

COMRADE CAESAR

"Oh great Stalin, oh leader of the people, you who created man, you who made the centuries young, you who made the springtime flower!"

Twenty years after this rhapsodic outburst appeared in a 1936 issue of *Pravda*, the 77th anniversary of the birth of the one-time "supreme genius of mankind" came and went unmarked in the U.S.S.R. No official speeches, no parades, no celebrations. In ten short months from Nikita Khrushchov's denunciation of Stalin in the famous Secret Speech, Big Brother's stature had fallen from that of a mourned and revered deity to that of a man ignored.

Stalin died on March 5, 1953; his denigration began only last year. This three-year hesitation of the present Soviet rulers to expose the myth, however, was only logical. They could hardly destroy overnight the cult that had dominated Russian life and thought for nearly a quarter of a century.

What was the origin of the Stalin cult and why was it created? These questions are examined by the notable authority and biographer of Stalin, Isaac Deutscher, in a BBC series of documentary programmes, *The Stalin Myth*, which begin from 3YC at 10.0 p.m., Tuesday, November 5. "These programmes," Deutscher writes, "do not, of course, recapitulate the history of the U.S.S.R. or even the life of Stalin. They are intended to deal with the Stalin myth proper. But as the myth did not arise independently and grow by itself, but was closely connected with Stalin's long and grim struggle for power, the story of the myth had to be constantly related to its broader political background."

It is the year 1924—the beginning of the Stalin era in Russia. But Stalin

himself is not yet the leader. The Bolshevik Party is not yet prepared to accept the dictatorship of a single man. The core of the party still consists of old underground revolutionaries who have spent most of their lives fighting against the Tsarist regime. They are not yet ready for a new autocracy and collective leadership is the slogan of the day. In the Kremlin Military School Stalin speaks of the "mountain eagle" of the party, his leader Lenin. He makes no claim at this stage to be his most "devoted disciple, closest associate and best friend": there are still too many alive to speak the truth. He speaks of Lenin's modesty:

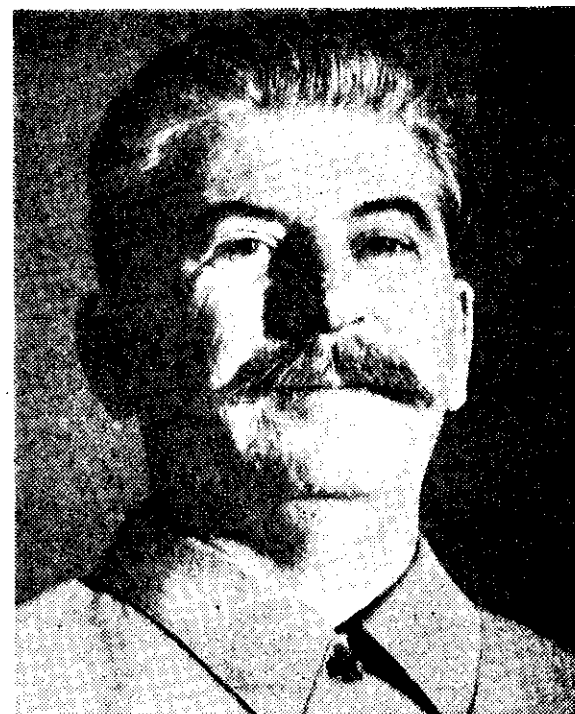
"I first met Lenin in December, 1905, at the Bolshevik Conference in Tammorfors. I was hoping to see the mountain eagle of our party, the great man, great not only politically, but, if you will, physically, because in my imagination I pictured Lenin as a giant, stately and imposing. What then was my disappointment to see a most ordinary looking man . . . in no way, literally in no way, distinguishable from ordinary mortals. . . It is accepted as the usual thing for a 'great man' to come late to meetings so that the assembly may await his appearance with bated breath; and then, just before the great man enters, the warning whisper goes up: 'Hush! . . . Silence! . . . He's coming.' This rite did not seem to be superfluous, because it creates an impression, inspires respect. What then, was my disappointment to learn that Lenin had arrived at the conference before the other delegates . . . and was carrying on a most ordinary discussion with the most ordinary delegates. . . I will not conceal from you that at that time this seemed to me rather a violation

of certain essential rules."

Ten years were to pass before he felt safe enough to start the propaganda campaign that would make sure the "certain essential rules" were obeyed in his case. From the mid-thirties on, his portraits and statues—like the religious icons of old Russia—spread like a blight over his vast domains. History was rewritten to give him a larger part. Kamenev, Trotsky had never existed. Together with Lenin he had "inspired and led the Great October Revolution," "built up the Red Army," "jointly with Lenin founded the Bolshevik Party."

Through the years the myth grew. On his seventieth birthday in 1949 he was hailed as "father of the arts and sciences," "the wise, the strong, the beloved," "the great strategist of the war against Fascism," and, more prosaically, "the creator of the worker's creative initiative." Like the deification of the Roman Emperors from Augustus on he was tailored—not only as father, Big Brother, leader and general, but also as the people's god.

The subject matter of the three hour-long programmes in *The Stalin Myth* is arranged in chronological order. The first programme covers the years 1917-24, from the time when Stalin, a more or less obscure party-man, returned to Petrograd from Siberian exile carrying all his belongings in a wicker basket,



to the moment when, at Lenin's death, he gripped all the levers of power in the Bolshevik Party and State and set out to create his legend. The second programme, with the Great Purges at its centre, covers the period 1924-39. The last programme deals with the Generalissimo, the leader of the Communist bloc, and the autocrat in his last years.

At every stage of the programmes, writes Otto Deutscher, "myth and reality are juxtaposed, and the inner contradictions of the myth are exposed. Throughout I have made use of Khrushchov's revelations in his 'secret' speech at the XX Congress, the speech which has done so much to expose the Stalin myth. However, as it often happens that a myth is exploded only in order that it should make room for a counter myth, I have tried to subject to critical scrutiny parts of Khrushchov's testimony as well."

All the dramatic episodes and dialogues heard in *The Stalin Myth*, the author adds, are authentic. For documentation he has gone to various sources: the records of Bolshevik Party congresses, the minutes of the Central Committee, and memoirs such as those of Anna Alliluyeva, Stalin's sister-in-law. These memoirs, incidentally, were suppressed by Stalin when they appeared just after the war, for in them he was portrayed rather as a man instead of a superman. Deutscher has also used material gained from his examination of Trotsky's papers, which were deposited by Trotsky at Harvard University shortly before his assassination in 1940.

The principal characters in the programmes are represented by the following actors: Edward Chapman (Stalin), James McKechnie (Trotsky), Carleton Hobbs (Lenin), Raymond Huntley (Ribbentrop), George Coulouris (Khrushchov). The narrators are Edward Ward, Howard Marion Crawford and Ronald Simpson. *The Stalin Myth*, which was produced by Laurence Gilliam for the BBC, will be heard later from other YC stations.



LENIN AND STALIN: "The devoted disciple, closest associate and best friend"