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STALIN'S NATIONALITIES POLICY - A BARRIER FOR HIS COMPLETE REHABILITATION

Summary: The efforts of certain circles to rehabilitate Stalin at any price have been amazingly successful, but there are two issues which place a check on these strenuous endeavors: 1. it is impossible to restyle him into the "guardian of socialist justice" and 2. his nationalities policy can hardly be called perfect and equitable. On this latter subject several articles have recently been published.

Numerous essays and articles on the subject of nationalities policy keep appearing in Soviet publications. Occasionally the historical aspect is treated, but praise for Stalin's nationalities policy remains conspicuously absent, even among authors taking a great-Russian chauvinistic line. The weekly Novoe Vremye recently published an article by Justas Paleckis under the pretentious title of "Equal right for all nations-- Lenin's foundations of the nationalities policy of the USSR." (1) Paleckis would seem particularly qualified to write on this subject in view of his present position. Since August 1966 he has been chairman of the Nationalities Council of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. He has held public office before. In fact, right after joining the party in 1940 he became deputy chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Paleckis goes as far as saying in his article that Lenin considered Stalin "a great expert in the field of nationalities questions." Stalin's writings on this subject had been highly esteemed by Lenin, and for that reason Lenin appointed him commissar for

(1) Novoe Vremye No. 18, May 1969, p. 8 pp.

nationalities questions. But while Paleckis expounds at great length upon "Lenin's contributions to the Marxist theory of the nationalities question," he describes a controversy with Stalin in somewhat foggy terms:

As early as 1920 Stalin had declared that he did not agree with Lenin's theory about the difference between the federalist ties between the Soviet republics based on the principles of autonomy and the federalist ties between independent Soviet republics...

Lenin then charged Stalin with "big power chauvinism." Lenin realized his own concept of a federation of sovereign Soviet republics with equal rights.

In accordance with his title, the author does not bother to explain what happened to Lenin's idealistic theories after his death. In his view, "Lenin's foundations of the nationalities policy of the USSR" remained intact for all times, regardless of Stalin's despotism. Stalin's name is never mentioned again. Paleckis describes his impressions at the peak of Stalin's power in idyllic terms, without venturing one critical word about the rule of the dictator:

In 1940 I participated actively and as an eyewitness in the reestablishment of Soviet power in the Baltic provinces. After returning to the Soviet family of nations, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia experienced a true renaissance; in a relatively short time tremendous social and cultural changes took place in these countries.

What the peoples of the Baltic republics had to suffer after "the reestablishment of Soviet power," suffering for which Stalin bears the responsibility, is left unsaid. The somewhat unusual phrase of the "return to the family of nations" is used in all innocence. If one compares this "judgment" of Stalin's nationalities policy with the charges raised during Khrushchev's time it seems mild indeed; a mock fight designed to enhance Lenin's glory. Around 1960, on the other hand, Soviet historians had proved that Stalin returned to his "theory of autonomization" after having fortified his despotic rule. The republics of the Union were deprived of their rights, especially in the economic field, and the establishment of an extremely centralistic system of administration meant that he had returned to his ideas on the building of Soviet power which Lenin had condemned so sharply in the early 1920's. (2)

(2) Cf. among others M.S. Akhmedov, "W.I. Lenin i obrazovanie Soyuza SSR" (Lenin and the creation of the USSR) in Voprosy istorii KPSS No. 6/1962.

These problems seem to have been overlooked by Paleckis. He did not see the exploitation and disfranchisement of nations but only their development, their progress. What do the solemn decrees issued by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet on the rehabilitation of the uprooted peoples and thousands of members of the national intelligentsias who were innocently persecuted and liquidated, mean today?

Paleckis seeks a rather primitive compromise which reflects the discussion on the limits of Stalin's rehabilitation. Although Stalin has been reestablished by various authors as a successful general and financial expert, as a patron and promoter, his rehabilitation in the field of nationalities is still impossible.

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