

Notes on Stalin 2016

Joseph Stalin created around his rule a formidable cult of personality that has been interpreted in many ways, as a product of Russia's recent feudal past, as reflecting the inevitable outcome of centralized, authoritarian politics; or as a reflection of Stalin's own psychology. Isaac Deutscher's *Stalin: A Political Biography*, roots Stalin's tyranny in the psychology of his class and ethnic background. Deutscher opens the story in 1875 at the time Stalin's father, Vissarion Ivanovich Djugashvili, left his native village to work as an independent shoemaker in the Georgian town of Gori. He establishes three essential biographical details about Stalin. His father was born a peasant, a "chattel slave to some Georgian landlord";¹ in fact, ten years before, Stalin's grandparents had been serfs. Like his father, Stalin's mother, Ekaterina Gheladze, was also born a serf.² When Stalin was born, on 6 December 1878 (Baptised Joseph Vissarionovich Djugashvili), he was the first of her children to survive—two sons had died in infancy.³ Deutscher considers Stalin's class origins to be central to an understanding of his subsequent biography. Serfdom, he claimed, "permeated the whole atmosphere" of Stalin's early life, weighing heavily on "human relations . . . , psychological attitudes, upon the whole manner of life."⁴ In this world of "[c]rude and open dependence of man upon man, a rigid undisguised social hierarchy, primitive violence and lack of human dignity," the chief weapons of the oppressed were "[d]issimulation, deception, and violence," traits, he argues, that Stalin was to exhibit at many points of his political career.⁵

Second, Stalin wasn't Russian; his nationality and first language were Georgian. At the time of Stalin's birth, Georgia was a recent addition to the Russian Empire. Historically, the Kingdom of Sakartvelo was an independent, Christian state surrounded by hostile nationalities. The Caucasus region was splintered into principalities and had been forcefully added to the Russian Empire in 1859 with the surrender of Chechens after a 30-year war. The last slice of Georgia was annexed in 1879. Simon Montefiore, author of *Young Stalin*, argues that Georgian aristocrats dreamed of independence.⁶ Stalin's grandfather was an Ossetian, a "mountain people" from the "northern borders of Georgia" regarded by Georgians as "barbarous." A separatist movement in 1891-93 succeeded in gaining autonomy for South Ossetians. Stalin, however, was totally Georgianized.⁷

Finally, while his father hoped to prosper as a petty bourgeois artisan in Gori, he was forced to abandon this ambition and was compelled to seek work in a shoe factory in the Georgian capital of Tiflis.⁸ Montefiore says that Vissarion Djugashvili found work in a shoe-factory in Tiflis and was then recruited to Gori, where he made shoes for the Russian military in Georgia. / The family prospered in Gori.⁹ Vissarion opened his own cobbler shop, backed by his friends. After two sons died in infancy, Vissarion began to drink heavily. / The family lived in "a

¹ Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* Second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1.

² Deutscher, *Stalin*, 2.

³ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 23. Stalin's 'official' birthday was 21 December 1879 (p. 23n), as reported by Deutscher, *Stalin*, 2.

⁴ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 12.

⁵ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 13.

⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 20-1.

⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 21n.

⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 4.

⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 21-2.

pokey two-room one-storey cottage” with little furniture and little more than basic table fare.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, the family moved. Vissarion’s business grew to the point where he employed apprentices and as many as ten workers.¹¹ But the drinking worsened and, by the time Stalin was five, his father “was an alcoholic tormented by paranoia and prone to violence.”¹² Stalin grew up with an abusive father and an unstable home life. The family prospered and then sank into poverty. His mother both protected and dominated her young son, and also punished him physically.¹³ By the time Stalin was ten, his father had lost everything. Deutscher says it was largely Ekaterina’s labour as a washerwoman that put bread on the young Stalin’s table and paid his school fees, although she later found stable employment as an atelier.¹⁴ In Deutscher’s view, Stalin’s particular upbringing further reinforced the character traits that were consistent with the condition of subservience in the face of unjust authority: from his father Stalin learned “distrust, alertness, evasion, dissimulation, and endurance.”¹⁵

While his father sought to teach Stalin the shoemaking trade, his mother had grander ambitions and, with the help of a local priest, he began to learn to read and write Russian and Georgian. In 1888, Ekaterina arranged to send young Stalin to the elementary, ecclesiastical school at Gori. He excelled in the examinations and was accepted into the second grade.¹⁶ Under the reactionary Tsar Alexander III, schooling in Georgia was in Russian. Georgian was forbidden as part of a Tsar’s Russification plan.¹⁷ Meanwhile, from the 1880s, Russia was undergoing a rapid but localized industrialization, largely funded by foreign capital, such as in the oil fields of Baku.

Young Stalin, who became the “best scholar” at the school, had a magnetic personality but, argues Montefiore, he led a double life. Outside classes, in the streets, he brawled.¹⁸ For the next five years at the parish school, Deutscher claims, Stalin was a top student who was made aware of class differences and national inequalities. In the first years at the school, Stalin was devout but rebellious. On one occasion he was forced by his father to work as an apprentice in the same Tiflis factory where his father was employed. The period was intense but short, since his mother and teachers prevailed on officials to have her son return to school.¹⁹ Drawn to like-minded friends and reading voraciously, including, apparently, Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, Stalin began to have doubts about his faith and to express sympathy for the poor. His ambitions changed from being a priest to an administrator “with the power to improve conditions.”²⁰ The atmosphere was charged with Georgian nationalism and Stalin was enthused by tales of Georgian bandits who refused to accept Tsarist rule. Russian oppression was never more symbolically obvious as during the hanging of two Georgian bandits in Gori, which Stalin

¹⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 22-3.

¹¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 24. Montefiore discusses rumours about Stalin’s paternity and concludes that the shoemaker is still the most likely candidate (pp. 26-7).

¹² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 28.

¹³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 30-33. Stalin’s father died in August, 1910 (p. 215); effectively, however, Stalin lost his father when he was still a child.

¹⁴ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 3; Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 33.

¹⁵ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 3.

¹⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 33-4.

¹⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 42-3.

¹⁸ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 36.

¹⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 47.

²⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 43; 48-9.

witnessed as a schoolboy. The event, Montefiore suggests, solidified Stalin's youthful rebelliousness.²¹

He left the school, Deutscher says, "in a mood of some rebelliousness, in which protest against social injustice mingled with semi-romantic Georgian patriotism."²² In 1894, at the age of 16, Stalin began his study at the Theological Seminary of Tiflis,²³ not leaving until May 1899 when he was expelled for radicalism. Even with a scholarship, the fees were high. Many of the friends and possibly the lovers of Stalin's mother helped pay the cost of her son's education at the best seminary in "the southern Empire."²⁴

Deutscher says that the Tiflis Seminary was a traditional and stifling boarding school run on strict lines of discipline, "a spiritual preserve of serfdom," dominated by authoritarian, "feudal-ecclesiastical habits of mind."²⁵ / At first Stalin was a model student in his behaviour as well as intellectually. / By seventeen, young Stalin was considered an excellent singer, good enough, according to Montefiore, that some believed he could "go professional." He also showed some poetic talent, his poems demonstrating "delicacy and purity of rhythm and language."²⁶ The career of a priest, poet, or musician, however, tempted Stalin less than the image of himself as a romantic outlaw. Tiflis was not only the centre of Georgian nationalism, but of "advanced social and political ideas" including Marxism.²⁷ Stalin was soon at the centre of a group of Tiflis students who defied the censorship of the Seminary priests and covertly read western, liberal literature. Stalin was particularly fond of Victor Hugo, / Emile Zola, and the Caucasian romantic novelist, Alexander Kazbegi, whose hero, Koba, fought for Georgian independence against the Russians. Stalin adopted the name as his revolutionary pseudonym.²⁸ / His grades dropped as his interest in secular, romantic, and rebellious ideas grew. The young rebel-priests played cat-and-mouse with the Seminary's disciplinarians, and spend many evenings in the punishment cell without food. / Stalin refused "to cut his hair, growing it rebelliously long."²⁹ Stalin was expelled in 1899, officially for not sitting the examinations. Montefiore speculates that the reasons were complicated. Besides the liberal reading circles, Stalin was reputed to have amorous relationships with women. Stalin's story was that his expulsion was for distributing Marxist literature.³⁰

According to the "Biographical Chronicle" in the first volume of Stalin's *Collected Works*, in 1895 Stalin came into contact with underground Marxists who had been sent into exile in Transcaucasia.³¹ As an unintended consequence, the policy of exiling revolutionaries spread radical ideology to far-flung corners of the Empire. Stalin and a group of his friends read *Capital* and slipped away from the Seminary to meet with railway workers. Montefiore says that Stalin

²¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 49-51.

²² Deutscher, *Stalin*, 8.

²³ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 9.

²⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 51-2.

²⁵ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 13.

²⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 54-5, 56, 58.

²⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 13.

²⁸ In the recent *Planet of the Apes* franchise, the ape leader is Caesar and his initially sycophantic right-hand is Koba. Caesar pursues peaceful coexistence with humans against Koba's advice. Koba tries to assassinate Caesar, takes over the leadership, and imprisons Caesar's closest allies. The parallels with Stalin are superficial but apparent.

²⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 62-4, 68-9. Stalin's uncle (his mother's brother) was killed at this time by the police (p. 64).

³⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 71-2. Stalin also said that he had been unable to pay the increased fees (p. 73) but this was the story he told the secret police (p. 73).

³¹ J. Stalin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (1901-1907) (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 415-16; Deutscher, *Stalin*, 19.

had taken his first tentative steps from being a “rebellious schoolboy” to dabbling in revolutionary waters.³² Over the next few years he read what liberal and socialist ideas he could find, and organized students’ and workers’ study circles. He also came across the writings of Lenin. By New Year’s Day, 1900, the 22-year old Stalin had helped organize a strike among tram workers and was arrested within the week, being detained for only a brief period. / His agitation among the railway workers continued. At the time Stalin dressed the part of the scruffy, provincial revolutionary, as described by Trotsky: “a beard; long ... hair; and a black satin Russian blouse with a red tie.”³³ By day, he was employed as a weatherman at the Tiflis Meteorological Observatory.³⁴

In August, 1898, Stalin joined the underground Georgian Social Democratic group, *Messameh Dassy*, in Tiflis.³⁵ The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was formed in 1898, during a small gathering of socialists in the city of Minsk. Led by George Plekanov, the RSDLP adopted the Marxist view that the socialist revolution would come to Russia as a result of a proletarian revolution and not on the basis of a system of peasant communes. In 1900 the Party began publishing the periodical, *Iskra (The Spark)*, which was meat and drink for the young revolutionaries who surrounded Stalin.³⁶

According to Deutscher, Stalin was singular among the Bolsheviks he would eventually join in being from a peasant background. Unlike the Bolshevik intelligentsia, Stalin did not bring any sense of personal guilt to his socialism. His hatred for the “possessing and ruling classes” was genuine and deep, but Stalin did not see the backward masses, poor peasants and workers romantically or sentimentally, “as the embodiment of virtue and nobility of spirit.”³⁷ He would treat the oppressed masses as he would their oppressors, Deutscher claims, with “sceptical distrust.”³⁸ Deutscher concludes: “His socialism was cold, sober, and rough.”³⁹

In 1900, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party conducted Party work in Tiflis. In March, 1901, Stalin was helping organize demonstrations in Tiflis, having affairs with local women, and managing to avoid arrest. He was now on the secret police’s list of revolutionary leaders. As workers and ex-Seminarians fought pitched battles with the Cossacks on the streets of Tiflis, Stalin managed to escape the gendarmes.⁴⁰ The Russian secret police was well-organized and effective in its pursuit of anarchists and revolutionaries. At first, Marxists were seen as little more than liberals, committed to a legal struggle for democracy. The usual target of the secret police were the populist and anarchist groups, such as People’s Will, which carried out assassinations of officials, often targeting the Tsar, and the peasant-based Social Revolutionaries, also committed to conspiratorial violence. The terrorists and revolutionary groups were locked in

³² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 64, 67. For the first time, he was drawn to the attention of the Tsar’s secret police (p. 66).

³³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 76-7.

³⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 76. An underground, violent group in the United States formed in 1969 as a break-away faction of the SDS, referred to itself as the ‘Weathermen’. They conducted bombings of government institutions into the 1970s, The term apparently came from a Bob Dylan song, *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, which contained the lines: ‘You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows’.

³⁵ J. Stalin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (1901-1907) (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 415-16; Deutscher, *Stalin*, 22.

³⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 80.

³⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 25.

³⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 25.

³⁹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 26.

⁴⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 82.

a complex network of intrigue, secrecy, disguise, manoeuvre, and betrayal known as *Konspiratsia*.⁴¹

In 1901, Stalin became a member of the Tiflis Committee of the RSDLP. During these years, the Bolshevik leader, V. I. Lenin was busy promoting an all-Russian underground Marxist organization, stimulated by publication abroad of *Iskra*, which was smuggled into Russia. Stalin was influenced by these readings and became committed not only to Marxism, but to *Iskra*'s main arguments and policies.⁴² Stalin's group began publishing the illegal revolutionary newspaper, *Brdzola (The Struggle)* in September, 1901 in Baku, on an illegal printing press.⁴³ The first issue was headed by Stalin's editorial outlining the programme of the paper. The paper was published in Georgian and set its task to explain local conditions as well as translating the all-Party newsletter (written in Russian), informing "its readers about all questions of principle concerning theory and tactics." The paper intended "to be as close to the masses of workers as possible, to be able constantly to influence them and serve as their conscious and guiding centre." The paper would raise "the necessity of waging a political struggle." Given the state of the movement for freedom, which extended beyond the demands of the working class, the paper would "afford space for every revolutionary movement, even one outside the labour movement" and "explain every social phenomenon." This did not mean "compromising with the bourgeoisie" / or failing to expose the errors of "all Bernsteinian delusions."⁴⁴ Stalin opposed the Legal Marxists in the party, and he pushed his supporters into direct confrontations with big business and the state.

In his article on the 'Immediate Tasks' of the RSDLP, Stalin contrasted utopian socialism with Marxism. Marxism was based on "the laws of social life" / that established the workers as "the only *natural* vehicle of the socialist ideal" (italics in original). Quoting Marx, Stalin asserted: "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself." Socialism required "the independent action of the workers and their amalgamation into an organized force."⁴⁵ Until the 1890s in Russia, socialists had been brave and active, but utopian, while the labour movement was in revolt but leaderless and disorganized: / it was "unconscious, spontaneous and unorganized."⁴⁶ The movement, however, was divided between those who pursued only economic struggles and the revolutionaries who wanted to raise the workers to social-democratic consciousness and challenge the state.

The revolutionary movement against autocracy extended beyond the working class to include the peasants, small officials, the petty bourgeoisie, liberal professionals, and even middle-level bourgeois. The overarching slogan was: "*Overthrow the autocracy.*" Stalin imagined a two-stage revolution: The achievement of freedom and a democratic constitution, the common aim of all the movements, "will open a free road to a better future, to the unhindered struggle for the establishment of the socialist system."⁴⁷

The task of the RSDLP was to take the banner of democracy into its hands and lead the struggle.⁴⁸ Stalin warned that the bourgeoisie has, historically, used the power of the working

⁴¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 83. Montefiore says that the spirit of *Konspiratsia* 'is vividly drawn in Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils*.'

⁴² Deutscher, *Stalin*, 34-43.

⁴³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 87.

⁴⁴ Stalin, 'From the Editors' (Sept. 1901, *Collected Works*, 1: 1-8), 6-7.

⁴⁵ Stalin, 'The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks' (Nov.-Dec. 1901, *Collected Works*, 1: 9-30), 9-10.

⁴⁶ Stalin, 'The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks', 11-12.

⁴⁷ Stalin, 'The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks', 23-4. Italics in original.

⁴⁸ Stalin, 'The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks', 27.

class in its struggle with autocracy, but left the workers empty-handed in the end: “the workers will merely pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the bourgeoisie.” / Only if workers take the lead in the movement through an independent political party will a broad, democratic constitution be achieved; led by the bourgeoisie, a constitution would simply be “plucked.”⁴⁹

Not leafleting, but direct street agitation was the primary tool of propaganda and organization. The “curious onlooker” who witnesses the demonstration sees the courageous actions of the demonstrators and comes “to understand what they are fighting for, to hear free voices ... and militant songs denouncing the existing system and exposing our social evils.” The consequent repression by the police transforms the situation “from an instrument for taming into an instrument for rousing the people:... [R]isk the lash in order to sow the seeds of political agitation and socialism.”⁵⁰

Stalin soon became an energetic and effective organizer and underground worker in Batumi, a city in the oil-producing region of Georgia. The working class movement had become strikingly more active by 1903. A strike in the Baku oil fields in 1903 rapidly spread to Tiflis, and similar outbreaks occurred in other south Russian cities such as Kiev and Odessa. The strikes included political demands and were accompanied by large street demonstrations—and, inevitably, by police violence.⁵¹ Stalin organized several strikes and demonstrations, becoming the centre of a circle of young activists who defied the cautious counsel of the Legal Marxists. Tactics were rough and ready, and included the assassination of businessmen and double agents. In March, 1902, a large demonstration of workers was fired upon by troops, killing 13 workers. The massacre stirred the revolutionary pot.⁵² On the fifth of April, Stalin was arrested.⁵³

Stalin was imprisoned in Batumi prison, where he distinguished himself by organizing the prisoners. He had considerable unofficial authority in the prison culture. He continued his studies and maintained contacts with social democrats outside. Partly as a response to Stalin’s high profile in Batumi and the demonstration he led against a visit by the Exarch of the Georgian Church, he was transferred to Kutaisi prison in Western Georgia.⁵⁴ On the eighth of October, 1903, Stalin boarded a train taking him to exile in the village of Novaya Uda, Siberia. After a seven-week journey, he arrived on 26 November and began boarding in a two-room house with a peasant family.⁵⁵ Unlike many other prominent exiles, such as Lenin and Trotsky, Stalin was short of money. Nevertheless, on January 4, 1904, he escaped. This feat cost about 100 roubles and was managed by thousands of exiles before and after Stalin. His return to Tiflis took barely ten days.⁵⁶

By the time Stalin returned to Georgia, the political situation in the RSDLP had been changed fundamentally. In July-August, 1903, the first act of the future Bolshevik Party had been enacted in Brussels and London—while Stalin was cooling his heels during his first period

⁴⁹ Stalin, ‘The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks’, 28-9.

⁵⁰ Stalin, ‘The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks’, 25-6.

⁵¹ William Henry Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution: 1917-1918*, Vol. 1 (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965 [1935], 46. By 1901, Montefiore says, ‘Baku produced half the world’s oil’. Among the foreign owners were the Nobels from Sweden, who established the Nobel Prize in that year funded largely from oil profits (Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 187).

⁵² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 93-6.

⁵³ Stalin, *Collected Works*, 1, 418.

⁵⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 104-5. Montefiore says that some of the guards sympathized with the radicals. Stalin read *The Communist*

⁵⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 108, 110-11.

⁵⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 114,116; Stalin, *Collected Works*, 1, 420-1. The village was located in Balagansk Uyezd, Irkutsk Gubernia.

of imprisonment in Kutaisi, Georgia. Rather than forming a single, united Social Democratic Party, the Second Congress resulted in a split between two groups, which became known as Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The division was first formalized over the membership of the editorial board of *Iskra*, with Lenin's group then being in a majority – Bolshevik.⁵⁷ The crucial debate in the Second Congress, however, was over principles of party organization. Socialists were divided on the organizational principles the party should adopt. Lenin had published his position in 1902 in *What is to be Done?* He argued that Party membership should be limited to a small, dedicated, and active group of professional revolutionaries who would be the vanguard of a mass, workers' movement. Julius Martov argued in favour of a membership based on adherence to the principles of the SDLP, a more open membership model that was common among Western socialist parties. Martov's formula won by a vote of 28 to 23. Among those who supported Martov were Plekhanov, the RSDLP founder, and Leon Trotsky.⁵⁸ While Martov's group (the Mensheviks) was a majority in the RSDLP, the apparently mis-named groups continued to be known as Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

When Stalin returned from Siberian exile to Tiflis early in 1904, a confused debate raged between these two political tendencies. According to Montefiore, at first Stalin insisted on a Georgian Social Democratic Party. Within months, however, Stalin expressed his support for the Bolshevik cause.⁵⁹ The first Georgian Bolshevik and one of the founders of Mesame Desi, Mikha Tskhakaya, espoused the Leninist principles of a single, all-Russia party and on nationalism. Stalin then wrote a *credo* professing his errors. The seventy printed copies became serious contraband during and after Stalin's later rise to leadership in the Party because they were used to undermine his Leninist credentials, showing that he had not always adhered to Lenin's principles.⁶⁰

The National Question

Stalin had originally been a Georgian nationalist. As a social democrat, he had advocated for a Georgian Marxist party. He had already published an article on the 'national question' in his editorial on the "Immediate Tasks" of the RSDLP in 1901, which was reprinted in Stalin's *Collected Works* (unlike the *Credo*):

Groaning under the yoke are the oppressed nations and religious communities in Russia, including the Poles, who are being driven from their native land and whose most sacred sentiments are being outraged, and the Finns, whose rights and liberties, granted by history, the autocracy is arrogantly trampling underfoot. Groaning under the yoke are the eternally persecuted and humiliated Jews who lack even the miserably few rights enjoyed by other Russian subjects—the right to live in any part of the country they choose, the right to attend school, the right to be employed / in government service, and so forth. Groaning are the Georgians, Armenians, and other nations who are deprived of the right to have their own schools and be employed in government offices, and are compelled to submit to the shameful and oppressive policy of *Russification* so

⁵⁷ <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Russian:Social:Democratic:Labour:Party.html> (26 March 2010).

⁵⁸ <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/RUSsdp.htm> (26 March 2010).

⁵⁹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 59.

⁶⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 117-18, 118n.

zealously pursued by the autocracy.... The oppressed nations in Russia cannot even dream of liberating themselves by their own efforts so long as they are oppressed not only by the Russian government, but even by the Russian people.⁶¹

The 1901 article talks about the liberation of oppressed nations and places the blame for the oppression partly on the “Russian people.” The article is not couched in the language of class.

In September, 1904, Stalin defended the Bolshevik position on the national question in “The Social Democratic View of the National Question.” Marxism links nationalism and class. The question is, which class leads the movement and which class interests are being pursued. Stalin identified feudal-monarchist nationalism as a reactionary movement of the Georgian aristocracy seeking, in alliance with the Church, to rule the independent nation. The aristocracy was divided, however, between nationalists and those who sought material benefit in an alliance with the Russian aristocracy.⁶²

Second was bourgeois nationalism, which was driven by a desire to protect the Georgian market from foreign business competition. In the form of a National-Democratic movement, the bourgeoisie sought an alliance with the proletariat in the interests of a national economic policy. Economic development, however, had increasingly connected “advanced circles” of Georgian and Russian businesses.⁶³ Both forms of nationalism, then, were tainted by connections with Russian imperialism.

What of “the national question of the proletariat?” The terms appear to be in contradiction, although Stalin does not make this explicit. It is in the interests of the proletariat of “all Russia” that “Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Polish, [and] Jewish” workers unite and demolish national barriers. In this sense, nationalism among the proletarians of these groups works in the interests of the autocracy because it fosters disunity among the working classes. Stalin says the autocracy strives to divide nationalities and incite conflict among nations.⁶⁴ At the same time, they all face similar oppression. The Russian autocracy, he argues, “brutally persecutes the national cultures, the languages, customs and institutions of the ‘alien’ nationalities in Russia. It deprives them of their essential civil rights, oppresses them in every way.” But as workers’ nationalism is aroused, Stalin argues, the autocracy thereby prevents the development of class consciousness,⁶⁵ which is in opposition to national consciousness. In these terms there can be no genuine nationalism among proletarians.

For social democrats, the question becomes how to demolish national barriers and unify the proletariat. The answer is not to create separate, national social-democratic parties that are loosely united in a federation because that would intensify the barriers. Each national party in a federation would be built on the foundation of the factors that distinguish that nationality from all others. Stalin argued that “narrow-national strings ... still exist in the heart of the proletarians of the different nationalities in Russia.”⁶⁶ The Bolshevik answer is a single, all-Russia proletarian party because “we are fighting under the same political conditions, and against a common enemy!” It was necessary to emphasize the common interests of workers and speak “of their ‘national distinctions’ only insofar as these did not contradict their *common* interests.”⁶⁷ National

⁶¹ Stalin, ‘The R.S.D.P. and its Immediate Tasks’, 20-1. (Italics in original).

⁶² Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’ (1 Sept. 1904, *Collected Works*, 1, 31-54), 31-2.

⁶³ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 32-3.

⁶⁴ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 34-35.

⁶⁵ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 35.

⁶⁶ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 39.

⁶⁷ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 37.

interests, for example, are common among the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, yet the national bourgeoisie sucks the blood of its “tribe” like a vampire, and the national clergy systematically corrupts their minds.⁶⁸

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was, by name and programme, a party for all nationalities in Russia, not only ethnic Russians. The party programme, Stalin asserted, included “complete equality of rights for all” nationalities (Clause 7) and language rights in education and politics (Clause 8). While under the Russian SDLP, all of Russia would have a set of general laws and a single constitution, nationalities within Russia would have the right to apply the constitution in a way that was consistent with local conditions and socialist development – the “common interests” which must not be contradicted. The Party programme called for: “wide local self-government; regional self-government for those localities which are differentiated by their special conditions of life and the composition of their population” (Clause 3).⁶⁹ Stalin claimed (in 1904) that clauses 3, 7, and 8 implied “*political centralism*.” Under Clause 9 of the Party programme, however, nationalities were “granted the right to arrange all their national affairs according to their own will”; national affairs were not the same as collective, socialist affairs.

In Stalin’s view, bourgeois development was gradually integrating the Russian and the so-called ‘alien’ nationalities, undermining the specifically nationalistic ambitions of the bourgeoisie of the various nationalities. In these terms, aristocratic and bourgeois nationalism were both being undermined by growing integration with the Russian aristocracy or bourgeoisie, respectively. For their part, the proletariat is opposed to such movements of national emancipation because they always operate in the interests of the bourgeoisie and have “corrupted and crippled the class consciousness of the proletariat”; hence, the need for political centralisation. But, argued Stalin, “economic and political conditions may arise in which” members of an “alien” bourgeoisie may want national emancipation and “such a movement” may “prove to be favourable to the class consciousness of the proletariat.” / Clause 9 specifically allows the right of succession. But Stalin sidesteps the question whether national emancipation is or is not advantageous for the proletariat. Dialectically, there is no precise, theoretical answer to this question.⁷⁰ A movement for national emancipation among the proletariat, Stalin asserted, was merely hypothetical and, if one emerged in the future, it was presently impossible to know the level proletarian class consciousness would have reached at that time.⁷¹

Similarly, Stalin said, co-operatives may be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on “time and place.” They are corrupting if they corrupt class consciousness by breeding “small-shopkeeper tendencies and craft insularity among the workers.... [W]here the class consciousness of the proletariat has reached the proper level of development and the proletarians are united in a single, strong political party,” co-operatives are beneficial “if the party itself undertakes to organize and direct them.”⁷² The question is not whether cooperatives, in general, are progressive. The judgment must be made in the context of class struggle and the degree of socialist consciousness of the proletariat.

Nationalism is subject to the same contextual analysis. Posing the question whether national independence is “useful or harmful to the proletariat” is too abstract. In Stalin’s view, a

⁶⁸ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 39n.

⁶⁹ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 44.

⁷⁰ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 48-9.

⁷¹ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 50.

⁷² Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 50.

national emancipation movement among the bourgeoisie of the ‘alien’ nationalities neither existed presently in Russia, nor was inevitable in the future. The judgment about whether such a movement would be helpful or harmful to the proletariat would depend on the context, on the “the level of the class consciousness of the proletariat.”⁷³ Stalin asserts that clause 9 gives the right to national emancipation—only the ‘alien’ nationality can decide whether independence is useful or harmful. However, he also asserts,

that same clause imposes on us the duty to see to it that the wishes of these nationalities are really Social-Democratic, that these wishes spring from the class interests of the proletariat; and for this we must educate the proletarians of these nationalities in the Social-Democratic spirit, subject some of their reactionary ‘national’ habits, customs and institutions to stern Social-Democratic criticism—which, however, will not prevent us from defending these habits, customs and institutions from police violence.⁷⁴

The question of nationalism must be based on a contextualized analysis of the class interests of the proletariat.⁷⁵

In the end, other than hypothetically, nationalism is condemned as either feudal or bourgeois. It is difficult to conceive of a proletarian democracy with Stalin’s formulation. All that is actually possible is to establish local and regional areas of relative autonomy, in language, religion, and custom, for example. It would be assumed that the establishment of a proletarian government in Russia would bring an end to the oppression of national and other minorities, and end forced Russification in the expectation that slow, evolutionary change in the direction of socialist practices would inevitably ensue.

Serious contradictions would necessarily develop between socialist practices and certain local or regional differences, affecting such revolutionary requirements as the emancipation of women, for example. In theory, religious practices could be ameliorated over time, but the Marxist opposition to supernaturalism makes religion a refuge of opponents of the socialist system, necessarily limiting religious autonomy. The boundaries of nationality, religion, and localism overlapped significantly in Russia, reinforcing centrifugal tendencies. Minority regions also tended to be agricultural or resource-rich, which later exacerbated the contradiction between centralized industrial expansion and local, primary industries.

The question of how ‘wide’ the powers of local government would be was settled in favour of centralization in the Constitution that was promulgated after the Revolution. During the period of War Communism in the early years of Soviet rule, relative autonomy was basically shelved through the implementation of revolutionary practices, deemed necessary in the circumstances. In the early years of the Revolution, the central government suppressed nationalist and other locally-based movements by non-Russian minorities. As the Party expert, following the October Revolution, Stalin was named Commissar of Nationalities.

⁷³ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 50.

⁷⁴ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 51.

⁷⁵ Stalin, ‘The Social Democratic View of the National Question’, 54. Stalin concludes that a federation of nationalist/social-democratic parties reinforces national barriers and abandons the “standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat.” Georgian revolutionaries, then, must join the RSDLP.

The National Question in 1913

“There is no middle course: principles triumph, they do not ‘compromise.’”

-- J. Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question”⁷⁶ (1913)

Stalin addressed the national question just prior to WW I, assuming that Russia was in the bourgeois democratic stage of the revolution and that the goal was complete democratization. In this context, he advocated the right of nationalities to self-determination. In his pamphlet, “Marxism and the National Question” (1913), Stalin wrote:

a combination of internal and external conditions may arise in which one or another nationality in Russia may find it necessary to raise and settle the question of its independence. And, of course, it is not for Marxists to create obstacles in such cases.

But it follows that Russian Marxists cannot dispense with the right of nations to self-determination.

Thus, *the right of self-determination is an essential element* in the solution of the national question. (Italics in original)

Should a nationality choose to remain within the whole, the only solution is regional autonomy, for such coherent territories as Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania. Autonomy includes control over productive forces without requiring “the decision of a common centre.” Regional autonomy breaks down national barriers and opens the way to divisions based on classes. “[R]egional autonomy is an essential element in the solution of the national question.” (Italics in original). With “complete democracy,” fear for minorities in an autonomous region will disappear. Minorities want the right to sue their native language, have their own schools, and have

“liberty of conscience (religious liberty), liberty of movement, etc. Thus, *equal rights of nations in all forms (language, schools, etc.) is an essential element* in the solution of the national question. Consequently, a state law based on complete democratization of the country is required, prohibiting all national privileges without exception and every kind of disability or restriction on the rights of national minorities. (Italics in original).

Nevertheless, Stalin opposes class divisions by nationality. Trade unions should not be split into national sections or sections based on religion. There should be a single party structure which, however, “presumes, wide autonomy for the *regions* within the single integral party.” (Italics in original). Workers in Baku, for example, representing a kaleidoscope of nations, have been organized effectively into a single organization. Class rather than national consciousness is the consequence of collective organization. The basic question, however, is whether the right to national autonomy changes in the era of socialism.

In December 1917, the government of Finland applied to the Council of People's Commissars to recognize its national independence and succession from Russia. The demand for independence, Stalin argued, came from the Finnish bourgeoisie, which had seized power in the face of what he called the “irresolution and ... cowardice” of the Finnish social democrats. Nevertheless, the Council of People's Commissars consented to the succession “in full conformity with the principle of the right of nations to self-determination.... [I]f a nation,

⁷⁶ Marxist International Archives. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm>

through its representatives, demands recognition of its independence, a proletarian government, acting on the principle of granting the peoples the right to self-determination, must give its consent.”⁷⁷

Just short of a year later, in the context of the civil war, Stalin wrote “The October Revolution and the National Question” (November 1918).⁷⁸ The national question was not fixed but had to be approached in the context of the existing social conditions, in which the national movements have fundamentally changed their character. The 1913 pamphlet was written in the context of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia, in which, “The movement was headed by the national, bourgeois-democratic intelligentsia. Since October 1917, “tsarism was being replaced by naked and barefaced imperialism, and that this imperialism was a stronger and more dangerous foe of the nationalities and the basis of a new national oppression.” The Provisional Government was imperialist in its aim of maintaining domination over the nationalities that had been brought within the Russian Empire. The lesson of the October Revolution was that “the emancipation of the labouring masses of the oppressed nationalities and the abolition of national oppression were inconceivable without a break with imperialism, without the labouring masses overthrowing “their own” national bourgeoisie and taking power themselves.” After the February Revolution, bourgeois nationalist governments emerged in the border regions of Russia. They were opposed to the October Revolution and declared war on the Soviet government, becoming centres of counter-revolution. At the same time, workers and peasants in these border regions formed Soviets opposed to their bourgeois governments and allied with workers and peasants in revolutionary Russia. By November 1918, it appeared possible that revolutions were underway even in Germany. “Thus was formed a socialist alliance of the workers and peasants of all Russia against the counter-revolutionary alliance of the bourgeois national ‘governments’ of the border regions of Russia.” Foreign intervention in these regions was depicted as a response of bourgeois governments to imminent collapse at the hands of their own workers and peasants. The flag of nationalism in the struggle against Soviet power was designed to split the workers’ movement in a context in which foreign troops consolidated the power of the national bourgeoisie in the border regions. Rather than to the national bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies, then, power should be wielded by “the labouring masses of the oppressed nationalities.” Just as Russia had its socialist revolution, the border regions were in the midst of their own Octobers.

The struggle against imperialism had begun. “[F]rom the particular question of combating national oppression, the national question is evolving into the general question of emancipating the nations, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism.” (This formulation, however, still implied a bourgeois nationalist revolution and stage.) After October, the bourgeois interpretation of the principle of self-determination was abrogated, Stalin asserted.

The Soviet victory in the Civil war ended the bourgeois governments on border regions, such as Ukraine, which had temporary independence between 1917 and 1921. Regional Soviet governments were quickly brought into the USSR. The question of proletarian nationalism was answered in the negative. The question of the degree of regional autonomy was still on the table.

⁷⁷ Marxist International Archives. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1917/12/22.htm>.

⁷⁸ Marxist Internet Archives. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1918/11/19.htm>. *Works*, Vol. 4, November, 1917 - 1920

Early in 1919, Stalin wrote:⁷⁹ “The Soviet Government could not maintain unity with the methods used by Russian imperialism without being false to its own nature. The Soviet Government was aware that not any sort of unity was needed for socialism, but only fraternal unity, and that such unity could come only in the shape of a voluntary union of the labouring classes of the nationalities of Russia, or not at all.” As border regions experienced their own revolutions, soviet national governments arose and, in accordance with the national policy of Soviet Russia, they were recognized as independent. The Congress of Soviets of the Byelorussian Republic, also recognized as independent, sought union with the Russian Republic. The trend appeared to be from independent soviet republics to unity with the Russian. In this early 1919 article, however, Stalin does not address the question of autonomy within the RSFSR.

In 1926, Stalin said that “since then [the 1912 pamphlet] the international situation has radically changed, that the war, on the one hand, and the October Revolution in Russia, on the other, transformed the national question from a part of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a part of the proletarian-socialist revolution.”⁸⁰

Inner Party Unity and Struggle

Stalin sided with Lenin’s emerging conception of the party, which distinguished between the economist view that militant trade union struggles would imbue workers with revolutionary consciousness, a doctrine Lenin called spontaneity. Lenin argued that class consciousness must come to the proletariat from an organized party of revolutionaries.⁸¹ In his letter to comrades in Germany, written from Kutais in September-October 1904, Stalin formulated the question of consciousness as explaining

how separate ideas, and hints of ideas, link up into one harmonious system—the theory of socialism, and who works and links them up. Do the masses give the leaders a programme and the principles underlying the programme, or do the leaders give these to the masses? ... the spontaneous movement does *not* engender the theory of socialism from itself ... the latter is generated *outside* the / spontaneous movement, from the observations and study of the spontaneous movement by men who are equipped with up-to-date knowledge.⁸²

The theory of socialism is not only worked up by intellectuals independently of the spontaneous movement, it is “in spite of that movement in fact, and is then *introduced* into that movement *from outside, correcting* it in conformity with its content.” Stalin perceives a wide gap between spontaneous peoples’ movements and the development of theory, which is reasonable in general but does not deal adequately with the question of theory and practice and the necessary links between leadership and peoples’ movements. In part, the context of the times (pre-1905 Russia) is an important factor. Revolution was imminent in Russia but, according to standard Marxist theory, which Stalin adopted, it would be a bourgeois revolution. The strategy of the times was

⁷⁹ Marxist Internet Archives. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1919/01/31c.htm>. *Works*, Vol. 4, November, 1917 - 1920.

⁸⁰ The National Question Once Again Concerning the Article by Semich *June 30, 1925* Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/06/30.htm>

⁸¹ E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican 1966 [1950], 27n. Carr cites, I, 14.

⁸² Stalin, ‘A Letter from Kutais’, (Sept-Oct 1904, CW, 1: 55-58), 56-7.

intended to create a broad multi-class alliance to unite the spontaneous opposition movements and overthrow the autocracy. It is *socialist theory* that has to be introduced from outside. The place of socialist propaganda in the context of the revolution against autocracy is a question that required explicit debate. Stalin repeats a formula but doesn't consider the argument in relation to the actual context of the revolutionary moment:

We must raise the proletariat to a consciousness of its true class interests, to a consciousness of the socialist ideal, and not break this ideal up into small change, or adjust it to the spontaneous movement. Lenin has laid down the theoretical basis on which this practical deduction is built. It is enough to accept this theoretical premise and no opportunism will get anywhere near you.⁸³

Stalin repeats the key element of intro Leninism. In the years before and after 1905, however, socialist propaganda was directed at wider targets than only introducing the proletariat to the ideals of socialism. The Bolsheviks presented socialism in the context of a wide attack on all forms of injustice and oppression (as Stalin had in 1901), while addressing the importance of class analysis and long-term socialist solutions. After April, 1917, when Lenin explicitly called for a socialist revolution in Russia, the contradiction between the peoples' spontaneous movements and the socialist revolution would become absolute. Prior to his April Theses, the first stage of the revolution was still assumed to be an era, not a few months in duration.

The Bolsheviks knew the difference between debates among leadership and propaganda and practical work among the people. The question of opportunism, as it developed in the Bolshevik Party after 1903, was an issue of misleadership. In 1904 Stalin condemned Plekhanov for "inconsistency," which "is a blotch on the political physiognomy of a 'leader.'" / Plekhanov rejected Lenin's position on tactics – who formulates the programme? Who raises the understanding of whom? – which Stalin called '*tactical opportunism*.'⁸⁴

In Stalin's analysis, Russia was divided in struggle between two armies led by two parties: of the bourgeoisie (led by the Liberal Party) and of the proletariat (led by the RSDLP). To bring out the characteristics of the proletarian party, Stalin contrasts it with the proletarian class. The party is defined as "a fighting group of leaders" which must be smaller than the class in membership, superior to the class in its understanding and experience, and be "a united centralised *organisation*." This, Stalin asserts, is "self-evident." He adds: "So long as the capitalist system exists, with its inevitable attendant poverty and backwardness of the masses, the proletariat as a whole cannot rise to the desired level of class consciousness."⁸⁵

Referring to the Second Party Congress, during which the principles of membership in the RSDLP was debated, Stalin criticized Martov and reiterated the Bolshevik argument about Party organisation in "The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party" (January 1905). A member of the RSDLP must accept the Party's programme ("the immediate and the ultimate aims of the movement"), its tactics ("methods of struggle"), and its principle of organisation.⁸⁶ Beyond acceptance, membership implies the application of the accepted principles, "putting them into effect." Action is not undertaken individually, but must be united action "in a *compact*

⁸³ Stalin, 'A Letter from Kutais', 57.

⁸⁴ Stalin, 'A Letter from Kutais' (CW, 1: 59-62), 60, 61.

⁸⁵ Stalin, 'The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party' (January 1905: CW, 1: 63-74.), 64-5.

⁸⁶ Stalin, 'The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party', 65.

organisation.”⁸⁷ “[O]nly those can be regarded as members of this Party ... who work in this organisation and, therefore, deem it their duty to merge their wishes with the wishes of the Party and to act in unison with the Party.”⁸⁸ The formula leaves out the issue of how the Party decides on its ‘wishes’ to which the individual member must conform, and there is no discussion of democracy within this centralism.

For Stalin, the Party has tossed aside its patriarchal past and had become “a *fortress*, the gates of which are opened only to those who have been tested.”⁸⁹ As a member of a Party organization, an individual subjects himself to the Party’s will (discipline). ‘Party discipline is the same as the will of the Party’.⁹⁰ This key conditions of active work within the organization and being subject to Party discipline were essential elements for Lenin (and Stalin), but were rejected by Martov, among others in the *Iskra* group. Martov’s formula, Stalin said, makes the Party a banquet, not a fortress.⁹¹ The rejection of centralism that is implied by a broad, non-active membership is a route for opportunist intellectuals to enter the Party. For Martov, membership does not imply joining an organization and being subject to the organisational principles, party discipline, and tactics within this organization.⁹²

In May, 1905, Stalin entered the debate about organizational and revolutionary strategy. He wrote his arguments, which were particularly aimed at the Tiflis Mensheviks, in a pamphlet titled, “Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party.” Lenin had presented his theory of the party organization and the need to bring socialist consciousness to workers from the outside in *What is to be Done?* His views were attacked as non-Marxist by Mensheviks as well as other Marxists. Stalin raises the question of whether the working class, by its own efforts, will develop socialist consciousness and overthrow capitalism. That was the view of Marxism that prevailed in the Second International – that scientific Marxism essentially predicted that socialism was an inevitable stage of social development, that capitalism had created its own grave-diggers, and that the working class would liberate itself. Stalin seeks to reconcile the opposites by agreeing with Lenin about his theory of politics while noting the plausibility, but not desirability, of an evolutionary road to socialism.

The principal question was the argument about spontaneity. In Stalin’s view, the Menshevik position eschewed the necessity to instil social democratic consciousness into the working class movement because “to lead this movement ... would be fruitless coercion.” / Stalin claims that a spontaneous working class socialist movement is like “groping in the dark.” The Bolsheviks would lead the working class movement and unite advanced elements in a party, which were the ‘duties’ of social democracy. / Quoting from *Iskra*, Stalin cites the ‘task’ or ‘mission’ of social democracy: “to imbue the masses of the proletariat with the ideals of socialism and with political consciousness and to organize a revolutionary party that will be inseparably connected with the working class movement.” Stalin concludes that social democracy “must always be at the head of the movement and its paramount duty is to unite the Social-Democratic forces of the working class movement in one party.”⁹³ Unity of the movement was the goal; consistent with Lenin, unity was defined in Bolshevik terms.

⁸⁷ Stalin, ‘The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party’, 66. Italics in original.

⁸⁸ Stalin, ‘The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party’, 67.

⁸⁹ Stalin, ‘The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party’, 68; Members must also provide financial support. Italics in original.

⁹⁰ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 125.

⁹¹ Stalin, ‘The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party’, 69-71.

⁹² Stalin, ‘The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party’, 72-3.

⁹³ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’ (CW, Vol. 1: 90-132), 93-5.

Summarizing some of the conclusions of Lenin's pamphlet, *What is to be Done?* Stalin asks rhetorically, "who does not know" that the spontaneous consciousness of the working class movement is only / trade unionism? That without socialism the working class movement will be only "marking time within the limits of capitalism?" As Stalin presents the case, however, socialism is inevitable in either case; the only difference is one of time and, consequently, of suffering. Even if, Stalin argues, the spontaneous working class movement "does ever lead to the social revolution, who knows how long it will take and at what cost in suffering?" The difference, as Stalin sees it, is whether the working class will enter the 'promised land' in the near future or after a long period of time; "by an easy or by a difficult road." At the same time, he repeats the argument that failing to imbue the working class movement with socialist ideology "subordinates the workers to" and strengthens "bourgeois ideology." / Because bourgeois ideology is the negation of socialism, the former ousts the latter from the consciousness of the workers.⁹⁴

For Stalin, it is also "self-evident that the spontaneous working class movement will proceed along that beaten path and submit to bourgeois ideology until, of course, long wanderings and sufferings compel it to break with bourgeois ideology and strive for the social revolution." While Lenin argues that: "The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism," bourgeois ideology "spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class still more.... Someday, of course, after long wanderings and sufferings, the spontaneous movement would come into its own, / would arrive at the gates of the social revolution, without the aid of Social-Democracy, "because "the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism.""⁹⁵ To possess social-democratic consciousness, workers must aim at overthrowing capitalism and be "as sure of the ... establishment of the socialist system as they are of the inevitable rising of the sun." Capitalism "must inevitably be superseded by its negation, the socialist system" through "social revolution." / Without "scientific socialism," the working class movement is like a ship without a compass "which will reach the other shore in any case" but much less soon. When scientific socialism is combined with the working class movement, the vessel "will speed straight toward the 'promised land'" and "reach its haven unharmed."⁹⁶ Stalin interprets Lenin as arguing that the working class spontaneously gravitates to socialism, although Lenin "does not dwell on this at great length." Lenin wrote: "Our Party is the conscious exponent of an unconscious process." Stalin quotes from *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in which Lenin asserts that every strike is not only an expression of a "*class instinct*" but is also "inevitably leading to the social revolution," and Stalin repeats that spontaneous class struggles, which cannot be called social-democratic, "inevitably lead the working class to social revolution."⁹⁷

Stalin attributes the idea of spontaneous socialism to "Comrade Gorin" who, at the Second Party Congress, said that "Even without ideologists the proletariat would, of course, in the long run, work towards the socialist revolution, but it would do so instinctively ... but it would lack socialist theory. Only, the process would be slow and more painful."⁹⁸ "Some day, in the far distant future, economic development will inevitably bring the working class to the social revolution, and, consequently, compel it to break off all connection with bourgeois ideology." But it is a long and painful path. This does not imply, however, that the movement is

⁹⁴ Stalin, 'Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party', 96-8.

⁹⁵ Stalin, 'Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party', 99-100. Quoting Lenin.

⁹⁶ Stalin, 'Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party', 103-4.

⁹⁷ Stalin, 'Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party', 105; quote from source, p. 53.

⁹⁸ Stalin, 'Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party', 106; quote from Minuets of Second Party Congress, p. 129.

everything and socialism nothing because the combination of socialism and the working class movement creates / a “sharp weapon.”⁹⁹ Lenin claims that the workers can easily “assimilate” socialist ideas because they correctly and profoundly define the causes of their misery. / But they are unable to “elaborate” scientific socialism through their own efforts. For Stalin, the spontaneous working class movement will inevitably lead only to trade union consciousness, but this is not the same thing as saying that it can lead only to “bourgeois ideology”. / By definition, says Stalin, “the *spontaneous* working class movement is a movement without socialism.” The duty of social-democrats is the “accelerate the victory” of the gravitation towards socialism.¹⁰⁰ A worker can be a proletarian and be unconscious of his position and, consequently, submit to bourgeois ideology.¹⁰¹ Stalin quotes Kautsky as asserting that the spontaneous workers movement can lead only to utopianism or anarchism, and will ultimately end in the narrowest form of trade unionism. / Hence the importance of intellectuals who can develop scientific socialism, communicate it to “the more intellectually developed proletarians” who “introduce it into the proletarian class struggle.”¹⁰²

No working class has spontaneously arrived at scientific socialism, which originated in the minds of Marx and Engels, who “belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia.”¹⁰³ Stalin reminds his readers that, while the class struggle continues, “the bourgeois ideologists are not asleep; they, in their own way, disguise themselves as socialists and are tireless in their efforts to subordinate the working class to bourgeois ideology.”¹⁰⁴ Not only is it the duty of social-democrats to be “at the head of the movement,” they “must combat tirelessly all those – whether they be foes or ‘friends’ – who hinder the accomplishment of this task.”¹⁰⁵

On 1 January 1905, Stalin published an article, “The Class of Proletarians and the Party of Proletarians,” which summed up Lenin’s arguments in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Following Lenin’s argument, Stalin asserted that the Party must be small in number, coherent and centralized, and “superior in consciousness and experience.”¹⁰⁶ Most significantly, Deutscher quotes Stalin as asserting that, “Unity of views on programme, tactic and organization forms the basis on which our party is being built. If the unity of views crumbles, the party, too, crumbles.” Rather than a party resembling a “hospitable patriarchal family,” the new party was to be a “fortress, the doors of which will be opened only to the worthy.”¹⁰⁷ Deutscher points out that Stalin’s adherence to Lenin’s argument had one point of originality: “his insistence ... on the need for absolute uniformity of views inside the party.”¹⁰⁸

This text is not identical to the editorial Stalin printed in *Pravda*, on 22 April 1912, following Lenin’s final break with the Mensheviks. On that day, Stalin argued for “unity at all cost,” claiming that “a strong and full-blooded movement is unthinkable without controversy—full conformity of views can be achieved only at a cemetery.” The editorial continued: “Just as we ought to be irreconcilable *vis-à-vis* our enemies, so we must make concessions towards one another. War to the enemies of the workers’ movement, peace and friendly collaboration inside

⁹⁹ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 106-7.

¹⁰⁰ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 108-10.

¹⁰¹ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 111.

¹⁰² Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 116, 114.

¹⁰³ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 102.

¹⁰⁴ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Stalin, ‘Briefly about the Disagreements in the Party’, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Deutscher *Stalin*, 59; (Deutscher cites *Collected Works*, Vol. 1: 62-73).

¹⁰⁷ Deutscher *Stalin*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*. 60.

the movement.”¹⁰⁹ Even then the formulation is peculiar: one is either an irreconcilable enemy, or there is “peace and friendly collaboration.” What about major differences of opinion and deep debates about tactical and strategic questions? The history of the Bolshevik Party under Lenin is no model of ‘internal peace.’ Even when Kamenev and Zinoviev broke with Party discipline in 1917 and published a warning on 17 October about the Bolshevik intention to seize power in an insurrection, the two Bolsheviks remained Party members and retained prominent places in the Central Committee (though Lenin argued for their expulsion).¹¹⁰

The Revolution of 1905

Stalin’s return from Siberia in January, 1904 was propitious because the Tsar was about to lead Russia into a disastrous war with Japan. Much of Stalin’s time was spent opposing Georgian Mensheviks, in the midst of a growing rebellion in the Georgian countryside. The Mensheviks were more supportive of the peasants’ demands for land than the Bolsheviks. Stalin’s political manoeuvres brought him, for the first time, to the attention of Lenin.¹¹¹ Events temporarily overtook the debate over strategy in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The fall of Port Arthur to the Japanese in January, 1905, legitimated the growing opposition to the war and its privations, and heightened demands for change.

The Union Committee of the Caucasian RSDLP published a manifesto, dated 8 January, stating that Russia is a “loaded gun with the hammer cocked ready to go off.” Revolution was near and party members were advised to “sow the good seed among the broad masses of the proletariat ... and *Rally around the Party committees!*” because only the Party can lead the movement to socialism. The Manifesto called for the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and the election of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal suffrage that would “give us the *democratic republic* that we need so urgently in our struggle for socialism.”¹¹²

The following day, 9 January, a massive demonstration of working people in St. Petersburg petitioning for political and economic reforms, led by a priest and carrying banners with pictures of the Tsar and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, approached the Winter Palace. When the crowd would not disperse, Cossacks attacked, killing about 200 people. The January massacre, known as Bloody Sunday, precipitated uprisings throughout the Russian Empire, including strikes and peasant rebellions. Nationalist movements became more militant, especially in the Caucasus. On June 14, sailors of the battleship *Potyemkin* mutinied.¹¹³

Unrest in Russia also meant an escalation of ethnic massacres.¹¹⁴ For five long days, beginning on the fifth of February and encouraged by government authorities, ethnic violence escalated in Baku, pitting Azeri Turks (Tartars) against the relatively more prosperous Armenians. In the frenzy of “ethnic hatred ... Baku descended into an orgy of ethnic killing, burning, raping, shooting and throat-cutting.” / Two thousand people were killed. In Tiflis, which was paralyzed by strikes, Stalin led a demonstration opposing ethnic violence between Georgian and Armenians.¹¹⁵ The Bolsheviks distributed a pamphlet, from the Tiflis Committee of the

¹⁰⁹ Deutscher, *Stalin*. 113; (cited *Collected Works*, ii, 248-249).

¹¹⁰ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 164.

¹¹¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 124-5.

¹¹² Stalin, ‘Workers of the Caucasus, It is Time to Take Revenge’ (8 January 1905: *CW*, 1: 75-81), 80.

¹¹³ Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution*, Vol. 1, 49.

¹¹⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 126.

¹¹⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 128-9.

RSDLP, warning that the Tsar and his agents were behind the ethnic violence, pitting nation against nation in the Empire and specifically in the Caucasus.¹¹⁶

On February 14, as described by Stalin, the cathedral enclosure and the adjacent streets of Tiflis were crowded with 8,000 people. Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and numerous other anti-Imperial groups were behind the demonstrations. The groups, including the Bolsheviks, distributed thousands of leaflets, delivered speeches to groups in the crowd, and encouraged them to march and confront the police. The Bolshevik tactics in what was largely a demonstration organized by other groups, is clear from Stalin's description:

The temper of the masses rises higher and higher. Pent-up revolutionary energy breaks through the surface. The masses decide to march in demonstration.... Our committee takes advantage of the situation and immediately organizes a small leading core. This core, headed by an advanced worker, takes the central / position—and in improvised red flag flutters right in front of the Palace. The banner-bearer, carried shoulder-high by demonstrators, delivers an emphatically political speech.... He ... criticizes the preceding speakers from the social-democratic viewpoint, expresses the half-heartedness of their speeches, urges the necessity of abolishing tsardom and capitalism, and calls upon the demonstrators to fight under the Red Flag of Socialism.¹¹⁷

The tactics of the Tiflis Bolsheviks took the opportunity to spread anti-capitalist, socialist message in the midst of a democratic, anti-government rally as part of their campaign against the mis-leadership of the Mensheviks. It is difficult to gauge how the demonstrators would respond to this agitation, though the other groups would likely have seen the tactic as divisive.

At that time, social democracy in Georgia and generally in South Russia was largely dominated by Mensheviks, who were 'moderate' in the sense that they were welcoming of liberal democratic reforms, more sympathetic to local nationalism, and muted in their socialist propaganda.¹¹⁸ In the revolutionary days of 1905, however, even the Mensheviks in the Caucasus were engaged in armed struggle.¹¹⁹ Montefiore says that Stalin's Bolsheviks controlled only the mining district near Kutaisi, were his direct, brief, and militant appeal to the mineworkers was more successful than the intellectual speeches of the Mensheviks. Stalin was developing skills in persuasion and learning to use the Menshevik's rhetoric against them. Meanwhile, he was organizing Red Battle Squads and developing a taste for armed conflict and guerrilla war, / in some cases adopting the tactics of banditry, such as demanding protection money from bourgeois owners.

When the Empire erupted in violence after the unprecedented defeats of the Russian navy and army in May, the entire Caucasus was thrown into revolutionary disorder and dual authority.¹²⁰ On 15 July, Stalin published "Armed Insurrection and our Tactics" in the 10th issue

¹¹⁶ Stalin, 'Long Live International Fraternity!' (13 February 1905, *CW*, 1: 82-4), 82-84.

¹¹⁷ Stalin, 'To Citizens: Long Live the Red Flag!' (15 February 1905, *CW*, 1: 85-9), 86-7. In our present context, this paragraph describes the tactics of some ultra-left groupings who jump in the front of popular demonstrations to pose as leaders of the movement.

¹¹⁸ William Henry Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution: 1917-1918*, Vol. 1 (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965 [1935], 39.

¹¹⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 132-3.

¹²⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 130-1, 133-5.

of *Proletariatis Brdzola* (*Proletarian Struggle*), in which he argued that the proletariat must not only be at the centre of the struggle to overthrow the autocracy, but lead the uprising. The proletariat should utilize the impending revolution for the purposes of its own class struggle, “to enable it to establish a democratic system that will provide the greatest guarantee for the subsequent struggle for socialism.”¹²¹ The necessity to arm the people and engage in armed insurrection should unite all social-democratic forces. Rather than distributing existing arms to the masses, Stalin urged the creation of well-trained and organized ‘fighting squads’ which, when the insurrection breaks into the open, will lead the people in procuring weapons and put into effect the “prearranged plan of action.” / They must plan the uprising and organize resistance against the Black Hundreds and other “dark forces.” / Stalin advises that the Party should utilise “military men in the organization” to help with planning local insurrections, and also “utilize the services of a number of other comrades who will be extremely useful in this matter because of their natural talent and inclinations.”¹²²

A massacre of students by Cossacks on 29 August 1905 was countered by simultaneous raids on Cossack barracks on the 25th of September. / As revolution drew nearer, the Georgian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks cooperated in revolutionary violence, each of the factions controlling their own districts with armed militias.¹²³

The Tsar granted an elected Duma in August, but it was purely advisory, and suffrage was limited to a propertied minority. Unrest grew, including renewed ethnic violence as Armenians retaliated against Azeris, and Jews were massacred in pogroms in Odessa.¹²⁴ A general strike began on September 20 and lasted to October 30.¹²⁵ In the industrial centres of Russia, numerous if short-lived workers’ Soviets were established. The most important was in the Petersburg Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, in St. Petersburg, which was organized by Mensheviks on the 26th of October, although workers of many political factions were involved. Leon Trotsky was one of the Soviet’s elected leaders. The Petersburg Soviet lasted fifty days (until December 16) before it was crushed by the military and its members were arrested.¹²⁶ During his trial in the aftermath of the Soviet, according to E. H. Carr, Leon Trotsky’s “brilliant and defiant” defence helped establish the prestige of the Soviet as well as his own.¹²⁷

In August, 1905, Stalin anticipated the overthrow of the autocracy and the creation of a “provisional revolutionary government,” the task of which was to bring about democratic change (the Party’s ‘minimum’ programme), such as freedom of the press, progressive taxation, / trade union rights, and the organization of peasant committees to “settle the land question.” / The ‘dark forces’ of reaction must be disarmed and curbed; and the people must be armed. The government then should “immediately proceed to convoke a constituent assembly.” / Because the proletariat and peasantry will shed their blood in the revolution, they should also dominate in the assembly.¹²⁸ These two forces were united in their in “their hatred of the survivals of serfdom” /

¹²¹ Stalin, ‘Armed Insurrection and our Tactics’ (CW, 1: 133-139, 15 July 1905), 135. The first edition of *Brdzola* appeared in September, 1901.

¹²² Stalin, ‘Armed Insurrection and our Tactics’, 137-9.

¹²³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 137, 142-3.

¹²⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 142.

¹²⁵ The Corner of the World, ‘The Russian Revolution of 1905’, <http://www.thecorner.org/hist/russia/revo1905.htm> (accessed 20 April 2010).

¹²⁶ Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution*, Vol. 1, 52.

¹²⁷ Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1, 58-9.

¹²⁸ Stalin, ‘The Provisional Government and Social-Democracy’, (CW, 1: 140-161, 10 August 1905), 140, 141, 140, 141.

their struggle against the tsarist government, and “their desire for a democratic republic.” The differences between them, however, were “much greater.... [T]he proletariat is the enemy of private property. It hates the bourgeois system” and democracy is only the necessary means to overthrow “the bourgeois regime, whereas the peasantry are tied to private property, are bound to the bourgeois system,” and seek a democratic republic to strengthen the “bourgeois regime.” In this sense, Stalin spoke theoretically; it is unlikely that he imputed this degree of socialist consciousness to the proletarian majority. He argued, tactically, that because the revolution was bourgeois and was not directed against private property, there was no reason for enmity between the two revolutionary groups. / But the proletariat must be represented in the assembly by their own, social-democratic party.¹²⁹

A minority in the party, Stalin said, argued against participation in the Constituent Assembly because it would be a bourgeois government, and in principle, social democrats should not seek representation in bourgeois parliaments. / This may be true of an established bourgeois government, such as the conservative one in France, but is not true of a revolutionary provisional government, where social democrats must “take an active part in consummating the cause of the revolution.”¹³⁰ Stalin distinguishes between entering bourgeois parliaments for the purpose of conquering political power (Bernsteinism), and entering for the purposes of pushing the provisional government to take socialist measures during the democratic revolution.

The expectations were premature of a successful attack on autocracy and establishing a provisional government. The Tsar’s pseudo-liberal strategy had been replaced by a violent one. In the weeks after the granting of the Constitution, Russia was swept by waves of ethnic violence and pogroms against Jews. The secret police published appeals to foment pogroms. Where the police and the troops did not initiate ethnic violence, they stood by passively

The ‘Black Hundreds’ were organized, consisting of reactionary “landowners, rich peasants, bureaucrats, merchants, police officials, and clergymen, who supported the principles of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and Russian nationalism.” Created to win back the streets and the rebellious provinces, and backed by official support, the right-wing, counter-revolutionary terrorists fomented ethnic violence and launched anti-Semitic pogroms.¹³¹

On 26 November, 1905, a Bolshevik conference in Saint Petersburg elected Stalin as one of three representatives from the Caucasus. He set off for the imperial capital about the third of December, arriving in the midst of the Tsar’s counter-offensive.¹³² In 1905, rank-and-file social democrats from both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had fought side by side, and the general sentiment in both wings was for unity. In the face of Tsarist repression, the conference was moved to Finland in December 1905—the first meeting between Lenin and Stalin—and approved holding a joint party congress. Montefiore says that Stalin was immediately disillusioned by Lenin’s ordinary appearance, hardly the “mountain eagle” he had imagined. / With the counter-revolution by then fully underway, Stalin returned to Tiflis in time to see the bloody end of the movement. He sent his battle-scarred groups back underground, / but not before he and the Mensheviks cooperated in the assassination of the general responsible for the Tiflis massacres.¹³³

¹²⁹ Stalin, ‘The Provisional Government and Social-Democracy’, 142-3.

¹³⁰ Stalin, ‘The Provisional Government and Social-Democracy’, 144-5.

¹³¹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/67962/Black-Hundreds>, accessed 23 April 2010.

¹³² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 145.

¹³³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 146, 148-50.

Led by the charismatic, violent, and dangerous comrade ‘Kamo,’ the Georgian Bolsheviks carried out a number of ‘expropriations’—bank robberies—from which Lenin’s organization was funded. Stalin organized the heists and the distribution of the loot to the Party organization abroad. Montefiore says that Stalin did not enrich himself from these acts of expropriation. Similar acts of banditry were carried out by Socialist Revolutionaries, Anarchists, and ordinary criminals, with a mixture of political motives and a desire for personal gain. It is not possible, however, to draw any lines around the people engaged in rebellious banditry.¹³⁴ As the Georgian Bolsheviks went underground, a “criminal fringe” formed “around the revolutionary movement” and revolutionaries were treated indistinguishably from bandits.¹³⁵

From Dress Rehearsal to 1914

Meetings of the two social democratic groups were organized abroad in 1906 and 1907 during the first blush of optimism about elections for the new Russian parliament (the Duma). Strategic disputes simmered until 1912. In these intervening years, the Mensheviks advanced the position that socialists must help push through the democratic, bourgeois revolution. In *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, Lenin proposed a clearly demarcated two-stage process, the first of which was a bourgeois-democratic revolution based on an alliance between the peasantry and the proletariat that would culminate in a revolutionary democratic dictatorship. The first stage would strengthen bourgeois rule, but once this bourgeois revolution was underway, the proletariat would unite with the semi-proletarian peasantry in opposition to the rich peasants in developing a socialist revolution.¹³⁶ Lenin envisaged a continuous, ‘uninterrupted’ revolutionary process in Russia that, nevertheless, required a European revolution to succeed.¹³⁷ Trotsky differed from Lenin primarily in asserting that the urban proletariat was the only genuinely revolutionary force and was capable of seizing political power on its own. His experience with the Soviet in Petersburg convinced him that a workers’ rebellion would win political power for the proletariat. Sustaining their position of power would necessarily lead to further socialist demands as the revolution would become continuous or ‘permanent.’ It would not be possible to maintain an alliance with the peasantry because a fundamental conflict of interest existed between the proletariat and the peasantry. A proletarian agricultural policy would necessarily entail cooperatives or state control, and such socialist measures could only be imposed on the peasantry.¹³⁸

Stalin was elected as a delegate from the Tiflis social-democratic organization to the Fourth Congress of the RSDLP, dubbed a Unity Congress. The Stockholm Congress opened on the tenth of April with 156 delegates – Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Polish Socialists, and members of the Jewish Bund. The sixteen delegates from Georgia were, with the exception of Stalin, all Mensheviks.¹³⁹ Stalin’s *Collected Works* claim that Stalin opposed the Mensheviks and defended

¹³⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 153.

¹³⁵ Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution*, Vol. 1, 44.

¹³⁶ Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1, 66-7. Lenin expected that the first stage of this revolution would incite a European revolution.

¹³⁷ Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1, 68.

¹³⁸ Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1, 69-73. Carr cites *Results and Prospects*, 1906.

¹³⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 157.

“the Bolshevik tactics in the Revolution.”¹⁴⁰ Montefiore says that Stalin “remained proudly his own man” in the debate.

On the peasant question, Stalin voted against Lenin’s proposal, which was defeated, on the nationalization of the land, favouring instead the redistribution of land to the peasantry. According to historian William Chamberlain, state decrees of 1907 and 1910 “broke up the compulsory communal life of the peasantry.” Each peasant could demand his share of land in a single, consolidated holding, and peasant communes could dissolve themselves into individually-owned plots. Twenty-two percent of previously commune members left the system to become individual owners; even more in the West and South were already small owners. Chamberlin says that the effect of land reform, led by Stolypin, the conservative minister, was to strengthen the layer of peasants who were better off and create a class of landless peasants who either became a rural proletariat or sought work in the towns: “[e]very peasant who made a modest success out of his individual holding was an unconscious recruit for the properties side of the barricades in any future social conflict”. Chamberlin quotes Stolypin who, in 1904, had argued that “Individual property ownership is the natural antidote to communal ownership. It is the guaranty of order. Because the small proprietor is the basis on which stable conditions in the state can rest.”¹⁴¹

On the question of participating in the Duma elections, Lenin disagreed with most Bolsheviks and supported the Menshevik position that the party should run candidates in the elections. Stalin abstained on the vote. Montefiore says that, when the Congress discussed the issue of illegal ‘expropriations,’ and finally decided to ban the practice, both Lenin and Stalin “made themselves scarce.” / Expropriations continued over the next three years.¹⁴² In the first weeks of September, 1906, Stalin and five other delegates attended a Tiflis SD conference, a small minority of the 42 social democrats. Montefiore says that Stalin was “defiant, crude and sullen.”

Stalin had returned to Tiflis from Stockholm newly minted, at least in appearance. With a suit, a felt hat, and a pipe, Montefiore says, he looked like a European. / That was not the only thing that was new. At two in the morning, on the 16th of July, Stalin and Kato Svanidze were married by an Orthodox priest in a small church.¹⁴³ This was a love match, Montefiore says. Marriage and, in, March 1907, the birth of a son, Yakov, left Stalin “over the moon,” according to Montefiore. These events were only minor hindrances to Stalin’s underground activities. / Kato, he says, paid the heaviest price. The majority of the Bolshevik faction in the Caucasus was in Baku where Stalin was at the centre of social democratic activity. Stalin moved his family to Baku to be closer to them, but Kato was ailing and got progressively worse in the semi-tropical oil capital. Montefiore says that Stalin became “neglectful.” Kato was weak, malnourished, and suffered from typhus fever. Stalin finally helped her return to Tiflis, where he nursed her tenderly before she died “in his arms,” at the age of 22.¹⁴⁴ Stalin was devastated, threw himself

¹⁴⁰ Stalin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 425. Chamberlin says that there were 62 Mensheviks and 42 Bolsheviks. Most Bolsheviks were “strongly committed to armed struggle” and wanted to boycott the Duma elections (*The Russian Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 58. Stalin’s abstention supported neither the Bolshevik’s tactics nor Lenin’s, which was never an either/or; that is, either armed struggle or election. For Lenin, participating in elections was a tactical, not a strategic move.

¹⁴¹ Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, vol. 1, 61-3.

¹⁴² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 158, 162. Stalin also did not support the Menshevik plan, which called for the municipalisation of the land.

¹⁴³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 158-9.

¹⁴⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 190-1.

into the grave, and appeared suicidal. Feeling his personal life “shattered,” Stalin dropped out of sight for two months.¹⁴⁵ When he resurfaced, he threw himself into revolutionary work in Baku, pushing to radicalize the workers and encouraging more militancy. He spent considerable time with illiterate workers and ethnic minorities, particularly the Azeri and Persian Moslems, groups otherwise neglected by social democratic intellectuals.¹⁴⁶

A month after the birth of his son, Stalin had left for the Fifth SD Congress in London, first visiting Lenin briefly and secretly in Paris, Montefiore says, to discuss expropriations. / Stalin stayed in a dreadful East End dosshouse in London and then moved into cramped, rented quarters. / “[H]e spent most of his time on the rough side of town.” / Well-heeled delegates on private incomes lived more comfortably – some delegates, Montefiore says, “were more equal than others.” / The Bolsheviks had 92 of the 302 delegates; and “every vote was ‘ultra tense.’” In the end, more Bolsheviks were elected to the Central Committee than Mensheviks.¹⁴⁷ Stalin and two comrades from Georgia were only “consultative delegates,” indicative of the shrinking of the Bolshevik group in Georgia. Stalin first met Trotsky (Lev Bronstein) at this conference, the son of a rich Jewish farmer and intellectual. Montefiore says that Trotsky was “overweeningly arrogant” and contemptuous of Georgians, and / Stalin “hated him on sight.” Stalin was quiet throughout the conference, concluding that the Mensheviks were the “Jewish faction,” opposed to the “Russian faction” of Bolsheviks. / Stalin, he said, grew tired of the “petty squabbles.” Two double agents attended the Congress and reported on the debates to the Russian secret police, the *Okhrana*.¹⁴⁸

Back in Tiflis, and despite another Congress vote banning expropriations, Stalin orchestrated a spectacular robbery leaving as many as 40 people dead, an action that made world-wide headlines. The action netted the Party about 3.4 million US dollars (in 2007 value).¹⁴⁹ In 1908, Stalin again visited Lenin, this time in Geneva, where Lenin was carrying out a campaign against Bogdanov and the Mensheviks. Montefiore called it a “fissiparous feud”¹⁵⁰ and reiterated his argument that Stalin had little patience for intellectual squabbles that divided social democrats. Meanwhile, Stalin’s standing in the Party continued to rise.¹⁵¹ In Stalin’s view, the schism in the Party was “the self-indulgence of spoiled émigrés.” Combined with the heavy repression, internecine disputes had reduced the social-democratic party to insignificance. / The ‘Liquidators’ wanted to bury the Party; the conciliators sought salvation in reconciliation with the Mensheviks. Stalin was a conciliator,¹⁵² convinced by the “dire circumstances” in Russia and frustrated with the “bickering.” The centre of the Bolsheviks was still abroad. Stalin was appointed by the Central Committee to the new Russian Bureau, charged with running the Party inside Russia.¹⁵³

In March, 1908, the *Okhrana* finally nabbed Stalin a second time. In Baku’s Bailov prison, Stalin was quickly the dominant prisoner among both the political and common criminals. / He was sentenced to two years in exile in Vologda Province, but was not sent to

¹⁴⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 192-3.

¹⁴⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 194.

¹⁴⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 168, 175, 170, 174.

¹⁴⁸ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 172-4.

¹⁴⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 13-14, 180.

¹⁵⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 195.

¹⁵¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 199.

¹⁵² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 211-2.

¹⁵³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 214.

Eastern Siberia.¹⁵⁴ Vologda was about equidistant between Moscow and St. Petersburg. He arrived in late February, 1909 / and made his escape by late June.¹⁵⁵ Between 1910 and 1917, Montefiore says, Stalin “was free for just ten months.”¹⁵⁶ He was arrested again in March 1910, along with his noblewoman mistress, who he almost married, / and was exiled, again only to Vologda.¹⁵⁷ The tedium of exile was relieved partly by discussions among social democratic exiles, and partly in carousing and sexual affairs, including one with a young school teacher that was serious enough to result in a civil co-habitation— until she was exiled further to the east.¹⁵⁸

Montefiore says that, “in Baku the party really was infested with police spies.” Stalin, he says, was deeply engaged in rooting them out, including ordering executions. / So effectively entrenched were the spies, however, that most of those who were alleged to be spies were not, in fact, double-agents, while the ‘spooks’ contributed to the difficulty by denouncing revolutionaries as spies. Stalin tried to create his own double agents. The police, whether secret or open, were often corrupt. It was, says Montefiore, a “cesspit of duplicity and espionage.”¹⁵⁹

Stalin was still serving time in Vologda when preparations were being made for a conference of Bolsheviks, to be held in Prague in 1912. He was unable to attend. / With just 18 delegates, a first Bolshevik Central Committee was formally established and the divorce from the Mensheviks was formalized.¹⁶⁰ The Bolsheviks constituted themselves a Party with its own organization and central committee, including Lenin and Zinoviev, while Stalin was co-opted to the committee in his absence.¹⁶¹ The ‘rising star’ of the founding congress was the “stirring working-class orator,” Roman Malinovsky. Unknown to his supposed comrades, Malinovsky had been convicted of rape and burglary and then recruited to the *Okhrana*. “He was their highest paid agent.”¹⁶² In October, 1912, Malinovsky was one of six Bolsheviks—and one of two *Okhrana* agents—elected to the Duma.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, the workers’ movement was coming to spontaneous rebirth, accompanied by a revival of tsarist repression. In St. Petersburg, Stalin ran the weekly *Zvezda* – writing what Trotsky dismissed as / “‘Seminary homilectics,’” and began editing the new daily, *Pravda*, in April. By this time, however, as a result of Malinovsky’s efficient work, Stalin became the last member of the Central Committee still at large within Russia. That reprieve lasted until 22 April, when Stalin was once again arrested. Sentenced to three years in Siberia, the period was “to be his shortest exile.” / By September, he was back in St. Petersburg.¹⁶⁴

As editor of the party daily, *Pravda*, Stalin declined to publish 47 articles written by Lenin. / His conciliatory politics led to two summons from Lenin to visit him abroad. After the first, a visit to Cracow, Stalin concluded that Lenin was “out of touch”; in the Duma, Malinovsky read a manifesto, “probably written by Stalin,” which was supportive of the Mensheviks, who had also elected six representatives.¹⁶⁵ Stalin’s second visit, which took him to Vienna, was

¹⁵⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 203, 206.

¹⁵⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 208, 212.

¹⁵⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 220.

¹⁵⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 222, 226.

¹⁵⁸ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 230.

¹⁵⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 217, 221.

¹⁶⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 238-9.

¹⁶¹ Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Vol. 1, 75-6.

¹⁶² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 239.

¹⁶³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 256.

¹⁶⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 246-8, 255. In one article, Montefiore says, Stalin wrote that a diplomat’s words must conceal his “‘shady deeds. A sincere diplomat is like dry water’” (p. 255n).

¹⁶⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 256, 258.

Stalin's longest period abroad. Lenin recommended that Stalin write on the Bolshevik's position on the national question, seeking an expert who was non-Russian.

On the question of party unity, Malinovsky and Lenin pursued the schism, while Stalin wavered, / finally conceding to Lenin's position. He emerged as the senior Bolshevik within Russia.¹⁶⁶ His publication, *Marxism and the National Question*, was his most famous article. Published under the pseudonym, K[oba] Stalin, it fixed both his identity and his name.¹⁶⁷ Soon afterwards, in February 1913, Stalin was arrested for the last time, despite dressing in drag in an effort to escape. This time the sentence was more severe: four years in eastern Siberia.¹⁶⁸ He spent the next few years in Turukhansk, near the Arctic Circle, on the Yenisei River, / ending up in the hamlet of Kureika, living among 67 villagers. / Montefiore says he began an affair with a thirteen-year old girl, and once again became a father, not once but twice.¹⁶⁹ Stalin's son, Alexander, was born on April, 1917, following the February Russian Revolution and after Stalin had left Siberian exile, abandoning both his lover and child. He never contacted her.¹⁷⁰

October

Momentous events occurred while Stalin was cooling his heels in Siberia, hunting, fishing, carousing, and politicking with the few fellow Bolsheviks also serving the most severe exile. Meanwhile, the Russian army was decimated in the Great War. Ill equipped, incompetently led, staffed mostly by raw peasant recruits, the Russians were no match for the Germans even in a multi-front war. With the Tsar taking personal if ineffectual leadership of the front, the Tsarina, Alexandra fell under the baleful influence of the mystic monk, Rasputin. The war was going so badly that the Tsar's exiled enemies were conscripted into the army. In December, 1916, Stalin joined a group of 20 exiles beginning their return, ostensibly to fight for Mother Russia on the Eastern Front. / Stalin was declared unfit as a soldier because of his congenitally withered left arm—a fact that he suppressed because it damaged his image of the man of 'steel.' Stalin spent the last four months of his exile at the far end of the Siberian railway while the February revolution broke out without him—in fact, without most of the Bolshevik leaders, who were still abroad.¹⁷¹ On March 1, a Provisional Government was formed in Petrograd (the newly named St. Petersburg) while, simultaneously, a Soviet of Workers and Soldiers was established, creating a situation of dual power. The Tsar abdicated the following day in favour of his brother, who abdicated the following day. The Romanov dynasty was at an end.¹⁷²

News of the Revolution was quickly telegraphed to Siberia. By the 12th of March, Stalin had returned to the capital city in the fervour of revolution: / “Even the whores and thieves held meetings and elected soviets. Everything was reversed: soldiers had their caps on back to front and wore a fancy-dress shop of uniforms; women borrowed military head gear and breeches.

¹⁶⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 262-3. Stalin was in Vienna at the same time Adolf Hitler was living as a struggling artist in the city. Both liked to walk in the park around Schonbrunn Palace, Montefiore says, the closest they ever came to meeting (p. 264). Malinovsky soon sank into dissolution. His nerves frayed, he was fired from the *Okhrana* and resigned from the Duma on 8 May 1914 (p. 281).

¹⁶⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 267.

¹⁶⁸ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 269-70.

¹⁶⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 273, 278, 284. The first child died soon after birth (p. 293).

¹⁷⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 300.

¹⁷¹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 301-2.

¹⁷² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 303.

People felt suddenly unrestrained in this febrile carnival. ‘Sexual acts from kissing and fondling to full intercourse,’ writes Orlando Figes, were ‘openly performed in the streets in the euphoria.’”¹⁷³

The Provisional Government consisted of many parties, including conservatives and liberal Cadets (Constitutional Democrats). The Soviet in St. Petersburg (Petrograd) included Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and SRs. The lone figure straddling both organs of dual power was Alexander Kerensky. There were about 25,000 Bolsheviks in Russia, only about 1000 of them ‘veterans.’ / From abroad, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks should demand an end to the war and refuse to cooperate with the Provisional Government. In Petrograd, Stalin and Kamenev were the senior Bolsheviks. They argued, instead, that the Bolsheviks should offer tentative support to the Provisional Government and support the war as long as it was clearly ‘defensive.’¹⁷⁴ Stalin was elected a Bolshevik representative to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. As senior leaders – Stalin was 38, Kamenev 34 – the returned Siberian exiles took over the editorship of *Pravda*, / Montefiore says, swinging it “rightwards towards mild conciliation” while applying ‘pressure’ to the government. Stalin expressed the sentiment of the majority of Bolsheviks at the time. Lenin was in an absolute minority in his demand that the Provisional Government be overthrown.¹⁷⁵ Stalin shortened or refused to publish Lenin’s *Letters From Afar*, which were delivered to *Pravda* by Alexandra Kollontai. /¹⁷⁶

On April 3, Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd, accompanied by a number of Bolsheviks including Krupskaya and Zinoviev. / Stalin boarded the train and met with a defiant, angry, and energetic Lenin. When he alighted, Stalin had shifted allegiance away from Kamenev to the fiery Lenin. With “Finland Station in revolutionary fiesta,” / Lenin spoke to the crowds demanding the overthrow of the Provisional Government, immediate end to the war, and “All power to the Soviets!”

Like most Marxists (with the exception of Trotsky), Stalin accepted the formula that the coming revolution in Russia would be bourgeois democratic in character, an expectation that was clear in his earliest political writings. He envisioned a people’s revolution against autocracy, led by proletarian socialists, and culminating in ““a broad democratic constitution, giving equal rights to the worker, the oppressed peasant and the capitalist.””¹⁷⁷ As Deutscher pointed out, this point of view was confusing. If proletarian socialists led the revolution, why would they stop and concede power to the bourgeoisie that was not strong enough to win and hold power itself?¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks believed the standard Marxist position that the Russian revolution would be bourgeois and democratic. Only Trotsky differed. In 1905, he had argued that a victorious revolution “could not help embarking upon the road of proletarian dictatorship and socialism.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 304, 308.

¹⁷⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 308-9.

¹⁷⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 310-11.

¹⁷⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 314n, 354-5. At the time of the October Revolution, 46-year old Kollontai was involved in a passionate and apparently ‘scandalous’ affair with Pavel Dybenko, People’s Commissar of the Navy, a 29-year old black-bearded and ‘giant’ sailor. Stalin sniggered at the pair—an ironic attitude considering his history of sexual liaisons—crossing verbal swords with Trotsky who considered the matter to be their own business. Trotsky later said that he found Stalin’s response ‘vulgar’ and that Stalin, thereafter, never again approached Trotsky with anything personal (p. 355).

¹⁷⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 42; (cited, *Collected Works* Vol. 1: 22).

¹⁷⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 75.

¹⁷⁹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 75.

All this changed on 4 April 1917, when Lenin presented his “April Theses” to the Bolshevik Party. In Lenin’s view, the Soviets represented an alternative state form that must consolidate political power. The next phase of the revolution marked the repudiation of the provisional government and the assumption of political power by the Soviets, which would then begin to take control of the economy. It was a declaration for a Bolshevik insurrection and implied that Russia would enter a socialist phase without a consolidation of the bourgeois revolution. This formulation was partly dependent upon Lenin’s belief that Europe was ripe for socialism and that the revolution in Russia would incite an uprising there.¹⁸⁰ With these statements, Lenin made a fundamental, strategic break with his own and with his Party’s past. Initially, Lenin’s thesis was dismissed. The Bolshevik position, supported by Stalin, was to cooperate with the progressive policies of the provisional government. To seek to replace bourgeois with proletarian power immediately was deemed adventurist. Lenin was charged with adopting Trotsky’s formula of permanent revolution. Lenin’s April Theses were the necessary theoretical and strategic prelude to the October Revolution and he was ultimately able to rally the Party around the insurrection.

When Lenin broke decisively with the past in April 1917, Stalin followed suit, declaring: “Those who try to halt in a Revolution will inevitably lag behind; and he who lags behind will receive no mercy – the Revolution will throw him into the camp of the counter-revolution.”¹⁸¹ On the eve of the October Revolution, Stalin again drew sharp lines of demarcation. “The Revolution has enrolled them [the great names] in its service, or thrown them into nothingness if they have not been willing to learn from it. . . . The revolution is incapable either of regretting or of burying its dead.”¹⁸² Again, Deutscher reads ominous meaning into the words, “an unconscious or perhaps half-conscious challenge” directed against the new names who were emerging brilliantly in the Party, while Stalin, who held high office, had not earned a “great name.”¹⁸³ Stalin’s editorial in *Pravda* ten days after Lenin’s April ideological *coup* repudiated the Mensheviks and any cooperation with the Provisional Government, advocated direct peasant liberation of the land, and predicted a European revolution.¹⁸⁴

The Bolsheviks were dumbfounded and incredulous at Lenin’s audacity. At first, Montefiore says, “only Alexandra Kollantai supported him unreservedly.” Lenin’s strategy appeared to abandon the Marxist theory of a bourgeois revolution leading to a constituent assembly and civil rights, within which the class struggle could take on a new, socialist form. Lenin understood the immediate need for peace, land, and bread, and the unique opportunity that the Revolution presented. Stalin was won over to Lenin’s side and, by April 6th, the two were collaborating closely on *Pravda*.¹⁸⁵ When elections were held for the Central Committee on 29 April, Stalin was the third elected, after Lenin and Zinoviev, showing “his standing in the Party.” With the addition of Kamenev, a four-member Bureau was created within the Central Committee. Trotsky arrived from abroad on the 4th of May and immediately made his mark as a fervent speaker and a leader of the Petrograd Soviet. Lenin opened discussions in an effort to recruit Trotsky to the Bolshevik Party. / While Trotsky shone in public, Stalin demonstrated his abilities to work more quietly, behind the scenes. Stalin’s knowledge of Russian conditions

¹⁸⁰ Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol 1, 90-1; Deutscher, *Stalin*, 138-140.

¹⁸¹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 142; (cited CW, iii: 37-38).

¹⁸² Deutscher, *Stalin*, 171; (cited CW iii: 383-386).

¹⁸³ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 171.

¹⁸⁴ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 142; (cited *Collected Works*, vol. iii: 34-38).

¹⁸⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 313-5.

outside Petrograd, his local contacts, and his reputation as a man of the rank-and-file gave him considerable influence.¹⁸⁶

One False Step Forward

In June, “the radicals in the armed wing of the Bolshevik Party—the Military Organization, which now claimed the allegiance of 60,000 troops—demanded an armed demonstration.” They set a date of 10 June. Lenin supported it; Kamenev and Zinoviev were against it; Stalin helped to plan it and wrote the proclamation for the demonstration. On June 9, the Mensheviks in the Soviet denounced the demonstration as a Bolshevik attempt to take power. When the Soviet “banned the demonstration,” Lenin acquiesced. The Soviet held its own demonstration on 18 June while the Bolsheviks used the occasion to advance their own propaganda.¹⁸⁷ With an exhausted Lenin resting in Finland, the Military Organization decided to seize power. This appears to be a rebellion from below. Soldiers took to the streets in arms and sailors mutinied. They “demanded that Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev give them their orders to take the capital.” Receiving no answer, they appealed to Stalin at the *Pravda* office. According to Montefiore, Stalin said that soldiers “know best” and implicitly supported (or “half encouraged”) the uprising, although he believes that Stalin probably organized it, which was Trotsky’s view. / The Soviet, still dominated by Mensheviks, refused support. Lenin was quickly called back from Finland. More than 400,000 armed soldiers and sailors controlled the streets for a day, but it was an unplanned revolt and the would-be revolutionaries dispersed when the Soviet backed away from support and the rebels were left leaderless. The Mensheviks claimed that the Bolsheviks had attempted to seize power and accused Lenin of treason—of being a paid German agent who would surrender to Germany. Without a plan, without leadership, and chastened by the anti-Bolshevik propaganda, the July Days fizzled.¹⁸⁸

The provisional Government asserted its force, smashed the *Pravda* office and took the offensive against the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Stalin negotiated with the Soviet to intervene and promised the surrender of the Bolshevik headquarters to avoid a massacre. A warrant was issued for Lenin’s arrest on the treason charge. “Stalin took charge of his safety.” Moved about from safe house to safe house, Lenin was willing to surrender himself and go on trial, a move he believed would clear him but also restore the propaganda advantage for the Bolsheviks. He was essentially wanted dead or alive, however, and his arrest would likely have been followed by his quick assassination—he wouldn’t have been the first or the last revolutionary leader to suffer this fate. Lenin was smuggled back to Finland, with Stalin playing the role of go-between with the Central Committee.¹⁸⁹

The Sixth Congress was held in late July, with Stalin as acting leader. The issue of whether to proceed with the socialist revolution was debated in the July 1917 Congress of the Bolshevik Party (at which Trotsky’s group merged with the Bolsheviks). Bukharin and Preobrazhensky argued that the Party ought to direct its power towards socialism only if proletarian revolution materializes in Western Europe. In the absence of a European revolution, the aims of the Russia Revolution should remain bourgeois democratic. In other words, the Bolshevik strategy should be dependent upon the state of the class struggle in the West. Lenin’s

¹⁸⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 316-7.

¹⁸⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 319.

¹⁸⁸ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 320-1.

¹⁸⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 323-4/

thesis, however, implied that Russia should initiate the socialist revolution; that a Bolshevik revolution in Russia would help stimulate the proletarian uprising in the West. Lenin still implicitly accepted the older Marxist notion that Russia could not build a socialist economy and society in the absence of help from a revolutionary Europe, but argued that this revolution would actually begin in Russia. Lenin said that Russia must create its own revolution instead of waiting for Europe.

Stalin was elected to the Central Committee in July, 1917, but beneath Trotsky and Kamenev. Events gradually fell in place for a Bolshevik recovery that summer, while Stalin was kindling a romance with Nadya Alliluyev, the daughter of a woman with whom he once had an affair in Georgia.¹⁹⁰ Power in the Provisional Government was being fought over between Kerensky and General Kornilov—two leaders, Montefiore says, with Napoleon complexes. With national leadership split and faltering, the Bolshevik opportunity was nearing. Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev were once again in charge of the Central Committee. The Bolsheviks finally secured power in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. By late September, Trotsky was chairman of the Soviet in Petrograd. What to do next?

Kamenev used the new power of the Soviet to negotiate from a position of strength with the Mensheviks and SRs to form a coalition in a new pre-parliament. From Finland, Lenin exerted all the force of his will to direct the seizure of power. Lenin argued for a revolutionary offensive in October, 1917. Only Zinoviev and Kamenev voted against the resolution. For Stalin, the minority position would leave the Bolsheviks in the position of merely “an opposition.” Stalin endorsed the call for revolution and reliance on the European proletariat.¹⁹¹ He backed Lenin and proposed publishing his call to arms, but the vote was lost 6-4 in the Central Committee, which supported the efforts at coalition building. Lenin secretly returned to confront his wavering Party members.¹⁹² On the 10th of October, eleven Bolshevik leaders, many in disguise – Lenin was clean-shaven and wore a curly wig under a workman’s cap – met in a street-level apartment and argued strategy until the early hours of the morning. In the end, only Kamenev and Zinoviev did not accept Lenin’s argument that the time was ripe for taking power. / The debate was resumed five days later with the same result. From the start, Trotsky and Stalin supported Lenin. On the 18th, the two dissenting Bolsheviks denounced the plan to seize power in an article published in a journal edited by Gorky. Lenin and Trotsky demanded their expulsion; Stalin argued that they should remain in the Central Committee but be required to submit to the decision of the majority.¹⁹³

The centre of the uprising was in the Soviet, in Trotsky’s Military-Revolutionary Committee – Stalin was not a member. On the 24th, while Kerensky’s agents raided the Bolshevik press, the leadership tasks were assigned to Central Committee members. Stalin maintained control over the press and was the essential go-between with Lenin, who remained in hiding.¹⁹⁴ In the early morning hours of the 25th, the Bolshevik Central Committee met in a prolonged session in the Smolny. As the revolution proceeded on the streets and on the cruisers, *Aurora* and *Amur*, the Central Committee sketched out the beginnings of a new Bolshevik administration. In the early hours of the afternoon on the 26th, the Provisional Government

¹⁹⁰ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 326-7.

¹⁹¹ E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* Vol. 3, 1917-1923 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966 [1953], 21; cites Stalin, CW, iii, 381.

¹⁹² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 326-32.

¹⁹³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 335-6.

¹⁹⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 338.

surrendered.¹⁹⁵ Lenin arrived at the Congress of Soviets at 8:40 in the evening and announced, “We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order!” / Stalin was made Commissar of Nationalities. According to Montefiore, “Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin formed an inseparable Trioka in those first months of power.” For Lenin, both were ““men of action.””¹⁹⁶ In Trotsky’s view, Lenin advanced Stalin ““valuing his firmness, grit, stubbornness and slyness as qualities necessary in the struggle.”” / Montefiore’s claims that only in the exceptional circumstances of the Russian Revolution and then the Civil War could someone with Stalin’s character rise to supreme leadership: “it required the synchronicity of man and moment.” / From the beginning, he said, Stalin and Trotsky competed for power.¹⁹⁷

Deutscher says that Stalin characteristically took Lenin’s position on revolution a step further. There was a possibility, Stalin argued, ““that precisely Russia will be the country that paves the way to Socialism... We ought to discard the obsolete idea that only Europe can show us the way. There exists a dogmatic Marxism and a creative one. I am opting for the latter.””¹⁹⁸ According to Deutscher, where this position differed from both Trotsky’s and Lenin’s argument was that, in their views, the fate of socialism in Russia would ultimately depend upon proletarian revolution in the West. Russia could not build socialism by itself. Stalin’s words, Deutscher claimed, accepted the argument that Russia could begin the transition to socialism first, but implicitly ignored the second proposition about Western revolution. Even at that stage of the debate, Stalin held “an implicit, only half-conscious faith in Russia’s revolutionary self-sufficiency.” By the mid-1920s, however, Stalin would expound on this view as “socialism in one country, the view that Russia by herself, in isolation from the rest of the world, could build to the end the edifice of socialism.”¹⁹⁹ By that time, of course, the European Revolution had been smashed, the USSR had survived the counter-revolution, and the Bolshevik (Communist) Party had control of the state. Socialism in one country was the only reasonable strategy, although what this socialism would entail, the policies to pursue in the short and long terms, would be subject to debate in the Party and the country.

Russia has been deemed the first successful socialist revolution. It might also be considered to be the first modern anti-imperialist revolution. Imperialism shifted the revolutionary impetus from the advanced West to the periphery. It was the ‘over-determination’ of the contradictions in Russia that propelled that country into a revolution. Initially the February Revolution was bourgeois democratic and anti-imperialist. All of the 20th century socialist revolutions have occurred in the context of a struggle against imperialism. Russia’s revolution, then, was dualistic. It was a socialist revolution in that it was directed by a Party whose goal was socialist transition. On the other hand, it was also nationalist (anti-imperialist).

Party Struggles, 1923-4

In March, 1922 [The year in which the USSR was formed] Stalin was appointed Secretary General of the CPSU. Lenin’s last public speech was given in November, 1922, to the Moscow Soviet. According to Trotsky, he held a last conversation with Lenin soon afterwards in which Lenin expressed his concern over the growth of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. On the

¹⁹⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 340-6.

¹⁹⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 349-50.

¹⁹⁷ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 352-4.

¹⁹⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 155; (cites *CW*, iii: 187).

¹⁹⁹ Deutscher, *Stalin*, 154.

12th of December, on medical advice, Lenin withdrew from public life to his apartment in the Kremlin. Over the next three months, he saw none of the party leaders, communicating with them through articles and personal notes, which were circulated by Krupskaya. On the 25th of December, 1922 (January 1923), nine days after a serious stroke, Lenin dictated what has been dubbed his ‘testament’ in which he expressed concern about the need for stability in the Party and the potential for a split, rooted in the two-class alliance which was the basis of Soviet power. His ‘testament’ contained “a series of considerations of a purely personal character.” The question of the ‘personal’ character of revolutionaries, however, is never an unimportant matter. Lenin described Bukharin, for example, as one of the “most able” and a valuable theoretician, but as being one-sided. He was overly scholastic and insufficiently dialectic in his thinking to be “fully Marxist.”

The “relation between” Stalin and Trotsky, Lenin wrote, constitutes the largest factor portending a split in the Party. They were the two most able leaders. His analysis of Trotsky was even-handed. Trotsky possessed “exceptional abilities” and was “the most able” member of the central committee, but he possessed a “too far-reaching self-confidence” and his disposition was attracted too much “to the purely administrative side of affairs.” For Stalin, Lenin had only words of warning: he “has concentrated an enormous power in his hands” as general secretary, and Lenin expressed concern that he does not always know “how to use that power with sufficient caution.”²⁰⁰

By January, 1923, Lenin was actively writing about the national question and expressing fears of great-Russian chauvinism and warning against “the smallest harshness or injustice towards our own non-Russians.” Stalin was partly responsible for the “truly great Russian nationalist campaign.” In Lenin’s view, a lack of coordination was preferable to prejudicing the Soviet power in Asia. In this context, Lenin added a ‘postscript’ to his ‘testament’ in which he stated “Stalin is too rude, and this fault, entirely supportable in relations among us communists, becomes insupportable in the office of general secretary.” Lenin recommended removing Stalin from this powerful position and appointing someone superior to him in the sense of being “more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc.” What appears a trifle, Lenin concluded, in the context of a potential Party split, “is such a trifle as may acquire a decisive significance.”²⁰¹ For the time being, these two documents remained private. They were read to “leading party members on May 22, 1924” just prior to the thirteenth party congress, and the contents became widely known among party members.²⁰²

On 6 February, 1923, Lenin wrote *Better Less but Better*, described by Carr as “a fierce uninhibited attack on the People’s Commissariat of Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection,” which Stalin had headed from its beginning in 1920 until May, 1922. Stalin was not named in the article but it was widely interpreted as critical of his “hastiness and administrative impulsiveness.” Twice Lenin warned about bureaucracy in both the Soviet institutions and in the party, a critique also aimed at the office of the general secretary.²⁰³ An intense debate in the Politburo finally led to the publication of Lenin’s article early in March, 1923. At the end of his life, Lenin apparently sought Trotsky’s support for his position on the national question and, Carr

²⁰⁰ E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1954], 258-9.

²⁰¹ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 263.

²⁰² Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 259n. They were published in the *New York Times* on 18 October 1926.

²⁰³ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 264-5.

says, broke off “comradely relations” with Stalin.²⁰⁴ Three days later, Lenin suffered a third stroke that left him without speech.

The twelfth party congress was postponed until April 1923. The dominant rivals for leadership were Zinoviev and Trotsky. Trotsky remained isolated and did not contest the leadership. Opposition to the growing bureaucracy and centralization of the party, Carr says, was apparent among a number of groups and individuals, but it was “dispersed and ineffective ... without cohesion without organization or leadership” and “without policy or tactical plan.”²⁰⁵ The Congress concluded by creating a three-member leadership core (triumvirate) consisting of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin. Stalin’s profile had been raised to the pinnacle of party power. Trotsky was conspicuously absent from a position of power broker in the party. By December 1923, with Lenin partly paralyzed and out of the picture except as an iconic founder of a doctrine becoming known as ‘Leninism,’ a phrase which could be used to support any side of the political struggle, the campaign against Trotsky began in earnest. All three members of the triumvirate spear-headed the attack, highlighted on December 15 in an article in *Pravda* by Stalin, accusing Trotsky of being in a ‘bloc’ with the ‘Left’ communists and part, simultaneously, of the (bourgeois) ‘democratic centre,’ aligning him objectively with the anti-Soviet opposition.²⁰⁶ Zinoviev first used the term ‘Trotskyism’ as “a definite tendency in the Russian workers’ movement.” Bukharin detailed Trotsky’s past deviations from ‘Leninism.’²⁰⁷

Trotsky had become, at least objectively if not actively, the leader of an opposition within the Communist Party (CPSU), but his own position in the party was essentially individualist. He was not engaged behind the scenes in the development of factions and groupings, Carr believes. In his view, the main concern of the triumvirate in December 1923 was to maintain the division between Trotsky and the opposition, which might yet seek Trotsky’s leadership. The opposition, Carr argues, was based on a vague but widespread feeling among the rank and file that change in Soviet administration was necessary, but it is “difficult to gauge the strength of the opposition.” It was strongest in Moscow and was an important factor in many Army party cells and among “the mass of students in technical institutions and universities.” Students in the training school of the People’s Commissariat of Communications, for example, had declared that “the party consisted of 40,000 members with hammers and 400,000 with portfolios.”²⁰⁸ While ostensibly a workers’ opposition, however, Carr notes that the opposition appealed to the managers and technicians, but “was least successful in rallying” the support of industrial workers. While Trotsky would appear to have the credentials to become a formidable leader of the opposition, he was not trusted by industrial workers because of his past role in the militarization of labour and “the ‘statization’ of the trade unions.” In Carr’s view, Trotsky “had done more than anyone to justify the charge that the dictatorship of the proletariat had been transformed into a dictatorship over the proletariat.”²⁰⁹ At the root of the failure of the opposition, however, was an eroded working class. The proletariat was disillusioned, hungry, and disorganized, and the political consequences of the NEP further undermined the political consciousness of the mass of workers. Carr concludes that there was not a sufficient mass of class conscious workers upon which an opposition could rely.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 265-6.

²⁰⁵ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 278.

²⁰⁶ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 316.

²⁰⁷ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 317, 321.

²⁰⁸ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 323-5.

²⁰⁹ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 326-7.

²¹⁰ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 328.

The Politburo, in January, 1924, consisted of six Bolsheviks: Grigori Zinoviev (the head of the Comintern, which had been established in 1919), Lev Kamenev, Alexei Rykov, Nikolai Bukharin, Joseph Stalin, and Leon Trotsky. As preparations were underway for the thirteenth party conference in January 1924, Trotsky left Moscow for the Caucasus in an attempt to recover from a prolonged illness. At this juncture, which Stalin claimed was a struggle “for the life and death of the party,” Carr says that Stalin left nothing for chance. The conference was carefully planned down to the important task of delegate selection. In Stalin’s speeches on party organization, Trotsky was for the first time explicitly identified as the head of the opposition, a change in tactics Carr attributes to Stalin’s calculation that the party apparatus securely held the upper hand.²¹¹ In Carr’s view, the thirteenth conference was a decisive moment in the history of the CPSU. At stake were “personalities rather than principles”; discrediting members was more important than debating policies: “The struggle for power had assumed a naked form.”²¹² To summarize, there was dissent among the rank and file, an unorganized ‘workers’ opposition,’ and Trotsky, who sided ideologically with the internal opposition but did not sanction factions or party splits. Carr interprets the situation in terms of personal power.

Lenin died on 21 January, 1924, a few days after the thirteenth party conference. With him died Trotsky’s hopes that Lenin’s prestige would turn the tables in his favour. In 1924, the CPSU opened its membership to recruitment from among the industrial workers. By May, 128,000 new members—the Lenin recruitment—increased the total membership to about 600,000. No more than about 10,000 were ‘old Bolsheviks’, Carr estimates, while many of the new members who had joined since 1917 were revolutionaries. Increasingly, however, as the CPSU was ‘imperceptibly transformed into a political machine geared to manage and supervise the affairs of a great state’, new members entered ‘to conserve an established organization and to enjoy the privileges of participation in it.’ Simultaneously, the CPSU was purged of members who were identified, primarily, as opposition supporters.²¹³

In May 1924, Lenin’s ‘testament’ was made public within the central committee, but both Zinoviev and Kamenev refuted Lenin’s suggestion that Stalin be removed as party secretary. The Politburo then moved to strip Trotsky of power before he could rally support and become the de facto opposition leader they had apparently feared.

A few months after Lenin died, Stalin published a major pamphlet called *The Foundations of Leninism* (April 1924) in which he laid an interpretation of Lenin’s theories, which began the process of turning principles into dogma, into indisputable, uncontextualized truths. At the 13th Congress (June 1924), Stalin had spoken of the increase in political illiteracy since the Lenin Enrollment (the addition of 250,000 new members from a working class background, in a party, by another estimate, of about 800,000 – of whom, 80% were defined as politically illiterate). There was a “decline in the theoretical level” of Party members.” The task, then, was “teaching the Lenin Enrollment the foundations of Leninism.”²¹⁴ Party democratization was identified with the class background of members; for example, Stalin noted that in 1924, “the Central Committee has 54 members, of whom 29 (53 per cent) are workers and 25 (47 per cent) are intellectuals. This is a sure sign of the democratisation of the principal Party leadership,” he concluded.

²¹¹ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 333-7, 341.

²¹² Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 340.

²¹³ Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-24*, 354-6.

²¹⁴ Marxist Internet Archive <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/06/17.htm>

In 1924, the question of Trotskyism, identified as an ideological tendency, was made explicit by Kamenev and then by Stalin.²¹⁵ Stalin asked: “What is the purpose of Trotsky's new literary pronouncements against the Party? What is the sense, the purpose, the aim of these pronouncements now, when the Party does not want a discussion, when the Party is busy with a host of urgent tasks, when the Party needs united efforts to restore our economy and not a new struggle around old questions? For what purpose does Trotsky need to drag the Party back, to new discussions?” Stalin argues that Trotsky represented his ideas as proletarian ideology that were not merely distinct from Lenin but were in “irreconcilable contradiction with Leninism.” Trotskyism rejected the worker-peasant alliance, “the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and *peasantry*” (italics in original). Organizationally, “Trotskyism is distrust of the Bolshevik Party principle, of the monolithic character of the Party, of its hostility towards opportunist elements. In the sphere of organisation, Trotskyism is the theory that revolutionaries and opportunists can co-exist and form groups and coteries within a single party.” Stalin argued that, “It is the duty of the Party to bury Trotskyism as an ideological trend.” He qualified this, at the time, by rejecting the necessity of “repressive measures against the opposition... I am emphatically opposed to them. What we need now is not repressive measures, but an extensive ideological struggle against renascent Trotskyism,” presumably despite his earlier point that the party did not want more discussion and needed united efforts at construction.

Socialism in One Country

David McLellan says that Bukharin originated the doctrine “socialism in one country” in his defence of the NEP, although arguably the NEP itself was seen by Lenin as a temporary step back to small-scale capitalism in some sectors, particularly agriculture, in the light of the post-Civil War economic difficulties. It was also rooted in the international situation, following the defeat of the last German uprisings in 1923, and the realization that the USSR was isolated and would have to construct socialism from its own resources.²¹⁶ Stalin argued, in April 1924, that the “final victory of socialism” could not be achieved in one country alone without “the joint efforts of the proletarians in several advanced countries”. By December, however, he had converted to this view and called “the victory of socialism in one country ... quite possible and probable.” [/] By 1926, he defined the aim as “a complete socialist society in our country”.²¹⁷ Bukharin planned to base this socialist construction on the slow transformation of the rich peasants to cooperatives, which, he said, would be accomplished “at a snail’s pace”.²¹⁸

Stalin said “in 1925, the task is to make the transition from the present economy, which cannot, as a whole, be called socialist, to socialist economy, to the economy that must serve as the material basis of a socialist society.”²¹⁹ The key to building socialism is essentially economic, a matter of socialist construction; “That is mainly a front of economic construction.” Capitalism was stabilizing itself after the revolutionary upheavals, but it was “possible to convert the brief ‘respite’ into a whole period of ‘respite.’” Stalin begins to talk about the imperialist “camp” versus the socialist camp. Internally, “the task is, on the one hand, to link the proletariat and poor peasants with the middle peasants on the basis of a firm alliance between them, ... [and] to draw

²¹⁵ Marxist Internet Archive http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/11_19.htm

²¹⁶ David McLellan, *Marxism after Marx: An Introduction*, Third Edition (London: McMillan, 1998), 133.

²¹⁷ McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 133-4.

²¹⁸ McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 134.

²¹⁹ Marxist Internet Archive <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/11/07.htm>

the vast masses of the peasantry into the co-operatives and thereby ensure the victory of the socialist core of our economy over the capitalist elements.” With the expansion of the already socialist industry, it was necessary “to *implant a co-operative communal life in the countryside*” (*italics in original*), which become “the necessary conditions for victory in building socialism in our country.” Success required Leninist “firmness.”²²⁰ Stalin’s argument in 1924 was that the possibility of building complete socialism in one country was demonstrated by the perseverance of the USSR through seven years of international intervention and civil war.

In the inner-party struggles of 1928, Stalin succeeded in defeating the “right” line based on Bukharin’s agriculture-first policy. The result, McLellan says, was a “revolution from above” in which over the five-year plan, agriculture was rapidly collectivized and the foundation was laid for a rapid industrialization of the Soviet economy. McLellan argues that the repressive economic policy was reflected in equally harsh measure in the Party. Under the pretext of rooting out counter-revolutionaries occasioned by a political assassination in 1934, the first to face trial and execution were Zinoviev and Kamenev. Bukharin was executed in 1938, perhaps the main victim of the show trials of the late 1930s. McLellan says that “only 3 per cent of the delegates to the 1934 Party Congress reappeared in 1939, and of the Central Committee elected in 1934, 70 per cent were shot.”²²¹

The German novelist Olin Steinhauer, whose mystery/detective fiction is set in an unmade Eastern European state post-Second World War, explored the purges in *The Confession*:

It meant ... the quick cleansing of the Capital. It meant sudden disappearances in post offices, government ministries, and even the Militia offices – old friends of questionable loyalty vanished, replaced by fresh faced automatons.... [/]

... and then arrests begin to riddle the Capital with holes where men once stood—you’re only one of many. The empty prisons swell as they did a decade before, after the war, and the trains lumber under the weight of the dispossessed on their way to the provinces and the camps.

... once the Capital is cleansed it is time to fumigate the Central Committee. Chairs in the great hall go empty, two, three at a time. Emergency elections bring in new, quieter men, younger men with a lifetime of service before them.²²²

The radical filmmaker, Costa-Gavras, directed *The Confession* (unrelated to Steinhauer’s later novel) in 1970. The key question was how it could be that long-time Party members could confess to being imperialist spies; to all outside observers, an outrageous lie. The simple answer is that they were subject to torture. Costa-Gavras suspects that it was more complicated and, in particular, that being a Party loyalist was the root of their self-confessed guilt. The film is based on the actual arrest, interrogation, and confession of Artur London (Yves Montand), a Czechoslovakian official arrested in 1952 and tried as an agent of the Yugoslav leader Tito along with 13 other Party members in a show trial. Most defendants were hanged; London was imprisoned but released in 1955.

²²⁰ Marxist Internet Archive. Stalin, “October, Lenin and the Prospects of Our Development,” November 7, 1925 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/11/07.htm>

²²¹ McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 147.

²²² Olen Steinhauer, *The Confession* (New York: St Martin’s Minotaur 2004), 40, 300. Italics in original.

The interrogator (played by Gabrielle Forzetti) certainly threatens violent measures: London is asked about being a foreign spy. “Answer the questions!.... Heads will roll. We have all the proof we need. We have methods you never dreamed of.” The interrogator says that they represent the power of the proletariat, that they are above even the Central Committee and are charged with unearthing traitor there, as well. At first, London is accused of being a Trotskyist in Spain in the 1930s, with information supplied by Soviet advisors. You are here to confess your crimes, he is told. You must confess. He was given two choices: “to try to redeem yourself by making a full confession or to remain an enemy unto death of the Soviet Union and our party.” “... to show good faith and help the party”—he had not believed that the Soviet Party would make the innocent confess. But, of course, who is, in all respects, innocent? Once London is told it was the Party that was asking for the confession, as a loyal Party member, he begins to comply. At first staying only within the bounds of what might be an interpretation of his past:

At first we tried to aid the party to help it see things clearly. To understand ourselves and the mistakes that had brought us there. We were prepared to admit that our mistakes may have harmed the party. The years of discipline, our whole education, led us to believe that the party was never wrong, that the USSR was always right. We aren't acting alone. We have advisors! In all humility, we felt it better to err with the party than be right as individuals.

Again: “You must confess!” London is told. But, confess what? Be specific, he wants to know. And he is told: he was “arrested for international espionage and being a traitor to the Soviet Union and our country.... I appeal to you to help the Soviet Union and our Party. He is not alone; others are implicated. The interrogators refer to Hungary and the trial of Laslo Rajk, who was condemned by a unanimous party vote—including Rajk's own vote—which is shown in flashback. Many other Spanish volunteers were implicated in this trial. The interrogator also makes reference to London being a Jew—most of the defendants in the 1952 show trial were Jews. London was a Jew and a communist in the 1940s, so he was asked, how did he survived the Gestapo? The implication was that he survived by becoming a traitor, though at one point he tells the guards they are acting like Nazis.

Then the psychological and physical tortures begin: sleep deprivation, inadequate food, being forced to “march” in his small cell while he is awake to wear him down physically. Repeatedly, the interrogation goes over everything beginning with his birth, and he is questioned every time there is a discrepancy in any of the details from one version to another. The interrogator pounces on each “lie” – the implication being that he has been caught not being truthful. Finally, London is blindfolded and taken outdoors, a noose placed on his head, and taken through a mock execution. “You must confess your guilt. As an obedient member of the Party, you must submit.” Even so, he is not broken and attempts to turn the logical tables on the interrogator's contradictory accusation: “If I am not a good communist but a Trotskyist spy, why appeal to my loyalty? If I'm a good communist, why am I here?” The interrogator doesn't have to answer any questions.

He does switch tactics, however, playing on the “good communist” angle but distinguishing between so-called “objective” factors while leaving aside the subjective ones – what London thought he was doing, his intentions, the state of his mind as a ‘good communist’: “We are simply considering the facts. As I said, the subjective aspects, will be dealt with at a later stage....” The interrogator uses scraps of information about other alleged spies London had known, including someone called Field. He is asked to sign the following fact: “I had dealings

with him [Field]. I am objectively guilty of espionage. During this time Field paid me 800 Swiss francs. Sign please.” Objective means out of context and without an explanation. London agrees to sign because the events had happened and Field was acknowledged to be an agent. After signing, London is shown a letter from his wife and the allowed to sleep in “regulation position” (flat on his back) likely not for long. Then he is awakened and an additional signature required: “The International Brigade Volunteers are self-confessed Trotskyists and traitors. Objectively, therefore, as their leader, so am I. After signing you may write to your family.”

Then the interrogator accuses London of being a Trotskyist before he went to Spain. In 1936 he had sheltered Wagner, a Trot. And he had expressed doubts about the Moscow trials. London digs in his heels: “I will not sign.” The interrogator replies, “You will ... like the rest.” “Trust in the Party,” he is told. “It’s your only chance.” They may be lenient, the interrogator implies. London continues to try to use logical arguments against arbitrary power: “But in Spain in 1937, they were Yugoslav Communists, not Titoists.”

He then gets a lesson in ‘dialectical materialism’: “An ex-undersecretary too. You don’t know the ABCs of dialectics. The past must be judged in the light of truth established today.” The past is to be interpreted in terms of the objective outcomes of the decisions in the present. Again, Party loyalty is the issue: “Confession is the highest form of self-criticism. And self-criticism is the principal virtue of a communist.”

When London finally capitulates and confesses to everything, including being a spy for the Americans—that is, he agrees to confess to false and absurd accusations—he is told to learn the script by heart and to say it as if he means it. Again, there are promises of relative leniency at the trial and no death sentence. (Ironically, perhaps, his first demonstration was to save Sacco and Vanzetti, anarchists hanged in the United States.) “The party expects you to be guided by its interests.” He is told his testimony won’t be recorded, in the interest of a smooth trial.

“*J’accepte!*” He declares, the inverse of *J’accuse*.

The trial smacked heavily of anti-Semitism; most of the convicted were identified as Jews. There was a major effort to make them appear healthy. They are well fed beforehand and cleaned up; London is tanned under a sun lamp. The appearance is no less made up than the confession, which must appear unrehearsed. London is pressured always to make a good show. This modern inquisition is a morality play with appointed scripts and roles with the infallible Party in the role of God.

In a parallel story, London’s loyal wife of twenty years (played by Simone Signoret) is slowly convinced that her husband is guilty of crimes against the Party, to which she remains loyal. And she disclaims her husband after his confession is broadcast, in his own voice and with apparent sincerity.

London was one of three accused reprieved from hanging. He is sent to do hard labour but released in a few years. Then he meets his former interrogator on the street. In the end, London accepts his confession of guilt as having been his duty to the Party. The interests of the individual and his or her intentions are submerged in the wider interests of the building of socialism.

As in the Czechoslovakian show trial, the Moscow Trials of the 1930s included leading members of the CPSU. McLellan quotes Trotsky’s biographer, Isaac Deutscher, who says that among those who were out made to confess to equally absurd charges in the Moscow show trials

were all the members of Lenin’s Politburo, except Stalin himself and Trotsky [who had been exiled] ... one ex-premier, several vice-premiers, two ex-chiefs of

the Communist International, the chief of the trade unions ... the Chief of the General Staff, the chief political Commissar of the Army, the Supreme Commanders of all important military districts, nearly all Soviet ambassadors in Europe and Asia, and, last but not least, the two chiefs of the political police.²²³

In his two-volume analysis of the communist international movement, Fernando Claudin claims that Stalin's theory of the possibility of achieving "complete socialism" in a single country is an example of Stalin's revisionism. In its Fourth Congress, the Comintern reiterated the position that a proletarian revolution cannot triumph completely in a single country; complete victory required a world revolution, or at least the combined efforts of several countries, of which the most important were revolutions in countries that had reached the stage of advanced capitalism. To build complete socialism, it was necessary to have an international division of labour in a socialist world economy.²²⁴ The key emphasis, however, is on the word "complete." Claudin's critique seems to hinge on the word "complete." Trotsky argued that the doctrine of socialism in one country substituted nationalism for internationalism and world revolution. Certainly the USSR had demonstrated the possibility that a Soviet government could maintain and consolidate itself in power in a single country in the face of external and internal opposition, and that it had the capacity to *begin the construction* of a socialist system that could, for some period at least, co-exist with capitalism. There was, in actuality, a degree of relative autonomy in the development of socialism nationally and in the international movement.²²⁵

Claudin argues, however, that Stalin's claims were not this modest. In his hands, the doctrine assumed an "absolute significance."²²⁶ According to Claudin, in the face of the apparent consolidation of capitalism after the defeat of the German Revolution, Stalin revised Marxist theory by asserting that revolution in advanced capitalism was not necessary for the development of socialism; the USSR was capable of developing a socialist society alone.²²⁷ As socialism in one country was applied within the Comintern, the basic contradiction was defined as the capitalist world system versus the Soviet Union. The USSR had become the base and the leading force of the international revolution, the fatherland of the world proletariat. But the doctrine implied more than this leadership. Not only does the USSR, through the Comintern, claim leadership of the world revolution; building socialism in the USSR becomes the primary objective of the world movement, to which end other national communist movements should be subordinated.²²⁸ The western proletariat and anti-colonial movement become "auxiliary factors" for the consolidation of socialism in the USSR.²²⁹ Hence the bewildering changes of policy undertaken in the world communist movement, such as the switch from the allied front against fascism to the Hitler-Stalin pact, which were dictated by the contingent interests of the Soviet Union. The doctrine implied, secondly, that the USSR provided the "model" for revolutionary movements, to which other movements must adhere in strategy and tactics. Their relative autonomy was denied. [/] Nevertheless, these ideas were worked out in the practice of the Comintern and of the USSR; the theory of "complete" socialism in one country and its

²²³ Deutscher, quoted in McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 147.

²²⁴ Fernando Claudin. *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*. Vol. I: *The Crisis of the Communist International*. trans. Brian Pearce. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976, 72-76.

²²⁵ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 83.

²²⁶ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 84

²²⁷ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 92.

²²⁸ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 75.

²²⁹ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 92.

implications for class struggle within the USSR and for the international movement were never specified and debated theoretically.²³⁰

Stalin argued in 1926 that the Soviet proletariat was strengthening its power yearly, was “rallying the main mass of the peasantry around it,” and had made substantial achievements in socialist construction. This success provided grounds for accepting as fact that the Soviet proletariat “can overcome *its* bourgeoisie and continue the victorious building of socialism” in the USSR despite capitalist encirclement.²³¹ Stalin anticipated that the USSR “will succeed in laying a socialist foundation for our economy” before the Western proletariat successfully overthrows its bourgeoisie.²³² Industrialization is the essential component of the foundation for the construction of a socialist economy. Industrialization requires a “bond between industry and peasant economy.” The proletariat is hegemonic in this bloc. The alternative is to adopt a capitalist method of industrialization involving higher taxes on the peasantry and higher process for manufactured goods, which treats the peasantry as a colony and as an object of exploitation.²³³ In 1926, Stalin said:²³⁴

What is the principal merit of the socialist method of industrialisation? It is that it leads to unity between the interests of industrialisation and the interests of the main mass of the labouring sections of the population, that it leads not to the impoverishment of the vast masses, but to an improvement of their living standards, not to an aggravation of the internal contradictions, but to the latter being evened out and overcome, and that it steadily enlarges the home market and increases its absorbing capacity, thus creating a solid domestic base for the development of industrialisation.

The debate centred, in part, on Preobrazhensky’s question of whether developing socialist industry required primitive accumulation from the peasantry. The opposition in 1926 pointed out the contradiction between agriculture and industry, which Stalin interpreted as necessarily favouring the capitalist industrialization of the USSR. Stalin’s argument is that the opposition line is *objectively* capitalist; that “Preobrazhensky, without himself realising it, is undermining or trying to undermine, all possibility of socialist industrialisation.”

Stalin criticized Trotsky for saying that increased economic surplus in agriculture, in the context of a short supply of agricultural goods, would bring the peasantry into conflict with Soviet foreign trade policy. In Stalin’s interpretation, Trotsky, “is afraid of a ‘good harvest’ and apparently thinks that it would be a danger to the economic development of our country.” Stalin contrasts Trotsky’s statement with “Lenin’s statement, during the period when the goods famine was at its worst, that a good harvest would be the ‘salvation of the state.’” The labouring opposition took a proletarian line, arguing that taxes should be raised on the peasantry and wholesale prices of goods raised. In either case, the issue was the potential sharpening of the

²³⁰ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 84-85.

²³¹ J. Stalin, “Once more on the social democratic deviation in our party”, Report to the 7th enlarged plenum of the E.C.C.I. (Third International), 22 Nov. - 16 Dec. 1926, pp, 1-155 in J. V. Stalin, *Works* Vol 9 (Dec. 1926 - July 1927), 43.

²³² Stalin, “Once more on the social democratic deviation in our party”, 46.

²³³ Stalin, “Once more on the social democratic deviation in our party”, 48-9.

²³⁴ J. Stalin, *The Social-Democratic Deviation in our Party*. Report Delivered at the Fifteenth All-Union Conference of the C.P.S.U.(B.) November 1, 1926. Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/11/01.htm>

contradiction between industrialization and agriculture, the latter being in large measure still operating within a market framework.

Stalin's argument was clear: he wanted the expulsion of Trotsky. "Trotsky cannot but know that the Thirteenth Congress of our Party proclaimed Trotskyism a "downright petty-bourgeois deviation." But nobody has so far held that the adoption of that resolution must necessarily lead to the expulsion of the leaders of the Trotskyist opposition from the Party." The plan was for ideological struggle. For the opposition to renounce factionalism is important, "But it, is not enough. In order to secure full unity, it is necessary to go one step further and get the opposition bloc to renounce its errors of principle, and thus protect the Party and Leninism from assaults and attempts at revision." In other words, the opposition must capitulate and accept majority decision on economic policy.²³⁵

Trotsky critiqued the Comintern and the Bolshevik party for the demand for theoretical and ideological unanimity.²³⁶ He pointed out that the Bolshevik Party had a history of sharp disagreements, even on the eve of the October Revolution. The Party, however, had formally banned factions in 1921, in the middle of the Civil War. Claudin argues that this ban was necessary at the time, but it was implemented temporarily, dictated by circumstances, and did not represent a principle of party organization. Stalin elevated the ban to the status of principle. For Stalin, party disagreements had to be resolved administratively rather than through theoretical debate rooted in the analysis of praxis.²³⁷ Factions in the Party were "impermissible," Stalin (1926: 49) said in 1926, because they could lead only to the splitting of the party and, hence, undermine the dictatorship of the proletariat, since the Party is the "principal instrument" of this dictatorship. Factions necessarily weaken the essential unity of the Party.²³⁸

From this perspective, the USSR was perpetually in crisis, through the whole period of socialist construction as it struggled with its internal bourgeoisie (such as the kulaks) and as it sought to protect itself from foreign intervention and ultimately invasion. The times, then, were always exceptional, and exceptional measures were always necessary. Soviet Marxism, Claudin concludes, became monolithic; relative truths became absolute and repression of opposition, widely defined, became an imperative for party unity and the survival of the state.

Collectivization and the Comintern

Agricultural output in the USSR was insufficient to sustain any major degree of industrialization. At the 15th Congress of the CPSU in December 1927, Stalin argued.²³⁹

The way out is to turn the small and scattered peasant farms into large united farms based on cultivation of the land in common, to go over to collective cultivation of the land on the basis of a new and higher technique.

The way out is to unite the small and dwarf peasant farms gradually but surely, not by pressure, but by example and persuasion, into large farms based on

²³⁵ Stalin, "The Social-Democratic Deviation in our Party," 1 November 1926. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/11/01.htm>

²³⁶ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 120-1.

²³⁷ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 121.

²³⁸ Stalin, "Once more on the social democratic deviation in our party", 49.

²³⁹ J. Stalin The Fifteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B.) December 2-19, 1927.

Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1927/12/02.htm>

common, co-operative, collective cultivation of the land with the use of agricultural machines and tractors and scientific methods of intensive agriculture.

By 1928, the change in policy was deemed an offensive against the capitalist elements in the countryside.²⁴⁰ Opposing rapid industrialization, subsidies to co-ops, and self-criticism in state bureaucracies, “there are people in the ranks of our Party who are striving, perhaps without themselves realising it, to adapt our socialist construction to the tastes and requirements of the "Soviet" bourgeoisie.” A victory for the right strengthens capitalism, weakens the proletarian democracy, and “increasing the chances of the restoration of capitalism.” Under the NEP, the conditions exist for the restoration of capitalism. Stalin quotes Lenin to this effect:

“we shall see to it that our economic base is transformed from a small-peasant base into a large-scale industrial base. Only when the country has been electrified, only when our industry, our agriculture, our transport system have been placed upon the technical basis of modern large-scale industry shall we achieve final victory.”²⁴¹

The right was declared a frankly opportunist deviation, one for which conciliatory approach is inadequate. Rightists surfaced in the grain-procurement crisis in 1927, and were expelled. But there were no right or left deviators in the Politburo. Still, Stalin is assuming the transition will take years:

“But this condition for the building of socialism cannot be fulfilled in one or two years. It is impossible in one or two years to industrialise the country, build up a powerful industry, organise the vast masses of the peasantry into co-operatives, place agriculture on a new technical basis, unite the individual peasant farms into large collective farms, develop state farms, and restrict and overcome the capitalist elements in town and country. Years and years of intense constructive work by the proletarian dictatorship will be needed for this. And until that is accomplished—and it can not be accomplished all at once—we shall remain a small peasant country, where small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously and on a mass scale, and where the danger of the restoration of capitalism remains.”

On the other hand, if the ‘Left’ deviation succeeded, Stalin says: “There is no doubt that the triumph of the ‘Left’ deviation in our Party would lead to the working class being separated from its peasant base, to the vanguard of the working class being separated from the rest of the working-class masses, and, consequently, to the defeat of the proletariat and to facilitating conditions for the restoration of capitalism.”²⁴²

In 1927, Stalin was still talking about the Trotskyist opposition. Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled in 1927 (the latter was later reinstated). By October 1928, Stalin was warning of the danger of the right deviation in the party. The Moscow organization of the party had been

²⁴⁰ Stalin, *The Right Danger in the C.P.S.U.(B.)*(October 19, 1928). Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/10/19.htm>

²⁴¹ Stalin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 46-47.

²⁴² Stalin, “The Right Danger in the CPSU(B),” 19 October 1928. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/10/19.htm>

stirred up. Stalin said: “*Under the conditions of Soviet development*, when capitalism has already been overthrown, but its roots have not yet been torn out, the Right deviation in communism signifies a tendency, an inclination that has not yet taken shape, it is true, and is perhaps not yet consciously realised, but nevertheless a tendency of a section of the Communists to depart from the general line of our Party in the direction of bourgeois ideology.”

Early in 1928, Bukharin was identified as a principal figure of the right deviation.²⁴³ The rightists wanted a slower pace of industrialization, and end to the repression of the kulaks and other opponents in the countryside, slowing down the pace of co-op and state farm formation, and more utilization of the market as opposed to the state plan. “[T]hey accuse the Party: a) of a policy of military-feudal exploitation of the peasantry, b) of a policy of fostering bureaucracy, c) of a policy of disintegrating the Comintern.” He argued that the Bukharinites reflected the stage of national reconstruction that had been superseded. “This new period is giving rise to new class changes, to an intensification of the class struggle. It demands new methods of struggle, the regrouping of our forces, the improvement and strengthening of all our organisations.”²⁴⁴ Stalin emphasizes the class struggle nature of the new policy: “Until now, we Marxist-Leninists were of the opinion that between the capitalists of town and country, on the one hand, and the working class, on the other hand, there is an *irreconcilable* antagonism of interests. That is what the Marxist theory of the class struggle rests on.”

The nature of the emergency in the USSR, which necessitated widespread repressive measures, changed in different conjunctures. In 1928, the economic situation in the USSR faced what Claudin called a “serious situation” caused by a serious shortage of foodstuffs in the early months of the year. The policy of giving the peasants considerable economic freedom to produce and sell grain was the root cause of the shortage, felt most deeply in urban Russia and hence among the proletariat. Stalin’s response was to liquidate the Kulaks as a class through collectivization, a policy which was part of the first five-year plan. Ironically, Stalin adopted the goal of socialist agriculture that was consistent with Trotsky’s plan for industrialization, which Stalin had denounced as employing capitalist and colonialist methods to the peasantry (primitive accumulation), effectively exploiting the peasantry. Claudin claims that the majority of the peasantry, including a large section of middle peasants and some poor peasants “were under the influence of the kulaks” and were caught up in the repression that was directed at the kulaks.²⁴⁵ Claudin considers Stalin’s move to collectivization and the attack on the Bukharin influence in the party to be ultra-left.

At the same time, the Comintern adopted the social-fascist line, according to which the main enemies of the international working class were the social democrats.²⁴⁶ Separate, communist-led unions were organized in the trade union movement. This policy of attacking the “right” within the socialist and movement was consistent within and outside the USSR, but it was a serious mistake. The rise to power of Nazism in Germany brought about a different historical conjuncture within which the Comintern eventually dropped the social-fascist rhetoric and adopted the tactic of an anti-fascist alliance with not only social democrats, but bourgeois democrats. The Hitler-Stalin pact would later reverse this tactic, reviving for a time the social-

²⁴³ Stalin, Bukharin’s Group and the Right Deviation in our Party, Feb. 1929 Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/x01/x02.htm>

²⁴⁴ Stalin, The Right Deviation in the C.P.S.U.(B.) April 1929 Marxist Internet Archive <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/04/22.htm>

²⁴⁵ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 88-9.

²⁴⁶ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 89.

fascist label. The alliance with Hitler, Claudin argues, was not simply a temporary measure aimed to prepare the USSR for an inevitable war with Germany. Since *Mein Kampf*, it was clear that German territorial ambitions were in the east, in Russia. Fascism is qualitatively distinct from other forms of bourgeois rule. In 1939, these two forms were equated. The USSR abandoned the struggle of progressives and people generally and contemplated a longer-term alliance with German Nazism beginning with the mutual partition of Poland.²⁴⁷

This ambition was shattered in 1941 with the German invasion of the USSR, for which the Russian military was unprepared. Consequently, the anti-fascist alliance had to be once again revised. By that time, unsurprisingly, the Comintern was moribund organizationally and theoretically, and it held its final Congress in 1935.²⁴⁸ Referring to the formal end of the Comintern in 1943, and in the context of the anti-fascist alliance, Stalin said the dissolution cleared “the way to the future organization of a companionship of nations based on their equality”.²⁴⁹ The doctrine of peaceful coexistence with Western imperialism, proclaimed by the revisionists after Stalin’s death, had its precedence a decade earlier. This policy was more than a tactical manoeuvre in the context of the anti-fascist war. It is couched in the terms of long-term strategy rooted on the construction of socialism in the USSR.

1936 Constitution of the USSR

By 1936, in a *Report Delivered at the Extraordinary Eighth Congress of Soviets of the U.S.S.R.* (25 November),²⁵⁰ Stalin claimed, the last vestiges of capitalism had been eliminated in the USSR. Capitalism had been banished entirely from industry, which had expanded seven-fold under socialism. The kulaks, described by Stalin as an agricultural capitalist class, had also been liquidated. With them had gone most of the middle peasants, who had existed in the NEP as “a boundless ocean of small individual peasant farms with backward, mediaeval technical equipment.” By 1936, with the exception of small vestige of middle peasant farms, most farms in the USSR were either collective or state-owned. “Thus the complete victory of the Socialist system in all spheres of the national economy is now a fact.... It means that the exploitation of man by man has been abolished, eliminated, while the Socialist ownership of the implements and means of production has been established as the unshakable foundation of our Soviet society.”

As a result of these changes in ownership and productive forces, “the class structure of our society has also changed.” All the exploiting classes – landlords, kulaks, capitalists, merchants – have been eliminated. There remain three groups: the working class, the peasant class, and the intelligentsia. The means of production have been expropriated from the capitalists and handed over to the working class and the people as a whole, represented by the Soviet state. Hence, “all possibility of the working class being exploited is precluded.” There is no longer a “proletariat” in the USSR, a term that implies an exploitative relationship with capitalists. “Marx said that if the proletariat is to emancipate itself, it must crush the capitalist class, take the instruments and means of production from the capitalists, and abolish those conditions of production which give rise to the proletariat.” This situation has been accomplished in the USSR. Similarly, “our peasantry is a peasantry emancipated from exploitation.” It does not own private property and works on collective or state farms. Stalin does not call it a rural “working class.

²⁴⁷ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 192-3.

²⁴⁸ Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 90.

²⁴⁹ Stalin, quoted in Claudin. *The Communist Movement*, 30.

²⁵⁰ Marxist Internet Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/11/25.htm>.

Finally, “Our Soviet intelligentsia is an entirely new intelligentsia, bound up by its very roots with the working class and the peasantry.” The class origins of the intelligentsia used to be aristocratic or bourgeois; now 80 to 90 percent of the intelligentsia comes from the working or peasant classes “or from some other strata of the working population.” The intelligentsia formerly served the wealthy classes. “Today it must serve the people” s a new, working intelligentsia, which is equal to the peasant and working classes, with whom, “side by side ... it is engaged in building the new, classless, Socialist society.... The distance between these social groups is steadily diminishing” while economic and ideological contradictions among these three groups of working people are “becoming obliterated.” Later in the address, Stalin noted: “The intelligentsia has never been a class, and can never be a class – it was and remains a stratum, which recruits its members from all classes of society.”

The national contradictions had, similarly, been resolved: “This period has shown beyond a doubt that the experiment of forming a multi-national state based on Socialism has been completely successful. This is the undoubted victory of the Leninist national policy.... [R]eal fraternal cooperation among the peoples has been established within the system of a single federated state.... [W]e now have a fully formed multinational Socialist state.” “[I]n the main, we have already achieved the first phase of Communism. Socialism.... [F]or the U.S.S.R. Socialism is something already achieved and won.”

The new constitution was designed to reflect the fact that two classes, the workers and the peasants, were in power. “[T]he guidance of society by the state (the dictatorship) is in the hands of the working class, the most advanced class in society.... [A] constitution is needed for the purpose of consolidating a social order desired by, and beneficial to, the working people.”

The 1936 constitution, then, represented what had been accomplished; it “must speak of that which already exists, of that which has already been achieved and won now, at the present time.” Leftist critics of the draft constitution argued that:

“If the broadening of the basis of the dictatorship of the working class and the transformation of the dictatorship into a more flexible, and, consequently, a more powerful system of guidance of society by the state is interpreted by them not as strengthening the dictatorship of the working class but as weakening it, or even abandoning it, then it is legitimate to ask: Do these gentlemen really know what the dictatorship of the working class means.

In this critical perspective, “the legislative embodiment given to the victories of Socialism, the legislative embodiment given to the successes of industrialization, collectivization, and democratization is represented by them as a ‘swing to the Right.’” Other critics:

“While the last-mentioned group accuses the Draft Constitution of abandoning the dictatorship of the working class, this group, on the contrary, accuses it of not changing anything in the existing position in the U.S.S.R., of leaving the dictatorship of the working class intact, of not granting freedom to political parties, and of preserving the present leading position of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. And this group of critics maintains that the absence of freedom for parties in the U.S.S.R. is a symptom of the violation of the principles of democratism....

“A party is a part of a class, its most advanced part. Several parties, and, consequently, freedom for parties, can exist only in a society in which there are antagonistic classes whose interests are mutually hostile and irreconcilable - in which there are, say, capitalists and workers, landlords and peasants, kulaks and poor peasants, etc. But in the U.S.S.R. there are no longer such classes as the capitalists, the landlords, the kulaks, etc. In the U.S.S.R. there are only two classes, workers and peasants, whose interests - far from being mutually hostile - are, on the contrary, friendly. Hence, there is no ground in the U.S.S.R. for the existence of several parties, and, consequently, for freedom for these parties.”

Stalin rejected the proposed amendment “that ministers of religion, former Whiteguards, all the former rich, and persons not engaged in socially useful occupations be disfranchised, or, at all events, that the franchise of people in this category be restricted to the right to elect.”

Mao on Stalin 1939

In 1939, on the occasion of Stalin’s 60th birthday and “in a period of the bitterest suffering in our history,” Mao praised Stalin as a “dear friend.” He professed “the Chinese people’s wholehearted love and respect for Stalin and our genuine friendship for the Soviet Union.” Behind the sentiment was the reality that China needed the support and aid of the Soviet Union. Mao pointed out that only the USSR had “renounced its privileges in China”; while all the imperialists opposed the Chinese Revolution, “the Soviet Union alone helped us”; and only the USSR has continued to give “real help ... with its aviation and supplies” during the war of resistance against Japan. Without the help of the Soviet Union, “our cause cannot win final victory.” Mao marked the occasion, as well, by denouncing false friends “who profess sympathy for China” and he classified them with Li Lin-fu. Li was prime minister in the Tang Dynasty “who was notorious as a man with ‘honey on his lips and murder in his heart.’”²⁵¹ The Marxist Internet Archive says that Li Lin-fu feigned friendship but “plotted the ruin of all those who surpassed him in ability and fame or found favour in the emperor’s eyes.” Mao was explicitly targeting imperialist leaders with the reference, but it is interesting how the Archive’s description of Li is consistent with a common critique of Stalin’s inter-Party practices in the 1930s.

Stalin on Cooperatives in Albania, 1951

In 1951, Enver Hoxha, the Albanian leader, met Stalin in Moscow and, among other matters, addressed the problems of agriculture in Albania. The agricultural sector was not sufficiently productive “for the population, raw materials for industry or for expanding export resources.” Hoxha said, “We know that the only way to finally pull our agriculture out of its backwardness and put it on a sound basis for large scale production is that of collectivization. But in this direction we have been and are cautious.” The approximately 90 cooperatives in Albania were no more than one or two years old and received state aid in the form of seeds, machinery,

²⁵¹ *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* “Stalin, Friend of the Chinese People,” December 20, 1939. Marxist Internet Archive, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_24.htm.

and cadres. They were to serve as a model for individual producers. But Hoxha wanted to take “cautious steps” in the setting up of new cooperatives. He reported that Stalin advised:

"You should not rush things in setting up other agricultural cooperatives. Try to strengthen the cooperatives you have, but you must see to it that the yields of crops in these cooperatives are high," he said. "In this way," he went on, "the members will be satisfied with the good results of the production in the cooperative, and the other peasants will see this and will want to become collectivized, too.

"As long as the peasants are not convinced of the superiority of the collective property you have no way to increase the number of cooperatives. If the existing cooperatives prove beneficial to the peasants, then the other peasants will also follow you, too."²⁵²

Discussing aid from the USSR, Stalin advised Hoxha that most Albanian requests are for “more aid for industry, but industry cannot stand on its feet and make progress without agriculture. With this, comrades, I mean that you must devote greater attention to the development of agriculture.”

Later in the visit, Hoxha attended the Bolshoi Theatre to see the new opera "From the Depths of Heart," which “dealt with the new life in the collective farm village.” Stalin criticized the opera because “it did not reflect the life in the collectivized village correctly and objectively.” Stalin said “that in this work life in the collective farm had been idealized, truthfulness has suffered, the struggle of the masses against various shortcomings and difficulties was not reflected, and everything was covered with a false lustre and the dangerous idea that ‘everything is going smoothly and well.’”²⁵³

Death of Stalin 1953

“There can be little doubt that history will account Stalin one of the greatest men of all time.”²⁵⁴
— Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy (1953)

Huberman and Sweezy pronounced this judgement on Stalin’s death in 1953. The crux of their argument for Stalin was his success in industrializing and collectivizing the Russian economy, which were necessary prerequisites for victory over fascism. Without an industrialized USSR, fascism would have triumphed and ushered in a new dark age for humanity. They admit his methods may have been “unnecessarily harsh and ruthless” and attribute this harshness to his class background and early experiences. But he was the only leader who believed that Russia could accomplish industrialization at such a rapid rate.²⁵⁵ Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin “preached a policy of concessions to the rich Peasants” which would have prevented

²⁵² Stalin’s Place in History,” April 5, 1956. *Collected Works*.

http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-7/mswv7_467.htm.

²⁵³ Enver Hoxha, “Memoirs from my Meetings with Stalin,” Fifth Meeting, April 1951.

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hoxha/works/stalin/meet5.htm>.

²⁵⁴ Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, “Stalin and the Future,” *Monthly Review*, Vol. No. (April 1953), pp. 449- , p. 449.

²⁵⁵ Huberman and Sweezy, “Stalin and the Future,” 649.

industrialization and was inimical to the building of socialism,²⁵⁶ while Trotsky “looked for salvation from the international revolution which ... was in retreat.”²⁵⁷ Finally, Stalin and the Party had organized a smooth transition of power, signaled at the 19th Congress by “the selection of Malenkov to deliver the key report on behalf of the Central Committee which Stalin himself had delivered at every Party Congress since 1924.” Malenkov was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers and “trusted political figures” were placed in important government positions.²⁵⁸

Following Stalin’s death in 1953 and the turn to revisionism in the Soviet Union, Mao summed up Stalin’s place in history in an article for the *People’s Daily*. Stalin “creatively applied and developed Marxism-Leninism.” Stalin, he said, had defended Leninism from Trotsky and Zinoviev, “brought about the triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union and created the conditions for the victory of the Soviet Union in the war against Hitler.” These were victories of “the Soviet people” and reflected the interests of the international working class and progressive people. In addition, Stalin was being condemned by all reactionary forces, through which means they sought to attack Marxism-Leninism. To defend Stalin was to defend the movement.

Mao did not defend Stalin uncritically, however. For Mao, Stalin was “a great Marxist-Leninist ... who committed several gross errors.” “Stalin erroneously exaggerated his own role and counterposed his individual authority to the collective leadership, and as a result certain of his actions were opposed to certain fundamental Marxist-Leninist concepts he himself had propagated.” Leadership is essential, Mao argues, but “when any leader of the Party or the state places himself over and above the Party and the masses, instead of in their midst, when he alienates himself from the masses,” he can “not avoid making unrealistic and erroneous decisions on certain important matters.” Consequently, “Stalin fell victim to subjectivism and one-sidedness and divorced himself from objective reality and from the masses.”

Mao attributes Stalin’s errors to the “cult of the individual,” which had been denounced by the 20th Congress of the USSR in the movement to criticize Stalin. The cult of the individual, Mao says, is rooted in the long history of exploiting classes and the “patriarchism” of the “small-producer economy.” In short, it was a hangover of feudalism and bourgeois individualism.

Stalin “violated the Party’s system of democratic centralism and the principle of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility.” Among Stalin’s “serious mistakes” Mao noted that “he broadened the scope of the suppression of counter-revolution.” Mao did not condemn the Hitler-Stalin pact outright, but it was an Error, he said; Stalin had “lacked the necessary vigilance on the eve of the anti-fascist war.” In socialist economic policies, Stalin “failed to pay proper attention to the further development of agriculture and the material welfare of peasantry.” Finally, Mao criticized Stalin for giving “wrong advice” to “the international communist movement.” Consequently, “Stalin full victim to subjectivism and one-sidedness and divorced himself from objective reality and from the masses.” Mao said that, “Stalin put forward a formula that in different revolutionary periods the main blow should be so directed as to isolate the middle-of-the-road social and political forces of the time.” This formula, however, should not be applied dogmatically. At times, isolating middle forces may be correct, but not in all circumstances. Mao argued that the correct tactic was to identify, isolate, and direct the main blow at the “chief enemy” while uniting with (and struggling against) middle forces. They should at

²⁵⁶ Huberman and Sweezy, “Stalin and the Future,” 650.

²⁵⁷ Huberman and Sweezy, “Stalin and the Future,” 649.

²⁵⁸ Huberman and Sweezy, “Stalin and the Future,” 651.

least be neutralized and “efforts should be made to shift them from their position of neutrality to one of alliance.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Mao, “Stalin’s Place in History,” 5 April 1956. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-7/mswv7_467.htm