

'The man and his legacy' from Le Monde (7 March 1953)

Caption: On 7 March 1953, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the death of Marshal Joseph Stalin and attempts to gauge the influence of Stalinism on the Soviet Union.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 07.03.1953, n° 2 524. Paris: Le Monde. "L'homme et son héritage", p. 1.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_man_and_his_legacy_from_le_monde_7_march_1953-en-145b566a-46cd-472a-9cac-ba20c8420d40.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

The man and his legacy

Few men give their names to a doctrine. Stalin was such a man. In fact, his pseudonym helped: it is hard to imagine 'Molotovism' or 'Malenkovism' ... and Stalinism was not, strictly speaking, a doctrine: more a method, a tactic, a form of wisdom. Will it outlive Stalin? Yes and no.

Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili will undoubtedly go down in history as the man who reconciled Russia and the Revolution to such an extent that the two became inseparable, inciting the Soviet nation to acts of devotion and sacrifice that have turned it into one of the two great world powers. As Chakotin so astutely notes, the Russian people, a nation at the same time both very old and very young, has always been in need of a father figure: this is why they adored the Tsars, despite the brutality and corruption of the Imperial regime.

Whether consciously or not, Stalin played the father figure to perfection, being simultaneously intimidating and charming: benevolent to his children, terrible to his enemies. It should not surprise us that Russians still openly weep for him: chronicles from the past report similar scenes at the deaths of the Tsars. It is surely in this role that the seminarian who became Field Marshal and ruler of the Empire will be most difficult to replace. It is not something a 'troika' could provide. And it seems that none of the heirs apparent can rise to his extraordinary stature ...

Stalin is dead, and there is no second Stalin to hand. It will certainly take some time before a personality of his stature can appear, one fit to take up the legacy of his prestige and personal charisma. But it looks as if everything else will survive, starting with the extraordinary situation which has turned Communist parties throughout the world into pawns at the disposal of the Kremlin under the pretext that the well-being of the birthplace of Socialism must be paramount. It was in the name of this principle that the Chinese Communists were once delivered up to the executioners of Chiang Kai-shek and that the Spanish Civil War was used by the Stalinists for reasons that often had little to do with victory. Nothing, we can be sure, will change on this side, unless Mao Tse-tung aspires to the leadership of the Worldwide Revolution: a hypothesis which at the moment seems very flimsy...

What will remain is the profoundly hierarchical, not to say reactionary, structure that Stalin bequeathed to the Soviet State; the continual purges and terror, born from the Russian people's traditional mistrust that prompts the Communists to see spies, saboteurs and assassins everywhere. What will also remain is the bureaucracy and formalism that Stalin set up in his empire and that scandalises the old romantic revolutionaries so much.

For this is what Stalinism boils down to: it is a revolution without romanticism, conducted with an implacable determination, making no concessions to sentimentality or pity, intended to impose happiness on mankind. Such happiness Stalin and his heirs believe will automatically be achieved once the conditions underlying human exploitation have disappeared, conditions which they feel are the inevitable consequences of Capitalism.

This pursuit of calculated happiness has filled the concentration camps and the mass graves; it has transformed millions of people into civilian or military robots. It has reduced others to the status of acolytes stripped of the most fundamental dignity. It has also enabled mankind to achieve some of his most magnificent victories over nature, providing him with extraordinary motives for exaltation and pride.

Stalin, we repeat, managed to reconcile Russia and the Revolution. His success may be surpassed only by somebody who can reconcile the Revolution and liberty.