

26) Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (2003)

The foundation of Stalin's power in the Party was not fear: **it was charm**. Stalin possessed the dominant will among his magnates, but they also found his policies generally congenial. He was older than them all except President Kalinin, but the magnates used the informal "you" with him. Voroshilov, Molotov and Sergo called him "Koba". They were sometimes even cheeky: Mikoyan, who called him Soso, signed one letter: "If you're not lazy, write to me!" In 1930, all these magnates, especially the charismatic and fiery Sergo Ordzhonikidze, were allies, not protégés, all capable of independent action. There were close friendships that presented potential alliances against Stalin: Sergo and Kaganovich, the two toughest bosses, were best friends. Voroshilov, Mikoyan and Molotov frequently disagreed with Stalin. His dilemma was that he was the leader of a Party with no Fiittreprinzip but the ruler of a country accustomed to Tsarist autocracy.

Stalin was not the dreary bureaucrat that Trotsky wanted him to be. It was certainly true that he was a gifted organizer. **He "never improvised" but "took every decision, weighing it carefully"**. He was capable of working extraordinarily long hours - sixteen a day. But the new archives confirm that his real genius was something different - and surprising: "he could charm people". He was what is now known as a "people person". While incapable of true empathy on one hand, he was a master of friendships on the other. He constantly lost his temper, but when he set his mind to charming a man, he was irresistible.

Stalin's face was "expressive and mobile", his feline movements "supple and graceful", he buzzed with sensitive energy. Everyone who saw him "was anxious to see him again" because "he created a sense that there was now a bond that linked them forever". Artyom said he made "we children feel like adults and feel important". Visitors were impressed with his quiet modesty, the puffing on the pipe, the calmness. When the future Marshal Zhukov first met him, he could not sleep afterwards: "The appearance of Joseph Stalin, his quiet voice, the concreteness and depth of his judgements, the attention with which he heard the report made a great impression on me." Sudoplatov, a Chekist, thought "it was hard to imagine such a man could deceive you, his reactions were so natural,

without the slightest sense of him posing" but he also noticed "a certain harshness ... which he did not ... conceal".

In the eyes of these rough Bolsheviks from the regions, his flat quiet public speaking was an asset, a great improvement on Trotsky's oratorical wizardry. Stalin's lack of smoothness, his anti-oratory, inspired trust. His very faults, the chip on the shoulder, the brutality and fits of irrational temper, were the Party's faults. "He was not trusted but he was the man the Party trusted," admitted Bukharin. "He's like the symbol of the Party, the lower strata trust him." But above all, reflected the future secret police chief, Beria, he was "supremely intelligent", a political "genius". However rude or charming he was, "he dominated his entourage with his intelligence".

He did not just socialize with the magnates: he patronized junior officials too, constantly searching for tougher, more loyal, and more tireless lieutenants. He was always accessible: "I'm ready to help you and receive you," he often replied to requests. Officials got through directly to Stalin. Those lower down called him, behind his back, the Khozyain which is usually translated as "Boss", but it means much more: the "Master". Nicholas II had called himself "Khozyain of the Russian lands". When Stalin heard someone use the word, he was "noticeably irritated" by its feudal mystique: "That sounds like a rich landowner in Central Asia. Fool!"

His magnates saw him as their patron but he saw himself as much more. "I know you're diabolically busy," Molotov wrote to him on his birthday. "But I shake your fifty-year-old hand... I must say in my personal work I'm obliged to you..." They were all obliged to him. But Stalin saw his own role embroidered with both Arthurian chivalry and Christian sanctity: "You need have no doubt, comrades, I am prepared to devote to the cause of the working class ... all my strength, all my ability, and if need be, all my blood, drop by drop," he wrote to thank the Party for acclaiming him as leader. "Your congratulations, I place to the credit of the great Party... which bore me and reared me in its own image and likeness."