Stalin Essay, Research Paper

Russian Revolution

The real revolution in Russia did not culminate in 1917 with the establishment of the Soviet state that became known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It came under the rule of Joseph Stalin in the late 1920 s and 1930 s. Many as the Russian Revolution refer to the two successful revolutions of 1917. The first revolution overthrew the autocratic imperial monarchy. It began with a revolt on February 23 to 27, 1917, according to the calendar then in use in Russia. The second revolution, which opened with the armed insurrection of October 24 and 25, Organized by the Bolshevik party against the provisional government, effected a change in all economic, political, and social relationships in Russian Society. When looking at the Russian Revolution it is easy to notice that it was not undertaken in one giant leap, but in little steps that were led by Joseph Stalin.

During the period before the October Revolution, Stalin was not, as he later claimed, Lenin s right-hand man. He played an important, but not vital, role in the revolution. Lenin worked most closely with Leon Trotsky in the Bolshevik takeover of the government. After Stalin became dictator of the Soviet Union, he had history books rewritten to say that he had led the revolution with Lenin.

Lenin became head of the new government after the revolution, and named Stalin commissar of nationalities. Within a few months, opposition to the new government developed in many parts of the country. Armed uprisings broke out and grew into a civil war. Stalin was active on the southern military front. In Stalin s version of history, he repeatedly corrected the mistakes of others. Stalin took credit for a victory at Tsaritsyn, the city later named Stalingrad. Actually, Stalin s military role there was exaggerated (Conquest 72-81).

During the civil war, the Russian Social Democratic Labor party was renamed the All-Russian Communist party. On April 4, 1922 Stalin received what was to be his key job. He became one of the five members of the newly formed Politburo, the policy-making body of the party s Central Committee elected Stalin as its general secretary (Conquest 96).

The evening of Stalin s arrival on the war scene Lenin told an audience of Bolsheviks and others (in what came to be called The April Thesis ) that peace would only be possible after the overthrow of capitalism (Conquest 63). The Bolsheviks won the civil war in 1920. They then began the task of rebuilding the war-torn country. At first, Lenin, and the others were unaware of Stalin s quiet potting. By the end of 1922, however, Stalin s growing power began to disturb Lenin. The two of them clashed repeatedly (Antonov-Ovseyenko 14). Before a series of strokes prevented Lenin from working, he wrote a secrete letter warning that Stalin must be removed as general secretary:

Stalin is too rude, and this defect, though quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communist, becomes intolerable in a General Secretary. This is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way to remove Stalin from that post and appoint another man who in all respects differs from Comrade Stalin in his superiority, that is, more loyal, more courteous, and more considerate of comrades, less capricious etc. (Conquest 101)

Lenin became seriously ill in 1922. On May 25, Lenin had his first stroke, which was followed by many more. A struggle for power developed among members of the Politburo, the policy-making body of the Communist party s Central Committee. Because of his illness, Lenin was unable to carry out his plan to remove Stalin. Lenin died 1924. (Conquest 96-8) The leading Bolsheviks finally learned of the secret letter warning against Stalin, but they ignored it. They accepted Stalin s promise that he would improve his behavior. Instead, Stalin continued to build his own power. He cleverly used his power to destroy his rivals. Stalin s power in the Communist party grew rapidly. As general secretary, he had the support of the local party secretaries, whose careers depended on his approval. Stalin built up this following carefully behind the scenes. In December, 1929, the party praised Stalin on his 50th birthday. He had become dictator (Daniels 314).

In 1928, Stalin started the first of the Soviet Union s five-year plans for economic development. The government began to eliminate private businesses. Production of industrial machinery and farm equipment became more important, and production of clothing and household goods was neglected (Antonov-Ovseyenko 104).

In 1929, Stalin began to collectivize Soviet agriculture. He ended private farming and transferred the control of farms, farm equipment, and livestock to the government. But the farmers resisted his order and destroyed about half of the U.S.S.R. s livestock and much of its produce. As punishment, Stalin sent about a million families into exile (Tucker 129). The destruction of livestock and grain caused widespread starvation. The economy moved forward, but at the cost of millions of lives.

During the 1930 s, Stalin adopted a policy of Russification. The minority nationalities in the Soviet Union were subjected to increasingly strict control by the government. In 1939, the Soviet Union seized a large part of Poland. In 1940, Soviet troops invaded the Baltic countries. This Siberian area, three hundred miles up the River Ob from Tomsk , was at that time a leading center for political deportees. Nearly 200,000 peasants were deported into its swamplands on Stalin s orders and most of them perished (Conquest 51). Stalin tried to destroy the middle classes in these countries. He set up Communist governments and joined them to the Soviet Union.

Under the czars, the Russian secret police had often arrested revolutionists and sent them into exile without trial. Stalin set up a police system that was far more terrible. Millions of people were executed or sent to labor camps. Stalin also turned over many industries to the secrete police, who forced prisoners to work for them. Fear spread through the U.S.S.R. as neighbors were ordered to spy on each other. The government broke up families and urged children to inform on their parents to the police (Myron Rush).

In 1935, Stalin started an elimination of most of the old Bolsheviks associated with Lenin. During the next few years, he killed anyone who might have threatened his power. He even killed a friend who wrote a poem attacking Stalin (Conquest 187-8). He also executed thousands of other Communist party members, including the chiefs and countless officers or the Soviet army. Stalin achieved his purpose. When he decided to cooperate with the Germans dictator Adolph Hitler in 1939, there was no one left to oppose his policies. Even when the Soviet Union later suffered terrible military defeats from Hitler s army, no opposition to Stalin was possible.

After World War II ended in 1945, Leverti P. Bernia, chief of the secrete police, became a leading figure in Stalin s government. Police control grew tighter. The bloody executions went on, but in secrete rather than public. No one was safe. Even Politburo members and Communist leaders were executed . Anti- Semitism, which had been encouraged by Stalin during the 1930 s was now being practiced throughout the century (Daniels 293).

“By the late 1930 s, Adolph Hitler was ready to conquer Europe, the astonishing speed of the German blitzkrieg was a surprise in Moscow as well as in London and Paris. Hitler had demonstrated that he had a first-class military machine” (Conquest 22). Soviet leaders bargained unsuccessfully with the French and the British for a defense agreement against Germany. Then, on August 23, 1939, the U.S.S.R. and Germany suddenly signed a treaty agreeing not only to Non-Aggression but also friendship. In a secrete part of the treaty, Stalin and Hitler also agreed to divide Poland between themselves (Tucker 133).

On September 1, 1939, German troops marched into Poland. On September 3, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. World War II had begun. Germany quickly conquered western Poland, and the Soviet Union seized the eastern part. On September 28, Germany and the U.S.S.R. signed a treaty, which set the boundaries for the division of Poland. The Soviet Union invaded Finland on November 30, 1939, and, after a bitter struggle, took a large portion of that country (Tucker 133).

Through the leadership of Stalin, Russia went threw a revolution throughout the late 1920 s and early 1930 s. After Stalin s rule in Russia was put to an end, Russia did not immediately replace Stalin. A collective leadership made up of several men ruled the Soviet Union, but thankfully never as harshly as Stalin had.

Bibliography

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