

## 'STALINISM'

An Address to the Sarat Academy in London  
on 30 April 1999 by Bill Bland

I am grateful to the Sarat Academy for inviting me to speak to you on 'Stalinism'.

However, your choice of subject presented me with some difficulty, since I am a great admirer of Stalin and the word 'Stalinism' was introduced by concealed opponents of Stalin -- in particular by Nikita Khrushchev -- in preparation for later political attacks upon him.

Today, in fact, 'Stalinism' has become a meaningless term of abuse employed to denote political views with which one disagrees. The Conservative press sometimes even describes Tony Blair as a 'Stalinist' -- giving Stalin, were he still alive, ample grounds for a libel action!

Stalin always referred to himself modestly as 'a pupil of Lenin' and I shall follow his example and interpret the subject of 'Stalinism' as 'Marxism-Leninism'.

Perhaps the nearest figure to Stalin in British history is Richard the Third, whom everybody 'knows' -- and I put the word 'knows' in inverted commas -- from their school history books and Shakespeare to have been a cruel, deformed monster who murdered the little princes in the Tower.

It is only comparatively recently that serious historians have begun to realise that the commonly-accepted portrayal of Richard was drawn by his Tudor successors, who had seized the throne from him and killed him.

Naturally, they then proceeded to rewrite the chronicles to justify their usurpation of the throne -- even altering his portraits to present him as physically deformed, as a physical as well as a moral monster. In other words, the picture of Richard which has become generally accepted today was the result not of historical truth, but of the propaganda of his political opponents.

It is, therefore, legitimate to ask: is the picture of Stalin presented to us by so-called 'Kremlinologists' historical fact or mere propaganda?

The 'Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (the Soviet Union), which was constructed under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, no longer exists. Is it therefore true to say -- as many people do -- that this means that socialism in the Soviet Union failed?

I intend to quote here only one set of statistics. In his report to the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in January 1939, Stalin cited figures from Western sources on the growth of industrial output in various countries as compared with 1913. These figures were:

Germany: -24.6%  
Britain: -14.8%  
USA: +10.2%  
USSR: +291.9%

Indeed, it is an undisputed fact under the centrally planned economy instituted under Stalin, Russia was transformed in a few decades from a backward agrarian country into an advanced industrial country which by 1941-45 had become powerful enough to defeat a German aggression able to draw upon the resources of the whole of Western Europe.

It is common to hear Stalin described as a 'dictator'.

The strongly anti-Soviet American writer Eugene Lyons once asked Stalin directly: 'Are you a dictator?' Lyons goes on (and I quote:)

"Stalin smiled, implying that the question was on the preposterous side.

'No', he said slowly, 'I am no dictator. Those who use the word do not understand the Soviet system of government and the methods of the Communist Party. No one man or group of men can dictate. Decisions are made by the Party'.

The British Fabian economists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in their comprehensive book 'Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation' categorically reject the notion of Stalin as a dictator. They say (and I quote):

"Stalin . . . has not even the extensive power . . . which the American Constitution entrusts for four years to every successive president. . . .

The Communist Party in the USSR has adopted its own organisation. . . . In this pattern individual dictatorship has no place. Personal decisions are distrusted and elaborately guarded against",

Certainly, in the time of Lenin and Stalin the Soviet regime was officially described as one of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. But this does not imply personal dictatorship. It means simply that political power is in the hands of working people, and that political activity aimed at taking political power away from the working people is illegal.

Of course, this latter is regarded in official circles in London and Washington as 'undemocratic' and 'a grave violation of human rights'

But the word 'democracy' means 'the rule of the common people', and in this sense the Soviet Union in Stalin's time was infinitely more democratic than any Western country.

As for 'human rights', the United Nations Human Rights Convention of 1966 lays down that states should guarantee to their citizens the 'right to work'.

But only in a socialist society can this right be put into effect, can unemployment be abolished (as it was in the Soviet Union in Stalin's time). A capitalist society requires what Marx called 'a reserve army of labour' so that it can make labour readily available in times of boom.

Thus, for a socialist country to ban political activity aimed at the restoration of capitalism is fully in accord with the UN Convention on Human

Rights.

In fact, talk about human rights is in most cases merely a propaganda weapon directed against socialism. In the eyes of Lombard Street and Wall Street, a corrupt central American 'banana republic' which sends out nightly death squads to murder homeless children in order to keep the streets tidy for the tourist trade counts as a 'free country' as long as it allows freedom of investment.

The Soviet traitors to socialism opened their attack upon socialism in 1956 at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in February 1956 by charging Stalin with organising a 'cult of personality' around himself.

Certainly, there was a cult of Stalin's personality in the Soviet Union in the time of Stalin. But this was organised not by Stalin, but against his wishes. In fact, Stalin himself opposed and ridiculed this cult.

For example, when in February 1938 someone wanted to publish a book entitled 'Stories of the Childhood of Stalin', Stalin wrote typically:

"I am absolutely against the publication of 'Stories of the Childhood of Stalin'.

The book abounds with a mass of inexactitudes of fact, . . . of exaggerations and of unmerited praise. . . .

But . . . the important thing resides in the fact that it has a tendency to engrave on the minds of Soviet children (and people in general) the personality cult of leaders, of infallible heroes. This is dangerous and detrimental. . . .

I suggest we burn this book".

There was indeed a 'cult of personality' around Stalin. A leading communist cried at the 18th Congress of the Party in March 1939:

"The Ukrainian people proclaim with all their heart and soul . . . :  
'Long live our beloved Stalin!' . . .

Long live the towering genius of all humanity, . . . our beloved Comrade Stalin!"

The speaker was Nikita Khrushchev!

It was Khrushchev too who coined the term 'Stalinism' and began to call Stalin 'Vozhd' -- the Russian equivalent of the German 'Fuhrer', Leader.

In other words, the 'cult of personality' around Stalin was built up not by Stalin and those who genuinely supported him, but by his political opponents as a prelude to attacking him later as a 'megalomaniac dictator'.

Even though Stalin did not have the power to stop these alleged manifestations of 'loyalty' and 'patriotism', Stalin was no fool and was aware that their motives were, as he told the German writer Lion Feuchtwanger in 1937, 'to discredit him' at a later date.

Thus, the cult of personality around Stalin was contrary to Stalin's own wishes, and the fact that it went on demonstrates that in the last few years of his life Stalin -- far from wielding dictatorial power -- was in a minority within the Soviet leadership.

This explains many strange facts:

For example,

that after 1927 Stalin ceased to be active in the Communist International;

that Stalin's works, although incomplete, ceased to be published in the Soviet Union in 1949, three years before his death;

that, in breach of long-standing practice, Stalin -- although General Secretary of the Party and in good health -- failed to present the report at the 19th Party Congress in 1952.

Let me return to the question of the alleged 'failure of socialism'.

In an effort to prevent the building of socialism, in 1918 the new state was attacked by the armed forces of Britain, France, Poland and Japan. But despite the fact that the new Soviet state possessed at the outset neither an organised army nor experienced military men, the five-year War of Intervention ended in victory for the Soviets.

The opponents of socialism learned an important lesson from their defeat, namely, that socialism was most unlikely to be destroyed by a direct offensive, but only from within, that is, by <sup>agents</sup> ~~agents~~ <sup>posing as</sup> ~~posing as~~ socialists, working hard within the Communist Party so as to achieve positions of influence and then, in the name of 'modernising' socialism, using this influence to divert the Party along political lines which would undermine socialism and gradually forfeit the support of working people for the Party.

It is a programme which Marxists call revisionism, because while revising Marxism in significantly harmful ways, it claims to be merely modernising it.

Khrushchey became leader of the Soviet Communist Party shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. But it was not until 1956, three years later, that he felt it safe openly to attack Stalin -- and then only in a secret speech which was never published in the Soviet Union until many decades later.

The attack upon Stalin was a necessary prelude to an attack upon, and a change to, the programme for building socialism put forward by Stalin.

One of the charges often levelled against Stalin is that while he was General Secretary of the Party many innocent people were falsely imprisoned for counter-revolutionary criminal offences. This allegation, unlike most of the others, is true. Between 1934 and 1938 the post of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs -- in charge of the security police -- was held successively by Genrikh Yagoda and Nikolai Yezhov. At Yagoda's public trial in 1938, he described to the court how he had used his authority to serve the conspiracy by protecting his fellow-conspirators from arrest, but arresting loyal communists on false charges.

It was Stalin who, suspecting something was terribly wrong, got his personal secretariat under Aleksandr Poskrebyshev to investigate what was going on in the security police.

It was as a result of these investigations that Yagoda and Yezhov were dismissed and arrested, that all cases of alleged political crimes were

reinvestigated and thousands miscarriages of justice were corrected.

It was more than anything this situation which led to the production of whole libraries of books accusing Stalin of responsibility for mass murder.

With every edition of such books as Robert Conquest's 'The Great Terror', his estimate of Stalin's 'victims' went up by several million to become farcical. When, after the counter-revolution had been completed, Boris Yeltsin published official figures of Soviet prisoners, they turned out to be less than in the United States, and the world press was strangely silent.

It was to Leonid Brezhnev -- who succeeded Khrushchev as Party General Secretary in 1964 -- that the dishonour fell of beginning the actual dismantling of socialism. Under Brezhnev's 'economic reforms', carried out under the cloak of 'decentralisation', moves were made to replace centralised planning, which is one of the bases of socialism, by the regulation of production by the profit motive, which is one of the bases of capitalism.

From this time on, it was all downhill.

What was abolished, along with the Soviet Union, in 1991 virtually without opposition, was not socialism, but a particularly corrupt and undemocratic form of capitalism akin to fascism

Today, thanks to phoney communists like Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev the once united Soviet Union has split into a number of rival principalities, often at war with each other in spite of being bankrupt.

But, we are told, the people of the former Soviet Union are now 'free'.

free to be unemployed;

if they are lucky enough to have a job, free to go months without wages because their employer's bank has gone into liquidation;

free to buy Rolls-Royce cars if they happen to be Mafia millionaires;

free to drink polluted water;

free to be mugged in any side street for the equivalent of a few pennies.

It should be no surprise that in Russian newsreels today we see demonstrators carrying portraits of Stalin! For to the demonstrators the picture of Stalin symbolises the socialism of which they have temporarily deprived.

If, therefore, people call me a 'Stalinist' -- as they sometimes do -- I regard this as a compliment, even though an undeserved one.

I honour Stalin as a great progressive figure who struggled all his life for the ending of the capitalist and imperialist system which is the cause each year of the misery and death of countless millions of men, women and children, especially in the neo-colonial world.

I honour Stalin as one who struggled all his life for the greatest cause in the world -- the liberation of mankind.