

WAS STALIN'S WAY THE ONLY WAY?

The attempt to attribute all social phenomena to "objective circumstance" leads to fatalist tendencies or mechanical determinism. But ascribing undue historical importance to subjective factors—to personal traits of leaders, to their state of consciousness and their capacity to act "freely" and independently of circumstances—leads to irrationalism, the acceptance of wilful, accidental and blind movement of history.

The fact is that the objective and subjective, the accidental and the necessary, are always intertwined. Failure

to disentangle them or to distinguish that which is primary in the causal nexus of the outrageous crimes which dishonored the socialist states, can only deepen perplexity and confusion.

It is evidently impossible to blame Stalin for all that was negative during the first stage of socialism in the Soviet Union. But even if the blame is assigned to the leadership of the Soviet party, an explanation is still required as to why they defended what they now admit was wholly indefensible. And if this question again is answered by pointing to theoretical errors, sectarian one-sidedness and blindness, the question remains as to the interrelation and interplay between these theories and attitudes and the concrete circumstances of that period.

Still, attributing these phenomena primarily to historical necessity—as the report of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party seems to do—leaves a number of important questions unanswered and opens the materialist concept of historical necessity to attack or misinterpretation.

“Was Stalin’s way the only way? Were not crimes inherent in the task?” asks Milton Howard, editor of *Mainstream*, in a *Letter to a Friend* (August, 1956). But there were a number of Stalin ways. As Palmiro Togliatti declared, “In him a maximum of good things were accompanied by a maximum of bad things.” Howard’s question lumps that which was historically inevitable in Stalin’s policies with that which was wholly accidental. As a result, Howard arrives at the incorrect conclusion that historical necessity is equivalent to “moral passivity, fatalism, grisly Calvinism” and that “we cannot make choices at all.”

Spinoza, Hegel and Marx long ago pointed out that

necessity strikes wilfully and appears unfathomable only insofar as it is not understood. Indeed, the making of proper choices, social and individual, always involves taking into account what “must be.” Men are free only to the extent that they understand the laws through which necessity manifests itself. Generally speaking, it is the still inexplicable, the accidental and seemingly irrational that generate moods of fatalism.

Howard states that “without forced industrialization and the keen vision of Stalin” there would have been “no People’s China or anything of that great turning point in history,” but then he goes on to deny that “the congealing of social freedom and semi-military discipline” was an inevitability and asks, “Was there the same necessity in the concentration of power, both in the state and the party, in the crushing of people in the quasi-religious mania and its terrible consequences?”

But it has never been asserted by Marxists that arbitrary “crushing of people” is dictated by necessity. Yet, on the other hand, can the inevitability of passion, fanaticism or semi-military discipline in social transformations of such magnitude be questioned and is revolutionary ardor to be confused with “quasi-religious mania”? Peoples’ China is ruled by a highly centralized party apparatus. It subjects millions to semi-military discipline and displays what antagonistic American observers call “puritanical fanaticism,” but “terrible consequences” have been confined almost exclusively to agents of Chiang Kai-Shek. (The Chinese revolution, however, has not proceeded without errors and excesses, as party officials admitted at the recent party congress.) Evidently, the crimes in the USSR during the Stalin era cannot be attributed simply to “fanaticism” and “concentration of power.”

In order to understand the indignation among Communists the world over at the revelations in the Krushchev report, it is necessary first to determine what in the report caused the shock. Were people shocked at learning of Stalin's inordinate desire to be glorified? of his belief in his own infallibility? of his political or military errors? or of his brutal vindictiveness in deporting to Siberia the Ingush, Volga Germans and the Tartars (many of whom were actually guilty of collaborating with the Nazi invaders)?

It is clear that it was not these disclosures alone that created the storm of indignation.

What horrified people was Stalin's co-responsibility in sending thousands of innocent people to their death, his ruthless suppression of intra-party dissent and criticism, his approval of torture as a means of obtaining confessions, his pathological suspiciousness and his promotion of a general atmosphere of terror.

For these cruel perversions of justice, there could not have been and was not any historical necessity. On the contrary, socialist development required, as Stalin himself repeatedly insisted, the most careful differentiation between friend and foe, scrupulous observance of revolutionary justice and legality as well as the fullest expression of the people's creativity and inventiveness. Socialist development certainly did not require the extermination of innocent people or the depletion of the party of its best leaders. These crimes are related to an historical accident—Stalin's paranoia—a factor outside the realm of politics and economics or what is commonly referred to as objective historical circumstances.

Stalin's pathological suspiciousness or paranoia greatly facilitated the plots and conspiracies of those who sought

the weakening or overthrow of Soviet power. Both the Krushchev speech and the report of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party mentioned the interrelation and interaction between the subjective and objective factors in the chain of crimes, but neither statement explored the dynamics involved. This omission has added to the confusion and even strengthened the arguments of those who identify socialism with violence. The bourgeois press, for example, conceded that Stalin suffered from pathological suspiciousness. Though always on the hunt for the diseased and pathological, it avoided describing the nature of this disturbance. Its silence was not accidental.

Had the press described Stalin's illness, they could not have advanced the absurd charge that madmen can rule under socialism as was claimed by the *New York Times*.

Stalin rose to eminence by virtue of his brilliant intellect. His writings attest his capacity for illuminating highly complex problems. He was a man of immense historical foresight. Every speech and article revealed his profound mastery of the application of Marxism-Leninism to practical problems of building socialism. The logic, simplicity and almost mathematical precision of his polemical writings, dispelling doubt and confusion, evoked almost universal admiration.

Paradoxically, Stalin also accepted as true "absurd, wild accusations by enemies contrary to common sense," according to the Krushchev report. He carried self-glorification to ridiculous extremes, suspected his most reliable associates and ordered the annihilation of the most loyal supporters of Soviet power.

To grasp the strange and dual character of Stalin as

it can now be seen, the nature of his disturbance must be investigated.

Such an investigation will elucidate many of the puzzling contradictions of the Stalin era and provide answers to the questions concerning the relationship of the present leaders to him.