

## *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-

vidual. It is people who move history, not an individual. How was it then that an individual (and in this instance, one suffering from delusions) was able to wield such enormous influence on events?

The effort to explain history in terms of psychology, and especially on the basis of the traits of leaders, has never yielded fruitful results. Inherent in such efforts are assumptions of the kind expressed in the aphorism that history would have taken a different course had Cleopatra's nose been shorter. At best such an approach leads to the view that history "is a confused whirl of senseless deeds of violence, all equally condemnable before the judgment seat of the now matured philosophic reason." (Engels' *Anti-Duehring*) Marxism does not deny the role of psychological factors, errors or accidents. But it considers them of subsidiary importance as compared to the material forces acting upon society as a whole. And even the individual or accidental cannot always be regarded as pure chance or as wholly accidental. Deeper study reveals that what appears to be pure chance is often connected with elements of necessity.

As Plekhanov pointed out in his famous essay *The Role of the Individual in History*, the character of an individual is a factor in social development but only to the extent that the given social relations permit it to be. While placing the stamp of his individuality upon events, the great man cannot mold history to his will or by the power of his genius.

Stalin's peculiarities played an important role in molding the character of the first stage of socialism in the Soviet Union. Though certain of Stalin's traits proved destructive, they could not stem the over-all advance to socialism. "Even Stalin was not big enough to change the

character of the Soviet state," declared the Central Committee report. In the end, not accidental personal traits but the laws governing socialist society proved decisive.

Some Marxists have criticized the term "cult of the individual" as a mere euphemism that tends to hide the origin of the crimes. The resolution of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, however, asserted that "certain of our friends abroad have not yet got to the bottom of the question of the personality cult and its consequences." Obviously, the term "personality cult" is an oversimplification when employed as an explanation for the origin of the crimes. Having been accepted by millions, however, the cult turned into a material force and as such profoundly affected the development of Soviet society. Above all, it made impossible the timely rectification and exposure of the crimes.

The Stalin cult arose out of a number of objective conditions, especially out of the backwardness or the lag of social consciousness of the masses as compared to the new social relations and the forces of production. It is unnecessary here to offer an historical materialist explanation of the origin of hero worship and its interrelation with what psychologists term "the need for a father image," or why kings and chieftains were at times endowed with omniscience and infallibility. Such hero worship dates to antiquity and is expressed in countless myths and legends. Obviously these survivals of the past, particularly powerful among the formerly backward peoples of Russia, played a role in the development of the Stalin cult. Lenin was referred to by many workers and peasants as "the Little Father."

Stalin was both the expression of the cult and its foremost exponent.

Of course, it has been revealed that Stalin intensified its worst features. He reenforced the cult by assuming sole credit for victories achieved by the party and the people as a whole. But the fact remains that the cult began developing long before socialism achieved its signal victories, indeed during the years of its greatest trials. Having just emerged from semi-feudalism, steeped in religious superstitions, the vast majority of the people and especially the peasantry, were not fully conscious of their role in the building of the new society. During this phase, it is understandable that the words and plans of the leader were received with awe. Marxist-Leninist concepts were still too vague to replace the vestigial but concrete image of an all-powerful, all-wise leader. Stalin's successful forecasts and effective plans aroused adulation, particularly because they had initially met with doubt and opposition.

The Krushchev report explains how Stalin utilized objective circumstances for building himself into an exalted, omniscient hero. However, it was the interaction between Stalin's personality and the circumstances that gradually set in motion the chain of events which finally made his removal or the correction of his mistakes impossible. The grimness of the tragedy consisted not only in the commission of errors and excesses, unavoidable in times of revolutionary upheavals. Even more tragic was the apparent impossibility of rectifying them. Any such attempt would have required the separation of the Siamese-twin — Stalin and Soviet power — an operation whose outcome could not be foreseen. Indeed, during that period there seemed no way of shattering the one without the other.