

Books of the Age

by Bertram D. Wolfe

STALIN, by Henry Barbusse. Macmillan. 315pp. \$3.00.

It is a pity that Barbusse, who began his literary career with "Under Fire," should have ended it with such a work as this. The book is a failure as a biography, for Stalin never comes to life in it. It is a failure as a discussion of political problems, for scientific analysis of situations and determination of tactics are beyond the capacities of Barbusse whose warm heart and eager humanitarian sympathies are not a sufficient equipment for the mastery of Marxism. Worst of all it is not even truthful as a record of fact, for Barbusse has accepted unquestioningly the official version of everything and Stalin or his adulators have rather shamefully abused the trusting author with official misinformation.

Thus Barbusse was told and writes:

"There was never, at any time, any difference of opinion between Lenin and Stalin." (p. 30). One has only to read Lenin's famous letter on the danger of a split, dated December 25, 1922 and postscripted January 4, 1923, to know that the above statement is inaccurate. And what shall we think of a biography of Stalin which does not even mention the letter in which Lenin calls for the removal of Stalin from the office of General Secretary, nor seek to analyze it?

In his zeal to exalt Stalin (and Stalin's actual stature, if truthfully reported, is

concert in the Town Hall, New York City, on January 25, 1936.

Among the gym groups are to be found men's and women's basketball teams who are now beginning to play off the first matches for the Hochman and Dubinsky trophies.

TRUCK DRIVERS of Philadelphia struck on November 30. It appears to have resulted from a jurisdictional dispute between Local 470 of the Teamsters Union and the Brotherhood of Transportation Workers. Both are affiliated with the A. F. of L. Industrial unionism would abolish such struggles between unions.

MOTION PICTURE OPERATORS struck in Chicago on November 30. No demands were put forward. The reason for the stoppage appears to be differences with the Hollywood studios. New York has not been effected by this walkout.

AT FIRST GLANCE

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not merely because of the opportunity offered by the Italian onslaught on Ethiopia but as least as much because they find it necessary to grab off as much as possible before an impending showdown. From all angles, it would appear that some pact of mutual assistance in the Far East—under one name or another—is being consummated between Great Britain and the U. S. Furthermore, no one can exaggerate the tempo with which the Washington government has been preparing its "defenses" in the Far East.

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"LONG Live the Republican Army" shouted the Communist Party and members of other sections of the Peoples Front in Paris on Armistice Day. Coming from the Socialists and Communists, it was a cry which made one shudder at the degrading depths to which the French proletarian masses are being dragged by their leaders today.

Not a word of criticism or condem-

gigantic enough without falsification) Barbusse feels it necessary to deny Trotsky any role at all in the November uprising, the civil war and the organization of the Red Army! Not having the political understanding to know wherein Trotsky was wrong and Stalin correct in their basic differences, Barbusse reduces it to the simple formula that the majority is always right. "When 100,000 people act together," he writes, "there must be some intelligence in what they do." (p. 119). With such reasoning we can uphold the intelligence of the Hoover and Roosevelt electorates, of the Hitler seizure of power, or any country's participation in the world war!

"All opposition," says Barbusse, "is a confession of retrogression, discouragement, incipient paralysis and sleeping-sickness." (p. 118). By this simple formula we could condemn the entire opposition of the revolutionary socialists to the action of the Second International at the outbreak of the World War! Of course, what Barbusse really means is that all opposition to anything Stalin thinks or proposes has such disastrous effects, for the book as a whole is a "contribution" of incense to the hero cult.

The glorification transcends all decent limits. Stalin "was everywhere at once." (p. 43). Unfortunately, this is the equivalent of being nowhere at any time for it prevents Barbusse from telling where Stalin really was and what he really accomplished. That is why the work is at its best in the rare moments when it leaves off these generalities which tell us nothing and treats a real achievement of Stalin's, as in the chapter on the national question. But such spots are few and far between. In the main the hero is treated literally as "the man who looks after everything and everybody, who has done what has been done and who will do what is to do." (p. 281).

Barbusse doesn't know a Brandlerite from a Siderealite but he puts his foot into it here too when he tells how Stalin helped to expel the "Brandlerians," the "Haisists," the "Lovestonians" and the "Pepperists" and helped the English and French parties in 1927-28 "to place their electoral tactics upon the rails of true revolutionary policy." (p. 191). A most unfortunate reference that, for since Barbusse's work was written the Seventh World Congress under Stalin's leadership found it necessary to take those parties off the rails on which Stalin had set them (withdrawal from the British Labor Party, abandonment of united front, "social fascism" and "class against class") and put them back on the rails which the "Brandlerians and Lovestonians" had advocated against Stalin, as those of "true revolutionary policy."

But let us draw a veil over the rest of this unfortunate work. It is neither a vivid personal picture such as Barbusse left to his own literary devices might have drawn, nor politically enlightening, nor historically accurate, nor theoretically sound. If it is useful at all, it will be only as a pathetic warning to intellectuals sympathizing with Communism not to abdicate their intellects and critical faculties, a warning as to the degenerating effects of sycophancy and the "hero cult" upon writers who, however inadequate their theoretical equipment, should at least bring to the movement their powers of observation (in which the novelist should excel), and intellectual honesty and self-respect. Let no one tell the sympathetic writer that those are but "bourgeois virtues." There will be no sound proletarian writing without them.