



Stalin: Dealer in Destiny

Who is the man who rules the earth's largest nation and wages magnificent war against the Nazis?

by WALTER DURANTY

IT WAS EARLY in '22 when someone came into my office in Moscow and asked, "Have you heard the news?"

"Such as what?" said I.

"That Stalin has been appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party?"

"Never heard of him," I said. "What does it mean anyway?"

"Only," replied my friend, "that he now ranks next to Lenin in importance because Lenin has given him the manipulation of the Communist Party, the most important body in Russia."

I checked the fact for reference but didn't realize how truly important it was until the following year, when I knew that Lenin could not long survive. Of six possible candidates to succeed him I picked Stalin, for the reason my informant had mentioned, and even talked about him irreverently the way we talk about horses. I said, "I'm betting on Stalin," just the way you'd say "I'm betting on Whirlaway." And once when the Man of Steel said to me "You bet on the right horse," I knew that my wager had come to his notice. So I confessed:

"Yes, I did, and I think it will go on winning."

He grinned quite humanly.

"How did you get the name Stalin?" I asked him. I knew that he had lived under many aliases, and thought that as Lenin took his name to commemorate a massacre of workers on the Lena River, so Stalin had chosen his because he perhaps had worked in a steel plant. The Lord of the Kremlin puckered his brows and smiled almost with embarrassment.

"I don't quite know," he replied. "It started with some of my friends. They seemed to think it suited me."

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Today it can be said that J. Stalin, as he always signs himself, has greater personal power than any man alive. Yet he would be the first to declare that his power resides in his position rather than in himself. In a sense this is true, because Stalin crowns a vast pyramid, the Communist Party and its junior affiliates, whose foundations are set solidly across the length and breadth of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Foreigners seem to believe that members of the Communist Party in Russia comprise only a small percentage of the total population. They note the figures—say three million Communists and “candidates” in a total of 193 million—but forget that in addition to these adult members, there are at least 10 million members of the Communist Youth Organization, youngsters between the ages of 15 and 22, and another 12 million “Young Pioneers,” Red Boy Scouts and Girl Guides from eight to fifteen, not to mention the many millions of younger children born to Communist parents. You thus reach a mighty host of 30 to 35 millions, or 20 per cent of the population, pledged to serve the Red Cause from birth. On that monolithic mass is based Stalin’s rule.

He is the supreme chief of a civilian army more disciplined than any soldiers, because interwoven in their militant training is a cord of almost religious fanaticism, so strong and real that close observers sometimes compare Party members to the followers of Mohammed. From this “religious” angle, Stalin is the symbol of the Communist Party faith, the transmitter of a mystic Party Line, which from the outset has been the expression and inspiration of Bolshevik policy. The world has known no such combination of spiritual and temporal power in the hands of a single man since the days of the mightiest Popes, whose thunder of excommunication often was enforced by the lightning of war.

Josef Vissarionivich Djughashvili was born in 1880 in the little town of Gori in the uplands of Georgia, where his father was a cobbler.

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Among the Georgians, themselves a subject race conquered by the Russians, names ending in *-idze* or *-adze* were considered a mark of local nobility, whereas names ending in *-illi* betokened the lower classes. The boy Josef, known as "Soso" to his family and friends, was a bright and sturdy child and a model student. At the age of 11 he survived an attack of smallpox, the only serious illness of his life, which left pockmarks all over his face and neck, unnoticeable today save at the closest distance. The fol-



lowing year young Soso won a scholarship at a religious seminary near Tiflis, the Georgian capital, to the delight of his mother, a most religious woman, who retained her faith until the day of her death a few years ago. In this connection a friend of mine tells a story that is not without pathos. He interviewed the old lady shortly after her first and only visit to Stalin in the Kremlin, and remarked that she must be proud to have a son sitting in the seat of Peter the Great. To which she replied, a trifle sadly, "Yes, but if he had not been naughty at school he might by now be a bishop."

At 17, when Soso became interested in *Das Kapital* of Karl Marx and the works of other revolutionaries, he was expelled from the seminary as a harmful and subversive influence. However, not until 1905 did he actually meet Lenin in Finland. Thenceforward he regarded his leader with a deep, almost dog-like devotion, and never on any occasion challenged Lenin's views. Raymond Robbins, who was in Petrograd during the "ten days that shook the world," once said, "Whenever I went to see Lenin, I always found Stalin sitting in his ante-room, like a sentry or faithful watchdog."

THE FIRST TIME I interviewed Stalin in 1929, I was required to submit to him a copy of the dispatch I was sending to the *New York Times*. In it I used the phrase that Stalin was the "inheritor of Lenin's mantle." He

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scratched out these words and replaced them with "Lenin's most faithful disciple, and the prolonger of his work." Later he also told me that in critical moments he always tried to think what Lenin would have done under the same circumstances, and acted accordingly.

In the opening years of this century, prior to the Russo-Japanese War, the revolutionary movement in Russia made great headway, especially in the oil fields of Baku, where strikes and armed conflict were a common occurrence. The youthful Stalin flung himself into this struggle with great energy. In 1902 there occurred a split in the Social Democratic Party, as the Russian revolutionaries were then called, in which the majority voted for Lenin's policy of active armed revolution, wherever possible, against the minority, which preferred more devious methods of compromise and appeasement. The Russian word for majority is *Bolshevik*, and for minority *Menshevik*, so the two groups were henceforth known by these terms. Stalin of course supported the Bolshevik program. Although Lenin opposed the practice of individual assassination advocated by the anarchists and other revolutionary groups, he did countenance seizure by violence of Tsarist wealth. Thus Stalin first gained prominence as a revolutionary by engineering a coup against the treasure of the Bank of Tiflis which was being removed to Moscow for safer keeping. The heavy horse-drawn wagons were attacked by bombs and the assailants captured some 10 million dollars' worth of gold and securities.

Although Stalin planned the coup, its actual leader was a remarkable young Georgian known as Kamu. Most of the participants escaped abroad—including Maxim Litvinov, who was arrested in Paris while trying to negotiate some of the securities, on a charge made by the Tsarist Government that he was disposing of stolen property. The French Government took the view that the "crime" was political, and Litvinov escaped extradition and made his way to

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England, where he lived unmolested. The less fortunate Kamu, arrested in Germany, to avoid being handed over to the Tsarist police, feigned madness with such success that he deceived the German doctors and lay low in a lunatic asylum for several years before returning to Russia.

Stalin, who also succeeded in evading the clutches of the police, in December, 1905 went as a delegate to the Bolshevik Conference at Tammerfors in Finland. There he first met Lenin. This conference was epochal because it decided to carry out the Bolshevik policy of violent revolution by trying to combine all strikes and labor outbreaks into a mass general strike, backed by the use of force.

The disastrous war with Japan had imposed terrific burdens on the Russian people, who were seething with revolt in town and country alike. The Tsar's regime was terrified, but when the actual clash came in 1905-06, enough troops remained loyal to the Tsar to drown the uprising in blood. The army had been defeated, but not broken, by Japan, and it was on this account that Lenin, when he later drew up his *Blueprint for Revolution*, added a fourth condition—that the army must be shattered by defeat in war and have lost confidence in its leaders, to three other conditions which he claimed would lead to social revolution. The three were:

1. Widespread popular suffering and discontent.

2. Complete lack of confidence by the people in its government and ruling class.

3. Lack of confidence by the ruling class in itself.

During the years which followed, until 1917, Stalin's life was a tale of illegal "underground" work, imprisonment, exile, escape and re-arrest. He did manage to attend the Fifth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, in London in May 1907, his only trip abroad. An article which he wrote about that Congress, called *Notes of a Delegate*, set the seal upon his Bolshevik orthodoxy, as opposed to the compromise views of the Mensheviks. In it he stressed Lenin's belief that the

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urban workers, the true proletariat, must be the leaders of any real revolutionary movement, even in a country like Russia which was more than three-quarters agricultural.

In 1907, the weak Tsar Nicholas II found a pillar of strength in his First Minister Peter Stolypin, who set out to liquidate all sedition in a most Russian manner. By his orders, rebellious workers and peasants were slaughtered by tens and hundreds of thousands, until the hangman's rope was known as "Stolypin's necktie."

THE "STOLYPIN REACTION" provided a distinction of great future importance between two sets of Bolshevik leaders, the "Western exiles" and those who, like Stalin, remained in Russia to bear literally "the burden and heat of the day." Lenin, it is true, belonged to the former group, but Lenin was somehow different, to all Bolshevik eyes a man of superlative character and transcendent ability. But no such charity was accorded other Western exiles by Stalin and his associates, Molotov, Voroshilov and the rest of Russia's present rulers, who had stayed on at home to be tracked by police, betrayed by spies, imprisoned, exiled and hanged. While Lenin lived the "Westerners" held power, but after his death conflict amongst his followers was inevitable. It's interesting that no Westerner holds power in Russia today.

In the ensuing clash of personalities, between Stalin and Trotsky, and between the Westerners and those who remained in Russia, Stalin won. Thenceforward he put into practice his own policies, based always, as I have said, on his idea of what Lenin would have wanted. He forced, at great cost, the industrialization or collectivization of the farms, and carried out Lenin's policy of making Russia an industrial and mechanized rather than an agricultural country. To do this, Stalin found it necessary to abandon "communism," so called, which offered no incentive to the average man, and to revert to a system whose methods are not too far remote from those of capitalism. I should

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say that the economy of Russia today is state capitalism, much as the Bolsheviks dislike the term. Industry, commerce and new construction are financed by central banks and their branches, as in a capitalist country. Moreover, there is complete difference between the worker who gets the equivalent of 50 dollars a month and his boss who gets 1,000—in other words, the principle of greater reward for greater service prevails. There is extra payment for overtime, and if any enterprise has a successful year, its workers receive bonuses.

As a world statesman, Stalin perceived that Hitler's Nazi Germany would make a bid for world dominion long before Chamberlain, Bonnet of France, or even the United States paid any heed to Hitler's wild ambition. From then on, under the German threat, Stalin swung Russia towards what I might call national "preparedness," in the American sense. Deliberately he reduced the production of consumers' goods, which the Russian people so greatly needed, in favor of factories to produce the matériel of war, and located those factories in areas east of Moscow, far from hostile attack.

Meanwhile, he used all the power of the Communist Party to stimulate patriotism among the Russian people—the idea that their country was their own, for which they must fight, perhaps die. There was a motion picture of a noble, Alexander Nevsky, who had defeated invaders, and Tolstoy's book, *War and Peace*, which described the victory of the Tsar Alexander I against the invader Napoleon, was reprinted by the millions. Simultaneously the Red Army became an object of popular veneration. Its soldiers were better fed, better clothed, better housed, than the mass of the civil population. And when their terms of service ended they were taught trades and given good jobs.

Communiqués from the Russian front today are daily testimonies to Joseph Stalin's success in building a powerful, united nation dedicated to beating back the Nazi invaders with

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every weapon at its disposal.

The Man of Steel, who tries always to think as Lenin would, had Hitler's number long before most of the rest of the world did. He may yet write the epitaphs of Der Fuehrer and his German hordes.

—Suggestions for further reading:

STALIN

by Emil Ludwig \$2.50
G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York

ONE WORLD

by Wendell L. Willkie \$2.00
Simon and Schuster, Inc.

THE KREMLIN AND THE PEOPLE

by Walter Duranty \$2.00
Reynal and Hitchcock



In 1920 Walter Duranty arrived in Moscow to report history for the New York Times. From there he made frequent junkets into Russia, the

*Balkans and the Far East, and in the course of his travels became intimately acquainted with most of the architects of the Soviet Union. Including, of course, Joseph Stalin whom he interviewed twice and whose story he tells here. Duranty has since turned author of best sellers, among them, *I Write As I Please* and, most recently, *The Search for a Key*.*



(image added)

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