

Note on conversations between the Prime Minister of India and Mr. A.I. Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier of the U.S.S.R., in the Prime Minister's House on March 27, 1956, at 2.15 p.m.

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Also present:

- U.S.S.R. 1. Mr. S.R. Rashidov  
2. Mr. M.A. Menshikov  
3. An Interpreter.
- India 1. Shri N.R. Pillai  
2. Shri Rishi, Interpreter.
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At the Prime Minister's request, Mr. Mikoyan spoke about the work of the Twentieth Congress. He said that the proceedings of the open session of the Congress which lasted six days had been published. When the official programme was over, the Congress went into a closed session at which only delegates to the Congress were present. The questions discussed at the closed session were concerned with the cult of personality, involving a critical analysis of the events which took place from the death of Lenin to the death of Stalin. The report submitted to the Congress by Mr. Khrushchev was a factual one and was made on behalf of the Central Committee. It was not thought proper to give publicity either to the report or to the discussions which took place, but Mr. Mikoyan was prepared to let the Prime Minister have confidentially a brief summary of the proceedings.

2. The period after Lenin might be divided into two phases, the first phase covering about ten years immediately after Lenin's death, and the second, the subsequent period to the time of Stalin's

death. Before Lenin lost his capacity for speech, he had written some letters in which he had warned the Party against a split. These letters had been brought to the notice of the Congress at that time, and Mr. Mikoyan himself was present on the occasion. The principal thing that was mentioned in these letters was that Stalin should be removed from the Secretaryship of the Party. Lenin admitted the ability of both Stalin and Trotsky, but, he said, Trotsky was ideologically unreliable. Stalin was good, but was rude and disloyal to his colleagues. These were grave defects in a man who held the post of Secretary to the Party; the incumbent of that post was expected to possess in abundance the qualities of patience and politeness. Lenin did not mention in these letters who should take Stalin's place as Secretary. He only said that someone else should be found.

3. Mr. Mikoyan went on to say that after Lenin's death the Party found it difficult to find for the post of Secretary a man with Stalin's ability but without his defects. Trotsky was clearly unacceptable. Stalin, who had been told about the severe criticisms of him, declared that he would take into account what had been said about his shortcomings and promised to conduct himself in a manner worthy of his post. During the first ten years of his Secretaryship, Stalin conformed to the accepted norms of behaviour. The first six years of this period was a period of struggle in defence of Lenin's principles. In that ideological struggle

Trotsky and Bukharin were beaten, but no reprisals were taken against them. Trotsky was deported to Alma Ata, but that was not an extreme form of reprisal.

4. After the first ten years, by which time all opposition had been overcome, Stalin started a regime of terror. His associates thought that this was wholly unnecessary. The first five year plan had been successfully carried out, and Socialism was being firmly established. In such circumstances, the trials and the prosecutions which took place were wholly unnecessary. It was true that violence was used in the time of Lenin also. But that was at the beginning of the revolutionary movement and was used in defence against external attack. The initiative in the use of violence came from others, and while Lenin retaliated with violence, he stopped it on his side when he found that the further use of violence was no longer necessary. The terrorist methods adopted by Stalin after 1934 were wholly unjustified. He even applied these extreme methods against men whose loyalty to the Party was undoubted. Security organisations were built up by Stalin and given overall authority, with the result that they began to terrorise innocent and loyal people. Stalin could not escape responsibility for these acts. Even in Stalin's time there was a feeling that things were not all right. But the documents that were produced at the prosecution of the condemned people contained full evidence to prove their guilt. This evidence, conclusive as it was, was also supported by

confessions made by the accused themselves. Recent examination of the archives, however, has shown that the charges made and proved at the time were false. As a consequence the names of people unjustly condemned had to be rehabilitated. For all this, Stalin was solely responsible.

5. The principle of collective guidance which even before the war was beginning to be ignored completely disappeared after the end of the war. The press then began to say that all that was done in the Soviet Union had been done by Stalin, and this encouraged Stalin to go his own way more determinedly. He completely ignored and pushed aside everyone else in the Government. He took extreme measures against anyone who criticised him. Some of his closest associates committed suicide; some were arrested; others were openly attacked by Stalin and deprived of authority either permanently or for a temporary period. Only the Congress had authority to sanction such steps, but for 13 years running Stalin did not convene the Congress. Lenin always did so, even at the time of the civil war. Stalin's colleagues did not insist on the Congress being called during the war; after the war they demanded the convening of the Congress, but it was not until 1952 that Stalin complied with their demand. Such individual methods of ruling the country showed the dangers of the cult of personality.

6. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, experienced Soviet Generals and administrators had been liquidated by Stalin. The lack of success

of Russian arms in the early part of the war was solely due to this fact and could easily have been avoided if Stalin had not liquidated the top Generals before the war. Furthermore, preparations for defence could have been taken earlier than they actually were, but were neglected by Stalin. The industrial potential of the country justified quicker and better preparation. But Stalin dealt with this matter personally, without consulting anyone else, and was complacent. He also made the mistake of thinking that Germany would not start a war though others knew she would. Stalin was clever, of course, but he thought that Germany would not attack the Soviet Union before she had defeated the United Kingdom. Sir Stafford Cripps, under instructions from Sir Winston Churchill, told the Soviet Government two months before the German attack took place that such an attack was in contemplation. But Stalin took the view that the UK was merely finding some excuse to get the Soviet Union to enter the war against Germany. The Soviet Military Attaché in Berlin also warned against an impending German attack, but Stalin did not believe this report, thinking that his Military Attaché had been misled by foreign agents. A day before the German attack took place, a German soldier came over the lines to the Russians and warned them that war would start the following day. This, too, was disbelieved.

7. So that when the attack did come the Russians were wholly unprepared. Their planes were still on the ground and were easy targets for the enemy.

Death and destruction followed on an unprecedented scale. But for Stalin's capriciousness and disregard of democratic methods all this could have been avoided.

8. The Germans were at last halted and then thrown back. At that time Stalin did not listen to his advisers and insisted on the Soviet army breaking through every line, fighting its way through every village and town, thus having to make enormous sacrifices. Soviet soldiers were compelled to march to certain death. The younger Generals had by then developed experience and proved their capacity. Stalin should have listened to their advice and attacked the Germans from the flank.

9. Stalin did many good things, but committed many errors too. He did not want war, but by the contemptuous manner he assumed towards other people and other nations he gave the impression that he desired war, and to some extent this helped cold war propaganda in the US. It had taken the Soviet Union three years to convince the world that they stood for peace.

10. Why did the Central Committee place all this before the Congress? According to Lenin, it was their duty to report all such matters to the supreme authority, which was the Congress. If the Central Committee had not done so, they would have committed a grave error and would have been seriously misunderstood.

11. In the history of the Party written some time ago, Stalin was extolled and others condemned to oblivion. It also gave the impression that the

popularity of Lenin was waning. The history would now be completely re-written from an objective point of view for the benefit of future generations. But the main thing now was that the Party should know that this sort of thing would not be allowed to happen again and that Lenin's democratic centralism would be fully observed in practice.

12. Stalin had centralised the State to an undue extent, against Lenin's advice. This weakened the power of the constituent republics. The Soviet Government was now changing all this. Some central ministries had been abolished, and their functions re-transferred to the republics. At the same time the Soviet Government had undertaken a programme of measures to improve the standard of living, by means of higher wages, shorter hours, special benefits, etc. All this must be well-known to the Prime Minister of India.

13. The Congress gave its approval to Mr. Khrushchev's report. The report had not been published, but copies had been given to all members and must have been read by a very large number of people. The outer world would get to know the details of what had taken place from the revised text books which would shortly be published. The Soviet Government believed that the steps taken by them would lead to greater strength. Under a bureaucratic regime, such as was practised in Stalin's time, the capacity of workers could not be judged properly. Already good results had followed upon the measures taken by the Soviet Government, more especially amongst the intelligentsia.

14. The Prime Minister enquired whether it was as a result of Stalin's personal policy that the agreement of 1939 between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany was concluded. To many people this came at the time as a surprise, as it was inconsistent with the Soviet Government's opposition to Nazi policy. Mr. Mikoyan said that this was due to the "silly behaviour" of the British and the French on the eve of the Soviet Government's negotiations with Germany. The Soviet Government knew, of course, that Nazism was their enemy, but when practical measures for collective military action were discussed, the British and the French only offered a small number of divisions and Poland made it clear that she did not want the Soviet army to go through her territory. The practical position, therefore, was that the other nations concerned wanted the Soviet Union alone to fight Germany. The Soviet Union was against war, but because of its dislike of Germany it was in favour of a collective defence arrangement with the British and the French. The attitude of these two countries, however, made it impossible for the Soviet Union to continue to depend on their support.

15. Germany then stepped in with the offer of a pact of non-aggression on condition that the Soviet Union remained neutral. The Soviet Government then knew that Germany would not attack the U.S.S.R. for two or three years, and in this they were proved correct by later events.

16. It could not be said therefore that for the agreement with Germany Stalin alone was responsible. It was a collective decision. The British did not appear to take the negotiations with the Soviet

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Union seriously. Their delegation consisted of a junior officer (Mr. Strang) from the Foreign Office and a little known General, whereas the Soviet Union was represented at the negotiations by some of its topmost men. If the British had approached the Soviet Government in a "more decent way" the Soviet Government would have turned down the German offer.

17. The Prime Minister asked what was to be done to prevent a man of great ability in high position from progressively assuming all powers. Mr. Mikoyan replied that in Stalin's case this had been a gradual process. The principal anxiety of Soviet leaders now was to exclude all such possibilities for the future. This they desired to ensure (1) by the strict application in practice of Lenin's democratic principles (2) by compliance with the provisions of the Constitution (3) by preventing courts from assuming powers not granted by the Constitution (4) by resort to democratisation and decentralisation and (5) by the abolition of all security organisations. Beria and his staff had been done away with. The only "reprisal" that the Soviet Government had taken after Stalin's death was the execution of Beria and some of his associates who had adopted police methods abhorrent to the people. There was now an upsurge of democratic feeling throughout the Soviet Union, and no reprisals of this kind would take place in the future.

18. The Prime Minister asked whether apart from the cult of personality any basic changes in policy were adopted in the Twentieth Congress. He added that he noticed that greater emphasis had been placed on violence not always being necessary, that is to say,

that changes could be brought about by peaceful means. Mr. Mikoyan said that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union believed that violence might be necessary in some instances, as the history of their own movement showed. But they also recognised that violence was not necessary in certain other situations. For instance, Lenin was for violence before the February revolution, after that he stood for non-violence. To put it shortly, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would prefer peaceful methods but would regard violence as sometimes unavoidable. To meet a situation caused by internal forces, violence should not be necessary.

19. The Prime Minister then asked whether it was now accepted that changes could be brought about by parliamentary and other peaceful methods. Mr. Mikoyan agreed that this was the position, and said that basing themselves upon Marx and Lenin the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had itself proved the efficacy of non-violence. The Prime Minister then enquired whether it was correct that the Congress also recognised that there were different ways to socialism. Mr. Mikoyan said that Lenin himself had forecast that the approach to Socialism in countries other than the Soviet Union such as China, India, etc., would be along different paths.

20. The Prime Minister asked whether it was the Soviet view that the pattern of Socialism attained in different countries would be identical or be different, one from another. Mr. Mikoyan said that complete uniformity was not possible and that the picture presented by different Socialist States would be a varying one.

21. The Prime Minister then enquired whether the tremendous technological developments that had taken place since the time of Marx and Lenin had not brought new factors, not thought of previously. Mr. Mikoyan said that Lenin had pointed out Marx's insistence that the aim was the main thing and that the methods followed might be different and be chosen by each country in the light of its own conditions. Two examples were cited. The Soviet Communist Party believed that the Chinese were strict adherents to Marxist principles, but while the Soviets deported Kulaks to Siberia and Kazakistan the Chinese were absorbing peasant proprietors in their collective farms. Secondly, while the Russians liquidated all capitalists and Lenin approved State capitalism, the Chinese Communists were making use of capitalistists in furtherance of their own programmes. Chinese methods were, of course, opposed to the earlier Russian examples, but they were Marxist methods nevertheless and the Chinese were right in adopting them. To take another instance, while in the Soviet Union land was nationalised, in Poland land had been left largely in the hands of peasants. Poland was right. The aim was the same, but the means used were different. One country might move faster, another more slowly. The methods adopted depended partly on the international situation and partly on national policies.

22. The Prime Minister asked what issue of policy led to the break between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Mr. Mikoyan replied that the disruption of relations between the two countries was due solely to the caprice of Stalin. Mr. Mikoyan himself advised Stalin to give the matter more thought before he came to a decision, but Stalin would not wait,

saying that the Yugoslavs were Fascists and took his fatal decision.

23. The Prime Minister asked whether the somewhat aggressive policy adopted towards Turkey immediately after the war was really wise. Mr. Mikoyan said that was one of Stalin's mistakes. As was well known, the Soviet Union helped Ataturk after the first world war. After Ataturk's death, Turkey began behaving badly towards the Soviet Union, but that certainly did not justify Stalin's own unwise policy towards Turkey. Stalin thought that Turkey would yield readily to pressure. It was true that Turkey had been haunted for centuries by fear of Russian aggression, but Mr. Mikoyan said that the Soviet Government never had any aggressive designs on Turkey.

24. The Prime Minister said that the French Communist newspaper "L' Humanite'" published little news of the Twentieth Congress and reported Mr. Mikoyan's own speech in a short paragraph. He asked whether this meant that the French Communist Party was not in favour of the decisions made by the Congress. Mr. Mikoyan said that this was due rather to the fact that Communist parties in other countries were somewhat taken by surprise and had not sufficient time to digest the news. Mr. Mikoyan had himself received many letters from French communists which made it clear that while no one doubted the truth of what was said in the Congress they were critical of Stalin's name having been mentioned. The reaction in other countries and among non-communists was different. The bourgeoisie in these countries were now attacking communism on account of the criticisms which had been voiced against Stalin.

25. The Prime Minister asked whether it was not correct that Communist parties in non-Communist countries rather lived in the past and functioned in a different way from the Communist parties in Communist countries. Mr. Mikoyan said that the behaviour of Communist parties in different countries was determined by the particular circumstances of the party in each country. With this the Communist party of the Soviet Union was not concerned. The Italian Communist leader, Togliatti, for instance, went his own way.

26. Finally the Prime Minister asked whether the Cominform was likely to continue. Mr. Mikoyan said that they were discussing this question. The Cominform was not functioning any way, and there appeared to be little use in keeping it on.

27. Mr. Mikoyan ended by saying that the information he had given the Prime Minister should be treated as confidential, and that he would not have spoken so candidly to anyone else.