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YUGOSLAV PAPER VOICES UNUSUAL CRITICISM OF THE SOVIET UNION

Summary: Now it is the anti-Stalinists rather than the Stalinists who are persecuted in the Soviet Union: the Moscow correspondent of the Zagreb daily Vjesnik, M. Sedmak, claims that the events in Czechoslovakia and Poland have led the Soviet leaders to tighten the ideological screws on the country's cultural elite. The example of Alexander Solzhenitsyn indicates that it has become dangerous to be a sincere anti-Stalinist, despite the fact that several Party Congresses denounced Stalin and his errors.

In the Soviet Union today, "it has become dangerous to criticize Stalin, despite the fact that three of the past four Party Congresses have done so." These words by the Soviet writer Svirsky are quoted by M. Sedmak, Vjesnik's correspondent in Moscow, in a report insisting that it is now the anti-Stalinists rather than the Stalinists who are persecuted in the Soviet Union.¹ Sedmak mentioned the case of Alexander Solzhenitsyn who has of late been strongly attacked for his anti-Stalinist views. The historian Nekrich has been the second to be attacked, followed recently by the popular poet and chansonnier Visocky. Visocky has been attacked by Sovietskaya Rossiya recently for

1 Vjesnik, Zagreb, 13 July 1968.

singing about past times "in which people were sent to concentration camps without knowing why."

Sedmak further said that the Soviet writers "have, for a long period of time, lived in an atmosphere which by itself imposes the question: Why have we condemned Stalin and why are we still condemning him?" Sedmak then continued:

Such a reaction is quite understandable, because the official condemnation of Stalin has been Platonic [lip service] only; nobody today -- at least not on the official level -- cares to explain to the public what Stalin's errors were. People have to be satisfied with a short contradictory claim that Stalin committed "some" mistakes, while the Party has never erred. If people cannot accustom themselves to such an explanation, that is their problem. It seems that the present struggle in Soviet cultural life is, above all, being fought over the question of what attitude should be taken vis-a-vis Stalin and the past as represented by Stalin. The October, 1967 celebration [of the 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution] served as a pretext for the demand that ideological unity should be achieved within "our ranks." This year's events in Czechoslovakia and Poland have been used as yet another piece of evidence that the screws in cultural life must be tightened in order to prevent any undesirable influence on politics.

Sedmak went on to say that, since the 1967 Soviet Writers' Congress, a struggle has been waged behind closed doors between the Stalinists and anti-Stalinists. In the spring of 1968, it became clear that the anti-Stalinist writers have been losing this struggle. "In the time when every division between 'progressive' and 'dogmatists' [in the Soviet Union] is considered an offspring of 'imperialist diversionist activities,' the position which Solzhenitsyn occupies in Soviet literature, for instance, is rather threatened," Sedmak said. He continued:

Since the beginning of this year, the official representatives of Soviet cultural ideology have not condemned any "dogmatist"; instead they have exclusively attacked people who have been suggested [for the attack] by "Literaturka" [i.e., by Literaturnaya Gazeta]; these people could be called "the Progressives." The case is unusual; actually they themselves are to blame for this. Their fault

has been nothing less than the fact that they have been implementing the line of three of the past four Party Congresses, i.e., those congresses at which Stalin and Stalinism were condemned.

Sedmak especially attacks the Moscow periodical Oktyabr and its editor, Kochetov, who has been well known for his conservatism. Kochetov stated, through the mouth of a hero in one of his novels: "Who are we to judge so great a man as was Stalin? This can be done only by the Party rather than by ordinary people who are too small to do so." While some novels written in the Stalin era are being reprinted and even exported, the anti-Stalinist authors are told their works cannot be published "because of the lack of printing paper."

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