

## Joseph Stalin : General Secretary

In 1921 Lenin became concerned with the activities of Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shlyapnikov, the leaders of the Workers' Opposition group. In 1921 Kollontai published a pamphlet *The Workers' Opposition*, where she called for members of the party to be allowed to discuss policy issues and for more political freedom for trade unionists. She also advocated that before the government attempts to "rid Soviet institutions of the bureaucracy that lurks within them, the Party must first rid itself of its own bureaucracy." (49)

The group also published a statement on future policy: "A complete change is necessary in the policies of the government. First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks; they want to control their own destinies. Comrades, preserve revolutionary order! Determinedly and in an organized manner demand: liberation of all arrested Socialists and non-partisan working-men; abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who labour." (50)

At the Tenth Party Congress in April 1922, Lenin proposed a resolution that would ban all factions within the party. He argued that factions within the party were "harmful" and encouraged rebellions such as the Kronstadt Rising. The Party Congress agreed with Lenin and the Workers' Opposition was dissolved. Stalin was appointed as General Secretary and was now given the task of dealing with the "factions and cliques" in the Communist Party. (51) (as a result of his extreme organizational skills)

Stalin's main opponents for the future leadership of the party failed to see the importance of this position and actually supported his nomination. They initially saw the post of General Secretary as being no more than "Lenin's mouthpiece". According to Edvard Radzinsky, the author of *Stalin* (1996): "Factionalism became punishable by expulsion. Lenin sought to stifle the very possibility of opposition. The wording of this resolution, unthinkable in a democratic party, grated on the ear, and it was therefore kept secret from the public." (52)(faction ban of 1921)

Roy A. Medvedev, has argued in *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (1971) that on the surface it was a strange decision: "In 1922 Stalin was the least prominent figure in the Politburo. Not only Lenin but also Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and A. I. Rykov were much more popular among the broad masses of the Party than Stalin. Close-mouthed and reserved in everyday affairs, Stalin was also a poor public speaker. He spoke in a

low voice with a strong Caucasian accent, and found it difficult to speak without a prepared text. It is not surprising that, during the stormy years of revolution and civil war, with their ceaseless meetings, rallies, and demonstrations, the revolutionary masses saw or heard little of Stalin." (53)

Isaac Deutscher, the author of *Stalin* (1949) has pointed out: "The leading bodies of the party were now top-heavy; and a new office, that of the General Secretary, was created, which was to coordinate the work of their many growing and overlapping branches... Soon afterwards a latent dualism of authority began to develop at the very top of the party. The seven men who now formed the Politbureau (in addition to the previous five, Zinoviev and Tomsky had recently been elected) represented, as it were, **the brain and the spirit of Bolshevism. In the offices of the General Secretariat resided the more material power of management and direction.**" (54)

Soon after Stalin's appointment as General Secretary, Lenin went into hospital to have a bullet removed from his body that had been there since Dora Kaplan's assassination attempt. It was hoped that this operation would restore his health. This was not to be; soon afterwards, a blood vessel broke in Lenin's brain. This left him paralyzed all down his right side and for a time he was unable to speak. As "**Lenin's mouthpiece**", Joseph Stalin had suddenly become extremely important. (55) **(Very important)**

While Lenin was immobilized, Stalin made full use of his powers as General Secretary. At the Party Congress he had been granted permission to expel "unsatisfactory" party members. This enabled Stalin to remove thousands of supporters of Leon Trotsky, his main rival for the leadership of the party. As General Secretary, Stalin also had the power to appoint and sack people from important positions in the government. The new holders of these posts were fully aware that they owed their promotion to Stalin. They also knew that if their behaviour did not please him they would be replaced.

Surrounded by his supporters, **Stalin's confidence began to grow.** In October, 1922, he disagreed with Lenin over the issue of foreign trade. When the matter was discussed at Central Committee, Stalin's rather than Lenin's policy was accepted. Lenin began to fear that Stalin was taking over the leadership of the party. Lenin wrote to Trotsky asking for his support. Trotsky agreed and at the next meeting of the Central Committee the decision on foreign trade was reversed. Lenin, who was too ill to attend, wrote to Trotsky congratulating him on

his success and suggesting that in future they should work together against Stalin.

Joseph Stalin, whose wife Nadya Alliluyeva worked in Lenin's private office, soon discovered the contents of the letter sent to Leon Trotsky. Stalin was furious as he realized that if Lenin and Trotsky worked together against him, his political career would be at an end. In a fit of temper Stalin made an abusive phone-call to Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, accusing her of endangering Lenin's life by allowing him to write letters when he was so ill. (56)

After Krupskaya told her husband of this phone-call, Lenin made the decision that Stalin was not the man to replace him as the leader of the party. Lenin knew he was close to death so he dictated to his secretary a letter that he wanted to serve as his last "will and testament". The document was comprised of his thoughts on the senior members of the party leadership. Lenin stated: "Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated enormous power in his hands: and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution. I therefore propose to our comrades to consider a means of removing Stalin from this post and appointing someone else who differs from Stalin in one weighty respect: being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite, more considerate of his comrades." (57)

A few days later Lenin added a postscript to his earlier testament: "Stalin is too rude, and this fault... becomes unbearable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man... more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may seem an insignificant trifle, but I think that from the point of view of preventing a split and from the point of view of the relations between Stalin and Trotsky... it is not a trifle, or it is such a trifle as may acquire a decisive significance." Three days after writing this testament Lenin had a third stroke. Lenin was no longer able to speak or write and although he lived for another ten months, he ceased to exist as a power within the Soviet Union. (58)



### **Joseph Stalin in 1924**

Lenin died of a heart attack on 21st January, 1924. Stalin reacted to the news by announcing that Lenin was to be embalmed and put on permanent display in a mausoleum to be erected on Red Square. Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, immediately objected because she disliked the "quasi-religious" implications of this decision. Despite these objections, Stalin carried on with the arrangements. "Lenin, who detested hero worship and fought religion as an opiate for the people, who canonized in the interest of Soviet politics and his writings were given the character of Holy Writ." (59)

The funeral took place on 27th January, and Stalin was a pallbearer with Lev Kamenev, Gregory Zinoviev, Nickolai Bukharin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Felix

Dzerzhinsky, Alexander Schottmann and Mikhail Tomsky. Stalin gave a speech which ended with the words: "Leaving us, comrade Lenin left us a legacy of fidelity to the principles of the Communist International. We swear to you, comrade Lenin, that we will not spare our own lives in strengthening and broadening the union of labouring people of the whole world - the Communist International." (60) As Robert Service has pointed out: "Christianity had to give way to communism and Lenin was to be presented to society as the new Jesus Christ." (61)

It was assumed that Leon Trotsky would replace Lenin as leader when he died. To stop this happening Stalin established a close political relationship with Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev. (as a result a lot of hatred towards Trotsky raised which left Stalin untouched allowing him to take advantage of this) The three men became known as the "triumvirate". The historian, Isaac Deutscher, the author of *Stalin* (1949) has pointed out: "What made for the solidarity of the three men was their determination to prevent Trotsky from succeeding to the leadership of the party. Separately, neither could measure up to Trotsky. Jointly, they represented a powerful combination of talent and influence. Zinoviev was the politician, the orator, the demagogue with popular appeal. Kamenev was the strategist of the group, its solid brain, trained in matters of doctrine, which were to play a paramount part in the contest for power. Stalin was the tactician of the triumvirate and its organizing force. Between them, the three men virtually controlled the whole party and, through it, the Government." (62) (Take note of this, important) Does the triumvirate oppose the ban against factions?

Simon Sebag Montefiore, the author of *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (2003), pointed out that an important point of his strategy was to promote his friends, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov and Gregory Ordzhonikidze: "An outsider in 1924 would have expected Trotsky to succeed Lenin, but in the Bolshevik oligarchy, this glittery fame counted against the insouciant War Commissar. The hatred between Stalin and Trotsky was not only based on personality and style but also on policy. Stalin had already used the massive patronage of the Secretariat to promote his allies, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov and Grigory Konstantinovich; he also supplied an encouraging and realistic alternative to Trotsky's insistence on European revolution: 'Socialism in One Country'. The other members of the Politburo, led by Grigory Zinoviev, and Kamenev, Lenin's closest associates, were also terrified of Trotsky, who had united all against himself." (63)

Some of Trotsky's supporters pleaded with him to organise a military coup. As People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs and as leader of the Red Army during the Civil War. However, Trotsky rejected the idea and instead resigned his post. Trotsky was now vulnerable and Kamanev and Zinoviev were in favour of having him arrested and put on trial. Stalin rejected this idea and feared that at this stage, any attempt to punish him would result in the party splitting into two hostile factions. Before dealing with Trotsky, Stalin had to prepare the party for the purge that he wanted to take place. (64)

At the Communist Party Congress in May, 1923, Stalin admitted that the triumvirate existed. In reply to a speech made by a delegate he argued: "Osinsky has praised Stalin and praised Kamenev, but he has attacked Zinoviev, thinking that for the time being it would be enough to remove one of them and that then would come the turn of the others. His aim is to break up that nucleus that has formed itself inside the Central Committee over years of toil... I ought to warn him that he will run into a wall, against which, I am afraid, he will smash his head." To another critic, who demanded more freedom of discussion in the party, Stalin replied that the party was no debating society. Russia was "surrounded by the wolves of imperialism; and to discuss all important matters in 20,000 party cells would mean to lay all one's cards before the enemy." (65)