

The Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party: The Distorted Mirror of Party Propaganda

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The Politburo sessions of October 11 and 12, 1938, which were devoted to the publication of the *Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, took place at a time when the official end of the Great Terror lay one month ahead. The party had already been purged from top to bottom as a new and younger party leadership replaced the Old Bolsheviks who had perished in the purges. The *Short Course* was written by and approved by a committee of the Central Committee, but Stalin was its principal author. Between 1938 and 1953, over 42 million copies of the *Short Course* were issued, in 301 printings and 67 languages. The *Short Course* was regarded throughout the communist world as the most authoritative source on Soviet Marxism until de-Stalinization began in 1956.

This essay addresses Stalin's revision of party history after the Great Terror of the 1930s, his intended goals and implementation plans, and his reorientation of propaganda towards the Soviet intelligentsia. We show how a new "party history" was born along with a "renewed" party that reemerged after the Great Terror, and how Stalin used depersonalized history to blot out the memory of other Old Bolsheviks as a convenient foundation for his own "cult of personality." We also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of party propaganda, where demands for total submission of the individual to the state coincided with the growing alienation of the population from official ideology.

The session of the Politburo on October 11 and 12, 1938 was called "On the Question of Party Propaganda in the Press Associated with the Publication of the Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party."¹ The main report was presented by Andrei Zhdanov, soon to be promoted to full membership in the Politburo and already Stalin's main advisor on propaganda and cultural matters. Zhdanov's report was followed by lengthy discussion that included nineteen invited representatives of Regional Party Committees from various cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia.

The invited participants must have been overwhelmed by the "honor" of a personal meeting with Stalin. Most were in charge of local propaganda, such as the Gorky representative, a Comrade Troshin, who bravely responded to Molotov's call for comments on Zhdanov's presentation:

Molotov: Comrade Troshin has the floor.

Troshin: Comrade Zhdanov in his report...

Stalin [interrupting]: Excuse me, where do you work?

Troshin: In Gorky province, Comrade Stalin.

Molotov: Propaganda work?

Troshin: Yes, I am head of the party propaganda department of the Gorky Party Committee.

The tone of these invited officials was deferential to Stalin, and most of the discussion was in the form of exchanges between Stalin and attending local party officials. There were also prepared remarks by Stalin that were separately included.

Given the almost complete turnover of regional party officials as a result of the purges, most local officials were new appointees or relatively new to the job. A Comrade Antropov from the Orel Party Committee, who headed a propaganda department of forty, reported to Stalin that "if you take the case of editors, then we have 99 percent new cadres."

The Great Terror had not yet been officially halted; so we can imagine that the local party officials approached this meeting with Stalin with considerable trepidation. Attendees treated Stalin as an oracle, peppered him with questions about how to teach the Short Course, and heaped flattery on him, such as a Comrade Khomenko, department head of party propaganda, Kiev: "The Short Course is one of the greatest events in the intellectual life of our party, directing our party and primarily the party activists and the nonparty intelligentsia to a still higher intellectual-theoretical level based on the intensive study of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin."

Politburo sessions were rarely devoted to a single issue, even one of primary importance. The selection of the Short Course for discussion, as well as the choice of time, place, and participants, was neither arbitrary nor random. In fact, formal Politburo meetings had become a rarity during the Great Terror. Although the Politburo continued to issue decrees, decisions were made by Stalin himself or by appointed subcommittees, and Politburo members perfunctorily voted by phone or in writing.

Stalin must have regarded the publication of the Short Course of sufficient import to call a formal meeting of the Politburo. The presence of invited middle-level party officials was also exceptional. Historically, only top party leaders from the Central Committee or presidium members of control commissions were invited.

This Politburo session on the Short Course raises a number of questions, which this essay seeks to answer: What was Stalin's primary message to the party? Why was this revision of "party history" undertaken in the second half of 1930s? Who were the targeted readers of the Short Course? What was the plan of action to inculcate workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia with an understanding of this new party history? Can we learn something of value about the state of affairs inside the country and inside the party through the "distorted mirror" of party propaganda?

Why a New Party History ?

Although Stalin had expelled his major opponents from the political arena by the end of the 1920s, their physical extermination took place in the period 1936 through the beginning of 1938. In the first show trial, which took place in Moscow August 19-24, 1936, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and fourteen other purported members of the "Left Opposition" were sentenced to capital punishment. M. N. Riutin,² who earlier had had the audacity to challenge Stalin's growing power, and his allies were shot on January 10, 1937. They were followed on January 23-30 by the show trial of the "Parallel Anti- Soviet Trotsky Center," in which Grigory Piatakov, Grigory Sokol'nikov, K. B. Radek, and L. P. Serebriannikov were executed. June 11, 1937 was marked by the executions of M. N. Tukhachevsky, I. P. Uborevich, I. E. Yakir, V. M. Primakov, A. I. Egorov, Y. K. Berzin, and other leading Red Army commanders. Stalin's final blow was directed against the "Rightist-Trotsky Coalition" in the show trial of March 2-13, 1938, which produced the death sentences of Nikolai Bukharin, Aleksei Rykov, N. N. Krestinsky, and eighteen other alleged participants.

Stalin's purges left behind few key players from the October 1917 events and the unfolding history of Bolshevik rule thereafter.³ The slate was clean for a new history of Soviet communism that could not only justify earlier mistakes committed by the Soviet leadership (Stalin and the Politburo) but also show the wisdom and inevitability of their policies. A "renewed party" should receive a "new history," or as Stalin remarked near the end of the session: "As Jesus said: Do not pour new wine into old wineskins."

The publication of the Short Course was feted as a major event in Soviet history. The fanfare was considerable: a publication run of twelve million was ordered along with two million copies in non-Russian languages and more than a half-million copies in foreign languages.⁴

The Short Course was to give the Soviet Union a new history and therefore its contents had to be disseminated properly. The Politburo was the highest authority on Soviet ideology and propaganda. It was therefore only fitting that the Short Course's launch should be in a session of the Politburo, the highest authority on ideology and propaganda. The message of the Short Course ultimately had to be imparted to the masses by those responsible for propaganda within

the party, and wide dissemination required a grassroots effort. The Short Course would have to be taught to the intended audience by the same midlevel propaganda operatives invited as special guests to the October 1938 Politburo session.

What Was New in the Short Course?

How did the Short Course change Soviet ideology? Stalin's primary goal was to rewrite the history of the revolution, diminishing the true roles of other Old Bolsheviks and exaggerating his own, and to introduce new aspects of party history that would serve his interests.

The elevation of Stalin was achieved by the replacement of the theory of Leninism with the theory of "Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin." If prior to the publication of the Short Course primarily Lenin's writings were studied, now the role of Marx and Engels was raised significantly, while the main focus of attention was shifted to Stalin, portrayed as a chief creator of party history. The analogy was drawn consistently between Marx and Engels on the one hand, and Lenin and Stalin, on the other. As Engels remained the closest ally of Marx and purveyor of Marx's legacy after his death, so the only possible and legitimate heir to Lenin was Stalin. All others had ostensibly betrayed Lenin's doctrine and deserved to be obliterated from the official history of the party.

Stalin's rewriting of party history aimed at its depersonalization, erasing from it all revolutionaries except Lenin and Stalin. The Short Course became an instrument of social engineering and construction of new mentality.⁵ The Short Course shifts the accent from historical protagonists to abstractions. Responding to the criticism of depersonalization, Stalin in his remarks notes:

uSome say, there is little about individuals in the Short Course. Well, we prefer a different approach in our work... A history focused on 'great personalities' teaches our cadres little or nothing at all; history should focus on great ideas."

A depersonalized history that excluded all but the "greats" (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin), with only one conveniently among the living, laid the groundwork for an extreme personality cult, reminiscent of those under oriental despotism. It was this personality cult that Khrushchev sought to dismantle with his secret speech of February 1956.

The Audience

Who was the intended audience of the Short Course? Who were the millions of readers to be? In the first decade of Soviet power, the pool of educated citizens was small, but with improving education, an increasing number of citizens were capable of critical appraisal. Although the Short Course was also meant for workers and peasants (who might have to be

taught by party propagandists), it was directed primarily to the emerging Soviet intelligentsia as the Politburo discussion would show.

Andrei Zhdanov, in his opening remarks, described the Short Course as "the basic guide for our cadres in their understanding of Bolshevism, although as Comrade Stalin correctly noted, it can be used in shortened form for unprepared cadres, and it can be used in its entirety for the midlevel of our party." Zhdanov further stressed that "the Short Course is targeted primarily at our leading officials, at our Soviet intelligentsia."

In his own remarks, Stalin made the same point: "For whom is this book? It is for the cadres, for our cadres. And what are cadres — they are the command staff, the lower, middle, and higher command staff of the entire state apparatus." If previously, propaganda was targeted primarily at the proletariat, Stalin proclaimed, "from now on our propaganda should address our intellectual cadres."

Increasing bureaucratization combined with a new generation of state and party officials made necessary, as Stalin put it, the task of the "Bolshevization" of administrative workers. Stalin also placed special emphasis on "ideological work" with the rapidly growing student population, the reservoir of future administrative personnel. Publication of the Short Course, as the official "civic history" of the Soviet Communist Party, was yet another step in the preparation of qualified intellectual workers.

Stalin's famous motto "cadres decide all" suggests that peasants and the proletariat require strong leadership from an effective bureaucratic apparatus. That state apparatus, however, must be politically loyal. In a mild form of self-criticism, Stalin expressed regret about the loss of some "unreliable" cadres during the purges in a telling remark:

Stalin: The most serious evil, which we uncovered in the recent past, was that our cadres were not satisfactorily equipped- If "cadres decide all," and this means cadres that work with their minds, these are the cadres that run our country, and if these cadres are poorly equipped in their political understanding, the government is in danger. Take for example the Bukharinites. Their leadership — inbred factionalists — lost their foundation among the people and began to cooperate with foreign intelligence. But besides their leaders — Bukharin and others —there were large numbers of them and not all of them were spies or intelligence agents. We must presume that there were ten to thirty thousand and maybe more who sided with Bukharin. We must conclude that there were as many or more under Trotsky. But they were not all spies. Obviously not. What happened to them? These were cadres that could not digest the sharp turn to collective farms, they could not envision such a change because they were not

politically equipped. They did not know the laws of societal development, of economic development, of political development. I am speaking about average Trotskyites and Bukharinites who occupied relatively important positions. One could have been the secretary of a party committee; another may have been a minister; another a deputy minister. How can we explain that some of them became spies and intelligence agents? Some were our own people, who went over to them. Why? It appears that they were not politically equipped, they lacked theoretical foundations; they did not know the laws of political development.

Stalin goes on to assure his listeners that the purges (the "loss" of cadres) was not in vain:

Stalin: At this time, we lost a part of our cadres, but we gained an enormous number of lower-level workers, we got new cadres, we won over the people to collective farms, we won over the peasantry. Only this explains how easy it was for us to sweep away yesterday's ministers and deputy ministers. We did not waste our time in this period. We won over the working class and the peasantry, but they need direction. They must be directed through the administration but in the administration there were, it appears, the wrong people. ... In this fashion, in winning the people we let an opportunity slip by for our cadres. We must recognize this fact, and we must correct this mistake.

The implication of Stalin's indirect remarks on the Great Terror is that if there had been a Short Course earlier, cadres would have understood his policies better, would have supported them, and mass purges would not have been necessary:

Stalin: [Correcting the mistake] begins with the publication of the Short Course. This book demonstrates the basic ideas of Marxism-Leninism on the basis of historical facts. Because it demonstrates its theses with historical facts, it will be convincing for our cadres, who work with their intellects, for thinking people who will not blindly follow. We have not paid sufficient attention to this matter and now we must complete it.

Stalin then offered Nikita Khrushchev as an example of the party creating its own intelligentsia:

Stalin: There is no class that can maintain its domination and rule the state if it is not capable of creating its own intelligentsia, namely, the people who have abandoned physical work and make their living through intellectual labor. Let's take the example of Comrade Khrushchev. He thinks he is still a worker while he is already part of intelligentsia. (Mirth from the audience.)

It is not a coincidence that Stalin's reference to Khrushchev evoked laughter from party functionaries: everyone knew that high intellect was not a quality of which Khrushchev could boast. Despite his short-lived enrollment in a polytechnic institution in Donetsk, he never completed his higher education.

Party Propaganda Workers: Up to the Task?

Stalin's statements make clear why party propaganda workers had been summoned to the Politburo meeting. It was their job to educate "thinking persons" on the principles of the Short Course. If they did their job poorly, cadres would not have a grounding in the truth as expressed in the Short Course.

Stalin: These are neither workers "at the lathe" nor kolkhoz peasants.... an official is an individual who makes conscious decisions. He wants to know what is going on, he raises questions, gets confused because he does not have adequate understanding of politics, preoccupies himself with petty trifles, exhausts himself; finally he loses interest in Marxism and in his "Bolshevization." We ought to compensate for this failure of ours ... and the best way to begin is to publish the Short Course.

Were those party officials responsible for the dissemination of ideology up to the task? The party leadership probably realized the discrepancy between the rising cultural level of the workers and intelligentsia and that of party functionaries. Despite the large number of propaganda workers, there were reasons to doubt their effectiveness, as the Gorky representative, Troshin, went on to explain:

Troshin: This is one of our most qualified party organizations. But even here, when we began to discuss their work with learning the Short Course, we recognized a fact that speaks to their having watered down the quality of the Short Course. On September 20, our House of Party Education called a meeting of seminar leaders and discussed with them how to conduct their first session with propagandists. It turns out that the first chapter, which was already published, was being supplemented by material from the lecturers themselves.

This demonstrates that the lecturers moved away from the text and are using their own material.

Although not stated explicitly, the Gorky propaganda workers were not about to change their lectures just because of the release of a new party history. Probably they wanted to continue to use old material with which they were familiar.

Zhdanov himself related two further examples of the "limited preparation of propagandists":

Zhdanov: A circle is studying the fifth topic of the history of the party. A question about the August Bloc is answered thusly: The bloc did nothing but make noise. On the question of what was the Boxer Rebellion, the propagandist answered: You know what boxing is; this is the origin of the Boxer Rebellion.

What Stalin heard at the meeting from those heading party propaganda departments about the qualifications of propaganda workers was, to say the least, discouraging:

Troshin: Often a semiliterate propagandist with secondary education or none at all consults an engineer with higher education, who is well read and has a better understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory; the latter asks questions the educator cannot answer.

Another proof of the poor intellectual level of propagandists was the fact that party organizations had trouble finding specialists on the fourth chapter of the Short Course, which contained a rather primitive description of the basics of dialectic and historical materialism and of Lenin's philosophical work *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. The low intellectual level of propagandists, it seems, existed in almost all regional party organizations. How could the party legitimize itself if its propagandists were not familiar with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, not to mention not understanding its tenets! And these were not rank-and-file instructors but the chiefs of propaganda sections that covered entire regions and republics.

The low cultural level of the propagandists was vividly reflected in the verbatim remarks of the Politburo session participants. The majority could not express themselves well in Russian; theirs was a language filled with poor grammar and bureaucratese. For example, Puzin (chief of the Press Department of the Yaroslavl Regional Party Committee) stated: "Every one of the participants of our group will read a definite sum of literature in a month ... I think the party committee should have a "fist" (kulak) of such qualified individuals/specialists . . ." "Sum of literature" is not appropriate in the Russian language, nor was the awkward use of "kulak" (a common metaphor in propaganda posters) in "kulak kvalifizirovannikh lydei." Stalin's speech, separately transcribed in the stenogram, was not an exception in respect of the use of poor grammar and bureaucratese.

As the chief of the Propaganda Section of the Voronezh Regional Party Committee Shaposhnikov confirmed, despite the fact that editors and their assistants regularly attended courses for improvement of their qualifications, "the qualifications of the staff in the publishing houses are very poor . . . ; during a test, one of the editors managed to make 40 mistakes in a short dictation."

Voluntarism or Coercion in Learning the Short Course

Stalin called the October 1938 Politburo session to plan the dissemination of a new party history to new and more discriminating cadres. Stalin's Soviet Union was a planned economy that ran on the basis of quantity indicators (such as tons of steel). Judging from Stalin's remarks, he did not wish to spread the word of the new party history superficially to large numbers. Rather he wanted the intelligentsia and those who administered the system to gain a "deep" understanding of its message.

The party propagandists represented at the meeting were, like their industrial counterparts, accustomed to being judged by quantitative indicators. The habit of "quantitative coverage" of propaganda could not be easily eliminated. Even after extensive criticism, the Politburo session participants pointed proudly to the large numbers of "circles" in their territories, most of which, in reality, were either dysfunctional or nonexistent. The chief of the Propaganda Section of the Ivanovo Party Committee, Meltser, for example, boasted: "On July 1 we had 2,800 circles with 48,000 participants.... additionally, we had up to 12,000 visitors in the countryside.... Among the participants at that time 26,000 individuals were party members, 69,000 were candidates, 4,800 "sympathizers," 3,300 Komsomol members, and 4,700 nonparty visitors. Currently, we have involved in our network 104,000 participants and up to 9,000 nonparty visitors."

The Ivanovo party official did not emphasize that the number of participants had risen from 48,000 to 104,000 in only three months, as a consequence of orders "from above." Nor did he explain that these increases were primarily due to people being forced to attend meetings. Other participants were more candid about the role of force. The Yaroslavl regional party propagandist (Puzin) elaborated: "The majority of listeners have been forced to attend the circles against their will. So the propaganda reports in the course of our party committee meetings discuss not the quality of training, but how many people are involved in it. The subsequent criticism of propaganda work is also based on the numerical data."

The fact that mandatory attendance was required to obtain listeners was not hidden from Stalin:

Stalin: The consultations. Are they mandatory?

Antropov (Orel Party Committee): Some of them are voluntary. Sometimes an instructor is compelled to organize them. Not necessarily everyone is dragged there. (Laughter.) But in most cases, it is an obligatory event. Molotov: Like any examination.

The chief of propaganda of the Tula region (Kuznetsov) confirmed similar happenings: "The creation of evening schools for the study of party history is a result of pursuit of numbers. Consequently, of those recruited at the beginning of the schools' existence, by the end of the second year only 10 to 15 percent remained enrolled. One can spend an entire lifetime attending school and still learn nothing."

The pattern of forced attendance followed by massive dropouts applied to entire regions. The Tula representative (Kuznetsov) noted there were at one time 1,600 circles in his forty districts. In a four to five month period, 215 of these circles fell apart; in another three to four months 140 more collapsed, despite the fact that the repeated orders of local Party Committees demanded "full involvement" of local Communists. In fact, 30 to 40 percent of Communists did not participate at all.

These anecdotes and figures suggest that even Communist activists did not wish to attend and that coercion worked only for a short period. Nationwide, Zhdanov attested to the collapse of at least every fifth circle soon after its creation. According to Zhdanov, of the 73,000 party history circles that existed in the country (in which mandatory education of more than one million Communists took place) 15,000 had already collapsed.

The reason that so few attended and forced attendance had to be required could be traced, at least in part, to the low educational level of instructors. Many of the participants in the Politburo session, who could hardly be accused of bias against propaganda departments, admitted to the low level and poor training of propaganda workers. Puzin, of the Yaroslavl Party Committee, stated: "Having returned to Yaroslavl upon my graduation after a ten-year absence, I met my colleagues, with whom I had once worked and studied. I was struck by how little progress in personal development these people had made. Despite their long training in conducting party circles, they obviously learned very little."

According to the information provided by the chief of the Propaganda Section of the Kiev Party Committee, Khomenko, in the propaganda circles, most of the participants covered the program up to the third or fourth chapter in an academic year, so the following year it had to be started anew: "Many listeners complain that no matter how often they attend, no matter how much they study, we never get beyond the third or fourth chapter and from this we get very little."

Other regional propaganda officials offered an additional explanation for the boring lectures — fear of misrepresenting the text. The chief of the Propaganda Section of the Kalinin Party Committee, Perepelkin, made clear: "People [who teach party history] fear that they will make mistakes." Therefore instructors have become accustomed to the practice "that at every event there will be exhaustive circulars and instructions, telling them what to do, how to start."

Such extreme reticence spread from the top to the bottom of the propaganda ladder, starting with the Institute of Red Professors, where party cadres were prepared (and where many of them earned promotion through denunciations). In the words of the chief of the Press Section of the Yaroslavl Party Committee, Puzin, "such cowardice and indecisiveness of theoretical thought, especially in the Institute of the Red Professors, is an ordinary phenomenon. ... If some unanswered question arises [among the students] and they go to the teachers with controversial questions, the teachers often do not give answers. ... I wrote a report on the uneven development of capitalism and they were dissatisfied that I wrote that tsarist Russia was the most backward capitalist country in Europe. They forced me to renounce this assertion. Even if the student did not understand, there were no efforts to discuss or explain it to him."

The head of the Kiev party propaganda provided yet another example of extreme caution: "In one of our regions, during the work of the circle, a participant asked the propagandist about the possibility of building socialism in one country. At this time, Comrade Stalin's speech on this subject was already known. The propagandist instead of answering immediately said: 'Right now I need to get exact information on this subject and then I'll answer you.' He telephones the regional party secretary and asks: 'Is it possible to build socialism in one country?' The party secretary answers: 'Yes, it is possible.' Then the propagandist returns and answers yes it is possible to build socialism in our country. (General laughter in the hall.)"

To avoid personal responsibility, many instructors resorted to collective readings of the Short Course. Consequently, as Zhdanov noted after observing this practice in person, dogmatism became a major factor in indoctrination:

Zhdanov: Asking questions, propagandists expect answers in chorus. An instructor from Vyshnyi Volochek addressed his audience with the question: "What did we learn from our discussion?" No one replied, so he went on: "After the discussion the party emerged —what... ?" The students replied all together: "More consolidated." (Everyone laughs.)

Organizing Propaganda

A genuine master of political intrigue, Stalin assumed that ideological manipulation in and of itself was not sufficient. For a doctrine to become an official ideology, a specifically trained propaganda apparatus was needed, whose members were willing and capable

to propagate its main ideas clearly and diligently among the masses, and consistently arguing its orthodoxy — or, as it was said at the time, "the purity of the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism."

If there were failures in the dissemination of the ideas of the Short Course, it would not be due to the limited size of the propaganda apparatus. The enormity of that apparatus was illustrated by the Gorky representative's description of propaganda work at the Gorky Automobile Works: "I'll give you a concrete example —the party organization of the automobile factory. It has a membership of about four thousand engineering and technical persons. There are 207 propagandists and more than 130 study circles on party history."

Stalin and his inner circle ruled so effectively because of their control of the state and party apparatus. Stalin's loyal deputy, Zhdanov, insistently argued for copying the principles of strict subordination and centralized management

in teaching the Short Course to the people. The Politburo session fully revealed incompetence and multiple deficiencies in the existing propaganda apparatus, as well as the necessity of creating rigid, vertically integrated, and hierarchical system of training and improving the qualifications of its instructors. The so called "circles" (*kruzhki*), strictly subordinated and controlled by superior party organizations, became the basic unit for Short Course studies. The establishment of the Higher School of Marxism-Leninism for training and improving the qualifications of party officials became yet another step in this project. The notion of "party history" replaced "Leninism." Against a backdrop of intensified censorship, the journal *Bolshevik* became the major theoretical weapon of indoctrination and control of the masses.

The centralized structure of management and control was complemented by material incentives, in particular, by high salaries. The stenogram shows that the heads of regional party propaganda departments received the relatively high salary of eight hundred rubles per month.

The unified system of indoctrination of the masses was created through the special decree of the Central Committee of November 14, 1938 "On Party Propaganda in Relation to the Publication of the Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)" The decree clarified the chief function of the Short Course: "to endow the party with unified instruction on party history, providing a legitimized (reviewed by the Central Committee) interpretation of major questions of party history and of Marxism-Leninism, that excludes the possibility of arbitrary interpretation."⁶ The Short Course was proclaimed an "encyclopedia of the basics of Marxism-Leninism," playing the role of a dogma that had to be learned not only by the party members but by everyone else.

Final Thoughts

Dictators have enemies; they are not elected by constituents. They pursue programs that do not please a large part of the citizenry. Dictators have a number of choices with respect to their enemies. They can eliminate them by banishment, imprisonment, or execution. They can choose to live with a certain percentage of enemies. Or they can educate or reeducate citizens who are enemies or who might become enemies. They also might wish to identify those enemies, actual and potential, who can do them the most harm.

Stalin's message, clearly expressed at the November 1939 Politburo meeting, called in the declining days of the Great Terror, was that he was ready to turn from physical elimination of enemies to "enemy-prevention." The cadres that he had to eliminate as enemies during the Great Terror were enemies because they had not been properly enlightened. That was the mistake of the party; the party had survived without them and was ready to move on, but should avoid the mistakes of the past. It needed a doctrine or dogma that should be understood by all, but most importantly by those "who work with their minds." If only the citizenry were properly educated in this dogma, there would be no need to worry about enemies or opposition to the party line.

Stalin's Short Course was to be the means to accomplish these goals. It explained to the intelligentsia and to the masses what they needed to understand. If they understood, they would be active supporters of party decisions.

The Politburo session ended on the usual note. A Politburo commission was to be formed that would deal with the practical implementation of the task of teaching the Short Course and would consider all those deficiencies raised by the dialogue with the actual practitioners of official ideology.

Stalin's discussions with propagandists from around the country may or may not have been an eye-opener for him. He may well have known already that most people were not interested in party history or ideology and that they had to be forced to attend sessions. Maybe he knew of the low level of training and intellect of party propagandists. The candor of these low-level party propagandists in pointing out deficiencies is remarkable, because usually such problems were kept from the dictator's view. Either they were new in their positions and could blame deficiencies on their predecessors, or they were simply naive.

Notes

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1. RGASPI Fond 17, op. 163, del. 1218. Subsequent citations are from this source.
2. M. N. Riutin was known as an ardent opponent of the Trotskyist-Zinovievite coalition, a follower of N. I. Bukharin, the author of the work "Stalin and the Crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship," and a key figure of the Alliance of Marxists-Leninists. He shared Bukharin's vision of economic policy and Trotsky's criticism of the internal party regime. In September 1932 Stalin issued an order demanding Riutin's execution; however, it did not find immediate support, so Riutin's arrest, exile, and execution were postponed until 1937.
3. By 1938 from Stalin's political rivals only L. D. Trotsky remained alive. He was killed with an ice ax by a Stalinist agent on August, 20, 1940 in his exile in Mexico.
4. Boffa, *Istoriia sovetskogo soiuza*, vol. 1: *Ot revoliutsii do vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Lenin i Stalin, 1917-1941*, p. 534.
5. For more details see Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*; for his view on Russia, see Hofstede, *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*. According to Hofstede, the oriental mentality differs from the Western one through the despotism of the rulers and the poorly developed individuality of the ruled. According to this view, depersonalized history of the party can be understood as involving the elimination of "heroes," who previously had constituted an intermediate stratum between "the gods" and "the humans"; and an emphasis on collective actions versus individual deeds.
6. KPSS v rezoliutsiakh, part 2, p. 859.