

THE NATURE OF STALIN'S AFFLICTION

A comparison of the observations about Stalin in the Krushchev report with a description of the clinical course and symptoms of paranoia is illuminating. Standard textbooks on psychiatry define paranoia as a slowly developing mental disturbance characterized by a gradual systematization of delusions of persecution. In their early years, paranoiacs merely exhibit a suspicious nature or an inclination to believe the worst about other people. They tend to attach great significance to trivial details in the behaviour of others and to interpret innocent remarks or actions as having sinister implications.

As early as 1922 in his testament, Lenin characterized Stalin as "excessively rude" and "lacking in tolerance,

kindness (and) considerateness toward comrades" and criticized Stalin's "suspicion and capricious temper."

"After the war (twenty-three years after Lenin's comment)," according to Krushchev, "the situation became more complicated. Stalin became even more capricious, irritable and brutal; in particular, his suspicion grew. His persecution mania reached unbelievable dimensions."

Paranoia must not be confused with insanity. There is a wide range of paranoid reaction patterns from comparatively normal people who are oversuspicious but otherwise competent to pure paranoiacs who develop whole systems of persecutory delusions. Many people have propensities to paranoia especially if their life experiences have conditioned them to suspicion or exaggerated caution. An individual who has suffered misfortunes and faced the slander, intrigues and machinations of real enemies often is particularly susceptible to paranoid behaviour. Some psychiatrists cite these factors as the reason why paranoia is most common among men, and among those of advanced age.

Stalin's experiences in the revolutionary underground before 1917 and with counterrevolutionary conspiracies later, conditioned him to distrust. His disorder progressed with the years. "Stalin was a very distrustful man," Krushchev declared, "sickly suspicious; we knew this from our work with him. He could look at a man and say, 'Why are your eyes so shiftily today . . . or avoiding looking me directly in the eyes?' Everywhere and in everything he saw enemies, 'two facers' and spies." Krushchev noted that Stalin's suspiciousness became intensified "during the last fifteen years of his life."

The primary mental mechanism operative in paranoia is the projection of subjective images or ideas to the surrounding environment. Ideas apparently logically connected to one another are considered as objectively true. A is my enemy, B is a relative of A, C has had dealings with B—hence C, too, is my enemy. Usually these inferences are directed against certain people who the paranoiac assumes are scheming against him personally or against the ideas he stands for. Gradually these delusions become ever more fixed and unshakable.

Krushchev reported that a woman doctor "wrote a letter to Stalin that doctors were applying supposedly improper methods of medical treatment. Such a letter was sufficient for Stalin to reach an immediate conclusion that there are doctor plotters in the Soviet Union. He issued orders to arrest a group of eminent Soviet medical specialists."

Significantly, *apart from the specific delusion, the paranoiac remains perfectly sane. He retains a sound intellect and a perfectly logical orderly process of thought, normal in every respect except for his over-meticulousness and preoccupation with his suspicions.* In addition, people who develop paranoiac ideas are often extremely brilliant and frequently endowed with other superior qualities. "They exhibit great energy, continuity of purpose, and their persistence in the face of all obstacles in gaining their points and making their ends is usually extraordinary," declares William L. White, the noted American clinical psychiatrist. (*Oxford System of Medicine*, 1936)

These characteristics of paranoia explain the apparent contradiction between Krushchev's picture of Stalin and that presented in Stalin's speeches and writings and by

numerous foreign diplomats, who were invariably impressed by his perspicacity and intelligence.

Yet despite their usually acute mentality, in everything connected with their delusion, *paranoiacs are very gullible.* They accept everything that corroborates their suspicions and reject everything that doesn't. Eugen Bleuler, one of the founders of clinical psychiatry, observed: "What is not related to the delusion is not even perceived by them, is not even experienced. *They tend to a shutting off of criticism.* What contradicts their ideas is not even brought into logical connection . . . they are so one-sidedly influenced by the delusions that they cannot feel the just rights of others." (*Textbook of Psychiatry*, 1924)

"Stalin believed in Beria and that was enough for him," declared Krushchev, "and when Stalin believed in anyone or anything, then no one could say anything contrary to his opinion." Beria "utilized very skilfully Stalin's weaknesses; feeding him with suspicions. He assisted Stalin in everything and acted with his support."

The suspicions of paranoiacs, William L. White noted, "are most often directed against close relatives and family members rather than against strangers."

Stalin constantly suspected zealous party leaders of being masked counterrevolutionaries. He distrusted his closest associates. He suspected that Voroshilov was a British agent and after the 19th Party Congress, according to Krushchev, suggested that Molotov and Mikoyan were guilty of some baseless charges. "It is not excluded that had Stalin remained at the helm for another several months," Krushchev stated, "Comrades Molotov and Mikoyan would probably have not delivered any speeches at this Congress."

"Every paranoiac has a desire," Bleuler declares, "to be regarded as super-excellent and to maintain of himself a picture of being *infallible* amounting at times to grandiosity. He usually regards others as beneath him and looks with disdain on the accomplishments of associates. *There is no paranoiac delusion of greatness without delusions of persecution, and no delusions of persecution without ideas of greatness and aspirations to such.*"

Krushchev's comments about Stalin's delusions of grandeur are pointedly applicable:

"He never acknowledged to anyone that he made any mistake large or small."

"Stalin acted not through persuasion, explanation and patient cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion."

"Stalin invented things for the purpose of minimizing the role and military talents of (Marshal) Zhukhov."

"Stalin transformed the whole past October historical period solely into an action of the 'Stalin genius'. . . . Stalin himself using all conceivable methods supported the self-glorification of his own person."

"Stalin told the Politbureau members, 'You are blind like kittens. What will happen without me? The country will perish because you don't know how to recognize enemies.'"

According to Bleuler, the difference between a delusion and an ordinary mistaken idea is a quantitative one and thus the disorder is often extremely difficult to diagnose. "It (the diagnosis of paranoia) is often *absolutely impossible* when the delusion has centered itself on a class of ideas that are beyond proof as in the politicians and

philosophers" for "an idea may, by chance, correspond with reality and nevertheless be a delusion."

A diagnosis of paranoia becomes impossible if the surrounding circumstances confirm the sufferer's suspicions. A person harrassed by arsonists, for example, who have set his house on fire on several occasions may well become afflicted with paranoia. But even the most brilliant ensemble of mental experts would be incapable of diagnosing his exaggerated suspicions as pathological or abnormal.

Beria's skillful exploitation of Stalin's extreme fear of foreign and domestic enemies made distinction between actual counterrevolutionary activity and fabrications practically impossible.

THE STALIN CULT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The extraordinary influence of Stalin's paranoia, obviously an historical accident, upon the course of events would appear to contradict the Marxist thesis concerning the primacy of material forces. Marxism postulates the preeminence of social forces and classes over the indi-