

# *The American* MERCURY

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## THE END OF JOSEPH STALIN

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THESE words are being written a few days after Germany launched its titanic and unprovoked offensive against an astonished Russia. Vice-Premier Molotov's pitiable stutter, apprising the world that his master had been utterly loyal to Hitler and that the Nazi boss had not even complained on that score, is still unpleasantly fresh in memory. Communist-inspired strikes to cripple American defense output — minor items in Moscow's mountain of appeasement gifts to Berlin — are still under way. There has not even been time for the Muscovite isolationist and "peace" outfits to change their names and "principles."

But by the time this issue of THE AMERICAN MERCURY reaches

its readers, the picture will doubtless be clearer. Events will have written a large part of the story in blood on the dusty steppes of Eastern Europe. Unless a miracle intervenes, the gluttonous invader is likely to have torn off and devoured fat chunks of Russian territory. After that, political convulsions in the truncated country would surprise no one. Because the Kremlin camarilla is more concerned with saving its power than saving its country, an early "negotiated peace" at the point of Nazi bayonets is always possible — provided that Hitler is content with anything short of the overthrow and destruction of the Georgian dictator. In any case, by conquest or capitulation or compromise, the Soviet empire is likely to be closer

to integration with Hitler's "new order."

Beyond that we have no warrant to guess or to speculate. Those who hate totalitarian barbarism in any shade, brown, black or red, can only hope for a protracted struggle, for the tactical advantage the interval may give Britain and America.

One thing, however, may be assumed with reasonable assurance: that we are witnessing the violent and ignominious end of the Caucasian brigand-chief Dzugashvili, known to history as Joseph Stalin. Whether he survives physically or is slaughtered even as he slaughtered a hundred thousand of his comrades, the Stalin of the Soviet myth — strong, shrewd, masterful, deeply Machiavellian — is already "liquidated." It was from that myth, now shattered beyond repair, that his authority in large measure derived. Stalin may remain as Germany's puppet, as a kind of Russian Laval or Pétain; or he may emerge with the semblance of independent authority. His world-wide ideological empire of Communist Parties and open or secret "front" organizations may survive a few years longer through sheer inertia. But the Stalin of the past, the fabulous Great Leader, is no more.

Had events merely confirmed that Stalin is cruel and corrupt, he

might have survived intact. Success unfortunately is its own justification, while it lasts. But events have proven that he is also politically short-sighted and stupid. Against the fires of the Russo-German war Stalin stands limned for history and for his subject hordes as a great blunderer. He has been exposed as pathetically inept in the one art in which even his detractors granted he possessed a sort of genius: the art of duplicity. His super-Machiavellism has backfired. He has been hopelessly tangled in a cobweb of his own eager spinning. And that no modern dictator, since he relies in the final analysis on a legend of infallibility and omniscience and uninterrupted triumph, can possibly survive.

European statesmanship has been at a tragically low level in the two decades between the two World Wars. Nations which had produced Richelieu and Metternichs and Disraelis had to depend in their extremity on Chamberlains, Daladiers and Schuschniggs. But even on that plane of statecraft, Stalin has carried off the booby prize. After ten years of elaborate and horrifying hocus-pocus — zigzagging "party lines," ruthless blood purges, multiple betrayals at home and abroad, limitless terror and suffering visited on his own people

— where does this *ersatz* superman find himself?

He finds himself practically alone against the world's greatest military machine, despised and mistrusted even by those who must offer him grudging support out of simple self-interest; hated by neighbor nations which once looked to him for protection; dependent on military forces which he decapitated with his own hand; caught between the murderous treachery of the Führer for whom he acted as stooge and the no less murderous resentments of his own subjects. Stalin's unabridged perfidy, year after year, has been wholly wasted. He offers to mankind, for eternity, a copybook parable of Aesopian simplicity to illustrate the moral that for nations, too, crime doesn't pay.

In the whole complex and unfinished story nothing is clearer than the bankruptcy of Stalin's policies. If there are any miscalculations he failed to make, they are not apparent on the surface.

## II

In pre-Hitler Europe, Soviet Russia had political allies despite the general fear of Soviet social experiments and pretensions. The Weimar Republic, if only because it had to propitiate a huge German

communist movement, was amenable to economic, political and even military coordination with Russia. Mussolini's Italy, if only because it was (like Moscow) anti-Versailles and revisionist, valued its excellent relations with the Soviet Government. The Balkan nations, having reason to distrust both the French and the British, regarded their great Slav neighbor as a species of political insurance. The chain of frontier countries, from Finland to Rumania, were obliged to placate Moscow since their very lives depended on the maintenance of European peace.

The keystone of this European arch was the German Republic. Yet Stalin and his associates, priding themselves on their hard-boiled realism, deliberately helped yank out this stone and applauded when the arch collapsed. Not only did the German communists, acting on explicit Moscow instructions, refuse to work with other Left and labor groups to stop Hitler's march to power, but they repeatedly joined with the Nazis in attacks on the Republic. Communists fatuously regarded Hitler as "the ice-breaker that would make way for the dreadnought of our communist revolution in the frozen ocean of capitalism." Their suicidal slogan was "After Hitler — our turn!"

In helping destroy the Weimar Republic Stalin made perhaps his greatest blunder. He unloosed forces which were destined to sweep him off his throne. But he was so self-righteously proud of this glorious accomplishment that as late as April, 1934, fifteen months after the Nazis took over, his Communist International still declared solemnly that Hitler's victory, "by destroying all the democratic illusions of the masses . . . accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution." American comrades parroted this nonsense. Earl Browder explained that fascism "hastens the revolutionization of the workers, destroys their democratic illusions and thereby prepares the masses for the revolutionary struggle for power." Not until Hitler began to carve out his anti-Comintern Axis did the sage of the Kremlin begin to suspect that this logic was cockeyed.

It was then, after his failure to win over Hitler to comradely collaboration, that Stalin inaugurated the pseudo-democratic "anti-fascist" epoch in the checkered career of his International. Liberal self-delusion the world over soon blurred the significant fact that it was not ideological disgust but simply military fear that led Rus-

sia, in 1935, to seek democratic allies against the brown-and-black Axis. The Kremlin and its foreign legions were not anti-Nazi. They were pro-Soviet. Even while promoting the new Popular Front, for collective security, while Litvinov orated in Geneva and communists everywhere temporarily turned patriots in their homelands, Moscow did not give up the campaign for a united front with Hitler.

For the time being, however, Hitler found it more profitable to set up in business as Europe's policeman against Bolshevism. In sheer desperation, therefore, Stalin undertook the immense task of constructing a world-wide anti-Nazi front. He worked at it for fully four years: from the summer of 1935, when the Seventh Congress of the Comintern announced its new-found passion for capitalist democracy, until the summer of 1939, when the Soviet-Nazi nuptials were celebrated in Moscow and followed up immediately with a bloody honeymoon in Poland.

The Popular Front strategy succeeded beyond the Kremlin's wildest imagining. In some countries Russia, through its local communist contingent, became in effect a full-fledged member of coalition governments. In others it rolled up tremendous influence as the leader

and embodiment of the anti-Nazi cause. In America the Popular Fronters penetrated every department of life; they infiltrated the New Deal to the point where they constituted almost a government within the government. Throughout the world millions who were not communists eagerly accepted Muscovite uniforms in the alleged crusade against Hitlerism.

Every totalitarian aggression — Ethiopia, Spain, Austria, Albania, Czechoslovakia — heightened Stalin's prestige and enlarged the mass of his followers. Ruling cliques might fight against the collective-security idea, but it prospered all the same as the futility of appeasing aggressors became more manifest. Popular Frontism was more than a political movement. It became a pervasive mood, coloring the art and literature, the journalism and thinking of a large part of the world's population with anti-fascist ardor. Stalinists could be justly proud of their achievement. They were riding the crest of a tidal wave of anti-fascist sentiment.

Finally even the men and the groups which had been most hostile and suspicious of Russia came, hat in hand, to beg for the political and military alliances which Stalin had been offering since 1935. The circumstance that they did so re-

luctantly, under the pressure of events, underlines the completeness of Stalin's victory. As a tell-tale preliminary, France and England gave the best possible proof of their earnestness by pledging to fight against violations of the Polish or Rumanian frontiers. Since Hitler could not conceivably move against Russia without violating those frontiers, they were in effect undertaking to fight for the safety of Stalin's Russia. They gave Stalin all he had ever asked for even before he pledged anything in return.

What did the super-Machiavelli on the Moscow River do with this rich harvest of his four years of diplomatic sowing? He threw it all into Hitler's lap as a bonus for being allowed to remain a helpful "neutral" with the right to do a little scavenging after battles.

In August, 1939, Stalin had a clear and unhampered choice between the fascist Axis and the democratic Allies. Either choice involved the risk of war. But whereas his support of the Allies might reasonably have postponed or obviated the Second World War, support of the Axis made that war an immediate certainty. His apologists later tried to make it appear that Stalin was afraid of Hitler or could not trust the Allies. But it happens that no one at that time suspected the

overwhelming strength of Germany, not even Hitler himself; there was every reason to suppose he would hesitate to undertake a war on two fronts. As to trust, with all their faults the Allies had more claim to be believed than the Axis.

It was not out of necessity that Stalin chose the Axis, but in the delusion that he was making a master stroke of Machiavellian statesmanship. With one blow he demolished his four years of anti-fascist propaganda and political alliances and sold the wreckage for a promissory "peace" note signed by Adolf Hitler. He sacrificed tens of millions of friends in many countries, evoked hatred and contempt in the very places where his prestige had been highest, and took upon himself forever the blood-guilt of having touched off the most devastating war of all time.

### III

As appeasement of Hitler the Soviet-Nazi Pact was incomparably larger and more humiliating than Munich. Chamberlain and Daladier at least had the mistaken hope that Hitler would abide by his undertakings. Stalin, having witnessed the aftermath of Munich, could harbor no such illusions. Chamber-

lain and Daladier, however foolishly, sought to purchase peace for all Europe by paying off the robber nation. Stalin aimed only to buy peace for himself by plunging all Europe into war. The Western appeasers had been criminally mistaken. The Kremlin appeaser was mistakenly criminal.

It should be emphasized before new myths take root that Stalin's was not a single act of appeasement. The pact was only the signal for a continuing and deepening propitiation that lasted twenty-two months — until the Nazis would have no more of it. No supposedly Great Power in modern times has so slavishly served another. Stalin helped to kill off France by preaching defeatism to its masses. Until the very morning of the invasion of Russia, he preached immediate peace on Hitler's terms to embattled Britain through British communists and fellow-travelers. In every country his agents worked overtime to advance Hitler's local policies, so that the Comintern and its multitudinous extensions became little more than branch offices of Dr. Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. In Latin America, Stalin's men did more than the Nazis to spread anti-Yankee sentiment. In the United States they led all the rest in shouting for

know-nothing appeasement of Hitler and promoting sabotage-strikes in war industries.

Stalin's statesmanship was further polluted by greed. At the time that Hitler struck down Czechoslovakia, he allowed Poland to help itself to a sliver of territory, only to swallow up Poland, sliver and all, soon thereafter. Now the Nazis similarly inflamed the cupidity of the Kremlin. They encouraged Stalin to help himself to half of Poland, all of the Baltic states, mouthfuls of Finland and Rumania. They knew, as the rest of the world knew, that the Soviet dictator was thereby erecting around Russia a wall of enemy peoples hungering for vengeance; and that he was stirring up fear of the Russian Bear in every Balkan and Near Eastern heart. There can no longer be any doubt that Turkey, for instance, feared a Soviet invasion from the east in case of a Nazi attack from the other side; that fear facilitated von Papen's job in obtaining the Turkish non-aggression pact which signalized the Nazi attack on Russia.

Stalin, the all-wise, took the bait. He relinquished the good will of Europe for a few bits of soil. By the time Germany, having conquered the rest of the continent, was ready for Russia, it had the

support of a Europe united at least in its hatred of Stalin's Russia. Even thus Stalin, years earlier, had fallen for the Nazi trick of inflaming his pathological suspicions of his associates. There are many grounds for believing that the Gestapo, if it did not itself originate the Stalinist purges of military and naval leaders, helped along the good work by providing "evidence" against the ablest Soviet generals, admirals, aviation designers and industrial directors. Hitler thus used the GPU firing squads to achieve his first major military victory over Stalin.

Today Russia, despite Stalin's abject surrender to the Nazis during twenty-two crucial months, has been forced to fight. The lie will be industriously spread that he is fighting because he refused to knuckle under to Germany's demands. But the fact is that Hitler and his war staff did not give Stalin the chance to refuse. There was apparently no ultimatum because Berlin was afraid it would be accepted. . . . For reasons of their own they preferred to take Russia the hard way, rather than through face-saving capitulation without war.

Taken off guard by the suddenness of the onslaught, Molotov spoke the truth in explaining tear-

fully that Hitler had made no complaints. In the preceding weeks Stalin had hurriedly recognized the short-lived pro-Nazi regime in Iraq and expelled the representatives of Greece, Yugoslavia, Denmark and Norway. He had speeded up sabotage strikes in American defense plants. Only a few days before the invasion, the official Soviet news agency branded reports of impending German action as "quite clumsily concocted propaganda" by democracies "interested in further extension of the war." Had Russia intended to hold out against Hitler's demands, it would have chosen its own time for the inevitable war — while Germany was deeply involved in Greece, let us say — instead of leaving the initiative to Hitler.

No matter from which angle the picture is studied, it is clear that Stalin counted on continued appeasement. He could not see why the Nazis should fight for what they could have, a bit disguised but good as the original, without fighting. The record should therefore be kept clear. Stalin did not join the democracies. He was pushed in among them by Hitler. He was pushed in, moreover, after he had been allowed to prove to all and sundry that the Kremlin was ready to betray Turkey, Persia, China,

anyone else, at Hitler's command.

Such has been the bankruptcy of Stalin the statesman. He might have headed off the war. At worst, he would have been a respected and trusted ally in an almost total encirclement of Hitler's Germany, playing the role of protector of his small neighbors, with the halo of leadership in the anti-fascist crusade around his head. He would then have faced the Nazi dictatorship with the backing of an unexhausted Europe. Instead, that continent is united against him, because it now hates Stalin even more than it fears Hitler. Most of his potential allies have been destroyed — with his own cynical help. Britain and America wish only to prolong his agony, knowing too well that he will capitulate and betray them at the first good opportunity.

The fact that Russia's infamous bargain with Germany has turned sour does not reduce Stalin's infamy by an iota. The American comrades and their agents in the CIO, in Washington, in our cultural life, are a no less dangerous Fifth Column today than they were before June 22. Next week, next month, whenever the new orders come from Stalin, they will hasten once more to cripple our defenses and our national unity.



Stalin is fighting a war on two fronts — against the German invader and against his own people. He is as much afraid of his domestic foe as of the Nazis. He will look for the chance to outflank the Russian people by making a new bargain with the Nazis if possible. Our common interest in defeating Hitlerism should not for a moment dull the edge of our sympathy for the victims of Stalinism. In the First World War there were many who accepted the aid of the Russian monarchy against Germany without approving or supporting

Tsarist tyranny. Similarly, we must exploit the accident of Russia's present involvement without compromising with the Soviet despots.

The Nazi invasion of Russia is Hitler's most treacherous aggression, because it is directed against a fellow-dictator eager to submit and industrious in self-abasement. Whether he remains ostensibly a ruler or not, it is the end of Stalin as the world has known him in the past. And it is an end unrelieved by any suspicion of heroism or principle or human decency.



## COUNSEL

POET, here's a world for you,  
Here's a universe to scan,  
Sun and stars unfurled for you —  
Sing its measure if you can.

Here's a world of loves and hates,  
Creatures witless, kind and clever;  
Immortality awaits —  
Poet, sing, and live forever!

SYDNEY KING RUSSELL