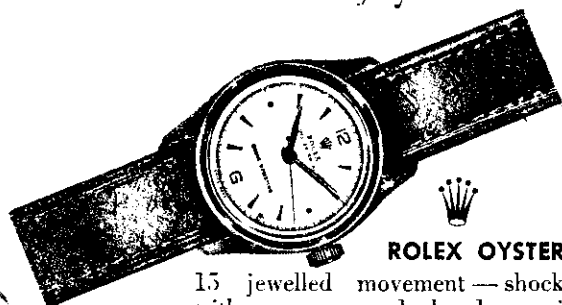


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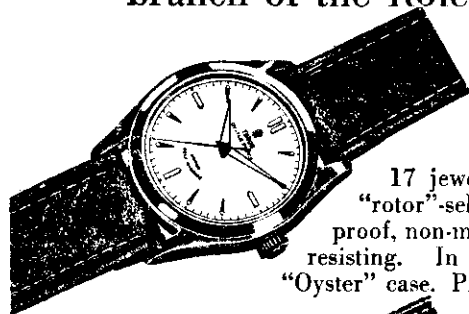


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## The Death of Stalin

**T**HE life of Joseph Stalin was a climb to absolute power.

This man, born a Georgian peasant, died after ruling Russia for nearly 25 years. He was the first dictator of the Communist State, and his regime covered one of the stormiest periods of history. His name at home was the symbol of infallible and ubiquitous authority; his influence reached far beyond the frontiers to satellite countries; and in all other places he was a formidable figure, seen indistinctly, but never underestimated. Behind him was the strength of Russia, a nation of nearly 200 million people; and his complete control of their destinies allowed him to exert drastic pressures in countries he had never seen.

Great power means isolation. For Stalin, the remoteness was congenial. There was nothing colourful about him, nothing in his career or character which brought him close to common humanity. He was not an orator; his writings and speeches were without passion; and because he could never be wrong, and must always be protected from criticism, his personality was drained of the warmer qualities which bring a man alive to his contemporaries. It is easiest to love someone who shares our own weaknesses, whose failings as well as virtues are magnified by high position. Stalin was feared, admired, respected, hated; but if he was loved, it was by that psychological process of transference through which a man becomes a symbol. The real man is hard to discover. He was exalted to infallibility by a propaganda machine which taught his people to believe that he had all knowledge and wisdom, that he made no mistakes, and that if his policies miscarried it was because he was betrayed. These methods allowed him to keep his hold on the masses, but they meant that outside Russia he was seen either as a demi-god or a monster. He was the embodiment of Soviet power.

The facts through which we can see him are comparatively few, and

belong mainly to his earlier career. He must have been one of the most skilful politicians of the age. His talent was for work done secretly. He knew how to win the support he needed, and how to weaken his opponents; and when the moment came for action he was utterly ruthless. According to western biographers, he was unknown to the masses in the early days of the Bolshevik regime. Lenin was the leader, and Trotsky his assistant. Stalin worked in the background, exploiting his position as General Secretary of the Communist Party. After Lenin's death he saw that the man to be feared was Trotsky. The political organiser pitted himself against the volatile leader of men; and in every move until Trotsky's expulsion he was subtle and unscrupulous. These manoeuvres took place many years ago. Since then there have been much larger events: the liquidation of the Kulaks, the purges, the five-year plans for economic development, heroic wartime efforts and Soviet expansion in the postwar years.

The man who had schemed his way to the dictatorship continued to work with great ability for his own ends, now identified with the aims of Russia. His hold upon the party machine never weakened; and the party, a small and well-disciplined minority, ruled Russia's millions. Under his leadership the nation grew strong, and attained a far-reaching influence in world affairs. Whatever may be thought of Stalin's ideas and methods, his achievements must be acknowledged. The world might have been a different place today, and perhaps a better one, if another man had succeeded Lenin. But history takes no account of what did not happen. The unalterable fact is that Stalin became the architect of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. In one sense he will stay alive, not only in the results of his work, while men continue to argue about him. And we who have lived under the shadow of his name for 25 years are only at the beginning of the argument.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 20, 1953.