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**Stalin's Legacy**



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As we mourn the death of the world's greatest working-class leader, we receive a magnificent gift and guide for those fighting in Britain in the cause of socialism—the first volume, in English, of Stalin's Collected *Works*[1]. This is a contribution of the very first order to the publication in the English language of the classics of creative Marxism; an outstanding event in the spread of Marxist thought and teaching in Britain.

The first volume, of what is to be a series of sixteen, contains the bulk of his writings in the period of 1901 to April 1907, many available in English for the first time. These are the writings of the young Stalin who inspired and led the early Bolshevik organisations in Transcaucasia, writings most of which first appeared in the illegal Georgian Marxist journals, mainly edited and directed by Stalin himself.

This was the period when Stalin organised and led the great May Day demonstration in Tiflis in 1901, hailed by Lenin's *Iskra* as an event of historic importance for the whole of the Caucasus; when *Brdzola* (Struggle), the first illegal Marxist newspaper in Georgia was founded on Stalin's initiative, second only to *Iskra* itself as a Marxist newspaper in Russia. Stalin created the Marxist organisation in Batum and the Batum Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, himself organising and leading the famous political demonstration of the Batum workers on March 9, 1902. He led the struggle against opportunism in the Transcaucasian labour movement, fighting for the unity of the workers of different nationalities-Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanians and Russians. Then came his arrest, exile to Siberia and escape. Returning, illegally to the Caucasus in February, 1904, he led the huge strike of the Baku workers (December, 1904) and secured a collective agreement with the oil owners, first of its kind in the Russian working-class movement. He consistently and trenchantly fought against the Transcaucasian Mensheviks, defending and spreading the ideas and teachings of Lenin. It was the period when Stalin led the 1905 Revolution in the whole of Transcaucasia, the period when he first met Lenin, and when after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, side by side with Lenin, brilliantly defended the theoretical foundations of Marxism in his series of articles published under the title of *Anarchism or Socialism?* Stalin, though still a young man, showed himself already as an outstanding Bolshevik leader combining the deepest theoretical understanding with daily concrete practical leadership of the revolutionary struggle.

The study of this first volume of Stalin's works shows how consistently he defended and spread the teachings of Lenin, how from his early revolutionary apprenticeship he emerged as the companion-in-arms of Lenin. The illegal Marxist press edited by Stalin in Transcaucasia, especially the *Brdzola* (Struggle) and the *Proletariatis Brdzola*, both edited by Stalin, carried to the Transcaucasian workers the messages of Lenin's *Iskra* and *Proletary*, most often through the pen of Stalin, many of whose articles in these papers are reproduced in this first volume. His *Briefly*

*About the Disagreements in the Party*; his two *Letters from Kutais* and his *Reply to a Social Democrat* brilliantly defend Lenin's conception of a proletarian Party as put forward in his famous *What is to be Done?* Stalin underlines again and again the need to give a socialist consciousness to the labour movement, to combine the labour movement with socialism:

What is scientific socialism *without the working-class movement?*—A compass, which, if left unused, will only grow rusty and then will have to be thrown overboard.

What is the working-class movement *without socialism?*—A ship without a compass which will reach the other shore in any case, but would reach it much sooner and with less danger if it had a compass.

Combine the two and you will get a splendid vessel, which will speed straight towards the other shore and reach its haven unharmed.

Combine the working-class movement with socialism and you will get a Social-Democrat movement which will speed straight towards the 'promised land'.

(*Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party*, p. 104).

In his *Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party* (January 1, 1905), Stalin discusses the first paragraph of the Party rules, supporting the organisational principles of the Party as Lenin had expounded them, and enlarging upon Lenin's ideas:

Is not our Party *a fighting Party*? Since it is, is it not self-evident that our Party will not be satisfied with a platonic *acceptance* of its program, tactics and organisational views, that it will undoubtedly demand that its members should *apply* the views they have accepted. Hence, whoever wants to be a member of our Party cannot rest content with merely accepting our Party's program, tactical and organisational views, but must set about applying these views, putting them into effect.

But what does applying the Party's views mean for a Party member? When can he apply these views? Only when he is fighting, when he is marching with the whole Party at the head of the proletarian army. . . . Clearly, to be a Party member one must belong to one of the Party organisations.

(*The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party*, pp. 66-67).

Throughout the period of preparation for and carrying through of the 1905 revolutionary struggle, Stalin consistently, brilliantly and very trenchantly, supported and expounded Lenin's strategy and tactics of the hegemony (leadership) of the proletariat in the bourgeois democratic revolution, the need for an armed insurrection and for the detailed preparation for such an insurrection, the aim of establishing a provisional revolutionary government. These views are brilliantly put forward in Stalin's clear, logical, powerful manner in many articles in this first volume of his works and especially in his *Present Situation and the Unity Congress of the Workers' Party*, published first in 1906.

Lenin himself quickly came to realise the great revolutionary capacities of the young Stalin, his deep theoretical understanding of Marxism and his brilliant powers as a practical leader of the struggle. ‘Every district in Tiflis has been inundated with splendidly written leaflets in Russian, Georgian and Armenian’, wrote Lenin’s *Iskra* on September 15, 1902, referring to the activities of the Tiflis Marxists led by Stalin. Lenin often referred to the activities of the Transcaucasian Party organisation as a model of proletarian internationalism. Stalin’s two *Letters from Kutais* of September–October, 1904, were forwarded to Lenin who referred to Stalin as the ‘fiery Colchian’ and the translations of these letters were found amongst the correspondence of Lenin and Krupskaya with the Bolshevik organisations of Russia. Stalin’s *Reply to a Social Democrat* which appeared in the *Proletariats Brdzola* in August, 1905, was praised by Lenin for its excellent formulations. Special mention of the activities of the Bolshevik organisations in Transcaucasia, led by Stalin, was made at the Third Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in a Resolution on ‘The Events in the Caucasus’ moved by Lenin himself, in which he referred to these organisations as ‘the most militant in our Party’.

One of the greatest features of all Stalin’s work—his combination of the most profound theoretical understanding and constant theoretical explanation with the most consistent revolutionary practice and the utmost simplicity and clarity—is reflected throughout these earliest writings of the young Stalin. Here you find him as the revolutionary leader explaining in all detail the problems of preparing insurrection, organising fighting squads, arming the workers (*Armed Insurrection and our Tactics; Two Clashes; Marx and Engels on Insurrection*). You find him as the moving, passionate agitator calling on the workers to struggle, producing leaflets that stir to action, full of hatred of the cruel autocracy, and deepest feelings for the suffering of the people—simple, lucid, moving, stirring, with clear slogans leading to concrete immediate action (*Workers of the Caucasus, It is Time to Take Revenge; To Citizens Long Live the Red Flag; To all Workers*). Here you find Stalin the brilliant expounder of dialectical materialism, of the principles of scientific socialism, confounding the Anarchists and the Mensheviks, exposing their contradictions and their opportunism and explaining in words that all can understand, startling in their simplicity, stark in their clarity, the deepest issues of philosophy, of the strategy and tactics of the working-class struggle (*Anarchism or Socialism?*). From the style of Stalin alone—its simplicity, its illustrations from the daily experience of the workers, its logic, its humanity and warm love for those for whom he is writing and his bitter hatred for the enemies and misleaders of the working class, how much there is to learn!

The young Stalin was full of boundless confidence in the working class. ‘The revolutionary proletariat alone is destined by history to liberate mankind and bring the world happiness’, he wrote in the first work printed in this first volume, in the first issue of the illegal *Brdzola*, in September, 1901. ‘Only the

working class, and the people generally, who in the struggle have nothing to lose but their chains, they, only they, constitute a genuine revolutionary force', he writes in No. 2-3 of the same paper. 'But in order to be able to play this leading role the working class must organise in an *independent political party*' (*The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks*, p. 30). To organise this 'independent political party', Stalin, from the very first days bent all his great energy, and it is this task, the problems of it, and the fulfilment of it, that runs like a red thread through all this first volume of his collected works.

He sees the leading role of the working class, but he sees too that if only the working class can lead the struggle, the struggle can never be won by the working class *alone*. His early writings are full of discussion of the vital problem of winning allies for the working class, and isolating at each stage the essential enemy. He constantly directs his shafts against the splitters of the working class, against those who try and disarm the working class by harnessing them through class collaboration to the class enemy. He exposes the methods by which reaction tries to defeat the workers, using violence on the one hand and concessions on the other:

The fight against the proletariat is waged by means of bullets and laws everywhere. . . . Recall the years 1824 and 1825 in constitutional England, when the law granting freedom to strike was being drafted, while at the same time the prisons were crammed with workers on strike.

(*Factory Legislation and Proletarian Struggle*, December, 1906, p. 293).

But, he adds wisely, even when concessions are made and laws are passed to head off the struggle of the workers 'that, however, does not mean that the proletariat cannot utilise such laws'.

Already in his earliest writings, Stalin shows himself as a master of the national question. In his *Social-Democratic View of the National Question* of September, 1904, he foreshadows the ideas that he was to develop later in his *Marxism and the National Question*. Amongst his earliest leaflets is his *Long Live International Fraternity* (February, 1905), a stirring appeal for unity of Armenians, Tatars, Georgians and Russians, to unite against those who try to sow enmity between the nationalities of Russia, against those who organise pogroms against Armenians and Jews. '*Divide and rule*', writes Stalin, 'such is the policy of the tsarist government'; and in its place he puts forward the glorious slogan '*Long Live International Fraternity*'.

Those who hate the working class and the people, those who hate peace, those who hate and fear the conception of international fraternity, have always hated and feared Stalin, the man of peace, of international fraternity, the champion of the working class and the people who labour. They feared and slandered him in his life and they feared and slandered him at his death. Stalin always liked to quote the watchword of the German Socialist Bebel: '*What pleases our enemies is harmful to us*'. (Vol. I, p. 185 and p. 269). The writings and the actions of Stalin were never pleasing to the enemies of peace and of the people. In these

early works of the young Stalin, already comrade-in-arms of Lenin, already a great leader of the working-class movement, already deep theoretician of Marxism, there is a profound wealth of lessons for those who fight for socialism or who are building socialism in all countries. The publication in English of the first volume of Stalin's works is an outstanding event for the labour and progressive movement in this country.

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### **Notes**

1. J. V. Stalin. *Works*, Vol. 1, 1901-1907. (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow; Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 426. 5s.). Date of publication to be announced shortly.