

Liberty

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STALIN DEVIL OR GENIUS?



by Emil Ludwig

Mr. Ludwig last week described Stalin as he had found him—slow, cautious, taciturn, locked-in, gloomy, lonely—in the Kremlin, and noted that the man's seeming heaviness betokens inner self-certainty and patience.

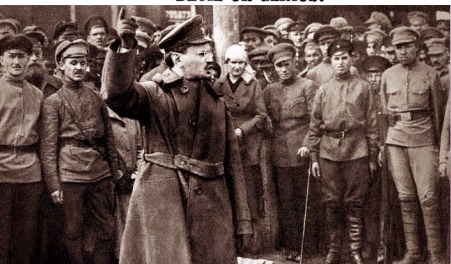
Stalin was born in the Georgian mountains. His father, a cobbler, was the equivalent of a serf. When the boy was 14, his deeply religious mother enrolled him in a seminary to study for the priesthood. He has told Mr. Ludwig that the nature of the discipline infuriated him, made him a Socialist. At 18 he was expelled. In general, Mr. Ludwig infers that Russian oppression of this essentially Asiatic youth was largely responsible for his later ambition to rule Russia.

Between 1903 and 1913 he was six times captured by the Czarist secret police and sent to prison camps in Siberia. Invariably, upon escaping, he would return to the hidden task of unifying the workers for revolution.

★ THE basic idea of this revolutionary system was derived from Marx, but it was first adapted for Russia by Lenin: There can be no liberation of the peasants without the leadership of the workers! It was among the city masses, the factory workers, who owned nothing, that the revolution was to be prepared. Whenever the Russian peasantry revolted in the nineteenth century, the revolution collapsed because it lacked the leadership of a city proletariat; and when in 1905 the workers rose, they did not have the peasants with them.

It was only with Stalin, Gorky, Kalinin, and their comrades that a born proletariat entered the leadership; but they had much to learn in order to fill the gaps in their education.

Stalin learned something during the period of his activity in St. Petersburg. The social order was so undermined there that this perpetual fugitive from the police was kept in hiding by a quartermaster of the mounted Imperial Guards. There were periods lasting weeks during which he slept every night in a different house, though by no means always in a bed. Lenin, who from his exile abroad not



As the military leader of the Reds, Leon Trotsky—Stalin's rival, and the Jew to whom Hitler avowedly owes much—gave his fiery pep talks to peasants and workers.

only laid down the theory for the party congresses but directed internal activities down to the minutest details, sent his newspaper, *Iskra*—the Spark—into Russia, concealed in the covers of cigarette boxes, in the lining of hats, or in capsules dropped into barrels of wine; it was printed in tiny letters on the thinnest paper.

Stalin met Lenin at two congresses. He speaks proudly of a letter which Lenin wrote to a third comrade praising the work of Stalin, and which this comrade forwarded to Stalin in Siberia. There are some who say that this is pure invention. In any event, Stalin played no role at those congresses, held outside of Russia, in which the young party broke up into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks; as a delegate he made no speeches, and was little noticed by Lenin at the beginning.

He, however, obtained an unforgettable impression of Lenin. "I am nothing but a pupil of Lenin, and I don't wish to be known as anything else," said Stalin to me, twenty years later, and he has expressed himself similarly in his speeches. For a long time Stalin was characterized by his complete self-eclipse behind Lenin. Today Stalin's propaganda puts the two men side by side, and this must obviously be done with Stalin's consent. How the twenty-six-year-old Stalin first met the thirty-six-year-old Lenin at a congress in Finland was subsequently related by Stalin himself:

"I waited for the eagle of our party, and I expected a big man, one who would tower even physically above the others; yes, I thought of him as a giant. To my astonishment, I saw a man of less than medium height who was in no way to be distinguished from the others. A great man likes to come late to meetings, so that the impatience of the audience is increased, and so that on his entry he may hear on every side: 'Ssh! Quiet! Here he is!' But I found Lenin there long before the others. He sat in a corner conversing with a wholly unimportant delegate. This simplicity and modesty, which struck me at once, this desire not to attract attention or to demonstrate superiority, was an outstanding trait in the new chief, and was suited to the simple human masses which were beginning to educate themselves."

While Stalin's retiring and thoroughly prosaic nature felt itself attracted by Lenin's simplicity, it was alienated and even repelled at the same meet-



"I am nothing but a pupil of Lenin," says Stalin—shown here at Lenin's side in 1922.

ings by the brilliant presence of Trotsky, whose nature had everything that Stalin's lacked. As a matter of fact there is a similarity between the speeches of Lenin and of Stalin in a certain factual dryness common to both. In physiognomy they were definitely nearer to each other than to Trotsky, with his exciting and winning personality. But Lenin possessed enough devotion to draw closer to himself this enormously gifted co-worker, who did not fit in with his own nature; while even as far back as this period Stalin must have felt discontented with himself, must have felt inferior in the presence of Trotsky.

REVOLUTIONS NEED LIBERATED MARTYRS

The success of the Russian Revolution and the failure of the German

Revolution may be partially explained by the fact that in Russia there was, for twenty years, a constant interplay between the exiled leaders and the leaders on the spot, while the German government exiled nobody and imprisoned very few. The humane methods of the German Empire, which spared its opponents, at least after 1890, resulted in the fact that when the rule of the Kaiser collapsed, in 1918, there were no liberated martyrs to spread flames of revolution.

This was one of the reasons for the weakness and short-livedness of the Weimar Republic, which let itself be pushed over by Hitler. As against this, the cruelty of the Czaristic regime in Russia was a preparation for the Revolution, both internally and abroad.

Stalin, as a soldier in the army of Lenin, who between 1900 and 1919 transmitted his commands from abroad, acquired importance very slowly during those years; and right up to the Revolution he never once appeared in the foreground. When I asked whether, in his opinion, a revolutionary could prepare himself better at home or abroad, Stalin did not give me a yes-or-no answer, but delivered himself as follows:

"I consider Lenin an exception. Very few of those who were then liv-



Stalin in 1920—for the time being, a military leader—as he looked to a Russian artist.

ing and working in Russia were as intimately acquainted with everything that happened as Lenin managed to be from abroad. I visited him in 1907, 1908, and 1912, and I saw the stacks of letters he received every day from Russia. And yet he himself considered it a great disadvantage that he was never in Russia. The others, those who remained here, rendered great service: for every man that we had abroad there were two hundred working at home. Today we have in our Central Committee, which consists of seventy members, only three or four men who have ever been outside the borders of Russia. But against this, we have here comrades who have lived twenty years in Berlin, and can't give me a precise answer to a question on German conditions."

JESSE JAMES A LA RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Stalin's life in Russia was far grimmer and more dangerous than Lenin's abroad. That was the time, 1905, when the first Russian Revolution collapsed, leaving nothing to show for it but a façade parliament, a slight increase in wages, and a slight improvement in the lot of the workers. At the same time there was an intensification in the persecution of the first Socialists and Bolshevists. It was in this period of so-called liberalization, between 1905 and 1909, that the number of political convictions rose from 85,000 to 200,000 in a year.

There existed in Russia so-called "Black Hundreds" and "White Fanatics," who wore black masks. The government used violence and illegal measures, exactly like the dictators of our time. It was perfectly natural for the radical groups to retort in kind.

Among the methods of violence invoked by the radicals, there was the obtaining of money for party purposes through robbery. The most famous of these armed robberies was carried out by Stalin himself. On June 26, 1907, there was an outburst of pistol shots and bomb explosions on the main boulevard of Tiflis; men and horses



"Lenin's pupil" addressing an April All-Russian Conference of the Bolshevik Party. Behind him sits Lenin himself, and at Lenin's elbow is Leon Trotsky. The artist Vasiliev made the sketch.

lay dead on the asphalt, and \$175,000 of State money had disappeared from the car. The process was called "expropriation," or "ex" for short, and had already been carried successfully on previous occasions.

Stalin, who was a higher party official, played the same role as a general in a battle: he planned and prepared the attack and had it carried out by eight comrades, two of them women. The leader was the romantic robber Kamo, who had only recently lost an eye in a similar but unsuccessful attempt.

The attackers left no clue. The wrong people were arrested, and the perpetrators of the attack remained unknown till eleven or twelve years later, when Lenin had the case investigated on the request of a political group.

We tell this story in order to indicate in what company, and in the midst of what adventures, Stalin passed his youth. Men of this cast have a very different view of human life, having risked their own so often. They can be understood only in terms of their own world, even if we call them criminals.

Since this story has been suppressed in Stalin's official biography, though it is definitely established that he had the directing hand in the robbery, I asked him about it, expecting that he would deny it in so many words, but that I would be able to get at the truth from the expression on his face.

"In Europe," I said to him, "you are described either as the Bloody Czar or as the Bandit of Georgia. There are stories about bank robberies and the like which you are said to have organized in your youth for the benefit of the party. I would very much like to know how much of this we can believe."

Stalin began to laugh in that heavy way of his, blinked several times, and stood up for the first and only time in our three-hour interview. He walked over with his somewhat dragging footsteps to the writing desk and brought me a pamphlet of about thirty

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pages, his biography—in Russian; but there was nothing in it, of course, about my question. “You will find all the necessary information in here,” he said, and laughed slyly to himself because he had “put one over” on me. The question of the bank robberies was the only one he would not answer—except to the extent that he answered it by passing it over.

This malicious manner of evasion gave me a new insight into his character. He could have denied it; he could have confessed to it; or he could simply have described the whole thing as a legend. But he acted, instead, like a perfect Asiatic, and even in his smile he looked like a Mongolian.

In June, 1913, a year before the outbreak of the World War, Stalin was exiled to Siberia for the sixth time, but now to a frightful region from which a prisoner rarely returned alive. Kuleika lies twenty miles south of the Arctic Circle, a desolate place which consists of three houses and is free from snow only three months in the year. It is the frozen steppe, where a man must live like a northern Robinson Crusoe. There Stalin passed most of the day hunting and fishing, in order to obtain food and to keep himself in motion. Then he chopped wood, to warm himself and the food. He made his own nets and hooks, also the hatchet with which to chop holes in the ice. He was kept alive by his books, and by what he wrote for himself on the problems of the time.

It was while he lived in Kuleika, in the company of a dull-witted guard, that there finally came the war on whose outbreak Lenin, like Marx, had reckoned, and for which he had long waited. But the World War did not bring liberty to Stalin. That was done by the Revolution.

And thus, to understand the character and acts of this man, we must also bear in mind that in his middle thirties, in the full tide of his energies, he lived about four years in utter isolation, without newspapers, without radio, without letters, cut off from friends, from family, and from the events of the world; the last three years passed in constant tension over the outcome of the war.

We should now have a better picture of the physical and mental make-up of the man who in March, 1917, suddenly received a call and a letter which freed him and flung him out of this place of utter silence into the seething whirlpool of the Revolution.

**THE LONGEST-LIVED
GOVERNMENT TODAY**

No government in the world today has been so long in power as that of the Russian Communists. For more than twenty-four years, without a single break, they have been the sole governing power in Russia; and they have not only consolidated their power—they have extended it. Mussolini, with his nineteen years of governmental power, is next to them. In the democracies, like England and America, the parties have alternated; ten years has been the maximum

duration of a lease of power; in the half-dictatorships even less.

The great experiment of a pure Socialistic state in Russia has been only a partial success; but the party which took over the reins in October, 1917, has remained in power. Why have these men succeeded where others have failed? Why are they at the helm after twenty-four years, whereas Hitler, who has ruled for nine years at this date, will not reach half their record?

The extraordinarily easy success of the Russian Revolution was due primarily to the backwardness of the country. The highest classes were either degenerate or corrupt and offered no resistance. The middle class, exhausted after a lost war, was intimidated and cowardly. It was the worker who carried out the revolution which the various working-class parties had been preparing for twenty years. The peasants, who at that time constituted 85 per cent of the population, were won over when they saw before them the realization of their immemorial dream—the removal of their overlords, the landowners, and the leasing of the land to the peasants by the State. The soldiers, among whom there were no less than 2,000,000 deserters, voted for the party which promised peace.

Thus it was that the two revolutions, that of February, 1917, and that of October, 1917, were effected practically without bloodshed. It was only later that the tremendous sacrifice of life took place, and that would have been considerably less but for the intervention of the western states.

In Russia an amazing thing also happened: Lenin was able to pass on his power to an heir, and this heir was not a son but the party of Lenin. To be sure, this party has often ruled by means of terror, and more so under Stalin than under Lenin. But at the same time it presents to the world the spectacle of a new Russia which has not only kept pace in the general upward tendency of our age but has converted the most primitive and backward country in Europe into the technically most advanced, second perhaps only to Germany.

It is in this heirship of power that we shall find the secret reasons for the duration of a regime which has overcome all difficulties. It overcame them precisely because other men continued that which the founders of the state began. For there is a symbolism in the fact that Lenin died six years after the Revolution, and Trotsky was exiled a few years later, and that these two were in on only the beginning of the reconstruction. The man who did not carry out the Revolution, Stalin, carried out the reconstruction.

There is not the slightest doubt that Lenin, the first revolutionary, was also the most important one. Even his rivals recognized him as leader and master. Stalin was nevertheless the man who closed the revolutionary epoch and directed the rebuilding of the country. He was not among the

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great planners of the Revolution; all that can be said of him is that he went along with it, in a capacity of no particular importance. Communism would have come to power exactly as it did without Stalin; but without him its subsequent course would probably have been different.

The men who arrived in Petersburg in February, 1917, with the avowed purpose of swinging the bourgeois revolution leftward and transforming it into a proletarian revolution, represented a variety of records, of temperaments, and of ideologies.

HITLER LEARNED MUCH FROM TROTSKY A handful of Liberal deputies, mostly princes or professors,

had taken over the government of Russia after the collapse occasioned by the military defeat. At the head of the group stood Kerensky, first intellectual leader, later also Prime Minister. But the young republic which these men founded attracted no support; it gave neither land to the peasants nor peace to the soldiers. It was utterly determined to beat Germany first at any cost. Like most liberals, these men wanted to prove their patriotism, and this was the mistake which ruined them. For who wanted the war continued, after it had already lasted thirty months? The hundred and twenty millions of Russia wanted bread and peace, and were profoundly disappointed in the Liberal government.

The one historic act performed by the Liberal government was the liberation of political prisoners and the permission given to political exiles to return. It is part of the "nice" tradition of a Liberal government that it sets its opponents free. When Kerensky later imprisoned some of the leaders, it was too late. Hitler did the opposite, and was therefore more successful. It may be observed generally that Hitler profited immensely from the Communist example, and particularly from Stalin's experiences. When Hitler once asked some of his friends what they thought of Trotsky's memoirs, and all of them expressed the profoundest contempt for this book, written by a Jew, he replied: "For my part, I've learned a great deal from that book."

Earlier he learned from the weak methods of the Russian liberals what he ought not to do. Kerensky's defeat was due in the first line to this tolerance; for without the Red leaders the social revolution would at least have been deferred.

Lenin, who was living as an emigree in Austria, had fled in August, 1914, to Switzerland, and from that center had carried on, with a newspaper, pamphlets, and speeches, against Czarist Russia. He poured scorn on "the Socialists of the Czar" and wanted the defeat of Russia "as the lesser evil." When, in 1917, the French and British refused him a transit visa, he got it from the German generals, who hoped by their action to reach an early peace with Russia, and did so. But by their action they also

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brought about the creation of the Communist State. If Lenin had not arrived in Petersburg, the revolution of the workers and peasants would never have taken place.

Trotsky, who was at that time not yet a Bolshevik, took a similar view to Lenin's during the early years of the war, though he was less extreme. He was expelled from France, fled to the United States, and was arrested in Halifax while trying to get back to Russia, but was finally set at large. Within a few weeks of each other, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin arrived in Petersburg from three different points of the compass.

What did Stalin feel about the situation? For four long years, cut off from all contact with his master, Lenin, he had lived the life of a hunter and fisherman in his arctic exile. He had come within a hair's breadth of becoming a soldier of His Imperial Majesty the Czar, and perhaps of being wiped out in the great mass slaughter. The losses of the Russian army were so enormous that even political prisoners were pressed into service and twenty of Stalin's comrades in Siberia were enrolled. A defect in his left arm saved him from a like fate. I do not know whether he still suffers from this defect.

What his thoughts were during those three years we do not know. Since Stalin was extremely careful in later years to have his own and other records and papers sifted so as to leave a favorable picture, his opponents point significantly to the lack of documents relating to that time; for it is certain that he would have published every radical line he wrote. At any rate we know that on his way back from exile with two comrades, he sent this telegram to Lenin: "Comradely greetings on departure for Petersburg. Stalin."

Stalin's jealousy of Leon Trotsky, their records as "civilians suddenly become field marshals," and Lenin's success in keeping them victoriously co-operative in the Bolshevik cause, will be interpreted for you by Emil Ludwig in Liberty next week.

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