

THE QUESTION OF THE STALIN QUESTION

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A CENTENARY EULOGY

The most remarkable thing about the Stalin question on the hundredth anniversary of Stalin's birth is that it should still be as much of a question as it was when the anti-Stalin campaign was launched by Khrushchev three years after his death. Almost a quarter of a century has passed since the 20th Congress, when the Stalin period was made into a question. The Khrushchevites declared that they possessed a new and quite superior form of Marxism which would supersede Stalinist dogmatism. A quarter of a century later we still await a history of the Stalin period written from the viewpoint of the 20th Congress Marxism. But there is now less prospect of such a history being produced than there has been at any time since 1956.

A quarter of a century is a theoretical eternity. No theoretical work could occupy a quarter of a century. It is too long a period of time to be in any way relevant to the failure to produce a history of the Stalin period.

The Communist Party of Great Britain published in November 1978, in its fortnightly magazine, Comment, an item about

"STALIN - THE MISSING 10,000,000 - AND US"

On the cover was a cartoon of Stalin eating people by the dozen. Inside

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translation of an extract from a book, The USSR & Ourselves, published in France last year with the approval of the Politburo of the French Communist Party, as well as reprints of a few comments made by the CPGB over the decades. The editors of *Comment* say in their introductory remarks that Khrushchev's "*courageous exposure*" of the "*devastating repressions unleashed by Stalin*" in the thirties "*shock the whole world Communist movement*".

It is undoubtedly an awful thing that millions of people should be killed in political turmoil. It is undoubtedly human to be shocked on discovering that those millions were killed. But how long can one realistically be shocked and horrified? The mere expression of shock and horror prolonged over a quarter of a century by politicians who were actively involved in the leadership of the movement through which those people were killed cannot be taken seriously. It is a routine of cheap sensationalism that is deliberately substituted for political thought.

The leadership of the CPGB had reason to be genuinely shocked in 1956. They had been amongst the least critical of Stalin cultists until Stalin died, and their critical faculties had remained dormant between 1953 and 1956. They had imagined themselves to be historical materialists, and to have a scientific understanding of the history of society and of the conflicts through which contemporary society developed that no other political body in Britain had. Then it was revealed to them that they had grossly misunderstood what had happened in Soviet society since the twenties. They had been blind in a way that no other political body in the society had been blind. They had mistaken a massive slaughter of the innocents by what they now declare to have been an inhuman totalitarian state for defensive measures by a socialist democracy against counter-revolutionary terrorism. They had been better placed to see the realities of Soviet life than anybody else, yet alone had not seen them. They had roundly denounced the social democrats as malicious slanderers, but it was suddenly revealed to them that what the social democrats said was substantially true.

In 1956 they had reason to be profoundly shocked. They had in human terms, (that is to say, in Althusserian jargon, as "*subjects of history*"), two choices: either to dispute Khrushchev's revelations or to be shocked to the core of their being by them. Either course would have been honourable. They chose neither. In their moment of truth they displayed that attitude which the Althusser theorised a few years later with his notion of history as "*a process without a subject*". And they displayed a practical scepticism about the possibility of truth that harmonises well with the Althusser's notion that truth is an illusion of ideology. They said as little as possible and hung on. Their synthetic humanism a quarter of a century later can therefore be regarded as no more than the cheap, frivolous sensationalism of political bankrupts.

Khrushchev's "*courageous exposure*" of Stalin in 1956 exposed nothing, nor did it lead to the exposure of anything by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was neither a theoretical criticism of Stalin nor a factual exposure of him as a criminal. It was not an event within the sphere of reason. It was a dogmatic event. What Khrushchev revealed was intended to be received as a dogma and not to be reasoned about. It was a test of faith rather than an appeal to the critical faculties. If a Pope revealed that an investigation of

the Vatican archives showed that Jesus, the Son of God, had betrayed the Father, and become an agent of Satan, he would not be developing a secular outlook among Catholics: he would merely be requiring them to choose between Jesus and the Vatican within the realm of revealed dogma. And so it was with Khrushchev. He declared Stalin to have been a monster, and in accepting that declaration as an unquestioned assumption on the basis of which they reasoned (or as the Althusser puts it, or as the Althusser puts it, used it as the "protocols" governing the operation of reason), the loyal Communists accepted that the Kremlin was the perennial source of truth and that no particular body of ideas was true for any longer than it was sanctioned by the Kremlin.

History, according to the Althusserianism currently fashionable within the CPGB, is "a process without a subject". That there is apparently a human subject of history is an illusion of ideology. The apparent subject of history is no more than an ideological agent of the process of history. It is therefore not to be expected that, as the structure of the agent is changed by the development of the process, the agent should develop coherently as if he were a subject. Human continuity is not to be expected between the successive forms taken on by the agents of a process without a subject, and the human spirit certainly did not manifest itself to any appreciable extent in the leadership of Western Communism in 1956 and after.

NONE SO BLIND

"The CPGB, like the rest of the international Communist movement, was at the time misled into publicly denying as 'anti-Soviet slanders' the evidence for these unjustified repressions, which the CPSU subsequently revealed to have been true", say the Editors of Comment. They do not indicate which evidence the CPGB had been misled into denying, and how Khrushchev revealed it to be true. Nor do they ask how the CPGB could have been so easily misled into believing things which could subsequently be revealed to be true with such little use of reason and such little display of fact.

The most damning this is that, after it had been revealed to the CPGB that it had slandered truths as slander, it made no effort to reassess the political literature that it had so glibly and groundlessly condemned for over thirty years. Menshevism in forced exile had continuously published material about Soviet society which must fall into the category of truth which the CPGB had been misled into condemning as slander. But did the CPGB, after the revelations of 1956, set about reassessing this Menshevik literature, and figuring out how it had been misled into a general condemnation of it as slander? It never even occurred to it to do such a thing.

The excuse that what the bourgeoisie were saying about the Soviet Union might have been reasonably presumed to be lies without further investigation is quite threadbare. The most acute and perceptive criticism was not published by the bourgeoisie, but by emigre socialists, and chiefly by those trends in Russian socialism that had been closest to Bolshevism, the Left Mensheviks. But perhaps the CPGB had been misled by Lenin into supposing that the Mensheviks were mere agents of the bourgeoisie maliciously intent on slandering socialism?

In the thirties a new sort of literature describing Soviet politics began to be published, written by emigre Communists who were familiar with the Soviet

system from the inside. Two of these are of special interest. The first, The Russian Enigma, by Anton Ciliga, appeared in 1938, and was published in English by The Labour Book Service. The second, I Chose Freedom, by Victor Kravchenko, appeared in 1947. Ciliga was a member of the Politburo of the Yugoslav CP who was expelled from Yugoslavia in 1925 and went to Russia in 1926, where he remained until 1935. He lived life in Russia to the full, and he knew from personal experience the reality underlying Bukharin's earnestly jocular remark at the height of his power that "It's nonsense to say that different political parties may not exist in Russia. On the contrary they may - provided that one party - the Communist - is lodged in the Kremlin, and all the rest in jail". Ciliga mixed with the Soviet leadership from 1926 until 1930, and spent the years 1930 - 35 in the other political party in prison and in internal exile.

Kravchenko belonged to the first post-October political generation in Russia. He joined the Communist Youth in the early twenties and was admitted to the Party in 1929. During the thirties he was involved as an engineer in economic management in various spheres, both agrarian and industrial. In 1943 he went to America as a member of a Purchasing Commission, where he defected in 1944.

One might disagree with how Ciliga or Kravchenko formally characterised the Soviet system but if one were in the least bit interested in the particular details of its functioning one could scarcely fail to recognise the ring of truth in their accounts of their experiences. If the editors of *Comment*, instead of continuing shocking graphics a quarter of a century too late, had tried to explain how the CPGB leaders had been misled into declaring the truthful accounts of their experiences written by Ciliga, Kravchenko and others to be slanders, that would be a sign of political earnestness. But, alas, the CPGB is no more in earnest now about such things than it was in 1956.

It is not believable that the CPGB was "misled" about the unpleasant facts of life in the Soviet Union. It is not compatible with the frivolity of their response to the supposed revelation of these facts in 1956 that they had in any substantial sense been misled, and there is ample evidence that on various occasions before 1956 they had chosen to avert their eyes. (See Manus O Riordan's articles on The CPGB and the East European Trials, *The Communist*, August 1977 and March 1978.)

One can plead ignorance if one does not see, but not if one averts one's eyes. The aversion of the eyes is conclusive proof that one has seen very clearly indeed but that one does not wish to know.

What happened in 1956 was that the aspect of Soviet reality from which eyes had previously been averted had attention focussed on it. It would seem that the aversion of the eyes had taken place on the assumption that the features from which they were averted would never be acknowledged to have existed, and would be obliterated from known history. Khrushchev's incoherent and unenlightening secret speech made a considerable impact merely because it acknowledged those features of reality to have existed, not because it revealed very much about them. The shock, therefore, did not result from the revelation of things which had previously not been known, but from the indication that things from which the eyes had been averted were being

officially acknowledged to exist. It was therefore a very different kind of shock from ^{what} it is now being pretended that it was. And that is one of the reasons why the question of Stalin became ever more problematic for the CPGB instead of being answered in one way or another.

ANTON CILIGA

"How is it that in its first stages the Russian revolution shows the most modern social developments whereas in the next stage it exhibits the highest degree of exploitation and oppression?... The question is all the more difficult to answer as no civil war, no dated period of revolution separates these two stages... The revolution has at no time ceased to be 'victorious', to maintain itself. The men and organisations that stood at the head of the revolution during its first phase, its liberating phase, are, in the main, those who, during the second phase defended and spread the rule of slavery and oppression."

That is the question that Ciliga asked over forty years ago (The Soviet Enigma, p136). It is a more coherent question than any that were posed after 1956 by those who condemned Ciliga as a malevolent slanderer in the thirties. They now affect to be greatly concerned about the fate of millions from whom they averted their eyes at the time, but, since they need to postulate a break in the internal development of the revolution, they are incapable of asking coherent questions.

Ciliga was transferred to the party in jail because he asked awkward humanitarian questions about the progress of the revolution at the moment when it was most relevant, and therefore most dangerous, to do so. And he discovered, a generation before Solzhenitsyn, that freedom of thought in the Soviet Union was possible only when one was entirely removed from the sphere of action. He debated the revolution in jail in a way that he could never have done if he had continued to be involved in it. One great subject of discussion was Lenin:

"Lenin's part in the revolution was much discussed among Left-wing Extremists at Verkhne-Uralsk... Brought up in the midst of the Lenin-cult, as were all the members of the young Communist generation, it seemed obvious to me that 'Lenin had always been right'... In that spirit did I talk of Lenin... It was very moved when on one of our first walks Prokopenia the Decist gave me the following ironic advice 'Don't get excited as regards Lenin's struggle against the bureaucracy. Do you really believe that Lenin ever fought the bureaucracy? You quote his article written on the eve of his death, on the reform of the workers' and peasants' Inspection; but did he call on the working masses to organise themselves against bureaucracy? in no way! He simply proposed the creation of a very well-paid body of officials to fight against - bureaucracy! You see, foreign comrade,... at the close of his life, Lenin lost his faith in the working masses and his only hope remained in the administration; nevertheless, afraid that it might exaggerate, he wished to limit the evil by having part of that administration watched by another administration'. Then, after a moment's silence, he went on, 'Obviously it is useless to shout this from the house-tops, for it would provide Stalin with further arguments. But among ourselves, that was the true Lenin'.*

"The results of the Five Year Plan spurred me on, and, with me, others, to

*Decists = Democratic Centralists, a democratic opposition group within the Party, 1920-21.

analyse Lenin's activities with greater freedom, not to belittle his vast merits, but better to understand the heritage he had left us... When one honestly thinks of the ugliness of the Stalinist period, it is impossible not to see in it - with greater emphasis and coarseness - the negative traits of the Lenin regime. Was the triumph of these negative elements...not due to Lenin, right from the beginning? It was true in so far as party life was concerned... It was none the less true of the political regime in general. Non-conformists within as well as outside the Party had been made powerless; in the factories...the workers had been subjected to a Communist or non-Party bureaucracy. All these fundamental problems had been solved, as early as in Lenin's time, to the detriment of the workers and the advantage of the bureaucrats. The Bolshevik working class leaders, elite of the revolutionary Russian proletariat, such as Sapronov, Chliapnikov, Medvedev, or Miasnikov*, who had criticised Lenin, had been good prophets. Towards the end of his life, Lenin was no more than the incarnation of the present... Lenin acted with great logic, but the results of the Five Year Plan showed him to be wrong...

By criticising 'the era of Lenin', I was penetrating into the Communist Holy of Holies, into my own sanctuary. I advanced timidly, for even in this stronghold of Opposition where I lived, the figure of the defunct leader had retained all its prestige and its glory... Weeks and months went by in painful meditation and I could no longer evade the anguished question: is Lenin guilty, too? ... Was it true...that he aided the establishment of new privileges, that he did not recoil from repression when the masses stirred and that he insulted them, distorting the meaning of their legitimate claims? Were then these workers resistances...not the essential element of the Russian revolution? Did Lenin's crimes surpass his merits?..

"From that time onward I began to see two Lenins before me: the eternally great one of the liberating epic of 1917, and the one of the decadent revolution... I felt very lonely. In silence I buried the myth of Infallible Lenin" (p274-7).

Nowhere amongst the belated "20th Congress" responses to the matters which caused Ciliga's inner turmoil in the early thirties was there anything so genuine and coherent. How could there be? Ciliga's problem was that he was too much a subject of history to renege on his human obligations. Their problem was that, as agents of the process without a subject, they had averted their eyes for over thirty years and were unexpectedly called upon to counterfeit a human response.

Ciliga could discern no fundamental difference between the main Opposition groups and the Party: "One could not fail to be struck by the spirit of hierarchy and submission to a leader which was permeating the Russian Opposition. A quotation from Trotsky had the value of a proof... The complete submission to Lenin and to Stalin that pervaded the Party could also be found in the Opposition, but then in favour of Lenin and Trotsky" (p232). And he observed how Trotsky's equivocal formulations were grasped in practice by the Opposition:

"The Left wished only to hear negative judgements pronounced by Trotsky on the political superstructure of the regime; the Right listened only to his positive

* Members of the Workers' Opposition, 1920-21.

judgements as to social basis. The real incoherence of Trotsky's attitude gave rise to two antagonistic groups in the isolator, both of which clung to one of the two contradictory aspects of the leader" (p232).

Ciliga's experiences with the Party in the Kremlin which was transforming the society are no less interesting than those with the Party in jail which was thinking about the unpleasant features of that transformation. He tells the story of a German Communist of social democratic origin who in 1923 "was sent to Russia to be cured of his 'Brandlerian opportunism'... Working conditions in Soviet factories appalled him. These conditions were still worse than those he had fought against in Germany. What depressed him most was that all workers were systematically searched upon leaving the factory... But he could not bring himself to protest openly, for, he said, 'there really were cases when workers stole things'. Torn between the wish to protest against the system and that of justifying it by taking particular Russian conditions into account, he decided to return to Germany. He did not succeed in settling there; he had lost the art of living as a simple workman, and apart from that he found the German CP torn by internal dissensions. Abandoning the struggle, he returned to Russia. In 1930, in Leningrad, he occupied the post of factory director. It was his turn now to have the workers searched." (p116).

The newly established Soviet working class, which had no pre-revolutionary history and whose development had occurred entirely under the guidance of the Party, experienced no subjective difficulties of the kind suffered by this German: "The brisk rhythm of Soviet life had underlying it a lack of social principle. Entire groups of peasants and workers rose in social status and took on all sorts of directing, economic, political and administrative functions. A very large number of young peasants and manual workers, owing to their secondary or higher education, took in hand the reins of the new society. But this happy evolution entailed not only certain regrettable isolated characteristics, it also had a considerable and deeply perverted aspect. The strata that rose would at the same time be permeated with a certain bourgeois spirit, a spirit of dissipated egoism, of low calculation. One felt their firmly established desire to hew themselves out a good place, regardless of others... In his efforts to succeed, each man gave evidence of a totally unscrupulous capacity for adaptation and a shameless aptitude for flattery of those in power... This spirit prevailed not only among non-Party members, but also and above all among the Communists themselves" (p13).

In 1929-30 Ciliga lectured in history in the proletarian city of Leningrad under Kirov's administration. He taught in the University, the Party School, and gave special lectures for factory workers: "I took a great interest in my students... the elite of the Leningrad proletariat; young people from 23 to 30 years old... They were nearly all working men and had long careers of public activity behind them... It seemed to me that this was the ground from which were to spring the future champions of the working class against the bureaucracy... Yet I was soon to find that my forecast had no foundation. They were interested only in a very superficial way in questions of history and sociology and in theoretical debates on the working class movement. They certainly learned very well all they were taught; they learned it too well; for them what was ^{not} written in the manual did not exist... Their spiritual life was utterly mechanised. When I endeavoured to guide them beyond the narrow bounds of their syllabus, to awaken their interest and their critical sense, they hung

back... I...made an effort to bring out certain analogies between a number of characteristic phenomena of the Fascist and the contemporary Soviet regimes... I tried to sketch out the idea of what was lacking in Russia, namely, the free activity of the masses. My intention did not reach the audience. Certainly up to a point they saw the analogy, but it did not astonish them, they found it entirely normal: it was ^{the} part of leaders to take decisions; the whole question depended on knowing what was the end in view. The final end of the Soviet leaders was good, that of the Fascists bad. My listeners thought it was entirely natural that in both cases the masses should be only an instrument... In the end I was forced to accept...that they represented not a workers' elite, but a 'young guard' of the bureaucracy" (9p74-6).

Of the collectivisation campaign Ciliga comments: "The enormous machine destined to transform the whole of Russia, worked at full speed. Events proved Preobrazhensky to be right when he said, 'Once the struggle against the kulaks has begun, there will be no retreat possible, even should we wish it'... The hurricane was sweeping Russia, smashing the time-old patriarchal system of the country to atoms. Bureaucracy was imposing its own civilisation. The bloody progress fought its way through towns and villages, sword in hand and starvation at its heels" (p94-5).

KRAVCHENKO

Kravchenko, who was of the political generation amongst which Ciliga laboured in vain to awaken a humanist critical sense, was one of those in whom it awoke of its own accord. He was one of those Komsomol enthusiasts in whom the initial idealism survived in such a form that it made him to decide to defect if the opportunity presented itself. Krushchëvite Marxism in the West has never made clear its attitude to humanitarian defectors. (And it should be borne in mind that Kravchenko defected before the onset of the Cold War, during the anti-fascist alliance, when the U.S. State Department was not attempting to provoke defections.) Now that it feels obliged to apply humanitarian standards to the Stalin period, however frivolously, does it have nothing to say about the predicament of humanitarian Communists in the Soviet Union.

Kravchenko describes out of his direct experience some problems of factory management during the Five Year Plans. He also describes the numerous systems of supervision through which the directing centre of the state stimulated and controlled "the brisk rhythm of Soviet life" (as Ciliga puts it): "Multiple webs of espionage by the party and of the party, by the GPU and of the CPU, pooling information at some points, competing at other points, covered Soviet life from top to bottom and back again. Tons of dossiers. Millions of spies. All of it sorted and studied, filed and cross indexed... Within our ruling Party this whole thoroughly secret process of surveillance and exposure in which old fashioned privacy was forever liquidated had a name. It was called 'Party democracy'" (p76-77).

By contrast with this he describes the response of his group on the Soviet Purchasing Commission to arrival in Vancouver: "I had never seen so many relaxed, unafraid, happy people in one place at one time. What excited us most was the shop windows. This lush abundance of things to wear, to eat, to use! We were like children at a circus, gaping and exclaiming over wonders... But this is as if the dream of socialist abundance had come true, I kept repeating inwardly". At first they imagined that they were being subjected to a

confidence trick, by a Potemkin village built to mislead them. They were astonished at the price of shoes, and could not believe that the salesman in the shoe-shop was not a capitalist. And the service was beyond words: "These fantastic capitalists not only gave you all your heart's desire but packed it up for you and thanked you for taking it away." And when they crossed the border into the USA the cursory check of passports and luggage took their breath away. How could a state exist amidst such laxity? "Personal freedom is one thing, but didn't such lack of vigilance smack of anarchy, chaos?" (p455-7). Kravchenko could acknowledge this experience because he was already a traitor in his heart, because he had contrived to get selected for the mission in order to defect when he still had only a pale notion of bourgeois democratic freedom. His colleagues, taken entirely by surprise, gazed about them in wonder but suppressed dangerous thoughts.

Kravchenko's treason was conceived in the collectivisation campaign: "In war, there is a palpable difference between those who have been in the front lines and the people at home. It is a difference that cannot be bridged by fuller information and a lively sympathy. It is a difference that resides in the nerves, not in the mind. Those Communists who had been directly immersed in the horrors of collectivisation were thereafter marked men. We carried the scars. We had seen ghosts. We could almost be identified by our taciturnity, by the way we shrank from discussion of the 'peasant front'. We might consider the subject among ourselves...but to talk about it to the uninitiated seemed futile. With them we had no common vocabulary of experience. I do not refer ...to the gendarmes and executioners. I refer to the Communists whose feelings had not been wholly blunted by cynicism. Try as we would, the arithmetic of atrocities made no sense." (p107).

THOUGHTS IN SEASON

We had intended to survey the writings of Lucio Colletti and Jean Ellenstein on the Stalin question, but are prevented from doing so by a sense of anti-climax and irrelevance. They are not fit company for those we have been considering. We will turn instead to Raphael Abramovitch, a Bundist Menshevik who emigrated with Martov in 1920 and founded the emigre Menshevik journal, Socialist Courier (Sotsialisticheski Vestnik), ensuring that the Communist movement abroad need not be uninformed about features of Soviet life which the official Soviet press saw no purpose in describing. Abramovitch was politically active in Petrograd and Moscow during the first year of Bolshevik power. He was arrested, sentenced to death, and whimsically reprieved just before he was due to be shot, (a quite usual occurrence in times of revolutionary justice). In this case the whimsical reprieve resulted from an appeal to Lenin by Friedrich Adler, the Austrian Social-Democrat, who was himself in prison in Austria. Towards the end of his life Abramovitch wrote a general history of the Bolshevik revolution from the Menshevik viewpoint which, as a master of his art, he was not afraid to enliven with personal anecdotes. He recounts the following conversation with Dzherzhinsky in August 1917, at a moment when both parties joined forces in defence of the February revolution:

"Abramovitch, do you remember Lassalle's speech on the essence of a constitution... He said that a constitution is determined by the correlation of real forces in the country. How does such a correlation of political and social forces change? 'Oh, well, through the process of economic and political development, the evolution of new forms of economy, the rise of different

social classes, etc., as you yourself know perfectly well yourself'... 'But couldn't this correlation be altered? Say, through the subjection or extermination of some classes of society.'" (The Soviet Revolution, p313)

Dzerzhinski became a couple of months later the first policeman of the revolution. He was especially selected for the job because he was highminded and historically motivated. If you were an innocent man about to be shot in those times you could reflect that you were being exterminated for the noblest of motives, a consolation that would have been denied you in later times under Yagoda or Beria. Though Dzerzhinski was the architect of the secret police and the apparatus of terror his works have not been translated and published in English, so we do not know whether he ever wrote anything on the lines that he spoke of to Abramovitch. How do we know that Abramovitch was telling the truth? Put it this way. There are infinitely better grounds for believing Abramovitch than for believing Krushchev, whose anecdotes were very readily accepted. Furthermore, it would be very remarkable if the speculation which Abramovitch attributes to Dzerzhinsky had not been considered in Bolshevik circles once a socialist revolution had been decided upon: and it would have been in character for Dzerzhinsky to consider it most openly. His altruism was of a kind which enabled him to look upon the extermination of multitudes of others as dispassionately as he looked upon his own long imprisonment: an incident in the ongoing progress of humanity.

Trotsky during the twenties could not publicly contemplate "*the liquidation of the kulaks as a class*", even though making demands which required it in practice. Since Trotsky was not in power, he did not need to deal with the practical implications of his demands. But Bukharin was in power, and he parted ways with Trotsky primarily because he could not avoid thinking of the practical implications of the Left Communist position with relation to the peasantry. Both of them sought a way around the peasant question. So did Stalin, for as long as it was possible in terms of practical politics to think that there was a way around it. When that was no longer possible he tackled the peasant question head on and survived. Trotsky had not believed that survival was possible.

The Left Opposition had predicted a bourgeois evolution under Bukharin-Stalin rule. When Stalin went into opposition to the powerful Bukharin group on a programme of industrialisation and collectivisation, and there were indications that he would succeed where the previous oppositions had failed, many elements of those oppositions enlisted under Stalin's banner. They had until then condemned Stalin in quite extravagant terms, and regarded him as a mere instrument of Right-wing Bukharinite rule, but suddenly Bukharin was whining about the "*Genghis Khan of the Politburo*" who was upsetting all his ineffectual schemes, and the ideas of the Left Opposition were being made the basis of political action.

Yuri Pyatakov was one of that select band of Bolsheviks mentioned in Lenin's Testament in December 1922. Lenin bracketed him with Bukharin as "*the most outstanding figures (among the youngest ones)*" in the Party leadership. After an adventurous military experience in the Civil War, Pyatakov specialised in industrial affairs and advocated a single economic plan. It was as an industrialiser that he took part in the first post-Kronstadt opposition grouping, the Forty-Six, in mid 1923, and remained in opposition until 1928.

Deutscher includes him on a list of which he says: "Marxists of large views, unconventional, resourceful, and full of verve, they represented the most advanced and internationally minded elements in the party" (Trotsky, Vol 2, p203). In 1928 he left the Opposition on the ground that Stalin was implementing its programme. While on business in Paris later that year he had a discussion with a Menshevik called Volsky, who had been a close associate of Lenin in the years around 1905. (Volsky's fascinating account of his philosophical dispute and political rupture with Lenin in connection with the publication of Materialism & Empirico-Criticism, entitled Encounters With Lenin, was published in 1954 under the name of N. Valentinov, and has been unaccountably ignored in recent Marxist epistemological writings.) Abramovitch relates Pyatakov's discussion with Volsky from a note of it made by Volsky:

"Volsky made a critical remark about Piatakov's rather sudden change of attitude towards Stalin's policies. Piatakov answered by a monologue of more than an hour in which he explained his conception of the Bolshevik party as a unique phenomenon in the world. 'According to Lenin', Piatakov said, 'the C.P. is based on the principle of coercion which doesn't recognise any limitations or inhibitions. And the central idea of this principle of boundless coercion is not coercion by itself but the absence of any limitation whatsoever - moral, political, and even physical, as far as that goes. Such a party is capable of achieving miracles and doing things which no other collective or man could achieve. A real Communist, that is, a man who was raised in the Party and had absorbed its spirit deeply enough becomes himself in a way 'a miracle man'. An ordinary man, Piatakov noted, cannot honestly change his views quickly, but a Communist, by an effort of will, can honestly and earnestly call white today what was black for him yesterday, and vice versa." (p415).

It is quite understandable that the mystique of power should have developed into such exaggerated notions in the minds of "Marxists of large views, unconventional, resourceful, and full of verve", who were incapable of comprehending the situation in which they were entangled in a way that made them incapable of effective political action, and whose despair of further revolutionary development in the first half of 1928 was suddenly dispelled by Stalin's initiative in the latter part of that year. There is even a considerable degree of truth in Pyatakov's exhaltated view of the matter. But it is a purely contemplative and ecstatic form of truth; and it is improbable that anybody who brooded on the unrestrained use of power in the way that Pyatakov, and many others, did would actually be capable of directing the use of that power, or of keeping their bearings while engaged in the use of it. The effective use of unrestrained power requires considerable objectivity, and considerable power of self-restraint, as well as strong motivation: which is to say, in the case in point, that it needed Stalin.

FORESIGHT AND PREPARATION

The matter of factness with which Stalin dealt with the gigantic problems confronting the revolution in 1928 has a disturbing effect on historians who write about the period from the viewpoint of the Western intelligentsia. If he had agonised more over the dilemmas of the revolution, if he had been less rational in his approach to the immense obstacle posed by the peasantry to the revolution, he would be much more acceptable to that viewpoint. Because he did

not flounder around ineffectually he is beyond the comprehension of these intellectuals, therefore they write about him in an entirely irrational way.

Consider the following from Deutscher's biography: "In 1929...Soviet Russia embarked upon her second revolution, which was directed solely and exclusively by Stalin. In its scope and immediate impact upon the life of some 160 million people the second revolution was even more sweeping and radical than the first. It resulted in Russia's rapid industrialisation; it compelled more than a hundred million peasants to abandon their small, primitive holdings...; it ruthlessly tore the primeval wooden plough from the hands of the muzhik and forced him to grasp the wheel of the modern tractor; it drove tens of millions of illiterate people to school and made them learn to read and write; and spiritually it detached European Russia from Europe and brought Asiatic Russia nearer to Europe" (Stalin. p296, Pelican edition).

This second revolution was achieved at a moment when those Bolshevik leaders with whom Deutscher feels a spiritual affinity, and whom he regards as the advanced and cultured Marxists of the Party, were of the opinion that the revolution had reached the end of its tether. But, while Deutscher acknowledges the immensity of the achievement, he can see nothing great in the man responsible for it: "...the giant robe hangs somewhat loosely upon Stalin's figure. There is a baffling disproportion between the magnitude of the second revolution and the stature of its maker, a disproportion which was not noticeable in the revolution of 1917. There the leaders seem to be equal to the great events; here the events seem to reflect their greatness upon the leader. Lenin and Trotsky foresaw their revolution and prepared it many years before it materialised. Not so with Stalin. The ideas of the second revolution were not his. He neither foresaw it nor prepared for it. Yet he, and in a sense he alone, accomplished it. He was at first almost whipped into the vast undertaking by immediate dangers. He started it gropingly, and despite his own fears. Then, carried on by the force of his own doings, he walked the giant's causeway, almost without halt or rest" (p296-7).

"Stalin acted under the overwhelming pressure of events" (p319), therefore there is a baffling disproportion between the man and his deeds. But does it mean, to "act under the overwhelming pressure of events"? It is an illusion that the pressure of events can be overwhelming in the sense of compelling coherent political action to be undertaken. History is littered with political leaders whom the overwhelming pressure of events failed to impel into coherent political action relevant to them. Stalin's capacity to be "overwhelmed by events" in 1928, and to find bearings in the consequent flux, was political ability of a rare quality.

The idea that "Lenin and Trotsky" foresaw and prepared for October 1917 is no less illusory. Trotsky may later have imagined that he had foreseen it and prepared for it. Lenin was not given to that kind of self-deception. He had in the years around 1905 figured out two possible forms which the bourgeois revolution might take: an assumption of power by the developed bourgeoisie of the towns or an eruption of the latent bourgeoisie of the countryside in alliance with the industrial workers. He held the latter to be preferable from a socialist viewpoint. He did not speculate on the possible course of development of a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry".

The fall of the autocracy was not the culmination of a period of revolutionary turmoil in which the Bolsheviks participated on the basis of Lenin's programme. The Tsar fell suddenly and unexpectedly a couple of weeks after Lenin had said in Switzerland that he did not expect to see the socialist revolution in his lifetime. Revolutionary turmoil followed instead of preceding the overthrow of the Tsar. What Lenin argued for in Two Tactics was participation in the Provisional Government which would be established in place of the Tsar. What he proposed on his return to Russia in April 1917 was opposition to and the overthrow of the Provisional Government. His first task was to persuade the Bolshevik leaders in Russia to take up a position of revolutionary opposition towards the Provisional Government. Stalin was among the first to go over to this position.

It might be said that Trotsky foresaw the October Revolution, though it cannot be said that he prepared for it, (and it might perhaps be said that Lenin prepared for it without foreseeing it). In his 1906 ("permanent revolution") pamphlet, Results And Prospects, Trotsky predicted that the revolution against the Tsar would end up as a socialist revolution. He held that Lenin's "democratic dictatorship" of workers and peasants was unrealisable, that power would pass to the workers alone, and that *"the proletariat in power will stand before the peasants as the class which has emancipated it"* (Chapter V). The situation then would be that a small working class with socialist objectives would hold political power in a society which was mainly composed of peasants who had been freed from feudal shackles and whose spontaneous development would be capitalist. *"Thus, the more definite and determined the policy of the proletariat in power becomes, the narrower and more shaky does the ground beneath its feet become. All this is extremely probable and even inevitable"* (Chapter VI).

The revolution would necessarily be socialist in its political form, but the socialist state would necessarily undermine itself and come into conflict with the bulk of the society. It would have no internal means of maintaining itself. "Without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship. Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt. But neither can there be any doubt that a socialist revolution in the West will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship" (Ch. VIII).

One might in 1928 have regarded this as a remarkable achievement of Marxist scientific prediction, with one exception: the revolution in the West. But of what practical political relevance was this foresight or prediction? Let us even assume that his prediction had been entirely accurate, and that he had foreseen that the revolution in Russia would be isolated: of what political use would it have been? One could reflect on the acuteness of the insight that foresaw that the revolution would necessarily be socialist, and that the socialist revolution would necessarily be a cul-de-sac; but then what? Wait for the end in a state of scientific detachment?

Trotsky's foresight was of no political relevance, and at the end of his life he could see no more sense in Lenin's pre-1917 programme than he could in 1906. In his article, Three Concepts Of The Russian Revolution, (published as an appendix to his 1940 biography of Stalin) he remarks that *"The weak point of*

of Lenin's concept was its inherently contradictory notion, 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'." But Lenin's objective was not political prediction, it was the establishment of grounds for political action by a revolutionary socialist party in revolution in a largely pre-capitalist society. Trotsky's clear predictions were inherently dissociated from political action, while Lenin's "inherently contradictory notion" enabled him to feel his way into political action as it developed. He never attached much value to foresight. In the summer of 1917 he ditched the agrarian programme with which he had "prepared" for revolution during the preceding decade, adopted the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries (the land to the peasants), and was criticised for doing so by Rosa Luxemburg, who warned that he was thereby creating immense problems for the future. But when Lenin was intent on acquiring political power he was not to be deterred by the consideration that the means by which he was gaining it would create problems for the subsequent exercise of it.

And in his final reflections on the October revolution in January 1923, in response to Sukhanov's criticism, there is not the slightest suggestion that he foresaw and prepared for it. With regard to foresight he only dismisses the idea that Kautskyian Marxism (in which he participated prior to August 1914) "foresaw all the forms of development of subsequent world history". His own justification is that he made the most of an unforeseen situation in accordance with a Napoleonic maxim "First engage in serious battle and then see what happens" . (Let us for the time being give the final word to Volsky in this connection: "In the years after the October Revolution he abandoned most of his previous views and certainties, replacing them with an empiricism which he expressed in Napoleon's dictum - On 'sengage et puis on voit'" (Encounters With Lenin, p256.)

Ciliga's view that "Towards the end of his life, Lenin was no more than the incarnation of the present" is true in one sense. His main achievement since the revolution had been the maintenance of the Bolshevik state at the expense of every other form of politics in the society. One cannot gather from his writings that he considered any cost too high for the preservation of that state. He represented the status quo insofar as the status quo was that revolutionary and arbitrary state. In 1922 the revolutionary state existed in a mainly capitalist and petty bourgeois economic ~~environment~~ and therefore the possibilities of future socialist development rested entirely on the arbitrary, unrepresentative, character of the state. The supreme law of the revolution was the conservation of the state.

The conduct of the revolution from 1918 onwards had not been guided by a programme, and Lenin did not leave to the Party as his testament a programme to guide it through the complexities of NEP. The kind of revolution that Lenin made was not capable of having its development programmed. His testament was no more than a set of character assessments - or, rather, it was a hopeless attempt to imagine how certain characters would develop after his own influence was removed. His own conduct of politics since 1918 had consisted of the extemporisation of solutions to crises, and that is what revolutionary politics continued to be after his death.

He dictated a number of brief and cryptic articles on the future of the economy shortly before his final paralysis, which were subsequently a source of confusion to the Party rather than of assistance. It is possible to read

them in the context of what he had previously written about the NEP, as Stalin did. It is also possible to read them as a self-sufficient group of articles, involving a drastic break with his previous views about the NEP, as Bukharin did. Bukharin, basing himself extensively on these articles, held that socialism would come about gradually through the evolution of the NEP. If Lenin intended these articles to be regarded as Bukharin saw them, then he had left a programme for development of socialism. But since this programme was in fundamental contradiction with his previous views on the NEP, it is puzzling that he did not say that he had discarded his previous views.

If Lenin's last articles are to be regarded as a programme for the development of socialism through NEP, it must be said that they are an inadequate statement of that programme because they ignore the political aspect of it. Abramovitch's comments are to the point: "*Had the CP not intended the NEP to be a temporary breathing spell to enable it to 'reculer pour mieux sauter' [draw back to make a better leap]; had the CP accepted the NEP in principle and decided to promote the gradual evolution of peasant Russia towards industrialisation and the progressive introduction of necessary social reforms, it would eventually have had to give up the very idea of dictatorship over the peasants and the working class. Communism would have become a Social Democratic doctrine adapted to the peculiar social and cultural conditions prevailing in Russia; it would have become a more or less democratic state governed by a coalition of the peasantry, the proletariat and the intelligentsia.*" (p317/8). The Bolshevik programme would have been similar in many respects to the programme of the Menshevik government of Georgia which the Bolsheviks overthrew by military force in 1921.

THEORY AND POLITICS

Stalin's view of himself as a theorist was: "*Stalin never had any pretensions to making any new contributions to theory, but only strove to facilitate the complete triumph of Leninism in our party*". (Once More On The Social Democratic Deviation. Nov. 1926. Vol 9, p121). Bukharin and Trotsky fancied themselves as original theorists. Even Kamenev and Zinoviev were overcome at times by the urge to theorise. Only Stalin was content not to be a theorist. And yet, of Lenin's successors, only Stalin had an independent and capable political mind.

Western historians, and even Mensheviks who should know better, agree that Stalin was a very inferior person amongst the first rank of the Bolshevik leadership. They agree completely with him that he was not a theorist, and that Bukharin and Trotsky were. But he had political ability and they hadn't. Bukharin accused him of having a lazy mind. That is true in a sense. His collected works are blank between 1914 and 1917, when he was in exile in Siberia. It seems that he saw no point in writing when he was not engaged in political activity: and that he was quite capable of living without writing. On the other hand, for Bukharin and Trotsky to live was to write. They wrote therefore they lived. They did not write merely because political activity required it. They wrote because to write was to live. In the midst of the civil war Trotsky wrote not only the Defence of Terrorism but also a critical review of contemporary Russian literature - or, rather, he dictated. Trotsky's writing was written speech. (Bukharin's speech was spoken writing. Stalin was capable of speaking or writing, as the occasion required.)

During the early years of the revolution Bukharin produced two original theoretical works: the Economics Of The Transition Period, in which he justi-

fied unlimited dictatorship in both political and economic spheres, and Historical Materialism, in which he expressed Marxism as a sociology in terms of mechanics, (thus anticipating the Althusser, who has however chosen to ignore him). He also engaged in two major political disputes with Lenin - over the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918 and the trade unions in 1920-21.

For Bukharin to theorise was to go off at a tangent from reality by expressing as a system some particular feature of reality. His theory, therefore, never functioned as a guide to political action. In 1918 he opposed Lenin's political empiricism on grounds of theoretical principle. Lenin was determined to make whatever concessions to German imperialism that were necessary to preserve the Bolshevik state. Bukharin did not think the Bolshevik state could be preserved in its proper form by such means. He advocated revolutionary war. Lenin jeered empirically at the suggestion that they should wage revolutionary war without an army. Bukharin had a Central Committee majority against Lenin, but in the moment of truth he did not have sufficient confidence in his theoretical position to engage in decisive action to save the revolution in the way he was advocating. Lenin achieved a stalemate from a minority position until Trotsky's nerve gave way under the pressure and he defected from Bukharin. The deal with Germany was done without Bukharin's theoretical approval, but he re-emerged in the forefront of politics sometime later, again as a theorist.

What happened in 1928-9 was in certain respects a repeat of 1918. At the outset of the grain crisis Bukharin had a majority in the Politburo and his Right Communist group controlled the major organs of state. Power slipped away from him because he was no more prepared to act decisively on the basis of his Right Communist position than he had been on the basis of his Left Communist position in 1918. Since the crisis was real, and since Stalin was prepared to deal with it on its merits on the basis of what he conceived to be the Leninist position, Stalin displaced Bukharin with the support of the men who were responsible for the government of Russia on the ground in its various regions. Bukharinite evasion was not a possible basis for the conduct of government. There is no evidence that Stalin had been scheming to displace Bukharin. Bukharin was displaced because he was not prepared to face up to the actual crisis confronting the government. He hung on in silence while the crisis was being resolved in a way of which he did not approve, and then returned for a second time to theorise within a political framework which would not exist if he had been a politically effective theoretician.

It is fashionable amongst Western historians and political intellectuals to attribute a religious mentality to Stalin, but there is no real doubt that the clouded minds were those of Bukharin and Trotsky. They had postured as Lenin's theoretical equals, but had had to give way to him in politics without being convinced: and having given way irrationally they engaged in the Lenin cult. It is customary to attribute the development of the Lenin cult to Stalin. But what Stalin did was to summarise Lenin's political position after his death for the purpose of guiding the mass of Party members, and seek to convey to the Party some feeling of Lenin's absolute political determination. The Lenin cult existed long before Lenin's death, and was created by others than Stalin.

The Lenin cult was for Bukharin and Trotsky an irrationality since they had both been involved in fierce disputes about fundamentals with Lenin, and had had to give way without being convinced - not to mention that they were both supposed to be of the advanced European mentality for which all cults are

irrational. And yet both of them wallowed in the cult in a way that is not explicable as a practical need to placate a popular prejudice. For all their theoretical exhibitionism and their Western mentality, they were psychologically dominated by Lenin in a way that Stalin was not. They postured as equals because honour required it, but in reality they related to Lenin as a Catholic does to a spiritual superior. Lenin was a kindred spirit to them insofar as he was an intellectual, but as a politician capable of dealing effectively with original situations he was beyond their ken. Lenin was the condition of their political effectiveness, and in difficult times he mediated reality for them so they did not need to take full account of it. That is why, whatever theoretical tantrums they might throw, they always had to come to heel politically: they sensed that if they persisted in acting in accordance with their own understandings, the result would be catastrophic.

Stalin's relationship with Lenin was entirely different. He was a Leninist because Lenin made political sense to him. He had a political aptitude which he developed by close observation of and reflection on Lenin's conduct of politics, but his mind was always his own. Only in his writings does Lenin appear matter-of-factly as a person who might be right or wrong, though he was usually right. Because Stalin was a Leninist only because Lenin made sense to him (and had made sense to him long before the revolution), he alone remained his own man while being a Leninist.

Deutscher acknowledges this fact in the form in which it is comprehensible from his particular viewpoint: *"Stalin was in a sense less dependent on Lenin than were his colleagues; his intellectual needs were more limited than theirs. He was interested in the practical use of the Leninist gadgets, not in the Leninist laboratory of thought"* (Stalin, p239).

Deutscher deplores Trotsky's participation in the Orientalism of the Lenin-cult, and his degeneration into the mystical position that *"one cannot be right against the Party"*, but treats them as unaccountable and insignificant lapses on the part of a rational Western mind - which of course makes nonsense of rationality. And, of course, Deutscher describes the only man in the Politburo who never lapsed from rationality as a religious throwback: *"The mind of this atheistic dictator was cluttered with biblical images scattered in his dull and dreary writings, the phrase about the march 'to the promised land of socialism' recurred perhaps most frequently"* (p327). Perhaps he used the phrase, though we don't recall it as a refrain in his writings. What struck us about his writing was its matter-of-factness, its lack of rhetoric, and its concentration on political practicality. But we do recall a pamphlet entitled, A Paradise In This World. Its date is 1918. It is by Trotsky.

Here is another assessment of Stalin's character: *"Every ruler is irresistibly tempted to justify his deeds by appealing to reasons of state, custom, or the necessity for a 'white lie'. But Stalin feels no need to draw on such an argument. In the course of his struggle he answered all such accusations once and for all with the comment: 'The only liars are the self-deceivers'. No one can seriously believe that Stalin would ever deny or betray himself"* (Achmed Amba: I Was Stalin's Bodyguard, 1952, p73). What is beyond dispute, at any rate, is that he is the only person in the Politburo who inherited from Lenin who never did betray himself, who suffered no lapses from rationality, and who (as far as one has grounds to judge) developed throughout as an integral character. (The writer of the lines quoted above was a Turkish physicist and

marksman who emigrated to Soviet Russia and became a member of the Kremlin guard in the mid-thirties. He was arrested by Yezhov in 1936 and released by Beria in 1938. During the war he fell into German hands and spent years in a concentration camp. While his book is far from being pro-Stalin, he had both the opportunity and the ability to make of assessments of character which were lacking in Deutscher etc.)

COLLECTIVISATION

Much is heard nowadays about the "*forced collectivisation*" undertaken by Stalin. But how was collectivisation forced on the vast majority of the population? How can ten per cent, or less, of a society coerce ninety per cent to act against their interests in a class conflict? "*Creative Marxism*" finds no difficulty in imagining such a thing. Since it is in the business of creation, of making things out of nothing, it has no grounds for its ideas, and so all things appear possible to it. It is morally concerned about how the Bolshevik leadership could have been made so wicked by Stalin that it was prepared to coerce the peasantry into collective agriculture against their will in preference to leading them into it in accordance with their will. It is not at all concerned about how it was possible for the Bolshevik leadership, (given that it was sufficiently wicked to make the attempt), to actually coerce the peasantry. It is so appalled by the idea of coercion, (in a highminded sort of way that still leaves plenty of room for manoeuvre), that it imagines it to be a self-sufficient explanation of everything. But the idea of forced collectivisation (in the sense of the peasantry in general being forced) is very difficult to grasp in terms of empirically grounded thought.

Let us reset the scene. The October revolution abolished landlordism in the sense of ratifying the seizure of land by the peasantry. In the following years a system of state appropriation of the agricultural surplus was established to meet the requirements of the Civil War. This was tolerated by the peasantry under war conditions, but it led to discontent when prolonged after the end of the war. In the spring of 1921, under pressure of this discontent, Lenin ended War Communism and introduced the New Economic Policy. The NEP revived the shattered economy by freeing market activity. The possibility of socialist development was preserved by tightening the Bolshevik monopoly of the political sphere.

Splits occurred in the Politburo immediately after Lenin's death. First Trotsky, and then Zinoviev and Kamenev, adopted opposition positions expressing dissatisfaction with the drift of things under the NEP, and demanding that it be phased out. Both these oppositions failed to elicit substantial support in the Party. In the mid-twenties a relatively stable ruling group was established by Bukharin and Stalin. Bukharin, in stark contrast with the Left Opposition, devised a scheme for the evolution of socialism through the NEP. The market would be nudged towards socialism by means of budgetary incentives. To the peasantry he issued the slogan, "*Enrich yourselves*".

Stalin held a position that was described as Centrist. That is to say, he did not try to disrupt the NEP while it was developing the economy without endangering the state, but neither did he declare the NEP to be the framework of socialism. He held to the position stated by Lenin in 1921. He clearly did not sympathise with Bukharin's "*Enrich yourselves*" slogan, but he realised that

under NEP the towns were dependent for supplies on the capitalist motivation of the peasantry. And, unlike Bukharin, he never deceived himself into thinking that the abolition of the NEP, that is to say the abolition of capitalism, would be anything other than a period of sharp class conflict.

The view in the Opposition was that Stalin was a helpless instrument in Bukharin's hands, that he was inescapably caught in the web of the NEP, and that the tendency of development was continually strengthening Bukharin. The prospect of socialist development seemed to be at an end, except in some vague Kautskian form. (The most rigorous of the Oppositionists, Rakovsky, had resigned himself early in 1928 to a virtual bourgeois restoration.)

How was it that something entirely different happened? Why were the calculations of all the "advanced Marxists" ^{so} entirely wrong? Not because the Opposition refused to entertain the idea of coercing the peasantry - they did not.

Stalin frequently quoted Lenin's description of the peasantry as "*the last capitalist class*". By 1928 the capitalist development of the peasantry had had seven years to take root. On the assumption that the land was the private property of the peasantry, and that the peasantry, stimulated by a revolution, had been developing themselves as bourgeois and petty bourgeois farmers in a more or less freely operating market for seven years, how could it possibly have happened that the leading politician who had urged them to enrich themselves should lose power, and that within a year or two private farming should virtually have disappeared from Russia.

It has been suggested that the reason lies in Bukharin's reluctance to break with the discipline of the small ruling group and appeal to the country. But that, at most, explains why Bukharin lost power within the narrow confines of the Politburo and the Central Committee. It does not explain the ensuing transformation of the countryside. If private farming had been developing effectively throughout the NEP, it is impossible that sufficient force could have been exerted on it by the small urban part of the society to unravel its capitalist development and reorganise agriculture along lines to which it was opposed. One can refer glibly to the totalitarian coercive apparatus of the state, but in the twenties that was a mere phenomenon of the towns.

In short, if the countryside had been developing on the basis of a capitalist agrarian revolution which occurred in 1917, there is a powerful prima facie case against the assumption that it was coerced into collectivisation in 1929-30.

But a suggestion has been made recently which puts the matter in a very different perspective. This occurs in an article on "*Russian Industrialisation Debates of the 1920s*" by Jonathan Schiffer (Problems Of Communism, No. 8). What Schiffer's account of rural development in Russia amounts to is that a capitalist agrarian revolution did not occur in 1917. In fact, there was even a recession in the capitalist development of agriculture in 1917. The "*mir*", the mediaeval village commune, was being slowly eroded in the last decade of Tsarism by the development of private farming, which was sponsored by the autocracy. What happened in 1917 was not that the landlords' estates passed into the hands of private farmers, but that they were taken over by the mir.

The mir was strengthened relative to the capitalist farmer, and the bias of the mir against the capitalist farmer was reinforced by a similar bias on the part of the new state. The ideal of the mir was a more or less homogeneous peasantry, and it engaged in periodic land redistributions to this end.

Schiffer's suggestion is rather hesitantly expressed: it is scarcely expressed at all. It deserves better treatment. It needs to be singled out and developed, because there is a strong prima facie case in its favour. If it proves to be true a great puzzle disappears.

It means that the capitalist peasantry were unable to rise in support of the man who had exhorted them to enrich themselves, since they were a stifled social class in the countryside. It explains why, after seven years of free market relations, there was not a powerful and coherent capitalist will in the countryside: its development was stifled by pre-capitalist rural social forces. The mir preserved the countryside from capitalism while the Bolshevik state was strengthening itself in the town. When Bukharin relied on the bourgeois peasantry he relied on a force that did not yet properly exist in much of the countryside.

The conservative position of relying on rural capitalism turned out not to be a conservative position. Even Bukharin's conservatism required an agrarian revolution to support it. It was not a question of whether there should be an agrarian revolution, but of what form the agrarian revolution should take, private or collective farming. And there is no longer a problem of how capitalist farming was collectivised.

The history of the collectivisation campaign remains to be written. When that history is written it will undoubtedly turn out to have been a much more complex affair than has generally been assumed.

On that tentative note we end this eulogy.

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