

Stalin and Socialist Experiment in Soviet Russia

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After seven decades of socialist experiment, the Soviet Union which had established the rule of the proletariat for the first time in the history of mankind, reverted back peacefully to the capitalist hold. Mikhael Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the then CPSU who at one time could convince many-a-leftist all over the world that his perestroika and glasnost were only Leninist prescriptions to the problems of advanced socialism, consciously initiated and promoted the necessary conditions for capitalist restoration and after the unsuccessful coup attempt of the so-called hardliners in 1991, joined hands with his radical rival, Boris Yeltsin, in pronouncing the death of socialism in the USSR. While these dramatic events were happily welcomed by the imperialists and other reactionaries, the progressive sections who used to see in the Russian Revolution of 1917, a hope for a new and just human order, find themselves dejected and confused. The questions 'how' and 'why' naturally agitate the minds of leftists all over the world. In this situation, the parties and persons who still believe that capitalism cannot be an alternative to the problems of socialism and that Marxism is a science and still a potential revolutionary philosophy, should take up the responsibility to comprehend the factors leading to the failure of the socialist experiment in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and draw necessary lesson for strengthening the communist movement once again.

It is true that different leftist parties and left minded

intellectuals have already started making attempts to reflect on recent setbacks in the world proletarian movement. A study of their initial reflections, however, exhibit many contradictions and inadequacies. One can not find unanimity among them on many vital issues. However, it seems many, if not all, broadly arrive at some kind of consensus on questions regarding Stalin's role in the Soviet Union. Not just the petty bourgeois intellectuals who flirt with Marxism and bourgeois humanism at the same time, even some of the parties claiming to be Marxist-Leninist hold on to the view that Stalin was primarily responsible for distortion of the socialist experiment in the Soviet Union. All their criticism against Stalin mainly revolves around four major themes :

1. Following Bukharin and Grobachev, a few parties and their intellectuals argued that Stalin prematurely stopped New Economic policy (NEP) initiated by Lenin and hastily switched over to collectivisation though co-operatives still had relevance in the Soviet system.

2. Stalin initiated forcible collectivisation and brought misery to lakhs of farmers and it was that collectivisation which is responsible for stagnation in agricultural production in the recent years.

3. Stalin advocated for and even turned the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the party, raised party above all other groups and organs dominated the soviets and even prevented them from exercising their power.

4. Stalin resorted to bureaucratic repression to achieve his goals. As a result a number of innocent people, including many of the top members of the party died in the thirties.

None of the above criticism are new. Similar allegations were made during Stalin's life time by his contemporaries like Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev and a few Menshevik leaders, though none of them could muster majority support either in the party or among the people. It is only after

Stalin's death that Krushchev could initiate the process of de-Stalinisation in the USSR. Following his foot-steps, Gorbachev projected his 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' as antidotes to 'command-style management methods' associated with Stalin. Taking advantage of the confusions created in the communist movement after the death of Stalin, imperialists and their allies liberally financed publication of all kinds of bourgeois and petty bourgeois criticisms against Stalin, though they never dared to publish Stalin's own works at any time. It is interesting to note that while evaluating Stalin, many of the Indian leftists, who are otherwise very critical of imperialists and even of Gorbachev and Krushchev for that matter, use the language and methodology of the very same persons whom they brand as 'bourgeoisie' or 'revisionists'. The inference here is not that leftists should blindly accept Stalin or any Marxist authority for that matter. It is indeed essential to evaluate Stalin's role critically and comprehend the nature of mistakes committed during his regime. But the essential prerequisites of such analyses are that they should see Stalin, not from bourgeois humanist angle, but with proletarian class outlook and apply only Marxian dialectical method to evaluate the role of Stalin in Socialist Russia. Keeping this aim in mind, an attempt is made in this article to study four major controversial aspects associated with Stalin, namely, New Economic Policy, Collectivisation, Bureaucracy and Party.

New Economic Policy : Status of Cooperatives

Joseph Stalin was criticised by a section of the leftists for dispensing with cooperatives, which Lenin himself had introduced as a part of the New Economic Policy (NEP). While there are critics like Bukharin, Rikov and more recently persons like Gorbachev who saw NEP as synonymous with socialism, it is interesting to note that at one time there were

extremists within the Bolshevik party who criticised NEP as a reactionary policy aimed at capitalist restoration. Almost immediately after Lenin's death, even leaders like Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev became highly critical of NEP for promoting the interests of the kulaks and demanded collectivisation and rapid industrialisation. Keeping in view these two opposing view-points, one may evaluate Stalin's agricultural policy in the light of significance or meaning that Lenin himself assigned to the NEP in general and cooperatives in particular.

Immediately after 1917 revolution, the Soviet Russia got entangled in a civil war which was further complicated by the interference of the external forces. For that reason almost upto 1920, the Bolsheviks directed their whole attention to consolidating the revolution by diverting huge funds for strengthening the defense system. Strict controls were imposed on economic activities and freedom for private trade was denied. Large amounts were extracted from agriculture to strengthen the power of workers and soldier deputies. Ignoring the basic line of the Bolshevik party which demanded alliance between workers and peasantry, some of its extremist elements attacked even the ordinary peasants. Since the socialist sector was still weak, it was unable to link towns and villages and meet all the basic requirements of the peasants and workers. Moreover, being economically backward, with strong remnants of many precapitalist structures, direct transition to socialism was not objectively possible. It was in such circumstances that Lenin conceived of the New Economic Policy (NEP) not only to overcome immediate economic necessities but also to lay the foundations for future socialist society.

Under the NEP programme, the Soviet state permitted private trade, capitalism and hired labour under the overall guidance and supervision of the dictatorship of the

proletariat. While going ahead with its programme of strengthening the socialist sectors, NEP aimed to organise the people of Soviet Union in various cooperative societies on a sufficiently large scale. Though certain collective principles, first in selling and then in growing farm produce, were introduced, agricultural cooperatives were not yet socialist firms, for the individual peasants, including the kulaks who joined them, retained legal rights over land and means of production. Lenin indeed stressed the need for organising peasant cooperatives but he never declared them as socialist form of production. Rather he admitted that "cooperatives are also a form of state capitalism".¹ Further he said, "in Russia's present conditions freedom and right for cooperatives mean freedom and rights for capitalism". Lenin was fully aware of the fact that in initial days the advantages of NEP would go to the kulaks and other capitalist elements. However, he considered that such a form of state capitalism was necessary at that juncture for linking peasant economy with industry, accelerating the growth of productive forces, amalgamating small production and for augmenting capital accumulation essential for passing over to socialism.

In essence, NEP in itself was neither a capitalist programme nor a socialist venture. As Lenin himself pointed out, NEP aimed to achieve "socialist society out of cooperatives...It is not still the building of socialism, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it."¹ Stalin rightly understood that "NEP is a policy of the proletarian state aimed at permitting capitalism while commanding positions are held by the proletarian state, aimed at increasing the role of socialist elements to the detriment of the capitalist elements, aimed at the victory of the socialist elements over the capitalist elements, aimed at the abolition of classes and the building of the foundations of a socialist economy".² While it would be premature to dispense with it before achieving the purpose for which it

was initiated, it would become self-defeating if NEP in general and cooperatives in particular were allowed to continue for an indefinite period. While NEP Russia was not a capitalist Russia, it was also not a socialist Russia. It was only a transitional phase which had to be continued as long as the economy had not yet reached a stage where it could pass over to socialism. It is in this light that it becomes necessary for us to examine whether Stalin was correct in opting for collectivisation by dispensing with the NEP programme which he himself supported and advocated almost upto the end of twenties.

Stalin and Collectivisation

Following Bukharin, Mikhael Gorbachev and his supporters in India criticise collectivisation initiated by Stalin as a hasty step. Even Trotsky and other left extremists of the day, who advocated action against the kulaks as early as 1924 itself, afterwards joined the rightists in 'exposing' the mistakes or 'excesses' committed during the course of collectivisation. They all hurl abuse at Stalin for his 'ignorance' of the economic laws. In the light of such accusations, one may evaluate the significance of collectivisation.

As is pointed out earlier, NEP was only seen as a transitional period essential for switching over to socialism at an appropriate moment. Cooperatives indeed played the roles assigned to them. Agricultural production increased and links between towns and villages were established. Alongside, the socialist sector also gained a considerable strength. By 1927 agricultural production reached its pre-war level and it was sufficient to meet the basic needs of the people. However, owing to the capitalist character of cooperatives, other kinds of problems crept in. NEP no doubt helped in mitigating the sufferings of the poor and middle peasants to an extent. But it was the kulaks who took maximum advantage of the New

Economic Policy. Even Trotsky said, "The growth of kulak far outstripped the general growth of agriculture. The policy of the government under the slogan "face to the country" was actually a turning of face to the kulak. Agricultural taxes fell upon the poor far more heavily than upon the well-to-do, who moreover skimmed the cream of the state credits. The surplus grain, chiefly in possession of the upper strata of the village, was used to enslave the poor and for speculative selling to the bourgeois elements of the the cities".³ It was not the poor peasants or middle peasants but the kulaks who accounted for a major share in the marketable agricultural surplus. As their right to property was not denied, they could amass riches and started dominating the cooperatives. Even at that juncture leaders like Bukharin failed to see growing differentiation within the peasantry and continued to argue that the kulaks would automatically grow into socialism. Having realised their strength, the kulaks began to demand more concessions, including high prices for food, which according to Isaac Deutscher, was "intolerably burdensome to the towns people"⁴ i. e. to the working class. Such condition created objective necessity to take stern action against the kulaks.

A study of Stalin's speeches would show that he did not speak of collectivisation almost upto 1930. Even in 1927, he opposed Zinovev's idea of fomenting any class struggle in the countryside.⁵ Stalin believed that unless the kulaks were completely isolated from the rest of peasantry and the production in the socialist sector gained sufficient strength to outdo the kulaks, it would be counter productive to attack the kulaks as a class. It was this understanding which made Stalin wait till 1929, when total production and marketable surplus of the collective and state farms could surpass the marketable surplus of the kulaks.³ Growing opposition of the kulaks and increase in the relative strength of the socialist sector over

private capitalism created both objective necessity and objective possibilities for breaking with NEP. It was at that time that Stalin advocated collectivisation which in essence means passing over to large scale mechanised production by eliminating the class of kulaks from the agrarian sector.

The communist party under Stalin's leadership formulated an agrarian policy aiming at securing three objectives, namely, (1) liberation of the small peasants from the slavish attachment to their little plots of land and combining small peasant plots into large scale collective farms, (2) attracting the middle peasants towards collective farms by demonstrating to them the gains of mechanised methods of farming and (3) finally initiating class struggle to deprive the kulaks of their products, instruments and means of production. The party and administration were geared up to achieve these ends. Contrary to the expectations of Bukharinites, there was good response from the peasants to the collective farm movement. Between 1929 and 1933, the number of collective farms increased from 57 thousand to 224.5 thousand and the number of households in collective farms raised from one million to 15.2 million. By 1933 sixty five percent of the peasant farms were collectivised.⁸ In order to overcome the growing demands from the collective farms for tractors and other modern implements, the Soviet state was compelled to speed up its industrialisation process. In spite of initial technical difficulties and despite opposition from the kulaks, agricultural productivity showed a gradual increase. Such an effort could not have become successful if the majority of peasants have not voluntarily joined the movement. In this issue, even Trotsky admitted, "At the present time hardly anybody would be foolish enough to repeat the twaddle of liberals to the effect that collectivisation as a whole was accomplished by a naked force.....(The) union of

these small parcels into big tracts had become a question of life and death for the peasants, for agriculture and for society as a whole".⁴

Overlooking these positive dimensions of collectivisation, many critics of Stalin point out the use of force, and accuse Stalin of the 'excesses' committed during this period. A section of the leftists condemns the use of 'force' even against the kulaks who had vested interest in opposing collectivisation. Such critics should however need to answer whether any exploiting class as a whole accepted socialist path voluntarily at any time in history. If the communists had failed to take appropriate action against the kulaks and other capitalist elements, these exploiters would have regained strength and confidence even to oppose the political rule of the proletariat. If Stalin had failed to take stern action against the kulaks, the Soviet Union would have met with counter revolution long back. Those who knowingly or unknowingly sympathise with the kulaks and argue for soft options against the exploiters, do not deserve to be called Marxists, for true Marxists will never shy away from conducting class struggle if the social necessity so demands.

However, there are better informed critics of Stalin who argue that they oppose collectivisation because of the 'excesses' committed against the middle peasants. But that was never the official line of the CPSU at any time. The party policy was to attract the peasants towards the collective farms by convincing them of the practical advantages of mechanised production. Stalin consistently stressed the necessity of winning over the middle peasants and making them allies against the kulaks.³ Since the principle was strictly followed in the initial years of collectivisation, lakhs of middle peasants voluntarily joined collective farms. However, in their over-enthusiasm to meet the plan targets, certain local partymen and government officials began to attack the property of the middle peasants also. The kulaks spread many kinds of

rumours and confused the peasantry on the question of party line. All these led to ill feeling and misunderstanding among a section of the peasants. Moreover, Stalin himself found out that the Leninist principle of taking into consideration the diversity of conditions in various regions of the USSR was violated in building collective farms. The moment such incidents were brought to the notice of Stalin, he reviewed the situation and demanded an end to such 'excesses.' Under his guidance, the party and government took appropriate measures to rebuild confidence among the middle peasants. As such the party's official line never permitted or advocated the use of force against the middle peasants. If in implementation certain excesses were committed, one should not blame Stalin or his Central Committee. Accepting that there were excesses, it needs to be questioned whether the historic necessity of collectivisation could be overlooked just because certain excesses were committed in the course of implementation. That was precisely the question Stalin posed to Bukharin and his friends who were magnifying the mistakes. As Stalin rightly pointed out, "the conclusion to be drawn from this is that we must combat the excesses. But can one on these grounds decry the line itself, which is the only correct line ?³

Party and Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Persons like Gorbachev and parties like the CPI criticise Joseph Stalin for turning the dictatorship of the proletariat into party dictatorship where the fate of millions of the working masses would be arbitrarily decided by a few lakhs of party members. There are also critics starting from Trotsky, who accused Stalin for putting an end to intra-party democracy and behaving in a Bonapartist way. In the name of working class they plead for maximum freedom to the non-party organisation and minimum role to the communist parties.

Since those who make such statements also claim themselves as Leninists, one may start discussion of party from Lenin's own understanding of party.

Here it may be mentioned that long before Stalin was attacked, Lenin himself was accused by his contemporaries on the same charges now levelled against Stalin. For, it was Lenin, not Stalin, who propounded the idea of leading role of the party both, at the time of revolution and also during the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was Lenin who fought against the theories of khvotism and spontaneity in the working class movement.⁶ Responding to critics like Rosaluxemberg, Lenin correctly argued that even in the advanced capitalist countries, the dictatorship of capital was exercised through organised bourgeois political parties which could comprehend the aggregate interests of the bourgeoisie better than any individual capitalist. In the developed capitalist states, capital does not exercise power directly, rather it rules with the help of their own parties. If this phenomenon is true in the case of capitalists, it should be all the more true in the case of proletariat, majority of whom because of their own objective conditions, find it difficult to comprehend their own interests and organise revolution on the rule of capital for establishing, consolidating and expanding the dictatorship of proletariat.⁷

Here arises the necessity of leading role of the party. When Lenin said that the revolution would come from above, he did not mean that a party divorced from the proletariat or imposed upon the proletariat would achieve revolution. The party, which Lenin conceived, is not something external to the working class. As Stalin put it, the party is a part of the class, closely bound with all "the best elements of the working class, their experience, their selfless devotion to the cause of the proletariat." The communist party is the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat armed

with revolutionary theory, with a knowledge of the laws of revolution. To Lenin, without a true proletarian party with a revolutionary line, there cannot be proletarian revolution anywhere. Whatever may be the conclusions of critics of Lenin, none of them can show a single example from history where proletarian struggle succeeded without communist parties playing leading roles. Since all other non-party bodies are not proletarian bodies and even if some of them are, say trade unions, since all its members have not reached the level of its advanced detachment, the leading role of party becomes essential even during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Supporting it Lenin himself said, "to forget the distinction between the advanced detachment and the whole of the masses which gravitate towards it, to forget the constant duty of the advanced attachment to raise ever wider strata to this advanced level, means merely to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks and to narrow down these tasks."⁸

This leading role of the party should not, however, be identified as the dictatorship of the party.⁶ Neither Lenin nor Stalin considered the communist party as the sole representative of the proletariat and other working masses. In the system of dictatorship of the proletariat, in addition to the party, there would be many other non-party organisations such as trade unions, soviets, cooperatives, youth leagues etc. Though the party remains as the main guiding and unifying force in the system of dictatorship of the proletariat, the party does not negate the significance of other non-party organisations. According to Stalin, the party should exercise power, "not directly, but with the help of trade unions and through the soviets and their ramifications. Without these transmission belts, it would be impossible for the dictatorship to be firm at all."⁶ Stalin never pleaded for a party that rules the workers by force. What he or

Lenin for that matter advocated is for hegemony of the party on workers and other toiling masses. To put it in Stalin's words, "The prestige of the party is sustained by the confidence of the working class. And *this confidence of the working class is gained not by force—force only kills it—but* by the party's correct theory, by the party's correct policy, by the party's devotion to the working class, by its connection with the masses of the working class, by its readiness and ability to convince the masses of the correctness of its slogans."⁶ He always advocated dialectical interaction between the party and non-party bodies.

It is interesting to note that Joseph Stalin did not preclude the possibility of conflict between the party and the classes it should lead. He clearly understood that "the party cannot lead the class if it is not connected with the non-party masses, if there is no bond between the party and non-party masses, if these masses do not accept its leadership, if the party enjoys no moral and political credit among the masses."⁸ He could foresee open conflicts between the party and the class when the party turned bureaucratic and ceased to be self critical or when the masses did not rise to a level where they can voluntarily accept the party's view point or when the party tries to impose its will arbitrarily. But if the party fulfills all necessary conditions—that is, if the party exercises hegemonic leadership and enjoys the confidence of the masses, if it takes correct policy decisions, if it can correctly comprehend the subjective considerations of the masses it should lead, if it can convince the masses of its policies and if the masses themselves take the party policy as their policy—in such circumstances, non-party organisations need not feel acceptance of party's suggestions as unwanted intervention. Stalin very clearly understood this and openly advocated such prescriptions for preventing alienation of the party from the masses. In one of his speeches, Stalin clearly said, "unless we show

a certain degree of confidence in the non-party people, they may answer by becoming very distrustful of our organisations. This confidence in the non-party people is absolutely necessary comrades..."⁶ According to Stalin, instead of demeaning the status of non-party bodies, it should encourage them to utilise all their powers in legislation, execution and implementation of party's policy. So long Stalin was alive these party directives were followed in the main, and it was precisely the reason why the party could ensure mass participation during the period of reconstruction.

The question of conflict between party and soviets or other non-party organisations, is a post-Stalin phenomenon which has nothing to do with the theory and practice of Lenin or Stalin.

Closely related to this issue are the questions of intraparty democracy and bureaucratic attitude within the party—phenomena which the critics try to attribute to just one person i. e., Stalin. It is true that Stalin was opposed to turning the party into a debating club. He stood for a monolithic party structure based on the principles of democratic centralism and collective leadership. He did not tolerate existence of separate groups within the party and mercilessly suppressed anti-party activities when they crossed reasonable limits. If all these were undemocratic acts, then more than Stalin, it was Lenin who had to be blamed because in doing so, Stalin was only implementing Leninist principles of the party organisation

Joseph Stalin who was aware of the class content of terms such as democracy or freedom, did not make fetish out of the word, 'inner party democracy.'¹⁰ Yet he had not forbidden open and free discussions within the party on all matters of serious consequences to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin was never afraid of criticism. On the contrary, to him, "self criticism is a sign of our party's strength and not of

weakness. Only a strong party which has its roots in life, and is marching to victory can afford the ruthless criticism of its own shortcomings... A party which hides the truth from the people, which fears the light and fears criticism, is not a party, but a clique of imposters, whose dome is sealed." ⁶ Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and all other critics of Stalin were freely allowed to express their view points within the appropriate party forums. As Stalin's biographer Isaac Deutscher himself pointed out—Stalin had great patience to listen. But when he had to talk, he used to speak cautiously, clearly and confidently. On the party if his will always prevailed, it was because at all times, Stalin could command the majority either in the Central Committee or in the Party Congress. It would be simplistic to argue that he commanded the majority support by applying force against all its members. Instead of voluntarily submitting to the majority decision, if the defeated members maintained groupism and conducted anti-party activities to the detriment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Stalin and his party should not be blamed for being stern with such elements.

It does not, however, mean that the party headed by Joseph Stalin was without any defects. Stalin himself had to take note of the fact that internal party democracy, in its true sense, was not operating in the party to the extent it was needed. While the critics would be content with criticising Stalin for all its defects, Stalin as the General Secretary of the party tried to locate the objective roots of the problem. More than anyone else Stalin understood that it was mechanical or bureaucratic attitude that developed within the party which hindered the functioning of internal democracy within the party. Stalin could find out that such attitudes had objective bases in illiteracy, lack of political education, cultural

backwardness and cotinuous contacts of the party cadres with the bureaucrats working in the state apparatus.⁶ Sometimes the militarisation of the party structure on the eve of war would make a section of the comrades feel that the party was only like a system of administrative institutions with a rigid hierarchy. Some other times a tendency of self-satisfaction arising out of the victories achieved in economic and military fronts also developed uncritical attitude among the party members. Stalin was highly critical of such bureaucratic attitude towards criticism and self-criticism which 'has done serious damage to the party, killed the initiative of a party organisation, undermined the prestige of the leadership among the party masses and infected some of the organisations with anti-party habits of bureaucrats, sworn enemies of the party.'¹¹ Self-critical appraisal of the party as reflected in the Report to the Nineteenth Party Congress on the work of the Central Committee of the CPSU (B) would show that Stalin was clearly aware of the limitations of the party and that he himself realised the necessity of ideological work and of widespread criticism and counter-criticism, especially from below, for strengthening the foundations of the party. Perhaps, the prolonged civil war in Russia, compelling economic needs of the people, involvement in the Second World War and the necessity of economic reconstruction after the war—all these urgent tasks could not create conducive atmosphere for attending to the needs of the party. Though one can still argue that even in those critical conditions Stalin should have paid a little more attention to the party affairs, it would be highly subjective if anyone says that Stalin had a vested interest in perpetuating the weaknesses of the party. Had it been true, he would not have exposed and criticised the weaknesses of the party so openly.

Stalin and Bureaucracy

Of all the accusations made against Stalin, one which clicked well with many, is identification of Stalin with the Soviet bureaucracy. While some of them criticise Stalin for using bureaucratic measures to achieve the goals he himself set; there are a few who would even attribute the origins of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union to Stalin alone. It is here that all critics, especially those who are not well conversant with theoretical issues related to Stalin, find a chance to denigrate all the positive contributions of Stalin by citing the excesses committed during the collectivisation and then at the time of purging that took place before the Second World War. In view of such accusations, it becomes necessary to examine the origins and development of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and the nature of relationship that Stalin entertained with it.

At first it needs to be asserted that the bureaucracy was not a phenomenon associated exclusively with Stalin and post-Stalin periods in the Russian history. It existed even at the time of Lenin. Though Lenin insisted that the old state machinery of the landlords and capitalists should be destroyed, because of the peculiar conditions that prevailed in Russia at the time of revolution. Lenin considered it impossible to throw out all the bureaucrats at one stroke. As Lenin himself put it, "In our country bureaucratic practices have different economic roots, namely, authorised and scattered state of small producers, with his poverty, illiteracy, lack of culture, the absence of roads and exchange between agriculture and industry, the absence of connection and interaction between 'them'.¹² Lenin understood that many more years were required to overthrow bureaucracy completely. To put it in Lenin's words, "When you are called upon to 'put a stop to bureaucratic practices, it is demagogy. It is nonsense, we shall be fighting the evils of bureaucracy for

many more years to come and whoever thinks otherwise is playing demagogue and clearly cheating, because overthrowing the evils of bureaucracy requires hundreds of measures, wholesale literacy, culture and participation in the workers and peasant inspection."¹²

Though the workers and peasants took over political power from the Czar and the Russian bourgeoisie, they did not have the experience and capability to run the administrative and economic bodies. Hence there was a necessity to retain many bureaucrats and professionals who were till then working under the Czarist and Kerensky governments. Lenin was not unaware of the bourgeois attitudes of those employees. He knew that many Czarist and bourgeois elements which had lost their economic and political power, gradually entered the bureaucratic apparatus as managers and technicians. But it was then considered premature to give call for total elimination of such elements until and unless the working people gave birth to their own intelligentsia capable of handling all the administrative, economic and technical problems involved in socialist development. Association with bourgeois experts was seen as a condition essential for the proletariat to develop its own skills. The concessions that the bourgeois experts used to get in the initial years of development were viewed as the 'price' that the working class pay for learning from them.¹ Though the bourgeoisie played significant roles as experts in the initial years, they could not consolidate their position permanently. With the complete elimination of the kulaks and capitalists and with the gradual inflow of the educated persons from the working class and peasantry, the significance of bourgeois experts was lowered to a considerable extent. Charles Bettelheim's argument that the bourgeoisie consolidated its position as 'the state bourgeoisie',¹³ does not appear to be sound. Mere existence of bourgeoisie in the state machinery or the predominance of bourgeois

practices in the administration cannot automatically turn the proletarian state into the state of the bourgeoisie, just as the presence of representatives of the proletariat cannot make the capitalist state into a proletarian state. Yet, it should be admitted that owing to ideological backwardness and absence of cultural revolution, the representatives of the workers and peasants who entered into bureaucracy could not completely overcome the bourgeois practices of their predecessors. Hence in spite of the disappearance of the bourgeois class as an economic category, bureaucracy as an ideology and as a method of working continued to affect the administrative processes in the Soviet state.

Joseph Stalin did not fail to detect this new development. Reading of his works would show that far from being its advocate, Stalin was a bitter critic of bureaucracy. Stalin, who denounced bureaucracy as "one of the worst enemies of our progress", did not fail to notice that bureaucratic method of functioning entered even within the party, komsomols, trade unions, and economic bodies. In the case of the old bourgeois experts, he correctly handled their dual character before and also after the civil war. However, he found that it was difficult to handle the new bureaucrats. As he himself put it, "If it were only a question of the old bureaucrats, the fight against bureaucratism would be very easy. The trouble is that it is not a matter of the old bureaucrats. It is a matter of new bureaucrats, bureaucrats who sympathise with the Soviet government and finally communist bureaucracy with the title of party member. And unfortunately, we have quite a number of such communist bureaucrats".¹² Stalin never had any hesitation to expose these new bureaucrats whenever they distorted the correct line of the party. For example, while reviewing the process of collectivisation, Stalin became highly critical of the attitude of certain local officials, regional officers and even individual members of the

Central Committee who believed in the omnipotence of the decrees, resolutions and orders and diluted the party's revolutionary measures.³ Contrary to the dominant belief, Stalin encouraged the party to organise criticism of the bureaucracy, of their shortcomings and their mistakes by the vast masses of the working class. The Report to the Nineteenth Party Congress on the work of the Central Committee of CPSU(B) prepared under Stalin's guidance clearly stated, "the party cannot close its eyes to the fact that whenever criticism and self-criticism are suppressed and control by the masses over the activities of organisation and institutions is weakened, there such ugly features as bureaucracy and degeneration, and even the corruption of individual sections of the party apparatus invariably appears."¹

However, one cannot but admit the fact that inspite of his opposition to bureaucracy, he could not pay full attention to check its ugly growth. What was worse, the extraordinary situation that prevailed in the Soviet Union after the death of Kirov, compelled Stalin to depend on those very bureaucrats whom he himself hated. It is true that some of the bureaucrats took advantage of the freedom they obtained then and committed many mistakes in handling the situation. But all these events should be seen in the context of the menace of fifth columnists whose threat was indeed real and called for stern and swift action. Writings of the journalists¹⁴ like Anna Louis Strong and John Gunther who were direct witnesses to the developments that took place in Russia during those days, reveal that there were large scale subversive activities all over Russia, instigated by German agents. Reflections of the then American ambassador John Davies¹⁵ show that the convicts were tried duly in accordance with law and in many cases in the presence of foreign journalists and other dignitaries. However, one need not rule out the possibilities of excesses in such situation. But it would be

highly subjective to criticise Stalin for all mistakes committed by the bureaucrats as if all of them had the sanction of Joseph Stalin. On his part, Stalin never tried to hide the mistakes. Long before Krushchev 'revealed', Stalin himself accepted this fact in the Seventeenth Congress of the C. P. S. U. Stalin never argued that the Soviet state should continue to depend on bureaucracy even in the ordinary conditions. If the evils of bureaucracy continue to dominate the Russian Society even thirty five years after his death, then it is the post-Stalin leadership—not Stalin—who had to be blamed. If they were really serious, nothing would have stopped post-Stalin leaders bent upon de-Stalinisation to wage a successful struggle against the bureaucracy. But an impartial study would reveal that the so called command management method of working, which Gorbachev in Russia and his friends in India point out, actually spread its tentacles after Stalin's death.

At this critical historical juncture, when counter revolutions have become world wide phenomena, it becomes all the more essential to have a fresh look at Stalin's contributions to the theory and practice of socialism. Far from being metaphysical in approach, such an effort must evaluate Stalin's role, within the historical context in which he had to act. But it appears that most of the criticisms made against Stalin are either ahistorical or highly subjective. Our effort to reread Stalin, however, makes us conclude that Joseph Stalin had a better understanding of the economics and politics under the dictatorship of the proletariat than any of the so-called critics. He was right in dispensing with the NEP and co-operatives and the so-called excesses associated with the collectivisation were not the outcomes of Stalin's policy. Contrary to what many critics make us believe, Stalin did not advocate bureaucratic method of working and he was very well aware of the

loopholes within the Bolshevnik Party.

These necessary assertions are not in any way aimed to conceal the mistakes or limitations of Stalin. It was indeed a blunder on the part of Stalin to consider that after collectivisation all the exploiting classes had ceased to exist. He could not initiate the much needed cultural revolution within the party to elevate the ideological and cultural standards of the rank and file. In spite of his opposition, he could not succeed in checking the power of bureaucracy. Though Stalin cannot be personally blamed, one may even admit the fact that there were excesses during collectivisation and also at the time of the purges. But such limitations or excesses are unavoidable in any revolution, more so in countries like the Soviet Union which was experimenting with the dictatorship of the proletariat for the first time in this era of imperialism, Stalin might have committed mistakes, but when one looks at his positive contributions—i. e. his defense of the essence of Leninism, his fight against rightist and leftist distortions of Marxism, his contributions to the understanding of nationality question, linguistics and economic problems of socialism; his role in the economic development of the Soviet Russia and above all his inspiring leadership during the Second World War which turned the destinies of not only the Soviet Union but of the whole world—then his 'mistakes' or limitations appear to be insignificant.¹⁶ It was precisely the reason why Mao-tse-tung, in spite of his disagreement with Stalin on certain issues, regarded Stalin as a Marxist authority and gave him his due, at a time when the imperialists and the revisionists were hurling abuse at Stalin.

Except a few revolutionaries like Mao-tse-tung, all other critics utilised the mistakes or limitations of Stalin, not to set right the things, but to initiate a vulgar revisionist line.

By unleashing the venom of anti-Stalinism, Krushchev came out with revisionist ideas and practices such as the state and party of all people, material incentives to the workers and 'peace' with the imperialists. Eurocommunists used blind hatred against Stalin to do away with Leninist theory of the party and dictatorship of the proletariat and started dreaming of peaceful revolution to socialism, that too in those countries with the most powerful state machineries. By discarding Stalin, the East European nations became the victims of narrow nationalism and failed to overcome market economy and bourgeois culture associated with it. Finally, Gorbachev made use of anti-Stalin hysteria to implement his 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' which further widened the sphere of commodity production and speculation, strengthened the idea of profit motive, reestablished private ownership of land, weakened the central authority and ultimately paved the way for restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union.

By magnifying the mistakes or the so-called excesses, the revisionists and the imperialists succeeded in hiding the positive contributions of Stalin which have great relevance to the proletarian struggles all over the world. Stalin's name was invoked only to unleash the most unjustifiable revisionist onslaught on Marxism Leninism. As such, anti-Stalin hysteria has done more harm than good to the world proletarian movement. Hence it becomes all the more important for all true Leftists to bring Stalin back to rigorous theoretical discourse, neither to worship him nor to crucify him, but to learn objective lessons for strengthening the international communist movement once again.

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—Editor: Trend.]

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2. Stalin, Problems of Leninism, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1977, pp. 241-242, 473-74, 710, 297, 365, 100, 502, 412-13.
3. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, Path Finder Press, Newyork, 1977, pp. 26-27, 38.
4. Isaac Deutscher, Stalin : A Political Biography, Penguin, 1984 Edn., p. 319, 38.
5. Stalin, On Opposition, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1977, p. 220, 292, 298-99, 23, 218-19, 17-19.
6. Lenin, What is to be done, Progress, Moscow, 1976.
7. Lenin, "Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder, Progress, Moscow, 1977, pp. 26-27.
8. Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Progress, Moscow, 1977.
9. Stalin himself stated, "There is no need to prove that the dictatorship of the proletariat is wider and richer in its scope than the leading role of the Party. The Party carries out the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it carries out the dictatorship of the proletariat and not any other kind of dictatorship. Whoever identified the leading role of the Party with the dictatorship of the proletariat substitutes "dictatorship" of the Party for the dictatorship of the proletariat". See Stalin, On Opposition, n. 6, p. 294.
10. Stalin asserts, "Evidently there are two kinds of democracy, the democracy of the mass of Party members who are eager to display initiative and to take active part in the work of Party leadership and the "democracy" of disgrunted Party big-wigs who thinks that dismissing some and putting others in

their place is the essence of democracy. The party will stand for the first kind of democracy and will carry it with an iron hand. But the party will throw out "democracy" of the disgruntled party big-wigs, which has nothing in common with genuine internal party democracy, worker's democracy. See Stalin, *On Opposition*, n. 6, p. 39.

11. Stalin, Report to the Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the CPSU (B), 1952, Republished by SUCI, p. 69.
12. Lenin quoted in Chakraborty: *Stalin Question*, Kathashilpa, Calcutta, 1977, pp. 159-60, 157-58, 177.
13. Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R.* M.R.P., 1976, pp. 22, 134, 141, 253.
14. Refer Anna Louis Strong, *The Stalin Era*, Mainstream Publishers, Newyork, 1957 and John Gunther, *Inside Europe*, London, 1936.
15. John Davies, *Mission to Moscow*, Victor Gollamez Ltd. London, 1943, pp. 179-94. Relevant portions of his book are quoted in Biplab Chakraborty, 'Stalin: The Watchful Defender of Proletarian Revolution', *Trend*, Vol. 10, No. 1, May 1991.
16. Stalin's positive contributions are well brought out in Shibdas Ghosh, *On Steps taken against Stalin*, SUCI, Calcutta, 1962.

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