

To carry out all these tasks, and many others which demand immediate attention, the fighters for democracy in South Africa must consciously strive to improve their own qualities and characters so that they may be still more useful to the people's cause. They must find time to study all the events of the day at home and abroad and learn from the experience of others. They must exercise unceasing vigilance against Government agents and disrupters within the democratic camp. They must pledge themselves at all times to set an example of loyalty, energy and courage to all who strive for freedom.

EVERY NEW ACT OF TYRANNY AND SUPPRESSION MERELY BETRAYS THE WEAKNESS OF THE GOVERNMENT, ITS FEAR OF THE PEOPLE.

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US.

Editorial Note:

The twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 was chiefly remarkable for the denunciation of the 'cult of the personality' contained in the report of the Central Committee presented by Party Secretary N.S. Kruschov. Coming barely three years after the death of Stalin in 1953, the report created a furore in the international Communist movement.

DOCUMENT 102:

'Collective Leadership in the Soviet Union', by Michael Harmel, published in *New Age* (successor to the banned *Advance* and *The Guardian*) on April 5, 1956.

What are the Soviet leaders saying about Stalin? Have they 'turned against him'? What is the significance of the widespread discussions about collective leadership? Many people are asking these questions, following on reports of the recent Communist Party Congress held a month ago in Moscow. In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider them against the background of the Congress itself.

The twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was an historic event of a significance extending far beyond the borders of the USSR, as is shown by the continuing discussion of it in every country, and by the Press, both friendly and hostile, all over the world. No serious student of international affairs can afford to be ignorant of what the leaders of so great a world power as the USSR are thinking and saying. And in our times, as never before, it is the duty of every citizen to become a serious student of world affairs.

It is a thousand pities therefore that the 'corrugated iron curtain' which the Nationalist Government's censorship has erected about South Africa, as well as the stifling and hateful suppressive legislation preventing free advocacy and debate of opinions, have thus far prevented widespread knowledge of and debate about the Congress and its decisions. The reports that have appeared in the daily

newspapers, in which facts and 'quotations' from speeches were inextricably mingled with the obviously biased comments of the battery of anti-Soviet 'experts', have done more to create confusion than to spread information.

WIDE RANGE

The reports placed before the Congress, and its decisions, cover a wide, comprehensive area of international and Soviet affairs. The main report of the Central Committee, presented by Mr N.S. Krushchov, is a remarkable document, containing some 50,000 words, and covering an extraordinarily wide range of subjects.

The report declares that socialism has spread beyond the borders of the USSR to a vast area embracing 900 million people, a world system of socialism existing side by side with the world system of capitalism; that the two systems can and should continue to exist side by side in peace; and that war is neither inevitable nor desirable. It discusses the 'infamous' system of imperialist colonialism, which it says is doomed – nearly half the human race has won freedom from colonial rule in the past decade; the final abolition of colonialism is now an urgent question on the agenda of history. The varied forms of transition to socialism in different countries; the need for rapprochement and collaboration between the wings of the labour movement which have parted company politically for so long; the long-term foreign policy of the USSR – all these matters were passed in review by the Congress.

Another momentous section of its deliberations dealt with sweeping advances in the development of the USSR, where overall industrial output has been multiplied by more than 20 times since 1929. And much time was spent in discussion of the next Five-Year Plan, terminating in 1960, in which further extraordinary increases of production are scheduled, and provision is made for a general increase of wages by an average of 30 per cent and a seven-hour day for all workers (six hours for miners).

SELF-CRITICISM

The report and discussions were informed throughout by a spirit of searching self-criticism of weaknesses and omissions, errors and failure, in a wide variety of field of activity. The work of the Party at every level, and not least of the Central Committee itself, was subjected to penetrating analysis: industry, agriculture, cultural activity, research, education: none were spared from criticism.

I have mentioned all these weighty problems tackled by the Congress, not in order to elucidate them, but merely to convey some conception of the broad scope and perspectives of the Congress. Without such a conception it is impossible to evaluate properly the significance of the discussions on collective leadership and the cult of the individual.

STALIN'S ROLE

It is difficult and painful for the Soviet people and their leaders – and this,

perhaps, is one of the reasons why it was done in a closed, private session of the Congress—to re-evaluate objectively and critically the role of the late Joseph Stalin. For Stalin rendered services of incalculable value to the cause to which he devoted his life. He was foremost in the stern struggle against the Trotskyites, Bukharinites and other traitors and saboteurs, who sought to undermine the country and to divert it from the course charted for it by Lenin. His name is inseparably linked with the heroic struggles of the Soviet people to achieve the rapid development of industry and the collectivisation of agriculture—the indispensable economic base without which the USSR would surely have been defenceless against Hitler's mechanised divisions.

No one can detract from these and other great accomplishments and achievements of Stalin, whose place in history remains secure. But at the same time, it became essential to correct the false picture that, in his later years, was built up of Stalin as an infallible miracle-worker, standing above and separate from his Party and his colleagues. This idealisation, in which he acquiesced, led gradually to a position where the democratic procedures laid down in the rules of the Party were neglected, and where the principles of collective leadership were violated and replaced often by personal leadership.

Decisions taken by an individual, no matter how brilliant and talented he may be, are invariably more prone to be at fault than decisions hammered out in collective discussion. Stalin, inevitably, made mistakes. He erred, in the opinion of his comrades, in disregarding specific warnings of the impending Nazi attack in 1941, in his handling of post-war relations with Yugoslavia, and in other matters detailed by Krushchov at the special session. Why, it may be asked, was it necessary three years after his death to draw attention to these mistakes? Apart from the requirements of historical accuracy, it seems incontestable that the myth of an 'infallible' leader can be extirpated only by frankly revealing the errors that he made.

One does not, however, have the impression that the sole responsibility for the undesirable cult of the individual is now being laid at the door of one man alone. On the contrary, the present condemnation of the trend seems to be in the nature of frank self-criticism, in line with the general tone of the Congress.

SERIOUS RESULTS

Violations of collective leadership have had other serious consequences. Once arbitrary decisions are tolerated at any level, it is impossible to avert the spreading of the infection throughout the organism. It is said that Stalin developed an exaggerated and incorrect theory of the intensification of the class struggle after the defeat of capitalism and that this led to an overemphasis on the role of the Security services, in which they became a law unto themselves, above the Party and Government alike. This enabled elements like the Beria gang, having gained control of the Security services, to defy socialist law and procedure and to frame up innocent people on false charges, for motives of their own. Again, attempts were made, as in Beria's Party history of the Caucasus, to manipulate and tamper with historical facts.

Steps have now been taken to set right injustices and to establish safeguards to preclude further violations of the legal rights of citizens. Departures from accuracy and objectivity in the study and teaching of history are being rectified. But, the Congress declared, it is even more important to extirpate the unscientific and harmful cult which gave rise to these aberrations, and thus to ensure that it shall never happen again.

The Soviet leaders boldly faced the difficult and far from pleasant task of uprooting the myth of the miracle-working hero, which is alien to the spirit of scientific socialism. The real heroes and makers of history are the masses of the people, led by their vanguard organisation. The hero myth obscures this truth. In elevating an individual on a pedestal, all others are cast into the shadow. This can only discourage and suffocate the development of creative thought and endeavour.

The Soviet leaders must have known that their bold acts of self-criticism would be seized upon by the capitalist newspapers, the Voice of America radio and other ill-wishers, and that what they said would be blown up and distorted out of all recognition. The grotesque and wildly exaggerated versions of Krushchov's speech in special session issued by Reuter is typical of what was to be expected. It is, I think, an extraordinary mark of their own strength and self-confidence, no less than of their firmness of principle, that Mr Krushchov and his colleagues should have ignored such considerations. If they are correct in their diagnosis, we can look forward to a great upsurge of creative activity in every sphere of Soviet life.

DOCUMENT 103:

'The Workers' History is Written in Blood – The Story of May Day in South Africa', by E.R. Braverman, published in *New Age*, April 26, 1956.

The first May Day demonstration in South Africa was held as far back as 1895. It was organised by the Johannesburg District Trades Council.

It gradually extended to other centres. Cape Town held its first May Day celebration in 1906. From this time onwards the history of May Day is a record of the labour movement and reflects the many great events that form part of our tradition.

MANN AND ANDREWS

In 1910, the demonstration was led by Tom Mann, the great English dockers' leader and international labour figure. He marched ahead of the procession with Bill Andrews followed by a united gathering of trade unionists and scientists. The unity established on that day brought about a united demonstration of 1st of May.

Four years later when the Botha-Smuts government had moved into action against the rising tide of working class indignation, the Social Democratic Federation called the workers out on the streets in Cape Town on May 1st to protest