

8 February 1957

THE COURSE OF DE-STALINIZATION
IN SOVIET DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA THROUGH JUNE 1956

I. Introduction

The Problem for Soviet Propaganda

Stalin! Always we hear in our souls his dear name. And here in the Kremlin, his presence touches us at every step. We walk on stones which he may have trod only quite recently. Let us fall on our knees and kiss those holy footprints.

from THE RUSSIAN LAND, published
by the Komsomol in 1946.

Thousands of workers representing generations of Soviet people are marching past; their life flows under the sign of love and gratitude to Stalin, Stalin--the beginning and end of our life.

from Radio Moscow's account of
the celebration of the 35th October
Revolution anniversary, 7 November 1952.

The public defamation of Stalin launched at the XX Soviet Party Congress in February 1956, setting off a chain of repercussions that continue to threaten the cohesion of the Soviet Bloc, confronted Soviet propagandists with a challenge of extraordinary magnitude. The propaganda apparatus, which since 1929 had been using its full resources to promote the adulation of Stalin, had now to direct its efforts toward minimizing the dangers and reducing the liabilities inherent in the process of destroying the infallible idol it had itself helped to create.

For 25 years, the peoples of the Soviet world and members of foreign Communist parties had been taught to bow to Stalin as "the greatest genius of mankind" and to accept all his dictates without question. By the time of Stalin's death, his image had been firmly established in the propaganda as that of an all-wise, all-knowing genius whose knowledge was supreme in almost every conceivable field, from politics, history, philosophy and science to folk-singing and stockbreeding. He was hailed as the inspirer of all the successes of the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement, including the winning of World War II.

Three years after his death, Soviet propagandists were called upon by Stalin's heirs to tear down this overpowering image. That they have not been altogether successful is manifest in the recent events in the Satellites and is attested by signs of "re-Stalinization" in the Soviet world.

Cautious Deflation of Stalin's Image After His Death

Following Stalin's death, a decision to deflate his image to some degree was reflected in the propaganda's deemphasis of the Stalin cult and greater attention to Lenin. But there was no evident propaganda preparation for the open attack on Stalin at the XX Congress, no indication in the propaganda that a step-by-step process of denigrating

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Stalin had been carefully mapped out in advance. Stalin remained a positive though less obtrusive symbol in the propaganda almost until the eve of the Congress.

The course of de-Stalinization in the months following the Congress was manifest in the propaganda in a cautious elaboration and expansion of the charges made against Stalin in Khrushchev's secret speech. The full text of that speech remained unavailable to the Soviet public. Its very existence was not acknowledged in Soviet media until four months after the Congress, when PRAVDA made passing reference to it in the Soviet press's first response to mounting criticism of the Soviet leadership among foreign Communist Parties! Even the sterilized version of Stalin's misrule presented in the propaganda was handled with extreme caution. Continuous efforts were made to counter resistance to the new line and to check efforts to exceed it. Any attempts to carry criticism of Stalin into areas touching on the correctness of Soviet policies and the legitimacy of the present leadership were quickly countered in the propaganda.

De-Stalinization Primarily a Domestic Affair at First

The Soviet leadership appears initially to have looked upon de-Stalinization mainly as an internal Soviet affair. Two foreign delegates to the XX Congress, Maurice Thorez and Chu Teh, were apparently not fully aware of the depth or firmness of the attack on Stalin, and during the open sessions of the Congress both made brief references to Stalin as still enthroned beside Lenin.* Foreign Communist delegations to the Congress were excluded from the closed session at which Khrushchev delivered his attack on Stalin, and various foreign Communists later complained that they were only able to learn of the contents of the secret speech after the U.S. State Department released a version of it.

The propaganda accompanying the attack on Stalin also indicated that denigration of the dictator was viewed as basically a domestic concern: It made repeated appeals for developing the creative initiative of the masses; it promised strict adherence to "socialist legality" by the regime; and it heralded a policy providing greater physical and material security for all segments of the Soviet population, in order to offset the stagnating effects of the heritage of Stalinist police rule and to reinvigorate Soviet society by a new stress on material and psychological incentives. It reflected, in other words, an apparent desire by the Party leadership to find a more effective means of urging the productive forces of Soviet society on to greater activity than had been possible under the Stalinist pattern of rule. But the signs of a retreat toward Stalinism in 1957 mirror the apparent inability or disinclination of Stalin's heirs to carry through a full and decisive break with the past.

This review of the course of de-Stalinization propaganda in the Soviet Union is confined to the campaign as it developed up to the end of June 1956, when the process was still basically a domestic affair for the Soviet leadership. Up to the end of June the propaganda attempted to break the news of Stalin's symbolic death gently to the Soviet population. But by the end of June the international impact of de-Stalinization on the world Communist movement began to rebound; the Soviet

* Thorez was later chided by members of the French Party for this "mistake."

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leadership lost control of de-Stalinization as a carefully directed process, and Soviet propaganda was forced sometimes to react rather than act. A primarily domestic propaganda problem of making an unpalatable fact acceptable had broadened into a Bloc-wide problem.

II. Deemphasis of the Stalin Cult After Stalin's Death

During the first week after Stalin's death in March 1953, Soviet media had a final fling at unrestrained Stalin-worship. Never before had the Soviet propaganda apparatus given so much attention to a single event. Radio Moscow devoted all its broadcasts to reports of the funeral, world-wide mourning, and messages of condolence interspersed with music. Regional transmitters abandoned most of their local schedules to relay these programs. By 12 March the lamentation began to subside, and within a week a deliberate effort to deemphasize Stalin became apparent.

The process of deemphasis took the form mainly of restraint in the use of Stalin's name: Stalin was less frequently named in connection with his previously heavily publicized contributions to Communism; quotations from his works were now regularly used anonymously; he was not credited with opening the way for the indulgent measures taken after his death, such as the amnesty and price reductions.

Stalin Loses Co-Equal Status with Lenin

The toning down of the Stalin image in the propaganda was in line with a new formula for Stalin's historical position set forth in the Central Committee's theses on Party history, published on 27 July 1953 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Party's Second Congress. The theses established Lenin as the uniquely great Soviet leader and Stalin as the continuer of his cause. Anticipating the line taken at the XX Congress, the theses attributed the supreme role during Stalin's long reign to the Party as a whole and its Central Committee in particular rather than to the dictator. However, Stalin continued to be treated respectfully, and his name appeared in the propaganda more frequently than that of any living Soviet leader.

Collective Leadership Displaces Personality Cult

The theme of "collective leadership" as the guiding spirit of the rule of Stalin's successors emerged in the propaganda along with the deemphasis of Stalin. Acclaim for that theme served as reassurance against anarchy or a war of succession among Stalin's heirs and was clearly not intended as an implicit criticism of Stalinist rule; the collective leadership theme had been used in the same way after Lenin's death, without in any sense reflecting on Lenin's methods of leadership. A PRAVDA article in April 1953 by editor Slepov of the paper's "Party Life" department, pointing to the superiority of the collective leadership method over "rule by administrative measures," took pains not to present the argument in such a way as to reflect on Stalin and in fact invoked Stalin's authority to support the contention. The propaganda said nothing about "restoring" Leninist norms, the device that was to be used at the XX Congress to point to past violations of Party principles under Stalin's rule.

Criticism of the "cult of the personality"--the phrase which during and after the XX Congress became the euphemism for Stalin's misrule--

appeared in propaganda after the dictator's death and before the XX Congress, but with no anti-Stalin overtones. The device of quoting Stalin himself to criticize the "cult," like the device used in the propaganda on post-Stalin collective rule, was used in Party organs. For example, KOMMUNIST's 27 May 1953 editorial, reviewing the Party's struggle against the cult of personality and explaining its harmful effect on initiative in the Party and among the masses, took its text from Lenin's and Stalin's condemnations of the cult and quoted from a letter in which Stalin objected to "the principle of devotion to persons." As late as September 1955, KOMMUNIST again invoked Stalin's name along with Lenin's in an editorial attacking the cult of personality. The use of this device in the propaganda fostered the implication that Stalin had at least not been personally responsible for manifestations of the cult during his lifetime, the key point on which the XX Congress was to effect a reversal.

Opportunistic Use of the Stalin Symbol

Favorable references to Stalin appeared in various leaders' speeches throughout much of the period between Stalin's death and the XX Congress. In late 1954 and early 1955, Stalin's name played a key symbolic role in the dispute over priority for heavy industry. Malenkov, in launching the consumer goods program in August 1953, had not associated Stalin with any of his proposals; now his opponents found ammunition in Stalin's injunctions for the preferential development of heavy industry. This opportunistic Stalin revival became manifest in mass propaganda as the Malenkov-Khrushchev struggle reached its climax.

The Stalin symbol was also used at the culmination of Malenkov's defeat, when Khrushchev nominated Bulganin as the new Premier and called him "one of the closest comrades-in-arms of the continuer of Lenin's cause, Iosef Vissarionovich Stalin." And Bulganin in his maiden speech replied that his Government would "follow the instructions of the great Lenin and the continuer of his cause, I. V. Stalin," for the development of heavy industry.

Stalin's 76th birth anniversary in December 1955 received extensive press treatment and radio coverage, surpassing even the radio publicity for his 75th birthday which had been so heavily exploited in support of the Khrushchev forces in the heavy industry controversy. Propagandists even counted Stalin's injunctions to the Party to maintain close ties with the masses and encourage their creativity among his "wise teachings"---the principles he was to be accused two months later of having violated. KOMMUNIST, in eulogizing Stalin, at the same time stressed collectivity as the vital principle of Party leadership; it even cited Stalin's injunctions as consistent with Leninist flexibility and as particularly relevant to current policy.

Subtle Hints Foreshadow Open Attack

The Party and its leadership continued to be portrayed as the heirs and loyal executors of Lenin's will, preserved and transmitted through the hands of Stalin, up to the end of January 1956. Stalin continued to be mentioned routinely in propaganda. There was no overt indication of what was in store for the dictator's name and reputation at the XX Congress.

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A public hint that a new line on Stalin had been taken appeared shortly before the convocation of the Party meeting on 4 February 1956, when the Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers greeted Stalin's oldest crony Voroshilov on his 75th birthday as Lenin's "faithful pupil" without reference to his comradeship with Stalin, a standard component of such decennial birthday tributes to Soviet leaders. And on 9 February KOMMUNIST was signed to the press without a single use of Stalin's name. PRAVDA and the rest of the Soviet press hailed only Lenin in greeting the opening of the XX Congress.

III. The XX Congress: From Demi-God to Scapegoat

Khrushchev's opening words at the XX Congress launched the public denigration of Stalin. In a memorial to "most prominent figures of the Communist movement" lost in the period since the previous Congress in 1952, he lumped Stalin casually with Communism's lesser lights, Czechoslovakia's Gottwald and Japan's Tokuda. However, most of the public assaults on Stalin at the Congress were indirect. Only two Soviet speakers ventured to use Stalin's name in the meeting's open sessions: Khrushchev, after slighting the memorial to the late leader, named him again quite respectfully in noting that his death had not caused confusion in Communist ranks as the enemies of socialism had hoped. Mikoyan, the only speaker to heap scorn on Stalin by name, attacked what had been represented as Communism's authoritative blueprint for the future--Stalin's ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM. Otherwise, speakers refrained from naming Stalin in hailing the restoration of "Leninist norms of Party life" such as collective leadership, intra-Party democracy and "socialist legality." They attacked the impersonal "cult of personality," deplored unidentified distortions of history and corrected anonymous erroneous predictions of capitalist stagnation. They looked to Lenin's inspiration to set such errors straight but did not directly impute the errors to Stalin.

Whether planned or the result of the dynamics of pressures upon or within the Soviet top leadership, Khrushchev's sensational indictment of Stalin at the closed final session of the Congress contrasted sharply with the vague criticisms of "mistakes" presented for public Soviet consumption in the speeches delivered at the open sessions. Although the attack on Stalin was gradually expanded and elaborated in Soviet propaganda as de-Stalinization proceeded in the months after the Congress, the public record of the indictment of the dictator available to the ordinary Soviet citizen remains a weak reflection of the contents of the secret speech.

Oral Agitation Precedes Frontal Attacks in Press and Radio

Before the first frontal attack on Stalin appeared in the Soviet press and radio, a month after the Congress ended, rumors spread in the USSR about oral disclosure of the contents of Khrushchev's secret speech. U.S. press correspondents report that the contents of the speech, either in full or in the form of a Central Committee circular, were rumored to have been read at closed meetings of lower Party organizations. It was reportedly also rumored that large segments of the public were informed of the attack on Stalin's misrule at open meetings at factories, enterprises and institutions. The only indication in the Soviet press and radio that such meetings were taking place were contained in brief reports--traditional following a Party Congress--that Party leaders,

secretaries and lecturers were addressing meetings throughout the Soviet Union "on the decisions of the XX Congress." However, a Moscow correspondent for the London DAILY WORKER reported that about 30 million people attended meetings at which the contents of the secret speech were reported.

Although rumors spread through Moscow immediately after the Congress that Khrushchev had attacked Stalin for his mistakes and crimes, Soviet censors did not allow foreign correspondents to report on the subject until after the middle of March. Direct criticisms of Stalin in speeches and articles by foreign Communists, beginning with an article by East German Party Secretary Ulbricht in the first week of March, were excised from reports on those pronouncements in the Soviet press and radio.

Georgians Protest Stalin Defamation

Despite the extreme caution with which the denigration of Stalin was launched, vigorous resistance to the new anti-Stalin policy among nationalistic Georgians--to whom Stalin was first of all a Georgian--touched off pro-Stalin demonstrations in Tbilisi and other Georgian towns. While in the rest of the Soviet Union Stalin's 5 March death anniversary was pointedly ignored, the date was observed in the Georgian press and radio four days late as an obvious concession to pro-Stalin sentiment in Stalin's homeland.

Apparently in the face of volatile pro-Stalin sentiment in Georgia, the campaign against the Stalin cult took a milder and more cautious course there than in the rest of the Soviet Union for a number of months following the Congress. The local press and radio generally avoided independent comment on the harmful results of the Stalin cult. Deference to local sensitivities by Georgian authorities was revealed when the local press and radio reported the appearance of Stalin posters on government buildings and among marchers on Lenin Day and May Day.

It was not until August 1956 that the Georgian Party leadership apparently considered it safe to initiate a concerted propaganda campaign against the Stalin symbol. While the Party leadership revealed a willingness to permit some concessions to powerful resistance to the new line on Stalin, the course of the anti-Stalin campaign in Georgia showed that such concessions were intended as only temporary and tactical.

Removal of Stalin Symbols

While Soviet propaganda held back any open attack on Stalin in the month after the Congress, a quiet process of removing Stalin symbols began. Pictures, statues and busts of Stalin began to disappear from view in such Moscow institutions as the Tretyakov Gallery, the Lenin Museum and the Military museum. A large display of presents given Stalin on his 70th birthday in 1949 was reduced in size and relabeled in such a way as to hide the fact that the gifts were Stalin's. The SHORT COURSE HISTORY OF THE CPSU and Stalin's biography began to disappear from Soviet bookstores. The Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin Institute became the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Moscow's Stalin Automobile Works became the Moscow Automobile Works and was again renamed in June after I. A. Likhachev, a former manager of the enterprise who died on 24 June. The Soviet radio began broadcasting the national anthem without the lyrics, which contain reference to Stalin.

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Although this process began ambitiously, it slowed down after April and has since given no indication that it is intended to erase all visible Stalin symbols.

At the same time, history curricula in the Soviet school system began to be revised, teaching of the history of World War II was discontinued until revised texts were available, and in April the cancelling of final history examinations for students completing secondary schools was announced. One week before PRAVDA's first post-Congress open attack on Stalin, leading Soviet historian Pankratova revealed in a radio interview in Leningrad that a vast long-term process of revising Soviet history was already under way.

PRAVDA Initiates Direct Assault on Stalin in Press and Radio

A month's press and radio silence on Stalin's obvious connection with attacks on the "cult of personality" was broken by PRAVDA on 28 March. An editorial article on that date was the opening gun for a series of elaborations of the attack on Stalin, with the general charges being outlined by the major propaganda organs like PRAVDA and specific charges being detailed by more specialized organs like RED STAR, QUESTIONS OF HISTORY and LITERARY GAZETTE.

The 28 March PRAVDA offered a diluted version of some of the main lines of attack developed by Khrushchev in his secret speech: It declared that the Stalin cult in the course of time "assumed ever more monstrous forms and did serious harm to the cause," which led to the "distortion of Party principles and Party democracy, violation of revolutionary law and unjustified repressions." PRAVDA, however, made it clear that Stalin's reputation was not to be completely destroyed. It said that the Party pays "due tribute to the services of J. V. Stalin," and it acknowledged the "great services" of Stalin as "one of the strongest Marxists." It called in effect for a go-slow approach in the campaign against the Stalin cult.

PRAVDA Places Limits on Censure of Stalin

On 5 April PRAVDA attacked "rotten elements" in the Party and named a number of minor Party functionaries and members who made "anti-Party" statements and questioned the correctness of Party policy under the guise of condemning the Stalin cult. This editorial--given wide publicity in the Soviet Union--was the first overt sign that the leadership was finding it necessary to move against pressures to exceed the new line on Stalin and enter the proscribed realm of criticism of the Party itself.

Echoes of the PRAVDA attack on "rotten elements" were heard in the regional press and radio during April. PARTY LIFE twice in that month--the second time more emphatically than the first--attacked Party members who had ventured to criticize Party policies and even had dared to call for basic policy changes, parroting "slanders" spread by bourgeois propaganda. The philosophical journal VOPROSI FILOSOFII advanced the argument that the principle of "peaceful coexistence" does not mean ideological coexistence for Western ideas in the USSR, an argument frequently repeated since then in Soviet and Bloc propaganda. The journal added that "Leninist blows" must be struck at any manifestations of bourgeois ideology in the Soviet Union. At the same time, the propaganda reflected the Party's concern that the campaign against the "cult of

personality" could generate widespread disrespect of the authority of leaders in general. Shepilov, in his Lenin Day speech in late April, put special stress on the "great importance" of the leader despite the attack on the cult.

Scope of Bloc-Wide Attacks on Stalin Suppressed

Two days after PRAVDA warned about the perils of straying from the official line on the Stalin cult, the press and radio widely publicized PRAVDA's abridged reprint of a PEOPLE'S DAILY editorial article giving the Chinese Communist Politburo's views on Stalin. This was the first inkling provided to the Soviet public by overt propaganda that Communist parties abroad were also attacking the Stalin cult.

However, the propaganda continued to withhold from the Soviet public the knowledge that criticism of the Stalin cult had been up to then more detailed and incisive in the Satellite countries of Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. The Chinese editorial article presented in the barest outline two additional charges against Stalin which had not yet appeared in Soviet media--that Stalin had not been vigilant on the eve of the Nazi attack on the USSR in 1941 and that he had pursued an incorrect policy toward Yugoslavia.

Details of Stalin Cult Provided--and Debated--by Specialized Journals

Mass propaganda treatment of the cult remained generalized after the 28 March and 7 April PRAVDA editorial articles on the Stalin cult. A host of Party, professional and specialized publications (SOVIET STATE AND LAW, PROBLEMS OF HISTORY, KOMMUNIST, PARTY LIFE, RED STAR, BULLETIN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET, and many others) took up the task of more detailed elaboration of the Stalin charges, developed the attack on various Stalinist practices, and rehabilitated victims of the Stalin era. The specifics of the campaign as a whole were thus being mainly directed to special audiences and could only become generally known by a gradual 'filtering-through' process.

Late in April KOMMUNIST took up the allegation that Stalin had pursued incorrect farm policies and had little first-hand knowledge of countryside conditions. Like all the rest of the charges against Stalin to appear in overt Soviet media, this was a weak echo of Khrushchev's accusations in his secret report.

At the end of April the MILITARY HERALD provided the first details in the press of the charge that Stalin had failed to properly prepare the USSR for the German attack in World War II. On 9 May, however, RED STAR took issue with that charge and indicated that MILITARY HERALD had come too close to an indictment of the Party itself on the question--though in fact the MILITARY HERALD's position closely followed that presented by Khrushchev in his secret speech. QUESTIONS OF HISTORY soon came out in support of the MILITARY HERALD's position, and the dispute was officially ended in MILITARY HERALD's favor by KOMMUNIST, the Party's most authoritative organ. The implementation of de-Stalinization emerged as not simply a problem of carrying out full, clear-cut propaganda directives, but as a problem involving areas of ambiguity and even disagreement.

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The Rewrite of Stalinist History

During April QUESTIONS OF HISTORY, coming out almost a month late, refuted the thesis that Stalin had single-handedly led the Soviet Union to victory in World War II, pointed to Stalin's insufficient attention to Lenin's strictures on anti-Semitism, and charged him with deviations from Leninist principles in nationalities policy.

At the same time, the authoritative history organ contributed to the process of clearing the names of leading purge victims of the thirties, a process effected by press organs rather than by formal announcements of rehabilitation. The rehabilitation procedure was kept as unobtrusive and unsensational as possible: The 22 April PRAVDA, for example, printed a previously unpublished letter from Lenin to Rykov, one of the major purge victims, thus subtly rehabilitating Rykov by presenting his name in a not unfavorable light.

In May QUESTIONS OF HISTORY pointed critically to Stalin's March-April 1917 alliance with Kamenev--shot as a counterrevolutionary in 1936--against Molotov in supporting the Provisional government. Stalin's "centrist" position in this period, soon to be overruled by Lenin, had for obvious reasons never been alluded to in official Soviet histories during Stalin's reign. The same issue of the historical journal punctured the myths of Stalinist historiography that the late leader had headed the Caucasus branch of the Russian Workers' Social Democratic Party from 1903 to 1905, that he had organized an underground printing plant in Baku, and that he had led the Baku oil workers' strike in 1904. The journal also continued the rehabilitation process by calling for a reissue of the writings of such former Politburo members as Voznesensky, Kossior, Postyshev, Rudzutak and Chubar, all executed on Stalin's orders.

The concurrent process of rewriting Stalinist history to conform to the new propaganda line was highlighted in June when the publication of Volume 40 of THE GREAT SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA was indefinitely delayed, presumably because the job of rewriting Stalin's biography which would appear in this volume had not been completed. Several succeeding volumes have been issued, but Volume 40 is still to appear. Especially in view of the more positive evaluation of Stalin being formulated in the USSR in early 1957, the writing of the new biography appears to be a particularly challenging task.

De-Stalinization of Law and the Arts

During April the BULLETIN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET listed new decrees abolishing Stalin's special investigatory and court organs designed to facilitate the execution of purges and at the same time setting up special organs to check on the activities of security agencies. In May the same publication announced the revocation of the Stalinist labor laws calling for severe penalties for workers who leave their jobs without permission.

The journal SOVIET STATE AND LAW also contributed in May to the revisions in the legal field. The high point in this process was the journal's attack on the late Andrei Vishinsky, state prosecutor during the purge trials, for his doctrine of proving guilt on the basis of confessions alone. KOMMUNIST gave the criticism high official sanction by repeating it and conceding that the doctrine had at times led to false convictions.

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In April the organ of the Union of Soviet Writers, LITERARY GAZETTE, spoke of the "dreadful sickness" that the Stalin cult had produced in literature and the arts. It struck out at the Stalin prize-winning motion pictures "The Vow" and "The Fall of Berlin," in which the image of Stalin predominated.

Public Disclosure of the Lenin Testament

One of the most carefully guarded documents of Soviet history concealed from public view in the USSR during the Stalin era, the "Lenin testament," was one of a number of incriminating documents used as exhibits in the indictment of Stalin at the XX Congress secret session. It was circumspectly introduced into the propaganda in mid-May. The testament, in which Lenin called for the removal of Stalin from the post of General Secretary, was first publicized only in part and without identification in the youth paper KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA, in the form of a "guide" for youth on the Stalin cult. KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA said it was publishing the "guide," which quoted without attribution some of the Lenin testament's most uncomplimentary remarks about Stalin, in response to numerous inquiries from youth regarding the attack on the Stalin cult. It was not until over a month later that the testament was published in full by KOMMUNIST along with an editorial asserting that "Stalin committed serious errors in leadership over agriculture, military affairs and in the area of foreign policy." Along with the testament, KOMMUNIST also presented for the first time a number of other Lenin documents distributed at the secret session of the XX Congress. The Lenin documents were given added broad distribution in the form of a pamphlet, of which a million copies were published. On 2 July, the day those pamphlets appeared, another pamphlet came out with the text of the Central Committee's 30 June resolution "On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences."

Central Committee Resolution Offers "Clear-cut" Answers About the Cult

The 30 June resolution, widely publicized by the Soviet press and radio, signalled a shift in the focus of mass propaganda with respect to Stalinism. It called for a halt to Western Communist assaults on Khrushchev's explanation of the sources and meaning of the Stalin cult, and it made it clear that any challenges of the legitimacy of the present leadership on the basis of attacks on the cult would not be tolerated.

The resolution came close on the heels of PRAVDA's 27 June reprint of an article by U.S. Communist Eugene Dennis that had appeared in the New York DAILY WORKER. The PRAVDA reprint had constituted Soviet propaganda's first response to foreign Communist criticism of the Khrushchev secret speech and first public acknowledgment that the speech existed. The mildest of the foreign Communist criticisms and the most complimentary to the Soviet leadership, Dennis' article was used to pave the way for the 30 June resolution.

The mounting foreign Communist criticism, resulting from the widespread dissemination of the Khrushchev secret speech abroad, had forced Soviet propaganda to go on the defensive. The resolution and a follow-up PRAVDA editorial article heralded an end to the effort in domestic mass propaganda, cautious as that effort had been, to convince the Soviet people of the harmfulness of Stalinist rule. In the propaganda, the Party's achievements, unblemished record and infallibility had not been seriously compromised by the Stalin cult and were to be the proper

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focus of attention henceforth. The role of the Communist Party as the "only master of the minds and thoughts, the spokesman, leader and organizer of the people in their entire struggle for Communism" was forcefully reasserted. In a hackneyed defense of the one-party system, PRAVDA indicated that to entertain the idea of a two-party system in the USSR was rank heresy.

PRAVDA indicated that the 30 June resolution had provided "clear-cut" answers to questions on the Stalin cult from which no substantiated deviations would be allowable. By releasing the Lenin documents, the Soviet leadership had invoked an unimpeachable authority for its use against Stalin without compromising itself. The possibility of release of Khrushchev's secret speech, which delved into the present leaders' relations with Stalin, seemed sharply reduced; the likelihood that the text may be introduced into the propaganda seems even more remote now. The expurgated fragments of the speech fed to the Soviet people in small but cumulative doses over a period of some four months still represents the extent to which the present leadership deems it wise to go in registering the case against Stalin in the full view of the whole Soviet population.

Since most of the text of the secret speech became public knowledge outside the Soviet Bloc in early June 1956, Khrushchev's explanation that the speech would be withheld from the public to prevent giving "ammunition to the enemy" obviously can no longer be the rationale for not publishing it in the Soviet Union. The cautious, piecemeal approach to informing the Soviet people of the case against Stalin, allowing only the Party faithful to learn the full story in detail, reflects what seems to be an underlying distrust and fear of the Soviet masses, based on the concept that the greater the knowledge, the greater the danger.