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An interview with the German author

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Ludwig: I am very much obliged to you for having found it possible to grant me this interview. For more than twenty years I have been studying the lives and deeds of prominent historical personages. I believe I am a good judge of people, but on the other hand, I do not know anything about economic conditions .

Stalin: You are very modest.

Ludwig: No, that is a fact. That is why I will put questions to you that may seem queer to you. Today, here in the Kremlin, I saw certain relics of Peter the Great, and the first question I should like to ask you is this: Do you think there is any parallel between yourself and Peter the Great? Do you regard youself as continuing the cause of Peter the Great?

Stalin: Not in any way. Historical parallels are always dangerous. The one in question is absurd.

Ludwig: But Peter the Great did a great deal to develop his country and to transplant to Russia the culture of the West.

Stalin: Yes, of course. Peter the Great did a great deal to elevate the landlord class and to develop the rising merchant class. Peter did a great deal to create and strengthen the national State of the landlords and merchants. It should be added that the elevation of the landlord class, the encouragement of the rising merchant class, and the strengthening of the national State of these classes, was effected at the cost of the peasant serf who was bled white. As for myself, I am merely a pupil of Lenin, and my aim is to be a worthy pupil of his. The

task to which I have devoted my life is to elevate another class—the working class. That task is, not to strengthen any national State, but to strengthen a socialist State—and that means an international State. Everything that contributes to strengthening that State helps to strengthen the international working class. If in my efforts to elevate the working class and strengthen the socialist State of that class, every step taken were not directed towards strengthening and improving the position of the working class, I should consider my life as purposeless.

You will see therefore that your parallel is unsuitable.

As to Lenin and Peter the Great, the latter was but a drop in the sea—Lenin was a whole ocean.

Ludwig: Marxism denies that personalities play an important role in history. Do you not see any contradiction between the materialist conception of history and the fact that you, after all, do admit the important role played by historical personalities?

Stalin: No, there is no contradiction. Marxism does not deny that prominent personalities play an important role, nor the fact that history is made by people. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* and in other works of Marx you will find it stated that it is people who make history. But of course, people do not make history according to their own fancy or the promptings of their imagination. Every new generation encounters definite conditions already existing, ready-made, when that generation was born. And if great people are worth anything at all, it is only to the extent that they correctly understand these conditions and know how to alter them. If they fail to understand these conditions and try to change them according to their own fancies, they will put themselves in a quixotic position. So you will see that precisely according to Marx, people must *not* be contrasted to conditions. It is

people who make history, but they make it only to the extent that they correctly understand the conditions they found ready-made, and to the extent that they know how to change those conditions. That, at least, is the way we Russian Bolsheviks understand Marx. And we have been studying Marx for a good many years.

Ludwig: Some thirty years ago, when I studied at the university, many German professors, who considered themselves believers in the materialist conception of history, taught us that Marxism denied the role of heroes, the role of heroic personalities in history.

Stalin: They were vulgarisers of Marxism. Marxism never denied the role of heroes. On the contrary, it admits that they play a considerable role, with the provisos that I have just made.

Ludwig: Placed around the table at which we are now seated there are sixteen chairs. Abroad, it is known on the one hand, that the U.S.S.R. is a country in which everything is supposed to be decided by collegiums, but on the other hand, it is known that everything is decided by individual persons. Who really decides?

Stalin: No, single persons cannot decide. The decisions of single persons are always, or nearly always, one-sided decisions. In every collegium, in every collective body, there are people whose opinion must be reckoned with. In every collegium, in every collective body, there are people who may express incorrect opinions. From the experience of three revolutions we know that approximately out of every 100 decisions made by single persons, that have not been tested and corrected collectively, 90 are one-sided. In our leading body, the Central Committe of our Party, which guides all our Soviet and Party organisations, there are about 70 members. Among these 70 members of the Central Committee there are to be

found the best of our industrial leaders, the best of our co-operative leaders, the best organisers of distribution, our best military men, our best propagandists and agitators, our best experts on soviet farms, on collective farms, on individual peasant agriculture, our best experts on the nationalities inhabiting the Soviet Union and on national policy. In this areopagus is concentrated the wisdom of our Party. It is possible for every one to correct the opinion or proposals of any one individual. Every one is able to contribute his experience. Were it otherwise, if decisions had been taken by individuals, we should have committed very serious mistakes in our work. But since every one is able to correct the errors of individual persons, and since we pay heed to such corrections, we arrive at more or less correct decisions.

Ludwig: You have many years experience of underground work. You have had occasion to transport illegally, arms, literature, and so forth. Do you not think that the enemies of the Soviet government can learn from your experience and fight the Soviet government with the same methods?

Stalin: That, of course, is quite possible.

Ludwig: Is that not the reason for the severity and ruthlessness displayed by your government in its fight with its enemies?

Stalin: No, that is not the chief reason. One might adduce certain illustrations from history. When the Bolsheviks first assumed power they adopted an attitude of mildness towards their enemies. The Mensheviks continued to exist legally and conduct their own paper. The Socialist Revolutionaries also continued to exist legally and had their own paper. Even the Constitutional Democrats continued to publish their own paper. When General Krasnov organised his counter-revolutionary attack on Leningrad and fell into our hands, according to the rules of warfare, we might at least have kept him prisoner. In fact, we ought to have shot him. But we released him on his "word of honour." What was the result? It soon became clear that such mildness was only serving to undermine the strength of the Soviet government. It was a mistake to have displayed such mildness towards the enemies of the working class. To have persisted in that mistake would have been a crime against the working class and a betrayal of its interests. That very soon became only too clear. It soon became obvious that the milder our attitude towards our enemies, the more bitter their resistance. Very soon the Right Socialist Revolutionaries—Gotz and his like—and the Right Mensheviks began to organise the military cadets in Leningrad for the purpose of carrying out counter-revolutionary attacks, as a result of which many of our revolutionary sailors perished. This very Krasnov, whom we had released on his "word of honour," organised the White Guard Cossacks. He joined forces with Mamontov and for two years waged an armed struggle against the Soviet government. It very soon appeared that behind the White Guard generals stood the agents of western capitalist states, such as France, England, America and Japan. And so we became convinced that mildness was a mistake. Experience taught us that the only way to cope with such enemies is to adopt a ruthless policy of suppression.

Ludwig: It seems to me that a large part of the population of the Soviet Union lives in fear and dread of the Soviet government, and that the stability of the Soviet government is based to a certain extent on that fear. I should like to know what feelings are aroused in you personally by the knowledge that in order to maintain the stability of the government it is necessary to inspire

fear. In your relations with your comrades, of course, with your friends, you adopt quite different methods, and not methods of fear. Yet the population has to be inspired with fear.

Stalin: You are mistaken. Incidentally, your mistake is shared by many. Do you think it possible to maintain power and enjoy the support of millions for a period of 14 years by methods of intimidation and terror? No, that is impossible. The tsarist government knew better than any other how to intimidate. It had a long and vast experience in that field. The European, and particularly the French bourgeoisie, helped tsarism in every way and taught it to terrorise the population. Yet, in spite of that experience, and in spite of the aid of the European bourgeoisie, the policy of intimidation led to the collapse of tsarism.

Ludwig: But the Romanovs maintained themselves for 300 years.

Stalin: Yes, but how much unrest and how many rebellions occurred during these 300 years? There was the rebellion of Stenka Razin, the rebellion of Emilian Pugachev, the rising of the Decembrists, the revolution of 1905, the revolution of February 1917 and the October Revolution. And I need hardly mention that the political and cultural life of the country is now fundamentally different from what it was under the old regime, when it was the darkness, the ignorance, the submissiveness and political subjection of the masses that enabled the "rulers" of that time to remain in power for a more or less lengthy period.

As to the people, the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R., they are not so tame, so submissive and intimidated as you imagine. Many people in Europe have old-fashioned ideas about the people of the U.S.S.R.: they

picture the people of Russia as being firstly, submissive and secondly, lazy. That is an out-of-date and fundamentally wrong conception. It arose in Europe in those days when the Russian landlords used to flock to Paris to dissipate the wealth they had acquired by plunder and to waste their days in idleness. They were indeed spineless and useless people. That is how the idea of "Russian laziness" arose. But that idea is not applicable to the Russian workers and peasants, to those who earned, and earn their daily bread by their own labour. Strange indeed, to consider the Russian peasants and workers, who in a short period of time made three revolutions, smashed tsarism and the bourgeoisie, and who are now triumphantly engaged in the building of socialism, as submissive and lazy.

You just asked me whether everything in this country is decided by one person. No, under no conditions would our workers now tolerate the domination of one person. Individuals of the greatest authority are reduced to nonentities as soon as they lose the confidence of the masses and as soon as they lose contact with the masses. Plekhanov used to enjoy exceptional authority. And what happened? As soon as he began to commit political errors, the workers forgot him; they abandoned him and forgot him. Another instance: Trotsky. Trotsky also used to enjoy very great authority, although of course, not as much as Plekhanov. What happened? As soon as he lost contact with the workers, he was forgotten.

Ludwig: Entirely forgotten?

Stalin: They remember him sometimes—with bitterness.

Ludwig: Do they all remember him with bitterness?

Stalin: As far as our class-conscious workers are concerned, they remember Trotsky with bitterness, with irritation, with hatred.

Of course, there is a certain small section of the population that really does fear the Soviet government, and fights the Soviet government. I am referring to the remnants of the classes that are dying out and are being liquidated, and primarily to that small section of the peasantry—the kulaks. But in this case, it is not merely a policy of intimidation, a policy that is indeed being pursued. As you know, we Bolsheviks in this case go farther than mere intimidation: our object is to abolish this bourgeois stratum.

But as to the toiling population of the U.S.S.R., the workers and the peasants, who represent not less than 90 per cent of the population, they stand for the Soviet government and the overwhelming majority of them actively support the Soviet regime. They do so, because that regime furthers the fundamental interests of the workers and peasants. This is the basis for the stability of the Soviet government, and not an alleged policy of intimidation.

Ludwig: I am very much obliged to you for that reply. Please forgive me if I ask you a question that may appear strange to you. Your biography contains incidents of "brigandage" so to speak. Have you ever been interested in the personality of Stenka Razin, and what is your attitude towards him as an "ideological brigand?"

Stalin: We Bolsheviks have always been interested in such figures as Bolotnikov, Razin, Pugachev, and so on. We regard the acts of these people as the reflection of the seething unrest of the oppressed classes and of the spontaneous revolt of the peasantry against the feudal yoke. We have always studied with interest the history of these first attempts at revolt on the part of the peasanry. But of course, no analogy can be drawn between them and the Bolsheviks. Isolated peasant revolts, even when they are

not of the bandit and unorganised character of that of Stenka Razin, cannot be successful. Peasant revolts can be successful only if they are combined with revolts of the workers and if the peasant revolts are led by the workers. Only a combined revolt led by the working class has any chance of achieving its aim. Moreover, when we speak of Razin and Pugachev, it must never be forgotten that they were tsarists: they were opposed to the landlords, but were in favour of a "good tsar." That was their motto.

So you see, no analogy with the Bolsheviks can be drawn here.

Ludwig: Permit me to ask you certain questions concerning your biography. When I saw Masaryk, he told me that he was conscious of being a socialist already, at the age of six. What made you a socialist, and when did you become one?

Stalin: I cannot assert that I was already drawn towards socialism at the age of six. Not even at the age of ten or twelve. I joined the revolutionary movement at the age of fifteen, when I became connected with certain illegal groups of Russian Marxists in Transcaucasia. These groups exerted a great influence on me and instilled in me a taste for illegal Marxian literature.

Ludwig: What drove you to become a rebel? Was it, perhaps, because your parents treated you badly?

Stalin: No. My parents were uneducated people, but they did not treat me badly by any means. It was different in the theological seminary of which I was then a student. In protest against the humiliating regime and the jesuitical methods that prevailed in the seminary, I was ready to become, and eventually did become, a revolutionary, a believer in Marxism as the only genuinely revolutionary doctrine.

Ludwig: But do you not grant the Jesuits any good qualities?

Stalin: Yes, they are methodical and persevering in their work. But the basis of all their methods is spying, prying, peering into people's souls, to subject them to petty torment. What is there good in that? For instance, the spying in the boarding house. At nine o'clock the bell rings for morning tea, we go to the dining hall, and when we return we find that a search has been made and all our boxes have been turned inside out. . . . What is there good in that?

Ludwig: I observe in the Soviet Union an extreme respect for everything American, I might almost say a worship of everything American, in other words, of the land of the dollar, of the most consistent of capitalist countries. This feeling is also entertained by your working class, and not only towards tractors and automobiles, but to the Americans generally. How do you explain that?

Stalin: You are exaggerating. We have no particular respect for everything American. But we respect the efficiency the Americans display in everything—in industry, in technology, in literature and in life. We never forget that the U.S.A. is a capitalist country. But among the Americans there are many healthy people, both mentally and physically, who take up a healthy attitude towards work and towards practical affairs. We respect that efficiency, that simplicity of approach. In spite of the fact that America is a highly developed capitalist country, their industrial methods and productive habits contain something of the democratic spirit; and that cannot be said of the old European capitalist countries where the haughty spirit of the feudal aristocracy still prevails.

Ludwig: You do not even suspect how right you are.

Stalin: Perhaps I do, who knows? In spite of the fact that feudalism as a social system has been destroyed in Europe, considerable relics survive in life and manners. Engineers, specialists, scientists and writers, continue to emerge from feudal circles, who carry the haughty spirit of the nobility into industry, technology, science and literature. Feudal traditions have not been completely destroyed. That cannot be said of America, which is a country of "free colonists," without a landlord class, and without aristocrats. Hence the soundness and comparative simplicity of American habits in productive life. Our industrial leaders who have risen from the working class and who have been to America, immediately noticed this trait. They relate, not without a feeling of pleasant surprise, that in America it is difficult in the course of work to distinguish the engineer from the worker by mere outward appearance. They like that, of course. But in Europe the case is entirely different.

But if we are to speak of our sympathies toward any particular nation, or rather, to the majority of the population of any particular nation, then of course, we must speak of our sympathy for the Germans. Our feelings for the Americans cannot be compared with our sympathies for the Germans.

Ludwig: Why particularly the Germans?

Stalin: I simply mention it as a fact.

Ludwig: Serious fears have recently been expressed by certain German politicians that the traditional policy of friendship between the U.S.S.R. and Germany may be forced into the background. These fears arose as a result of the negotiations between the U.S.S.R. and Poland. Should the present frontiers of Poland be recognised by the U.S.S.R. as a result of these negotiations, it would cause severe disillusionment among the whole of the Ger-

man people, who have hitherto believed that the U.S.S.R. is opposed to the Versailles system and has no intention of recognising it.

Stalin: I know that a certain dissatisfaction and alarm is noticeable among certain German statesmen, who fear that the Soviet Union, in its negotiations, or in any treaty that may be concluded with Poland, may take some step that would imply that the Soviet Union gives its sanction to, or guarantees, the possessions and frontiers of Poland. In my opinion such fears are groundless. We have always declared our willingness to conclude pacts of non-aggression with any government. We have already concluded such pacts with a number of countries. We have openly declared our desire to sign a pact of non-aggression with Poland. And when we declare that we are ready to sign a pact of non-aggression with Poland, it is not a mere empty statement; it means that we actually do want to sign such a pact. We are politicians of a peculiar breed, if you like. There are politicians who promise a thing one day, and next day either forget all about it, or else deny that they promised any such thing, and do so without blushing. That is not our way. Whatever we do abroad inevitably becomes known inside the country, to all workers and peasants. If we declared one thing, and did another, we should forfeit our authority. As soon as the Poles declared their willingness to start negotiations with us regarding a pact of non-aggression, we naturally consented and began negotiations.

What, from the point of view of the Germans, is the most dangerous thing that might happen? A change of attitude towards the Germans for the worse? But there is no foundation for that. We, like the Poles, must declare in the pact that we shall not resort to force, or aggression, in order to change the frontiers of Poland bordering the U.S.S.R., or to violate their independence. Just as we make such a promise to the Poles, so they must make a similar promise to us. Without such a point, namely to the effect that we shall not resort to war in order to violate the independence or the integrity of the frontiers of our respective States, no pact could be concluded. Without that, a pact would be out of the question. That is the most we can do. Does that mean recognition of the Versailles system? It does not. Does it mean guaranteeing frontiers? It does not. We never have been guarantors for Poland and never shall be, just as Poland never has been, and never will be a guarantor of our frontiers. Our friendly relations with Germany will remain what they have been hitherto. That is my firm conviction.

Therefore, the misgivings of which you speak are entirely groundless. Those misgivings arose owing to rumours that were spread by certain Poles and Frenchmen. They will disappear when we publish the pact, that is, if Poland signs it. It will then be seen that it contains nothing directed against Germany.

Ludwig: I am very much obliged to you for that statement. Permit me to ask you the following question. You speak of "equalitarianism," lending the term an ironical meaning in respect of general equality. But is not general equality a socialist ideal?

Stalin: The kind of socialism under which everybody would receive the same pay, an equal quantity of meat, an equal quantity of bread, would wear the same kind of clothes and would receive the same kind of goods and in equal quantities—such a kind of socialism is unknown to Marxism. All that Marxism declares is that until classes have been completely abolished, and until work has been transformed from being a means of maintaining exist-

ence, into a prime necessity of life, into voluntary labour performed for the benefit of society, people will continue to be paid for their labour in accordance with the amount of labour performed. "From each according to his capacity, to each according to the work he performs," such is the Marxian formula of socialism, *i.e.*, the first stage of communism, the first stage of a communist society. Only in the highest phase of communism will people, working in accordance with their capacity, receive recompense therefor in accordance with their needs: "From each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs."

It is obvious that people's needs vary and will vary under socialism. Socialism never denied that people differed in their tastes, and in the quantity and quality of their needs. Read Marx's criticism of Stirner's inclination toward equalitarianism; read Marx's criticism of the Gotha Programme of 1875; read the subsequent works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and you will see how severely they attacked equalitarianism. The roots of equalitarianism lie in the mentality of the peasant, in the psychology of share and share alike, the psychology of primitive peasant "communism." Equalitarianism is entirely alien to Marxian socialism. It is those who know nothing about Marxism who have the primitive idea that the Russian Bolsheviks want to pool all wealth and then share it out equally. It is the idea of those who have never had anything in common with Marxism. It was the idea of communism entertained by such people as the primitive "communists" of the time of Cromwell and the French Revolution. But Marxism and Russian Bolshevism have nothing in common with the equalitarian "communists."

Ludwig: You are smoking a cigarette. Where is your legendary pipe, Mr. Stalin? You once said that words and legends pass, but deeds remain. But you will believe

me when I say that millions of people abroad, who know nothing of certain of your words and deeds, nevertheless know about your legendary pipe.

Stalin: I left my pipe at home.

Ludwig: I will ask you a question that may astonish you greatly.

Stalin: We Russian Bolsheviks have long forgotten how to be astonished.

Ludwig: Aye, and we in Germany too.

Stalin: Yes, you in Germany, too, will soon forget how to be astonished.

Ludwig: My question is as follows. You have frequently undergone risks and dangers. You have been persecuted. You have taken part in battles. A number of your close friends have perished. You have survived. How do you explain that? Do you believe in fate?

Stalin: No, I do not believe in fate. Bolsheviks, Marxists, do not believe in "fate." The idea of fate, of *Schicksal*, is a superstition, and absurdity, a survial of mythology, like that of the ancient Greeks, whose goddess of fate controlled the destinies of men.

Ludwig: In other words, the fact that you survived is mere chance?

Stalin: There are internal and external causes, a combination of which led to the fact that I did not perish. But entirely independent of that, somebody else might have been in my place, for *somebody must* sit here. Fate is mythical, something contrary to natural law. I do not believe in mysticism. Of course, there were reasons why danger passed me by. But there may have been a series of other chances, of other causes, which may have led to the contrary result. So-called fate has nothing to do with it.

Ludwig: Lenin spent many years abroad as an exile. You did not have occasion to be abroad for long periods. Do you regard it as a drawback to yourself; do you believe that greater benefits were brought to the revolution by people who, having been in exile abroad, had the opportunity to make a thorough study of Europe, but who, on the other hand, lost direct contact with the people; or that greater benefits were brought by those revolutionaries who carried on their work here, but who knew little of Europe?

Stalin: Lenin must be excluded from that comparison. Very few of those who remained in Russia were as closely associated with Russian affairs and with the working class movement within the country as was Lenin, although he spent a long time abroad. Whenever I visited him abroad —in 1907, 1908 and 1912—I saw the heaps of letters he had received from practical workers in Russia. Lenin always knew more than those who stayed in Russia. He always regarded his stay abroad as a burden.

Of course, there are in our Party and its leading bodies far more comrades who have never been abroad than former exiles, and of course they were able to bring more advantage to the revolution than those who were in exile. There are very few former exiles left in our Party. There are about 100 or 200 in all, among the two million members of the Party. Of the 70 members of the Central Committee not more than three or four lived in exile abroad.

As regards knowledge of Europe and a study of Europe, of course, those who wished to study Europe had a better opportunity to do so while living in Europe. From that point of view, those of us who have not lived long abroad, lost something. But living abroad is not essential in order to study European economics, technology, the leading

cadres of the working class movement, literature—fiction and scientific literature. Other conditions being equal, it is of course easier to study Europe while living in Europe. But the disadvantage of those who have not lived long in Europe is not very great. On the contrary, I know many comrades who were twenty years abroad, lived somewhere in Charlottenburg or in the Latin Quarter, spent years sitting in cafes and consuming beer, and yet did not study Europe and failed to understand Europe.

Ludwig: Do you not consider that among the Germans as a nation the love of order is more highly developed than the love of freedom?

Stalin: There was a time when people in Germany did indeed respect the law. When I spent two or three months in Berlin in 1907, we Russians Bolsheviks used to laugh at certain of our German friends for their respect of the law. There was, for instance, an anecdote to the effect that on one occasion the Berlin Committee of the Social Democratic Party organised a demonstration fixed for a certain day and hour at which the members of all the suburban organisations were to attend. A group of about 200 from one of the suburbs arrived in the city punctually at the hour appointed, but they failed to appear at the demonstration. It turned out that they waited two hours on the platform of the station because the ticket collector at the exit was missing, and there was nobody to take their tickets. It was said in jest that a Russian comrade had to show them an easy way out of the situation, namely, to leave the platform without surrendering their tickets . . .

But is there anything like that in Germany now? Is there respect for the law in Germany today? What about the National Socialists, who should be the first to guard bourgeois law and order, do they not violate the laws,

break up workers' clubs and murder workers with impunity? I will not speak of the workers, who it appears to me, long ago lost all respect for bourgeois law and order. Aye, the Germans have changed considerably in these days.

Ludwig: Under what conditions will it be possible finally and completely to unite the working class under the leadership of one party? Why, as the Communists declare, is such unification of the working class possible only after the proletarian revolution?

Stalin: It is easier to achieve the union of the working class around the Communist Party as a result of a victorious proletarian revolution. But undoubtedly it will be achieved in the main even before the revolution.

Ludwig: Is ambition a stimulus or a hindrance to the activities of a great historical personage?

Stalin: The part played by ambition varies under different conditions. Depending on conditions, ambition may be a stimulus or a hindrance to the activities of a great historical personage. Most frequently it is a hindrance.

Ludwig: Is the October Revolution in any sense at all the continuation and the culmination of the Great French Revolution?

Stalin: The October Revolution is neither the continuation nor the culmination of the Great French Revolution. The purpose of the French Revolution was to put an end to feudalism and establish capitalism. The aim of the October Revolution is to put an end to capitalism and to establish socialism.

December 13th, 1931.