

SPEECH TO THE TWENTIETH CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY 1956

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Joseph Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953. During this period, he industrialized the country, transformed the agricultural system, and helped to defeat Germany in World War II. However, Stalin also crushed individual freedom and increased his power through police terror. After he died, his brutal tactics were brought to light, sometimes by political followers such as Nikita Khrushchev, the new head of the Communist Party. In 1956, Khrushchev stunned the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party when he delivered the following report attacking Stalin as a man of “sickly suspicion.”

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Motives

Why do you think Khrushchev delivered this devastating attack on the former leader of the Soviet Union?

Lenin used severe methods only in the most necessary cases, when the exploiting classes¹ were still in existence and were vigorously opposing the revolution, when the struggle for survival was decidedly assuming the sharpest forms, even including civil war.

Stalin, on the other hand, used extreme methods and mass repressions at a time when the revolution was already victorious, when the Soviet state was strengthened, when the exploiting classes were already liquidated and Socialist relations were rooted solidly in all phases of national economy, when our party was politically consolidated² and had strengthened itself both numerically and ideologically. It is clear that here Stalin showed in a whole series of cases his intolerance, his brutality and his abuse of power. . . .

Stalin was a very distrustful man, sickly suspicious; we knew this from our work with him. He could look at a man and say: “Why are your eyes so shifty today?” or “Why are you turning so much today and avoiding to look at me directly in the eyes?” The sickly suspicion created in him general distrust even toward eminent Party workers whom he had known for years. Everywhere and in everything he saw “enemies, two-facers, and spies. . . .”

The power accumulated in the hands of one person, Stalin, led to serious consequences during the Great Patriotic War.

When we look at many of our novels, films, and historical “scientific studies,” the role of Stalin in the Patriotic War appears to be entirely improbable. Stalin had

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1. **exploiting classes:** Capitalists and other anti-Communists
 2. **consolidated:** united in one system

foreseen everything. The Soviet Army, on the basis of a strategic plan prepared by Stalin long before, used the tactics of so-called “active defense,” i.e., tactics which, as we all know, allowed the Germans to come up to Moscow and Stalingrad. Using such tactics the Soviet Army, supposedly, thanks only to Stalin’s genius, turned to the offensive and subdued the enemy. . . .

During the war and after the war Stalin put forward the thesis that the tragedy which our nation experienced in the first part of the war was the result of the “unexpected” attack of the Germans against the Soviet Union. But, Comrades, this is completely untrue. As soon as Hitler came to power in Germany he assigned himself the task of liquidating Communism. The Fascists were saying this openly; they did not hide their plans. In order to attain this aggressive end all sorts of pacts and blocs were created, such as the famous Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis. Many facts from the pre-war period clearly showed that Hitler was going all out to begin a war against the Soviet State and that he had concentrated large armed units, together with armored units, near the Soviet borders.

Documents which have now been published show that by April 3, 1941, Churchill, through his ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Cripps, personally warned Stalin that the Germans had begun regrouping their armed units with the intent of attacking the Soviet Union. However, Stalin took no heed of these warnings. What is more, Stalin ordered that no credence be given to information of this sort, in order not to provoke the initiation of military operations. . . .

Had our industry been mobilized properly and in time to supply the army with the necessary material, our wartime losses would have been decidedly smaller. Such mobilization had not been, however, started in time. And already in the first days of the war it became evident that our army was badly armed, that we did not have enough artillery, tanks and planes to throw the enemy back. . . .

We must state that after the war the situation became even more complicated. Stalin became even more capricious, irritable, and brutal; in particular his suspicions grew. His persecution mania reached unbelievable dimensions. . . .

Let us recall the “Affair of the Doctor-Plotters.” [Animation in the Hall] Actually there was no “Affair” outside of the declaration of the woman doctor, Timashuk, who was probably influenced or ordered by someone (after all, she was an unofficial collaborator of the organs of State security), to write to Stalin a letter in which she declared that doctors were applying supposedly improper methods of medical treatment.

Such a letter was sufficient for Stalin to reach an immediate conclusion that there are doctor-plotters in the Soviet Union. He issued orders to arrest a group of eminent Soviet medical specialists. He personally issued advice on the conduct of the investigation and the method of interrogation of the arrested persons. He said that the academician Vinogradov should be put in chains, another one should be beaten. Present at this Congress is a delegate, former Minister of State Security, Comrade Ignatiev. Stalin told him curtly, “If you do not obtain confessions from the doctors we will shorten you by a head.” [Tumult in the Hall]

Stalin personally called the investigative judge, gave him instruction, advised him on which investigative methods should be used; these methods were simple—beat, beat, and once again, beat.

Shortly after the doctors were arrested we members of the Political Bureau received protocols on the doctors: confessions of guilt. After distributing these protocols Stalin told us, “You are blind like young kittens; what will happen without me? The country will perish because you do not know how to recognize enemies.”

The case was so presented that no one could verify the facts on which the investigation was based. There was no possibility of trying to verify facts by contrasting those who had made the confessions of guilt.

We felt, however, that the case of the arrested doctors was questionable. We knew some of these people personally because they had once treated us. When we examined this “case” after Stalin’s death, we found it to be fabricated from beginning to end.

Source: Excerpt from U.S. Department of State press release, June 4, 1956.