



Figure 4.1: Trotsky



Figure 4.2: Stalin

4.3 Key Historical Perspectives: Stalin

Historians see Stalin's rise to power and the relationship between Stalinism and Leninism in a variety of different ways. Some argue that Stalin's rule represented a major deviation from that of Lenin, whilst others see a basic continuity in their methods. Some of the key interpretations are summarised below.

Key interpretations

Structuralist approach

(e.g. Richard Pipes)

- Regards Stalin as a product of Russia's circumstances: a strong ruler was required because the country was just emerging from nearly a decade of war and civil war.
- Stalin was the natural successor to Lenin because of the way the Party had become increasingly bureaucratised.

Continuity between Leninism and Stalinism

(e.g. Robert Conquest)

- Lenin created the single party dictatorship and system of terror, which Stalin continued. So, Stalin was the heir to the Leninist tradition.

Stalinism viewed as a deviation from Leninism

(e.g. Stephen Cohen)

- Stalin distorted Lenin's legacy. Lenin used terror during the Civil War only as a temporary, emergency measure; Lenin allowed dissent within the Party; Lenin was hostile to a cult of the leader. Stalin, by contrast, used terror as a normal feature of government when the USSR was at peace; he suppressed debate within the Party; he created a personality cult of monstrous proportions.
- Historians like Cohen argue that Communism could have developed in a very different, less brutal way if another leader, such as Bukharin, had succeeded Lenin.