Historicus* on Stalin

Recent "revisionist" interpretations of the origins of the cold war have focused on the views of American statesmen but have generally shied away from any direct analysis of the Soviet leadership's perspectives on international politics in the 1941-1947 period. Most "revisionists" are specialists in American diplomatic history and their knowledge of Soviet materials has not matched their familiarity with American sources. As a result, their efforts to reassess the role of American leaders in the deterioration of Soviet-American relations have either neglected Stalin's views or imputed to him characteristics formerly associated with his American counterparts. The revisionists' reluctance to deal with Stalin's view of the world at that time may also be attributed to the obscure nature of his public statements; in contrast to American public pronouncements, Stalin's brief, cryptic interviews and speeches seem to provide little basis for a coherent reconstruction of his views.

In fact, not only have revisionists refrained from treating Stalin's pronouncements during this period, but no full scale effort to interpret Stalin's statements has appeared since 1949 with the publication of Historicus' essay "Stalin on Revolution" in Foreign Affairs. 1 Historicus concluded that Stalin's remarks could be understood only by examining them in the context of his previous analysis of international politics, thus he sought to determine Stalin's commitment to proletarian revolution in the 1940's by analyzing his discussion of revolution in the 1918-1948 period.

While Historicus' article never achieved the fame of George Kennan's study of the USSR's behavior, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1947), it was incorporated in widely read anthologies dealing with Soviet foreign policy and thus became part of the "conventional wisdom" of the 1950's and 1960's. For the graduate student of that era, Historicus' article came to be regarded as a model of analysis of Soviet public pronouncements. It was based entirely on Russian language versions of Stalin's works; it was unadorned by any reference to secondary works on Communist ideology or Soviet behavior; therefore it seemed free from any preconceived notions which might distort the analysis.

Historicus concluded that Stalin viewed the USSR as an instrument of "world revolution" and so sought to promote proletarian revolution abroad as a matter of Soviet governmental policy in the 1940's. In light of these objectives, argued Historicus, it was

**"Historicus" was the pseudonym of George A. Morgan of the United States Department of State. Mr. Morgan wrote this essay at Columbia University's Russian Institute and served as first secretary in the American Embassy in Moscow from 1948 to 1950.

1. There is one notable exception. A forthcoming study by Professor William O. McCagg of Michigan State University deals with the meaning and significance of Stalin's pronouncements within the context of internal political conflicts in the 1943-1948 period. Professor McCagg's remarkable study exposes the linkages between foreign and domestic policies by focusing on Stalin's efforts to cope with the "party revival" within the Soviet political elite.
possible to distinguish between pronouncements which were "propaganda" and those which were reflections of Stalin's "real intentions." This conclusion seemed to be well documented by appropriate quotes and by a discussion of the political implications of the selective republication of various key works.

However, a reexamination of the materials cited by Historicus indicates that his major conclusions and methodology were strongly influenced by certain a priori assumptions about the nature of the Communist movement, the USSR, and by the anxieties produced by Soviet governmental policy toward Eastern Europe in the 1940's. A completely different interpretation of Stalin's perspectives on proletarian revolution and the USSR's role in this transformation emerges from these same materials now that our anxiety about the USSR's intentions has dramatically decreased.

Historicus' central assumption was what he called the "acknowledged Communist practice of pursuing long range strategy by means of highly variable tactical lines." He applied this distinction not only to Communist parties seeking to overthrow the "bourgeoisie" and create new socialist states, but also to Stalin's pronouncements and to the behavior of the USSR.

Most important, Historicus regarded Stalin's statements of the 1920's, in which Stalin referred directly to the goal of proletarian revolution, as indicators of his "long range strategy" and therefore a more accurate reflection of his goals for the 1940's than public statements made in the latter period. The statements delivered from 1941 to 1947, which either ignored or denied the goal of proletarian revolution, were considered by Historicus as tactical efforts to deceive non-Communists about Stalin's actual intentions.

Historicus claimed that this distinction between strategy and tactics was borne out by the way Stalin's works were republished. In particular, he concluded that the statements included in the two volumes most widely used for political education, Voprosy Leninizma and Istoriia vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (Bolshevikov) (the so-called Short Course), were statements of strategic doctrine while materials not included in these volumes were "mere temporary shifts in line." Consequently, Historicus focused on two essays written by Stalin in 1924 which were consistently reprinted in each subsequent edition of Voprosy Leninizma as the "essence" of his theory of revolutionary change, while many important subsequent statements about proletarian revolution which were not incorporated into this collection were either ignored or regarded as tactical maneuvers.

One key example illustrates the impact of this methodology. Historicus pointed out that in 1924 Stalin defined the goals of the "third stage" of the revolution begun in 1917 as follows: "The goal of this phase is to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country using it as a base for overthrowing imperialism in all countries. The revolution spreads beyond the confines of one country—the epoch of world revolution

3. The two essays were "Ob osnovakh leninizma" and "Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i taktika russkikh kommunistov." Unfortunately, Historicus did not notice that the editors of Stalin's Sochinenia, which began publication in 1946, implied that the new collection was designed to alleviate the inadequacies of the everchanging editions of Voprosy Leninizma as an expression of Stalin's thought. See I. V. Stalin, Sochinenia, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1946-1950), I, vi-vii; The official English translation of Stalin's writings appeared in J. V. Stalin, Works, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1953-1954). All subsequent citations in parentheses refer to the English text. (I, vi-vii).