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- USSR: Ideology
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IZVESTIA ON STALIN

On September 15, Izvestia carried a short, unsigned article in its build-up for the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution. The unknown author began with the usual ritual quotation from Lenin, and then went on to describe events at the time of the 20th anniversary in 1937:

"The atmosphere demanded iron discipline, unflagging vigilance, and the strictest centralization of the economy. But certain restrictions on democracy in our country, which were justified by the logic of the fight for socialism in the conditions of capitalist encirclement, were even then regarded by the party as temporary.

"Matters were complicated by the fact that at that time the personality cult of Stalin was developing. Together with the other leaders of the party Stalin, as the general secretary of the C.C., actively fought for socialism against enemies of the party. In this political and ideological struggle Stalin acquired great authority and popularity. But all our great victories began to be linked with his name. Stalin excessively exaggerated his services, believed in his own infallibility, abused the confidence of the party and people. Certain restrictions on party and Soviet democracy, which were inevitable in the conditions of fierce class struggle, were raised by him to norms of inner-party and state life, and he grossly violated the principle of collective leadership.

"Great harm was done to the cause of building socialism, to the development of democracy within the party and the state by Stalin's erroneous

1) Emphasis supplied.

formula which proclaimed that as socialism achieved greater success the class struggle in the USSR would grow ever sharper. This thesis, put forward in 1937 at a time when socialism had already triumphed in the USSR, served in practice as the basis for the crudest violations of socialist legality.

"The cult of Stalin's personality did serious damage both to the CP and to Soviet society. But, despite all the evil which he did to the party and the people, he could not change and did not change the nature of our social system. The CPSU, at the 20th and 22nd Congresses, resolutely unmasked and liquidated the consequences of the personality cult, reestablished the Leninist norms of party and state activity, [and] strengthened its links with the masses of the people. Guided by the line of the 23rd Congress, the CPSU is steadily leading the Soviet people on the road to the building of communism."

This passage has been quoted in full because it is an excellent summary of the new line on Stalin which is emerging from the reappraisal begun in October 1964. It represents an advance towards the truth and towards objectivity in that it recognizes Stalin's great "authority" in 1937 (many would disagree with Izvestia about his "popularity" at that time). This is certainly more than would have been tolerated under Khrushchev.

It justifies the part played by such old Bolsheviks as Mikoyan and younger stalwarts such as Suslov in the purges of the thirties by referring to the need for "iron discipline" at the time. Yet it officially condemns Stalin's own excesses in stronger terms than at any time since the 22nd Congress, and thereby it rebuffs both Peking's propaganda and any exaggerated hopes of Stalinist survivors in the USSR for something approaching a rehabilitation.

The achievements of the thirties are being trumpeted once more, and accordingly some credit is now given the man who ruled the country for three decades and who made possible the defeat of Nazi Germany. But Izvestia is careful to specify that the 20th Congress (which included Khrushchev's secret speech) put the Stalin question in the correct framework and led to the necessary revival of "Leninist" standards in running the country.

Where Izvestia's new appraisal fails, most certainly, is in the hackneyed claim that Stalinism was not a product of the system, but only of a man swollen with egotism and

mistaken in ideology. As Mario Alicata of the ICP's Political Office pointed out in his report on the 23rd Congress, the CPSU has yet to undertake a critical, objective analysis of Stalin and his actions.

The only virtue of Izvestia's present evaluation is that it is slightly more objective and one step nearer to the truth than its predecessors of the Khrushchev and Stalin era. There remains much for Soviet historians and propagandists to do before they produce a portrait which carries conviction in the outside world.

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