

Stalin Presentation

Consolidation and Maintenance of Power - Cult of Personality

Last class Olivia spoke mainly about Stalin's purges which was one of his main methods of consolidation and maintenance of power so today I will look into the other methods that Stalin used to establish and maintain his power.

What was the role of Stalin's image in the consolidation and maintenance of power? How was this image created? Why was it successful?

What is the cult of personality?

The cult of personality is generally when a political figure is exaggerated and presented to the populace in an overwhelming positive light. It is most often used in single party states to glorify its leader as a means of persuasion and influence with the ultimate goal of consolidation and maintenance of power. It's something we see used by all the authoritarian leaders we have looked into, Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin and now we will look into its association with Stalin.

Stalin's Role

The cult of personality is associated perhaps associated with Stalin more than any other single party state leader. The evidence that remains of it, the propaganda and the memories of those who experienced it, is wide spread and seen everywhere. Stalin's cult of personality began as early as december of 1929 and subsequently developed through the 30s. The party and the media did this by creating a heroic persona for stalin who eventually became the embodiment of the nation itself as the 'father of the nation'. The role of the father in russian tradition is very important, as you might remember, the tsar was called 'the little father' and by associating himself with this role, Stalin places himself at the very top of the power dynamic in russia as the tsar had done. The father is a figure to look up to, to trust and respect and most of all, the father of the nation is the protector,

thus stalin was characterized as saviour of Soviet Union from its enemies. Later in the 1940s, Stalin reached God-like status and was nicknamed vozhd which meant “a genius with great wisdom and prophetic powers.”

Lenin and Stalin

A large part of the stalin's cult of personality was comparing him and placing him on the same level of Karl Marx and Lenin who were both hailed as genuses. Lenin in particular was focused on as he was the previous leader. An element that carried over from Stalin's rise was the way he portrayed himself as the true disciple of Lenin. This became the idea of the 'Lenin-Stalin partnership' and notion that 'Stalin is the Lenin of today' which were both popularised through the 30s. In this way, the way Stalin was publicly viewed was molded to resemble and be associated with Lenin and therefore Stalin used Lenin' own cult of personality to help build his own.

Historical Interpretation

With the cult of personality emphasising Lenin and Stalin's connection, specifically stressing that Stalin was Lenin's student, many historians debate the role of stalin and whether he began something new or simply followed what Lenin had laid out for him.

The Soviet Perspective is seen to generally follow the idea that Stalin followed Lenin's path however the tone with which this is looked at greatly changed over time:

1. During Stalin's reign, it is claimed that Stalin has only done what Lenin intended to do and that all the misery and terror such as the punishment of enemies in the great purge is all for the good of the state and people. Under this lens, Stalin is justified in his actions by the idea that it was what lenin wanted and that he was doing it for the greater good
2. Following Stalin's death with the state now under Khrushchev, the idea that Stalin was following Lenin's will continued only now Stalin was blamed for misinterpreting Lenin's will and thus the problems of

the state were all blamed on him. Now Stalin is no longer sympathetic but rather the scapegoat being denounced. Similar ideas would continue to Gorbachev who was the last leader of the Soviet Union. Stalin's main policy was thought to be "back to Lenin" and the big difference now was it was not only Stalin being criticised but the whole period. Historians continue with criticism continue following the collapse of the Soviet Union

Contrary, The western Perspective focuses much less on the idea that Stalin was simply following Lenin's path although the different schools have different ideas among them

1. The Determinist school cites the importance of Stalin's role and that it was less about Stalin's personality and more about the time in which he was active that led to it. EH Carr said "the revolution would have run into the sand hadn't Stalin done what he did"
2. This view is highly criticized by the liberals who don't see Stalin's role as as important. The Liberal Intentionalist school focuses on Stalin's intention to make the totalitarian state
3. The revisionist school focus not on the role of Stalin but more on the role played by the people of the USSR and how many of them actually supported collectivisation

What is Propaganda

Propaganda is information that promotes a certain view and is communicated to the public in order to push an agenda or influence public opinion .

Propaganda techniques have been employed by many leaders and parties so they are evidently a strong and powerful technique. As we look at the following propaganda poster we need to consider what makes them effective. How is colour and language and image and emotion used to influence reason?

Stalin's Propaganda

Propaganda is perhaps the central part of Stalin's cult of personality. It was the tool with which it was built. The newspaper Pravda once called on the party and the people to unite around 'Lenin's most faithful and dedicated pupil and associate'. Propaganda was not just limited to party newspapers, however, posters, paintings and statues appeared everywhere, in streets, factories, offices, schools and even in Soviet homes. Paintings and posters depicted Stalin among the common people and exaggerated his relationship with children, encouraging support for one of them. Further, operas, film and novels glorified his role in the revolution and presenting as the chief hero in the Civil War both of which Stalin played a minor role in. In schools and youth groups (komsomol), Stalin was idolised with text books that expressed Stalin's valour. Newspapers and radio did the same.

The creators of media in Russia such as artists, writers and filmmakers were ordered to praise Stalin and highlight his achievements in their work. In other words they were forced to become Stalin's propaganda machine as reference to his greatness began to dominate the media, Soviet communism became personalised to Stalin. Just as it had molded to Lenin in the form of Leninism, Stalinism was born.

Changing the Story

Stalin also used propaganda as a means of oppression and censorship for his enemies. History was distorted in the cult to fit their narrative. In photographs, the images of Stalin's opponents were airbrushed out or scratched out with pens. These people were torn out of books and the cult branded them 'anti-Leninists'. Further any artists or writers that produced anything against Stalin were threatened and their work was denounced essentially censoring anything against him. Lastly, as I mentioned earlier, Stalin's role in the revolution and the civil war was exaggerated effectively twisting a new story that showed only support for the great Stalin.

The Party and the Cult

On his own cult of personality, Stalin claimed that he did not seek out glorification but simply that he received it. This can be seen from the perspective of Stalin being humble and thankful for his praise or rather that he is bragging about being naturally showered by the people's affection (personally i think that sounds like something an egomaniac would say that they think sounds humble). The latter seems most likely due to what we already know about Stalin's personality and from Nikita Khrushchev stating that Stalin had "indulged in the cult of personality"

Khrushchev was actually a great supporter of Stalin prior to denouncing him after his death. Many of his public speeches endorsing Stalin added fuel to the cult as did any other endorsement from party members, many of which felt they owed Stalin their support due to Stalin getting them their position in the party in the first place. The consequences of opposition were demonstrated by purges and terror which added even more incentive to appeal to Stalin. Endorsement from party members is valuable. These were the men who were seen as the most intelligent and at the top of the power pyramid so when they agree with what has been stated in the propaganda they are giving validity to those claims.

The Role of The Cult of Personality in Consolidation

The cult of personality established Stalin's position as the unquestionable leader in the eyes of the people. Cult of personality is used to persuade and to access how effective it was, we must look at the people.

Many Soviet citizens did see Stalin as a national hero as the cult intended but, it was truly the people who showed real affection for Stalin and his ideas that allowed it to grow as it did. Stalin was truly liked by the people and although there was a substantial portion of the population such as the intellectuals, party members and workers that saw the cult as ridiculous, many of them still admired and respected Stalin. They felt his harsh methods were for the greater good and justified by the rapid industrialisation and the creation of a world power (Davies).

The people became dependant on the idea of the leader created by the cult of personality and thus willing participants to Stalin's policies. It's ironic given the idea of communism is that the people are the authority of the state and that there is no one person put above the others. Stalin's role transcended politics as he became the personification of the nation. Such popularity is truly remarkable for one man who was never favoured for the role of leader. The cult of personality was central to building Stalin's popularity which united soviet society under him and consolidating his power and position as leader.

Historical Perspective

Much of that agrees with the revisionist perspective that Stalin was very popular among certain sectors of society which is countered by the liberal perspective that Stalin was very unpopular.

Khrushchev:

"They lifted their hands against the greatest of all men, our wise vozhd, Comrade Stalin. Thou, Comrade Stalin, has raised the great banner of Marxism–Leninism high over the entire world and carried it forward. We assure thee, Comrade Stalin, that the Moscow Bolshevik organisation will increase Stalinist vigilance still more, will extirpate the Trotskyite–Zinovievite clique and close the ranks of the party around the great Stalin."

Khrushchev was the first to coin the term 'Stalinism' in 1936 at the introduction of the new Soviet Constitution:

‘Our constitution is the Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism that has conquered one sixth of the globe.’

At the 18th Congress of the CPSU in March 1939, Khrushchev lauded the Soviet leader as ‘our great inspiration, our beloved Stalin’, extolling him as ‘the greatest genius of humanity, teacher and vozhd who leads us towards Communism’.

‘Under the leadership of the Great Stalin, Forward to Communism!’

‘Thank you, dear Stalin, for our happy childhood!’