

Joseph Djughashvili (Stalin), was born in Gori, Georgia on 21st December, 1879. His mother, Ekaterina Djughashvili, was married at the age of 14 and Joseph was her fourth child to be born in less than four years. The first three died and as Joseph was prone to bad health, his mother feared on several occasions that he would also die. Understandably, given this background, Joseph's mother was very protective towards him as a child. (1)

Joseph's father, Vissarion Djughashvili, was a bootmaker and his mother took in washing. He was an extremely violent man who savagely beat both his son and wife. As a child, Joseph experienced the poverty that most peasants had to endure in Russia at the end of the 19th century. (2)

Soso, as he was called throughout his childhood, contracted smallpox at the age of seven. It was usually a fatal disease and for a time it looked as if he would die. Against the odds he recovered but his face remained scarred for the rest of his life and other children cruelly called him "pocky". (3)

Joseph's mother was deeply religious and in 1888 she managed to obtain him a place at the local church school. Despite his health problems, he made good progress at school. However, his first language was Georgian and although he eventually learnt Russian, whenever possible, he would speak and write in his native language and never lost his distinct Georgian accent. His father died in 1890. Bertram D. Wolfe has argued "his mother, devoutly religious and with no one to devote herself to but her sole surviving child, determined to prepare him for the priesthood." (4)

Stalin left school in 1894 and his academic brilliance won him a free scholarship to the Tiflis Theological Seminary. He hated the routine of the seminary. "In the early morning when they longed to lie in, they had to rise for prayers. Then, a hurried light breakfast followed by long hours in the classroom, more prayers, a meager dinner, a brief walk around the city, and it was time for the seminary to close. By ten in the evening, when the city was just coming to life, the seminarists had said their prayers they were on their way to bed." One of his fellow students wrote: "We felt like prisoners, forced to spend our young lives in this place although innocent." (5)

Stalin told Emil Ludwig that he hated his time in the Tiflis Theological Seminary. "The basis of all their methods is spying, prying, peering into people's souls, to subject them to petty torment. What is the good in that? In protest against the humiliating regime and the jesuitical methods that prevailed in the seminary, I was ready to become, and eventually did become, a revolutionary, a believer in Marxism." (6)

While studying at the seminary he joined a secret organization called Messame Dassy (the Third Group). Members were supporters of Georgian independence from Russia. Some were also socialist revolutionaries and it was through the people he met in this organization that Stalin first came into contact with the ideas of Karl Marx. Stalin later wrote: "I became a Marxist because of my social group (my father was a worker in a shoe factory and my mother was also a working woman), but also because of the harsh intolerance and Jesuitical discipline that crushed me so mercilessly at the Seminary... The atmosphere in which I lived was saturated with hatred against Tsarist oppression." (7)

In May, 1899, Joseph Stalin left the Tiflis Theological Seminary. Several reasons were given for this action including disrespect for those in authority and reading forbidden books. According to the seminary conduct book he was expelled "as politically unreliable". Stalin was later to claim that the real reason was that he had been trying to convert his fellow students to Marxism. (8)

Stalin's mother provided a different version of events: "I wanted only one thing, that he should become a priest. He was not expelled. I brought him home on account of his health. When he entered the seminary he was fifteen and as strong as a lad could be. But overwork up to the age of nineteen pulled him down, and the doctors told me that he might develop tuberculosis. So I took him away from school. He did not want to leave. But I took him away. He was my only son." (9)

Soon after leaving the seminary he began reading *Iskra* (the Spark), the newspaper of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP). It was the first underground Marxist paper to be distributed in Russia. It was printed in several European cities and then smuggled into Russia by a network of SDLP agents. The editorial board included Alexander Potresov, George Plekhanov, Pavel Axelrod, Vera Zasulich, Lenin, Leon Trotsky and Julius Martov. (10)

Joseph Stalin and Marxism

For several months after leaving the seminary Stalin was unemployed. He eventually found work by giving private lessons to middle class children. Later, he worked as a clerk at the Tiflis Observatory. He also began writing articles for the socialist Georgian newspaper, *Brdzola Khma Vladimir*. Some of these were translations of articles written by Lenin. During this

period he adopted the alias "Koba" (Koba was a Georgian folk hero who fought for Georgian peasants against oppressive landlords). (11)

Joseph Iremashvili, one of his Georgian comrades pointed out: "Koba became a divinity for Soso. He wanted to become another Koba, a fighter and a hero as renowned as Koba himself... His face shone with pride and joy when we called him Koba. Soso preserved that name for many years, and it became his first pseudonym when he began to write for the revolutionary newspapers." (12) He also used the name Stalin (Man of Steel) and this eventually became the name he used when he published articles in the revolutionary press. (13)

In 1901 Stalin joined the Social Democratic Labour Party and whereas most of the leaders were living in exile, he stayed in Russia where he helped to organize industrial resistance to Tsarism. On 18th April, 1902, Stalin was arrested after coordinating a strike at the large Rothschild plant at Batum and after spending 18 months in prison, Stalin was deported to Siberia. (14)

Grigol Uratadze, a fellow prisoner, later described Stalin's appearance and behaviour in prison: "He was scruffy and his pockmarked face made him not particularly neat in appearance.... He had a creeping way of walking, taking short steps.... when we were let outside for exercise and all of us in our particular groups made for this or that corner of the prison yard, Stalin stayed by himself and walked backwards and forwards with his short aces, and if anyone tried speaking to him, he would open his mouth into that cold smile of his and perhaps say a few words... we lived together in Kutaisi Prison for more than half a year and not once did I see him get agitated, lose control, get angry, shout, swear - or in short - reveal himself in any other aspect than complete calmness." (15)

At the Second Congress of the Social Democratic Labour Party held in London in 1903, there was a dispute between Lenin and Julius Martov over the future of the SDLP. Lenin argued for a small party of professional revolutionaries with a large fringe of non-party sympathizers and supporters. Martov disagreed believing it was better to have a large party of activists. Leon Trotsky commented that "the split came unexpectedly for all the members of the congress. Lenin, the most active figure in the struggle, did not foresee it, nor had he ever desired it. Both sides were greatly upset by the course of events." (16)

Although Martov won the vote 28-23 on the paragraph defining Party membership. With the support of George Plekhanov, Lenin won on almost

every other important issue. His greatest victory was over the issue of the size of the Iskra editorial board to three, himself, Plekhanov and Martov. This meant the elimination of Pavel Axelrod, Alexander Potresov and Vera Zasulich - all of whom were "Martov supporters in the growing ideological war between Lenin and Martov". (17)

Trotsky argued that "Lenin's behaviour seemed unpardonable to me, both horrible and outrageous. And yet, politically it was right and necessary, from the point of view of organization. The break with the older ones, who remained in the preparatory stages, was inevitable in any case. Lenin understood this before anyone else did. He made an attempt to keep Plekhanov by separating him from Zasulich and Axelrod. But this, too, was quite futile, as subsequent events soon proved." (18)

As Lenin and Plekhanov won most of the votes, their group became known as the Bolsheviks (after *bolshinstvo*, the Russian word for majority), whereas Martov's group were dubbed Mensheviks (after *menshinstvo*, meaning minority). Stalin who was still in prison in Siberia, decided he favoured the Bolsheviks in this dispute. He escaped on 5th January 1904 and although suffering from frostbite he managed to get back to Tiflis six weeks later. (19)

Later that year he married Kato Svanidze, she was the sister of an active member of the Bolsheviks. According to a friend, Joseph Iremashvili: "His marriage was a happy one. True, it was impossible to discover in his home the equality of the sexes which he advocated... But it was not in his character to share equal rights with any other person. His marriage was a happy one because his wife, who could not measure up to him in intellect, regarded him as a demi-God." Kato died of consumption on 5th December, 1907. (20)



Joseph Stalin

Bolshevism was in a small minority among the Georgian revolutionaries. Stalin wrote to Lenin: "I'm overdue with my letter, comrade. There's been neither the time nor the will to write. For the whole period it's been necessary to travel around the Caucasus, speak in debates, encourage comrades, etc. Everywhere the Mensheviks have been on the offensive and we've needed to repulse them. We've hardly had any personnel.... and so I've needed to do the work of three individuals... Our situation is as follows. Tiflis is almost completely in the hands of the Mensheviks. Half of Baku and Butumi is also with the Mensheviks." (21)

Lenin was impressed with Stalin's achievements in the Caucasus and in December 1905, he was invited to meet him in Finland. According to Robert Service, the author of *Stalin: A Biography* (2004): "According to his later account, he was taken aback by the unprepossessing appearance of the leader of Bolshevism. Stalin had been expecting a tall, self-regarding person. Instead he saw a man no bigger than himself and without the hauteur of the prominent émigré figures." (22)

Stalin was now a committed Bolshevik. Isaac Deutscher, the author of *Stalin* (1949) has argued: "Stalin was now an irreconcilable Leninist... The style of his polemics against the local bigwigs of Menshevism became more and more fanatical and bitter, reflecting both his sense of isolation among his comrades on the spot and the self-confidence imparted to him by the knowledge that he was marching in step with Lenin himself... His sense of isolation must have been the greater because of the passing of his two friends and mentors - Tsulukidze and Ketskhoveli... Ketskhoveli was shot by his jailers at the Metekhy Castle, the dreaded fortress prison of Tiflis; and Tsulukidze died of consumption." (23)

In 1907 Stalin settled in Baku where he became friends with Gregory Ordzhonikidze, Stepan Shaumyan, Kliment Voroshilov and Andrei Vyshinsky. Their leader, Lenin, went into exile with the words: "The revolutionary parties must complete their education. They had learnt how to attack... They had got to learn that victory was impossible... unless they knew both how to attack and how to retreat correctly. Of all the defeated opposition and revolution parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their army." (24)

Joseph Stalin worked closely with his friends in developing the political consciousness of the workers in the region. The workers in the oil fields belonged to a union under the influence of the Bolsheviks. Stalin later wrote: "Two years of revolutionary work among the oil workers of Baku hardened me as a practical fighter and as one of the practical leaders. In contrast with advanced workers of Baku... in the storm of the deepest conflicts between workers and oil industrialists... I first learned what it meant to lead big masses of workers. There in Baku... I received my revolutionary baptism in combat." (25)

Stalin was elected as one of the delegates of the union involved in the negotiations with the employers. Gregory Ordzhonikidze commented:

"While all over Russia black reaction was reigning, a genuine workers' parliament was in session at Baku." After eight months of work on the Baku committee, Ordzhonikidze and Stalin were caught by the Okhrana and put in prison. In November 1908 Ordzhonikidze and Stalin were deported to Solvychevodsk, in the northern part of the Vologda province on the Vychevda River. (26)

Bolshevik Central Committee

Joseph Stalin returned to Russia and over the next eight years he was arrested four times but each time managed to escape. He returned to St. Petersburg in February 1912, when Gregory Ordzhonikidze, Elena Stasova and Roman Malinovsky were appointed to the Russian Party Bureau, on a salary of 50 rubles per month. What they did not know was that Malinovsky was being paid 500 rubles per month by Okhrana. Stalin became editor of *Pravda*. Lenin, who described him as my "wonderful Georgian" arranged for him to join the Party's Central Committee. Arrested again in February 1913, Stalin was sent to the distant cold north-east of Siberia. The Bolshevik leader, Yakov Sverdlov, who was also in exile, found Stalin a difficult man to work with as he was "too much of an egoist in everyday life." (27)

After the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II, the new prime minister, Prince Georgi Lvov, allowed all political prisoners to return to their homes. Stalin arrived at Nicholas Station in St. Petersburg with Lev Kamenev on 25th March, 1917. His biographer, Robert Service, has commented: "He was pinched-looking after the long train trip and had visibly aged over the four years in exile. Having gone away a young revolutionary, he was coming back a middle-aged political veteran." The Bolshevik organizations in Petrograd were controlled by a group of young men including Vyacheslav Molotov and Alexander Shlyapnikov who had recently made arrangements for the publication of *Pravda*, the official Bolshevik newspaper. The young comrades were less than delighted to see these influential new arrivals. Molotov later recalled: "In 1917 Stalin and Kamenev cleverly shoved me off the *Pravda* editorial team. Without unnecessary fuss, quite delicately." (28)

The Petrograd Soviet recognized the authority of the Provisional Government in return for its willingness to carry out eight measures. This included the full and immediate amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles; freedom of speech, press, assembly, and strikes; the abolition of all class, group and religious restrictions; the election of a Constituent

Assembly by universal secret ballot; the substitution of the police by a national militia; democratic elections of officials for municipalities and townships and the retention of the military units that had taken place in the revolution that had overthrown Nicholas II. Soldiers dominated the Soviet. The workers had only one delegate for every thousand, whereas every company of soldiers might have one or even two delegates. Voting during this period showed that only about forty out of a total of 1,500, were Bolsheviks. Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries were in the majority in the Soviet.

The Provisional Government accepted most of these demands and introduced the eight-hour day, announced a political amnesty, abolished capital punishment and the exile of political prisoners, instituted trial by jury for all offences, put an end to discrimination based on religious, class or national criteria, created an independent judiciary, separated church and state, and committed itself to full liberty of conscience, the press, worship and association. It also drew up plans for the election of a Constituent Assembly based on adult universal suffrage and announced this would take place in the autumn of 1917. It appeared to be the most progressive government in history. (29)

At this time, Stalin, like most Bolsheviks, took the view that the Russian people were not ready for a socialist revolution. He therefore called for conditional support of the Provisional Government, declaring that at this time it "would be utopian to raise the question of a socialist revolution". He also urged policies that would tempt the Mensheviks into forming an alliance. However, he disagreed with Molotov, who was calling for the immediate overthrow of Prince Georgi Lvov. The historian, Isaac Deutscher, has suggested his "middle-of-the-road attitude made him more or less acceptable to both its wings." (30)

Stalin and the April Theses

When Lenin returned to Russia on 3rd April, 1917, he announced what became known as the April Theses. Lenin attacked Bolsheviks for supporting the Provisional Government. Instead, he argued, revolutionaries should be telling the people of Russia that they should take over the control of the country. In his speech, Lenin urged the peasants to take the land from the rich landlords and the industrial workers to seize the factories. Lenin accused those Bolsheviks who were still supporting the government of Prince Georgi Lvov of betraying socialism and suggested that they

should leave the party. Lenin ended his speech by telling the assembled crowd that they must "fight for the social revolution, fight to the end, till the complete victory of the proletariat". (31)

Some of the revolutionaries in the crowd rejected Lenin's ideas. Alexander Bogdanov called out that his speech was the "delusion of a lunatic." Joseph Goldenberg, a former of the Bolshevik Central Committee, denounced the views expressed by Lenin: "Everything we have just heard is a complete repudiation of the entire Social Democratic doctrine, of the whole theory of scientific Marxism. We have just heard a clear and unequivocal declaration for anarchism. Its herald, the heir of Bakunin, is Lenin. Lenin the Marxist, Lenin the leader of our fighting Social Democratic Party, is no more. A new Lenin is born, Lenin the anarchist." (32)

Joseph Stalin was in a difficult position. As one of the editors of *Pravda*, he was aware that he was being held partly responsible for what Lenin had described as "betraying socialism". Stalin had two main options open to him: he could oppose Lenin and challenge him for the leadership of the party, or he could change his mind about supporting the Provisional Government and remain loyal to Lenin. After ten days of silence, Stalin made his move. In the newspaper he wrote an article dismissing the idea of working with the Provisional Government. He condemned Alexander Kerensky and Victor Chernov as counter-revolutionaries, and urged the peasants to takeover the land for themselves. (33)

Stalin & the Russian Revolution

On 20th October, the Military Revolutionary Committee had its first meeting. Members included Joseph Stalin, Andrey Bubnov, Moisei Uritsky, Felix Dzerzhinsky and Yakov Sverdlov. According to Robert V. Daniels, the author of *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (1967): "Despite Menshevik charges of an insurrectionary plot, the Bolsheviks were still vague about the role this organisation might play... Several days were to pass before the committee became an active force. Nevertheless, here was the conception, if not the actual birth, of the body which was to superintend the overthrow of the Provisional Government." (34)

Lenin continued to insist that the time was right to overthrow the Provisional Government. On 24th October he wrote a letter to the members of the Central Committee: "The situation is utterly critical. It is clearer than clear that now, already, putting off the insurrection is equivalent to its death. With all my strength I wish to convince my comrades that now everything is

hanging by a hair, that on the agenda now are questions that are decided not by conferences, not by congresses (not even congresses of soviets), but exclusively by populations, by the mass, by the struggle of armed masses... No matter what may happen, this very evening, this very night, the government must be arrested, the junior officers guarding them must be disarmed, and so on... History will not forgive revolutionaries for delay, when they can win today (and probably will win today), but risk losing a great deal tomorrow, risk losing everything." (35)

Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks should take action before the elections for the Constituent Assembly. "The international situation is such that we must make a start. The indifference of the masses may be explained by the fact that they are tired of words and resolutions. The majority is with us now. Politically things are quite ripe for the change of power. The agrarian disorders point to the same thing. It is clear that heroic measures will be necessary to stop this movement, if it can be stopped at all. The political situation therefore makes our plan timely. We must now begin thinking of the technical side of the undertaking. That is the main thing now. But most of us, like the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, are still inclined to regard the systematic preparation for an armed uprising as a sin. To wait for the Constituent Assembly, which will surely be against us, is nonsensical because that will only make our task more difficult." (36)

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Leon Trotsky supported Lenin's view and urged the overthrow of the Provisional Government. On the evening of 24th October, orders were given for the Bolsheviks to occupy the railway stations, the telephone exchange and the State Bank. The Smolny Institute became the headquarters of the revolution and was transformed into a fortress. Trotsky reported that the "chief of the machine-gun company came to tell me that his men were all on the side of the Bolsheviks". (37)

The Bolsheviks set up their headquarters in the Smolny Institute. The former girls' convent school also housed the Petrograd Soviet. Under pressure from the nobility and industrialists, Alexander Kerensky was persuaded to take decisive action. On 22nd October he ordered the arrest of the Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee. The next day he closed down the Bolshevik newspapers and cut off the telephones to the Smolny Institute.

The following day the Red Guards surrounded the Winter Palace. Inside was most of the country's Cabinet, although Kerensky had managed to escape from the city. The palace was defended by Cossacks, some junior army officers and the Woman's Battalion. At 9 p.m. *The Aurora* and the Peter and Paul Fortress began to open fire on the palace. Little damage was done but the action persuaded most of those defending the building to surrender. The Red Guards, led by Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, now entered the Winter Palace. (38)

On 26th October, 1917, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets met and handed over power to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars. Lenin was elected chairman and other appointments included Joseph Stalin (Nationalities), Leon Trotsky (Foreign Affairs) Alexei Rykov (Internal Affairs), Anatoli Lunacharsky (Education), Alexandra Kollontai (Social Welfare), Victor Nogin (Trade and Industry), Peter Stuchka (Justice), Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (War), Nikolai Krylenko (War Affairs), Pavlo Dybenko (Navy Affairs), Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov (Finance), Vladimir Milyutin (Agriculture), Ivan Teodorovich (Food), Georgy Oppokov (Justice) and Nikolai Glebov-Avilov (Posts & Telegraphs). (39)

As a Georgian and a member of a minority group who had written about the problems of non-Russian peoples living under the Tsar, Stalin was seen as the obvious choice for the post as Minister of Nationalities. It was a job that gave Stalin tremendous power for nearly half the country's population fell into the category of non-Russian. Stalin now had the responsibility of dealing with 65 million Ukrainians, Georgians, Byelorussians, Tadzhiks, Buriats and Yakuts. To show his good faith, Stalin appointed several assistants from the various nationalities within Russia. (40)

The policy of the Bolsheviks was to grant the right of self-determination to all the various nationalities within Russia. This was reinforced by a speech Stalin made in Helsinki on November 16th, 1917. Stalin promised the crowd that the Soviet government would grant: "complete freedom for the Finnish people, and for other peoples of Russia, to arrange their own life!" Stalin's plan was to develop what he called "a voluntary and honest alliance" between Russia and the different national groups that lived within its borders. (41)

Over the next couple of years Stalin had difficulty controlling the non-Russian peoples under his control. Independent states were set up without his agreement. These new governments were often hostile to the Bolsheviks. Stalin had hoped that these independent states would

voluntarily agree to join up with Russia to form a union of Socialist States. When this did not happen Stalin was forced to revise his policy and stated that self-determination "ought to be understood as the right of self-determination not of the bourgeoisie but of the toiling masses of a given nation." In other words, unless these independent states had a socialist government willing to develop a union with Russia, the Bolsheviks would not allow self-determination. (42)

During the Russian Civil War Lenin saw his government confronted with almost insuperable adversities. He looked round to see which of his colleagues could be relied upon to form a close nucleus capable of the determined and swift action which would be needed in the emergencies to come. He decided to set up an inner Cabinet and appointed an executive of four members: Lenin, Stalin, Leon Trotsky and Yakov Sverdlov. When Sverdlov died on 16th March, 1919, Stalin became even more important to Lenin. (43)

Lenin also changed his views on independence. He now came to the conclusion that a "modern economy required a high degree of power in the centre." Although the Bolsheviks had promised nearly half the Russian population that they would have self-determination, Lenin was now of the opinion that such a policy could pose a serious threat to the survival of the Soviet government. It was the broken promise over self-determination that was just one of the many reasons why Lenin's government became unpopular in Russia.

During the Civil War Stalin played an important administrative role in military matters and took the credit for successfully defeating the White Army at Tsaritsyn. One strategy developed by Stalin was to conduct interviews with local administrators on a large barge moored on the Volga. It was later claimed that if Stalin was not convinced of their loyalty they were shot and thrown into the river. It was claimed this is what happened to a group of supporters of Leon Trotsky. When he was questioned about this he admitted the crime: "Death solves all problems. No man, no problem." (44)

Red Terror

On 17th August, 1918, Moisei Uritsky, chief of the Petrograd Secret Police was assassinated. Two weeks later Dora Kaplan shot and severely wounded Lenin. Stalin, who was in Tsaritsyn at the time, sent a telegram to headquarters suggesting: "having learned about the wicked attempt of

capitalist hirelings on the life of the greatest revolutionary, the tested leader and teacher of the proletariat, Comrade Lenin, answer this base attack from ambush with the organization of open and systematic mass terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents." (45)

The advice of Stalin was accepted and Felix Dzerzhinsky, head of the Cheka, instigated the Red Terror. The Bolsheviks newspaper, *Krasnaya Gazeta*, reported on 1st September, 1918: "We will turn our hearts into steel, which we will temper in the fire of suffering and the blood of fighters for freedom. We will make our hearts cruel, hard, and immovable, so that no mercy will enter them, and so that they will not quiver at the sight of a sea of enemy blood. We will let loose the floodgates of that sea. Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies in scores of hundreds. Let them be thousands; let them drown themselves in their own blood. For the blood of Lenin and Uritsky, Zinoviev and Volodarski, let there be floods of the blood of the bourgeois - more blood, as much as possible." (46)

Morgan Philips Price, a journalist working for the *Manchester Guardian*, reported that the Red Terror was announced in *Izvestia* on 7th September, 1918. "There was no mistaking its meaning. It was proposed to take hostages from the former officers of the Tsar's army, from the Cadets and from the families of the Moscow and Petrograd middle-classes and to shoot ten for every Communist who fell to the White terror. Shortly after a decree was issued by the Central Soviet Executive ordering all officers of the old army within territories of the Republic to report on a certain day at certain places." (47)

Stalin married the eighteen year-old, Nadezhda Alliluyeva in 1919. Her father, Sergei Alliluyev, was a Georgian revolutionary. Stalin first met Nadezhda two years earlier. After the revolution, Nadezhda worked as a confidential code clerk in Lenin's office. In 1921 she had her Communist Party membership suspended and it was restored only on Lenin's personal intervention. (48)