

An Attack on Stalin Is an Attack on Revolutionary Marxism

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(In a letter written to the General Secretary of the undivided Communist Party of India dated 15.04.1956)

The General Secretary
Communist Party of India
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Dear Comrade,

Almost three years after the death of Com. Stalin whatever the present leadership of the Communist Party of Soviet Union has brought up as individual attacks and criticism, has been more or less supported by our party's Central Committee in its proposal (as published in recent newspapers) and this letter is a strong protest against the aforesaid proposal, which I feel, is my primary responsibility as a member of our party. Com. Bhupesh Gupta, member of the Central Committee, has explained CC's position to us in Calcutta. Though you have tried to give a sugary coat to the bitter attack on Com Stalin as launched by the current Soviet leadership, it does not counter the criticism in any way. This is like patting one on his back while simultaneously kicking him in his back.

No sense of blind love or emotional attachment towards an individual has made me make this protest. The attack on Com. Stalin is an attack on an epoch of revolutionary Marxism, specially its time tested theories and practices. I, thus, as a Marxist cadre consider it to be my key responsibility to put forth my protest. But yes, I am concerned and worried as I think there has been a severe attack at the roots of the Marxist ideals and thoughts which inspired me to join this party.

I state my views briefly:

1. There is no doubt that the Soviet Union at present is in the leadership role of the world socialist camp and the international proletariat. Thus any decision of the Soviet Party has worldwide significance. Naturally thus the working class parties of all other countries must seriously reflect on the Soviet Party's decision. It also means that Communist Parties of other countries have a responsibility towards decisions taken by the Soviet party. Therefore the decisions of the Soviet Party cannot be kept aside as merely internal matters of the Soviet Union; rather the yardstick of measuring any such decision is its leadership of the interest of the international proletarian struggle. The challenge of providing this leadership lies with the Soviet Party. Nothing other than this point of view should be the way of analysing the decisions of the Soviet Party; blind emotional attachment is not at all pertinent to a position. The central issue is: the safeguarding and leadership of the International Proletariat.

2. In a particular historical epoch, by being in the leadership role of the Soviet Communist Party, Com Stalin developed many theories and principles of Marxism and also, by successfully practicing them, transformed himself from an individual to a theoretical ideological entity. Thus Stalinism is a chapter of Marxism. Leninism, which in the age of imperialism, showed how to counter social-democracy and was the Marxism in the epoch of the establishment of the first proletarian state in the world, Stalinism is the Marxism in the age of the establishment, growth and protection of Socialism, of countering Fascism, of the struggles against Trotskyism, a Marxism in the age of successful new democratic revolutions, a new phase in the anti-colonial struggles and the age of decline of capitalism.

Thus it needs to be seen, after Stalin's death, if the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party, based on the principles of Stalinism and adapting to the demands to the current condition, is providing strong leadership and guidance to the onward march of the proletarian class and enriching Marxism in the process. But what is evident is that the primary objective of the 20th Party Congress is to identify Com. Stalin as an individual and push his principles, theories and practices into oblivion. The Trotskyists had also adopted a similar strategy against Com. Lenin. They had criticised Com. Lenin by describing him as the "professional exploiter of every kind of backwardness of the Russian working class movement". Later they divided his work into two stages: Pre and Post October Revolution, completely disowned his pre-October work, while giving mere formal recognition to the post-October work. Most importantly they adopted this approach of showing his thoughts, works and practices as isolated events and as fragments – thus not accepting to show his work as part of a whole and integral part of a larger body of thought. Com. Stalin had fought against this strategy of the Trotskyists and had established that Leninism is an integral part of Marxism. In a changed situation in history, we again see an effort to identify Com. Stalin as an individual and attack him as a person; to split his work to pre 1917 Party Congress and post; to decimate the post 1917 period of his work, and not to accept or dissociate his work, thoughts, practice, principles as fragments, not contributing integrally to a larger body of thought and work – such a concerted effort has clearly begun. These tactics are just a changed form of the Trotskyist strategy.

Later on, the Trotskyites picked up the flag of Leninism to begin their attack on Com. Stalin. When Com. Lenin's theories could not be disputed anymore, then they started attacking the very person – Com. Stalin – who was upholding Leninism, in the name of defending Leninism. Similarly it is to be noticed that Com. Lenin is again being pulled up to build the attack against Com. Stalin. What needs to be deliberated upon is whether this is strengthening Leninism or attacking and weakening it. Stalinism is an integral part of Leninism. This attack will be proven, in days to come, to be actually an attack on Leninism itself.

3. The Marxist analysis is from ideology and principles to the individual; not the other way round. But the attack on Com. Stalin is a brutal personal attack on him, as an individual, in no consonance with the Marxist analytical framework. Actually by spreading the ideas of a 'horrible', 'despicable', 'power-hungry', 'dictatorial', 'oppressor', 'one-manship' against him, a negative feeling is sought to be generated against his work, principles, theories. The Trotskyites had similarly called Lenin, 'an idiot', 'factionalist', 'believer in coteries of power'. The current attack against Com. Stalin bears the imprint of these un-Marxist Trotskyist strategies. If one were to attack Com. Stalin in a truly Marxist way it would have been necessary to firstly prove his

theories and principles wrong and then discard them. But none of his critics have had the guts to do this. Sometimes some critics have made some indirect, disdainful negative comments on some of his theories or positions. Sometimes wrong things are being said about him. This is not really a truth-seeking approach of breaking the basis of a thought. Not facing up to the realities in the name of inner party struggle, what is going on is actually slandering from the dead man's grave – somewhere from where the person is in no position to defend himself. This would even put the bourgeois moral-ethical sensibility to shame.

After the unprincipled attacks began against Com. Stalin, the critics have had difficulty in arriving at a common date as to from when Com. Stalin became 'bad'; some say 1934, some say after the 17th Party Congress, some say in the last phase of his life, some say at the extreme last phase of his life, etc. Numerous such confusing statements are doing their rounds. But in between these very time frames, the Soviet Union under Stalin leadership progressed substantially; Fascism was dealt a death blow and defeated, many new democratic states were born, the Chinese revolution was victorious drawing its understanding from Stalin's theory of anti-colonial revolutionary struggles. How was it possible for a 'degraded' Stalin to have given leadership to such epochal tasks?

4. Actually the main attack against Stalinism has begun with the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU (b). Thus, intellectuals, people at large, the working class and the communist activist/ worker/ cadre in particular – these who are influenced by Marxism – are enraged, worried, dismayed and agitated by this attack. Because in their minds, Stalin is not just an individual but an upholder and practitioner of principles. An important chapter in revolutionary Marxism – Stalinism – is being attempted to be buried under criticism ranging from 'Criticism of Stalin's Faults', 'Critique of the cult of the individual', and the happiest lot are the Trotskyites, social-democrats, bourgeoisie, reactionaries and they are the ones who are patting the back of the (current) communist leaders.

5. It was by taking forward the learning and principles of Leninism that Stalinism enriched itself. Com Stalin, by correctly identifying the correct drivers of social progress, and its successful implementation, has ensured his place in history. This has not happened through intrigue, spreading lies, improper tactics, and neither can it happen this way. It is being said that Stalin has distorted history. Actually he has created history and that is why he is in the hearts of the international working class. Such an acceptance cannot be achieved by mere presence in the dry pages of books. If it were so, then the history of human civilisation would have been the story of plotters, of sheer animalistic power holders, of robbers. This is a distorted view of history. History cannot be arranged as per the whim and fancies of individuals. And neither is history created by writing it as someone would want it. And just inscribing one's name does not make him the creator of history. Actually the essence of Stalinism is its theories, principles and ideology and this is not the property of any individual or group, but an asset of world humanity. Thus just a few Communist Parties and their leaders cannot become the judge of Com. Stalin, and it is neither a matter of some secret group meeting; his true judge is the international working class and world civilisation.

Having failed to dislodge Stalin's contribution to this huge historical task and thus his position in history, you are putting forward only token and nominal appreciation for the same but at the

same time singing along with the tunes of personal attack, mud-slinging to sideline him and his contribution in the annals of history. This strategy is really abominable. It is being said that Stalin has been praised a lot earlier, it is time now for some criticism – one cannot but lament at such an approach by a Communist Party.

6. Bereft of principles, attacking a person is against the very principles of internal struggle within a Communist Party. The Communist Party has shown a new method of internal struggle: “Praise the leader while alive, abuse him after death.” If after the death of an individual, individual attack on him forms the basis of a Communist Party’s principles, then the Party has to discard all ethical standards and standards of decency it stood up for. We can definitely discuss about the ideology of the dead person. But for that is required a scientific analysis of mistakes and new learning’s and appropriate theorisations. Nothing of this nature was attempted in the case of Com Stalin; it began with the individual.

7. Marxism teaches us that to successfully bring about a social transformation it needs to be based on adoption of correct theory, practice and ideology and confidence and cooperation of the class (the working class). If Com Stalin was creating terror within the Party and the country and was acting merely on his whims and fancies – then how was it possible for him to have achieved the historical social transformation – there is no Marxist analysis provided by any of his critics. Without this kind of analysis it is pointless to get into subjective attacks against the cult of the individual. Such attacks actually dilute and sidetrack the real issues. Subjective struggles against the cult of the individual is not Marxism but metaphysics. And if it is not the cult of the individual when we refer to ‘Lenin’s Central Committee’, then why would be it individual worship to acknowledge Stalin as a new personality in Marxism after Lenin? In the same logic then any Marxist like Com. Mao Tse Tung or other like him should not find any mention in history. Collective leadership does not mean transforming from an individual to the leader of a small group; it is about accepting the qualities and abilities of an individual and honing them into large/collective skills for leading social transformation.

While giving examples of the cult of the individual Com. Bhupesh Gupta gave us the example of the people of the Soviet Union who individually felt leaderless at the death of Com. Stalin. Why just the Soviet Union? Recall the day we heard of his death. The working people all over the world and Communist cadres the world over felt leaderless that day and were overwhelmed by grief. From this we know where lies Com Stalin’s position, his stature. Those who are creators of history are remembered so, revered so when they are physically no more. The same had happened on Com. Lenin’s passing away. But Com Stalin did not become the leader by belittling Com. Lenin. He grew to be a leader by protecting Leninism.

8. At this historical juncture, Communist leadership is full of mistakes and self-contradiction. They praise India’s bourgeois leader Mahatma Gandhi. But they have teamed up like never before to berate, belittle the time tested accepted leader of the world proletariat – Com. Stalin, as cheerleaders of the false campaign unleashed by the imperialists and the bourgeoisie. The prestige of socialism is being tarnished by this.

9. Thus revolutionary Marxism is in a turbulent phase. Many of its core principles are under attack. Where is its source is something we should find out. On the face of it, observing many

trends and incidents at present, it seems that the old social democratic principles and thoughts are back again wearing new clothes and in organisational procedures and methods one can see imprints of some Trotskyist tactics. And this is happening at a time of socialist advancement, crisis of capitalism, and acute crisis of imperialism, in a present world situation which is latent with unprecedented opportunities for Marxism and whose flag and leadership is held aloft by Stalinism and which has been enriched and established by Stalinism – there is an attack on this leadership of revolutionary Marxism. Thus there is crisis of revolutionary Marxism.

10. It is to be noted that the ‘secret meeting’ of the Soviet Party in which issues relating to Com. Stalin were discussed, fraternal organisational representatives were not allowed to be present and some Soviet leaders (including all of you) have labelled Com. Stalin’s issue as an internal matter of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Party. Thus Com. Stalin is being shown as a ‘national’ person. But his criticism is being made worldwide against the worldwide applicability of Com Stalin’s theorisation and ideology; and without spreading a personal smear campaign against him internationally there is no way to destroy the international base of his ideology.

11. Thus one needs to have a comprehensive awareness of the centre of attack. If the core issue is clear other issues would also become clear. Today, for the sake of revolutionary Marxism, it is a pious and paramount responsibility of every Marxist, to immediately put a stop to this smear campaign and attack on Comrade Stalin. Those, from among the current leadership of the Soviet Party who have, after the death of Com Stalin, attacked him personally, their commitment to the Bolshevik principles of internal struggle, its fearless approach and those of you who now claim who had, during earlier visits to the Soviet Union, started locating some errors of Com. Stalin, I do not want to raise the weight of this letter by questioning their genuineness.

My main objective is to request all of you to re-assess as to where we are going and where heading to with all this criticism and attack on Com. Stalin – what is the direction we are taking? On other questions of principles and ideology, I have decided to write to the party. At the moment, I request all of you, in this moment of storm over the sky of revolutionary Marxism, to stop the current dangerous methods and tactics and trends by showing the required Bolshevik mindset, courage and determination, to save the communist party from severe defeat. In this regard two steps need to be taken immediately: (a) a forum of discussion across Communist Parties of all countries should be immediately established and correct strategies and tactics should be adopted for the present conditions and (b) request the Soviet Party to immediately put a stop to all criticism against Com. Stalin.

I hope that at the next Party Congress you will take effective steps (to stop this unwarranted dangerous criticism of Com. Stalin) and pass a resolution with a call to continue the struggle to defend Stalinism.

Through you I am presenting my views to the Central Committee and the Party Congress. I hope that you will present this to the CC and circulate it among the delegates to the Party Congress.

I place my demand to the Central Committee that a “party newsletter” should be published which will give opportunity to party members and cadres to be made aware of Com. Stalin and his contributions.

I fully believe that this temporary obfuscation of revolutionary Marxism will not be able to survive long; it will be defeated one day and Stalinism will continue to shine in its own light.

With greetings,
Parimal Dasgupta
15/4/56

Translated from the Bengali by Avijit Wasi