

Khrushchev and Soviet History

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Reviewing Victor Hugo's biography of Napoleon, Karl Marx wrote in the preface to his book, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire' – 'The event itself appears in his work like a bolt from the blue. He sees in it only the violent act of a single individual. He does not notice that he makes this individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal power of initiative such as would be without parallel in world history.'

This comment of Marx is equally valid when applied in the context of the speeches and reports of Khrushchev-Mikoyan and company in the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. We come to know from the reports of Khrushchev-Mikoyan and Co. that in the twenty years after 1934, Stalin gradually placed himself above the party and general masses. Deviating from Leninist principles of organisation he took recourse to bourgeois militant despotism in the field of organisation. On the one hand, this led to the destruction of democracy within the party, the loss of collective leadership, the crippling of independent thought and activity of the members and the growth of the cult of the individual reflected in the popular feeling that 'Stalin will do everything' resulting in increased dependence on great men. On the other hand, Stalin had distanced himself from the masses, the Politburo and the Central Committee and had become self-centred. On the whole, it was Stalin who did everything whether in the national sphere or in international affairs and it is Stalin who is responsible for the successes and the failures of the past twenty years of Soviet history. Stalin is the architect of these twenty years of Soviet history. The Soviet people were merely fodder for history and in the atmosphere of terror the CPSU was merely a mute terror-stricken spectator.

Victor Hugo was not a historical materialist. Hence in his review of great historical figures the analysis is centred on individuals. But Khrushchev-Mikoyan & Co. are communists and it is expected that they are historical materialists. However, in their evaluation of Stalin's role, they have emulated bourgeois idealists and adopted an individual-centric approach. In brief, the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU has abandoned the Marxist approach in its evaluation of Stalin.

Two basic questions of Marxism are closely linked up with the evaluation of Stalin by the CPSU. Deviating from Leninist organisational principles, Stalin had taken recourse to bourgeois militarist despotism in the field of organisation and to subjectivism in thought and method of work - this is one side of the history of the past twenty years.

What is the other side of the past twenty years? In the past twenty years great successes have been achieved and life has advanced with gigantic strides. Among industrially advanced countries, the Soviet Union is now placed second in the world and first in Europe. Life has developed and advanced in all fields - education, health, science, art and culture. In the political, social and economic life an exploitation free classless (in the sense of antagonistic classes - ed.) society has been created. Socialism has been established and steps advanced towards communism. Eminent savants, Romain Rolland, Rabindra Nath Tagore, H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Hewlett Johnson, Emil Ludwig, the Webbs etc. have been impressed by the unbelievable all-round progress of the Soviet Union. In the international domain, where the Soviet Union was like an island in the imperialist sea, the complete real basis for the emergence of a socialist world system has been laid.

Thus, over twenty long years, on the one hand we have, in the main, a basically successful and unerring practical application of the political, social and economic principles of Marxism-Leninism and on the other hand, a basic and primary deviation from the Leninist principles of organisation, an effort to distort these principles and in place of democracy, democratic centralism and collective leadership in society and the party, despotism and the establishment of a reign of terror.

It is natural to ask how is this possible? Is not success in politics, society and the economy reflected also in organisational and social life? The logical corollary of political, social and economic progress is organisational democracy and the development of social consciousness. The logical corollary of political, social and economic reaction is organisational reaction, lack of individual initiative, apathy, the slow pace of dull, dreary mechanical routine. Such a society does not reverberate with the song of life. But we have heard the song of life in the Soviet Union. The question arises - the political-organisational line of Marxism-Leninism is not a motley collection of discrete mutually exclusive independent phenomena which do not interact with or exclude one another; rather it is a union of all embracing, many-sided integral ideology and practice. If so, then how is it possible that politics and the organisation and organisational principles - the means of successfully accomplishing that politics could move in two opposite directions for twenty long years. The conservatism of organisational policy acts as a brake in political progress, similarly political conservatism also acts as a brake on organisational progress - it is in this contradiction that the organisation changes, there are changes made in its rules. In this way organisational policy comes into consonance with political progress and does not impede it. But where organisational policy and method of work impede political progress - there politics does not move forward and the organisation also remains backward.

Thus in the Soviet Union, politics was advancing, great successes were being achieved but at the same time, the organisation and organisational policies were falling behind and that this went on for twenty long years, in an era of great historical change seems quite impossible. Then are we to assume that society moves forward at its own speed and on its own volition? Man has no active or passive role to play in this process - society is governed by fate, man too is a puppet in the hands of fate? But Marxism denies this. In organisational policy, its activities, its form and character are reflected political identity, its form and character. And the form and character of the organisation and organisational policy are reflected in the form and character of the politics.

If this is Marxism, then obviously the Khrushchev-Mikoyan report is not. Then either one maintains that socialism was not established in the Soviet Union, that no advance in any aspect of life was made there and that even today, the Soviet Union is a vast prison-house or the Khrushchev-Mikoyan report is wrong, it is not in accordance with Marxism and is inspired by ulterior political motives. Apart from this, the only other alternative is to consider Marxism wrong and the Khrushchev-Mikoyan report as correct.

The second fundamental question linked up with the Khrushchev-Mikoyan report is the question of the role of the individual in the making of history.

Khrushchev-Mikoyan have said that after 1934, Stalin gradually concentrated all power in his hands and that he had no contact with the masses, the Party, the Central Committee or the Politburo. He never convened meetings of the Central Committee or Politburo, he took all the decisions himself and issued directions accordingly.

Negating the people, the party and everything else, giving no opportunity for criticism and evaluation, and basing himself only on his individual 'independent' ideology, theory and methods of work, if a single individual was able while the entire forces of world imperialism were ranged up against it; to raise a vast backward country to such heights of development, prosperity and power, if socialism can be achieved and society can advance towards communism based only on one man's theory, if communism can become powerful in the international arena and imperialism defeated only on the basis of one man's policies, methods of work and theory, then one must say that Marxism is false, historical materialism is false. Then why is so much stress placed on collective leadership and democratic centralism and why the proclamations against the 'cult of the individual'? If by raising himself over the mass of the people and treating them as fodder for history a single authoritarian individual can create the bright history of socialism, then the best example of this is Stalin himself. Refuting all hair-splitting theoretical arguments Stalin has by his actions, negated historical materialism. Now we can say with the idealists that the vast populace serves only as

the raw material for history. The great individual is everything, the vast masses nothing.

Hence one can say that if the Khrushchev-Mikoyan report is true then Marxism-Leninism is false, historical materialism is false.

In Khrushchev's report there is fulsome praise of the unparalleled sacrifice and patriotism of the Soviet people in the achievement of the many successes of the Soviet Union and at the same time, Stalin has been held responsible for all the failures.

It is not enough to say, as the French do, that their nation has been taken by surprise. A nation and a woman are not forgiven the unguarded hour in which the first adventurer that came along could violate them. The riddle is not solved by such turns of speech, but merely formulated in another way. It remains to be explained how a nation of thirty-six millions can be surprised and delivered unresisting into captivity by three high class swindlers. (K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Bombay, 1944, p. 298).

Marx means to say - only a few people cannot lead such a huge country astray and one cannot get off by laying the entire blame at their door. After making the above statement, Karl Marx made a masterly analysis of the historical condition under which the events in France took place. This is precisely the historical materialist method of analysis. That is to find out the basic cause in the analysis of the motion of contemporary society and to analyse the successes and failures, achievements and shortcomings and the role and contribution of the leader in the light of that basic cause. To evaluate the role of the individual in the historical context is a fundamental tenet of Marxism and the evaluation of the individual in individual-centric context is the method of anti-Marxist bourgeois idealism.

That is the fundamental difference between the Marxists and the Khrushchevite conception.

The limitations and shortcomings of the Soviet social system can be traced to the extraordinarily high price paid by the Soviet system and people for the all-round all-conquering development and progress made by the Soviet Union. Socialism in one country is possible because of the uneven development of imperialism and the Soviet Union is proof of this. But socialism in one country amounts to only a drop of water in the vast imperialist sea. Prior to its victory in the Second World War and the emergence of the People's Democratic states in several countries, the Soviet Union was always, on both internal and external fronts, in a state of war, that socialism would be restricted to a single country for such a long period had not been envisaged by Lenin or other contemporary communist leaders. But man has to work with the

material furnished by history to society and the world and advance in the task of the creation of new history. The creation of history cannot be done according to one's own sweet will and be based on illusory ideas and dreams. It was the historical restriction and limitation of the Soviet social system that it had to exist, over a long period, in a state of war amidst world capitalist encirclement.

To gradually entrust the masses of the people with all political, social and economic responsibilities and thus gradually make the existence of the state as a specialised institution for repression socially unnecessary is a fundamental task of the intermediate stage of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The three chief pillars of the state are - the executive, the judiciary and the legislative. It is the fundamental duty of a socialist country in its intermediate stage to keep in check the permanent bureaucracy of these three wings as well as to eliminate the standing army, the secret police, the intelligence department which do not play any creative role in production and are entirely dependent on the state. In place of the permanent bureaucracy will be the representatives elected by the people and the standing army will be replaced by armed people, which will not be dependent on the state for sustenance. It is only then that people will be able to form their own independent opinion and only then that the proper conditions will be created for them to express it. That is, the state cannot behave in a partisan manner towards them.

In the Soviet Union, over this long period, none of this could be accomplished. Amidst the imperialist encirclement and the ever present threat of attack, to protect socialism in one country, a well-trained vast standing army equipped with modern arms and weapons and fully dependent on the state was needed. In order that socialism in one country may advance rapidly, it was necessary for a vast and backward country to not only catch up with other advanced capitalist countries but also to surpass them and consequently, excessive stress had to be laid on centralisation. Later for similar reasons, it became necessary to build and depend on a vast army of skilled, self-sacrificing, idealist (not in the philosophical sense), hard working, individuals devoted to the party in the state, in industry, in agriculture, in education and culture.

The presence of a standing army secret police and intelligence department which are fully dependent on the state and do not play any creative role in production is a big barrier to the all-round democratic progress of society. The file-pushing bureaucracy, which has no contact with the life of the people or creative production, is also a barrier to all-round democratic progress. Thus in the Soviet Union, on the one hand, we have unprecedented development and progress in social and economic life, in education and culture and a classless (in the sense of antagonistic classes - ed.) exploitation-free social system, but on the other hand, there was also growth of excessive centralisation and bureaucracy in the state and state machinery. It was this

contradiction which was at the root of the national and social distortions in Soviet society. But one must bear in mind that the Soviet Union had no other alternative road to progress before it. If one visits a socialist country with a mind full of beautiful illusions, like Andre Gide, then one's dreams are bound to be shattered.

In the analysis of the failures of the Soviet Union, it is not enough to say this. It is as the result of the mutual interaction of the mutually conflicting ideology and activity of millions of people in society that history is created. Man is not merely an onlooker at history. He actively utilises his strength and capacity in the making of history. Up till now, this has been the contribution of millions of people in the creation of history. This is an active contribution, but not a conscious one. That person or party is the leader, who recognising the basic trend in the fundamental motion and development of the real situation engendered by the mutual interaction of the mutually conflicting, ideologies and activities of millions of people, consciously strives to advance society towards the achievement of its historical objectives (goals). This is the indelible role played by the individual in the making of history. Consequently, no leader or party can escape responsibility for failures and shortcomings by invoking the inevitable march of history. Leaders like Mikoyan tried to escape responsibility by propagating, that man learns only after the event has taken place. This may be true of millions of ordinary people but here we have a question of philosophical knowledge. Every one can understand after the event has taken place. But the role of the leadership or the leader lies in anticipating before hand the motion and development of the event or phenomena and in struggling against the adverse motion and development so that healthy and proper conditions can be created for the favourable motion and development. It is precisely here that the need arises for leaders and a leadership and it is to aid our understanding of this that dialectical and historical materialism have been developed.

Hence, on the one hand, we have the progress of socialist society and on the other, a standing army, excessive centralism and bureaucracy in the executive and the legislative resulting necessarily in the failures and shortcomings of the Soviet society, state and social life and a distorted development. The question arises: was Stalin as a leader sufficiently alert and watchful about these phenomena and did he strive to create favourable conditions for struggle against them? It is only up to this extent, and not more that Stalin can be held responsible for the failures and shortcomings. In spite of all efforts made in the struggle, the development of Soviet society was bound to be distorted and onesided to some extent - there is no point in concealing this truth. But the important question is how much effort was made in the struggle against the onesidedness and it is only here that the question of fixing responsibility arises.

If Khrushchev-Mikoyan and Co. had based themselves on the principles of historical materialism in their analysis of the failures and shortcomings of individual and state

then they would not have denigrated Stalin and communism before the world. They would not have made individual-centric personal attacks. It is because of their individual-centric bourgeois analysis that they had to take recourse to falsehood and distortion of history.

But Marxism-Leninism is invincible. Historical materialism retains its validity -it is independent of the sweet will of individuals. History will affirm the laws of historical materialism and will surely vindicate Stalin and his contribution.

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