

Vladimir Illyich Lenin: Testament, 1922

Lenin, 24 December 1922

Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest the comrades think about a way of removing Staling from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite, and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I think that from the standpoint of safeguards against a split, and from the standpoint of what I wrote above about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a detail, or it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.

Extract from Lenin's Testament (different translation):

SOURCE 2.2

Since he became General Secretary, Comrade Stalin has concentrated in his hands immeasurable power, and I am not sure that he will always know how to use that power with sufficient caution. On the other hand Comrade Trotsky... is distinguished not only by his outstanding qualities (personally he is the most capable man in the present Central Committee) but also by his excess of self-confidence and a readiness to be carried away by the purely administrative side of affairs....

Stalin is too rude, and this fault, entirely supportable in relations amongst us Communists, becomes insupportable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way of removing Stalin from that position and to appoint another man who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority; namely, more patient, more loyal, more polite, less capricious, and more attentive to comrades.

Extracts from Lenin's Testament and Postscript, 25 December 1922 and 4 January 1923. Quoted in Lynch, M., 1990, Stalin and Khrushchev: The USSR 1924-64, London, Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 15-16.

- Most historians (such as Robert Service) accept the authenticity of Lenin's Testament and Postscript, and his letter of 5 March about Stalin's use of foul language against Krupskaya. However, these aspects are questioned by Hiroaki Kuromiya, who states, in his 2005 biography on Stalin, that all of these events have been the subject of recent scrutiny. In particular, he argues that there are 'too many documentary and evidential inconsistencies'.

29) C. L. R. James, *Stalin and Socialism* (1937)

In the Testament, Lenin, as superior to his contemporaries in grasp of men as of politics, had warned the party of a probable split between Trotsky and Stalin. It was, he said, a trifle, but "a trifle as may acquire a decisive significance." Lenin believed in historical materialism but he did not underestimate the significance of individuals, and the full immensity of the consequences are visible today.

Yet, as Lenin, quite obviously saw, the immediate origin of the danger was personal. Lenin did not say so in so many words. The Testament is very carefully phrased, but all through the civil war there had been clashes between Trotsky and Stalin. Stalin, with Zinoviev and Kamenev, who supported him at first, hated Trotsky, but Stalin hated him with a hatred which saw in him the chief obstacle to his power; Zinoviev and Kamenev Stalin knew he could manage. Zinoviev on his part feared Trotsky, but feared Stalin also. He had the idea of balancing one against the other. But he went with Stalin for the time being. What manner of man was this who was so soon to usurp Lenin's position and attempt to play Lenin's part? No man of this generation, few men of any other, could have done this adequately.

Lenin, first and foremost, knew political economy as few professors in a university did. He was absolute master of political theory and practice. He knew the international working class movement of the great countries of Europe, not only their history theoretically interpreted by historical materialism, but from years of personal experience in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland. He spoke almost faultless German and wrote the language like a second tongue. He was at home in French and English and could read other European languages with ease. Intellectual honesty was with him a fanatical passion, and to his basic conception of allying the highest results of his theoretical and practical knowledge in the party to the

instinctive movements of millions, honesty before the party and before the masses was for him essential. The range and honesty of his intellect, his power of will, the singular selflessness and devotion of his personal character, added to a great knowledge and understanding of men, enabled him to use all types of intellect and character in a way that helped to lift the Bolshevik party between 1917 and 1923 to the full height of the stupendous role it was called upon to fulfill. No body of men ever did so much, and how small most of them really were we can realise only by looking at what they became the moment their master left them. Lenin made them what they were. He was sly and manoeuvred as all who have to manage men must manoeuvre. But through all the disagreements of those years which often reached breaking-point he never calumniated, exiled, imprisoned or murdered any leaders of his party. He was bitter in denunciation, often unfair, but never personally malicious. He was merciless to political enemies, but he called them enemies, and proclaimed aloud that if they opposed the Soviet regime he would shoot them and keep on shooting them. But Trotsky tells us how careful he was of the health of his colleagues; hard as he was it is easy to feel in his speeches, on occasions when the party was being torn by disputes, a man of strong emotions and sensitiveness to human personality. In his private life he set an unassuming example of personal incorruptibility and austere living. No man could ever fill his place, but it was not impossible that someone able and willing to act in his tradition could have carried on where he left off, and all knew that Trotsky was best fitted for that difficult post. Lenin had designated him as such in the Testament. But the irony, the cruellest tragedy of the post-war world is, that without a break the leadership of the over-centralised and politically dominant Bolshevik party passed from one of the highest representatives of European culture to another who, in every respect except singlemindedness of purpose, was the very antithesis of his predecessor.

Krupskaya to Kamenev about the phone call with Stalin

With regard to the short dictation I took from Vlad. Ilyich with his doctor's permission, Stalin spoke to me yesterday in the rudest terms. This is not my first day as a Party member - and during these 30 years I have not heard a single rude word from any of my comrades. The Party interests and those of Ilyich are no less dear to me than to Stalin. Now I need to exercise great self-control. I know better than any doctor what I may or may not tell Ilyich, as I know what agitates him and what does not. At any rate I know it better than Stalin. I am appealing to you and to Grigorii (Zinoviev, AW), as the closest friends of V.I. and I beg you to defend me from the rude interference into my personal life, from unseemly swearing and threats. I don't doubt the unanimous decision of the Control Commission, with which Stalin took liberties to threaten me, but I have neither the strength nor the time to spend on this stupid squabble. I am a human being and my nerves are extremely strained.