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"The Downgrading of Stalin As Seen from the Free World"

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Address by Honorable William P. Rogers,
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The Downgrading of Stalin As Seen from the Free World

President Jacobs, Members of the Graduating Class, Distinguished Guests: It is with a great deal of pleasure that I have looked forward to this occasion which permits me to participate in the Nintey-third Annual Commencement Exercises of Bryant College. It is a privilege to be asked to appear on this rostrum where so many distinguished persons have stood before and to address this year's graduating class and their friends and relatives. I am both indebted and pleased for the signal honor you have conferred in bestowing on me your Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws. To have been selected as a member of the Honorary Alumni of Bryant College is a recognition which I shall always prize and for which I am deeply grateful.

You members of the graduating class are soon to become responsible working members of our free society. I thought that I would talk to you today about recent events in Russia which point up, by startling contrast, the meaning of that free society in which we are privileged to live.

Our laws are not the directives of any man or any group of men. They are the moral code of a free people. In the free world laws go hand in hand with religion. Our laws express what our people regard as right and what they regard as wrong—and they apply with equal force to all of our people, regardless of their station in life. This is what we mean when we speak of a government of laws as distinguished from a government of men—or perhaps one man.

It is difficult for us to comprehend fully, or even to believe, that there is no moral basis underlying the law of Russia and her satellites. When we refer to Godless Communism we may think merely of a society which does not believe in God. But it means much more than that. Because it is a Godless society the concept of right and wrong, as we know it, does not exist. Killing an innocent person is not wrong if the leaders say that it serves the purpose of the state. Torture is right if the leaders think they need to use it. Mass reprisals are not wrong if they seem to serve a useful purpose at the time. Never has the contrast between free governments based on moral concepts and Communist governments based on total authority been more strikingly portrayed than by recent events in the U.S.S.R.

In a massive marble tomb in Moscow's Red Square, the body of Joseph Stalin, mummified and on display under glass, lies a few feet from that of Vladimar Lenin. Lenin's body is gray and leathery while Stalin, in a resplendent uniform, appears tan and healthy. Over the entrance to the tomb is the inscription "Mausoleum of Lenin and Stalin". Long lines of visitors, five abreast, come to gaze before it is too late. For it is almost a certainty that in the near future, Stalin's body and Stalin's name will disappear from this tomb and from the Russian landscape.

Even after his death, Stalin was widely hailed by the Communist Party as "the greatest leader, sublime strategist of all times and nations" and Lenin was of considerably less importance. All that is changed. As a result of the speech recently made by Khrushchev, the present boss of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Stalin has been downgraded—perhaps a better word would be decimated. Leninism has been resurrected for the use of the present Russian leaders. The free world now has direct proof of what happened during the regime of Stalin. His name can be erased from stone but his infamy will live long in the minds of all decent people. It is little wonder that Khrushchev tried to keep the text of his speech secret, saying "We cannot let this matter get out of the party, especially not to the press . . . We should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash our dirty linen before their eyes."

The speech by Khrushchev is one of the most amazing documents of all time. By our standards it is remarkably long and, of course took many hours to deliver.

According to Khrushchev, Stalin's sordid record really began in 1934 when he had an order issued directing the speeding up of cases of those accused of acts of terror. He said that this was followed by a letter from Stalin stating that the NKVD "is four years behind" in applying mass repressions and that there was a necessity for a "catching up" with the neglected work.

Later in 1937 and 1938, Khrushchev said, "many thousands" of Communists were liquidated as "spies and saboteurs," including 98 out of 139 members of the Central Committee and 1,108 out of 1,966 delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress. He now candidly admits that these purge trials, even though conducted by the government, were fabricated and that the confessions of enemy activity "were gained with the help of cruel and inhuman tortures."

Khrushchev said that between 1937 and 1941 Stalin's fear of the military resulted in the liquidation of most of Russia's experienced military leaders, from company commanders up.

Khrushchev detailed how during 1943 and 1944 whole nations of people were deported to Siberia and elsewhere from thir native lands.

He said that there was a continuing series of acts of terrorism designed to strengthen the leadership of Stalin. In 1949, the so-called "Leningrad affair" was framed and many persons in high positions were murdered. During 1951 and 1952, he said that "thousands of innocent people fell victim of willfulness and lawlessness" in Georgia solely because Stalin believed that Georgia planned to leave the Soviet Union and join Turkey.

Khrushchev now tells us that the affair of the "doctor-plotters," in which a group of eminent Soviet medical specialists confessed to being enemies of the people, was created out of thin air. Khrushchev failed to mention that this was but a small part of a tremendous anti-Jewish drive or that the chief of the secret police responsible still holds a high position in the Party—or did when last heard from.

Khrushchev's speech cannot be read without revulsion. It is a shocking revelation, not of a perversion of justice, but of a system of government totally lacking in moral concepts necessary to any system of justice. On page after page he describes in detail how confessions were extracted by torture and innocent men put to death. He continually refers to purges in which thousands were liquidated, presumably, and perhaps fortunately for the victims, without any trial whatsoever.

Khrushchev claimed that he and his colleagues were not guilty of any wrongdoing. As a consequence of pleading his case in his own defense he presented the most damning case ever made against the Communist system of government. But even his defense in behalf of himself and his colleagues is without any merit whatsoever.

The defense advanced by Khrushchev must be considered in the light of the Moscow Declaration of 1943. On October 30 of that year Great Britain, France, the United States, and Russia signed an agreement in which it was stated that the "men and members of the Nazi Party who have been responsible for *or have taken a consenting part in atrocities and crimes*" would be punished as criminals. Do Khrushchev and his colleagues contend that they did not "take a consenting part in the atrocities and crimes" of Stalin?

Khrushchev and most of the other Party leaders now in power held responsible positions under Stalin for years. Stalin hand picked them. If they are innocent why didn't they try to prevent these crimes? Why did they wait for more than three years after Stalin's death to make disclosure? Khrushchev was obviously disturbed by these questions and attempted to answer them as follows: "The majority of the Political Bureau members did not, at that time, know all of the circumstances in these matters, and could not therefore intervene." Then he said that, "In the situation which then prevailed I have often talked with . . . Bulganin; once when we two were traveling in a car, he said, 'It has happened sometimes that a man goes to Stalin on his invitation as a friend. And, when he sits with Stalin on his invitation, he does not know where he will be sent next—home or jail.'"

Their defense is inconsistent. First we are asked to believe that Khrushchev and the others didn't know about atrocities involving millions of Russians, including 70 per cent of the Central Committee and thousands of other prominent Party leaders. Then it is suggested that because they did know they lived in constant fear for their lives. Neither, of course, is true. It is perfectly plain that the present leaders survived, not because they reluctantly acquiesced, but because they actively supported and promoted this policy and carefully cultivated Stalin's friendship. When it suited their purposes, as it did for many years, the old system was fine; now that it doesn't it suddenly becomes bad. It was because they went along that they lived to sit in on this post mortem annihilation of their former leader.

It is interesting to recall, in view of the attempt by the present Russian leaders to place all blame on Stalin because of the great personal power concentrated in him, the closing argument of General Rudenko, the Chief Prosecutor for the U.S.S.R. at the Nuremberg trials of the major German war criminals. He argued:

> "As crimes result from a single criminal plan, common to the whole society, the accomplices who have not personally committed these separate criminal actions and were not practically informed of them, bear the responsibility for them."
>
> " . . . Very often the head of a criminal band usurps the unlimited power over the other members of the band, even the very right of life and death. However, it seems that it never occurred to any lawyer in the world to deny the existence of a criminal society only because its accomplices were not alike and one of them had power over the others."
>
> "It is at any rate strange to deny the existence of the conspiracy in the present case on account of the indisputable fact that great personal power was concentrated in the hands of the ring leader, Hitler."

Against this backdrop Khrushchev's speech is self-incriminating. Vividly set out therein for all to read are the *Inner* workings of one of the world's great criminal conspiracies. Any attempt to shift the full responsibility to one man necessarily fails. Each member of a conspiracy is jointly and severally

liable for all damage or crimes resulting. Each is fully responsible for the acts of all the others. By the test, agreed to by Russia at Nuremberg and concurred in by its present leaders, they were active members of Stalin's conspiracy and must share the guilt equally with him.

Even accepting by way of argument the defense that they were unwilling accomplices, it would then have been necessary for them to have made prompt exposure at the earliest possible time of their knowledge of the facts. They would have had immediately to disassociate themselves from the conspiracy by affirmative action. Yet, without any attempt to explain, they failed to do so and in fact made no disclosures until more than three years after Stalin's death.

Then too these Russian leaders continue to reap the harvest of their ill-gotten gain. In the free world wrongdoers may not profit by their illegal acts. For example, a person cannot set, fire to his house and then collect on his fire insurance. Our laws prevent it because it is wrong. But today in Russia the present leaders inherited their power and influence because they were members of the very conspiracy they now condemn. They remain in control of the government by virtue of positions gained as members of the conspiracy.

The real significance of the speech is not that we are told that Stalin was a ruthless tyrant; that was known. It is not that Khrushchev claims innocence; this too was to be expected. The real significance is the complete frankness with which Khrushchev details a system of government which is wholly devoid of any sense of moral values.

Khrushchev does not, as Lenin did not, and Stalin did not, disapprove of mass liquidations as a legitimate govermental weapon against enemies of the state. Stalin's crime, according to Khrushchev, was that he applied these measures against "entirely innocent victims." In Russia the judge of who the victims are to be, or who may properly be considered an "enemy of the people" is decided by the man or men in power at the time. Totally lacking is any concern or regard for the rights of the individual which we so highly prize. In Russia there was and is no need to prove that

persons have committed crimes—it is just decided. As Lenin said: "All is moral that serves to strengthen the Soviet system."

This concept—and the results which naturally flow from such a concept as illustrated by Khrushchev's speech is the antithesis of all we believe in. Outside the office of the Attorney General appears this inscription, which states our belief: "The United States wins its point whenever justice is done one of its citizens in the courts." Inscribed, too, in stone on the Justice Department building are these words in which we believe: "Above all statues is the figure of Justice—Justice the set and constant purpose—To render every man his due—Justice to each is the good of all."

One of the significant questions resulting from Khrushchev's speech is who were the people killed and how were they killed. So far, except in a few cases, the dead have not been identified. Nor is there any way of knowing how the "annihilations" were accomplished because the men who did the actual killings of thousands and thousands of innocent people have not been identified except in a few cases. With respect to the "Leningrad affair" Khrushchev stated that "Abakumov and others who had fabricated this affair were brought before a court; their trial took place in Leningrad and they received what they deserved." Note the omnious overtones—the obvious suggestion that this "trial" was like the rest which Khrushchev would now so strongly condemn—except the other trials were wrong because Stalin planned them—this one is right because the new leaders planned it.

Krushchev now enjoys a unique position. In seeking to protect himself by blaming everything on Stalin, he unquestionably gained for himself the title of the world's foremost informer. This must be perplexing to the Communists, especially in this country, when it is recalled that over the years they have carried on a strenuous campaign against people in the free world who furnish information to their own Governments against Communist agents engaged in infiltration and espionage. But in the case of Khrushchev the onus is greater. He did not confront the man he now accuses when he was alive. He waited and accused a dead man.

Khrushchev admits that whole nations were deported under Stalin. He confesses that many of those annihilated were the

innocent victims of fabricated cases. But we are not told whether the nations who were deported from their homeland will now be returned, their suffering paid for, and their property restored. Nowhere in this calculated recitation is there any suggestion that the present leaders contemplate any restitution for the wrongs of a quarter century.

There is a theory in law that "the king can do no wrong." It means that the government may not be held liable unless it consents. Our goverment long ago discarded this theory and consented to make restitution for wrongs however slight. Today if a citizen is injured as a result of the negligence of a Federal employee, he is compensated for such injury. If the government violates a provision of a contract, the aggrieved party can recover damages. When property is taken for the use of the government the owner is paid the fair value of the property. These things are done because it is right that they should be done.

How can the leaders of Russia confess the most revolting crimes imaginable against their people without any mention of making amends?

As a result of the downgrading of Stalin, is there in the light of this record any reason to believe that there will be any marked change in the relationships of Russia with the free world? Khrushchev supplied the answer to this when on his initial appearance before the 20th Congress of the Communist party he said: "Our enemies like to depict us Leninists as advocates of violence always and everywhere. There is no doubt that in a number of capitalist countries the violent overthrow of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the sharp aggravation of class struggle connected with this are inevitable." It seems clear that there is to be no lessening in this basic imperialistic design to enslave the free world.

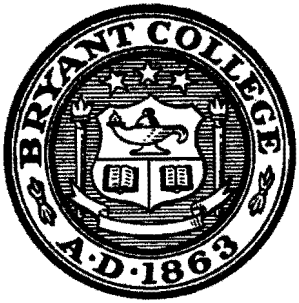
Yet it is also apparent that there is serious uneasiness, not only on the part of the leaders in command who are jockeying for control, but basic unrest throughout Russia and her satellites at all levels. Even in the face of certain mass reprisals and death, workers in Poznan were willing to defy openly the authorities and to demonstrate publicly their dislike for Communist practices.

History teaches that when any government fails to maintain the support of the governed it will not long endure. When it must depend on force and violence for its continued existence, then sooner or later these same tactics will boomerang and the suppressed will assert themselves.

A dramatic change is taking place within Russia. It is too soon to assess its direction. Yet there are hopeful signs that the present leaders, because they were partners in the now well publicized crimes of Stalin, are not as secure as they would have the free world believe.

We know that there is no more powerful force in the world than the fundamental human demand for decency and morality once it is put in motion. Khrushchev, by his confessions of crime and his shocking revelation of the moral shortcomings of Communism, may well have supplied the necessary push.

You, who are graduating today, are soon to become self-supporting members of a free society entitled to all the rights and privileges of free people. These rights and privileges should never be taken for granted but must be understood, respected and cherished. An evil force is loose in the world—Communism. It is the most potent confidence game of all time. It dangles many material things in varying ways before the eyes of many deserving and envious people in the world—and all they have to give in payment is their freedom and self respect.

Let us hope that the powerful human force which demands decency and morality, stimulated by a greater exchange of ideas, will somehow give the Russian people leadership with some moral basis. If this should come about and the Russian people in some measure should become free, then the chance of peace continuing would seem much more certain. It is just possible that the downgrading of Stalin will work to that end, and if so, it will become one of the most significant events in our lifetime.

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