

# Stalinism and the Problem of Bureaucracy in Soviet Society

Note: The essay "Stalinism and the Problem of Bureaucracy in Soviet Society" was written in 1974 in response to the questions posed by a group of political activists abroad who were in contact with The Organization of the Iranian People's Fadaee Guerrillas (OIPFG). These activists at that time were operating as "the Iranian National Front Organizations Abroad (Middle East Branch) (INF-ME)". The incongruity between this group and the OIPFG in 1976, and particularly after the regime's major assaults against the OIPFG, heightened which led to the complete disaffiliation between the two.

## The Iranian People's Fadaee Guerrillas



Stalin is the primary target of both the right-wing socialists as well as bourgeois ideologues in their attacks against communism. They have created a terrifying boogeyman out of Stalin, and have written numerous books and articles about his so-called tyrannies. They have even called him a "cold-hearted crazy tyrant"<sup>1</sup> and compared him to Hitler and other dictators. They grievously speak of prisons, forced labour camps, trials and executions during Stalin's time, and say that all of that was due to the tyrannical personality of Stalin. Some of them have invented Stalin's torture chambers, and have pushed falsity to the point that they even link the murder of Yakov Sverdlov<sup>2</sup> to Stalin as well as the murderers of Maxim Gorky whose actual identities are well known.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thought and Art, 1972, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The statement of a bourgeois humanist intellectual.

Since the emergence of modern revisionism (Khrushchevian Revisionism) also the Communist Party of the USSR and other revisionist communist parties around the world along with right-wing socialists and bourgeois ideologues have simultaneously waged a condemnation against Stalin, and have unmitigatedly repudiated him. Although the fabrication of fallacies by right-wing socialists and bourgeois propagandists make us even doubt the genuineness of their bourgeois humanism, and although the nature of modern revisionism too shows that the attacks of Khrushchevian Revisionism marks the genesis and the point of their departure from Marxism-Leninism, the question still remains: Who is Stalin and what is Stalinism?

Stalin was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a great Marxist-Leninist. He was an example of an honest revolutionary and a solid and relentless militant who was forged within the struggles of the masses. He was born into a worker-peasant family in 1879 and his father was initially an artisan shoemaker and later a worker in a shoe factory. Stalin was first sent to a religious school and later on to a theological seminary. Protesting against the theological seminary was the first building block of his revolutionary personality. At the age of fifteen, he turned to Marxism (1894) and as he himself expounded on this matter: "I joined the revolutionary movement at the age of fifteen, when I became connected with certain illegal groups of Russian Marxists in Transcaucasia. These groups exerted a great influence on me and instilled in me a taste for illegal Marxian literature."<sup>4</sup>

At the age of eighteen, Stalin became the head of Marxist circles within the seminary, and a year later he joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in Tiflis (1898). Unlike many of the leaders of the October Revolution, he never left for abroad and always fought from within the country. Regarding this issue, he himself said: "I recall the year 1898, when I was

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<sup>4</sup> An Interview with the German Author Emil Ludwig, December 13, 1931.

first put in charge of a study circle of workers from the railway shops... It was here, among these comrades, that I received my first revolutionary baptism... my first teachers were the workers of Tiflis."<sup>5</sup>

For many years, Stalin was engaged in the struggles of the masses throughout the Transcaucasian regions and in charge of several local newspapers until 1912 when he was elected and put in charge, at Lenin's recommendation, as the chair of the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee and the Director of Pravda newspaper in St. Petersburg and became one of the leaders of the Party. From 1901 to the 1917 February Revolution, Stalin lived a clandestine life and as a professional revolutionary.

During this period, he was arrested seven times, six of which ended up with him being exiled to Siberia where he managed to escape five times. Stalin's personality and revolutionary thoughts were always noted by Lenin and the Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party held in Prague, on Lenin's proposal, elected him, in his absence, to the Party's Central Committee and as the chair of the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee. And since he was in exile at the time, Lenin gave directives to facilitate the means for his escape. Stalin was always loyal to Lenin's political line within the Russian Social Democratic Party and always vigorously fought for it. He was consistently a militant Bolshevik and unlike many of the leaders of the Party, he never showed any tendency towards internal factions within the Social Democratic Party. It was when Lenin was alive that Stalin was elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and from 1917 until Lenin's death, he was in charge of the most important Party and State tasks in the Soviet Union. After Lenin's death too, Stalin was the most devoted promoter of his path and also a great builder of socialism in the Soviet Union. Stalin governed the affairs of the Soviet Union for 29 years after Lenin's death, and during this time he carried out the stage of socialist revolution by a complete

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<sup>5</sup> Pravda, No. 136, June 16, 1926, A Short Biography of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

dismantlement of private production (bourgeois or petite bourgeois) and by the incredible industrialization of the Soviet Union. During Stalin's time, urban economy (industry, commerce, financial affairs) were completely taken out of the hands of the bourgeoisie, and were totally proletarianized.

In the rural economy, kulaks were generally destroyed, independent production was totally dismantled and replaced by a communal economy (kolkhoz) and an all-people ownership (Sovkhoz and etc.) and furthermore, in the political and ideological front, Stalin put up an intense fight against both domestic left and right-wing bourgeois deviations. And in this fight, although he used extreme violence and achieved great victories, years after his death, he finally lost the fight to them and bourgeois deviation namely Modern Revisionism triumphed over Stalin. The main reason for Stalin's defeat was his mistake in his understanding of the nature of these deviations and also in his incorrect method in fighting them, which we will explain shortly.

In terms of foreign policy too, Stalin was the greatest defeating force against Hitler's fascism. Stalin played a major role in uprooting Nazi Germany as well as liberating the working class of the Eastern European countries. Stalin's realistic utilization of the internal contradictions amongst the imperialists, thus, forming an alliance with the UK and the US while being aware of their self-serving nature, and his timely occupation of Eastern Europe, added to his role in the winning of the working class of the Soviet Union, of Eastern Europe, and of all peoples of the world against fascism. Stalin was the embodiment of the iron will of the militant proletariat of the Soviet Union.

What is Stalinism? Right-wing socialists and bourgeois propagandists perceive Stalinism as the outcome of Stalin's so-called despotic and domineering personality. Modern revisionists, however, have no concrete explanation for it, so they regurgitate the words of the former. Their perception is contrary to the materialist dialectical perception of history. Stalinism is a social historical trend. Altogether, Stalin spent around 55

years in Party activities, 11 years as the leader of the revolutionary struggles in Baku, Tiflis and etc., 6 years (from 1912 to 1917) as one of the high ranking leaders of the Party and of the Russian Revolution, and 29 years as the leader of the Party and the head of the State since Lenin's death. If we acknowledge that it was Stalin's personal qualities that allowed him to occupy such positions, then, regardless of what shaped his qualities, the question remains as to what gave rise to such a personality? Is it that at anytime and anywhere this type of personality can come to the fore and occupy such a position? Most certainly, the only thing that has given Stalin the possibility to emerge was concrete social necessities. Therefore, Stalinism is a certain socio-historical trend. Stalin's political character was formed and raised to the leadership of the Party and the State, during a period when the greatest battle in political thoughts and the greatest class struggles in history were taking place in front of and around him. Within Russia and in the course of revolutionary struggles, there were giants like Plekhanov, Zasluch, Martov, Bukharin, Trotsky and others. What allowed Stalin to rise to the top? Most certainly, the very same thing that gave the decree for the demise of such a personality as Plekhanov, i.e., the social necessities.

But we still haven't answered what Stalinism is? In answering that, one can say that if Leninism is the Marxism of the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat and that of the construction of socialism in Soviet society, then the characteristic of the social trends and struggles of this era is precisely reflected in Stalinism. Stalinism is the political line and ideology of an era in the historic struggles of the Soviet proletariat when the Soviet people were fighting on two different fronts: internally against the Kulaks and the remnants of the bourgeoisie within society, and externally against the world's imperialist governments. The violence of the Soviet proletariat in confronting these harsh and inexorable struggles, as well as Stalin's mistakes, are in fact the historical violence and the mistakes of the proletariat, and according to the materialist dialectical laws of knowledge there could have been no escape from either.

What are the mistakes of Stalinism? The mistakes of Stalinism are basically in and around its treatment of the deviations within the Party. Stalin made two major mistakes concerning these deviations: one was that he thought that after the complete disappearance of bourgeois production (both in industry and agriculture) and after the complete dismantlement of independent (non-government) financial or commercial activities in society, the bourgeoisie had been entirely overthrown, therefore, there were "no longer antagonistic classes" in society, and that the only factor threatening Soviet society was "armed attack by international imperialism".<sup>6</sup> This very mistake resulted in a lack of clarity about and exposure of the class nature of the deviations which manifested itself in Stalinists often identifying those deviations as foreign spies and so on.

The fact is, however, that in a socialist society, even after the complete overthrow of bourgeois commercial production and financial enterprise in urban and rural areas, the remnants of the bourgeoisie can still exist or be restored in a number of ways: one is via the privileged stratum within socialist society. This privileged stratum consists of the upper echelon of intellectuals, as well as top professionals who have occupied high ranking positions within the Party, and within bureaucratic and managerial bodies in various centers of production and so on. In a socialist society, if the dictatorship of the proletariat is not alert, it is always possible that this privileged stratum, by gradually increasing its own privileges and high salaries, can turn into a particular type of bourgeoisie which could be called bureaucratic bourgeoisie. If not confronted with and fought against, this privileged stratum, in its process of development, can eventually turn socialism back into capitalism, and naturally along with it, contraband manufacturing and businesses are among the ways to revive and restore capitalism within socialist society. Nowadays in the Soviet Union and in many of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, there are small illicit manufactures that produce clothing and luxury items and sell them on the black market. In addition to that, embezzlement and influence peddling

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<sup>6</sup> On Khrushchov's Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World, Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) and Hongqui (Red Flag), China, of 14 July 1964.

and the illicit use of state properties are also practiced. This too is a particular type of bourgeoisie within socialist society which, if not confronted and fought against, grows and develops larger day by day and leads to the restoration of capitalism. This group of bourgeois elements establishes a relationship with the privileged stratum, bribes them, buys them out and thus takes advantage of their position.

Another vestige of the bourgeoisie in socialist society lives on in the form of bourgeois ideology and force of habit, and as Lenin put it: "They encircle the proletariat on every side... and corrupt the proletariat". It is clear that the Party must equip the masses extensively and deeply in fighting against these three types of bourgeois vestiges. And naturally there are different ways to fight against each one of these three phenomena to which the Party must undertake with reliance on the masses. For instance, fighting against privileges and high salaries through relative integration between manual and mental labour.<sup>7</sup> Holding bureaucracy directly accountable to the masses, exposing the individual lives of intellectuals and cadres, preventing political and cultural activities from becoming completely occupational, drawing the masses into a vast and ever more participation in all State and Party affairs, broad presentation of Party disagreements before the masses, and generating public discourse about these disagreements, and finally continuous cultural revolutions.

It must be noted that what insures and guarantees the correctness of all of these policies is the outright mobilization of the masses. The masses must always be mobilized in all areas, and there must be no hesitation to do so: the masses must have the right to supervise, adjudicate and decide on the affairs of society. Of course, in doing so, they might make mistakes, however, in the course of practice they will learn and correct their mistakes.

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<sup>7</sup> Complete integration between manual and mental labour is possible only in communist society.

Another mistake of Stalinism was in its method of confronting the deviations within the Party. This mistake was actually derived from the first one. In other words, since Stalin did not realize that his struggle against these deviations was indeed a class struggle, and as a result he did not understand which class had to fight which, therefore, he did not put enough effort into mobilizing the masses. Instead, in this fight, he resorted more to bureaucracy. For example, a number of deviants within the Party who were among the top ranking leaders of the Party, namely, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin etc. and who had left the Party, were put on trial and the court sentenced them to death. Of course, they had committed crimes and after the submission of evidence by the court, they themselves admitted to their crime of being involved in the murder of Sergei Kirov and other similar activities. Nonetheless, they should not have been treated like common criminals and handled by the bureaucratic apparatus, but rather they had to be done away with politically not physically. For instance, Zinoviev had written a book together with Lenin, so a person of that stature couldn't be done away with by a simple execution. Those individuals had to be thoroughly exposed, and to fight them, the masses had to be widely mobilized. In fact, this is historically vital. The masses were indeed going through a developmental stage in the course of a major struggle against Zinoviev and the like. Even if we consider Kirov's murder simply a criminal act, and assume that the above individuals had no political motives for such a crime, the point still remains that even before Kirov's murder, their deviations were abundantly exposed and they had committed enough treachery.<sup>8</sup> The Party had repeatedly warned them, and they had repeatedly repented, and they had even been expelled from the Party years before Kirov's death. And of course, a great deal of publicity had been waged against them but never a broad mass struggle against their views had been conducted and the people were not broadly engaged. Therefore, an ordinary Soviet worker, for example, did not clearly understand what someone like Bukharin was saying, or in what his ideological flaw was rooted.

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<sup>8</sup> Even when Lenin was alive, and at the threshold of the October Revolution, Zinoviev and Kamenev disclosed the plan for an armed insurrection beforehand in a Menshevik newspaper.



Needless to say, however, that every now and then there were extensive Party discussions on these deviations amongst the cadres, and the masses vastly supported Stalin. For example, in a discussion initiated by Zinoviev and Trotsky two months before the Party's 15th Congress in 1927, about 724,000 Party members condemned Zinoviev and Trotsky, whereas only 4,000 of them supported the two. Yet, these discussions were by no means enough. And besides, it had to be these very discussions that they should have relied on and not Party and State punishments. For example, in the Chinese Communist Party, Liu Shaoqi's view against collectivization of agriculture and in favour of independent small scale producers and kulaks was similar to that of Bukharin. And the difference was that Bukharin steered a small minority within the Central Committee of the Party, whereas Liu Shaoqi enjoyed majority support within the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Mao's minority, however, turned to the Party masses and with the vast mobilization of the masses, fought against Liu Shaoqi's views. Liu Shaoqi, while being in the position of power, was nevertheless defeated and politically died, and eventually, in the next congress (the 9th Congress), received a decisive loss within the Party. Or regarding Trotsky, who had been, at the 15th Congress, expelled from the Party in 1927, the Central Committee of the Party resorted to deporting him from the Soviet Union in 1929 charged with illegal political activities. But, in fact, this was merely a bureaucratic solution. Whereas Trotsky should have stayed in the country and rotted there. Even when he did have some power within the Party he only enjoyed a small minority both at the Party Congress and within the Central Committee. In terms of popular support he also faced outright defeat in all mass Party debates. For example, in the discussion that took place before the 13th Congress, when Lenin was ill (1924), Trotsky received a terrible defeat.

Only a limited number of intellectuals among the Party locals within the universities and clerical branches voted in his favour. Or in the course of a discussion that took place a month before the Party's 15th Congress in 1927, as we mentioned earlier, less than 1 percent of the Party members

(4000 people) voted in his favour while more than 99 percent of the members (724,000 people) denounced him and his allies. And that was even before his political demise. However, he had to be further exposed and his views had to be confronted widely in the public domain. And he should have been allowed to stay in the country and he should have been able to express himself so that moreover he could have been rebuffed by the masses. The greatest benefit of this would have been that the masses could have gained greater political development and experience in fighting their enemies. Banishing Trotsky from the Soviet Union could achieve nothing. One must embrace the battle rather than desert it. Of course Stalin was not the type to desert the battle, however, his historic mistake was merely in his understanding of the enemy's class nature and in choosing the correct method of fighting it. Instead of relying on the masses, he relied on Party and State bureaucracy, and that was principally wrong.

Although the bureaucracy during Stalin was, generally speaking, still in service of the masses and had not yet become alienated from them, nevertheless, one must bear in mind that the bureaucracy in the Party and in the State within socialist society is one of the sources of the restoration of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. Bureaucracy within socialist society had to be, as Lenin advised, overseen by the masses and directly accountable to them, and one cannot entirely rely on bureaucracy in the people's internal struggles. In other words, what Stalin's trials were doing had to be done through mass meetings, demonstrations and public forums.

Of course, it is possible to resolve a problem which needs years of popular struggle and years of general discourse throughout all Party cadres simply by a decree from the Central Committee. But what would be the outcome? First of all, what would guarantee the correctness of the decree? And secondly, the problem might be resolved in that particular case yet again return in a different form and at another point of time. And thirdly, the masses gain no education. This is the principal. The struggle is the

people's task, therefore, one cannot fight on their behalf and without their own participation. The masses must always have the right to scrutinize and to restructure the Party and the State at all levels. The masses have even the right to fight against the Central Committee and also the Party Congress.

Once again, and as we mentioned before, one must bear in mind that bureaucracy during Stalin's time had not yet become alienated from the masses and it was heavily supported by them. For example, in 1927, i.e., one year after the execution of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others who were all among the famous leaders of the Party in the past, and also years after Trotsky's exile, in the election for the High Council of the Soviet Union, of 94 million eligible to vote in the country, 91 million, i.e., 96.8 percent participated in the election, and 89,844,000, i.e., 98.6 percent of them voted for the candidates from the Coalition Front of the Communist Party and non-Party candidates, while only 632,000 voted for other candidates. As the result, all of the candidates from the Coalition Front without exception were elected. And that was the most incredible alliance that can exist between the Party (State) and the people. The masses could not have demonstrated greater support than that to Stalin. This testament of support took place one year after the execution of the great leaders of the deviation, and eight years after the expulsion of Trotsky. In fact, the masses candidly signed the execution. And precisely for this reason, therefore, the mistakes of Stalin deemed to be a secondary factor.

To sum up, in fighting against the deviations, Stalin resorted excessively to the bureaucratic apparatus. And even though the bureaucratic apparatus during his time was heavily supported by the masses, his method was nonetheless wrong because he did not foster a principled fighting tradition within the masses' camp. And it was for this reason that years after his death, the Party and State bureaucracy which had been alienated from the masses gave birth within itself to Modern Revisionism, and Stalin's proletarian line, due to the lack of experience and its historical mistake, lost the battle.