
“As Pure and Transparent as Crystal.”

by Leon Trotsky

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Mysterious things are happening in the headquarters of the Communist International. The apparatus has grown so powerful that it no longer feels embarrassed about performing its secret “functions” in the open. Articles and documents are being published that obviously have some very special — one may say occult — meaning. In these articles the priests of the first rank speak a language that can only be understood by the priest of the second rank. To those of the third rank, the occult meaning of their language is unintelligible, and ordinary mortals can only guess what it is all about.

Number 1 (1930) of the magazine *Bolshevik* — the principal cookery of bureaucratic mysticism and mystification — contains three speeches of Stalin which he made in May 1929 to the presidium of the Comintern and its committees.

The editors of the magazine have painstakingly emphasized, in the case of each speech, that it “is being published for the first time.” But they have not explained why these old and, alas, very poor speeches were set in type at all. The speeches belong to the period when Lovestone, still a member of the presidium of the Comintern, was competing with Foster for the position of priest of the first rank. The description of their competition given in his speech is not without a certain cynical precision. Here is how realistically Stalin has pictured the fight between these two clans for the right to represent in the United States the latest revelations of Leninism:

“The Foster group, wanting to demonstrate its loyalty to the Russian party, declares itself ‘Stalinist.’ Very well! We, the Lovestoneites, will go further than the Foster group, and we will demand that Comrade Bukharin be recalled from the Communist International. Let the Fosterites try to beat that! We will show those people in Moscow how we Americans can play the Market! The Foster group, wanting to demonstrate its intimacy with the Communist International, demands that the decision of the Communist International about the removal of Pepper be carried out. Very well! We, the Lovestoneites, will go further, and expel Comrade Pepper from the party. Let the Fosterites try to beat that! We will show those people in Moscow how we Americans can play the market.” (*Bolshevik* No. 1 (1930), pg. 10).

To appreciate these lines adequately, one must remember that the talk is not about brokers, after all, but about two factions, one of which had been leading the American party for several years and had put through the renowned campaign against Trotskyism. The other was subsequently placed at the head of the American party in order to fulfill the tasks of the “Third Period.”

One cannot help asking: What purpose does Stalin pursue in publishing these speeches today, many months after they were given, and thus publicly placing Foster, who is holding so high the banner of Stalinism, on the same level with Lovestone, who was expelled from the Communist International? The mystery is great. Such an unexpected publication of speeches, made in the most secret conferences, would be simply incomprehensible if one did not assume some *new machinations behind the scenes*, about which the priests of the first rank consider it timely to forewarn the priests of the second.

But can one be permitted to make such a disrespectful assumption? From other remarks in Stalin’s speech it would appear not. The general theme of the speech is — although you might not believe it — revolutionary morals. Yes, yes. No joking. Here is what the gifted orator has to say about it: “Either we are Leninists and our relations with each other, as well as the relations between the different sections and the Communist International, must be built on mutual confidence, must be *as pure and transparent as crystal*, and then there must be no room in our relations for rotten diplomatic tricks...or else we are not Leninists, and then...” — and then, of course, everything is permitted: intrigues, falsity, dark hints, vile slanders, murder from ambush.

However, insofar as Stalin is a Leninist he is, according to his own attestation, “as pure and transparent as crystal.” To what extent this is true of him has been, as is well known, once and forever testified by Lenin himself in describing his character as disloyal. What then is the meaning of this unexpected publication of an old speech? For there must be a meaning.

Was it done only in order to completely discredit the

expelled Lovestone? Suppose we admit that. Then what about Foster? Why does the pure and transparent moralist cast mud at the same time on the present leader of this party? Let us read on:

“To characterize the way in which *pure communist morals* are being distorted and *covered with mud*, in the process of factional struggle we could refer to such facts as, for instance, my conversation with Comrades Foster and Lovestone.... I am talking about the conversation that took place at the time of the Sixth Congress. It is characteristic that in correspondence with his friends Comrade Foster alludes to this conversation as something mysterious, something that should not be mentioned aloud.... Where does this mysticism come from? And what is it for, dear comrades? What could there be mysterious about my conversation with Comrades Foster and Lovestone? To hear these comrades, one might think that I was talking to them about things that I would be ashamed to tell you about. But this is absurd, dear comrades. And what is all the mysticism for? Is it so difficult to understand that *I have nothing to hide from comrades*? Is it so difficult to understand that *I am always ready at any moment to relate to the comrades* all the contents of my conversation with Foster and Lovestone from beginning to end?” (pg. 11, emphasis ours).

Thus Foster is accused of no more and no less a crime than “distorting” and “covering communist morals with mud.” But Foster is the head of the Communist Party in the United States! Foster is a member of the presidium of the Comintern. How are we to understand this?

We do not demand that all communists, even though they belong to the breed of leaders, should necessarily be “as pure and transparent as crystal.” That would be a too high, indeed a superhuman criterion. But still, between “crystal” and “mud” there are many intervening gradations. How shall a simple mortal explain the fact that a *player of the market*, Lovestone, has been replaced by Foster, who *covers with mud* “pure communist morals”? And why — this is the point of the question — does the pure-and-transparent-as-crystal leader of leaders find it necessary to disclose this hidden disgrace so many months after the muddy Foster has replaced the gambler Lovestone at the wheel of leadership?

At least we learn from these speeches — which, to tell the truth, we did not doubt before — that Foster won his victory, not at all against Stalin, but on the contrary with the help of some behind-the-scenes conversation with Stalin. “Where does this mysticism come from and what is it for, dear comrades?” Precisely: Wherefrom and what for? It is so difficult to understand that Stalin has nothing to hide from the comrades? Is it so difficult to understand that Stalin is “ready at any moment to relate to the comrades all and everything from beginning to end” — all,

decidedly all?

In spite of our bewilderment, we cannot resist the temptation of a hypothesis: Isn't this all just a first step toward overthrowing Foster? It seems impossible otherwise to understand the necessity of slandering a recently appointed leader, calling him a mudslinger. Nor is the situation simplified by the following words in Stalin's speech: “What is the solution?” he asks himself, and answers:

“Comrade Foster suggested one plausible solution. According to his proposition it is necessary to transfer the leadership to the minority [i.e., the Foster group]. Can this solution be accepted? *No, it cannot be accepted.* The delegation of the ECCI made a mistake when it sharply disassociated itself from the majority group [the Lovestone group] and did not at the same time dissociate itself from the minority group. The proposition of Comrade Foster, with all its consequences, falls of its own weight.” (pg. 12).

It seems that in May 1929 Stalin flatly refused Foster the right to inherit Lovestone's place. Was it quite flat, though, his refusal? At that time it was understood that Foster had still to show proof of his “loyalty.”

Stalin was accusing Foster, as if incidentally, of having been ready, in the interests of factional struggle with Lovestone, to use the “hidden Trotskyists.” That was, in May 1929, the chief accusation. The task of Stalin's sermon, *then*, was not to discredit but to intimidate Foster. And it was wholly successful. Foster produced in abundance all the demanded proof of his loyalty. In his struggle against the Left Opposition he outdid himself. And in consequence, after a private conversation with Stalin in Moscow, Foster received into his own hands the American “apparatus” and — from being a minority became a majority. During this operation, while Foster was successfully “covering communist morals with mud,” Stalin kept silent. But *now*, when Foster had completely received into his hands the fate of official communism in the United States, Stalin publishes his previous sermon with a mysterious note: “Published for the first time.”

The matter is complicated still more by the following quite unexpected attack:

“Foster and Bittelman” — the orator here becomes indignant — “do not see anything improper in declaring themselves ‘Stalinists’ in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the Russian Communist Party. But this is *really indecent*, dear comrades. Do you not know that there are not [!] and there must not be [!] any ‘Stalinists’? Why should such indecencies be permitted from a minority?” (pg. 9).

It appears that to declare oneself a Stalinist is really indecent. Who would have thought so? In the same issue of *Bolshevik* another “crystal,” smaller in size but no less

transparent, Kuusinen, proves in twenty closely set pages that to be a Stalinist is the first and, as a matter of fact, the only duty of every official seriously interested in his own fate. The article of the incomparable hero of the Finnish revolution of 1918 is even entitled “Stalin and the Bolshevization of the Party.”

With his usual brilliancy, the author proves that all its successes in China, Britain, and other countries, the Communist International owes to Stalin — all its defeats to someone else. On his part, Stalin praises Kuusinen highly in his speech. But we have to believe that this is just a mere accident, which has nothing to do with the case. If Kuusinen in January 1930 declares himself a Stalinist to the length of twenty pages, it is his private business. But when in May of 1929 Foster made similar announcements, he was trying to play on a rise in the market, and it was “really indecent, dear comrades.”

Can it be that all this taken together is just a sad misunderstanding? It seems that we shall have to believe so, because — “Comrades, the Communist International is not a stock market, after all. The Communist International is the holy of holies of the working class. You must not confuse the Comintern with the stock exchange.” Such are the incomparable, purely Stalinist formulas. They are taken from the same speech.

But nevertheless we hold to our conviction that everything in the world has its cause, and everything in politics its purpose. It is possible to assume that this speech “is being published for the first time” only in order to prove once more the political incorruptibility of Stalin?

Taken by itself such an assumption is not absolutely incredible in the present “Third Period” — a period characterized above all by its monstrous, arch-American, shamefully indecent advertisement of the personalities of the superleadership. Still it is difficult to imagine that the reputations of the as-yet undeposed leaders of the second rank might be dragged in the mud without any evident necessity — just casually besmirched in passing. If this is really so, it means that a new phase of the Bonapartist degener-

tion of the bureaucratic regime has arrived — a phase in which even the closest associates are regarded in the same light as the “mob.”

But we think that the nub of the matter *is not only* there. All the precedents — and there are more than a few — point to the conclusion that in Stalin’s faction the Foster stock is going down. Why? We do not know. We know only that it is not for reasons of principle. In that field it is doubtful whether Foster is inclined to cause any difficulties. What is the matter then? The mystery has not yet emerged from the keeping of the priests of the first two ranks. But why not ask the author of the speeches about it? He is the one who has no taste for mysteries. “Is it so difficult to understand that he has nothing to hide from the comrades? Is it so difficult to understand that he is always ready at any moment to tell the comrades, from beginning to end — everything, everything?” — *except, perhaps, how and why he murdered Blumkin?* (We intend to have an answer to that question, too.)

But Foster, it seems, ought to be getting ready for a change — unless, indeed, the publication of this article should save him.

P.S. *Pravda* on March 7 brings the news that Stalin’s speeches on the American question have been published in the form of a pamphlet. The first edition is 100,000 copies. We were right. The matter is much more “profound” than it could have seemed to an outsider. However, such an unexpected circulation of such inane speeches (except for cynical casuistries there is nothing in them) does not offer any key to the mystery. An edition of 100,000! Then it was really meant for the masses. But what will the masses make out of this sudden commentary on the sudden career of Foster? Is this new edition merely designed to show Foster that the boss is not joking? Or is this apocalyptic circulation only a by-product of the efficiency of the administrators, as in the case of collectivization? It certainly becomes more and more difficult to find your way among the zigzags of the General Line.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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