

Book review of Grover Furrs book 'Yezhov vs. Stalin' (part 1)

VANGUARD AUSTRALIA CPA-ML, Contribution C03 to the „International Internet discussion on the significance of 100 years October Revolution“, 28 September 2017

Joseph Stalin, the man who led the building of socialism in the USSR and saved the world from Hitlerite fascism, is to many people an evil, bloodthirsty dictator and tyrant.

Anti-Communists everywhere have had a field day demonising Stalin and using the demon so created to drive people from curiosity about, or positive feelings towards, Communism and Communist Parties.

Undoubtedly this demonisation has largely succeeded and derived credibility because the most vocal, fiercest critics have worn the cloak of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.

Trotsky spoke as a “Marxist” when he savagely attacked Stalin for adhering to the theory of “building socialism in one country”, for disallowing “democracy” (factionalism) in the Party, and for fostering a bureaucratic caste that took power away from the workers.

Following Stalin’s death, the Trotskyite attacks were largely confirmed by Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who succeeded Stalin.

Khrushchev delivered a secret speech to the Soviet Party’s 20th Congress in 1956, three years after Stalin’s death. Although the content was kept from the mass of Soviet Party members, it was leaked to a US capitalist newspaper and sent shockwaves through the international communist movement. It accused Stalin of fostering a cult of the personality behind which he cruelly suppressed and killed loyal Bolsheviks in their tens of thousands.

Anti-Communists could not conceal their glee. Many Communists were so disheartened and disillusioned that they withdrew from revolutionary activity or adopted the revisions to Marxist theory that Khrushchev passed off as corrections to “Stalinist dogma”.

Reactionary authors such as Robert Conquest lapped up the secret speech and produced “histories” that established as “fact” that Stalin had been responsible for mass repressions in which some 20 million Soviet citizens were murdered.

The evaluation of Stalin was not all one-sided. Trotsky’s writings had always been contested during Stalin’s lifetime. After the 20th Congress, Khrushchev was criticised by genuine Marxist-Leninists in all Parties. Great assistance was afforded by the Chinese and Albanian Parties and their defence of Stalin.

Even so, there was a grudging acceptance that Stalin had made serious errors. Neither the Albanians nor the Chinese had access to Soviet records against which to judge the validity of crimes attributed to Stalin by Khrushchev. The strongest criticism of the secret speech was that it “completely negated Comrade Stalin” whereas “his merits outweighed his mistakes” (*On the Question of Stalin*,

Beijing, September 13, 1963). It was largely accepted among genuine Marxist-Leninists that Stalin was 70% correct and 30% incorrect. In the latter component were departures from dialectical thinking; confusing the two types of contradictions (between ourselves and the enemy, and among the people); conviction of innocent people on charges of conspiracy and counter-revolutionary activity; and certain violations of democratic centralism within his own party and of comradely relations between the Soviet Party and other Communist parties.

In only relatively recent years has it been possible to access some previously unreleased archival materials relating to the Soviet Union.

By and large, academics working on history of the Soviet era have declined to visit this archival material. The demonisation of Stalin has been so widely and successfully spread that it is not worth risking one's academic reputation to suggest that there could be a different appraisal.