



**ON THE
HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE
OF THE
DICTATORSHIP
OF THE
PROLETARIAT**

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THE 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union summed up the fresh experience gained both in international relations and domestic construction. It took a series of momentous decisions on the steadfast implementation of Lenin's policy in regard to the possibility of peaceful co-existence between countries with different social systems, on the development of Soviet democracy, on the thorough observance of the Party's principle of collective leadership, on the criticism of shortcomings within the Party, and on the sixth Five-Year Plan for development of the national economy.

The question of combating the cult of the individual occupied an important place in the discussions of the 20th Congress. The Congress very sharply exposed the prevalence of the cult of the individual which, for a long time in Soviet life, had given rise to many errors in work and had led to ill consequences. This courageous self-criticism of its past errors by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union demonstrated the high level of principle in inner-Party life and the great vitality of Marxism-Leninism.

In history and in all the capitalist countries of today, no governing political party or bloc in the service of the exploiting classes has ever dared to expose its serious errors conscientiously before the mass of its own members and the people. With the parties of the working class things are entirely different. The parties of the working class serve the broad masses of the people; by self-criticism such parties lose

nothing except their errors, they gain the support of the broad masses of the people.

For more than a month now, reactionaries throughout the world have been crowing happily over self-criticism by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with regard to this cult of the individual. They say: Fine! The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the first to establish a socialist order, made appalling mistakes, and, what is more, it was Stalin himself, that widely renowned and honoured leader, who made them! The reactionaries think they have got hold of something with which to discredit the Communist Parties of the Soviet Union and other countries. But they will get nothing for all their pains. Has any leading Marxist ever written that we could never commit mistakes or that it is absolutely impossible for a given Communist to commit mistakes? Isn't it precisely because we Marxist-Leninists deny the existence of a "demigod" who never makes big or little mistakes that we Communists use criticism and self-criticism in our inner-Party life? Moreover, how could it be conceivable that a socialist state which was the first in the world to put the dictatorship of the proletariat into practice, which did not have the benefit of any precedent, should make no mistakes of one kind or another?

Lenin said in October 1921:

"Let the curs and swine of the moribund bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democrats who trail behind it heap imprecations, abuse and derision upon our heads for our reverses and mistakes in the work of building up our Soviet system. We do not forget for a moment that we have committed and are committing numerous mistakes and are suffering numerous reverses. How can reverses and mistakes be avoided in a matter so new in the history of the world

as the erection of a state edifice of an unprecedented type! We shall struggle unremittingly to set our reverses and mistakes right and to improve our practical application of Soviet principles, which is still very, very far from perfect."

It is also inconceivable that certain mistakes made earlier should for ever preclude the possibility of making other mistakes later or of repeating past mistakes to a greater or lesser degree. Since its division into classes with conflicting interests, human society has passed through several thousand years of dictatorships—of slave-owners, of feudal lords and of the bourgeoisie; but it was not until the victory of the October Revolution that mankind began to see the dictatorship of the proletariat in action. The first three kinds of dictatorship are all dictatorships of the exploiting classes, though the dictatorship of feudal lords was more progressive than that of slave-owners, and that of the bourgeoisie more progressive than that of feudal lords. These exploiting classes, which once played a certain progressive role in the history of social development, invariably accumulated experience in their rule through making innumerable mistakes of historic import over long periods of time and through repeating these mistakes again and again. Nevertheless, with the sharpening of the contradiction between the relations of production which they represented and the productive forces of society, still they inevitably committed mistakes, bigger and more, precipitating a massive revolt of the oppressed classes and disintegration within their own ranks, and thus eventually bringing about their destruction. The dictatorship of the proletariat is fundamentally different in its nature from any of the previous kinds of dictatorship, which were dictatorships by the exploiting classes. It is a dictatorship of the exploited

classes, a dictatorship of the majority over the minority, a dictatorship for the purpose of creating a socialist society in which there is no exploitation and poverty, and it is the most progressive and the last dictatorship in the history of mankind. But, since this dictatorship undertakes the greatest and the most difficult tasks and is confronted with a struggle which is the most complicated and tortuous in history, therefore, many mistakes, as Lenin has said, are bound to be made in its operation. If some Communists indulge in self-exaltation and self-complacency and develop a rigid way of thinking, they may even repeat their own mistakes or those of others. We Communists must take full account of this. To defeat powerful enemies, the dictatorship of the proletariat requires a high degree of centralization of power. This highly centralized power must be combined with a high level of democracy. When there is an undue emphasis on centralization, many mistakes are bound to occur. This is quite understandable. But whatever the mistakes, the dictatorship of the proletariat is, for the popular masses, always far superior to all dictatorships of the exploiting classes, to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Lenin was right when he said: "If our enemies reproach us and say that Lenin himself admits that the Bolsheviks have done a host of foolish things, I want to reply by saying: yes, but do you know that the foolish things we have done are entirely different from those you have done?" The exploiting classes, out for plunder, have all hoped to perpetuate their dictatorship generation after generation, and have therefore resorted to every possible means to grind down the people. Their mistakes are irremediable. On the other hand, the proletariat, which strives for the material and spiritual emancipation of the people, uses its dictatorship to bring about com-

munism, to bring about harmony and equality among mankind, and lets its dictatorship gradually wither away. That is why it does its utmost to bring into full play the initiative and the positive role of the masses. The fact that, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is possible to bring into play without limit the initiative and the positive role of the masses also makes it possible to correct any mistakes committed during the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Leaders of Communist Parties and socialist states in various fields are duty bound to do their utmost to reduce mistakes, avoid serious ones, endeavour to learn lessons from isolated, local and temporary mistakes and make every effort to prevent them from developing into mistakes of a nationwide or prolonged nature. To do this, every leader must be most prudent and modest, keep close to the masses, consult them on all matters, investigate and study the actual situation again and again and constantly engage in criticism and self-criticism appropriate to the situation and well measured. It was precisely because of his failure to do this that Stalin, as the chief leader of the Party and the state, made certain serious mistakes in the later years of his work. He became conceited and imprudent. Subjectivism and one-sidedness developed in his thinking and he made erroneous decisions on certain important questions, which led to serious consequences.

With the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the people and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Lenin, established the first socialist state on one-sixth of the earth. The Soviet Union speedily carried out socialist industrialization and collectivization of agriculture, developed socialist science and culture, established a solid union of many nationalities in the form

of a union of the Soviets, and the formerly backward nationalities in the Soviet Union became socialist nationalities. During the Second World War, the Soviet Union was the main force in defeating fascism and saving European civilization. It also helped the peoples in the East to defeat Japanese militarism. All these glorious achievements pointed out to all mankind its bright future—socialism and communism, seriously shook the rule of imperialism and made the Soviet Union the first and strong bulwark in the world struggle for lasting peace. The Soviet Union has encouraged and supported all other socialist countries in their construction, and it has been an inspiration to the world socialist movement, the anti-colonialist movement and every other movement for the progress of mankind. These are the great achievements made by the people and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the history of mankind. The man who showed the Soviet people and Communist Party the way to these great achievements was Lenin. In the struggle to carry out Lenin's principles, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, for its vigorous leadership, earned its credit, in which Stalin had an ineffaceable share.

After Lenin's death Stalin, as the chief leader of the Party and the state, creatively applied and developed Marxism-Leninism. In the struggle to defend the legacy of Leninism and against the enemies of Leninism—the Trotskyites, Zinovievites and other bourgeois agents—Stalin expressed the will and wishes of the people and proved himself to be an outstanding Marxist-Leninist fighter. The reason why Stalin won the support of the Soviet people and played an important role in history was primarily because he, together with the other leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, defended Lenin's line on

the industrialization of the Soviet state and the collectivization of agriculture. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, by carrying out this line, brought about the triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union and created the conditions for the victory of the Soviet Union in the war against Hitler; these victories of the Soviet people conformed to the interests of the working class of the world and all progressive mankind. It was therefore also quite natural for the name of Stalin to be greatly honoured throughout the world. But, having won such high honour among the people, both at home and abroad, by his correct application of the Leninist line, Stalin erroneously exaggerated his own role and counterposed his individual authority to the collective leadership, and as a result certain of his actions were opposed to certain fundamental Marxist-Leninist concepts which he himself had propagated. On the one hand, it was recognized that the masses were the makers of history, that the Party must keep in constant touch with the people and that inner-Party democracy and self-criticism and criticism from below must be developed. On the other hand, the cult of the individual was accepted and fostered, and the arbitrariness of a single person prevailed. Thus Stalin found himself in a contradiction on this question during the latter part of his life, with a discrepancy between his theory and practice.

Marxist-Leninists hold that leaders play a big role in history. The people and their parties need forerunners who are able to represent the interests and will of the people, stand in the forefront of their historic struggles and serve as their leaders. It is utterly wrong to deny the role of the individual, the role of forerunners and leaders. But when any leader of the Party or the state places himself over and above the Party and the masses instead of in their midst, when

he alienates himself from the masses, he ceases to have an all-round, penetrating insight into the affairs of the state. As long as this was the case, even so outstanding a personality as Stalin could not avoid making unrealistic and erroneous decisions on certain important matters. Stalin failed to draw lessons from isolated, local and temporary mistakes on certain issues and so failed to prevent them from becoming serious mistakes of a nationwide or prolonged nature. During the latter part of his life, Stalin took more and more pleasure in this cult of the individual, and violated the Party's system of democratic centralism and the principle of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility. As a result he made some serious mistakes such as the following: he broadened the scope of the suppression of counter-revolution; he lacked the necessary vigilance on the eve of the anti-fascist war; he failed to pay proper attention to the further development of agriculture and the material welfare of the peasantry; he gave certain wrong advice on the international communist movement, and, in particular, made a wrong decision on the question of Yugoslavia. On these issues, Stalin fell victim to subjectivism and one-sidedness, and divorced himself from objective reality and from the masses.

The cult of the individual is a foul carry-over from the long history of mankind. The cult of the individual is rooted not only in the exploiting classes but also in the small producers. As is well known, paternalism is a product of small-producer economy. After the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, even when the exploiting classes are eliminated, when small-producer economy has been replaced by a collective economy and a socialist society has been founded, certain rotten, poisonous ideological survivals

of the old society may still remain in people's minds for a very long time. "The force of habit of millions and tens of millions is a most terrible force" (Lenin). The cult of the individual is just one such force of habit of millions and tens of millions. Since this force of habit still exists in society, it can influence many government functionaries, and even such a leader as Stalin was also affected by it. The cult of the individual is a reflection in man's mind of a social phenomenon, and when leaders of the Party and state, such as Stalin, succumb to the influence of this backward ideology, they will in turn influence society, bringing losses to the cause and hampering the initiative and creativeness of the masses of the people.

The productive forces of society, the economic and political system of socialism and the Party life, as they develop, are increasingly coming into contradiction and conflict with such a state of mind as the cult of the individual. The struggle against the cult of the individual which was launched by the 20th Congress is a great and courageous fight by the Communists and the people of the Soviet Union to clear away the ideological obstacles in the way of their advance.

Some naive ideas seem to suggest that contradictions no longer exist in a socialist society. To deny the existence of contradictions is to deny dialectics. The contradictions in various societies differ in character as do the forms of their solution, but society at all times develops through continual contradictions. Socialist society also develops through contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production. In a socialist or communist society, technical innovations and improvement in the social system inevitably continue to take place; otherwise the development of society would come to a standstill

and society could no longer advance. Humanity is still in its youth. The road it has yet to traverse will be no one knows how many times longer than the road it has already travelled. Contradictions, as between progress and conservatism, between the advanced and the backward, between the positive and the negative, will constantly occur under varying conditions and different circumstances. Things will keep on like this: one contradiction will lead to another; and when old contradictions are solved new ones will arise. It is obviously incorrect to maintain, as some people do, that the contradiction between idealism and materialism can be eliminated in a socialist or communist society. As long as contradictions exist between the subjective and the objective, between the advanced and the backward, and between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between materialism and idealism will continue in a socialist or communist society, and will manifest itself in various forms. Since man lives in society, he reflects, in different circumstances and to varying degrees, the contradictions existing in each form of society. Therefore, not everybody will be perfect, even when a communist society is established. By then there will still be contradictions among people, and there will still be good people and bad, people whose thinking is relatively correct and others whose thinking is relatively incorrect. Hence there will still be struggle between people, though its nature and form will be different from those in class societies. Viewed in this light, the existence of contradictions between the individual and the collective in a socialist society is nothing strange. And if any leader of the Party or state isolates himself from collective leadership, from the masses of the people and from real life, he will inevitably fall into rigid ways of thinking and

consequently make grave mistakes. What we must guard against is that some people, because the Party and the state have achieved many successes in work and won the great trust of the masses, may take advantage of this trust to abuse their authority and so fall into error.

The Chinese Communist Party congratulates the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on its great achievements in this historic struggle against the cult of the individual. The experience of the Chinese revolution, too, testifies that it is only by relying on the wisdom of the masses of the people, on democratic centralism and on the system of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility that our Party can score great victories and do great things in times of revolution and in times of national construction. The Chinese Communist Party, in its revolutionary ranks, has incessantly fought against elevation of oneself and against individualist heroism, both of which mean isolation from the masses. Undoubtedly, such things will exist for a long time to come. Even when overcome, they re-emerge. They are found sometimes in one person, sometimes in another. When attention is paid to the role of the individual, the role of the masses and the collective is often ignored. That is why some people easily fall into the mistake of self-conceit or blind faith in themselves or blind worship of others. We must therefore give unremitting attention to opposing elevation of oneself, individualist heroism and the cult of the individual.

To counter subjectivist methods of leadership, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted a resolution in June 1943 on methods of leadership. In discussing now the question of collective leadership in the Party, it is still worthwhile for all members of the Chinese Communist Party and

all its leading personnel to refer to this resolution, which declared: "In all practical work of our Party, correct leadership can only be developed on the principle of 'from the masses, to the masses.' This means summing up (i.e. co-ordinating and systematizing after careful study) the views of the masses (i.e. views scattered and unsystematic), then taking the resulting ideas back to the masses, explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own, stand up for them and translate them into action by way of testing their correctness. Then it is necessary once more to sum up the views of the masses, and once again take the resulting ideas back to the masses so that the masses give them their whole-hearted support . . . and so on, over and over again, so that each time these ideas emerge with greater correctness and become more vital and meaningful. This is what the Marxist theory of knowledge teaches us." For a long time, this method of leadership has been described in our Party by the popular term "the mass line." The whole history of our work teaches us that whenever this line is followed, the work is always good, or relatively good, and even if there are mistakes they are easy to rectify; but whenever this line is departed from, the work is always marred by setbacks. This is the Marxist-Leninist method of leadership, the Marxist-Leninist line of work. After the victory of the revolution, when the working class and the Communist Party have become the leading class and party in the state, the leading personnel of the Party and state, beset by bureaucratism from many sides, face the great danger of using the machinery of state to take arbitrary action, alienating themselves from the masses and collective leadership, resorting to commandism, and violating Party and state democracy. Therefore, if we want to avoid falling into such a

quagmire, we must pay fuller attention to the use of the mass line method of leadership, not permitting the slightest negligence. To this end, it is necessary for us to establish definite systems, in order to ensure the thorough implementation of the mass line and collective leadership, so as to avoid both elevation of oneself and individualist heroism, both of which mean divorce from the masses, and to reduce to a minimum subjectivism and one-sidedness in our work which represent a departure from objective reality.

We must also learn from the struggle of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union against the cult of the individual and continue our fight against doctrinairism.

The working class and the masses of the people, guided by Marxism-Leninism, won the revolution and took state power into their hands, while the victory of the revolution and the establishment of the revolutionary regime opened up boundless vistas for the development of Marxism-Leninism. Yet because Marxism, since the victory of the revolution, has been generally recognized as the guiding ideology of the state, it often happens that not a few of our propagandists rely only on administrative power and the prestige of the Party to instil into the minds of the masses Marxism-Leninism in the form of dogma, instead of working hard, marshalling a wealth of data, employing Marxist-Leninist methods of analysis and using the people's own language to explain convincingly the integration of the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the actual situation in China. We have, over the years, made some advances in research in philosophy, economics, history and literary criticism, but, on a whole, many unhealthy elements still exist. Not a few of our research workers still retain their doctrinaire habit, put their minds in a

noose, lack the ability to think independently, lack the creative spirit, and in certain respects are influenced by the cult of Stalin. In this connection it must be pointed out that Stalin's works should, as before, still be seriously studied and that we should accept, as an important historical legacy, all that is of value in them, especially those many works in which he defended Leninism and correctly summarized the experience of building up the Soviet Union. Not to do so would be a mistake. But there are two ways of studying them—the Marxist way and the doctrinaire way. Some people treat Stalin's writings in a doctrinaire manner, with the result that they cannot analyse and see what is correct and what is not correct—and even what is correct they treat as a panacea and apply indiscriminately; inevitably they make mistakes. For instance, Stalin put forward a formula that in different revolutionary periods, the main blow should be so directed as to isolate the middle-of-the-road social and political forces of the time. This formula of Stalin's should be treated according to circumstances and from a critical, Marxist point of view. In certain circumstances it may be correct to isolate the middle forces, but it is not correct to isolate them under all circumstances. Our experience teaches us that the main blow of the revolution should be directed at the chief enemy to isolate him, while as for the middle forces, a policy of both uniting with them and struggling against them should be adopted, so that they are at least neutralized; and, as circumstances permit, efforts should be made to shift them from their position of neutrality to one of alliance with us, for the purpose of facilitating the development of the revolution. But there was a time—the ten years of civil war from 1927 to 1936—when some of our comrades crudely applied this formula of