

# A Polish Editor Weighs the Truth About Stalin

Roman Werfel is the editor of the official newspaper of the United Polish Workers Party, *Tribuna Ludu* (People's Tribune), which appears in Warsaw. He wrote the following "Letter to a Comrade" soon after the 20th Congress of the CPSU. In order to understand why Werfel was among the first to speak with such bitterness, it should be remembered that during the "purges" at the end of the 1930s the Polish Communist Party was dissolved and almost all the members of its Central Committee were accused of espionage. The "Letter" appeared in the Warsaw *Folkshtimme* of March 27.

By ROMAN WERFEL

THE TELEPHONE rang. Through the receiver came your voice, so familiar to me. "Why? Why are you writing this way, why are you striking out his memory? Why are you silent about his accomplishments? Why?"

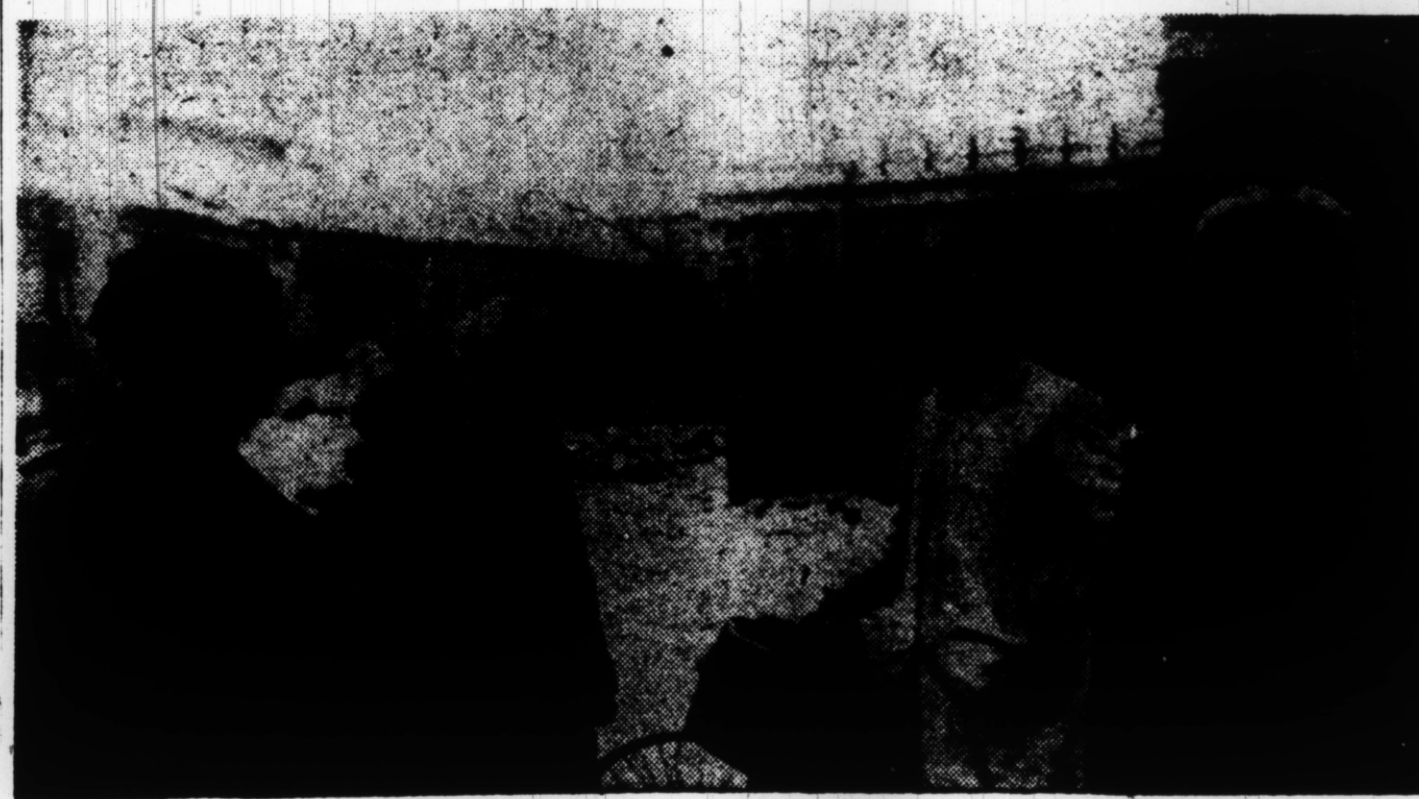
We talked for a long time. I tried to explain to you, and I think you understood, you accepted it as correct; I think I convinced you. That is why I want to put down on paper the notes of our conversation, just as it took place, because after your call I received several more just like it, and certainly I was not the only one who was asked that day, "Why?"

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YES, IT was some 30 years ago when we were literally intoxicated one night by a brochure which we had just received from the "Technik". The brochure was called: "Concerning the Foundations of Leninism," and the same of the author was Joseph Stalin.

Years passed. Do you remember the discussions on collectivization? The disputes about industrialization? The reports about the construction of Dnieprostroy? The bulletins of the first Five Years plans? That name was woven through them, grew up together with that mighty and heroic epoch.

I do not wonder that you ask.



Red Army officers chat with inhabitants of Warsaw after their soldiers liberated the city, ruined by the Nazis. New Poland has rebuilt their capital, one of the most beautiful cities of Europe.

We lived through those years together. And later? The war communiques of the terrible days of Stalingrad, and the joyful hours of the storming of Berlin. Signed by that same name. Do you remember how in Lodz on the 9th of May the salutes boomed through the night to celebrate the victory, the capitulation of Hitler Germany?

We could remember much more—we lived through those 30 years, and not merely lived; we marched in the ranks and fought and achieved victories. I do not wonder at your uneasiness. I do not wonder at it, but I want to explain.

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THE ANCIENT Romans said: "Plato is my friend, but an even better friend is the Truth." Do you remember how we used to say, "Stalin's Five Year Plans"? Did we do right to call them that? No one will deny it—Stalin took a leading part in their preparation, in organizing their fulfillment.

But think: Was not the decisive factor in their fulfillment the contribution of tens of millions of Soviet people who built Magnitogorsk, that great forge of the Soviet Union, on the slopes of the Urals? Was it not the contribution of the Soviet youth who, in the far north, wrestling with the elements, built that city of youth, Komsomolsk?

And what about those tens of thousands of workers of Leningrad and Moscow, who, sent by the Party, went out into the ocean of individual peasant economy to build the forms of a collective society?

Think: Was that a small thing—the contribution of millions of Soviet workers, tens and hundreds of thousands of technicians, engi-

neers, organizers of economic life, from whose efforts and labors, from whose many days of work and sleepless nights, grew the industrial might of the Soviet Union?

Or the contribution of tens and hundreds of thousands of Soviet Communists, heroes of the Civil War, soldiers of the battles for the collectivization and industrialization of the country, the contribution of the Party which was the organizer and backbone of the mighty effort of construction?

Was it right that all our love and admiration for the heroism of these tens of millions of Soviet people, for the great Bolshevik Party, was concentrated in one man?

You say: But the War? True, we heard the communiques which always ended with the name of Stalin.

But think: Were not these communiques the result of the bloody fighting of millions of soldiers, the will of hundreds of thousands of officers, the efforts of the brains of thousands of staff-officers, the resolution and foresight of the generals, the self-sacrifice of tens of millions of working men and women in the arms factories and the collective farms of the Soviet hinterland?

Were not these victories the decision of the Party, that organization which taught its members to face the events of the war with indomitable courage? And think: Did we do the right thing by concentrating in one man our love and admiration for those who, with their own blood, saved humanity from fascist enslavement, and for the Party which led them?

I think it was wrong. The authors of all the great accomplishments in history are the working people, the common people. We learned this together 30 years ago

from that old, tattered booklet which bore the title, Communist Manifesto. What do you think? Did not we—as well as many others—tend to forget this truth during the last decades? And that is what was bad.

But it is not only that. The thing goes much deeper, it is much more difficult.

Do you remember our first encounters with the Soviet soldiers, with Soviet life in Lwow? Do you remember how we were shocked by the ritual which surrounded that name—and was he not then for us the embodiment of the line of the Party? Later we became accustomed to it, we ourselves began to adopt the ritual, we applauded and stood up with everyone else. But tell me, didn't it ever occur to you that fewer ceremonies would perhaps better have reflected the greatness of the cause?

Today we know this: Our feeling of being in a dilemma arose because we were brought up under the influence of a Marxist conception of Party and leadership, on the one hand, and the un-Marxist cancer, which today we call the personality cult, on the other.

It was a conflict which we fled, but it was there nevertheless: a conflict between our correct thousandfold correct, love and attachment to the Soviet Union, to the first government of workers and farmers, to the first country which was building socialism, and the instinctive distaste which the cult of the individual aroused in us, the individual who placed himself above the Party and the people.

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DO YOU REMEMBER how we received the communique about the dissolution of the Polish Com-

munist Party? The matter was not simple. Each of us, in his own way, tried to find an explanation for this terrible thing, each of us was tortured by the thought: "It could not be that all of them. . . . There must be a tragic mistake." But we submitted to the decision, smothering our doubts.

Today we know that the source of the slanders was the evil which found a sanctuary in the very place where Felix Dzerzhinski had once gathered the best of the best, the most honest of the honest, the most loyal of the devoted. But do you think that that evil could have arisen if Stalin had not placed his will above the Party?

Today we know that this was only one of many things. At the 20th Congress they spoke of Leningrad, Georgia, Azerbidjan. They spoke of terrible, horrible things: of the sword which, sharpened by the Party during Lenin's time against the enemy of the Revolution, began to cut ever deeper into the body of the Party itself. They told how slander became a murderous weapon, how the healthy boldness of Party people became alleged hostility to the Party, how people who wanted, in a Party manner, to defend their Party opinions were branded enemies of the people and liquidated.

Do you think this would have been possible if the entire power had not been concentrated in the hands of one man, if one man had not made the decisions which should have been made by the Central Committee or the Party organizations; if this man, possessed by a sick suspicion, had not gradually pushed aside everything that stood in the way of his one-man rule—inner-party democracy, the party organizations, the Central Committee?

It must be resolutely said: We have to think through anew the activities of Stalin. We must not allow his undoubted achievements—and the gleaming colors by which these achievements were exaggerated, transformed into actual superhuman deeds—to conceal from us his serious errors, to conceal the unpleasant, very unpleasant things. Stalin must be evaluated justly—and the whole truth about him must be told.

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THE SOVIET comrades have begun this work. They have cast aside all hesitation and resolutely declared that the truth is the only way to strengthen the Party, to strengthen Communism.

How much greater are our strides forward in recent years, since we have finished with this cult, since the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the camp of Socialism have systematically, step by step, put aside its remnants. We will go forward even more quickly, when we root out every trace of it from our ranks, from our very souls.

