

STALIN AT 72: Prisoner of Himself

by EDWARD B. LOCKETT



With the growth of his power, he has become more and more of an enigma to his own people and the outside world

INSIDE THE ancient walls of Moscow's Kremlin sits the most powerful man on earth. At 72, Joseph Stalin is at the pinnacle of his career, a ruler whose empire extends halfway across the world, whose word is law to one-third of the human race. No other man in history has ever held such absolute sway over so many fellow human beings.

And yet, mighty Stalin himself, sinister and inscrutable, is as much a captive of the fear and terror system he has created as the lowliest labor slave in Russia. Ringed with guards, secluded in the Kremlin, he is a mystery not only to the world, but also to his own people.

Even the citizens of Moscow know little of his movements, and less about his actions. Housewives who live along the six-lane Mozhaisk Highway from Moscow to Minsk often glimpse the three-limousine cavalcade which conveys the

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lin is tremendous, but is calculated to impress the foreign visitor rather than to satisfy any vanity on the part of Stalin. There is a huge birch conference table in the center, well in front of Stalin's big desk. Once, the only pictures on the walls were of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Now portraits of three Russian military leaders of the past have been added to the gallery.

There is a big pull-down map on one wall, and enough upholstered chairs to accommodate fairly large meetings. It is in this office that Joseph Stalin, Prime Minister of the USSR, faces the world as a government official.

But behind this monolithic façade looms the chilling climate of fear on which all Stalin's power is based. It is invisible, yet no Western visitor has failed to sense it or to see its imprint on Russian faces.

In the evening of his life, Joseph Stalin is obviously a prisoner of his own tyrannical philosophy. Sometimes he must wonder whether this terror of his own making does not hold within itself the seeds of communism's downfall, for, as a student of history, he cannot fail to be haunted by the knowledge that no empire built on fear has ever long survived.

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Soviet Prime Minister from his suburban home to work in the Kremlin. Occasional written pronouncements, and rare appearances on a balustrade high above marching columns, constitute the rest of his public life to the average Russian.

Just as the people know little about Stalin, the Soviet Dictator knows very little, firsthand, about them. He seldom travels, even inside Russia. His public appearances have steadily been reduced in number. Today he lives in isolation unrivaled by any monarch since the Pharaohs. He must have forgotten what he himself once told historian Emil Ludwig: "Any man on a high pinnacle is lost—the instant he loses touch with the masses."

The outside world knows a good deal more than the Russian people about their Soviet master. It knows, for example, that he has relaxed his once-furious working pace. He Joe Stalin may well be with us for a long time to come, for the physical make-up of the Russian Dictator has changed little with the years, except that his hair and moustache have turned quite white.

BORN IOSIF DJUGASHVILI in 1879 to a Georgian peasant cobbler and his wife, Stalin is a squat, heavy-set man with thinning hair, rich brown eyes, a slightly pock-marked complexion, and noticeably bad teeth. He is five feet, five inches tall—one inch shorter than Winston Churchill. He weighs about 190 pounds, and looks neatly dumpy.

Stalin is not a Russian, hardly a Slav. There is a strong Turkish in-

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fluence both in his bone structure and his name. Gori, his home town in the Georgian Caucasus, is a crossroads of Europe and Asia, East and West. A hundred races met, fought, and melded in the mountain hamlets around Gori. The name Stalin—"Man of Steel"—was the last of a series of pen names which Iosif Djugashvili used as a writer of fiery revolutionary articles during his youth.

Callers meeting the Marshal for the first time are usually surprised at his lack of height. Pictures generally show him behind a podium of some sort, giving the impression of a man of normal height—an illusion supported by broad, thick shoulders, and a big, deep chest. His conversation is hard to follow, even for a Russian. Quite often he "talks in his beard," which makes him seem to mumble.

Smoking a pipe or one of the long Russian cigarettes, Stalin seems utterly relaxed. One of the few Americans who can actually be said to know the Dictator well remarked recently: "He never raises his voice; never bangs a table. I always think Stalin has quite a nice smile in greeting. But you sense there's power there, and a sort of slyness. You feel: here is a man you've got to be very careful with."

Another veteran Moscow diplomat has this to say: "Stalin always saunters into a room. I remember, in 1947, when he led the Russian group into a meeting, I thought about the terrific contrast between Hitler and Mussolini and this man. I've seen him wander into the Su-

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preme Soviet (Congress). He sits down, shows complete self-assurance—no bullying. He likes to doodle—often draws wolf heads. The kind of man, you feel, who would kill his best friend and smile quite affably about it.”

The Premier's plain, uniformlike suit of light tan color is always well pressed. The soft boots on his rather small feet are beautifully polished. Stalin's dress really should be called a uniform, for it never varies. Except on state occasions, the Marshal wears only one decoration: the single gold star which designates him a Hero of the Soviet Union.

“I don't suppose Stalin has ever worn a European-style civilian suit in his life,” observes one American diplomat. “Very probably, he is the only ruler alive who has never worn a tie.”

The drooping Stalin moustache is neatly trimmed. The Marshal's hair is always cut short and combed back, without a part. One American visitor came away from a meeting with the Dictator, fascinated by the polished sheen of his nails.

There is one incongruity in the otherwise impeccable Stalin. His coat sleeves are cut so long that they drop well past the knuckles of both hands, to hide a near-deformity in the Dictator's left arm and hand. During a serious illness in childhood, Stalin developed infection from an ulcer on his left hand, and came near dying. The arm was so seriously affected that, years later, he was rejected for military service because of it.

“It isn't very noticeable,” said one diplomat. “You see it particu-

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IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, the easygoing master of the Kremlin is the most heavily guarded individual in the world. The two limousines which precede and trail his bulletproof car are packed with MVD guards, and represent veritable rolling arsenals. The Stalin guards, incidentally, are as smartly turned out as any in the world. When news correspondents enter the Supreme Soviet on days when Stalin is scheduled to speak, the guards open portable typewriter cases to check for concealed weapons.

Visitors entering the high-walled Kremlin, which embraces the most important government buildings, are stopped and checked at the guarded outer gate. Inside, before entering the building which houses the Stalin offices on an upper floor, there is another going-over by the guards. Once in the building, practically everybody in sight is MVD.

At the Stalin Black Sea estate, heavily guarded iron gates in a high wall protect the outer grounds. The visitor must then follow two miles of steep drive, lined with guards, before approaching a solid iron gate giving access to an inner court surrounding the house. In the house proper, all servants are carefully screened by army personnel. The same conditions prevail at the Stalin household in the Moscow suburbs, which again is surrounded by a high fence.

Of Stalin's private life, neither the Russians nor outsiders know a great deal. There is never any mention of family matters in the Russian press. Elsewhere it has been

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published, and never confirmed or denied, that he is now married to Rosa Kaganovich, sister of Lazar Kaganovich, the only Jew in the Politburo. Some have ascribed official silence to fears that the connection might bring accusations of nepotism.

Neither the Premier's son Lt. Gen. Vassily Stalin, who commands the Moscow Air Force garrison, nor his red-haired daughter Svetlana, now married, lives with the Generalissimo.

Stalin has been married twice before. His first wife, Katerina Svan-dize, was the sister of a Socialist schoolmate of Stalin's at Tiflis, and died in 1917 during the Revolution. There was one son from this marriage, Jacob Djugashvili, reported to have been brought up by maternal grandparents in the Caucasus. He was captured by the Nazis in World War II, exchanged later for two generals, but hasn't been heard from since.

The second and best-known wife of Stalin was Nadya Alliluyeva, daughter of an old Revolutionary companion of Stalin's, Sergei Alliluyeva. Stalin corresponded with the Alliluyeva family when he was a youth in Siberian exile, long before Nadya was born. From the bleak, treeless steppes of his northern exile, he wrote of homesickness, and asked the Alliluyevas to send him picture postcards of his native Georgia countryside.

Stalin was married to Nadya in 1919, when she was 17 and he was nearly 40! She presented him with two children: Vassily and Svetlana. When Nadya died in November,

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1932, wild rumors circulated.

“Some say she committed suicide, others that Stalin shot her,” reports an American diplomat who was in Moscow at the time. “There was an orthodox religious funeral—fairly unusual in Russia. I talked to a man who went there and looked at the body, with the coffin open, Russian style. Afterwards, he told me: ‘Something happened to that girl’s neck. She wore a scarf well up around the neck.’”

The Stalin family lives quietly, considerably more withdrawn than in the Premier’s younger days. Occasionally he turns up at the opera or ballet, but appears at few public functions. The Dictator enjoys an occasional at-home evening of wine and conversation with cronies of revolutionary days, although he has long since killed most of them and must rely largely on friends of a later vintage. Like many a work-loaded official, Stalin hates telephones and avoids their use outside office hours.

Stalin loves movies, and his private theater in Kathryn Hall inside the Kremlin is described as “plush” by Americans who have been invited there. “Right after the war,” recalls one diplomat, “Stalin had the incredibly bad taste to show us scenes of Far East fighting which made the Soviets out as the people who won the war against Japan. Once, we loaned him a U. S. movie from the Embassy for two nights. He kept it two weeks.”

If Stalin has any hobbies, nobody knows what they are. He once enjoyed hunting, but age has all but ruled out sports. He certainly en-

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joys soldiering, and during the war was never so happy as when he returned from a visit with troops at the front. He likes good pipe tobacco, and generally settles down for a pipeful after dinner.

Stalin's working, eating, and sleeping hours are nothing like so arduous as during the war. He usually has breakfast between 9 and 10 A.M. This consists of the inevitable strong Russian tea, served in a glass, and black bread, with side dishes. He likes dried herring, which the Russians call "sledge," and he often eats eggs.

His main meal is eaten around 5 P.M., and consists of hors d'oeuvres, meat (he likes lamb and mutton), potatoes, rice, cabbage, and a dessert of stewed fruit. His final meal comes around 11 at night, and is apt to be made up of cold meat, bread, and tea. Like most Russians, Stalin loves ice cream.

STALIN USED TO READ voraciously, and is well-informed about the rest of the world, although his information has a tendency to be concentrated on industrial production figures. U. S. veterans of Moscow meetings report that the Premier has an amazing ability to absorb information correctly and in detail, and seems always thoroughly briefed before entering a conference. He uses the questioning phrase—"What does that mean, concretely?"—to the point of monotony in conferences, but never tires of it; and it seems to produce what he wants from callers.

If the Dictator has any heroes other than Russians, they are cer-

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tainly world industrialists—men who make things. Eric Johnston, then president of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, tells a story which he failed to write after he interviewed Stalin during the war.

Johnston carried greetings to the Premier from three men: Roosevelt, General Marshall, and Henry Ford. Stalin offered perfunctory thanks for the messages from the President and Marshall. Then his face brightened. "Give Mr. Ford my regards," he said warmly. "He is a great American!"

Stalin has always lived fairly simply and, although every luxury is now his for the asking, he has not changed old habits. There is nothing regal about any of the Stalin households.

"The Moscow place is very comfortable, but by no means a palace," said a visitor. "There is a large drawing room, furnished in fairly good taste. Nothing I remember particularly. There were the usual tables groaning with food during entertainments; the place seemed well-stocked with vodka and brandy for entertaining."

W. Averell Harriman once spent a week end at the Gagri estate. "There is a nice house," said a former member of his staff who made the trip. "Box hedges surround the inner court. Furnishings are heavy, austere, comfortable. Between conferences, we walked about; once we went swimming at a nearby Russian official's villa. Stalin turned over a guest house to us. It was very comfortable, but nothing elaborate."

The Dictator's office in the Krem-