

# Books in Review—

## Will the Communist Party Remain Unchanged After Stalin Dies?

*The Life and Death of Stalin*

By Louis Fischer. (Harper; \$3.50.)

Reviewed by Carter Brooke Jones

Joseph Stalin is past 70. What will happen to Russia and to an apprehensive world when he dies?

Mr. Fischer, who knows Russia as few persons free to write do, has no simplified answer. He does predict, though, that the dictatorship, the Communist Party, "an automatic machine tool of unanimity," will go on in much the same way. He feels that "there will be no party controversy such as followed Lenin's death." He adds: "The people had no voice in selecting Lenin's successor and will, of course, have none when Stalin dies."

### No Revolution Predicted

The author does not foresee a revolution. While the Red Army conceivably could seize the government, "Bonapartes are not in the Russian tradition," and "the nation would be slow to respond to a man on horseback." It "rarely reacts to glamour" and its historic revolts "have low-calory brush fires spreading spasmodically from village to village and from town to town."

Mr. Fischer does not see any man on the political horizon strong enough to take over single-handed, at least immediately after Stalin's demise. Stalin has seen to that.

The man closest to Stalin and hence most powerful, seldom is heard of by the public. He is, Mr. Fischer says, Lavrenti P. Beria, head of the secret police, the NKVD (or MVD). But Beria, like Stalin, is a Georgian, and Mr. Fischer doubts that the Politbureau—or the country—would accept another dictator not ethnically a Russian. So he feels that the answer may be a rule by Beria with two or more native Russians. These Russians may be Georgi M. Malenkov and the former Foreign Minister, V. Molotov, in Mr. Fischer's opinion, may be the front man, Prime Minister, titular successor to Stalin, but actually Beria would be the power.

"The choice in Russia is a military dictatorship or a police dictatorship, and at the mo-

ment the police is high in the ascendant."

All Mr. Fischer's forecasts are, naturally, speculation. And yet he was an American correspondent in Russia for 14 years and was personally acquainted with many of the important figures in the Soviet picture. Thus his prophecies are more than theories.

He doubts that, meanwhile, Stalin will commit Russia to a full-scale war. The Red Prime Minister's policy since World War II, Mr. Fischer points out, has been to equalize the balance between his sphere and the free world by prolonged, wasteful guerrilla wars in non-Soviet countries or colonies or by encouraging, if not fomenting, social upheavals. Another major conflict might be a gamble with Russia's national existence. The author also recalls that Stalin has backed down where we defied him, as in Greece and Berlin, and has refrained from spreading the Korean fight into a world war.

### Best Portrait of Stalin

The bulk of this searching book, leading to the conclusions summarized, is probably the best portrait of Stalin ever drawn—a likeness that takes in his personal and official life from his earliest years. It is a remarkable study, crackling with quotable phrases.

Mr. Fischer is not inclined to blame any one too much for our failures in dealing with Russia. He does blow up the idea, entertained at times by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman and some of their advisers, that "old Joe" or "Uncle Joe" is a prisoner of the Politbureau. It is rather, you gather, that the Politbureau is Stalin's prisoners. Perhaps the most powerful and ruthless dictator in history, Stalin is a lonely man; "he cannot command a single heart." He is only hated and feared, inside and outside Russia. He has no magnetism. He has only a genius for organization.

If you have any interest in the state of the world, you can hardly afford to overlook this book.

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