

Stalin's Excesses and Distortions

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AS THE REVALUATION of Stalin proceeds, the list of his errors and shortcomings, extending over the past two decades, grows longer and more disturbing.



Already it has been made clear that, following out his cult of the individual, Stalin reduced collective leadership and Socialist democracy to a minimum, undercut the

vigor and initiative of the Communist Party, put too much stress on the need for security measures inside the USSR, abolished self-criticism and cultivated an enervating adulation, exercised harmful controls over science, art and literature, made serious errors in the conduct of the war, needlessly antagonized Yugoslavia, committed mistakes on the Argentinian question, exhibited "great Russian" tendencies, used brutality in combatting dissident forces, prevented women from rising to high posts in the Party and the Government, misused Party cadres, etc.—altogether an appalling picture and one that has done grave damage to Stalin's erstwhile reputation.

How are we to understand these deplorable tendencies and mistakes of Stalin? Do they mean that he was following out a counter-revolutionary line? This important question must be def-

initely answered in the negative.

It is generally agreed in Communist circles that, whatever his faults, Stalin has consistently followed a correct general political line and that he has performed great services in the rapidly advancing Russian and World Revolution.

His many mistakes and errors, therefore, are deviations from, and distortions of, this essentially correct line. Various of them, in fact, may be classed as revolutionary excesses; which Stalin, no doubt, felt to be justified by the sharp needs of the Revolution. This could explain many of his rigid controls and bureaucratic practices.

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STALIN'S good intentions, however, must not be allowed to obscure the reactionary character of many of the policies which he was following. No matter what his motives, Stalin's suppression of collective leadership had a reactionary content. This was also true of most, if not all, of the other "errors" listed above, including the "great Russian" attitude which he assumed towards Yugoslavia and also towards some of the peoples within the USSR. This reactionary element was particularly dramatized by the anti-Semitic practices (the doctor's trial, the execution of many Jewish intellectuals, etc.) that were allowed to come into the police work of Beria and others. The fight against Stalin's deviations is, therefore, a struggle for a more solidly progressive policy

by the Party and the Government.

Stalin's errors and distortions obviously did much harm to the USSR, which was fighting its way ahead in the face of a million difficulties. This was notoriously the case with the blunders during World War II, when the very life of the Soviet Union was at stake. The same thing was also true in various other fields of policy.

Here we need only indicate the harm done in the realm of science and literature, by the harsh and rigid controls established over these activities. How much injury was done to science, although obviously great, has not yet been definitely made clear. But the injury to Soviet creative writing has been so severe that its poor quality has long been a matter of sharp comment throughout the world, including in all the Communist parties.

One of the most encouraging features in the present situation is that the USSR has been able to make such epoch-making progress in nearly every sphere, notwithstanding the holdback effects of Stalin's cult of the individual. The meaning of all this is that, once the various shortcomings are corrected, the USSR may be expected to boom ahead faster than ever. The present revaluation of Stalin is an unpleasant matter, but nevertheless it is highly constructive. We may rest assured that it will stand out as one of the most important milestones along the march of world Socialism to victory.