

However, it is apparently easier for Stalin to expound this excellent doctrine than for Soviet scholars to apply it and no bold spirit has yet tried to employ "free criticism" or the "struggle of opinions" against, for example, the Lysenko regime in biology.

After Stalin's contribution on June 20, the discussion continued in two additional issues of *Pravda*, on June 27 and July 4. All further articles were decidedly anti-Marrist and all now cited Stalin's "contribution of genius" as the starting point for serious linguistics. Among the final contributions on July 4 were short letters from Meshchaninov and one or two others who had written in support of Marr before Stalin's intervention. They humbly recognized their mistake and did not indulge in any "struggle of opinions". Stalin elaborated on his *Pravda* article in four letters to various "comrades" first published in *Bolshevik* No. 12 of 1950 and *Bolshevik* No. 14 of 1950. A comment on "formalism" in the first of these letters may have been encouraging to writers and artists who have been attacked for this vice:

N. Ya. Marr and his 'students' accused of formalism all the philosophers who do not share the 'new teaching' of N. Ya. Marr. This, of course, is not serious and is unintelligent . . . I feel that 'formalism' was fabricated by the authors of the 'new teaching' for facilitating the struggle with their opponents in linguistics.

His reply to a letter from a certain Comrade Sanzheyev began with a little joke about the Soviet bureaucracy:

Esteemed Comrade Sanzheyev:

I am replying to your letter very belatedly, since the Central Committee apparatus referred it to me only yesterday.

Speculation on Stalin's Intervention

There has been much speculation about the reason for this personal intervention by the supreme Soviet leader in what might seem a very academic controversy of interest only to a narrow circle of professional philologists and teachers. Whatever the explanation, it is at least certain that the question must have been regarded as one of the greatest importance if so weighty an authority as Stalin himself was needed to "smash the old regime in linguistics". The Marrists had made use of their dominant position in the field not only to tyrannize over the language teachers of the whole country but also to line their own pockets. One of them was cited in the press as holding seven salaried administrative posts simultaneously and spending his time interfering with the work of others to the neglect of his own philological research. Students writing theses for advanced degrees, especially in comparative linguistics, had long been hampered in their work by the necessity of conforming to the Marrist theories and the impossibility of getting them accepted if they did not. What was more serious, however, and perhaps one of the main reasons for Stalin's intervention, was that all language studies, including Russian, were being adversely affected right down to the elementary grades. For instance, a directive from the Ministry of Education forbade any teacher to take a single sentence for grammatical analysis; instead, he must take a passage of not fewer than three or four sentences and have the students analyze it semantically. As a result of such doctrinaire interference, there was an alarming decline in the standard of spelling and composition in Russian itself, and the better teachers in many parts of the country were seriously worried.

An article in the January 1951 issue of the Soviet journal *Questions of Philosophy* by A. Mordinov, lends support to the view that urgent practical needs of Soviet society, in particular the gradual Russification of non-Russian minorities, may have brought on the controversy and may have led Stalin to take part in person. Mordinov pointed out that Marr's theories found almost no acceptance outside the Soviet Union