

THE QUESTION OF CO-RESPONSIBILITY

In a statement following the Krushchev report, Togliatti asked: "What made such grave errors possible? and why was it that around them should have been created an atmosphere of consent and acceptance which almost imply co-responsibility on the part of those who today denounce the errors?" "Acceptance," of course, does not equal "co-responsibility," as Togliatti noted in the words "almost imply." The question whether the Soviet Communist Party as a whole can be absolved of all co-responsibility requires further discussion. It is important to recall that after Stalin was "deposed" by death, the Central Committee found it necessary to issue a warning against "disarray and panic." The de-Stalinization program thereafter proceeded over the course of three years in a gradual, step-by-step manner. Even so, it created widespread confusion. It seems clear that any organized attempt on the part of the present leadership to remove Stalin would not only have risked failure but also would have probably led to civil war and to the grave weakening if not the overthrow of Soviet power. It was precisely such an upheaval that western military leaders were hoping and planning for. Only unprincipled adventurers could have undertaken such a gamble.

Indeed the resurgence of domestic and foreign counter-revolutionary forces in Hungary following the de-Stalinization program attests the correctness of this judgment.

Entailing as it does a profound social transformation, a revamping of legal and administrative principles, the removal of countless "little Stalins" and a reappraisal

of an entire era, the wholesale de-Stalinization could not take place while the war danger was still acute. Actually the reevaluation of the Stalinist period gained momentum only after the relaxation of international tension following the Geneva conference in July 1955.

The previous international situation provides the answer to the question posed by Dulles as well as by some Marxist leaders concerning the failure of the present Soviet leaders to intervene during Stalin's lifetime.

In addition, it must be borne in mind that the full scope of the perversion of justice was not realized until the files of the secret Security Department archives were opened for a minute study and the documents that served to condemn people were exposed as fabrications. Previously the members of the Central Committee and of the Politbureau had no access to these documents or to the statements of those who retracted their confessions.

There are many leftwingers who have expressed the belief that the present leaders of the Soviet Union were fully aware of the scope of the excesses and bear responsibility for them. Such an argument leads to the absurd assumption that the present leaders put no value either on their lives or on the fate of the revolution. For if the present leaders were aware of the innocence of those arrested or executed, as they now are, the only conclusion they could have drawn was that Stalin and his Security Department officials were out to destroy the party and that they themselves were also in danger of being liquidated.

It is hardly likely that men like the leaders of the Soviet Communist Party who had undergone imprisonment and torture under the Czar would remain passive in the face of such danger to themselves and to the party. Whatever the Soviet party lacked in those years, there

was no absence of courage. The argument that an anti-Stalin coup would have endangered the revolution becomes meaningless, for what could have imperilled the revolution more than the destruction of the party?

That such an organized anti-Stalin coup was neither planned nor executed strongly indicates that the present leaders were at least partially convinced of the claims of Stalin and the Security Department of the existence of a massive counterrevolutionary movement to destroy Soviet power and that the terror was directed against enemies, hidden and open, of the revolution.

Of course, the assertion that the present leaders were not fully aware does not imply that they were entirely ignorant of the arrests and executions. But everyone, including the present leadership, was apparently ignorant of two essential facts: that the Security Department was riddled with provocateurs and enemies of Soviet power; and that Stalin was suffering from paranoia.

Even the victims of the repressions were often not unsure whether the repressions were necessary. Gyula Oszko, a Hungarian police colonel who had been imprisoned, replied when asked why he had signed a false confession: "The truth is that we believed for a time in the justice and necessity of these actions. We became ensnared in the false theory of political necessity. . . . We believed if we told the truth we would serve the imperialists." Now, he went on, "we are convinced that all this should not have happened, that the illegalities . . . were not dictated by historical necessity and that the victorious building of socialism does not at all call for similar horrors."

Although perhaps beset by doubts, the present leaders did not begin to recognize Stalin's paranoiac tendencies until they reached monstrous proportions. They too

found it difficult to differentiate between what was real and what was thought to be real. A significant passage in the Central Committee report declares that “the members of the Central Committee and the Politbureau viewed these matters (the arrests and the crimes) in a different way at different times” — differently in 1937, on the eve of the war, and differently during the war and the cold war period.