



Stalin's Cult of Personality

What was the Role of Stalin's Cult of Personality in the Consolidation and Maintenance of Power?

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 consolidating and maintaining power.

Glory to Lenin, glory to
Stalin, glory to great
October', V. Reshetnikov,
1952, Latgosizdat, edn
3,000
Source: Russian State
Library



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Lynch on the Cult of Personality

A consistent use of mass propaganda to promote the idea of the leader as an ideal, heroic figure, elevated above ordinary people and politics

Stalin's Role

- Developed through the 1930s
- Party and the media created a heroic persona for Stalin
- His title was 'Father of the Nation'
- Stalin was to be trusted, respected and he would protect the people
- In the 1940s he was called 'vozhd' meaning "a genius with great wisdom and prophetic powers."



'Thank you beloved Stalin for our happy childhood', Viktor Govorkov, 1936, Izogiz, 71 x 103.2 cm



'The captain of the Soviet Union leads us from victory to victory!', Boris Efimov, 1933, Izgiz (Moscow, Leningrad), 62 x 94 cm, edn 200,000
Source: Russian State Library

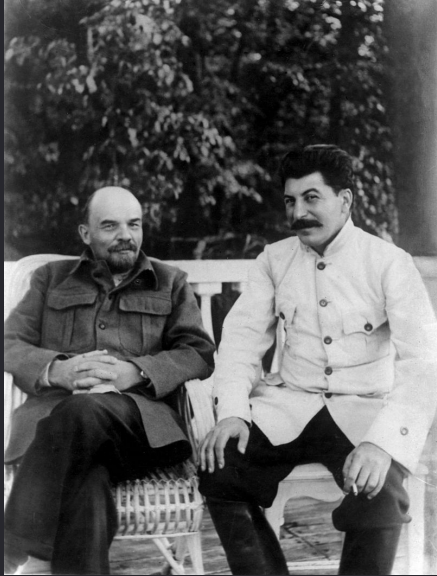
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Corin and Fiehn

His position was not completely secure in 1929 and it was only by about 1937 that his position was virtually unassailable.

Lenin and Stalin



- A large part of the stalin's cult of personality was comparing and associating him with Lenin
- Portrayed as the true disciple of Lenin.
- Ideas popularised through the 30s such as the 'Lenin-Stalin partnership' and notion that 'Stalin is the Lenin of today' furthered these ideas
- The way Stalin was publicly viewed was molded to resemble and be associated with Lenin and therefore Stalin used Lenin's own cult of personality to help build his own.

'Glory to the great
leaders of October',
Naum Karpovskii,
1951, Iskusstvo
(Moscow), 64.5 x
87.5 cm, edn
100,000
Source:
Russian
State Library



ВО ИМЯ КОММУНИЗМА



'In the name of communism', Viktor Govorkov, 1951, Iskusstvo (Moscow), 86 x 97 cm, edn 600,000 Source: Russian State Library

Historical Interpretation

Soviet Perspective

Stalin followed Lenin's path however the tone changed over time:

1. During Stalin's reign, it is claimed that Stalin has only done what Lenin intended Stalin is justified in his actions
2. Following Stalin's death, Stalin was blamed for misinterpreting Lenin's will and thus the problems of the state were all blamed on him. Eventually, the whole period was heavily criticised

Western Perspective

Focuses much less on the idea that Stalin was simply following Lenin's path

1. The Determinist school cites the importance of Stalin's role EH Carr said "the revolution would have run into the sand hadn't Stalin done what he did"
1. Don't see Stalin's role as as important. The Liberal Intentionalist school focuses on Stalin's intentions to make the totalitarian state
2. The revisionist school focus not on the role of Stalin but more on the role played by the people of the USSR

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Medvedev

There is no continuity between Stalinism and Leninism

Deutscher

Only the blind and the deaf could be unaware of the contrast
between Stalinism and Leninism

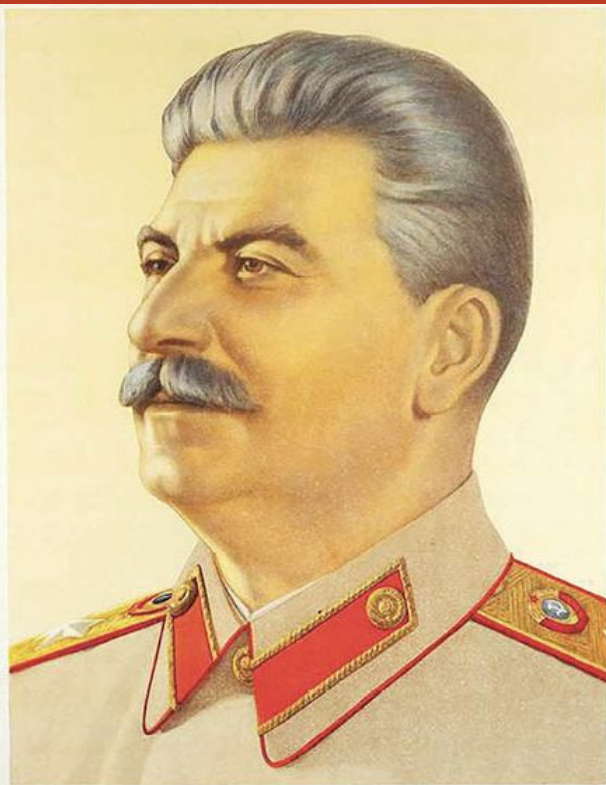
What is Propaganda?

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



'Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement ...', Pikalov, 1933, Izgiz (Leningrad), 77 x 109 cm, edn 30,000

Source: Russian State Library



**НАС ВЫРАСТИЛ СТАЛИН-НА ВЕРНОСТЬ НАРОДУ.
НА ТРУД И НА ПОДВИГИ НАС ВДОХНОВИЛ!**

'And Stalin raised us to be loyal to the people, inspired us to work and to deeds!', Leonid Golovanov, 1949, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), 76.5 x 56 cm, edn 300,000

Source: Russian State Library

Stalin's Propaganda

- Posters, paintings and statues appeared everywhere, in streets, factories, offices, schools and even in Soviet homes.
- Depicted Stalin among the common people and exaggerated his relationship with children, encouraging support for one of them.
- Operas, film and novels glorified his role in the revolution and presenting as the chief hero in the Civil War
- In schools and youth groups (komsomol), Stalin was idolised with text books that expressed Stalin's valour. Newspapers and radio did the same.



'Best friend of children. Glory to great Stalin!', Elena Mel'nikova, 1951, Iskusstvo (Moscow), edn 50,000 Source: Russian State Library



'Stalin's kindness illuminates the future of our children!', Iraklii Toidze, 1947, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), 61 x 43 cm Source: Russian State Library



ВЕЛИКИЙ СТАЛИН-ЗНАМЯ ДРУЖБЫ НАРОДОВ СССР!

Karpo Trokhimenko,
Stalin as an
organizer of the
October
revolution, Oil
on canvas, 85 x
117 cm. Location
Unkown.





Stalin's statue in Budapest before it was toppled in 1956

Stalin's Propaganda

- The creators of media in Russia such as artists, writers and filmmakers were ordered to praise Stalin and highlight his achievements in their work
- Stalin's greatness began to dominate the media
- Soviet communism became personalised to Stalin. Stalinism was born.



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Excerpt from *Let History Judge* by Roy Medvedev, published by OUP, UK, 1989, p. 588.

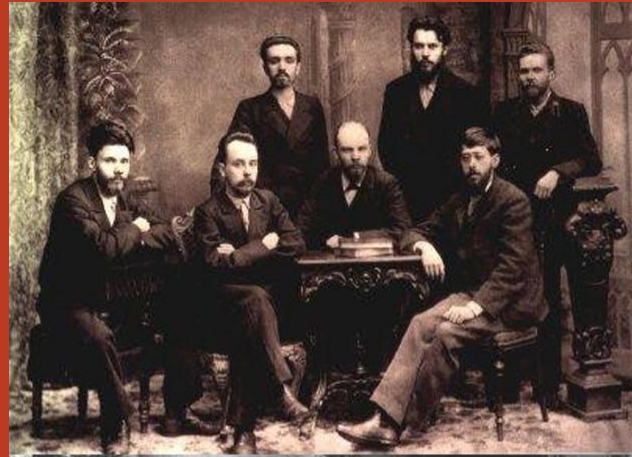
Everywhere he put up monuments to himself – thousands upon thousands of factories and firms named [after] Stalin, and many cities: Stalinsk, Stalino, Stalingrad ... more than can be counted. When Stalin was encouraging the cult of his personality he and his cohorts shamelessly falsified party history, twisting and suppressing many facts and producing a flood of books, articles and pamphlets filled with distortions.

Changing the Story



- Stalin also used propaganda as a means of oppression and censorship for his enemies.
- In photographs, the images of Stalin's opponents were airbrushed out or scratched out with pens.
- These people were also torn out of books and the cult branded them 'anti-Leninists'.
- Artists or writers that produced anything against Stalin were threatened and their work was denounced
- Stalin's role in the revolution and the civil war was greatly exaggerated

Photo of Nikolai Yezhov (Naval Commissar) and Stalin walking alongside the Moscow Canal. After Nikolai Yezhov fell from power, he was arrested, shot, and his image removed by the censors



Alexander Malchenko. After his arrested by the Okhrana he spent some time in exile before returning in 1900 and abandoning the revolution. in 1929 he was arrested, wrongfully accused of being a "wrecker" and executed on November 18, 1930. After his arrest and execution he was airbrushed out of all reproductions of this image.

The Party and the Cult

Khrushchev was actually a great supporter of Stalin prior to denouncing him after his death. Many of his public speeches endorsed Stalin as did many other party members, many of which felt they owed Stalin as he got them their position.

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 so when they agree with what has been stated in the propaganda, they are giving validity to those claims.

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Nikita 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.

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Figes

Immersion in the Soviet system was a means of survival for most people.

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 saw Stalin as a national hero
- It was truly the people who showed real affection for Stalin and his ideas that allowed it to grow as it did.
- Even many of those who saw the cult as ridiculous still admired and respected Stalin

The people became dependant on the idea of the leader created by the cult of personality and thus willing participants to Stalin's policies. Stalin's role transcended politics as he became the personification of the nation.

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

Revisionist School of Thought

Stalin was very popular among
certain sectors of society

Liberal School of Thought

Stalin was very unpopular