

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I read the discussion in your journal concerning J. Arch Getty's articles on Stalinism with utmost interest (*Slavic Review*, 42, no. 1 [Spring 1983]: 60–96). It appears to me that the criticism was a bit too one-sided and did not recognize Getty's achievement. In his article Getty formulated a number of ideas worthy of consideration. First of all, he made an appeal for more careful and meticulous use of available source material and an increased drawing upon unpublished material. Second, he attempted to establish clarity for the terms "purge" ("*chistka*") and terror—or repression as the term closest to its usage in the sources would be. Further, he formulated new hypotheses for the motives which led to purges and repression in the 1930s. Finally, Getty delineated features of "Stalinism" in his article which in no way correspond to the concept of a frictionlessly functioning, effective dictatorship by one person.

In the article (and in his dissertation) Getty addressed anew the issue of the nature of "Stalinism." The debate about this thesis shows that there are at present two points of view among Stalin scholars: one, which could be labeled "intentional," assumes that the person Stalin had a great control potential at his disposal and that the actual events corresponded with the intentions of the "*vozhd*." The other view tends to place a greater importance on the reality of mentality, on the political culture as well as on the actions of bureaucratic staffs and interest groups. One thinks here of the debate in West Germany concerning the explanation of National Socialist rule which revolves around the terms monarchy and polyocracy.¹ A number of young scholars in Western Europe and the U.S.A. (Lorenz, v. Boetticher, Merl, Kirstein, Mánicke-Gyöngyösi, Eichwede, Ritter-sporn, Filtzer, Getty, et al.) have demonstrated through their research the manifold factors which influenced the development of "Stalinism." Based on these heavily document-oriented works, the positions of Tucker and Rosenfeldt do not appear to me to be convincing.

I doubt—and here we enter the discussion about monarchy and polyocracy—that Stalin was able to conceive long-range economic and social policies and then implement them accordingly. I likewise doubt whether the potential for control which Stalin's leadership group had at its disposal was great enough to direct complex social and economic processes. The majority of political and social events after 1928 can, in my opinion, only be understood if one takes into account the prevailing disorganization, the incompetent personnel, the uncontrolled competition between various administrative organizations, and the haphazard interventions of a disorganized Central Committee. While this chaos hindered effective control over society by the party elite, it provided managers, party secretaries, and workers with the freedom to take their own initiatives without which the accomplishments of industrialization are unthinkable.

Certainly, here the position of polyocracy is somewhat exaggerated. In essence it is necessary to grasp "Stalinism" as an encompassing social, political, and economic phenomenon. The concentration of political authority, the concentration of authority at work, and the intensification of bureaucratic regimentation of the population went hand in hand. Lack of cadres, incompetence, competition between authorities as well as social protest and escapist reactions among the population prevented this process from being completely realized. The idea that Stalin had planned his policies over the course of many years and then actually implemented them is under such circumstances simply grotesque. As far as we can ascertain, no Soviet administrative organization functioned without friction in the

1. See K. Hildebrand, "Monokratie oder Polykratie? Hitlers Herrschaft und das Dritte Reich," in K. D. Bracher, M. Funke and H. A. Jacobsen, eds., *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933–1945* (Bonn, 1983), pp. 73–96; H. Mommsen, "Ausnahmestand als Herrschaftstechnik des NS-Regimes," in M. Funke, ed., *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte* (Düsseldorf, 1978); P. Hüttenberger, "Nationalsozialistische Polykratie," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, no. 2 (1976): 417–42; L. Kettenacker and G. Hirschfeld, eds., *Der "Führerstaat". Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart, 1981).

1930s. On the local level initiatives of the Central Committee were either not implemented or their execution was distorted. The material in the Smolensk Archive has confirmed this repeatedly, as have the numerous reports in the VKP's organization journal *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*. Memoirs have also demonstrated that the NKVD was not in a position to track down opponents of the regime but rather carried out arrests in an indiscriminate and irrational manner, without considering the functioning of administration and the progress in production. Ascribing the repression between 1928 and 1941 to Stalin's political calculation, thereby neglecting the interests of the security apparatus and the tension between political and technical economic bureaucracies, and failing to notice that the administrative dealings and actions did not correspond to the intentions of the leadership group does not contribute to the analysis of "Stalinism." It is, in my opinion, necessary to re-think the role of Stalin, to separate the Stalin myth from the actual activities of the person, to examine the freedom he possessed in view of the desolate bureaucratic organization upon which he had to rely for arriving at and implementing his decisions, and to discern to what extent the actual developments corresponded to Stalin's intentions.

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PROFESSOR ROSENFELDT REPLIES:

Hans-Henning Schröder makes a series of statements on Stalinism and Stalinology which he implies are contrary to the views held by Robert C. Tucker and myself. A number of these statements, however, are of so common-sense and self-evident a nature that few people, if any, would want to dispute them. As it has been put by the Danish poet and scientist Piet Hein,

The most infallible of tricks
in all polemic politics
is to impute to folks a fad
which all can see is raving mad.

For my part, I am strongly in favor of a "more careful and meticulous use of available source material and an increased drawing upon unpublished material." In fact, I have drawn extensively on the Smolensk archives in my own research. I certainly do not deny the importance of political culture and other factors in the explanation of Stalinism or Nazism. I am well aware that "manifold factors . . . influenced the development of Stalinism," and that there was a great deal of chaos, disorganization, and incompetence both in Moscow and in the provinces. Furthermore, I absolutely reject the "grotesque" view that Stalin had planned (*all?*) his policies "over the course of many years and then actually implemented them."

What I did say in my comment to Getty's article was that the evidence Getty referred to should not be taken as adequate documentation of the thesis that there was no organic connection between the purges of 1933–36 and those of 1936–38. I contested the standpoint that the purges of 1933–36 "had little to do with the opposition, the *Ezhovshchina* or, indeed, with politics at all." In fact, I had strong doubts about the feasibility of carrying out meaningful research on the purge period if the question of Stalin's political motives and tactics were totally disregarded.

Trite as it may be to state it, the identification of chaotic and unexpected developments in Stalinist Russia is not tantamount to proving that Stalin had no plans and intentions at all. Most leading politicians, one would imagine, are engaged in planning and improvising at one and the same time. Schröder himself seems to acknowledge this