

The stalin and lenin regimes politics essay



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If the words of traditionalist historians from the cold-war era are to be taken as fact, then the answer to the topic question dictates that there is a real connection that exists between Leninism and Stalinism. It was the socioeconomic and political base created by Lenin that became the plant from which emerged the excesses of Stalin's era. Stalin promoted an entirely personal viewpoint when it came to his soviet policy i. e. he took on the role and accumulative advantages of being the Lenin of his rule. His behavior highlighted his own policies and made evident the failing totalitarian arguments resulting in his regimes being termed " a nation's tragedy" (Ulam Stalin; the Man and His Era 12). There are several people who disagree with this view; mainly Trotskyites who put forth that Stalinism broke away from Leninism. They are in favor of the nature of Stalin's rule; he pulled his regime away from the progressive and democratic nature of Lenin's rule and pulled it towards a dictatorship that seemingly served his self-interest. It has been termed a " Thermidorian negation... [and] betrayal of the basic Bolshevik beliefs" (Cohan 41). Deutscher further went onto state that Stalin was only able to maintain the status of a revolutionary leader because he was able to implement a new and fundamentally different practice of socioeconomic and political organization, as opposed to staying true to the older definition of revolution (Stalin; a Political Biography 550). Khrushchev famously took up the vast break between the two regimes when he tried to validate the presence of his Leninist-Marxist regime. He went against the notion that Stalinism exhibited any qualities of Leninism and by way of de-Stalinization promoted the concept of the excesses that occupied Stalinism. Some theorists attempted to elaborate the two regimes in a more neutral tone and point of view; however, the revisionists insisted that although there were

discontinuities and continuities between the two regimes, Stalinism had been influenced heavily by other historical events from within Russia. “ The prevailing argument is now a balance of the straight line intentionalist theory that Bolshevik Marxism determined the character of post revolutionary Leninism as well as the main traits of what we call Stalinism, and the revisionist research that has shown the difference of extremity between the two regimes” (Cohen Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917 42). While Leninism slowly began to work its way in the direction of political totalitarianism, economic liberalization did not necessarily have to result in Stalinist authoritarianism. The demise of the communist regime led to a kind of rebirth in Sovietology, and also set in stone the fact that distinguishing between a ‘ good’ and ‘ bad’ Lenin “ is becoming less and less sustainable” (Pipes Three Whys of the Russian Revolution 84).

Although it cannot be stated as fact that “ out of the totalitarian embryo would come totalitarianism full blown,” it is certain that Lenin had played a significant role in creating Stalin. The one thing to note is however, that Stalin escalated politics and terror to an entirely new level. (Cohen Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917 43).

Several people are in agreement over the fact that a significant change took place when Stalin introduced economic reforms which stemmed from a policy of concentrating peasantry into collective farms after collectivization the effectively abolishing private property and swiftly industrializing through ‘ five year plans.’ Stalin believed that it was a “ Great leap forward”. Alev Nove came to the conclusion that Stalin’s economic policy’s infiltration was “ a great turning point in Russian history,” whereby Stalin challenged the

Marxist theory and turned it upside down to determine the character of the economic arrangement through political system (Hartfree 27).

The collectivization policy initially was a change to the semi-capitalists policy of trading under the NEP. Stalin, while restructuring the USSR, portrayed that wholesale collectivization and industrialization were not only representing the continuation of the Bolshevik blueprints that were set by Lenin but in his words was “ A path of socialism”. People like Trotsky totally disagreed with Stalin and his principals. Trotsky during the process of bringing about a change in policy portrayed how Stalin had deviated from the Bolshevik ideology and that “ opportunism ... turned into its opposite ... adventurism” (Trotsky & Eastman 45). Trotsky being an ex-Bolshevik in refuge, irrespective of everything would have still criticized Stalin out of personal revenge. Stalin’s contention of collectivization as a branch of Leninism did not hold much significance, even though it was coupled with “ Grain requisitioning tactics” and “ Kulak liquidation” during the Civil War. Stalin validated his actions using quotes by Lenin, who claimed collectivization as an eventual socialist goal and referred to Kulaks as “ bloodsuckers, vampires, robbers of the people” (Hartfree 28). Stalin claim to his theory leading to “ the destruction of the last roots of capitalism in the country, to the final victory of socialism in agriculture, and to complete consolidation of Soviet power in the country side” is unreal. The reliability of Stalin’s evidence was doubtful not only due to the omissions from some of Lenin’s writings (which were put away in sealed archives) also because of his selective manner towards economic arguments. Stalin’s reasons were based merely on words that strengthened his views and ambitions alone while completely being oblivious

to Lenin's wise warnings towards collectivization: " coercion towards the middle peasant is a supremely harmful thing, to act here by means of coercion is to ruin the whole cause", and collectivization should be based upon " not, pressure, but examples and persuasion" (Hartfree 28).

Deutscher, through the western study of Stalin's economic policy, was identified as the first to object to the Soviet thought by stating that a breach in policy of communists had occurred and had claimed on noticing a " Great Change". He further stated: " Soviet Russia embarked upon her second revolution, which was directed solely and exclusively by Stalin... [and which] ... was even more sweeping and radical than the first" (Deutscher Stalin; a Political Biography 296). Deutscher's distinction of it being the second revolution states his perceived difference that existed between both the revolutions. He stated collectivization as a " Military operation, a cruel civil war" (Full Text of " Facts on Communism"). Deutscher stated their experiment of placing 150 million peasants into 200, 00 kolkhoz as " piece of prodigious insanity, in which all rules of logic and principals of economics were turned upside down", (Deutscher Stalin; a Political Biography 326), he blatantly specified that " Stalin undertook to drive barbarism out of Russia by barbarous means" (Full Text of " Facts on Communism"). Even though Deutscher comprehended the price of such means, it is quite vague whether he possessed all the facts for writing in 1949, his prospect to view the material in person was quite limited, hence even while stating Stalin as " having borrowed so much from Marxist thinkers and economists, that he might well be charged with outright paligrism" he wraps Stalin up with a positive note (Full Text of " Facts on Communism").

Duetscher's compassion towards the communist ideology reflects a socialist nature in his political inclination, he discusses the rewards of such policies and describes Stalin's economy as "the first truly gigantic experiment in planned economy, the first instance in which a government undertook a plan to regulate the whole economic life of its country, and to direct its industrial resources towards a uniquely rapid multiplication of the nation's wealth" (Full Text of "Facts on Communism"). He outlines that the plans had allowed Russia to modernize and develop into a society, and that a vague idea had been given practicality for the first time. For Duetscher the breach in policy was not as catastrophic as what later historians would describe it as, but he did consider that behind Stalin "were tramping the myriads of weary bleeding Russian feet"(Full Text of "Facts on Communism"). Intentionalists stated collectivization as useless and that it only damaged Russia, they classify the Stalinism period as "a struggle on the same scale as of the First World War" (Conquest The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the terror-famine). According to Ulam, when questioned if the Civil War had ever concluded, answered stating that collectivization as a war against peasantry (Lenin and the Bolsheviks: the Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of communism in Russia). According to the totalitarian school of thought, Lenin and Stalin both classified peasants as filth, flexible towards the disposal of the party. According to Ulam had Lenin lived he would have bought and end to NEP long before Stalin did. To both the revolution was taken over by financial radicals that handicapped the economy, and they initiated institutions which later provided as a form or advancement for Stalin's "revolution from above"(Full Text of "Facts of Communism"). Conquest in order to link both the 'oppressors' deduced that both had

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martyred almost the same number of people using their economic policies. During the ' Peasant War' of grain requisitioning held by Lenin, an estimate of 14 million people died where as in the ' Revolution from above' of Stalin an estimate of 14. 5 million were found dead. Conquest's last words in respect to the Leninist-Stalinist policies were " When the Stalin regime moved into excessive requisitioning in late 1932, it had the experience of 1918- 21 behind it. Then the experience had resulted in disastrous famine. If it was again to do so, this cannot have been for want of understanding in the Kremlin." (The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine). 1933's ' Terror Famine' did it. He claimed that Stalin disregarded Lenin's advice and embedded his own exploitation and destruction of the muzhik. This perspective further more damaged the Stalinist's claims for further Bloshevik policies; which is clear to us that had they been accomplished NEP would have lasted. Ulam justifies his statement by stating that Stalin's war was not for power alone but also did not support " ideology, the faith of Marxism-Leninism" (Ulam Stalin; the Man and his Era). Upon proper comprehension of Marxism, " it would have required a safer, more reasonable method of transforming Russia into a modern industrial society" (" Full Text of " Facts on Communism"). Conquest grasps differences from both the Leninist and Stalinist policies and does not consider the Stalinist economics as an utter continuation of the Leninist war communism. He states that " Although Lenin shared Bolshevik antipathy towards the peasants as the archaic element in Russia, his main concerns were to understand them in Marxist terms... and to decide how to organize the countryside" (The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine), whereas Stalin only wanted to, " frighten the Kulaks into

submission" (The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine). The only factor that made up for Lenin was that he perceived peasantry in Marxist terms and his policy " was based on trial and error, with a changeable mixture of ideology and pragmatism" (Lee 180) and " at the last moment, Lenin... listened to the voice of reality" (Conquest The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine). None of this stands as a justification to the policies but simply outlines the imperfect characteristics of the Stalinist policies, unlike Deutscher's view, which weren't simply a continuation but also an intensification of Stalin's course which would end in " A cruel mockery of the peasant" (Ulam Stalin; the man and His Era). " It is said that one cannot make omelets without breaking eggs. In that case, perhaps one should not make omelets, if the menu happens to provide other choices" (Nove 379).

Quite a number of eggs were broken when speaking in terms of Russia, which not only according to the totalitarians, but was later also accepted by the Soviets, like Gorbachev who persisted on introducing Lenin - like perestroika and glasnost reforms to amend the Stalinists red tape. They claimed that a lot of stress had been placed on what Gorbachev described as the centralization - and - command system, and illustrated to the soviet people the horrific nature of collectivization: " Flagrant violations of the principals of collectivization occurred everywhere. Nor were excesses avoided in the struggle against the kulaks. An atmosphere of intolerance, hostility and suspicion was created in the country. I am putting things bluntly- those were real crimes stemming from an abuse of power. Many thousands of people were subjected to whole sale repressive methods. Such

comrades is the bitter truth" (Gorbachev). In Nove's words Stalin was required to bring Russia into the 20th century, losses were immense but such was the only available option for Russia. It had become more explicit that Stalin had taken the Leninist method and made it further extreme to a notch unconceivable under Lenin, and even though it is true that the foundations were there to be exploited, Stalin was not a Leninist but a Stalinist who was knowledgeable about Leninism, the events that followed would most probably not been approved by Lenin. According to the totalitarians, politically both of them were considered as dictatorships; each was a single - party system, each had secret - police apparatus; both inculcating ideas within their citizens; each had control over the economy and the political organizations of the country; both used terror as a practice; " To be clear: Lenin bequeathed to his successors a fully functioning police state" (Amis 32). Even though each had a one - party state, Trotskyite Deutscher implied that Stalin was " The rule of a single fraction [which] was indeed an abuse as well as a consequence of the rule of the single party" (The Prophet Unarmed Trotsky 1921 - 1929).

This was fully argued by Khrushchev who, claimed that in respect to political ideology, and procedures towards the party, Lenin was a true Marxist. In a discrete speech he justified this by stating that Lenin had upheld democracy and ' collegiality' in the Communist Party or which he named " The Leninist method of convincing and educating" (Crankshaw). He concurs with Figes perspective who stated that, " despite the ban on factions, the party still made room for comradely debate" (Figes). The political behavior inside the part faced a direct split for Stalin's heir. " In practice Stalin ignored the

norms of Party Life and trampled on the Leninist principal of collective Party Leadership." This was despotism for Khrushchev and Co.

The totalitarians portrayed Stalin as someone who ruled with an iron fist from inside the party, but he ran the country much more brutally than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This particular kind of Soviet judgment in the mix of the huge amount of writings by the Liberals is quite a minority. Liberals completely deny the split between the two political ideologies. On the other hand western historian had no reason to justify their beliefs like the Soviets, so stuck to agreeing with Pipes in his statement " Stalin's megalomaniac and other odious qualities should not obscure the fact that his ideology and modus operandi was Lenin's. A man of meager education, he had no other source of ideas" (A Concise History of the Russian Revolution). Historians that are persuaded by the American values of ' democracy' consist of the same modus operandi as Lenin. His theoretical and practical ' solutions' fueled the party which gave birth to the totalitarian Stalinist. Pipes does not indicate coming across any such signs that hint whether Lenin ever considered Stalin a traitor to his definition of Communism. According to Pipes the reason for this was the dictatorship of the proletariat which gave a rise to the dictatorship by the vanguard, and in both cases terror was struck by death. The odd fact was that these views were similar to those of the pre-revolutionary, utopian idealist Lenin, who was not affected by the hardships of the Civil War Government - " So long as the state exists there is no freedom". Pipes in particular did not have any freedom during the regimes of Lenin and Stalin. Another revisionist named Service, maybe not as intense as Pipes; but in accordance to recent archival research, shows that he sides

with the totalitarians, and also indicates to the violent Bolshevik political ambitions. He explains the one - party state as “ arbitrary rule, administrative ultra-centralism, and philosophical amorality”. Lenin was not graspable as it was first thought, and the “ speculation that if Lenin had survived, a humanitarian order would have been established is hard to square with this garment of agreed principals of Bolshevism” (Service). Volkogonov was a reformed communist who held similar totalitarian beliefs of the red tape, sabotage, and bureaucracy that was commonly railed against by Lenin was infused through the system that he had created. People’s freedom, power, human rights were concepts deemed unnecessary (Volkogonov and Shukman 77-78). By Lenin, the “ party had become a state within a state, its dictatorship a fact... Party absolutism replaced tsarist autocracy. Democracy and civil rights became ‘ bourgeois manifestations’... [and]... human life a soulless statistical unit.” (Full Text of “ Facts on Communism”).

This continued till Stalin’s death. On top of that revisionism proved that a instead of a continuation the finalized Stalinist product was poles apart of the primary Leninist system. Reevaluating the Soviet experience Cohen concluded that the party had a considerable amount of change from 1917 to 1921 alone, in terms of composition, organizational structure, internal political life and outlook. Stalin’s party was thoroughly different from that of Lenin. For, “ if ideology could influence events, then it was also shaped and changed by it”, (Cohen). If Lenin was impacted by the Civil War, then Stalinist had gone through different stages of evolution as well. Stalinist ideology changed in essence and “ it did not represent the same movement

as that which took place in 1917" (" Full Text of " Facts on Communism"). Nationalism, conservatism, reactionism, and dogmatism was revived where as there was a switch in the prominence of proletariat to the leaders as creators of life. Cohen concluded that, " discontinuities were secondary to continuities." (" Full Text of " Facts on Communism"). Although in terms of political continuation the difference between both the terms is " quantitative, not qualitative" (" Full Text of " Facts on Communism"), and, as Cohen states " excess was Stalinism" (Cohen), is what differentiates between the two. The extent to which they differed not the manner in which they differ. Essentially, " the basic elements of the Stalinist regime were all in place by 1924", Stalin simply prolonged it to feed his own personal satisfaction (Full Text of " Facts on Communism). Continuous and discontinuous can be found both economically and politically but it is risky to jump to a conclusion like the Soviets stating that no link was there between Stalin and Lenin or enforcing the fact that no difference is there between the two. It is vital for one to see and understand the link between the two regimes. Had precedents of economical and political nature not existed terrors such as those witnessed during Stalin's time would not have existed. Conquest derives that Stalinism did not emerge from nothingness, " like any other historical phenomenon, it had roots in the past", but it would be deluding to state like Solzhenitsyn who claimed that a direct chain of events led to Stalin (The Great Terror: A Reassessment). The terror of Stalinist made an impact on history and led to plain simple human barbarity which inhabits mankind. The Mongols, Ivan the Terrible, and many other dictators used Lenin's " Logic of the axe" (Volkogonov). Although there is a similarity between the Cheka of 1918 and the NKVD of the 1930's, the core difference between Lenin and Stalin was

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the extent of how far either would go. As evidence has it, majority agrees to the fact that Stalin took things further, both hold records showing that they had killed but “ Lenin did not kill fellow Communists, and Stalin did so on a massive scale”; Lenin spoke of collectivization whereas Stalin implemented it, Lenin commented over the bureaucratic red tape, whereas Stalin wrapped the USSR in it. (Pipes a Concise History of the Russian Revolution)