

Lessons from the Stalin Question

ALL THE COMMUNIST parties of the world, not the least ours in the U.S.A., have many lessons to learn from the Stalin question. The basic one to master, however, is the imperative need to practice self-criticism and collective leadership, and to fight unceasingly against bureaucracy and over-centralization, which are tendencies toward one-man leadership. The Communist Party of the U. S. had its own bitter experience in this respect in the Browder adventure, and it should never be forgotten. The basis of Stalin's errors, as they are now being brought to light, was that he departed from the elementary triumphs of collective leadership, which Lenin had incessantly stressed.

Stalin, in his earlier years, earned an outstanding reputation as a Marxist, by his great fight against the Trotsky-Zinoviev-Bucharin traitors, especially in the big struggle around the elementary question of building Socialism in one country, by the initiation and application of the five-year plans, etc. The issue now is not that he made a number of mistakes



during his long leadership; in any event mistakes would have been made in handling the many immense and complex tasks that the USSR has had to face ever since its establishment.

The essence of Stalin's errors is that he multiplied, complicated, and intensified these mistakes by his virtual liquidation of collective leadership and by the atmosphere of omniscience and extreme adulation with which he surrounded himself. The general effect was, more or less, to weaken the work of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. This fact inevitably produced the present down-grading of his reputation.

THERE ARE several dangers at present that Communists and other left forces must be alert to combat, in this general connection. The first is the intensified offensive that is everywhere being conducted by the capitalist forces against world Socialism in all its manifestations. They have given the green light to the worst red-baiters and Soviet-haters. They are trying to confuse the workers and to split the Communist parties with an intense propaganda to the effect that the whole course of Communist policy over the years has been wrong and that world Socialism has turned out to be a failure.

Communists must be alert not

to allow themselves to be tricked by such lies and fabrications. We must keep our eye on the ball: on the basic fact that over the years the USSR has made the most tremendous progress in the building of Socialism and that, as indicated by the recent Congress of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, it is going to continue to do so at an accelerated rate.

As for the policy of the USSR being "wrong all the while," it is very significant that the historic Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which boldly developed such a pioneer policy as the peaceful transition to Socialism and which initiated the re-valuation of Stalin and his work, did not deem it necessary to reverse the basic policy of the Party. This policy, strengthened and improved in various respects the Congress, with its central stress upon the building of heavy industry, the maximum improvement of mass living and cultural standards, and the struggle for the peaceful coexistence of all nations, will go on to higher and greater achievements.

TOGETHER WITH combatting the intensified anti-Socialist drive of the bourgeoisie, the workers must also be alert to fight a specific element in this offensive; namely the widespread attempt of capitalist apologists

to discredit Communist leadership in general. They are trying to antagonize Communists everywhere against the present strong and capable leadership of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union; they are seeking to turn rank and file Communists in the various countries against their leaders over the Stalin issue, and they are condemning every form of discipline and centralization in Communist parties.

Communists and other left forces must be on guard against such disruptive trends. The bourgeois elements cultivating them know perfectly well that organizations without democratic centralization, discipline, and strong leaders are virtually impotent. We Communists, more than ever, must stand for the principle of collective leadership. And in doing so, we must understand that collective leadership does not mean no-leadership and the abolition of Party discipline. It implies a joint working together of all the leaders, bringing out the best that is in them, both individually and collectively—and all under the general control and discipline of the Party as a whole.

Let us not forget that Lenin's basic principle of organization was **democratic centralism**. Lenin, himself, was a tireless exponent of self-criticism and collective leadership, in theory and practice; but this in no way pre-

vented him personally from being a most powerful leader in every sphere of thought and action.

A THIRD DANGER inherent in the present situation, one that Communists and other progressives must be on guard against, is that, under the guise of carrying on needed criticism and self-criticism, opportunists of various stripes will consider that they now have a license to fire indiscriminately into the various Communist parties and Socialist governments of the world. It is quite possible, in the coming period, especially as the policy of peaceful coexistence succeeds and international tension is relaxed, that there may well be a considerable development of critical international discussion among the many Communist parties.

Obviously, the present situation, since the dissolution of the Communist International, of simply going along on the basis of the self-criticism of the various Communist parties, is not adequate. This critical discussion will be all to the good, but it will have to be carried out upon a thoroughly responsible basis and in full consciousness of the imperative need for national and international class solidarity. Otherwise, ill-thought-out criticism can do grave injury by helping the enemy in given situations.