

JOSEPH STALIN

The Story of a Life that Rivals a Fascinating Detective Romance

There is perhaps no world figure so little known as Stalin, the present ruler of Russia. To-day he is the most powerful personality in Communism. His life story rivals the most dangerous and fascinating detective romance. Born in 1879, he has crowded into his life more fighting action than any other serving ruler in the world. As a political revolutionist under the Tsar's régime he was arrested six times, escaped five, and spent seven years in jail or exile. Few newspaper correspondents have ever seen him. His mother is a woman of unusual power. She said that her husband had been a Georgian of peasant origin who worked in a shoe factory. The family name was Dzhugashvili. They had four children, but three died in infancy. Stalin, who was the youngest, was therefore in effect an only child. He was not physically strong. The family was not prosperous, the food was poor, and he was often sick. At seven he had small-pox, which left his face pitted. In spite of all this he was first in his studies, and his mother proudly declared that he was ahead of all the boys in everything. His mother was a devout Christian and had literally prayed her son into theological seminary, hoping he would serve her country as a priest.

Nothing interested the youth quite so much as ideas and reading. His father did not care for politics, but even as a youngster the son managed to join a secret political circle. When he was ten his father died. The family was left penniless, but the mother, often sitting up until two or three at night, sewing, earned the necessary livelihood, and set aside every penny that could be saved for the religious education of the boy.

After finishing the local religious high school at fourteen, Stalin was sent to the theological seminary at the capital in Tiflis. At that time the institution was a hotbed of revolutionary doctrine, both nationalist and Marxist, and Stalin soon became the leader of the Marxist circle. In touch with the illegal Social Democratic organizations of the city, he distributed revolutionary literature and attended secret meetings of the railroad workers. In 1898 the authorities searched his room, found a copy of Marx, and promptly expelled him. It was a great blow to his mother, although she had feared it; for, although Stalin never talked politics at home, she had seen him hiding illegal

journals. Still she did not dream that he was really against the Czar, and it was not until his arrest in Baku that comrades explained all to her. Finally, in 1905, after her son had repeatedly been arrested and her prayers had remained unanswered, she lost her faith in God, dimly realizing then that the priests were supporting the Czar and betraying the people.

As a result of his expulsion from the seminary as a boy of nineteen he had firmly resolved to devote the rest of his life to the overthrow of the Czar's régime, and after examining all the different political parties had decided to join the Social Democrats.

The older revolutionists in Tiflis had been content with secret propaganda. Now came Stalin to champion the young, restless radicals who wanted to plunge into mass demonstrations and parades, as well as to distribute to the masses illegal leaflets on popular contemporary issues; and Stalin won over the majority. In 1900-1902 he engineered mass strikes in Tiflis, and on the first of May a great political demonstration. Immediately the party headquarters and his own apartment were raided. Stalin began to live under assumed names and to move every few days. He successively became known as David, Koba, Nisheradze, Cheshehoff, Ivanovitch; but the name which finally stuck was Stalin, or "Steel," not inappropriate in view of his present position.

Stalin next became a professional paid agitator for the party, and was transferred to Baku. He organized successful strikes in two of the oil plants, and a grand political demonstration in February, 1902. In March he was arrested and imprisoned until the end of the next year, when he was exiled to Eastern Siberia. Within a month he had escaped and returned to Tiflis.

While in jail in Baku, Stalin had learned of the fight between Lenin, representing the Bolsheviks (Majority), and the Mensheviks (Minority) of the party, and had become a strong supporter of Lenin and the policy of direct action. After his escape he organized the party all over the Caucasus in support of Lenin. He edited illegal Bolshevik papers, such as "The Proletariat Struggle" and "The Baku Workman," and wrote many pamphlets, such as "A Summary of the Party Split," "Anarchism" and "Socialism," and so forth. In 1905 he attended the party conference in

Finland, and in 1906 began to edit a weekly, *Time*. The same year he attended the Stockholm congress and another in London. On his return from London, he once more organized the workers of Baku.

His former associates say that there was no one quite so effective as Stalin in interesting the workers and making them see the injustice of their condition. Illegal meetings were organized in the evenings, to which the workers were invited, and Stalin would talk. He was particularly effective in arranging strikes. Many a time at a secret meeting one of the older workers would express doubts as to the advisability of such a dangerous course, but his argument would be swept aside by the clear, insistent plea of Stalin. Constructively, Stalin managed to conclude effective agreements with the oil magnates, improving working conditions, and this enormously increased his prestige with the workers.

In 1908 he was arrested a second time, being implicated in the work of the Baku committee, and after some time in the local prison was again exiled, this time to Irkutsk. His wife, whom he had married in 1905, did not survive the rigors of exile. One boy, the survivor of this union, is now studying at Moscow.

In 1909 Stalin again managed to escape and again returned to Baku. He plunged at once into the work of organizing every single oil plant in the city. He was in the room. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that inside of a year he faced prison and a six-year exile. But again in less than twelve months he had escaped and made his way in disguise to St. Petersburg. Barely six months later he was arrested while at work for the Central Committee of the party, but the Czar's police did not know him, and he was exiled for only three years, managing to escape in 1911.

Stalin at this time was either exceptionally clever or exceptionally lucky, for the Czar's police always accused him of relatively minor crimes: of being the organizer of some street parade, the editor of some illegal publication, the leader of a strike, and so forth. Consequently, while he was always in trouble, his sentences were relatively light. In April, 1912, he was again arrested and exiled. In September of the same year he escaped across the border into Cra-

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authorities had no answer. On May Day of 1935 a twenty-two-years-old Communist, the local school teacher, organized the peasants from the neighboring farms and led a May Day march on the village. They carried a red banner inscribed with the words "Give Us Schools for Our Children" and well over a thousand peasants, ancient Poles whose ancestors had tilled the soil for generations, their wives, younger folk and children of school age, marched upon the village of Kolki. There was a picnicky air about it. The long winter was over. May and the sun and warmth were here and to most of the gay and laughing line it was a great big party to be enjoyed, a sort of communal celebration. The young teacher led the procession and as they approached the long, level road leading to the village they met a group of policemen obviously on their way to intercept them.

"Where are you going?" the police demanded.

"To the village to ask for free schools," the teacher responded gaily.

"Our children will not be as dark and ignorant as we," said several peasants crowding around the police.

"You cannot march on the village," said the police.

"But the new constitution has guaranteed us free schools," the teacher protested.

"You will have to disperse," said the police. "You cannot march on Kolki."

"But all that these peasants and children want is to ask for the free schools the constitution has guaranteed them," the girl protested.

The police officer shook his head angrily and spread out his arms to signify that the road was barred. The girl turned to the peasants and waving the red banner with the words "Give Us Schools for Our Children" she called. "We have the right to march to Kolki and we are marching."

The policeman slapped her and in a few moments the gay and happy peasants and their wives had so set upon the police, kicking and cuffing them, that they beat a hasty retreat.

"Ah," sighed the old peasant, "we laughed—even the children laughed when we saw them running back to Kolki; and the teacher laughed and said that that showed what we could do when we were determined, that a few policemen could not stop us."

They marched on again, singing the International, laughing and joking about how the police had run away.

And then they saw a detachment of soldiers in the distance and an old peasant, wise in the ways of the military, called a halt.

"They are there to stop us from going

to Kolki," he said. "They will threaten us."

"We are not children to be frightened," said another. "I have been a soldier and I am not frightened so easily."

They placed the children in the front line so that the soldier could see they were on a peaceful mission, placed them right behind the teacher who was leading them and carrying the red banner asking that the children be not allowed to grow up in the darkness of their elders.

The officer in command of the soldiers shouted to them to stop. The teachers' face flushed as red as the banner she carried and she turned to the peasants behind her.

"Let us sing!" she called loudly. "All together—as we go to demand the end of darkness for our children!"

She waved the red banner and her voice came strong like a challenge to battle:

"Arise! Ye prisoners of starvation—"

The children who had learned the song joined in. Quavering peasant voices picked it up and then the voices were drowned out by a burst of machine-gun fire.

Nineteen were killed. Twelve little children who had gone to plead for free schools that they might not grow up in the darkness of their elders, the teacher, still clutching the banner even in death and six peasants. They had been "pacified."

"We could not even bury our dead," said the old peasant, rubbing a grimy hand over his nose. "We were told that here and there they are buried, the teacher and the children. There were many wounded and when we fled we carried them with us to our homes."

Not a word of the massacre was published. The organ of the Socialist Party, *Robbotnik*, learned of it and tried to publish an account of what had happened and the issue was promptly confiscated.

"And now?" I asked.

He stared at the floor.

"Now we remember our dead," the old peasant said quietly.

We sat silent for a while, none of us feeling much like talking after this tale.

"Some day," said the peasant slowly, "where those children died and where that teacher lies buried, blood will run like a river in the spring and it will not be the blood of peasant children."

"They will shoot you down as before," I said.

"They will shoot many of us down," he returned quietly, "but there"—he motioned to the east—"not a two day's journey by even a starving horse, are soldiers of the peasants. They are our soldiers. And they will come to help us."

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cow, in Austria, and was able to take part in the conference of the party with Lenin, when he was elected a member of the Central Committee.

Some Russian revolutionists of this period spent considerable time abroad studying in comparative security. Not so Stalin. He was always at the most dangerous front, giving himself unsparingly to the illegal work of his party. In 1913 he took part in the elective campaign for the fourth Duma (congress) and became leader of the Bolshevik faction. At that time he was also one of the editors of the illegal Bolshevik papers, "The Star" and "The Truth." In February, 1913, he was arrested for the sixth time and exiled under a heavy guard. This time he did not escape and was freed only by the February revolution.

In the Bolshevik Revolution Stalin was one of the committee of five who managed the uprising, working shoulder to shoulder with Lenin and strongly favoring the seizure of power, in opposition to Zinoviev and Kamenev, who cautioned delay. From 1917 to 1923 he was People's Commissar of Nationalities, the man who initiated the successful policy of giving cultural autonomy and local freedom to the nationalities within the Union. Besides this, from 1919 to 1920, he was People's Commissar for Workers and Peasants Inspection, and from 1920 to 1923, a member of the Revolutionary War Council of the Republic.

The intervention in Russian affairs of England, France, Japan and the United States threw him into the civil war. He was sent from one front to another, serving against Udenitch, Denikin and the Poles, and, for his heroism he was decorated with the highest Soviet order of the Red Sign.

It is always the custom for the Red Army soldiers to greet a commander with a cheer. On the front near Petrograd one December, Stalin noted that the soldiers did not greet him with enthusiasm. Halting one whose tightly compressed lips indicated complete silence, Stalin asked, "Why?" The man pointed to his own feet, clad only in straw sandals. Stalin immediately took off his own fine leather boots, gave them to the soldier, and took in return the straw sandals, which he wore all winter, sharing the deprivation with his men.

One of his comrades, Sturo, told his adventures during the direst days of the civil war, when it was a race between starvation and defeat at the Allies' hands. Stalin was food dictator. Said Sturo:

"I was commissioned to secure food for Baku. At the time Baku had a

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population of 200,000, with 75,000 workers. Grain was collected at the mouth of the river Volga to be distributed all over Russia. I carried my own armed force. After months of desperate work we had 300,000 poods of wheat. Then I had to get boats to ship it to Baku. All was arranged and I was happy, when officers of Stalin's men said, 'It makes no difference what orders you have. If we do not get grain and go back to Stalin with empty hands we shall be shot.' These men had a larger fighting force, and I realized that it would either mean a terrible fight or else surrender. Baku was starving. I decided to appeal personally to Stalin.

"At that time Stalin was virtually a dictator in the matter of securing grain. He almost never received anyone in his room except his lieutenants. He was like a lion in his cage, always pacing up and down. In spite of everything, I managed to get to him and plead for Baku. Stalin brushed the plea aside with the statement, 'What nonsense you are talking. If we lose Baku, it is nothing. We will take it again inside of a few months or a year at the most. If we lose Moscow, we lost everything. Then the revolution is ended.' The grain went to Stalin and Moscow."

Perhaps the most striking military achievement of Stalin was his defense

tanging upuan sa mga tanghalan ng mga dula o nang sariling pitak sa mga pahayagan, o ng kaunting taas sa kanilang sahod, o nang tanging kagaanan sa paglalakbay, at kung minsan, ng isang automobil at halaga ng sa kanya ay paggamit.

Marami pa sana akong dapat na sabihin, nguni't ito ang aking panghuling wikang masasabi: Ang aking pagkakadalaw sa Rusya ay nakapagbigay sigla sa aking pananalig sa kakayahan ng mga tao, sa kanilang mga hangarin at walang likat na pagsusumakit na nagbunga ng mainam at malulusog na mga balak na maaari nilang isagawa sa pagtutuwangan. Iya'y nakapagpatibay pa sa aking pananalig sa magandang maibubunga ng demokrasya na nababatay sa bagong paraan ng karunungan.

of the town of Tsaritsin, on the lower Volga, against the attacks of the anti-Bolshevist forces. The city has since been rechristened Stalingrad in his honor.

For a time Stalin worked as secretary to Lenin, then later he became General Secretary of the Communist Party. Previously this position had never been considered of central strategic importance, being rather a routine job, consisting of such formal and technical duties as preparing circular letters for the party organizations and outlining programs passed by the Central Committee. Stalin now made it the direct nerve center of the party. It gave him the chance to send out political workers throughout Russia, and to learn from the inside the methods of political organization. His previous heroic work made every one recognize his authority.

Stalin to-day is a man of medium height, erect, well built, with a heavy black mustache, thick hair, dark penetrating eyes and a handsome face. His speech is characteristic of the man, blunt and direct; he does not attempt to hide his meaning. On the other hand, as with so many key politicians, he does not place himself in the spotlight, although in 1930 he has assumed public leadership as never before. Stalin never acted as if the revolution were the opportunity for him to parade his genius. He is not an inspired orator or a brilliant writer, but is a man of iron will, extraordinary energy and an utter lack of fear. There is little question that he is extraordinary skilful and adroit in party politics.

It would be easy to magnify the role which Stalin is now playing. He is easily the most important man in Russia to-day, but the entire theory of Communist tactics is that the individual is nothing, the party is everything. Stalin rules because he has his ear close to the ground and knows what the rank and file of the party want. He has an extraordinary knack of keeping in touch with the changing moods of the common people, especially of the peasants. We have already mentioned the fact that long before he took the reins of power he inaugurated the policy of cultural autonomy for subject nationalities. Stalin insisted that, in contradiction to the policy of the Czar, every subject group could study in their own dialect or language and could have full power to print books and newspapers in their own tongue. In 1924 he insisted on democracy in the villages. He sensed the desire of the peasants for more economic liberty, and was instrumental in passing a law, against party opposition, giving the



NAKIKIDALAMHATI ANG
"SOSYALISMO NGAYON"
AT ANG KUSP SA PAG-
YAO NG KAIBIGANG
SUSANO GONZALES

Sa isang kapasyahan na pinagtibay ng Lupong Tagapagpaganap ng Mga Kaibigan ng Unyong Sobyet sa Pilipinas, ito ay taos na nakikidalamhati sa madaling pagyao ng Kaibigan Susano Gonzales, na sumakabilang buhay noong ika 23 ng Hulio, 1936, sa kanyang tahanan bilang 424 J. Zamora, Pako.

Ang Kaibigan Susano Gonzales ng siya ay nabubuhay pa ay isa sa mga lalong masusugid at masipag na kasapi ng samahan, isang tapat at marangal na kaibigan ng Unyong Sobyet, at isa sa tagapagtanggol ng mga pambihirang kabuhayan at mga simula ng nasabing bansa.

Ang Pahayagang ito at ang Samahang nagpapalabas dito ay nakikidalamhati sa kanyang mga anak at asawang naulila sa pagkawala ng isang kaibigan tapat at dakila.

peasant greater freedom in hiring help.

Stalin is a genuine believer in Communist principles; in spite of all that has been said about his conservatism, he has merely tried to harmonize practice with realities. By 1930 he has come to be recognized as the key figure in present-day Communism and it is now fairly settled that history will rank him, next to Lenin, the outstanding leader in the Russian Revolution. (Adapted from Contemporary Social Movements, by J Davis).