

# Foster Discusses 'Stalin Era'

## By Anna Louise Strong

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

Miss Strong's book, *The Stalin Era*,\* is the first full treatment of the Stalin question by an American. It is a notable achievement, and it should be read by everyone seeking information upon this complex matter. The book has many positive features. It is packed with first-hand material on the course of the Russian Revolution, gathered by Miss Strong during her long residence and extended travels in the USSR.

Moreover, it is written in her usual brilliant, entertaining, and penetrating style. One of the striking features of the book, in view of her own bad personal experience in the matter, is the calm manner in which she deals with Stalin's gross excesses and injustices. My present paragraphs are not a formal review of her book, but merely a general estimate it.

Of very great value in the book is the skeleton history that Miss Strong gives of the long and heroic struggle of the Soviet people to build Socialism.

This historical review is of great importance, particularly at the present time, when so many people in justified criticism of the Stalin cult of the individual, are tending to forget or even to sneer at the world-shaking achievements of the revolutionary Soviet Union. The book makes us again realize vividly the gigantic importance of the Russian Revolution in making the first breach in the world capitalist fortress. It provides a very good refresher course for those minimizers, underestimators, and slanderers of the USSR who appear to have forgotten some elementary facts.

A basic feature of Miss Strong's book is the picture she paints of the central role of Stalin during the historic struggle of the Soviet people to establish and build Socialism. She recites his many accomplishments, and in the doing, for example, she collides sharply with Khrushchev regarding Stalin's capacity as a military leader. There is much of value in this re-statement of Stalin's accomplishments, which were many and vital and of both a practical and theoretical character.

For in these days of deservedly sharp criticism of Stalin there are tendencies to play down or to ig-

more altogether his basically important achievements.



ANNA LOUISE STRONG

The one-sided picture of Stalin often thus created only confuses the issue; for unless the constructive side of Stalin's work is borne in mind, one cannot possibly understand how he achieved his enormous prestige among the Soviet masses and in the international Communist movement generally, all of which was such a decisive factor in the growth of his cult of the individual.

In her book, however, Miss Strong, in my opinion, leaves herself somewhat open to charges of understressing the many excesses and errors of Stalin. She, it is true, with obvious shock, presents a wealth of material upon this general question, tracing the growth of the secret police, the terrible injustices done during the purges of 1936-38, and various other ultra-bureaucratic trends, many of them of a closely personal character. She deals with nearly all the elements entering into the growth and functioning of the Stalin cult.

Nevertheless, the important fact is left that she does not do wull justice to its grave importance. She seems almost to brush it aside as a secondary weakness in the work of a great revolutionary leader.

That Stalin was an outstanding figure in the world struggle for Socialism is incontestable, and almost certainly proletarian history will so record. He was a superlative mass organizer and leader of the

people in struggle, and he made numerous important theoretical contributions—Miss Strong, in my opinion underestimates him in the latter respect, notably in the decisive question of the building of Socialism in one country. Notwithstanding all this, however, Stalin's cult of the individual, with "its cultivation of a highly centralized bureaucracy, with its brutalities, ideological domination, and sickly adulation, was so corroding in its effects, as to constitute a ghastly ulcer upon his work and revolutionary reputation.

It has done vast harm to the cause of Socialism, both in the USSR and on a world scale. It produced not only the most senseless and atrocious hardships and cruelties in the Soviet Union, but it has also seriously discredited Socialism in the minds of millions of otherwise sympathetic workers all over the world.

It would be wrong, therefore, to minimize or to fail to bring out fully the negative sides of Stalin's work, the bad consequences of which are now to be seen in various Socialist countries and Communist parties.

On the other hand, it would also be wrong to overestimate the evil results of the Stalin cult practices, as for example, is to be seen among some of our comrades, with their "all-is-lost" attitude and their tendencies to conclude from the current serious developments in Eastern Europe, that world Communism is in a crisis of decay, such as that which overwhelmed the Second International in 1914. Contrary to all such pessimism and defeatism, the current situation sums up to only a "crisis" of growth for world Communism.

The general question of the Stalin cult of the individual must be given far more incisive and extensive treatment than Miss Strong

(Continued on Page 7)



# FOSTER DISCUSSES BOOK

(Continued from Page 6)

gives it in her book. World Communist writers need to combat the widespread bourgeois - Right Social Democratic propaganda that the Stalin abuses are the inevitable fruit of the Communist movement and that Communism as a world movement is breaking up.

While taking steps to cleanse the Socialist countries and Communist parties of the corroding effects of Stalinite bureaucratic practices, both past and present, special efforts must also be made by such writers to explain the special objective and subjective conditions, which combined to produce the cult of individual in the Soviet Union, with its international repercussions. They also need especially to make known the steps now being taken by the Soviet and other Communist parties to eradicate the effects of Stalinist abuses and to prevent their recurrence.

The Stalin cult in the USSR had many deep and complex roots. It grew in a revolutionary situation, among a people with little prior democratic experience, and in a country very backward industrially. The young Socialist republic, surrounded by a threatening capitalist encirclement and faced by repeated imperialist attacks, confronted a situation imperatively demanding extreme drive and discipline and often ruthlessness upon

the part of the Soviet people and its Communist Party.

Among the fundamental tasks clamoring for attention were the basic need to build the industries and to collectivize the land with the utmost haste, to fight through World War II with every ounce of the people's highly mobilized strength, to defeat, with a maximum peace effort, the looming war threat of American imperialism after the second world war, and to hold in check the ever-present counter - revolutionary menace, both from within and without the Soviet Union.

It was under these severe conditions of struggle, maximum effort, and super-discipline, which have lasted in one form or another, almost continuously since the Soviet Union was born, that the unhealthy Stalin cult was able to grow and to wield its crippling influence. The cult was not inevitable but due primarily to a lack of vigilance upon the part of the Soviet Communists. We must get rid of the too current explanation that it was all caused because Stalin was some sort of a devil, and get down to basic Marxist-Leninist analysis.

Miss Strong's book is written in essentially a long-range historical sense. This is all to the good, and the cult of the individual also fits

The Sleeping Prince, Coronet Hamlet, Shakespearwrights, 264 W. 87 St.

My Fair Lady, Hellinger Theatre  
Three Penny Opera, Theatre de Lys.

Diary of Anne Frank, Cort Theatre  
Inherit the Wind, National Arms and the Man, Downtown Theatre

Mel Candido, Greenwich Mews  
Loud Red Patrick, Ambassador  
No Time For Sergeants, Alvin Judy Garland Show, Palace

fully into this type of treatment. To analyze and to fight the negative Stalin development is much more than merely a task of the moment. It also has basic historical significance and it should be handled as such.

The present discussion of the Stalin cult marks a decisive turning point in the history of world Socialism. It is registering a new and higher relationship among the Socialist countries and Communist parties; it is developing more democratic regimes in these countries and parties; it is making for broader coalitions of allies in the world fight against decadent monopoly capitalism; and it is bringing about a more vigorous growth of Marxist-Leninist theory—as the international Socialist and democratic forces gird themselves for a further expansion of world Socialism.

"The Stalin Era" is published by Mainstream Publisher, cloth \$2.25; paper \$1.00.