a greater, of all the rulers and diplomats of Europe, including such an Emperor of bourgeois background as Napoleon, who notwithstanding his non-Tsarist origin, practised in his foreign policy, also, intrigue and deceit, perfidy and flattery, brutality and bribery, murder and incendiarism.

Clearly, matters could not be otherwise.

It is evident that in writing his pamphlet against Russian Tsardom (Engels' article is a good fighting pamphlet), Engels was a little carried away, and, being carried away, forgot for a short time certain elementary things which were well known to him.

2. Characterising the situation in Europe and expounding the

8. causes and prospects of the approaching war, Engels writes:

"The European situation today is governed by three facts:

- (1) the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany;
- (2) the impending advance of Russian Tsardom upon Constantinople;
- (3) the struggle in all countries, ever growing fiercer, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the working class and the middle class, a struggle whose thermometer is the everywhere advancing socialist movement.

The two first (facts) necessitate the grouping of Europe, today, into two large camps. The German annexation makes France the ally of Russia against Germany; the threatening of Constantinople by Tsardom makes Austria and even Italy the allies of Germany. Both camps are preparing for a decisive battle, for a war such as the world has not yet seen, in which 10 to 15 million armed combatants will stand face to face. Only two circumstances have thus far prevented the outbreak of this fearful war: first, the incredibly rapid improvements in firearms, in consequence of which every newly-invented arm is already superseded by a new invention, before it can be introduced into even one army; and secondly, the absolute impossibility of calculating the chances, the complete uncertainty as to who will finally come out victor from this gigantic struggle.

All this danger of a general war will disappear on the day when a change of things in Russia will allow the Russian people to blot out, at a stroke, the traditional policy of conquest of its Tsars; and to turn its attention to its own internal vital interests, now seriously menaced, instead of dreaming about universal supremacy.

...a Russian National Assembly, in order to settle only the most pressing internal difficulties, would at once have to put a decided stop to all hankering after new conquests.

Europe is gliding down an inclined plane with increasing swiftness towards the abyss of a general war, a war of

9. hitherto unheard-of extent and ferocity. Only one thing can stop it - a change of system in Russia. That this must come about in a few years there can be no doubt.

On that day when Tsardom falls - this last stronghold of the whole European reaction - on that day a quite different wind will blow across Europe."

It is impossible not to observe that in this characterisation of the situation in Europe and summary of the causes leading towards world war, Engels omits one important factor, which later on played the most decisive part, namely, the factor of imperialist struggle for colonies, for markets, for sources of raw materials. This had very serious importance already at that time. He omits the role of Great Britain as a factor in the coming world war, the factor of the contradictions between Germany and Great Britain, contradictions which were already of serious importance and which later on played almost the determining part in the beginning and development of the world war.

I think that this omission constitutes the principal weakness in Engels' article. From this weakness there ensue the remaining weaknesses of the article, of which the following are noteworthy:-

(a) Over-estimation of the role of Tsarist Russia's striving towards Constantinople in connection with the maturing of the world war. True, Engels mentions first as a war factor the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany, but thereafter he removes this factor into the background and brings to the forefront the predatory strivings of Russian Tsardom, asserting that 'all this danger of general war will disappear on the day when a change of things in Russia will allow the Russian people to blot out, at a stroke, the traditional policy of conquest of its Tsars.'

This is certainly an exaggeration.

(b) Over-estimation of the role of the bourgeois revolution in Russia, the role of the 'Russian national assembly' (bourgeois Parliament) in relation to averting the approaching



10. world war. Engels asserts that the downfall of Russian Tsarism is the only means of averting world war. This is plain exaggeration. A new, bourgeois order in Russia, with its 'national assembly', could not avert war if only because the principal sources of war lay in the increasing intensity of imperialist struggle between the main imperialist powers. The fact is that from the time of Russia's defeat in the Crimea in the 'fifties of the last century the independent role of Tsarism in the sphere of European foreign policy began to wane to a significant extent, and that as a factor in the imperialist world conflict Tsarist Russia served essentially as an auxiliary reserve for the principal powers of Europe.

(c) Overestimation of the role of the Tsarist power as the 'last stronghold of the whole European reaction'. That the Tsarist power in Russia was a mighty stronghold of all-European (and also Asiatic) reaction there can be no doubt. But that it was the last stronghold of this reaction one can legitimately doubt.

It is necessary to note that these weaknesses of Engels' article are not only of 'historical value'. They have, or can have, a most serious practical importance. Truly, if imperialist struggle for colonies and spheres of influence is lost sight of, as a factor in the approaching world war; if the imperialist contradictions between England and Germany are not forgotten; if the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany is withdrawn from the foreground as a war factor in favour of Russian Tsardom's striving towards Constantinople, considered as the more serious and determining factor; if, finally, Russian Tsardom represents the last rampart of all-European reaction - then is it not clear that a war, let us say, of bourgeois Germany against Tsarist Russia is not an imperialist war, not a robber war, not an anti-popular war, but a war of liberation, or almost of liberation?

One can hardly doubt that this way of thinking facilitated the sin of the German Social-Democrats on August 4, 1914, when they decided to vote for war credits and proclaimed the slogan of defence of the bourgeois Fatherland against Tsarist Russia, against 'Russian barbarism' and so on.

It is characteristic that in his letters to Bebel written in



11. 1891, a year after the publication of this article when he deals with the prospects of the coming war, Engels says directly that 'the victory of Germany is, therefore, the victory of the revolution', that 'if Russia starts war, then - forward against the Russians and their allies, whoever they may be!'

It is obvious that such a way of thinking allows no place for transforming revolutionary war into civil war.

That is how matters stand as regards the weaknesses in Engels' article.

Evidently Engels, alarmed by the Franco-Russian alliance which was then (1801-91) being formed, with its edge directed against the Austro-German coalition, set himself the task of attacking Russia's foreign policy in this article so as to deprive it of all credit in the eyes of European public opinion, and especially of British public opinion; but in carrying out this task he lost sight of a number of other very important and even determining factors, with the result that he fell into the one-sidedness which we have revealed.

After all this, is it appropriate to print Engels' article in our fighting organ Bolshevik, as an article which provides guidance or which in any case is profoundly instructive - because it is clear that to print it in Bolshevik would mean to give it, tacitly, such a recommendation?

I think it is not appropriate.

J. V. Stalin

(Written as a letter to members of the political bureau of the CPSU on July 19, 1934. First published in May 1941. Published in English in Labour Monthly in 1944.)

# On Mistakes

'All men make mistakes': it should hardly be necessary to repeat that statement or to discuss it. But what are we to make of the following syllogism: All men make mistakes: Stalin was a man: therefore Stalin made mistakes. That is an argument that could be set out by a five-year-old who knew nothing about Stalin beyond the fact that he was a man, and who had happened to glance through a few pages of a textbook on logic. In political terms it is a futile argument. Yet it has been our experience during the past few years that this platitude is the final crushing retort of certain anti-revisionist Stalin-critics when their 'criticism' or specific 'Stalin-errors' is shown to be groundless. Having failed to show concretely that Stalin made the mistakes which they attribute to him, they fall back on the generalisation that Stalin must have made mistakes since he was a man and since all men make mistakes. Their attitude is that if they haven't succeeded in attributing to him the mistakes that actually made, they are nevertheless correct in alleging that he made mistakes, even though they can't quite put their finger on them.

And since the ICO, having failed (though not for want of trying) to discover any mistakes of a fundamental nature made by Stalin, does not engage in generalised chatter about Stalin's mistakes, we are accused of perpetuating the Stalin cult, or treating Stalin as a god.

The syllogism which proves, without any concrete investigation of Stalin's work, that Stalin made mistakes, also proves that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao made mistakes. The anti-revisionist Stalin-critics of one tendency have recently begun to apply this argument to Lenin, and the revisionists apply it to Marx, Engels and Mao as well. So a few words about mistakes are in order.

13. The bourgeois economist, Joan Robinson, has been described by Mr. Paul Sweezy, the revisionist, as having produced 'the first honest work on Marxism ever to be written by a non-Marxist British economist.' (in Keynes General Theory, ed. R. Lekachman, p305.) Whatever about that, Mrs. Robinson has engaged in a fairly astute baiting of Communists in the field of economic theory over the past quarter century. It is her view that Marxism, which began as a method of critical analysis in the field of sociology, became a religion when it became a mass revolutionary social force:

"A revolutionary movement needs faith; an organised society requires an established orthodoxy. The scientific aspect of Marxism had to give way to the need for a creed." ('Marxism: Religion and Science', Monthly Review, 1962. Included in Collected Economic Papers, Volume 3)

Mrs. Robinson made an astute proposal for combating this religious creed of Communism:

"Emancipation will come from the application of the method of Marxian analysis to Marxian ideology. This process has begun; but it is much impeded by the Cold War".  
(ibid)

The distintegration of Communism is to be brought about by turning the critical aspect of Marxism against the 'religious' aspect. The extent to which the propaganda of the bourgeois tendency represented by Mrs. Robinson has succeeded in penetrating the Communist movement in Britain is shown by those anti-revisionists who - many in connection with Stalin and some in connection with Mao - imagine that they are engaging in profound critical analysis when they are merely repeating platitudes about the need for a critical approach.

The statement that critical analysis is necessary, and that all men make mistakes, should at the very most be merely an introductory remark to a concrete critical analysis, or a concrete exposure of actual mistakes. But more often than not the 'criticism' does not even attempt to proceed beyond the remark that it is necessary to be critical: and it amounts to no more than an attempt to develop an agnostic or a pragmatic

14. approach to the work of Stalin and Mao, or Marx and Lenin.

In the work we have quoted, Mrs. Robinson gives an example of how she baits communists with regard to their 'religious' approach:

"Not long ago, I was teasing a good-natured professor behind the ex-iron curtain. I attacked various points at which it seems to me that Marx's analysis is defective, and he defended them with stock arguments. At last I said: Do you regard Marx as a superman, or, though a great genius, as a human being? - Of course he was human. - Then he could make mistakes? - Yes. Would you mind mentioning a mistake that he made? - The professor did not actually wink, but he changed the subject." (ibid)

Mrs. Robinson, of course, is doing a job for her class: but she has raised a question which the Stalin-critics would do well to face up to frankly. Being unable to refute Marx's economics in a concrete manner (her 'honest work' of Marx-criticism has rarely risen above petty jibing), she falls back on the good old syllogism, that, since all men make mistakes, and since Marx was a man, Marx must have made mistakes.

And what grounds have anti-revisionists who imagine that such an argument is valid in the case of 'Stalin's errors' for rejecting it in the case of 'Marx's errors'? If we must prove that we are not dogmatists by making generalised references to Stalin's errors, should we not also demonstrate the activity of our critical faculties by references to Marx's errors, Engels' errors, Lenin's errors and Mao's errors?

The ICO can consistently ask to be excused from repeating this liny on the grounds that we consider references, on general grounds, to 'Stalin's errors' a sign of the atrophy rather than the activity of the critical faculties concerned. The attempt to prove a case by reference to the widest possible generalisation ('to err is human') after having failed to prove it by concrete analysis ('this was a mistake, because of this and this, and had these consequences') is not to be taken seriously as scientific criticism.

15. The only Marxist criticism of Stalin's mistakes that we are acquainted with is to be found in Stalin's Collected Works; and the same can be said of Lenin's mistakes, and with a very few minor exceptions - including Stalin's article republished here - of the mistakes of Marx and Engels.

(It can be assumed that Stalin made numerous mistakes and false starts early in life. Marx began his active political life as an opponent of Communism. Mao was once influenced by subjective hostility towards the habits of the masses. Such 'mistakes' should not concern us. What counts are mistakes made in the leadership of the Communist movement.

Equally, subjective insights should not be taken for scientific work. For example, Marx met Kautsky in the 1880's and in a letter to his daughter gave a very unfavourable account of him. In view of Kautsky's behaviour twenty years later it can be said that Marx's hostile subjective reaction to him had an objective foundation. But does this mean that Engels made a serious mistake in working closely with Kautsky until the end of his life?

Trotsky in 1905 wrote a very vivid journalistic prophesy of the future of the revolution in Russia. ('Results and Prospects'). Events proved it to be remarkably accurate - up to the point at which the dispute about 'socialism in one country' begins. Nothing like it will be found in Lenin's works. Yet Lenin was the scientist. And Trotsky's journalistic prophesy/<sup>that</sup> came off - or nearly came off - is more than compensated for by numerous prophesies that failed abysmally. The success of this one prophesy has led trotskyist to define the function of scientific analysis as prophesy.)

The most significant of Stalin's mistakes was that made in March 1917. Before Lenin's return in April, the Bolsheviks in Russia did not have a clear strategy for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Here is Stalin's account:

"Under the new conditions of the struggle the Party had to adopt a new orientation. The Party (its majority) groped its way towards this new orientation. It adopted the policy of pressure on the Provisional Government

through the Soviets on the question of peace and did not venture to step forward at once from the old slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry to the new slogan of power to the Soviets. The aim of this half-way policy was to enable the Soviets to discern the actual imperialist nature of the Provisional Government on the basis of concrete questions of peace, and in this way to wrest the Soviets from the Provisional Government. But this was a profoundly mistaken position, for it gave rise to pacifist illusions, brought grist to the mill of defencism and hindered the revolutionary education of the masses. At that time I shared this mistaken position with other Party comrades and fully abandoned it only in the middle of April, when I associated myself with Lenin's theses." (Trotskyism and Leninism. C.W. Vol 6 p348)

And though he never regarded himself as other than a follower of Lenin, his approach to Lenin's teachings was thoroughly reasonable. In the course of the dispute with Trotsky he remarked:

"After the July defeat disagreement did indeed arise between the Central Committee and Lenin on the question of the future of the Soviets. It is known that Lenin, wishing to concentrate the Party's attention on the task of preparing the uprising outside the Soviets, warned against any infatuation with the latter, for he was of the opinion that, having been defiled by the defencists, they had become useless. The Central Committee and the Sixth Party Congress took a more cautious line and decided that there were no grounds for excluding the possibility that the Soviets would revive. The Kornilov revolt showed that this decision was correct. This disagreement, however, was of no great consequence for the Party. Later, Lenin admitted that the line taken by the Sixth Congress had been correct. It is interesting that Trotsky has not clutched at his disagreement and has not magnified it to 'monstrous' proportions." (Ibid p356)

This is not the approach of a 'deifier'. Stalin was a follower of Lenin because at every new development Lenin made an

17. essentially correct analysis and worked out an essentially correct line. And since Marxist analysis is scientific analysis, and not soothsaying, there is nothing supernatural in the fact that one man should make no essential mistakes over a long period.

To conclude this pamphlet (which is merely a preface to a more thorough assessment of Stalin's work) we give a number of quotations which conflict sharply with the notions about 'Stalinism' that have gained wide acceptance even among Communists.

Firstly there is the notion of Stalin as the organisational bureaucrat for whom politics was merely a subsidiary part of the technique of bureaucratic manoeuvring. In the following reply to Preobrazhensky, one of the earliest critics of the 'Stalinist bureaucracy', Stalin clearly asserts the primacy of politics. (It is notable that those who hurled the charge of bureaucrat at Stalin, as at Lenin, were bureaucratic opportunists who were defeated in the political struggle.)

"Preobrazhensky says: your policy is correct, but your organisational line is wrong, and therein lies the basis of the possible ruin of the Party. That is nonsense, comrades. That a party with a correct policy should perish because of short-comings in its organisational line is something that does not happen. It never works out that way. The foundation of Party life and Party work resides not in the organisational forms it adopts or may adopt at any given moment, but in its policy, in its home and foreign policy. If the Party's policy is correct, if it has a correct approach to political and economic issues that are of decisive significance for the working class - then organisational defects cannot be of decisive significance; its policy will pull it through. That has always been the case, and will continue to be so in the future. People who fail to understand this are bad Marxists; they forget the very rudiments of Marxism." (Reply to Discussion at 13th Congress of CPSU, May 1927. C.W. Vol 6. p240-241)

Even more to the point is Stalin's defence of the materialist view of the Leninist Party against Trotsky's metaphysical



13. view. In 1924, as a tactic in his opportunist manoeuvres Trotsky put forward a view of the party which<sup>had</sup> infinitely more in common with the Catholic dogma of papal infallibility than with marxism. One could not be right against the party, he said. The party is always right. The very notion of the party being wrong was meaningless, he suggested. In this view the party was the workers' church, the central organ of a new religion:

"Comrades, none of us wishes to be or can be right against the Party... In the last instance the Party is always right... One can be right only with the Party and through the Party because history has not created any other way for the realisation of one's rightness. The English have the saying 'My country right or wrong'. With much greater justification we can say: 'My Party, right or wrong'." (Speech to 13th Congress.)

Stalin replied:

"...the party, Trotsky says, makes no mistakes. That is wrong. The party not infrequently makes mistakes. Ilyich taught us to teach the party, on the basis of its own mistakes how to exercise correct leadership. If the party made no mistakes there would be nothing from which to teach it. It is our task to detect these mistakes, to lay bare their roots and to show the party and the working class how we came to make them and how we should avoid repeating them in future. The development of the party would be impossible without this. The development of party leaders and cadres would be impossible without this, for they are developed and trained in the struggle to combat and overcome their mistakes. It seems to me that this statement of Trotsky's is a kind of compliment, accompanied by an attempt - an unsuccessful one it is true - to jeer at the party." (ibid. p238-9)

And, finally, a couple of statements relevant to the view that Stalin either imagined himself to be infallible, or out of sheer vanity encouraged the development of a 'cult of the personality' around himself:

"I object to you calling yourself 'a disciple of Lenin'



19. and Stalin'. I have no disciples. Call yourself a disciple of Lenin; you have a right to do that... But you have no grounds for calling yourself a disciple of a disciple of Lenin's. It is not true. It is out of place. (Letter to Ksenofontov, December 1926. First published 1948. CW Vol 9 p156)

"I must say in all conscience, comrades, that I do not deserve a good half of the flattering things that have been said here about me. I am, it appears, a hero of the October Revolution, the leader of the communist party of the Soviet Union, the leader of the Communist International, a legendary warrior-knight and all the rest of it. That is absurd, comrades, and quite unnecessary exaggeration. It is the sort of thing that is usually said at the graveside of a departed revolutionary. But I have no intention of dying yet.

"I must therefore give a true picture of what I was formerly and to whom I owe my present position in our party ...". A down to earth summary of his development follows. Reply to Greetings of the Workers of the chief Railway Workshops in Tiflis. June 8, 1926. CW Vol 8 p182.)

It will be said, and it has been said, that what Stalin wrote or said was all 'for the record', and that it bore no relation to what he did. He tried to create a public record for 'posterity' which bore no relation to his actual behaviour. His theory went along in one direction and his practice went in an entirely different direction and the two did not interact with one another.

Well if somebody wants to believe that he will believe it, and since it is entirely a matter of belief there is little to be done about it. There is no reasoning with subjectivism of such intensity.

But for those who do not take leave of their senses when it comes to dealing with the Stalin question, and who try to deal with it in terms of actual history, it must be clear that he meant what he said: that he did not desire the development

20. of a 'personality cult': and that he himself kept his feet firmly planted on the earth during the period when many of his present detractors were declaring that he was the creator of the universe. This is proved beyond all doubt not by professions of modesty, but by the fact that he denied being the creator of the universe, but by the scientific work on political economy which he produced at the end of his life.

It is well known to marxists that political economy is a science in which subjectivism in the investigator is mercilessly exposed. The history of the science is strewn with the corpses of subjectivists. It is inconceivable that "Economic Problems of Socialism In the U.S.S.R." should have been written by an ego-maniac; by a man whose theoretical work was merely an attempt to whitewash his practice; or by a man who for a period of years had lost touch with the realities of the class struggle in the Soviet Union. It is inconceivable that such a man should have written such a work, just as it is inconceivable that a man with Bakunin's approach could have written Capital, or a man with Trotsky's approach could have written What Is to Be Done.

21. OTHER IRISH COMMUNIST ORGANISATION AND COMMUNIST WORKERS  
ORGANISATION LITERATURE ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST  
MOVEMENT AND REVISIONISM:

Stalin: On An Article by Engels  
Stalin: On The Personality Cult 5p  
" " Concerning Marxism in Linguistics 15p  
" " On Trotsky 10p  
" " On Lenin 7½p  
" " Dialectical and Historical Materialism 10p  
In Defence of Stalin - Discussion Notes by a British  
Worker (1964) 12½p  
Trotsky: Our Political Tasks 25p  
Neil Goold: The 20th Congress and After (includes  
analysis of trotskyism and 1956 Russian invasion  
of Hungary. 1956) 10p  
In Defence of Leninism (exposure of trotskyist and  
modern revisionist theories) 10p  
Russian Revolution 5p  
The CPC and the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU:  
Policy Statement number two) 5p

Economics of Revisionism:

Capital and Revisionism (exposure of revisionist  
attacks on Capital) 10p  
Economics of Revisionism 5p  
On Stalin's "Economic Problems", part one 10p  
" " " " " " part two, Marxism  
and Market Socialism 50p

Periodicals:

The Irish Communist - 6 months subscription 55p  
The Communist - 6 month subscription 50p

Full literature list available of request.

Please add 2½p for postage when ordering pamphlets (each)

Send for literature to:

I.C.O., 10 Athol Street, Belfast 12, Bt12 4GX

## LENIN ON MISTAKES

\*\*\*\*\*

"To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyse the conditions which gave rise to it, to study attentively the means of correcting it - these are the signs of a serious party; this means the performance of its duties, this means education and training the class, and then the masses."

\*

"The fighting party of the advanced class is not afraid of mistakes. The danger is when one persists in one's mistake, when false pride prevents recognition of one's mistake and its correction."

\*

"What is said of individuals is applicable - with necessary modifications - to politics and parties. It is not the one who makes no mistakes who is wise. There are no such men, nor can there be. He is wise who makes not very important mistakes and knows how to rectify them early and quickly."

\*

"We must not conceal our mistakes from the enemy. Whoever is afraid of talking openly about mistakes is not a revolutionary. If, however, we openly say to the workers, 'Yes, we have made mistakes', it will prevent us from repeating these mistakes in the future."





Stalin

On the Art of War

by Joseph

Stalin