



Stalin's 'Holy War' Against Communism

That Stalin destroyed the Marxist core of the Bolshevik Revolutionary program is a given. One has only to note his murder of all prominent communists unless they were fortunate enough to die before he could get to them. But important elements of the historical events need to be sorted out and discussed: Was he a power mad bad Marxist, or was Stalin merely an opportunist – a more or less fraud from the beginning with respect to Marxism – in either case it is critically important to understand how he was able to bring his plotting to a successful conclusion.

An opportunist, as it is used here in the political sense, is one who attaches himself to a movement or person primarily for personal gain and not for the declared goals of the organization or individual. Gain may be of a material sort, relate to one's reputation, or the experience of having power over the multitude.

Stalin was born into misery, the son of impoverished Georgian former serfs, and with no hope of gaining much more from Russian Tsardom than he already had. His father was a cobbler who at the time of Stalin's birth is said to have had a shop employing ten workers. If true it means that Stalin was born into a very low rung of the petite bourgeoisie. In any case it didn't last, the shop failed and his drunkard father left to work elsewhere and had little contact with his family thereafter. His extremely religious mother was a washerwoman who arranged to have her son attend an orthodox school. Stalin had an entirely ecclesiastical education until he quit or was expelled from a seminary for failing to take the final exam. How much he learned of a religious nature is unknown but the way the seminary managed the conduct of its pupils no doubt influenced how Stalin was able to maneuver his way to power.

Students were only allowed two hours a day outside the seminary. Rooms were regularly searched by the monks and students were encouraged to report infractions to the staff. According to later reminiscences of his fellow seminarians, the institution taught Stalin how to advance his interests through squealing and backstabbing. In one instance, shortly before he left, Stalin planted revolutionary leaflets in the rooms of students who refused to join a political organization that he was involved in. They were expelled, but since he was on his way out anyway, Stalin graciously confessed to being the culprit.

Stalin once in power had his entire life re-written. Having access to Tsarist records meant that he could have them destroyed, altered, or even have forgeries made for the purpose of being discovered and exposed, thus making genuine ones more difficult to accept. Official accounts of the years immediately after he left the seminary have him rapidly rising to the upper echelon of the Georgian communist movement. Independent evidence shows him to be more of a foot

soldier involved in activities closer to those of a common criminal than a revolutionary political activist.

Following the defeat of the 1905 revolution funds for party activities were severely curtailed. It was proposed that extralegal means be used to obtain what was necessary to maintain the party base. The Mensheviks and many Bolsheviks opposed the suggestion because it violated party principles and risked bringing discredit if discovered. Lenin gave it the okay though he later reversed his approval. In the interim several actions in Georgia against state entities were staged – the most sensational an attack on a Tsarist armored car transferring rubles. Many sources have Stalin recruiting a gang and planning the operation, though of course he observed while others performed. This would make Stalin's first contribution to the party center the shipments of stolen cash and securities.

But the key question remains: How did this shrewd, power mad mediocrity manage to worm his way to the top? Did slander, squealing and frame-up follow the seminarian in his next career move? Devoted anti-communist Roman Brackman in his *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin* has the disappearance of practically everyone in the party hierarchy immediately above him the work of Stalin as an Okhrana (Russian political police) agent. The Okhrana had a policy of recruiting political prisoner to work for them. After the revolution the names of many spies that served in the upper echelon of the party were revealed. Once in power Stalin would have had the files cleansed of any incriminating documents, if they existed, but some still may have been rescued during the chaotic early years. The most notorious document tying Stalin to the Okhrana is the Eremin Letter that made its Life Magazine appearance in the 50's.

The document purports to be a report from one Okhrana chief to another which, among other things, states that Stalin was recruited following an arrest in 1906. The 'Letter' contains so many flaws that it is certainly a forgery. To make it even more dubious, it was ceremoniously donated to the Tolstoy Foundation in New York where it promptly disappeared from the bank in which it was kept for safekeeping. Soviet records in 1935 and 1939 listed, respectively, 6 and 8 Tsarist arrests of Stalin, but none in 1906. When Trotsky was murdered in 1940 by a Stalin agent he was working on a biography of the man – *Stalin: An Appraisal*. The book was later published with Trotsky's completed chapters and the edited material Trotsky had gathered for the remainder of the work. Within the timeline for Stalin's life Trotsky had for 1906: *April 15, Stalin arrested and released in a raid on the Avlabar Printing Plant*.

The Avlabar plant was a secret operation for printing revolutionary material, storing weapons, and manufacturing explosives. It had been set up by the Mensheviks. When the two factions reunited at the time of the 1905 uprising the Georgian Mensheviks, by far the more numerous communists in the region, were ordered to permit the use of their facilities by the Bolsheviks. One visit by Stalin and a vital base of operations and 24 comrades were put out of commission. Some historians believe Stalin told the authorities of Avlabar on March 29 but the Okhrana postponed the raid until Stalin could attend and report on a high party

meeting in Stockholm, and then return for a demonstration arrest April 15. Trotsky's timeline suggests an immediate release.

Trotsky's well known extreme dislike of Stalin sometimes led to a very strained objectivity. In 1907 Stalin attended the 5th party congress in London, but there is no evidence of his participation. What did he come for? "*He must have had other tasks. What were they?*" Perhaps the answer is the mass arrests of those who had attended the congress once they entered Russia. But there were many spies that rose into the upper echelon of the party. One such was the Pole Malinovsky. Lenin was his strong supporter even when many others distrusted him. Perhaps Malinovsky being one of the few (perhaps only) members of the working class playing a leading role in the party at the time made Lenin more trusting. But it also might be because he needed all the support he could find. It's a myth that Lenin simply handed out orders to his loyal minions. Marxism is based on a critique of society, and that same acceptance of criticism in order to get things right governs its political organizations. Everything had to be fought for and Lenin lost his share of the votes. Spies make very good opportunists and Malinovsky was never found out until after the revolution.

Stalin, even though more of a lumpen-proletariat, is paired with Malinovsky in a number of biographies. Brackman even has him maneuvering within the Okhrana to take his job. But the upwardly mobile Stalin had more success in the extremely centralized bureaucracy of the party. He worked his way up by way of devoted loyalty to Lenin and the willingness to take on the less exalted task of organizational work within the bureaucracy. So he toiled up from gruntwork in the provinces – eliminating many comrades that impeded his ascent by slander, or revealing their identity, either personally incognito or through the Okhrana. By 1920 he was a member of the Central Committee and the more exclusive Politburo, but perhaps the key to his quick seizure of power was his leadership of the Central Control Commission – the organization entrusted with maintaining party discipline. What a perfect job for Stalin! Officially he was its chairman from 1920 – 1923, but Trotsky in his *Appraisal* says he was secretly made its boss at the 1921-1922 11th party congress, which suggests that those that followed as chairman were closer to figureheads.

The big lie broadcast by the bourgeois intelligentsia is that there is something innately evil in Marxism and communism that inevitably produces a Stalin. But there is certainly enough known about Stalin's personal life history to make it fair to say that he was an inveterate opportunist – neither Marxism, the proletariat or the revolution overrode his personal drive to power, and the final acts personally witnessed by Trotsky prove the point.

History: The Revolution, October/November 1917 – The Civil War against invading armies and native counter revolutionaries 1918 to 1921, followed by the New Economic Program designed to revive a dead economic structure. Lenin became ill late in 1921 and had his first stroke May 1922. In conversations with Trotsky Lenin revealed his growing dissatisfaction with Stalin. Trotsky quotes him in 1922 – "This cook [Stalin] will prepare nothing but peppery dishes". Between that stroke and another the following year, Lenin had periods of

recovery. At worst he would communicate with notes and phone-grams, at best he could walk and speak normally.

Lenin clearly saw that the rapid increase in the power of the bureaucracy was a threat to worker-peasant based democratic rule. He had created the Rabkrin (workers and peasants inspectorate) to neutralize the corruption and threat of a bureaucratic dictatorship. In 1923 it was dismissed, Lenin calling it “worthless”. Rabkin’s boss – Stalin! (Jan 23, 1923 Lenin proposed the creation of a worker controlled commission as a check on bureaucratic domination.) Lenin concluded that his ever loyal comrade, Stalin, was a major threat to the building of communist society. He began public political criticism of Stalin for his persecution of nationalities, and for his position on the issue of foreign trade. On December 25, 1922 he prepared an address aimed at Stalin to be read at the next party congress. His secretary told people it was a “bombshell against Stalin.”

Stalin had his informers among those tending to Lenin’s needs and became aware that Lenin’s address was aimed at denying his succession as leader of the Bolsheviks. He did all he could to isolate him, using his feigned concern for his health as a cover. But he had a major problem with Krupskya who disliked Stalin and was zealously working to keep her husband informed. Those efforts created an incident in which Stalin rudely dismissed Krupskya. When Lenin learned of the incident he sent a letter to Stalin stating that henceforth he was breaking off all personal relations with him. Krupskya told Kamenev that it was intended “to crush Stalin politically.”

January 4, 1923 Lenin wrote an addendum to his party congress address stating that Stalin should be removed as General Secretary. Kamenev brought the news to Stalin who became enraged. He also showed Lenin’s document to the Central Committee. In the address Lenin described Trotsky as “the most gifted man in the present Central Committee”. It’s clear who Lenin was recommending as his successor.

Lenin suffered a medical setback in late February 1923. Shortly after, at a Politburo meeting that included Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev, Stalin arrived with some shocking news. He said Lenin wanted him to bring poison. Did Lenin really ask him for poison, and if he did, was he testing him? – Stalin was clearly losing Lenin’s trust. It’s would seem likely that Lenin did ask him because the others may well have gone to him for verification, but on the other hand, Stalin was on the ropes, getting desperate, he may have lied to the Politburo, gambling that they wouldn’t want to bring up such a touchy subject with Lenin, as a cover for a later action. Trotsky noted the “sickly smile” when Stalin informed them of Lenin’s request.

Trotsky and Lenin had the same doctor. Trotsky asked Dr. Guetier about Lenin’s condition – Was it so desperate? He was told that “He can recover...he has a strong constitution.” And as to his mental state – “Untouched.” Stalin said the “old man is suffering”, but they all eventually agreed that giving him poison was out of the question.

In the latter part of 1923 the Left Opposition was formed. Trotsky sent a letter to the Central Committee aimed at Stalin. It condemned his undermining of worker democracy. Many positions were being filled with appointees rather than going through an electoral process. In October a group of 46 prominent Bolsheviks sent a letter to the Central Committee criticizing Stalin for, in couched terms, of planning the aggrandizing of all power to himself.

According to Trotsky, Lenin's condition was much improved in late 1923 and early 1924 – he was able to speak and move around. Trotsky was ill shortly before Lenin's death. At Stalin's insistence he left Moscow to recuperate. He no sooner arrived at his destination when he was informed of Lenin's death. Stalin then told him that the funeral will be on Saturday, not giving Trotsky enough time to attend. In fact, the funeral was on Sunday. Had Trotsky not left Moscow, or returned as quickly as possible he would have intervened in a medical examination. As it was the viscera had been destroyed and the Stalin's selected doctors were mystified as to a cause of death. Furthermore, Trotsky not having attended the funeral was used against him.

Was Lenin's address read to the whole party congress shortly after his death? No. Stalin prevailed upon the leadership to have it read only to delegation leaders as they arrived for the congress. It must be said that the conduct of the 'good guys' was pretty pathetic at critical moments.

The rest is mostly a mop-up for Stalin. He had de facto control of the party and country in 1923 – the only barrier being Lenin himself. Following Stalin's systematic cleansing action, 75% of party members had joined after 1923. One of his favorite safety measures was to appoint the son's of the old bourgeoisie to bureaucratic posts. Trotsky told Smirnov in the Spring of 1924 that "Stalin will become dictator of the USSR." When Kamenev and Zinoviev broke with Stalin in 1925 they placed letters in safe places – "If we should perish suddenly, know that this is the work of Stalin's hands". As it happened, they were both publicly murdered by Stalin.

Trotsky had his own incident. Stalin used GPU agents as Trotsky's official bodyguard on a 1926 trip to the Caucasus. Fortunately he also brought his personal guards because a trolley 'accident' had been arranged for his demise. He later expressed mystification as to how so soon after the revolution "a party 2/3rds of whose Central Committee was made up of enemies of the people and agents of imperialism" could have replaced dedicated communists. Something on that issue will be in the next article.

Malinovsky was discovered as an Okhrana spy in 1918 and executed. One would have to be an absurdly hard determinist not to speculate on what might have been had Stalin been his partner before the firing squad.

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<http://pocs.us/>

pocs-us@gmx.com