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Socialism in One Country: A Study of
Pragmatism and Ideology in the Soviet
1920s.

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Introduction

'The History of all Hitherto Existing Society is the History of Class Struggles.'¹ - Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

The period which existed between the establishment of the Bolshevik-led Republic in 1917 and Stalin's assumption of complete power in the late 1920s has been a focus of historical interest for decades. In this time the Soviet narrative began and what was once the Bolshevik dream would become twisted by events, bureaucracy, and personalities. The task of applying Marxian socialism to the Russia of 1917 would involve a colossal undertaking. Russia was a vast nation which contained a largely peasant population and, by contrast, a small and underdeveloped working class. The belief that Russia could be the first to try to build socialism, a path more befitting the industrialised west, inexorably led to a great many difficulties.

The ferment of revolutionary feeling prior to the Bolshevik takeover can be attributed to a general disenchantment with the Tsarist Imperial administration, and the weak Provisional Government which came to replace it, which had shared its power alongside the Workers' Soviets. Furthermore, the First World War, a conflict on a scale which had never been experienced quite so profoundly by all sectors of society, had brought such a sense of anguish to the masses that the Bolsheviks were able to capitalise on their unique opportunity. However, the processes of industrialisation had not expanded to a position where a socialist revolution was ripe; the means of production had not developed enough by this stage. Despite this, it has nevertheless been said that there was something admirable about the sheer daring of the venture. Indeed, writing from her prison cell in 1918 Germany, Rosa Luxemburg had stated in her piece *The Russian Revolution* that 'Lenin and

¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, Pluto Press, 2008 , originally published in 1848) P.33

Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: "I have dared!"²

Robert V. Daniels has written that 'the successful proletarian revolution in Russia proved Marx wrong by showing that socialism could win without previous industrial capitalism. But if Marx's predictions cannot be relied upon, with what assurance can the revolution be described as "proletarian?"'³ Clearly, this was a *Bolshevik* revolution rather than an orthodox socialist one. The ideology of the state would undergo enormous shifts in the coming years as a result of certain events. How Marxist theory could be applied would shift according to the needs of those in power. Even from the premise no 'workers' state' truly existed. It was, nevertheless, necessary for propaganda purposes to proclaim that that it did.⁴

Bolshevik policy, upon seizure of power, had associated itself with the concept of internationalism. The principle was that the revolution should only begin in Russia and that the western nations would, in consequence, revolt as well. The economic aid that western Europe was expected to donate to their Russian partners was crucial. This was especially true for Trotsky who, in his original capacity, could not imagine any other course of action other than his 'permanent revolution,' as first set out in *Results and Prospects* (1906).⁵ In the years which followed the First World War, the western nations mainly stabilised. In consequence, the regime had to abandon expectations of further insurrection taking place in the short term. The single revolutionary 'workers' state' became isolated. This raised the question of whether a country could attempt to reach socialism alone. The Russian situation, primarily the backwardness of her industrial development, was another pertinent issue to be considered. Another line from Rosa Luxemburg's *The Russian Revolution* aptly summarised the

²R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1961, *The Russian Revolution* was originally published in 1918), p.80 - Ulrich von Hutten was a German knight and reformist in the 16th Century. He supported the Lutheran reformation, and had attempted to enforce it by a popular crusade.

³ R.V. Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism Volume 1 Communism in Russia* (London, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1985), p.xxvii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xxvii.

⁵ See L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York, Pathfinder, 1969, *Results and Prospects* was originally published in 1906)

situation, at least from an outside perspective: 'In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia.'⁶

Leon Trotsky, in an article in *Pravda* of May 1922 compared the Soviet Union to a 'besieged fortress,' stating that during such a time of political and economic isolation from the rest of the world, it was necessary for the state to ensure unity at any cost.⁷ The political structures which developed had ensured the dominance of the Bolsheviks as the only legitimate party. A level of naivety existed in their actions, as well as authoritarian tendencies. Early policies such as 'War Communism' had been carried out in a callous manner, with scant regard for the human cost. 'The descent into chaos' which ensued, the excesses and trespasses into human life, had introduced a framework which could be described as a 'Partocracy'.⁸

In 1921 the New Economic Policy was introduced. Whether this was a retreat on the same lines as the Brest-Livotsk treaty of 1918, (which withdrew the Bolsheviks from the war against the Central Powers), or more a pragmatic manoeuvre, is a question which shall be explored. However, in Lenin's last years of control, the party would go on to solidify its monopoly of power. With such events as the Social Revolutionary trials of 1922, the state had completed its path towards authoritarianism. It has been argued that the manner in which events which were outside of the Bolshevik's control had brought this on. The idea being that Lenin had to operate in a difficult climate and had to enforce the one-party state as a temporary measure to ensure the survival of the regime. This would ultimately lead us to the conclusion that such concepts as 'Workers' Democracy' reflected his original intentions, if the situation had not dictated otherwise.⁹ Of course, historians who take ideology as a primary factor in the way that the early Soviet Republic developed, have commented

⁶ Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism or Marxism?* p.80.

⁷ I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed Trotsky: 1921-1929* (London, Oxford University Press, 1959), p.29.

⁸ M. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of the Soviet Union 1917-1991* (New York, The Free Press, 1995), p.111. & pp.137-138.

⁹ See M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (London, Pluto Press, 1973)

on the economic 'retreat' of introducing NEP being countered with political tightening.¹⁰ This would explain why Lenin had dealt with his political opponents in this time in such a brutal fashion.

With Lenin's departure from leadership, due to a series of strokes, the disunity of the leadership had begun to unravel. As will be discussed in the course of this dissertation, Stalin had been able to secure a large number of positions in the state apparatus. His domination of the bureaucracy became a crucial factor. Through such organs as the Secretariat he had been able to manipulate the Party Congresses, so that the overwhelming majority of voting delegates came in line with the leadership, regardless of where the party cells placed their allegiance. This had been of enormous importance in the conflict with Trotsky's opposition.¹¹

When Trotsky introduced the 'New Course' (1923), a criticism of the inflated bureaucracy and the excesses which had formed as a result of this, a debate began which would see Stalin enter the field of theory himself, with such works as *The Foundations of Leninism* (1924). With Lenin's death, Stalin was able to interpret freely many of the former master's ideas and twist them in such a way that he could use them to back up any attack. In the fight against 'Trotskyism', the idea of 'socialism in one country' came about. Initially, the idea of economic development within isolated circumstances was conceptualised by Nikolai Bukharin, but it would later be mentioned in a pamphlet by Stalin, *The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists* (1924).¹²

To ascertain how it was that Stalin was able to take a few lines of Lenin's previous works and transform them in such a way as to develop his own body of ideas is crucial in understanding the discourse of events in the 1920s. The course of this work will therefore examine both the context in which 'socialism of one country' was conceived, and its relative value in practice. It is easy to espouse the view that his theory was 'a mere smoke-screen for a clash of personal ambitions.'¹³ As

¹⁰ See A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* (California, Stanford University Press, 1995)

¹¹ J.F. Hough and M. Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1979), pp.129-132.

¹² E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country* Volume 2 (London, Macmillan, 1970), p.49.

¹³ I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (London, Oxford University Press, 1949), p.287.

Isaac Deutscher, in his political biography *Stalin* reminds us, 'No doubt the personal rivalries were a strong element in it. But the historian who reduced the whole matter to that would commit a blatant mistake.'¹⁴ Indeed, as much as it could be argued that the whole matter was simply to attack Trotsky's 'permanent revolution' as a counter-thesis of sorts, it had other properties. 'Socialism in one country' was an attempt by Stalin to formulate his own theory, and pander to the nation's tired and frustrated situation.

Of course, Bukharin's view of building socialism in Russia alone was far more geared towards slow and considered development. By utilising NEP, the state could take a path towards socialism which would not have the disastrous outcomes which had become associated with 'War Communism'.¹⁵ It will strike the reader that, for all the caution that Stalin would decree in the mid-1920s, he ultimately embarked on the 'revolution from above' and the 'great break.' The main reasons why this had occurred is the topic for the last chapter of this dissertation. Suffice it is to say, the impact of varying political and socio-economic crises, which occurred from 1926 onwards, had a fundamental effect on the regime and upon those who ruled it.

As Leonard Schapiro wrote in the introduction of *The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union*, 'Many pitfalls await the student of Soviet government. Not least is the problem of sources.'¹⁶ This statement quite succinctly bring across one of the issues of historiography in the study of the Soviet Union - the availability of sources. Across the decades since the 1920s, the release of certain documents at various moments of Soviet history has allowed for ever more well-grounded pieces to emerge. From such movements as Khrushchev's thaw, *Samizdat*, Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* more documents hidden away in state archives have come to light. One of the most significant events to bring on the declassification of materials was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since this date, many researchers have taken the opportunity to bring together hitherto

¹⁴ Ibid., p.287.

¹⁵ See S.F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York, Knopf, 1973)

¹⁶ L. Schapiro, *The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union* (London, Hutchinson & Co Ltd, 1973), p.11.

unseen documents which have, in consequence, fundamentally changed much of our understanding of the Soviet Union.¹⁷

The literature on the Soviet Union is vast. In respect to western works on the topic, writing has progressed in waves. The traditional liberal school of thought is characterised by the assessment that the October Revolution was not, like the Soviet historians claimed, a blazing trail which had been set out for the rest of humanity. As opposed to a class struggle which had come to its apex when the revolution began, as Edward Acton has written, 'they see the revolution as fortuitous, arising from the coincidence of catastrophic war, abysmal monarchist leadership and liberal ineptitude In a country which had only recently begun to move towards liberal democracy.' Far from the Bolsheviks representing the true will of the Russian people, they had instead manipulated an unstable situation.¹⁸ The 'libertarian' school, associated with writers of the far left, takes the view of both a triumph and a tragedy. 1917 was a genuine, proletarian revolution, which had swept away the monarchy as well as the Provisional Government. The issue ultimately was not with the revolution, but with the Bolsheviks. The reversion to coercive measures, and the attacks which ensued on political enemies, such as the Kronstadt sailors, had betrayed the cause. Such events of suppression paved the way for Stalinism.¹⁹ In the 1960s, in the midst of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation, historiography had taken on a far more optimistic outlook, which decidedly dissociated the original Leninist principles from Stalinism.²⁰ Since this time there has been revisionism based on greater empirical data becoming available, as well as reassertions of the primacy of ideology. It is intended that the historiography will be reflected in the course of this dissertation.

As well as a wealth of literature, this dissertation will utilise many of the primary sources which are available. This will involve a study into a number of the works which were produced and publically released in this time. The number of pieces which were written by Bolshevik Party members was

¹⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.ix.

¹⁸ E. Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London, Edward Arnold, 1990), p.35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

²⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, pp.10-11.

enormous. While only a fraction can be covered here, it is intended that a selection of the more major material can be touched on. Indeed, every academic will see the same source in a different way to the next, and so while these works have been available for a long time, a fresh examination will only make for interesting debate. Of course, further enlightening material has been available in recent years. Depositories of notes, letters etc. which were not available until a relatively short while ago, have added richness to our perspective. So in addition to the abundance of material which was available from the time, material from such outlets as 'The Annals of Communism' series will be utilised in broadening perspective and enriching debate.²¹

This dissertation goes into many of the core discussions which surrounded the Soviet experience of the 1920s. The challenges which were faced by the Bolsheviks were significant and would become exacerbated by the dogma of an ideologically driven one-party authoritarian regime. Therefore, in the first chapter the theme of 'War Communism' will be approached, along with the social and economic fallouts which stemmed from this. In the second chapter, the topic will be geared towards the events which came as a result of NEP – the ideological retreat but economic saviour. This is alongside the considerations of tightening state controls and repression in political thought. The third chapter will begin from Lenin's departure, and the concerns which ensued as a direct result of this. Stalin's thought and the general thesis of 'socialism in one country' is what will be discussed in the fourth chapter. In the fifth and final chapter, as previously mentioned, there will be an investigation into the last years of the decade – the culmination of the previous factors which became entangled with new crises. Apart from having an interest in the first decade of the Bolshevik regime and understanding its role in Soviet (and indeed, world) history, the reason for this dissertation's creation is to revisit some of the debates and by extension, the period as a whole.

²¹ 'Annals of Communism' works to be used include R. Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996); L.T. Lih, et al (eds.), *Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925-1936* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995); L. Viola, et al (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005)

I: War Communism.

'On s'engage - on voit'²² – Join battle - and see what happens.

It is first necessary to expand upon the early years of the regime if one is to address the topic of Stalin's rise and the subsequent major events of the 1920s. In doing so, many of the core arguments and key historiographical debates come to light. These ultimately serve to explain some of the fundamental questions which surrounds Stalinism, and indeed the development of 'socialism in one country' as a theory. Of those events surrounding the revolution until Lenin's death, it would be fair to say that the Russian Civil War, alongside the state policies of 'War Communism,' and later the New Economic Policy, take the forefront. While the military aspects of the Russian Civil War do not fall necessarily within the scope of this dissertation, the events and strains had a tangible impact on policy. The intention of this chapter, then, is to briefly approach a number of the key arguments surrounding the advent of 'War Communism' as a policy and its immediate consequences. The policies employed by the state ultimately culminated in intense civil unrest and would see the introduction of the New Economic Policy which will be covered in the next chapter.

Vladimir Lenin was undoubtedly the dominant character in the Bolshevik Party until his degenerative illness struck in 1921. While other players had gained increasingly prominent roles in the early years of the 1920s, Lenin was, until his final debilitating stroke in March 1923, the lord and master of the party. Born into the nobility in 1870,²³ Vladimir Ilyich Ulanov turned towards radical politics during the 1890s.²⁴ From the turn of the century, Lenin had begun to achieve theoretical independence from Plekhanov,²⁵ the founder of the Russian Social-Democratic movement, and had advocated doctrinal practices which were out of favour with many of the contemporary socialist thinkers.

²² Daniels (ed.) *A Documentary History of Communism*, p.154. - This was a relatively common phrase in the early years of the regime. Ostensibly coined by Napoleon Bonaparte, it shows the daring yet cavalier spirit of the Bolsheviks upon their seizure of power.

²³ Pipes (ed.) *The Unknown Lenin*, p.19. - While he never identified with his noble roots, there is some irony that a document exists which certified this status.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²⁵ J. Frankel, 'Lenin's Doctrinal Revolution of April 1917,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (1969), p.117.

Indeed, the position he held towards core Marxian values had not been orthodox. The common Marxist principles of 'historical materialism' and 'the economy as key determinant of the political superstructure of state' were turned on their head. To Lenin, politics was always the greatest factor. This blatant contradiction to classical Marxism was further stretched by Lenin's belief that the ripening of capitalist development was not so much measured on levels of production, but class antagonism.²⁶

Andrzej Walicki, a Polish intellectual historian, posited that while Lenin shared the same disregard for the workers' plight as Karl Marx, he had a Russian populist streak in him, even if he would not care to admit it (not of the traditional Russian populist ideology, which had been geared towards securing basic welfare for the ordinary citizen as a matter of priority, but rather the flagrant disregard for the law which came part and parcel with the radical groups of the 19th century.) He had attacked many of the western delegates of the Second International for their lack of will to act outside the laws of their bourgeois societies.²⁷ It could be argued that this pattern of thought was something of a root for future authoritarianism, and a key developer in the structures of 'War Communism.'

Within his own party Lenin was not one to suffer any form of insubordination. His very stubborn position had been one of the fundamental reasons for the 1903 Social Democratic Party split. *What is to be Done* (1902) had stipulated the importance of discipline at any cost within the party, and that hierarchy was to be followed. Walicki speculated that this may have been a conscious move towards the dictatorship which was to follow.²⁸ Only a professional cadre at the top of the chain would be allowed the freedom of deciding policy, formed of a *vanguard* of professional revolutionaries. All cells would be subservient, with very little room for developing thought of their

²⁶ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.274.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.288-291. & pp.301-302.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.302.

own.²⁹ While Julius Martov, leader of what would become the Menshevik party after the 1903 Social Democrat split, had agreed that a professional cadre be allowed in a central position, he had also advocated the creation of a larger scale working-class party which would have similarities with the German Social Democrats.³⁰

The Mensheviks had been left behind and had arguably become just as much an enemy of Lenin's Bolsheviks as the Tsarist regime it was trying to undermine. It has been argued that Lenin's own sense of narrow mindedness brought him to the conclusion that his own line was unquestionable. In defence of his actions at the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, taking the form of his work *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904), Lenin attacked the relative softer position of Martov and the Mensheviks. Again, the need for centralisation is asserted as Lenin clearly states that, 'In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation.'³¹ It is worth noting that Lenin had no quarrel in using deception after the Social Democrat split to misinform elements of their support base that it was the Mensheviks who had dissented.³²

Alexander Bogdanov was welcomed into the Bolshevik faction in 1904. He and Lenin had been close allies for a time, Bogdanov offering a wide variety of expertise and contacts, though this was not to last. In 1907 Bogdanov had shown his own independent flare, and thoroughly disdained the idea of 'party discipline.' Lenin had moved against him in short order, not only politically but on a theoretical level too. His *Materialism and Empiro-criticism* (1908), was a work which was primarily an attempt to destabilise Bogdanov's position as a philosopher – accusing him of philosophical idealism, and of distorting Marxism. In his criticism of Lenin's work, Bogdanov attacks authoritarianism, and how it had been appearing in the party.³³

²⁹ See V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (London, Penguin, 1989, originally published in Germany, 1902)

³⁰ V.N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October, Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987), p.1.

³¹ Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism* p.17.

³² Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp.306-307.

³³ Z.A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture, The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.6-8.

In addition to this, Bogdanov thought that Lenin had little regard for the class roots of his cadre of professionals. For a party which was meant to represent the proletariat, there was little in the way of direct representation. If we take this and combine it with the insistence of unrelenting central authority as first put forward in *What is to be Done?*, a startling conclusion can be reached; that there was no serious intention to allow the workers to reach their own cultural maturity. Bogdanov saw Lenin in the role of a vampire, willing to use the proletariat for his own gain, but without any intention of granting them privileges.³⁴ What is also crucial is that the possibility of philosophical heresy had incontestably come into being, even if its existence was unspoken. Discipline under Lenin meant that 'correct' and 'incorrect' lines existed in politics and philosophy in the party. Control was sought not only over party policy, but also over members' thoughts. After his brief time in the Bolshevik leadership, Alexander Bogdanov would leave with many like minded people.³⁵ A doctor of medicine by trade, Bogdanov held many talents. Perhaps, in the context of this discussion, the main points to remember him by are his participation in founding Proletkult (an experimental Soviet artistic institution), and his abstract and analogous science fiction novel *Red Star* (1908).

After the 1905 Revolution, Lenin had retained an outlook of pragmatism towards the coming revolution. According to Jonathan Frankel , 'he was determined to respect the concept of an orderly, stage-by-stage historical progression. His aim in the coming revolution, he explained, was not the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship nor the introduction of socialism.'³⁶ These down to Earth political rationales and a separation from utopianism and the anarchists had and, in Frankel's view, won him his central position in the Bolshevik party in 1905. While he had been appalled by the capitulation of many of the European delegates of the Second International to such ideas as

³⁴ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.316.

³⁵ Sochor, *Revolution and Culture*, p.8.

³⁶ Frankel, 'Lenin's Doctrinal Revolution of April 1917,' pp.122-123.

'defencism' and 'social chauvinism' at the beginning of the First World War, the core Bolshevik programme remained unaffected.³⁷

There were a number of key changes in Lenin's outlook between the turn of the century and 1917. As of 1914, he remained under the impression that grand revolution was an event which would occur far into the future, perhaps not even during his lifetime and certainly not by 1917. Alas, by 1917 we had a man who was willing to seize power when opportunity raised its head, rather than let the Provisional Government develop and bring Russia into the stage of capital development. By this point it is worth remembering that Lenin had departed from Social Democracy and had become in favour of achieving Communism, as set out by the 'April Theses' directives of 1917.³⁸

Accounting for the various *volte faces* in Lenin's thought from the outbreak of the First World War up until the point where the party was in a position to seize overall power from the Provisional Government come late 1917 can only be briefly commented on here. During Lenin's time in Switzerland, he had gradually changed from a line which involved a joint dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, to one where the latter would be discarded in the formation of governance. He took up and rejected various political lines as necessity and opportunity dictated. One of the tenets picked up with vigour during this time was internationalism in the context of the revolution which, in a limited capacity, brought him closer to Leon Trotsky and his 'permanent revolution'. Frankel aptly described the scene, 'the contradictions and complications which characterised Lenin's ideological pronouncements were so tangled, so labyrinthine, that the historian can only sympathise in retrospect with his Bolshevik comrades in their efforts to understand what he was saying and why.'³⁹

As this dissertation is geared towards 'socialism in one country,' it becomes necessary to make a few brief comments on the topic. Erik Van Ree, a professor at the University of Amsterdam and whose

³⁷ Ibid., pp.123-125.

³⁸ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.275.

³⁹ Frankel, 'Lenin's Doctrinal Revolution of April 1917' p.125., pp.129-130. & p.133.

current research goes into the topic of 'socialism in one country,' has written on the subject of Lenin's conception of the doctrine in the period 1915-1917. It is worth noting that the 'chain reaction' of revolutions had become an accepted format by 1917 (the idea that once socialist revolution sparked in Russia, it would soon spread across Europe). The general idea that within the confines of the backward, agrarian Russian state socialism could be never be constructed without foreign aid.

The contention made by Van Ree is that Lenin supported the establishment of socialism in Russia alone. This was only intended as a short term manoeuvre and only in the capacity for instigating further war and insurgency in other countries. This is opposed to Stalin's misinterpreted and engineered response, in later years, that this was meant to have been a longer term policy.

According to Van Ree, there is a crucial difference between Lenin and Trotsky by what Lenin meant by establishing socialism in Russia alone. Trotsky only ever thought that a socialist seizure of power was possible in Russia, and had come to think that Lenin agreed with his view. This was, according to Van Ree, mistaken. Lenin had, by the year 1917, come to believe that a socialist system could be constructed in Russia, in a short term context. The impact of the First World War, 'socialist militarism,' had led Lenin to conclude that with the assumed superiority of a socialist economy, the new state would be in a position where its superior armed forces and industry would allow it to expand against its weaker capitalist neighbours.⁴⁰

The reader should be reminded that the subject of Lenin's thoughts and manoeuvres before the revolution are not the primary concern of this dissertation. While this topic has been the centrepiece of an incredible array of literature, we are offered only the chance to comment on a rather superficial basis. The primary intention, beyond the capacity of providing a little backdrop to the revolutionary scene, is twofold. The first is to sketch a political portrait of Lenin as authoritarian and a breakaway from orthodox Marxism which would have ramifications as the Bolsheviks came to rule.

⁴⁰ E. Van Ree, 'Lenin's Conception of Socialism in One Country 1915-1917,' *Revolutionary Russia* 23 (December 2010), p.159., p.161. & pp.171-173.

The second is to allude to the idea of 'socialism in one country' having a potential root in this time. Stalin's thought in this period will be covered in the fourth chapter.

The October Revolution did indeed happen and the events that led up to the event such as Tsar Nicholas II's abdication in the February Revolution and the eight turbulent months of Provisional Government rule alongside the Soviets is well documented. It is in those exciting opening months of revolution where the gulf between idealism and what was practically realisable had begun to emerge. Indeed, Trotsky remembered seeing a note from Lenin which had ambitiously declared that the 'success of socialism' in Russia would take at least a few months. This is revealing as Trotsky would later recall that this had been 'no slip of the pen... *He believed what he said.*⁴¹ As well as taking on the enormous assumption that socialism could be built in Russia, this had been mixed with the assertion that such a task could be done on a timescale which would defy any logic. Of course, we should not discuss Lenin's assertion retrospectively. Being the first supposed workers' state, and being the first to embark on the road of socialism, this was enthusiasm which had not yet been tempered by reality.

The Russian Civil War, as is well known, ensued shortly after and had demanded a strong level of central organisation. The White Armies were formed from myriad factions, from anti-Bolshevik Monarchists, such as those under the command of Admiral Kolchak, to national movements most commonly associated with Denikin in the Ukraine. The point is that the soldiers of the White Guard were at different levels of organisation, with predominantly different aims and capabilities. One aspect they certainly lacked was a cohesion in overall grand strategy. While this acted primarily to the Red Army's advantage, this was countered to some degree by the fact that the Soviet Republic was also surrounded and essentially without an army itself.

While we shall not discuss the military strategies it took to overcome the enemy, suffice it is to say that one of the methods which was required took the form of an extremely tightly ran schedule,

⁴¹ Van Ree, 'Lenin's Conception of Socialism in One Country,' p.172.

with all the discipline one would expect from a professional army. Trotsky, as overall Commissar of the Red Army, had worked a fair share of miracles. As Geoffrey Swain, writer of the most recent profile of Trotsky's role in the revolution, has asserted that not only would the revolution have not been possible without Trotsky in the first place, in addition the regime would not have survived its first year without his skills. His genius at organisation, supply, discipline, and not to mention improvisation had quite literally prevented whole fronts from collapsing.⁴²

For as much as Isaac Deutscher would romanticise the image of Trotsky, there can be no denial that he got his hands dirty. Dmitri Volkogonov has explained many of such occasions in his-no-holds-barred biography, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*. To utilise a single brief example, let us take an incident in Vologda in August 1918. Trotsky had put forward the order to a commander whereby he personally ordained the utilisation of concentration camps, the shooting of shirkers and to disregard all past service when making judgements. Volkogonov has aptly described one of the major principles which had taken to the revolutionary field: 'Trotsky and the other leaders genuinely believed that they possessed the "revolutionary right" to determine the lives of millions of people.'⁴³ Ultimately, our interest extends to the effect this had on the mentality of the people in power. 'The conditions of civil war gave the rulers a taste for the unchallenged use of power and violence and instilled in them an indifference towards human life,'⁴⁴ states Michael Reiman at the beginning of his work, *The Birth of Stalinism*. This is a useful and valid insight into the future repercussions that such a string of events would have on the minds of a group for whom this formed their first tangible use of their new powerful position.

It is in the early months of the Civil War where the decision was made to embark on 'War Communism' as a state policy. In this period the historiography becomes rife with disagreement. Broadly speaking, there are two prominent lines of thought on the topic (each with varying sub-

⁴² G. Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution* (London, Routledge, 2014), pp.62-63 & pp.115-116.

⁴³ D. Volkogonov, *Trotsky: Eternal Revolutionary* (London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1997), p.213.

⁴⁴ M. Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987), p.1.

divisions). The first is generally characterised by the idea that 'War Communism' was intended as a method of reaching communism at breakneck speed. Walicki, Martin Malia and other historians fit into this category, driven by the belief of the supremacy of ideology, with the overarching thought that zeal had substituted for ability and temperance. Of course, the alternative view is essentially the reverse; the idea that 'War Communism' was a distinct break from the interim model and was a mechanism born out of necessity. This is held by the classical writers on the topic such as E.H Carr (who claimed that it was also the product of theory), Isaac Deutscher, and more recent writers, such as the late Moshe Lewin. According to Paul Craig Roberts, Adam Ulam is of the mind that it was a policy designed by Lenin in order to win over the workers. Roberts himself has provided the view that, from Lenin's writings of the period, he either genuinely thought, or was forced to believe, that this was the key to socialism.⁴⁵

Recognition should be given to certain events which followed the introduction of this policy to the sphere of civilian life, wherein laid the core tenets of 'War Communism.' With the creation of the Cheka, which was in essence the first incarnation of the secret police, any flirtation with draconian measures had ended and had been replaced by something far more sinister – the Red Terror.⁴⁶

Essentially, this consisted of the forced requisition of grain from the peasantry and the immediate and uncompensated confiscation of much of the nation's private property holders' wares and factories. When the plight of the Soviet situation is considered, coupled with the fact that its survival as a state hanged in the balance, the total mobilisation of absolutely all resources was justifiable, to an extent. However this was not going to be an easy affair. The level of violence which was used in the face of any disobedience was staggering, not that compliance automatically granted you exemption from it either. The violence and virtual asphyxiation of the peasantry was a price that had to be paid, with many poor souls left without even enough food to subsist, in order to see the cities and armies fed.

⁴⁵ P.C. Roberts, "'War Communism': A Re-Examination," *Slavic Review* 29 (June 1970), pp.244-5. & p.249.

⁴⁶ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.350.

It can be inferred from Walicki's writing that the bloodlust was essentially sanctioned, only because of Lenin's stance, in his view, that anything was acceptable, so long as it contributed to the end goal.⁴⁷ In a sense, much of this ethos is shared by prominent writers of the time. For instance Trotsky, of a similar misanthropic vein as Lenin, wrote a work, *Terrorism and Communism* (1920) which showed his complete lack of any moral scruples. The piece actively supports terror and intimidation for their efficiency in breaking the enemy's resolve. In this instance, the 'enemy' does not simply refer to sympathisers of the White opposition, but those who would resist the decrees in any way. Indeed, the usage of the term 'enemy' is fairly liberal. Rather than allow himself to be questioned on morality in this work, he would instead look to make the reader question their own. As a legitimate change of societal structures, from that of the old order to the dictatorship of the proletariat, is not anything allowed?⁴⁸

We must consider other sources too. Few are as revealing as those we can find in the 'Annals of Communism Series,' *The Unknown Lenin*, edited by Richard Pipes. Lenin, in January 1919 wired a message to Gregory Zinoviev with the message that:

According to Lunacharsky, Afansiev, Kormilitsyn, and other members of the Detskoe Selo Cheka have been charged with drunkenness, rape, and other similar crimes. I demand that all the accused be arrested, that no one be released, and that the names of all the special investigators be sent to me, because if those guilty are not exposed and shot in a case of this kind, then unheard-of shame will fall on the Petrograd Council of Commissars.⁴⁹

This is important to consider. It suggests *prima facie* that Lenin was against the excesses which had been committed and only advocated professional conduct. However, he would have almost certainly been aware of the magnitude of the excesses which had taken place, and thus was only interested in a case like this as it was in direct relation with the higher ranking personnel.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.303.

⁴⁸ See L. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism, A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1961, originally published in 1920)

⁴⁹ Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin*, p.61.

A further document from *The Unknown Lenin* is of importance, and certainly does little to hide Lenin's brutality. A letter to the Penza Communists, dating from August 1918, showed an extreme response towards a group of *Kulak* districts which had revolted:

The uprising of the five kulak districts should be mercilessly suppressed... one must give an example.

1. Hang (hang without fail, so the people see) no fewer than one hundred known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.
2. Publish their names.
3. Take from the all the grain.
4. Designate hostages...

Do it in such a way that for hundreds of versts around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout... they are strangling... to death... Find some truly hard people.⁵⁰

This advocacy of brutal measures should not be overlooked. Truly, the image of Lenin as a scornful man comes through here.

In the interests of accounting for other intellectual thought at the time, it is worth considering Nikolai Bukharin, a younger man and with a strong mind for theory, author of two works surrounding this topic. Firstly, *The ABC of Communism* (1920), written with Yevgeni Preobrazhensky. This was a relatively small work, but this was perhaps its greatest asset – accessibility. To the standard literate person of the time, it was understandable. In a triumphalist tone the capitalistic system is deplored as unsustainable and headed for eventual chaos and this is contrasted to the societal fairness that the communist future will bring. Perhaps the promise of human liberation from the shackles of class based hierarchy caused part of the piece's popularity with the rest of the leadership. There is another theme which can also account for this. The piece had blamed the contemporary grim set of affairs on the civil war and promised alleviation from this when victory inevitably comes. In a word, hope.⁵¹ A hope not only for the near future in the form of stabilisation, but a bright and idealistic outlook for the future in a way that common people could identify with.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.50.

⁵¹ See N. Bukharin and Y. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969, originally published in 1920)

The other prominent Bukharin piece of the time was *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period* (1920). It can be asserted that this piece was not as popular as the predecessor. The main aim was to be yet another explanation towards why the state of affairs had been so dire. As well as a discussion of the civil war burden, there was also a level of apologist sentiment for the internal struggle. An argument can be put forward that a further explanation was necessary beyond the ABC, as living conditions had still been plummeting and starvation had never been more commonplace. The standard ideological assertions are present in the text, that the only path to human salvation was through communism, and that the austerity would justify this end. The changes the society had to go through were structural and fundamental. 'Non-economic coercion' had to be applied as a midwife to help bring forth the next great society.⁵² These pieces in the Stalinist years would be left by the wayside as the utopian future envisaged could not have been further from reality. Nevertheless they give us a small insight into Bukharin's ability, even before his ideological shift, to champion the future New Economic Policy.

The years of intense Civil War and foreign intervention had arguably necessitated the extreme measures. As we approach 1921 however, the consequences of the previous actions had begun to catch up. Productive forces had been at an all-time low and even with the extraordinary measures, the food supply had been unreliable.⁵³ Arbitrary violence and atrocities had turned opinion decidedly against the state; the peasant 'bandits' were to be found across the entire country. Insurrections could be suppressed with terror but the system was undoubtedly headed for disaster. Richard Pipes has argued that the final lynchpin in ending 'War Communism' was the Kronstadt sailors' revolt.⁵⁴ Branded as 'counter-revolutionaries,' the sailors met a bloody end. Leonard Schapiro has pressed the case that the Kronstadt revolt was not a case of the classically revolutionary sailors being against the idea of revolution. The principle of a Soviet government had sat well with them; it

⁵² N. Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period* (London, Boston and Henley, Routledge 1979, originally published in 1920) pp.157-166.

⁵³ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919-1924* (London, Harvill Publishers, 1994) p.379.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.389.

was the fact that this government had been hijacked by a single party which had broken the law in order to retain its monopoly of political power which had forced them to rebel.⁵⁵ Indeed, this was not a dictatorship of the proletariat, it had swiftly become the dictatorship of the party.

In summary, the period of 'War Communism' has divided opinion. It has been said that the suppression of the market had been in the name of communist ideals since the start of the revolution.⁵⁶ Other takes include the idea that the original intention of the first few months of Soviet rule had been with the future intention of NEP, and that, as E.H. Carr concluded, 'War Communism' was a reaction to the outbreak of civil war.⁵⁷ Something of a theme exists in the reactionary camp that there was little connection between 'War Communism' and any Marxist inspiration. There is also significant reference to traditional Russian values coming through. While Richard Pipes is perhaps ambiguous in whether he believes 'War Communism' was a long term plan, he comments on how the period resembled the patrimony found in the medieval times.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ L. Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy, Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase 1917-1922* (Macmillan and the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1955), p.355.

⁵⁶ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.362.

⁵⁷ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* Volume 2 (London, Macmillan, 1978), p.270.

⁵⁸ R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (London, Harvill Publishers, 1991), p.673.

II: Lenin's Last Years.

'The Collapse of our Illusions.'⁵⁹ – Nikolai Bukharin

The course of events which led up to early 1921 had put the regime in danger. Civil unrest had become severe, and the furthering of 'War Communism' would be met with disastrous consequences. Additional burdens were taking form and could not be ignored, chief of which was the economy. To say it was in dire straits would be something of an understatement. Before the implementation of the New Economic Policy, industry was at a fifth of its pre-war figure, and were nothing done, would continue to worsen. In addition to the national income, which fell by two thirds, the coal mines now produced but a tenth of their pre-war output; worse still, the iron industry was down to one fortieth of previous production. The city populations were very low as well, with Petrograd at only one third of its pre-war size and Moscow at a half.⁶⁰ While it is difficult to get accurate figures for the total human cost of the first four years of Bolshevik rule, Richard Pipes has given realistic totals. The Red Army had suffered somewhere in the region of 700,000 casualties, while the total White losses were a little under this. Around 250,000 peasants, branded as 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'bandits', had been killed in various revolts and uprisings, in addition to some 2 million deaths due to epidemics, starvation, and the cold. A considerable number of people had emigrated during the turmoil too, and this must be considered in addition to the catastrophic losses of the First World War.⁶¹

Was the implementation of the NEP because of practical concern or was it merely a tool to save political power? Irrespective of the answer, there can be no denying that at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, Lenin had made it clear that socialism could only be built under one of two conditions: either one where the world socialist revolution had taken place; or, where an alliance

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.107.

⁶⁰ I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.4.

⁶¹ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, pp.138-139.

with the peasantry was sealed.⁶² While the likelihood of the former was not as low as it would later become, it could be considered folly to depend on its expediency when the west had already started showing serious signs of post-war stabilisation. The latter, then, was followed. To many this was a real sign that the revolution had, for all intents and purposes, ended. This chapter will examine a number of core factors which were prevalent throughout this period.. The discourse of affairs will run through to Lenin's final paralysis.

Was the introduction of NEP the move of a pragmatist? For many reasons this argument has validity. The 'Tax in Kind' (April, 1921), issued by Lenin, formed the quintessential announcement of NEP's introduction. In this piece there are a number of dominant points which require observation. The first is perhaps the simplest, but nevertheless captures the material outcome of the decree. Only the 'commanding heights' of: large industry, transportation, and communications, would remain under the control of the state. The 'tax in kind' would replace the 'surplus-appropriation' system. To move away from the jargon, this essentially meant that localised trade would replace the brutal acquisition methods of 'War Communism.' The second subject to note is that there is an amount of apologist sentiment for 'War Communism,' declared a necessity of the extreme circumstances that the country faced – starvation, war and ruin. Such a direct admission that events, rather than ideology, had driven policy could surely be considered a direct victory for the pragmatist camp. A view strengthened by two further points; the first, in which Lenin yielded to a localised revival in capitalism, and the second, which saw the condemnation of any communist who would be silly enough to prohibit trade in a nation primarily comprised of small producers.⁶³ The idea would be to channel localised capitalism into what would hopefully become 'state capitalism.' The fact that Lenin had emphasised that this approach was economically possible and moreover *necessary*, is worth some serious consideration, as state capitalism was to be the most advanced form of capitalism,

⁶² V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3 (New York, International Publishers, 1967), pp.399-437.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.593-607.

supposedly capable of rolling onto socialism with relative ease. As Moshe Lewin has written, facts would tear away at such an illusion.⁶⁴

However, the militant communist anger at the implementation of NEP can be understood. In a superficial way, the Engelsian feature of removing the market from a capitalist economy had been realised. This had long been a point of classical Marxism, as removing the market was the first bold step in replacing the capitalist system. The removal of the market was meant to be concurrent to an increase in productive forces. However, these productive forces had been in a severe state of regression. Instead of the removal of market forces leading to a direct transition to Communism, chaos had ensued.⁶⁵ The ideological shift was real enough however. To the empiricist, there was no progress towards building socialism beyond toppling the old order, but this is not how the ideologically devout had assessed the situation. On this point, it can be said that Andrzej Walicki does outmanoeuvre Moshe Lewin. While Lewin expressed that the NEP could not be considered a retreat, as no progress had actually been made in the first place, he may well have placed too much importance on purely economic factors.⁶⁶ The ideological regression had been significant.

While it is important to note that 'War Communism' had been, in an economic sense, a total disaster, Lenin would not place the blame with policy, and justified its necessity. Lenin later stated in his Testament, and in a number of other prior extracts, that a 'Lack of culture' among the proletariat had been prevalent.⁶⁷ The lack of culture is a moot point. How can a lack of culture be apparent in a class which in itself barely existed? Figures suggest that the quantity of the proletariat as a class at the time of revolution was only some 3 million.⁶⁸

This number is dwarfed by the peasantry further still when it is considered that a significant portion of this figure served in the Red Army and suffered its fair share of casualties in the civil war. A

⁶⁴ M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, p.26.

⁶⁵ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp.391.

⁶⁶ Ibid pp.391-2

⁶⁷ Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3, p.775.

⁶⁸ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, p.7.

sizeable number also abandoned the cities, post-demobilisation, in search of food. In the broader sense, it could be said that Lenin was deluded if he thought that enough of a proletariat existed to justify blaming their lack of culture for the ills of the regime. Conversely, in a narrower sense, he was correct in saying that a lack of skill, equipment and manpower existed in the factories.⁶⁹ Indeed, as Isaac Deutscher has pointed out, the civil war had not only stripped the working classes of much of their manpower, but the gentry and bourgeoisie had entirely vanished as a social class too. Only the peasantry had emerged unbroken.⁷⁰ This fact had led to the need to retain the *Smychka*, a core tenet of NEP - the bond between the countryside and city. According to E.H. Carr, Lenin had taken great pains to explain the necessity of this.⁷¹

The first year of NEP had been a relative success. While this must have been a relief to the common people in all sectors, with the food supply becoming re-established, and a notable recovery in the economy becoming quickly apparent, this had been sobering news to some. Economic successes via revived capitalism had shown the fallibility of ideology. Faced with the fact that for the time-being the Soviet Union would have to stand alone, NEP would have to suffice. While Bukharin and Lenin had both swung to some degree in favour of NEP, it has been posited that the former had overestimated the latter's enthusiasm for it.⁷² Certainly, Bukharin would come to champion NEP in later years, formulating a paradigm which some historians, primarily Stephen Cohen, would back as a far more practical and humane approach to the regime's survival than Stalinism.⁷³

When NEP was in its fledgling state, there is undeniable evidence that Lenin had been opposed to the principle. Indeed, to him the question was on the same lines as the treaty of Brest-Livotsk.⁷⁴ To not issue the economic relaxation would have provoked further hostility to the state, but it was, at

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.8.

⁷⁰ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, pp.6-7.

⁷¹ E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution From Lenin to Stalin 1917-1929* (London, Macmillan, 1979), p.47.

⁷² Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.393. & p.395.

⁷³ Nikolai Bukharin's political biography is Stephen F. Cohen's *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography 1888-1938* (New York, Knopf, 1973). There is an argument which has surrounded Bukharin and the argued Bukharinite alternative, as put forward more strongly in Cohen's *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), will be a topic for later discussion.

⁷⁴ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.391.

any rate, an undeniable concession. His vehemence is exemplified in a series of notes and letters in which he gives assurance that the retreat will soon be over. Other major characters, such as Gregory Zinoviev, had followed this line of thought. Even so, this is where we see such terms as 'Thermidor' begin to emerge; the situation in 1921 was compared to the overthrow of the French Jacobin revolutionaries in 1794. Having lost political and economical control of the country to more conservative elements, the French Robespierrians' cession of power had ultimately led to the restoration of the monarchy. Richard Pipes makes the case that this was no 'Thermidor'. Where the term implied a relinquishing of economic *and* political power, only the former was so. Political power had remained very much in the hands of the party.⁷⁵

Walicki has made a valid point in identifying that NEP is seen too much as a time of relaxation in western literature.⁷⁶ Indeed, at the Tenth Party Congress there had been two further resolutions. The first was the banning of all political factions which had hitherto been allowed to exist; the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. The second was the termination of any criticism towards state policy. An individual supposedly had the right to speak their mind before a decision had been passed, but could not criticise it once a party line was made.⁷⁷ This was the supposed meaning of 'democratic centralism,' a term which was ostensibly taken from Marx.

Pipes has talked extensively on Lenin and how combat was his true metier. With the failure of exporting Communism, a topic which will be touched on in the next chapter, and the failure of building socialism at home, he had focused his wrath on imagined foes. The clergy and other socialists had become the centre of his new campaign.⁷⁸ The view of Lenin as scornful, supported by Malia, Volkogonov and Walicki, goes against the idea of the rather classical, idealised interpretation of Lenin diverging from his radical ways and becoming a respectable statesman.

⁷⁵ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.369.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.308,

⁷⁷ Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3, pp.379-382.

⁷⁸ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.403.

Many Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries did, at first, return to Russia at the end of the war. So too did monarchists such as N.V. Ustrialov (whose later Slavophile tendencies would lead to him taking a dominant role in the creation of 'National Bolshevism'). Whereas the 'conservatives', amid those returning, had done so because they considered it their patriotic duty to help in the rebuilding of Russia, the hopes of the non-Bolshevik socialists had been set on the diminution of the militarised mind-sets of those in power (in essence, an optimism that the militant Communist aspirations would give way to a socialist democracy).⁷⁹ This had been the desire of many external observers, such as the revered German journalist and intellectual Karl Kautsky, who too was angered by the excesses committed by the Bolsheviks. While Julius Martov had ceased to be a significant political entity by this stage, the viewpoint of both himself and his followers is wonderfully described and juxtaposed with Lenin in Dmitri Volkogonov's biography of Lenin: 'People like Martov wanted the course of revolution to be like a river, peaceful, smooth and broad, while Lenin's followers saw it as a waterfall, cascading from on high.'⁸⁰

By the Ninth Party Congress, a rather modestly sized group named the 'Workers' Opposition' had emerged. Its agenda was focused not on the revolution but on the power behind it. They deplored the hegemony of the Bolsheviks, and moreover, the emergence of bureaucracy and the privileges associated with party membership. The question of bureaucracy is saved for the next chapter. Suffice it is to say here that their concerns had validity. An irony exists in that they were made the scapegoat for the agitation which had occurred amongst the masses in the early 1920s, when really this same agitation had been a key proponent in their movement's creation. They were also blamed for more direct displays of aggression, such as the Kronstadt mutiny. The Workers' Opposition obviously lacked the strength to take on the state, so, with the admission from their leader Shliapnikov that unity was necessary, they were disposed of. With the destruction of the Workers' Opposition and other similar events, like the Social Revolutionary trials, Lenin abandoned any notion

⁷⁹ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, pp.139-140.

⁸⁰ D. Volkogonov, *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), p.102.

that there was any democracy in his party.⁸¹ The repression of the workers, and their own supposed support base, made Bolshevik rule anything but a dictatorship of the proletariat. The true purpose of the Tenth Congress was arguably to detach the party from having to submit itself to popular will.

Leonard Schapiro has written on the topic of Lenin and his approach to government. In his view, an opportunity existed where he could have brought about a system which was based on true worker values, such as co-operation and legal order. The point that Schapiro makes here is that Lenin was no great statesman, and was obsessed with the revolutionary business of seizing and keeping power. During the civil war, the 'with us or against us' mentality had a validity, circumstances considered. Lashing out at the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and the Workers' Opposition, and lumping them together as 'counter-revolutionary' in 1921 was a simple lie.⁸² Additionally; Workers' Soviets never became political institutions where likeminded working people could genuinely discuss ideas. No one could speak out against the party.

An interesting counter-argument exists however. Moshe Lewin has insisted that the party's unfair dominance in the system was but a temporary measure, intended only to last as long as it took for the factory management to be strengthened. With this in mind, it must not be forgotten how far the primitive industrial base had been set back by seven years of war. Events tended to slip and deteriorate without many people being aware of the full situation, or what the consequences of their decisions would lead to. While Trotsky would later come to believe that the origins of dictatorship rested in the Bolshevik programmes of 1903-1904, Lewin disagrees. The dictatorship of party which overtook the dictatorship of the proletariat was, Lewin believed, not intended. It was a result of circumstances and could not be determined as Trotsky had written speculatively, however accurate it was, in *Our Political Tasks* (1904), on the topic of control substitution.⁸³

⁸¹ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p449 & p.454.

⁸² Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*, pp.360-361.

⁸³ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, pp.16-17.

Michael Bensley

While the period did not see a return of the red terror, the primacy of the Cheka in the state machine deserves a mention. While the overall reduction in its power may have been an ambition, their usefulness to single party state cannot be denied. Correspondence from Lenin to Dmitry Kursky, People's Commissar of Justice, in May 1922, indicates a liberal use of extreme charges including the death penalty. It is worth our time to examine one such letter:

Comrade Kursky,

Further to our conversation, I herewith enclose the draft of an article supplementary to the Criminal Code... The main idea will be clear... to put forward publicly a thesis that is correct in principle and politically (not only strictly juridical), which explains the *substance* of terror, its necessity and limits, and provides *justification* for it.

The courts must not ban terror - to promise that would be deception or self-deception - but must formulate the motives underlying it, legalise it as a principle, plainly, without any make-believe or embellishment. It must be formulated in the broadest possible manner, for only revolutionary law and revolutionary conscience can more or less determine the limits within which it should be applied.

With Communist Greetings,

Lenin.⁸⁴

One is hard-pressed to defend Lenin's scruples after considering this document. Those deemed culpable went beyond those who were corrupt or had been factional. It had reached the extent where even people deemed as assisting factionalists could be brought to 'justice'.

The idea that terror was primarily a defensive measure in this time is an understatement, and misconstrues the purpose of fear in this instance. In this regard, while the use of terror was not as unlimited as in the 'War Communism' years, it is difficult to defend Lenin as a man who shied away from aggressive force, even beyond a defensive capacity. It served an *educational* purpose; to teach that disobedience in any capacity would not be tolerated. As a further point, Walicki would claim that the basis of the Stalinist show trials began in this time.⁸⁵ This viewpoint is difficult to support

⁸⁴ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 33, August 1921 – March 1923 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965), pp.358-359.

⁸⁵ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp.352-353.

beyond its basic premise because, as Michael Reiman quite rightly indicates, the Social Revolutionary trials had little of the over dramatisation of the future affairs.⁸⁶

One of the core issues surrounding this time was the Bolshevik attitude towards the peasantry and the *Smychka*. However much the communists wished their state represented the proletariat, the sheer magnitude of the peasantry could not be denied. State capitalism had been intended to wean the peasantry off their small scale production and into more capitalised projects via the state co-operatives. There had been growing fears of a bourgeois revival in the form of the NEPmen, the name given to people who had become a part of the revived quasi-middle class. They had taken advantage of the economic circumstances, and were treated with caution and prejudice. A fear existed that these NEPmen could go on to form an alliance with the peasantry. In addition to the uneasiness which surround the NEPmen, the conspicuous role of the *kulak*, the well-to-do peasant, and the relative prosperity they were able to enjoy during NEP had not sat well with all in the party either.⁸⁷ The treatment of the populace and the state of economy will be dealt with in the fifth chapter. Suffice it is to say that the peasantry, the *kulak* and the NEPmen were all points of contention in the party, and all would go on to suffer at the end of the decade and into the thirties, (with the latter two being liquidated altogether).

The last major concerns of this chapter are in Lenin's last few months of active work and the events and postulations which took place therein. Lenin's health had been in decline for some time, and it became quite apparent by late 1921 that his capacity to work had significantly waned. It has been said that this was the first time that the members of the Politburo had gained a level of independence.⁸⁸ As of the end of the civil war, Stephen Cohen quite rightly posits that the superficial unity which had held the disparate groups of the leadership together was quickly dissolving into disagreement and disunity. With the key figure of authority hardly able to work, there can be no

⁸⁶ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, p.65.

⁸⁷ Carr, *The Russian Revolution From Lenin to Stalin*, p.60.

⁸⁸ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, pp.32-3.

surprise that it was at this time that serious splinters in interest began to arise.⁸⁹ Namely, one particular man had arisen. Having collected a number of important positions, Josef Stalin had begun to make waves. His domination of the state bureaucracy, which shall be covered extensively in the next chapter, had placed him in a powerful position. Even this early, a cabal had begun to form around him, with such ardent future supporters, most notably Vyacheslav Molotov, gaining a number of high ranking positions.⁹⁰

Contrary to prior thought, Stalin's capacity went beyond that of a glorified lackey in his period of service under Lenin. The aforementioned *The Unknown Lenin*, has suggested that Lenin was quite dependent on Stalin in his later years. The correspondence between Lenin and Stalin throughout 1922 was frequent. This was not squarely in the context of administrative matters, but also in taking Stalin's opinions on major policies.⁹¹ Stalin had absorbed the roles that his intellectually minded comrades thought were below them and, in these, found his basis of patronage.⁹² By contrast, there is also substantial evidence to back the case that Trotsky and Lenin's relationship was not as close as one may have thought. Indeed, one such rebuttal took the form of the automatic dismissal of Trotsky's proposal to remove the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) from direct economic management. 'Into the Archive,' in this instance, was all of Lenin's input on the note he received.⁹³

For some years Stalin had held the post of Peoples' Commissar of Nationalities, and it is with this position that the first use of his controversial power is publicly displayed. This took the form of the Georgian affair, a serious issue at the time. Its importance in trying to interpret Stalin's attitudes and abilities in the early 1920s cannot be overstated.

Georgia's late entry into the Soviet fold had only occurred in early 1921, having been seized from a Menshevik government by Gregory Ordzhonikidze, who went on to command the Georgian Central

⁸⁹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.107.

⁹⁰ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, pp.32-33.

⁹¹ Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, p.9.

⁹² Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.466.

⁹³ Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, pp.148-149.

Committee as though he were some governor-general. In the face of impending federalisation, into what would become the Transcaucasian SSR, the Georgians had shown resilience and a thirst for independence which went beyond their docile Armenian and Azerbaijani neighbours.⁹⁴ Budu Mdivani had led the Georgian cause after, rather ironically, being placed in the position of Revolutionary Committee Chief by Stalin in 1921, with the intention of quashing any nationalistic tendencies in the population.⁹⁵ Events had not gone smoothly and Georgian resistance to having to join the Transcaucasian SSR, in a bid to save a degree of national identity, led to the leaders being branded as 'social-nationalists'. Lenin, unaware of the full story and in poor health, had originally sided with Stalin on the matter, denouncing the attitudes of the Georgians.

Ordzhonikidze had carried on with his brutal treatment of the Georgians. This had eventually led him to physically strike a supporter of Mdivani, and though attempts had been made to smooth over the episode, Lenin could no longer ignore the situation. This was reflected in a part of Lenin's Testament, 'On the Question of the Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'' (December, 1922), where he admitted guilt for the decidedly poor organisation of supervising minorities. This was a hostile response to the 'great Russian chauvinism' displayed by Stalin and his henchmen. There was serious concern that the internationalism displayed by the Soviet Republic had been one of an imperialistic bully, with an all too apparent tendency to resort to violence. Unionisation on an equal footing, where the outer republics would receive fair representation in the Central Committee, was far more preferable to what Stalin was attempting in 'autonomisation' – where Russia would be the undoubted greater power in the arrangement. This sort of centrism and chauvinistic approach, from the 'Russified non-Russian,' could not be stood for.⁹⁶ When Stalin heard of this, he would manoeuvre his way out. It showed a certain encroaching boldness, which would be important in the future.

⁹⁴ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, pp.43-47.

⁹⁵ A.W. Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993) pp.26-27

⁹⁶ Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism* Volume 1, pp.151-153.

This conveniently brings us to the topic of Lenin's Testament. Reference has already been made to the volatility of his condition throughout the period, ultimately resulting in his paralysis on March 10th 1923; a state from which he would never recover, and which would lead to his death in January 1924. It is necessary, however, to remind ourselves that, as the head of state, Lenin would not give in, despite his afflictions. He had been firm in his judgement that it was his sole responsibility, fully aware that permanent debilitation or death could have arrived any day, to make sure that the state was in the best possible position when he was unable to alter the course of policy.⁹⁷ There are many dictations from this four month period, but only a small handful are of particular use in this discussion. The question of nationalities and union is one that has already been covered. However, Lenin's postulations on the subjects of administration, leadership, and the future of the revolution, with the prospect of no foreign insurrections occurring, are all topics worthy of some level of discussion. Pipes wrote that the Testament lacked lucidity and was repetitive.⁹⁸ This should not, however, suggest that we disregard these pieces as gibberish. Acknowledgement of the periodic lack of clearness does not render, as moot, the points which were made. If anything, perhaps too late to make a difference, these dictations make for good grounding to suggest that Lenin had a pragmatic side, at least in how he approached party divisions.

His article 'Better Fewer, But Better' (March, 1923) was geared towards the bureaucracy question and had successfully recognised many of the chief defects of the contemporary state of affairs. In the article itself, he had pointed out that one of the most significant issues had been the party's proneness to hastiness and a boastful attitude. A lack of knowledge was said to have existed, which would often be made up for with revolutionary zeal, rather than a rational approach. Temperance had to become a virtue, if the revolution was to hold out, and Lenin speaks of the 'new state machine' which would require education, and diligence, but also, patience.⁹⁹ It is also necessary to note that there is an explicit suggestion that the bureaucratic processes were caused by the

⁹⁷ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, pp.78-79.

⁹⁸ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.475.

⁹⁹ Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3, pp.774-786.

bourgeois inheritance. When it came to the subject of bureaucracy, Lenin hated the level of centrism which had appeared. He had falsely believed that the bloating bureaucracy was a hangover of the Tsarist state, when in truth it was a result of the ever centralising systems of control which occurred under his watch. His response to curtail the excesses of bureaucracy had been to *expand* the bureaucracy further by creating such institutions as the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (Rabkrin), in 1920. These, as he later admitted, had not worked as he had liked.¹⁰⁰

However incapacitated, Lenin was aware that the party could suffer a split. This would have disastrous consequences. In 'Letters to Congress' (December 1922), he had highlighted the issue of personalities. The matter of his succession was particularly problematic. While he was not a monarch and could not issue a God-given right to rule to a particular individual, his word would be respected, nonetheless. Trotsky and Stalin were pitted against one another here; Stalin's lack of caution, against Trotsky's deficiency in wit and popularity in the higher echelons. The document stipulates that perhaps a larger number of Central Committee positions could dilute the roles of individuals. The piece also suggests a hierarchy in which power could be shared, with Stalin and Trotsky both in principle positions, with additional positions given to Zinoviev and Kamenev, with Bukharin and Pyatakov (a later left opposition member) given lower ranks - the basis of a united leadership.¹⁰¹

In a postscript, added in January, Lenin had gone against this idea and declared Stalin outright as too rude. This most likely came from the aftermath of the Georgian affair, and Lenin sought action to see him toppled.¹⁰² There is the additional consideration that, in Stalin's efforts to prevent Lenin from having much contact with the political situation, he had ended up speaking to Lenin's wife, Krupskaya. He had hounded her with abuse over the telephone on the topic of allowing Lenin to continue to work, likely feigning concern for his condition whilst hiding his true, malign intentions.

¹⁰⁰ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.444.

¹⁰¹ Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3, pp.738-741.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.741.

Stalin had remained cold and sober when Lenin had a scornful note sent to him over his actions and, with what can only be assumed to be a level of incredulity, apologised. The set of affairs had looked set to turn against Stalin, but the 'bomb' that Lenin had designed to drop at the coming Twelfth Party Congress, which Stalin managed to delay, would never go off.¹⁰³

The last document that we shall assess briefly is 'Our Revolution: Apropos of the Notes of N. Sukhanov' (January, 1923), was an article which repudiated many of Nikolai Sukhanov's misgivings about the revolution. Sukhanov had been a member of the Social Revolutionary Party and had later switched to the Mensheviks. He had, in his work *The Russian Revolution, 1917: Eyewitness Account* (1922),¹⁰⁴ actively deplored Lenin's style of pursuing the victory of socialism, with the general message that Russia had not attained the level of development of productive forces that would make socialism possible. Lenin had heavily criticised his work. Some serious aspects of the future of 'socialism in one country' had come through in his response. Lenin knew Russia lacked the prerequisites for socialism, but he could not see a reason why they could not be created.¹⁰⁵ Many of Lenin's works at this time had the theme of setting the groundwork in order to hold on until the next surge of international revolution.

Sukhanov's objections had certainly not been without validity. Lewin points out in *Lenin's Last Struggle* that, in at least a sense of principle and on a theoretical plane, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries had their revenge. The embarrassment for those Marxists, who saw their system as one that could determine the course of history, was complete. There had been a revolution without 'adequate infrastructure, the dictatorship of the proletariat almost without a proletariat, led by a party in which the proletariat was the minority, the readmission of capitalism after a supposedly socialist revolution,' in addition to power having been fed into a growing bureaucratic machine, and hopes for revolution passing into the east instead of the intended west. Regardless of whether we

¹⁰³ R. Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (London, Viking Penguin, 1991), pp.101-104.

¹⁰⁴ See N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: Eyewitness Account* (New York, Harper, 1962)

¹⁰⁵ Lenin, *Selected Works* Volume 3, pp.765-768.

take an ideological or pragmatist viewpoint on this, there is no denial that this had been an enormous contradiction to Marxism, as well as common sense.¹⁰⁶ Of course, it should not be completely overlooked that Marxism can often be boiled down to interpretation, and that the difficulties in practical application with no previous example would inevitably differ from other theories.¹⁰⁷ According to Schapiro, there was little which was unique in regard to the Soviet situation, as revolutionary theory invariably has to undergo change when put into practice.¹⁰⁸

A small number of general observations can be made about Stalin's relation to the period. While the theory of 'socialism in one country' has not yet been discussed in Stalin's thought, the general point that the reader should be made aware of is the precariousness of the 1917-1923 period. The presence of authoritarian structures was in place long before his rise to power. Indeed, the topic of the continuity thesis, the question of the relation between Leninism and Stalinism, is a topic which will be saved for later. Briefly on this point however, it is clear to see that, whether or not Lenin had intended the authoritarian state to develop out of principle or out of an unfortunate series of dilemmas, it had equipped Stalin with the tools necessary to not only do, but justify, the many actions that were required in the seizure of absolute power. In sum, Marcel Liebman summarises a view on Leninism which closely resembles my own:

Leninism can be defined as a doctrine and practice of political centralisation; as an enterprise of revolution based on the action of a vanguard; as a technique of socialist construction based on an authoritarian state, or an active participation by the people in administrative tasks... Only by grossly distorting the facts, however, can Leninism be presented as a form of personal dictatorship.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, p.109.

¹⁰⁷ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.367.

¹⁰⁸ Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*, pp.349-350.

¹⁰⁹ M. Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1975) p.434.

III: Interregnum

'Departing from us, Comrade Lenin enjoined us to guard the unity of our party as the apple of our eye, we vow to you, comrade Lenin, that this behest, too, we shall fulfil with honour!¹¹⁰ – Stalin, the eulogy of Lenin.

As the intellectuals gritted their teeth, embarrassed by Stalin's eulogy to Lenin, (a throwback to a certain orthodox character penetrating the Soviet state), Lenin's permanent departure from state affairs brought to light the true disunity of the main participants of the regime's higher orders. In the years that followed, Stalin would become a dominant figure. The purpose served by the following chapter is to investigate some of the more important factors which surrounded the crucial years, 1923-1925. Doing so will give a greater understanding of the key figures involved, and the vibrant debates which ensued, in addition to a level of greater insight into the working of the higher functions of state.

Within much of the literature which surrounds the transitional period between Lenin's death and Stalin's 'revolution from above,' many writers have taken upon themselves the task of distinguishing the principle participants of the epoch. It is necessary to familiarise ourselves with the main figures of the time to some extent. This allows for a better insight into both the order of power at the time, and those likely to be in contention for filling Lenin's shoes as the key and spiritual leader of the revolution.

Leon Trotsky is a figure of lasting importance, not least for the primacy of his mind, compared to those of his peers. Trotsky's Marxism had been active and practical. As shown in such early works as *Results and Prospects* (1906), Trotsky had held the idea that Marxism was a method of analysing social relations rather than texts. The major claim to status he had, as a theorist, was the introduction of his idea of 'permanent revolution,' which had stemmed from such early works as the

¹¹⁰ "Farewell, Ilyich!" - The Party Leaders Eulogise Lenin' in R.A. Wade (ed.) *Documents of Soviet History* Volume 3: *Lenin's Heirs* 1923-1925 (Gulf Breeze, Academic International Press, 1995), p.141.

aforementioned *Results and Prospects*.¹¹¹ This formed Trotsky's critical response to the 1905 revolution and, perhaps more importantly for us, what he saw as the future prospects of the socialist movement. The core lesson to take away from the piece is the suggestion that a new upheaval was possible, (and perhaps inevitable), after the 1905 revolution. However, the situation in Russia, considering the overall backwardness of the country's economy, and overwhelming peasant population, meant the survival of revolutionary state was untenable without foreign aid.¹¹² The backlash against this idea would later see the piece taken apart and misconstrued in a way that aided the development of 'socialism in one country.'

Trotsky's position had been precarious from the start of the regime. He had been a latecomer to the Bolshevik party and had, until 1917, sided with the Mensheviks. As could be expected, this led to hostility from much of the higher leadership who were suspicious of his late defection, fearing that it was motivated less by ideology and more by self-preservation. His performance as People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs of the Soviet Union had been divisive among his contemporaries. While he had certainly identified and addressed many of the key weaknesses of the Red Army after he had assumed overall command, many policies had struck ill with colleagues. Perhaps the greatest rift was caused by allowing ex-imperial officers and experts to fill the ranks, as opposed to an ideologically pure and exclusively revolutionist composition in the armed forces.¹¹³ Nevertheless, he was still the man who the army remembered as the great leader, essentially responsible for arming the new republic with the Red Army, and jumping from theatre to theatre as need had demanded. As the civil war had calmed and Trotsky found himself ever more involved in the civil administration, he had made a name for himself as a unique, outspoken, and zealous individual. According to Geoffrey Swain, his methods of fighting were reflected in his plans for post-

¹¹¹ D. Law, 'How Not to Interpret Trotsky,' *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 20 (1993), p.187.

¹¹² See L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*

¹¹³ Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*, p.68.

war recovery: the utilisation of specialists and technical experts, regardless of their ideological affiliation.¹¹⁴ This is shown in his advocacy of Gosplan – The State Planning Committee.

The classic biography of Leon Trotsky is Isaac Deutscher's grand trilogy: *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet Outcast*.¹¹⁵ Here, across a 1500 page grand saga, Trotsky is presented generally in a sympathetic light and described as one whose mastery of Marxist thought, and perception of world events was almost unequalled among contemporaries, and certainly not exceeded. The middle volume, *The Prophet Unarmed*, a piece which has been a significant aid in this dissertation, focuses on the years from 1917 until Trotsky's exile from the USSR altogether in 1929. Deutscher had a deterministic view, having been a partisan of the revolution himself. His approach to the Trotsky and Stalin conflict can be summarised by an apt line from a review of the book, 'Stalin won because his talents were better suited to the situation in which the struggle took place than were those of the passionate revolutionary who lacked political craftiness.'¹¹⁶ The danger of fully trusting Deutscher's interpretation of Trotsky, as David Law has pointed out, is the way in which, as the titles of his books suggest, the man is treated as a *prophet*.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Martin Malia has described Deutscher's work as a 'Marxo-Miltonic' piece, where Trotsky is presented as a martyr, as well as the true hero of the revolution.¹¹⁸

Fresher interpretations have been made of Trotsky in the decades since *The Prophet* series. Notable scholars such as Ian D. Thatcher, Robert Service, and Geoffrey Swain have released their own profiles. The sympathy of Deutscher's stance towards Trotsky is not generally shared, a level of greater objectivity being evident in each case. Where Deutscher views Stalin and Trotsky as long-term enemies, (with Trotsky aligned more so with Lenin), by contrast, Swain takes a stance whereby

¹¹⁴ Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*, p.116.

¹¹⁵ See I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed Trotsky: 1879-1921* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980); Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*; I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast Trotsky: 1929 -1940* (London, Oxford University Press, 1963)

¹¹⁶ F. Barghoorn, 'The Prophet Unarmed by Isaac Deutscher,' *American Slavic and East European Review* 19 (February 1960), p.105.

¹¹⁷ Law, 'How Not to Interpret Trotsky,' p.181.

¹¹⁸ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.156.

Trotsky comes across as a frequent ally to Stalin in the early 1920s. Dmitri Volkogonov's biography of Trotsky, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, based on his access to secret archives as a high ranking officer and party member in the last years of the Soviet Union, truly defames the man.¹¹⁹

Lenin and Trotsky had been in league with each other in late 1922 in an effort to curtail the creeping bureaucratisation of the country, but they had not always been allies. The doctrine of 'democratic centralism', as brought up in Lenin's *What is to be Done?* (1902) had not sat well with Trotsky, and was a core factor in the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903. This had been where a number of Lenin's core points on strict party discipline had been rebuked by Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks* (1904). This was an aggressive strike against Lenin, particularly on the party principle of unconditional adherence to higher bodies. Trotsky stated such lines as 'In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead... to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee.'¹²⁰ The Trotsky we ultimately approach is one of intellectual superiority; somewhat uncouth, but also unbound by ethics. Like Lenin, he was willing to take any step necessary provided it helped to achieve the goals of the state.

The case of Nikolai Bukharin has been divisive in historical opinion. Stephen F. Cohen explored his life and relation to revolutionary events in *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*.¹²¹ Writers such as Michael Reiman give the impression that Bukharin had only been a second rate personality in the struggle which followed Lenin's demise, and had arguably acted chiefly as an ally to Stalin.¹²² Bukharin was very young, only thirty four by the start of 1923, and as Jerry F. Hough and Merle

¹¹⁹ See I.D. Thatcher, *Trotsky* (London, Routledge, 2002); R. Service *Trotsky: A Biography* (London, Macmillan, 2010); Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*; Volkogonov, *Trotsky: Eternal Revolutionary*

¹²⁰ See L. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks* (London, Connolly Books, 1969, originally published in 1904) pp.45-46. - Chapter 2 is heavily based in the idea of substitutionism.

¹²¹ See Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*

¹²² Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, p.11.

Fainsod pointed out in *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, he was much more a loveable figure than a tough one, indeed 'soft' is used to describe his personality.¹²³

Lenin had previously referred to Bukharin as the 'golden boy' of the Politburo. This labelling could be interpreted as having a dual meaning. Its first connotation is in respect of Bukharin's youth and relative naivety in comparison to other high ranking officials, lest it be forgotten that Bukharin had only been some fourteen years old when the Social Revolutionary split of 1903 occurred. All the same, he had displayed a keen mind for theory in the 1910s and 1920s. Such works, mentioned previously, as the *ABC of Communism* and the *Politics and Economics of the Transitional Period* showed an profound level of knowledge. His thought could be transferred into forms both accessible, as was the case with *ABC*, as well as complex, as was shown by a selection of other works of the time. One such piece, *Historical Materialism* (1921) which elaborated on the Marxist doctrine of the same name. Leszek Kolakowski has since shown the book to be a mediocre piece, a work which was criticised by such intelligent Marxist thinkers as Gramsci and Lukacs for its 'mechanistic' tendencies.¹²⁴ However it had, according to Cohen, solidified his position as the chief theorist in the higher wings of the party leadership.¹²⁵

Did this intellectual strength translate into tangible power? True enough, Bukharin held some positions of renown; notably he assumed the role of the editor of *Pravda*, and he was also a full member of the Politburo. However, he clearly lacked the patronage his peers had attained over the span of a longer career. The interesting case of Bukharin was his complete turn in outlook. In the early days of revolution he had been among the most leftward communists and had viewed the treaty of Brest-Livotsk as a terrible move based on its ideological ramifications. As NEP had come into existence, Lenin's personal reasoning had been a principle factor in bringing Bukharin to an acceptance of the limitations of the state, that a more moderate approach was required. In the case

¹²³ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.120.

¹²⁴ L. Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism 3 - The Breakdown* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978), p.61.

¹²⁵ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.111.

of Bukharin however, he would go on to champion the cause of the party's moderate wing wholeheartedly. His approach would be geared towards gentle transition, with incentive replacing coercion, and an internal mobilisation of resources.¹²⁶ However, much of this view would be revised by 1926.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, the 'Castor and Pollux' of the Politburo,¹²⁷ were important in this period too, and while they were never likely veritable contenders against Stalin and Trotsky, their influence within the party cannot be denied. Often seen as a pair and, broadly speaking, representing the left of the party, they held posts at the heads of Soviets in both Moscow and Petrograd. While both were powerful, respected figures, who crucially only conflicted strongly with Lenin over the timing of the revolution, it had always been clear that Kamenev was in the shadow of Zinoviev. Not to say that Kamenev was inept; far from it. As a respected figure of the party, he had been issued such a prestigious position as the chairman of the Comintern in 1919. As Hough and Fainsod argue, they recognised that they could not rule as a duumvirate, and brought Stalin into the fold in, (what many believe to be), the capacity of a junior partner.¹²⁸ Alternatively, Swain gives the impression that they had plotted against Stalin in the hope of curtailing his rising power.¹²⁹

Many other personalities were significant, but pale in comparison to the influence of the greater five. To mention every other prominent Bolshevik of the time would not be fruitful to this discussion and would involve an enormous undertaking, however, it is worth mentioning such figures as Mikhail Tomsky, Alexei Rykov, Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, and Vyacheslav Molotov for their worth. Tomsky was one of very few in the leadership with working class credentials. He had come into the Politburo in 1922, and had the relative expertise to assure the leadership that the NEP had been unbalanced in favour of the peasantry. He had also been angered by the militarisation of labour which had

¹²⁶ Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, p.77.

¹²⁷ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.79.

¹²⁸ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.116.

¹²⁹ G. Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power* (New York, Pearson, 2006), p.139.

occurred under 'War Communism,' in which Trotsky played a significant role.¹³⁰ Tomsy became a major backer of the moderate wing of the party and, from 1920, played a leading role in the Council of Trade Unions. Rykov had filled many early positions in the leadership and had supported a measure of reconciliation with the Mensheviks. As chairman of Sovnarkom from 1924, he would later become a major voice of the moderates in the later part of the twenties becoming as, if not more, influential than Bukharin.

Preobrazhensky had a keen intellect, and had been predominantly on the leftist wing of the party. Indeed, like the pre-NEP Bukharin, he had been critically opposed to the idea of the Brest-Livotsk treaty and collaborated with Bukharin to create such famous works as the *ABC of Communism*. Unlike Bukharin, he had not been able to settle accounts with Lenin and recognise the necessity of the NEP. He would go on to serve the Soviet state as an economist, having drawn together plans for industrialisation. In the coming years, he proved vital as a firm member of Trotsky's leftist opposition and as a staunch opponent of NEP.¹³¹ Indeed, he had been the main theoretical thinker behind the idea of what would be known as 'primitive socialist accumulation' in his work *The New Economics* (1925).¹³²

Molotov, or 'stone bottom,' (so-called because of his dour personality), is a man who had an uncompromising loyalty to Stalin throughout the entire period. According to Deutscher, he had been the perfect example of a revolutionary turned official, and had only made up for his mediocrity with his enormous capacity to work.¹³³ Interestingly, he turned over a cache of secret correspondence with Stalin in 1960s; a set of documents which have been explored in the years since the end of the Soviet Union in *Stalin's Letters to Molotov*. This piece provides us with another fresh perspective on

¹³⁰ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.82.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.118-120.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.86.

Stalin's political industry and the major proponents of his thought from the mid-1920s through to the 1930s.¹³⁴

Stalin had emerged in a position of unique power by the time Lenin had reached the final stages of illness. This had unsettled many different personalities in the party, none more so than Trotsky. There was much confusion about the man, and any agenda he might have had. Sukhanov aptly described his persona as something of a 'grey blur.' Indeed, Stalin had never given foreign interviews and, even within the Soviet Union, was not as well known as his other high profile colleagues. While Hough considers him the second rate contender for Lenin's position in the hearts and minds of the party, he also raised the interesting point that he had spent his time almost exclusively within Russia prior to the revolution, setting him apart from many other contenders in this regard.¹³⁵ One can draw lines quite satisfactorily between his Russified chauvinism, as displayed in the 1922 Georgian crisis, and a potential need to assert a Russified nature, given his foreign roots. This is expanded upon in one of the principle biographies of Stalin. Written by Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, A Study in History and Personality*, delves into the topic of psycho-analysis. He links much of Stalin's thoughts with his childhood experiences, such as his parental relations and his time at seminary school in Tiflis. Stalin's development as a revolutionary had a bold, independent streak but was grounded in the adoration of Lenin and a conversion to Russian-centric views.¹³⁶

Unlike Trotsky, where the 'Trotsky myth' was able to exist for a time, or indeed Bukharin, who enjoyed a 'modest personality cult' when his persona was rehabilitated in the time of Gorbachev's *Perestroika*,¹³⁷ 'Stalinism' and its excesses are well known. Indeed, there is such a broad range of biographies on the man and his era that it would be impossible to go into enough detail here to do the topic any justice. Suffice it is to say that this is a subject which has developed alongside the

¹³⁴ See Lih et al (eds.), *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*.

¹³⁵ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.112.

¹³⁶ See R.C Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, A Study in History and Personality 1879-1929* (New York, Norton, 1973)

¹³⁷ M. Cox, 'Trotsky and his Interpreters; or, Will the Real Trotsky Please Stand up?' *Russian Review* 51 (January, 1992) p.84.

openness of sources and what association the writer had in relation to the Soviet Union. Some of the more prominent pieces have been written by such historians as Isaac Deutscher, Adam B. Ulam, Robert H. McNeal, Robert C. Tucker, Robert Service and Dmitri Volkogonov.¹³⁸

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In order to better grasp the coming period, it is necessary for us to familiarise ourselves with the international situation. By 1917, many of the early Bolshevik policies had been geared towards internationalist involvement. Indeed, noteworthy is the praise that Rosa Luxemburg had provided for the fervent internationalist spirit which had been shown to exist in those early days.¹³⁹

For years, the Second International had been the mouthpiece of the international revolutionary stage. All too often did the congresses degenerate into needless and long polemic battles, thus little material progress was made. With many of the core delegates capitulating to patriotic duty at the outbreak of the First World War, the Comintern was created in 1919 and came with the original intention of replacing this polemical struggle with a stage for concentrated action. No longer was the battle to be fought over select Marxist terminology; instead they could look to Europe and discuss courses of action which could really change the world. Where the movement found some of its early enthusiasm was in the Polish-Soviet war.¹⁴⁰

The energy and optimism of the Bolshevik cause had been put in doubt in the climax of the struggle. When the Red Army had approached Warsaw in 1920, it had attempted to incite the workers to rise against their capitalist overlords. However, the proletariat had stayed true to their newly independent Polish colours. Clearly, the Bolsheviks were ignorant that national loyalty had remained

¹³⁸ See Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*; A.B. Ulam, *Stalin. The Man and his Era*. (London, Allen Lane, 1974); R.H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (London, Papermac, 1989); Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*; R.C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York and London, Norton, 1992); R. Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge Massachusetts, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); D. Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (Rocklin, Forum Press, 1996).

¹³⁹ Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism or Marxism?*, p.61.

¹⁴⁰ E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin*, pp.16-17.

an important factor.¹⁴¹ Indeed, as Deutscher wrote 'The Poles... would defend their native soil tooth and nail.'¹⁴² It had been this, combined with other failed coups, (notably the Spartacists in Germany), which had ended the immediate hopes of the international revolution, though this had not been for a lack of trying. As *The Unknown Lenin* makes us aware, a speech Lenin delivered in September 1920 ignited the opinion that they had an obligation to 'help' the maturing proletariat in Poland to Sovietise. There remains little doubt that Lenin was planning a greater campaign against Western Europe, having concluded that, 'We will keep shifting from a defensive to an offensive policy over and over again until we finish all of them off for good.'¹⁴³

Richard Pipes has written on the topic of the Comintern, and has brought a number of interesting points into the fold. He concludes that it had no formal successes whatsoever in the period of its existence from 1917 through to 1943. The lack of success can be attributed to a number of factors. The Bolsheviks were ignorant of foreign political cultures, and though Lenin, Trotsky, and Zinoviev had spent significant portions of their lives in Europe prior to the revolution, they were often isolated from mainstream thought. It is worth considering that no other socialist party in Western Europe was nearly as radical as the Bolsheviks. Most of them were closer to the softer line of the Mensheviks. The rigid Moscow line on *coup d'état* strategies was out of touch with the west. Lenin's centralist dogma was at work here too. Anyone with an independent flare could easily be misinterpreted as being mutinous, rather than imaginative. Perhaps the most important factor to consider was the Russian flavour of Bolshevism, and just how different the Russian intellectual tradition had been from that of the West. The point of view that a society should be torn down and rebuilt was simply incompatible with the west.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.18-19

¹⁴² Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p.464.

¹⁴³ Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin*, p.95. & p.114.

¹⁴⁴ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, pp.236-239.

To understand how Stalin emerged in such a strong position by Lenin's final days, one needs to look deeper into the state organs and apparatus.

Since the revolution in 1917, the party's highest governing body had been the Central Committee. This was the day-to-day policy maker, with only the intermittent Party Congresses being in a position to supersede its primacy. One of the principle defects of the Central Committee was the rather sluggish pace in which affairs played out. An additional consideration was that the civil war had disrupted the attendance of a great many of the members, due to the prioritisation of orchestrating the revolution. Moreover, the administrative efforts of the, then modestly-sized, Secretariat had suffered a severe drawback with the premature death of the great organiser, and 'old guard' Bolshevik Yakov Sverdlov, in the crucial year of 1919. Though Sverdlov's death was important, the membership of the party stood at 314,000 at this time. This meant that a formal restructuring was necessary. Two new institutions were created therefore: The Politburo and the Orgburo.¹⁴⁵

The Politburo, in its original capacity, was to be a smaller body than the Central Committee, with the purpose of carrying out decisions and legislature which could not wait. For the centrism this evidently displayed, there should however be due recognition of the circumstances – that the republic was locked in war and was in need of a more time efficient decision-making body. As expected, the level of privilege for those few who suddenly received a voting position was immense. Originally, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and Krestinsky had been the four with a voting position (but this would later expand). One observation that should be noted is how the Politburo outlasted its original purpose. Indeed, as Deutscher wrote in *The Prophet Unarmed*, 'from the beginning of the civil war the Politburo acted as the party's brain and supreme authority, although the party statutes contained no provision even for its existence.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.439.

¹⁴⁶ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.75.

The Orgburo had been created to tackle inner party management. It was essentially a central hub in which a record could be maintained of the many comings and goings of higher ranking personnel. Hough and Fainsod have pointed out that the more intellectual members of the leadership were unwilling to sully themselves by taking on the position of a glorified clerk.¹⁴⁷ Stalin had gained a primary position in the organ. It is perhaps too much to assume that his intentions were honest; he surely recognised the potential power of the organisation. With such administrative competency, he had also taken a position in the Secretariat, an organ which acted primarily as a link between Politburo and the Orgburo, with the responsibility of forming the groundwork of the party management. As described in the previous chapter, his reliability had earned him the role of General Secretary by April 1922.¹⁴⁸

The sheer weight of the bureaucracy cannot be understated. It became grossly overinflated. It is worth mentioning that under any other political system, the role of a general secretary would not have been nearly as important in overall decision making. While the Orgburo was responsible for higher personnel shifts, it was the secretariat that was in command of the lower groundwork and was integral to the appointment of the lower staff. It also made suggestions to the senior orders. The expansion of the staff in this period was enormous and, crucially, almost all of these new officials had risen to their position as a result, in at least some indirect capacity, of Stalin's decision making. This was poor for the state apparatus because this meant that loyalty and fear had become the main criterion driving the selection of those appointed to become secretaries. Indeed, Bukharin had described that when a new post had to be filled in a party cell, no one was able to challenge the decisions made for the sheer amount of fear.¹⁴⁹ Stalin truly had a monopoly in this way, and any individual who saw errors in his way of thinking would, as Trotsky's 'New Course' (1923) would later describe, be denounced as traitors and factionalists. There was an additional point. Many of the other major players of the time were able to see only what was effectively the tip of the

¹⁴⁷ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.126.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.127-128.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.128-131.

'bureaucratic iceberg' which had formed, and had underestimated just how much of an impact it would come to have.¹⁵⁰

The party's membership had inflated significantly in the early 1920s. On this point, Pipes and Deutscher agree that while some had joined the party out of idealism, an enormous amount were careerists and people who wanted to jump on the victors' bandwagon.¹⁵¹ The Soviet diplomat, and friend to Trotsky, Adolf Joffe, had pointed out that there was a rot from the top to the bottom within the membership. Party membership gave dividends in the form of special privileges from as early as 1920. This could take the form of an extra food ration, or an extra pair of shoes or, for more senior officials, a whole variety of luxuries. Pipes concludes satisfactorily that these patrician habits had nothing to do with any form of Marxism, but had roots in the political traditions of Russia.¹⁵²

The threat of Stalin to the development of the Soviet Republic had been identified by Lenin, as discussed in the previous chapter, by the time he had embarked on creating his political Testament. The latter events of the Georgian crisis had driven a wedge between them and, to Stalin at least, this may have been seen as a temporary souring of opinions, considering that this was the first time that Stalin and Lenin had suffered a falling out.¹⁵³ Whether this was the case or not, Trotsky's issues with bureaucracy, according to a recent study by Thomas M. Twiss, had been caused by its sheer inefficiency. Trotsky's pre-occupation with efficiency had compelled him to advocate measures which were centralist and authoritarian in their nature, showing that he had an active hand in weakening any last illusions of workers' democracy. 'His struggle against bureaucratic inefficiency had brought him into conflict with the majority of the party leadership'. In the year of 1923 this would only intensify.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.127-128.

¹⁵¹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.17.; Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.442.

¹⁵² Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.444.

¹⁵³ Deutscher, *Stalin*, pp.246-247.

¹⁵⁴ T.M. Twiss, *Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy* (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014), pp.93-94.

The Twelfth Congress of April 1923 was where Lenin had intended that the disciplinary charges against Stalin be issued, but with Lenin's stroke in March, this was not able to happen as planned. Even so, Lenin had urged Trotsky to deliver the message of his Testament and thus bring Stalin's political career to a halt. How was it that Trotsky assumed the role of the headsman and yet was unwilling or unable to deliver the blow that could have saved him? A simple but effective answer has been put forward by Isaac Deutscher; that Trotsky was simply not interested in this low and cunning drama. His objection was foolish, but principled. Why should he stoop to the level of the inarticulate Stalin? Why should he have accepted that Stalin could have become more than he, given how secure his position was?¹⁵⁵ Pipes is of the opinion that this is an overly magnanimous portrayal of his persona. Trotsky may have underestimated Stalin, or simply the General Secretary may have been too well entrenched to shift him.¹⁵⁶

The Triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev had formed in light of the threat they believed Trotsky to be, even if Kamenev had initially been reluctant to turn on his former ally.¹⁵⁷ The secret bloc had formed within the Politburo in the time of Lenin's and Trotsky's closer dealings at the end of 1922 and early 1923. Members would sit and discuss issues, ostensibly without Trotsky's knowledge, and would essentially make the decisions that the state would follow. In this regard, the official Politburo meetings would turn into a farce, the summit's conclusions having already been made.¹⁵⁸

Where did the need for this Triumvirate, this secret bloc come from? Two general assertions can be made; one emotional, the other decidedly more empirical. Trotsky was the ex-Menshevik, the one who was not afraid to speak his mind, and the 'man of the state but not of the party, in the old guard but not a part of it.'¹⁵⁹ The audaciousness of his persona was a blessing and a curse, for while

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.93. & pp.54-55.

¹⁵⁶ Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.481.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.80.

¹⁵⁸ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, pp.140-150

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.30-31.

he had been a primary mind, he was resented extensively by those individuals who found that their 'old guard' status had been challenged. The other major consideration was the threat posed by Gosplan and its expansion. Economically, the idea of expanding Gosplan's powers was quite legitimate, taking into account how many different departments there were in regards to construction and planning, and how often these various branches of the bureaucracy overlapped with one another. Having a single body which would carry out the plans would be far more efficient. However, this could be interpreted differently. Aside from the irksome nature of any suggestions put forward by Trotsky, which would directly interfere with the careers of members of the Politburo such as Tomsky and Rykov, there had been a growing rumour that Gosplan was just a deception of Trotsky's in order to seize more power for himself.¹⁶⁰

The unique opportunity Trotsky was offered at the Twelfth Party Congress, with all the fervour of Lenin's Testament behind it, from which even Stalin's maturing bureaucracy would not have been able to save him, was not taken. He had accepted the Triumvirs' 'rotten compromise' which Lenin and Krupskaya had warned him of, that small concessions would be given, and that an apology would be made by Stalin to Krupskaya in atonement for his previous misdemeanour.¹⁶¹ Barring his apathy toward the affair, it can be argued that Trotsky respected Lenin's wish for a collective leadership given the prospect of a split on the horizon.

With the passing of the Twelfth Congress in which Trotsky had, if anything, helped the Triumvirs, and having completely gone against his former line of aiding the Georgian delegation, he was set to feel the fallout of his own procrastination. Amazingly, Trotsky had two further opportunities to oppose Stalin. The 'Declaration of the 46' (October 1923) was voiced by a group of particularly distinguished individuals in the Soviet system who broadly shared the same concerns as Trotsky.¹⁶² To bring down individuals under the charge of factionalism as per the Tenth Congress was not an easy task. These

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.33-35., p.42. & p.46.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.92.

¹⁶² E. Mandel, *Trotsky as Alternative* (London and New York, Verso, 1995), p.32.

signatories gave the Triumvirs a serious headache, and with Trotsky's support could have become a potent weapon. This was not to happen. Trotsky was ill and depressed for large periods of time and may not have had the stomach to head the assault.¹⁶³

Consideration should also be given to the events at a Central Committee which took place shortly after Lenin's death. A unique opportunity opened up when Lenin's will, condemning Stalin, had been read aloud. Trotsky grimaced and sighed, and did not act when given a perfect opportunity to deliver the *coup de grace*.¹⁶⁴ It is worth considering, as Robert Conquest has described, that Stalin had realised that his state of affairs were in dire straits. His saviour had come in the form of his Triumvir partners, who had discouraged reading the testament to the next Party Congress.¹⁶⁵ Whether or not we consider Trotsky as a misanthrope, willing to put lives in jeopardy if it served the state, the unity of the party was, to him, a paramount concern.

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Differences in opinion between Trotsky and the party leadership had continued to widen in the months which followed the Twelfth Party Congress. This culminated in the released an article in *Pravda* in the December of 1923 titled 'The New Course,'¹⁶⁶ a full nine months after the Congress. Alongside other articles which followed, this piece turned out to be, while critical and quite correct in its observations, a political disaster. Naively, Trotsky had assumed that by making various speeches in the governing bodies he could bring about a radical correction in the way events had

¹⁶³ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, pp.150-155.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.113. & p.137.

¹⁶⁵ Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, p.111.

¹⁶⁶ Twiss, *Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy*, p.116.

played out.¹⁶⁷ His delay proved fatal, and now the literary war begun. Stalin's bureaucratic 'phalanx' moved into position and played its role in securing the facade of power.¹⁶⁸

In 'The New Course' Trotsky made it clear that 'pure' or 'complete' democracy was not realisable, or indeed did not represent the end goal of the revolutionary movement. While he accepted this, he pointed out that neither was absolute centralism; the aim should be to harmonise the two concepts in one form or another. This analysis is used as a springboard to deplore the method of the last period; that no equilibrium had existed, that excessive centralisation and bureaucracy had squandered initiative and threatened to send the entire party down a blind alley. Trotsky pointed out that the leadership had a horrible tendency to denounce any criticisms or proposals of change, even positive suggestions, as factionalism.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the following quotation sums up the great bulk of his thought succinctly:

Yes, our party would be unable to discharge its historic mission if it were chopped up into factions. That should not and will not happen. It will not decompose in this way because, autonomous collective that it is, its organism resists it. But it will combat successfully the danger of factionalism only by developing and consolidating the new course toward workers' democracy. Bureaucratism of the apparatus is precisely one of the principal sources of factionalism. It ruthlessly represses criticism and drives the discontentment back into the depths of the organisation. It tends to put the label of factionalism upon any criticism, any warning. Mechanical centralism is necessarily complemented by factionalism, which is at once a malicious caricature of democracy and a potential political danger.¹⁷⁰

Trotsky's opposition had found popularity among the party rank and file. However, it had many weaknesses; principally it lacked co-ordination. Trotsky's position as its leader was tenuous as a result of not aiding the 46, as well as his participation in advocating the militarisation of labour in 1920. The Secretariat's power in deciding voting delegates was supreme, and as a result, only a scarce three of the 128 voting members in the January 1924 Congress were in opposition.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, p.251

¹⁶⁸ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.123.

¹⁶⁹ L. Trotsky, 'The New Course' in *Documents of Soviet History* Volume 3, pp.90-95

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.93.

¹⁷¹ Twiss, *Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy*, pp.131-132.

With the Triumvirs leading the charge what followed the 'New Course' was a complete assault from the Politburo against Trotsky. Some important remarks about the literature employed would include the revival of Trotsky's 'permanent revolution' as a system of ideas which would be used to attack him. Trotsky would protest, in vain, how the doctrine, however important it had been, and whatever its merits were, belonged to the past.¹⁷² Trotsky's then current concerns were the bureaucracy and the economy. In addition, after the death of Lenin, the line of the deceased leader was not only made into what was effectively gospel, it was suddenly free to be interpreted as one would like, so long as it could be backed up with references (which were often slender).

The resolution of Thirteenth Party Conference in 1924 was the first major attack on 'Trotskyism'. The title alone describes the key points of the resolution: 'Party denunciation of Trotsky, the Other Oppositionists and "Petty Bourgeois Tendencies."' ¹⁷³ The resolution denounced Trotsky who had actually hoped his points would stand. The 46 signatories of the declaration were directly associated with him time and again and were collectively given the epithet of 'opposition'. The statement said that Trotsky had 'openly violated the resolution of the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, which forbade the formation of factions within the party,'¹⁷⁴ and declared, 'The Party will politically annihilate anybody who will venture to attack the unity of the party ranks. The party unity is secured more than ever.'¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the throwback to the decree of Tenth Party Congress was going to mark a general acceptance in using the political weapon in the following years. It is also worth mentioning the use of Menshevism as a derogatory tool which would later be used extensively in Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* (April, 1924) and *The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists* (December, 1924).

¹⁷² Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, p.47.

¹⁷³ 'Party denunciation of Trotsky, the Other Oppositionists and "Petty Bourgeois" Tendencies' in Wade (ed.) *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 3, pp. 134-140.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.137.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.138.

The roots of essentially deifying Lenin - the cult of Lenin - can be found across many of the speeches and articles of the time. However, its origin can be found in the eulogy given at Lenin's funeral. While there has been much said about Trotsky's absence here, and how Stalin was to blame for giving him the wrong date, in reality, he had been in the Caucasus, recuperating from illness.

Rex A. Wade's commentary on Stalin's contribution to the eulogy has brought up the good point that 'Stalin's [entry] is particularly notable for the repetitive but effective evocation of "Departing from us, Comrade Lenin enjoined us to..." followed by the pledge to fulfil Lenin's supposed wishes.'¹⁷⁶ As Deutscher has accurately described in *Stalin*, 'The elaborate ceremony was altogether out of keeping with the outlook and style of Lenin, whose sobriety and dislike of pomp were almost proverbial. The ceremony was calculated to stir the mind of a primitive, semi-oriental people into a mood of exaltation for the new Leninist cult.'¹⁷⁷ It was nothing if not ironic that Lenin's death involved the infiltration of Greek Orthodox, traditional Russian culture into the Marxist bastion he had assembled. It can be said that these values were capitalised upon by Stalin in the future.

Shortly after this time, in April 1924, Stalin made his debut in the field of theory and joined his fellow Triumvirs in the works directed against Trotsky. In *The Foundations of Leninism*, the principle message was the importance of the party. The party could be regarded as the ultimate guiding force, as it had the level of prestige and experience to, and should, guide the number of non-party organisations involved in the struggle against capitalism. In his words, the proletariat *needed* the party to achieve the dictatorship, to maintain it, and to pave the road to socialism. Iron discipline and a unity of will were necessary prerequisites to party cohesiveness. This left no room for factionalism, which he associated with opportunist elements.¹⁷⁸

Trotsky made a fresh literary attack on the Triumvirate by the autumn of 1924 in the form of an essay named *The Lessons of October*. This piece was aimed at reviewing the roles of various

¹⁷⁶ R.A. Wade, preface to "'Farewell, Ilyich" - The Party Leaders Eulogise Lenin' in *Documents Wade* (ed.), *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 3, p.140.

¹⁷⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.269.

¹⁷⁸ J. Stalin, *Problems with Leninism* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), pp.102-112.

personnel at the time of the October revolution. The piece attacked Zinoviev the most, and played up the trepidation that he, along with Kamenev, felt when the October Revolution had occurred. At the same time, there is evidence of self-glorification of Trotsky's own role during the revolution. Bringing up the past in such a crude way was a sly move from Trotsky. Indeed, it is easy to imagine the indignation at such passages as:

The position of the Rights is best and most completely illumined in its principled aspects by a letter signed by Zinoviev and Kamenev and entitled, "On the Current Situation"... The letter comes out in decisive opposition to the resolution for an armed insurrection adopted by the Central Committee... What then remained? To acquiesce to the demands of the opposition meant to liquidate October.¹⁷⁹

As Robert C. Tucker wrote in *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 'it is not clear that Trotsky anticipated the full extent of the storm that *Lessons of October* brought down upon his head.'¹⁸⁰ It is worth noting that the 'October mistake' of Zinoviev and Kamenev had, according to Tucker, only been temporary, a 'transient disagreement.' A series of defensive counter-measures were put into effect. Bukharin had been the first, with his editorial in *Pravda*: 'How Not to Write the History of October.' It is interesting to consider the role of *Pravda* in the course of this conflict. The state-run newspaper had initially retained journalistic objectivity as a key tenet during the early 1920s, but as Angus Roxburgh writes, this was not to last. In reaction to such issues as the 'scissors crisis' as well as criticising the condition of the Central Committee, 44 per cent of *Pravda's* articles had put forward oppositionist viewpoints. With the leadership crisis having emerged, the Triumvirate had put pressure on Bukharin, the editor-in-chief, to use *Pravda* as a tool against the oppositionists. The release of 'The New Course' was the last time that *Pravda* would see an oppositionist stance openly published. *Pravda* had seen its last days as a forum of relatively free party discussion. According to Roxburgh, this was a watershed for *Pravda*, as events of late 1923 and early 1924 meant that never again in the newspaper's tenure would alternative views from that of the party leadership be catered for.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ L. Trotsky, 'Lessons of October' in Wade (ed.), *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 3, p.214. & p.216. - The terms 'Rights' and 'Opposition' is meant to refer to Zinoviev and Kamenev, in addition to their supporters, in this context.

¹⁸⁰ Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p.344.

¹⁸¹ A. Roxburgh, *Pravda, Inside the Soviet News Machine* (New York, George Brazillier, 1987), pp.26-27.

Bukharin's article was then built on by Kamenev by way of a speech which laid out the conflicts between Lenin and Trotsky before 1917. In this speech, 'Trotskyism' was advanced as a thesis, centred on the idea that, as a 'political doctrine', 'Trotskyism' was a cover up for a greater Menshevik plot. He insinuated that Trotsky had acted as an agent of the Mensheviks by joining the revolution, and that *The Lessons of October* had attempted to supplant Leninism with this 'Trotskyism'. Zinoviev followed through with similar denunciations. A general trend emerged whereby the leadership rewrote their own role in the civil war. Interestingly, when Trotsky had joined Zinoviev and Kamenev in the 'united opposition' a couple of years later, he would learn from Zinoviev that, '*Lessons of October* served only as a pretext. Failing that, a different motive would have been found... You must understand it was a struggle for power... For this purpose 'Trotskyism' was invented.'¹⁸²

Stalin had thrown himself into these further denunciations. His principle offering to the renewed torrent of anti-Trotskyism was a speech he delivered to the plenum of the Communist Group at the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions, 'Trotskyism or Leninism?' (1924). The more interesting parts of the speech revolved around the general principles which had become key to anti-Trotsky attacks: defaming Trotsky and making crude misinterpretations of his actions. In addition, Stalin's tactic of pitting his opposition against what he asserted to be Leninist principles was put to good use in his speech of 1924. This tool would be used frequently in the coming years against his opponents. In this speech he had defended Zinoviev and Kamenev and their apprehension about going through with the October Revolution, as well as a defamation of Trotsky's role in the Civil War, as seen below:

...neither in the Party, nor in the October uprising, did Trotsky play any *special* role, nor could he do so, for he was a relatively new man in our Party in the period of October... Granted... it cannot be denied that Trotsky fought well in the period of October... but Trotsky was not the only one who fought well in October... Trotskyism is distrust of the leaders of Bolshevism, an attempt to discredit them, to defame them.¹⁸³

No matter what opinion we have on Trotsky, we cannot disagree on the point that his role in the revolution and the Russian Civil War had been exceptional. This is an example of history being

¹⁸² Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, pp.344-348.

¹⁸³ J. Stalin, 'Trotskyism or Leninism?' In *Works Volume 6 1924* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), p.341., p.344. & p.366.

altered for gain. The second part of the passage has been used only to remind the reader that any rational reproach to 'The New Course,' Trotsky's attack on bureaucracy, was being replaced with much more aggressive interpretations being presented as incontestable fact. As a comment on Stalin's works in general, he used language which the less intellectually gifted citizen could better understand and interpret, and set him apart as more of a grounded man.

Trotsky's resignation from many of his key posts came in January 1925. While it should be noted that only a relatively small amount of literature has been explored in regards to what was used to attack him, many of the key points have been covered. Trotsky, ill, humbled, and depressed, had offered his resignation from his posting as president of the Revolutionary Military Soviet. One of his concluding statements can make us sympathise with the view that he had put the party's interests ahead of his own the entire time:

As far as concerns the statement often repeated in the course of the discussion, that I aim at some "special position" in the party, do not submit to discipline, decline this or that work assigned to me by the Central Committee, etc., etc., etc., - without permitting myself to evaluate those assertions, I will simply categorically announce: I am ready to fulfil any work whatever assigned to me by the Central Committee, in whatever position, or without any position, and, it goes without saying, under any conditions whatever of party control.¹⁸⁴

To this outright surrender, Trotsky's dismissal came two days later. A line in the introductory paragraph of the note gives the reader a clear enough impression: 'Comrade Trotsky's unceasing attacks against Bolshevism confront the Party with the necessity either to abandon this fundamental condition or once and for all to put an end to these ceaseless attacks.'¹⁸⁵ What is interesting to briefly consider is the range of reactions to Trotsky's resignation. Succinctly, Zinoviev had called for his arrest but Stalin had held back and had decided his resignation from his military posting would be enough. Indeed, to spread this image of the grounded man further, Stalin would publish a letter in *Pravda* in the same month which mentioned how it would be 'inconceivable' to depose Trotsky

¹⁸⁴ 'Trotsky's "Resignation"' in Wade (ed.) *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 3

¹⁸⁵ 'Trotsky's Dismissal From His Military Positions' in Wade (ed.) *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 3, p.291.

entirely. He would later say at the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1925 that chopping off heads and bloodletting was a dangerous road to go down.¹⁸⁶

While much of this chapter has been dedicated primarily to contextual considerations, as well as Trotsky and some of his views, the underlying message has been the rise in Stalin's standing. This had been mostly material at this stage - the growing strength he wielded as a leading member of the Politburo, the Orgburo and the Secretariat. However, he had also broken into general debate and theory in an ever more self-assured manner. Under the preconditions of political struggle with Trotsky, and having ascertained a formidable stronghold of bureaucrats, he would advance his thesis on 'socialism in one country.'

¹⁸⁶ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.132.

IV: Socialism in One Country as Theory

'But what if the world revolution is fated to arrive with some delay? Is there any ray of hope left for our revolution? Trotsky offers no ray of hope.'¹⁸⁷ - Stalin.

The Triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin was in a position where it stood to fall apart, having lost the common enemy from Trotsky which kept it together. 'Socialism in one country' was a theoretical innovation which arose at this time and would become an accepted part of overall policy. Stalin had shown immense enthusiasm for the building of socialism in Russia alone from as early as 1921, according to Erik Van Ree, and yet the fervour he showed during the 'War Communism' period might suggest that it was earlier still.¹⁸⁸ The arguably conservative 'socialism in one country' would become one of the primary ideological factors on which Stalin would build his ascension to autocratic leadership. The intention of this chapter is to trace the key determinants of (a) Stalin's thoughts, and (b) the development of his doctrine.

There has been little attention given to Stalin's political thought in the years of 'War Communism' and the transition to NEP. Robert Himmer has explained that this is as a result of an assumption that Stalin lacked much thought of his own, and took his cue from Lenin.¹⁸⁹ Himmer has written a deeply interesting article on the topic, 'The Transition from War Communism to the New Economic Policy: An Analysis of Stalin's Views.' It is worth taking the time to absorb the key features of this piece.

Stalin's enthusiasm and his exploits against class enemies in the years of 'War Communism' depict a man who would naturally oppose NEP. He had denounced NEP at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923, having said that the growth of anti-Russian local nationalism would rupture the worker-peasant bond, thus threatening the entire dictatorship of the proletariat. As Himmer writes on

¹⁸⁷ J. Stalin, *Works* Volume 6 pp.384-385.

¹⁸⁸ E. Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p.85.

¹⁸⁹ R. Himmer, 'The Transition from War Communism to the New Economic Policy: An Analysis of Stalin's Views,' *Russian Review* 53 (October, 1994), p.515.

Stalin's opinion, 'NEP was, like Duma participation, a betrayal of "revolutionary struggle."'190 From 1917, he had disputed Lenin's belief that the revolution had to be worldwide in order for it to be successful. This had been evident in 1920, as he looked upon the three years of the revolution as proof that a socialist revolution could not only begin in underdeveloped Russia, but be carried through there. He had often minimised the scale of economic distresses, asserting that Russia's abundant natural resources could outlast any entente blockade.¹⁹¹

Stalin was fearful of allowing Lenin to know his opinion. Of course, as one of the major points of the first and second chapters of this dissertation, it is clear to see why. Any insubordination would have invariably led to his own political suicide. Himmer describes how he employed Aesopian language when in discussion and when making publications in the press. He had concealed his contempt for NEP with aloofness. His comments in Politburo sessions in the early 1920s lacked the flavour and style of the great orators like Trotsky. This was in part a ruse with two purposes. The first, as is clear enough, was to prevent himself from falling into direct conflict with Lenin. The second was to camouflage himself with the mediocrity that would later define him in the eyes of the higher ranking leaders; indeed, Trotsky had once referred to Stalin as 'The most eminent mediocrity in our party.' While he could not voice any opposition freely, in Himmer's article, Stalin emerges as a man who was capable of making his own judgements.¹⁹²

Stalin's conflict with Lenin was no short affair. Stalin had long admired Lenin, up until the Georgian affair, but the relationship had not been without its intermittent tensions.¹⁹³ Robert Tucker has emphasised the role and importance of personality in *Stalin as Revolutionary*. His daughter Svetlana recalls the metamorphosis her father underwent in the face of criticism,¹⁹⁴ but the expansion of this idea is left for the next chapter. While Stalin looked up to Lenin far more than his other colleagues,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.516-517.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.519.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.522., p.525. & p.528.

¹⁹³ Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p.239.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.449.

the souring of opinion in the aftermath of the Georgian crisis was crucial. When Lenin did eventually die, one of Stalin's secretaries would later recall that Stalin was positively jubilant to hear the news.¹⁹⁵

The creation of the term 'socialism in one country' was concurrent with the combat against Trotsky, which was discussed in the last chapter. Shrouded behind a veil of purely anti-Trotskyite sentiment, Stalin's 'interpretation' of Leninism, the idea of 'socialism in one country' was often disregarded. It is certainly worth making the point that Stalin wasn't seen, neither by friend nor foe alike, as any sort of theoretician. One could imagine a flash of anger overcoming the Stalin who, when attempting to engage in a theoretical discussion at a party meeting in 1924, was cut short by the Marxist scholar Ryazanov with: 'Stop it, Koba, don't make a fool of yourself. Everybody knows that theory is not exactly your field.'¹⁹⁶ This was somewhat unfair. While Stalin was clearly not gifted with brilliant or original ideas, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was certainly aware of the theories around him, and was capable of his own thought. Indeed, his *Marxism and the National Question* treatise (1913) had won him a level of respect in identifying the key issues which surrounded regional, ethnic, and national divides in the Russian situation,¹⁹⁷ proving himself to Lenin at the time that he was reliable.¹⁹⁸ Combined with his time spent in Russia as a radical revolutionary, as opposed to the foreign exile many of his comrades went through, he had established an early reputation as being adept in identifying the major issues surrounding national questions.

Even so, there is a *volte face* in his line on the question of whether socialism could be achieved in a single country. In the previously mentioned *Foundations of Leninism* (1924), the message within the lectures at Sverdlovsk University had been centred on an assertion of what Stalin conveyed to be stern, Leninist principles. What is important in this instance is that on the question of the construction of socialism Stalin clearly states, 'can the final victory of socialism be achieved in one

¹⁹⁵ Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, p.111.

¹⁹⁶ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.290.

¹⁹⁷ See J. Stalin, *Works Volume 2 1907-1913* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), pp.300-374.

¹⁹⁸ Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, pp.152-153.

country without the joint efforts of the proletarians in several advanced countries? No, it cannot.¹⁹⁹

This had been a generally accepted principle.

How is it that Stalin changes suddenly from one who adamantly refutes the possibility of 'socialism in one country' to the one who champions the cause? The radical shift of Stalin's approach was the consequence of two separate events. The first, the failed uprising in Germany in the autumn of 1923, this had finally ended any realistic hope that successful international unrest in western Europe would play a significant role in the immediate future.²⁰⁰ However, there is a fundamental flaw in the logic here. The failure in Germany was in late 1923, but the publication of *Foundations* had been in the April of the following year. Given such time to conceptualise his thought, and with little inspiring news on the international front during the downtime, it is difficult to believe that the revised stance Stalin assumed in *Foundations* was inspired by his own thought.

Association with Bukharin, then, appears the more likely alternative. Stalin, despite his Triumvirate arrangement, had according to Van Ree, 'associated himself with Bukharin's policy of co-operativisation as the road to socialism.'²⁰¹ This 'road' and the economic debates which surrounded NEP as a path forward, as opposed to the 'leftist' view of 'primitive socialist accumulation' and rapid industrialisation, we save for the next chapter. Suffice it is to say that Bukharin had asserted that, drawing on his interpretation of Lenin's later writings and his own economic intellect, there was a possibility of the Soviet state not only surviving, but thriving in its isolation, but that caution was necessary.

¹⁹⁹ D. McLellan, *Marxism after Marx* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1979) p.122

²⁰⁰ As an interesting side note, Trotsky, amidst the political drama which was hounding him in the Kremlin, had offered to aid the Germans in their struggle. According to *The Prophet Unarmed*, the key reason why the Triumvirs had not allowed him to aid their proletarian brethren abroad was simple. In the event that Trotsky had played a role in a successful revolution, then their platform of defaming and reducing Trotsky's role in the Russian Civil War would be in tatters. Worse still, if Trotsky was killed in such an attempt of insurrection then his posthumous position would have been one of a martyr. In this regard, politically, the reasoning to not allow Trotsky's departure was sound, but surely they were without the knowledge beforehand that the German enterprise would turn out to be a doomed one? Thus, there is argument that by disallowing the able and inspiring commander to have potentially tipped the scale of the conflict, the Triumvirs had in fact *helped*, at least in spirit, to bring on the isolation in the Soviet Union, since it cannot be argued that Trotsky's talents and abilities had been fully utilised on the home front.

²⁰¹ Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, p.86.

As is well documented, the first reference to the doctrine of 'socialism in one country' is in Stalin's renamed pamphlet, *The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists* (1924). As mentioned before, the quoting of Lenin became gospel in the polemics. Here it is worth appreciating a piece by Lenin, the *United States of the World Slogan* from 1915,²⁰² where Lenin referred to the United States of the World slogan and how this pointed to the worldwide international victory of the proletariat. He sought to make clear that the slogan was to be interpreted simply by its form, as it could easily be misinterpreted as saying that there was no chance of success of a socialist *revolution* in one country alone. Since the economic and political development of each country was, according to Lenin, inherently uneven under a capitalist regime, it would be possible for a small selection or even a singular country to successfully overthrow its bourgeois leaders. With their success, the oppressed workers of the other nations would ascertain more momentum to revolt as well.

Why this particular work was crucial is because Stalin's *October* was developed with this exact piece behind it. Lenin's message, in this instance, asserted that the simultaneous overthrow of capitalism in all (European) countries was an impossible thought, practically speaking; a view which Marx was sensible enough to share. A decade on, Stalin portrayed this as Lenin saying that the whole road to socialism could be achieved in one country. Lenin probably did not mean to say that the road to socialist *victory* could be carried through by a single country as a long term goal, although our discussion on Erik Van Ree's article in the first chapter suggested that, by 1917, he was under the impression that socialism could be established in one country as a vehicle for further spreading the revolution. Nevertheless, Stalin had changed the core principle of the text to suit his theory.

Stalin's *October* served many purposes. It was used primarily in the debate against Trotsky:

Trotsky's "permanent revolution" is a variety of Menshevism... Let us take Trotsky's pamphlet *Our Revolution* (1906). Trotsky writes:

²⁰² See V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* Volume 21 August 1914 – December 1915 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964) pp.339-344

"Without direct state support from the European proletariat, the working class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and to transform its temporary rule into a lasting socialist dictatorship. This we cannot doubt for an instant."

What does this quotation mean? It means that the victory of socialism in one country, in this case Russia, is impossible "*without* direct state support from the European proletariat," i.e, before the European proletariat has conquered power...

What is there in common between this "theory" and Lenin's thesis on the possibility of the victory of socialism "in one separate capitalist country"? Clearly there is nothing in common.²⁰³

'Permanent revolution', a concept which Trotsky had formed in response to the 1905 revolution, and with which Lenin agreed, (at least in principle), was used as a tool to strike division between *Lenin* and Trotsky. How very whiggish it would have been to assume that Trotsky knew, in his early writings, that the revolution would arrive within only a few years, and that it would be confined to Russia. This was not a symptom of historical illiteracy, but a deliberate ploy. Leszek Kolakowski has since brought up the considerable point that 'Stalin presented Trotskyism as signifying that socialism definitely could not be built in one country - thus suggesting to his readers that Trotsky's real design was to restore capitalism in Russia.'²⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that 'socialism in one country' was not secured in Stalin's mind as the panacea to the Soviet situation at this stage, but to quote *October* again, we see Stalin change the meaning of what international support is:

It goes without saying that for the *complete* victory of socialism, for *complete* security against the restoration of the old order, the united efforts of the proletarians of several countries are necessary. It goes without saying that, without the support given to our revolution by the proletariat of Europe, the proletariat of Russia could not have held out against the general onslaught... But what does support of our revolution imply? Is not the sympathy of European workers for our revolution, their readiness to thwart the imperialists' plans of intervention - is not all this support? Is this not real assistance? Unquestionably it is.²⁰⁵

Apart from being mostly false, the idea that actual economic aid can be substituted by what is essentially just well wishing, is ludicrous.

At a time when just about every theoretical piece of ammunition had been employed against Trotsky, E.H. Carr reminds us that, to the other Triumvirs, 'At [the] best, socialism in one country was one

²⁰³ J. Stalin, *Works* Volume 6, p.386. & p.389.

²⁰⁴ Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism* 3, p.23.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.391.

more nail driven into the coffin of Trotskyism. At [the] worst, it was a harmless fad of Stalin.²⁰⁶ Zinoviev and Kamenev were too tied up with their own works to truly absorb the message which Stalin had brought forth. Indeed, in scope, the idea of 'socialism in one country' in *October* was so utterly surrounded with anti-Trotskyite sentiment that the message could be easily misinterpreted, or moreover simply lost, in the venom-soaked literature. Some months passed before the doctrine was referred to again. However, by the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925, there was some mention of the idea in Stalin's works. By this time, Zinoviev and Kamenev had broken ranks with Stalin, with Stalin now sided with Bukharin and the moderate wing.

While it is important to remember that, empirically speaking, the NEP was not socialism, 'socialism in one country' had begun to alter this truth. Zinoviev brought light to this in part of his speech,

I feel that the thing here is really the attempt of certain comrades to declare that the NEP is socialism... Such a point of view, such a position represents the idealisation of the NEP, the idealisation of capitalism... It is indisputable that the NEP is the *road* to socialism, but the assertion that the NEP is not socialism also seems to me indisputable.²⁰⁷

As to whether the NEP could have really been the road to socialism is something that will not be discussed here. The point was that Stalin had, by this stage, not only promised that the victory of socialism was possible within the isolated confines of the Soviet Union, but had started to insist that the victory was, in some way, *already in existence*.

In 1926, the economy had started to shift in the direction of greater industrialisation, a topic which will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter. In the January of that year, Stalin produced a work by the name of *On the Problems of Leninism*. This is worth some serious consideration as it toned down the message that final, international victory was needed worldwide in order to fully guarantee safety against any counter-revolutionary threat.²⁰⁸ Indeed, the small quote drawn from *Foundations of Leninism* earlier in this chapter, which concerned the subject of the impossibility of socialism in one country, was taken by Stalin here and is revised. This is interesting to consider as he

²⁰⁶ Carr, *Socialism in One Country* Volume 2, p.52.

²⁰⁷ Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism*, pp.183-184

²⁰⁸ McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, pp.122-123.

outright lied, and placed the reasoning of his former assertion with the idea that he was combating Trotskyite attacks on Leninism.²⁰⁹ Now that he had made his mind on the matter of 'socialism in one country', he could change his theory as it suited him. It is also important to consider the way in which he referred so frequently not only to select works by Lenin, but also to his own. It can be suggested that this was part of a greater need to establish himself as a scholar, keen to point out where he could prove himself right.

'I think that lack of faith in the victory of Socialist construction is the fundamental mistake of the New Opposition.'²¹⁰ This line was the introduction to his final chapter which spoke of fighting for the victory of socialist construction. It is truly interesting to consider the term 'lack of faith' and just what this meant. It suggested that there were greater forces at work, conjuring up the imagery of the Bolshevik right to determine the fate of the destiny of its movement and indeed, history. Faith in the cause was a serious consideration, according to Robert Tucker, and would go some way to explaining Stalin's attacks on his political peers; not only those of the left, but later even his moderate allies.²¹¹

In the Fifteenth Party Congress in later 1926, Kamenev had mentioned similar ideas as Zinoviev had previously; fears of both Stalin as an individual and the role of NEP were extensive. Stalin had responded with:

Engels said that the proletarian revolution... could not succeed in one single country alone. The facts, however, show that... such a revolution in its most essential parts has already been carried through in one single country alone, for we have carried out nine tenths of this programme in our country... naturally, if Engels were alive today, he would not cling to the old formula. On the contrary, he would welcome our revolution and say: To hell with all old formulas!²¹²

The point on Engels is of particular interest. If Stalin was suddenly so able to freely construe the older generations of Marxist thinkers, and speculate with no sense of caution or doubt over what their gauging of current events would be, this essentially gave Stalin a free hand in saying anything he wanted.

²⁰⁹ Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, p.157.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.166.

²¹¹ R.C. Tucker Introduction to Lih, et al (eds.) *Stalin's Letters to Molotov*, p.54.

²¹² Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism*, pp.197-198

He continued,

One must recognise, comrades, that it was Lenin and no other who first of all established the proof of the possibility of the victory of socialism in one country alone... One must not be afraid of the truth, one must have the courage to speak the truth, one must have the courage to declare that Lenin was the first Marxist who formulated the question of the victory of socialism in one country alone in a new form and answered it in the affirmative.²¹³

In this extract, the reader is no longer subjected to suggestion or any level of uncertainty. In these few years, Stalin had progressed his 'interpretation' of Lenin's thought on the construction of socialism and had decided to present the situation as one which far from represented the truth.

The doctrine was refined over the years. By the Eighteenth Party Congress in 1939, he had revealed that the state existed even with its capitalist encirclement and that it had entered a post-socialist stage. Indeed, it was in this time that he had begun to suggest that even communism could be built in a single country alone. By 1946, the idea of 'communism in one country' became, to Stalin at least, a completely realisable objective in the USSR.²¹⁴

While the reasons above can account for the development for the 'socialism in one country' doctrine in the political field, the reason for its growing popularity should be accounted for too. Many writers appear to agree, including Deutscher and Kolakowski, that 'socialism in one country' represented much more than just a political ploy or an 'ideological smoke-screen' for Stalin's greater ambitions.²¹⁵ It captured the spirit and temperament of the nation. If we consider, for a moment, the state and morale of the Soviet Union's populace by the mid-twenties, one would not be met with a proletariat which was raring for more adventure. We are instead met with a populace who had only just emerged from several years of war and draconian edicts which invaded every aspect of their civil liberty. To quote Kolakowski, 'In proclaiming that the Russian revolution was self-sufficient he was

²¹³ Ibid., p.198.

²¹⁴ Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Josef Stalin*, p.93.

²¹⁵ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.287.

less concerned with theory than with countering the demoralisation produced by the failure of world communism.²¹⁶

How could 'socialism in one country' be interpreted by the average citizen, with little in the way of political literacy and not nearly the same fervour for revolutionary action as their detached leadership? For the peasant, it had guaranteed the more favourable circumstances in which they had found themselves thanks to NEP. Fresh were the memories of 'War Communism,' the requisition squads and all the brutal excesses which came with them. Under Preobrazhensky's 'primitive socialist accumulation' they could only come to expect more of this. For the citizen too, this was a step towards reflecting the sheer tiredness of their collective mindset. While, as has been described, levelling Trotsky with the charge of 'permanent revolution' was simply a falsehood - bringing up the past and creating artificial contention between Trotsky and the deceased Lenin - enough of the literature had penetrated the everyday way of thinking. 'Socialism in one country' promised the diametric opposite of 'permanent revolution.' Where 'permanent revolution' guaranteed further exertions and depletions, 'socialism in one country' was far more conservative by comparison.

It is also important to remember that 'socialism in one country' had also ceased demonising Russia's backward position. 'In Stalin's doctrine Russia no longer figures as a mere periphery of the civilised world.'²¹⁷ This, taken from Deutscher, really hits the nail on the head here. It harkens back to prior times of the 'Westerniser' against 'Slavophile' debate; that Russia would be able to potentially go down a different path to the west. This is a debate which truly has very little to do with socialism and its application; rather, it concerns an older question which was centred on the auspices of development in Imperial Russia. It is here that we see a departure from the internationalist spirit of the Bolshevik movement and a slip into 'Red Russian patriotism' trends. This system of ideas evokes that part of Stalin which had an intrinsic bias towards the great Russian nationalism (which Lenin had warned about in his testament). Indeed, the adoration of Lenin, and the personal break with his

²¹⁶ Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism 3*, p.24.

²¹⁷ Deutscher, *Stalin* p.293

Georgian roots had brought much of it about.²¹⁸ This suggestion of jingoism in the Soviet situation had undoubtedly resonated with the many people of a similar nationalist persuasion. There can be little hesitation in asserting that many of the later facets that we allocate to Stalinism, such as the pseudo-nationalist campaign of the 1940s and the general trend of Russian exaltation at the expense of the other nationalities, had roots here.

Erik Van Ree raised a point that the idea of 'socialism in one country' was not a uniquely Russian phenomenon. While the idea of promoting patriotic values in the Bolshevik context was heretical in the original canon of Leninism, there were members of the Marxist movement who had shown this. This was most prevalent in 'the broad mainstream of German Marxism: Marx, Engels, Vollmar, and Kautsky, or among the Austro-Marxists.'²¹⁹ It is unlikely that Stalin would have read Vollmar's *The Isolated German State* (1880) in this time. Even so, the other great Marxist figureheads' messages would not have been lost on him: Marx's support of the peasantry in the relatively backward peasant German states of the mid-19th Century, Kautsky's Erfurt programme of 1891, which had proposals of an autarchic state within. The fact that Stalin refused to reference these two, and instead gave the credit to Lenin, gave the doctrine a feel of being a genuinely Russian enterprise.²²⁰

The topic of culture in the era of NEP has brought about many great and interesting debates.²²¹ As Cohen has pointed to, there was a ferment in the arts, and in general creativity throughout the 1920s. Such names as Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Zoshchenko and many others made this a period which, like the liberal period of Weimar Germany, would be remembered as one of the great epochs of cultural history.²²² However, the freedom in ideological sphere in the time of NEP is contended by Kolakowski, who has written on the topic that an increasing pressure from the state

²¹⁸ Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p138.

²¹⁹ E. Van Ree, 'Stalin as Marxist: The Western roots of Stalin's Russification of Marxism' in S. Davies and J. Harris (eds.) *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.178.

²²⁰ E. Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Josef Stalin*, p.94.

²²¹ For a greater insight into the cultural trends which developed in NEP, including such subjects as class identity, family life, and popular song and literature, see S. Fitzpatrick, A. Rabinowitch and R. Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991)

²²² Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp.271-273.

upon the creative arts existed.²²³ Indeed, the topic of intellectual and creative suppression is a focal point of Stuart Finkel's book, *On the Ideological Front*, where he states that most 'Most intellectuals did not experience the time of the New Economic Policy... as a time of relative permissiveness... but as one of increasing state encroachment on their scholarly, professional, and artistic activities.'²²⁴

The point of this argument is that, as Martin Malia writes, the state had an increasing number of mediums through which to transport its message to the public, such as: the newspaper, the theatre, the new cinema and soon enough, the radio too, to name but a few. While it was not yet at the totalitarian stage of control with which we associate Stalin's dominance of culture, the key tenets of 'socialism in one country' could still be laid into the public spheres of interest.²²⁵ It is interesting to consider the rising power of the cinema, Sergei Eisenstein was, of course, the name we unmistakably link to Soviet film in this era for the many pictures he produced in this time. Indeed, we should, as written in *Kino*, 'note the extraordinary speed of the Soviet film's development as communication, as art, growing in the power of its propaganda.'²²⁶ Malia has made a good point on the general feel of the doctrine, 'Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" is transitional... it was half a means of analysing Bolshevik Russia's isolation and half a means of fostering Party hope in such a bleak situation.'²²⁷ He made another prime observation; that it is worth our consideration that by 1929 there were 1,090,000 members in the party who would have been indoctrinated in this idea.²²⁸

In this chapter we have established where and how 'socialism in one country' began, and explored a little into how the system of ideas had escalated. The progression had been due in no small part to the political turmoil, and involved twisting Lenin's original writings, in addition to practically deifying the dead man's works as untouchable. Indeed, having planted many of the delegates at these

²²³ Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism 3*, p.45.

²²⁴ S. Finkel, *On the Ideological Front: The Russian Intelligentsia and the Making of the Soviet Public Sphere* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007), p.3.

²²⁵ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, pp.172-173.

²²⁶ J. Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London, George & Unwin Ltd, 1983), p.193. - This book is of exceptional value in studying the development of film in both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, up to 1947.

²²⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.172.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.169.

congresses in some manner himself, Stalin had created an atmosphere in which his words would be applauded, probably far beyond their original value. Of course, as a doctrine, 'socialism in one country' had initially emerged from Bukharin's thought, but Stalin had taken this and pushed it far beyond its original context. This was truly one of the key reasons in explaining why Stalin had managed to build himself a reputation of level headedness. He distinguished himself as a man of pragmatism, with which the common person could identify, as opposed to the cafe intellectuals whose long running polemics could be interpreted as fruitless to the layman.²²⁹

²²⁹ A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, Harper Collins, 1991) pp.100-110

V: Socialism in One Country in Context

'We cannot say these were the deeds of a giddy despot. He considered that this should be done in the interests of the party, of the working masses, in the name of the defence of the revolution's gains. In this lies the whole tragedy!²³⁰ - Nikita Khrushchev, the Secret Speech of 1956.

As explained in the previous chapter, the doctrine of 'socialism of one country' had developed significantly after Lenin's death. Stalin felt more and more able to assert his own interpretation of Leninism, developing as the political conflict expanded. This chapter focuses more at the contextual factors which surrounded the development of the doctrine and the rise of Stalin. To appreciate 'socialism in one country' we shall investigate the events which occurred simultaneously with Stalin's exploits in the field of theory. This will involve an appreciation of the political factors, including a brief examination of the 'united opposition,' consisting primarily of Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev. With their ousting, Stalin turned on the moderates, the group he would later dub 'the right deviation'. The economic factors likewise need to be scrutinised, as does, by extension, the social climate. The chapter will be rounded off with an idea which has yet to be explored in too much depth - Stalin's personality and how much this had an effect on the situation. On that last point, there are many significant arguments about Stalin's mind, his demeanour, and his sheer industry for political intrigue.

With Trotsky defeated, the original Triumvirate fell apart. Stalin had, during 1925, joined the moderate wing of the party. Principally, this wing comprised of Rykov, Tomsky and Bukharin. Their approach was to develop socialism through the NEP. This was because a war against the peasantry, on the same lines of 'War Communism,' would have been 'economically ineffective and politically disastrous.'²³¹ To retain the market link between town and countryside was of paramount

²³⁰ N.S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1970) p.616

²³¹ Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism 3*, p.32.

importance. In Bukharin's view, the only effective way to increase agricultural output was by offering a material incentive. The peasantry would be drawn to co-operative farms out of choice, rather than by coercion.²³²

It is important to remember that, despite being the primary theorist among the moderates, Bukharin was something of a junior partner in that group. His own power base was limited to his long term editorship of *Pravda*. During his years in alliance with Stalin he enjoyed greater influence when he became the General Secretary of the Comintern's Executive Committee in the years 1926-1929. His position as a full Politburo member from 1924 had, nevertheless, earned him a level of prestige. While Andrzej Walicki has contended that Bukharin overstated Lenin's support for NEP as a long term solution on the road to socialism,²³³ an interesting argument put forward by Lars T. Lih suggests otherwise.

Lih has suggested in his piece, 'Political Testament of Lenin and Bukharin and the Meaning of NEP,' that the co-operatives were not so much an extension of NEP, but the method for overcoming it. One of the core issues that Lenin pointed to in the Testament was the lack of culture from which the Soviet state suffered. Therefore, Lih has asserted that Lenin was not so much interested in the economic advantages to be gained through the use of co-operatives; they were an answer to the criticism of culture. Lenin's final articles had an impact on Bukharin, and he often referred to these in his works right through the 1920s. According to Lih, the final idea in both Lenin and Bukharin's minds was not a permanent capitulation to revived capitalism. The general idea was that as soon as economic recovery was achieved, an offensive would begin again. Unlike 'War Communism,' this would not take the form of a brutal assault against the domestic capitalists, but a peaceful transition. Private trade would be 'crowded out' by way of the co-operative apparatus. The difficulty of the enterprise was time. Collectivisation would not be able to occur peacefully for many long years, and rationally speaking, the only way to proceed was to use the market as a mechanism for maintaining

²³² Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism 3*, p.33.

²³³ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.382.

relations with the peasantry. It should not be suggested that Bukharin liked the *Kulak* or the NEPmen who emerged from the readmission of private trade. Lih has suggested that the leaders did not emphasise the idea of NEP deepening, but rather the possibility that, through diligence and the mechanism of the market, NEP would eventually overcome itself.²³⁴ In this respect, Lih differs from the view that Bukharin overstated Lenin's intentions behind NEP.

Bukharin was troubled most of all by sceptics of the idea that socialism could be built in Russia alone. Additionally, he feared those who dreamt of a resurgence of 'War Communism,' the viability of militarised efforts to achieve socialism at breakneck speed.²³⁵ Much of this dissent had come from leftist elements. In this regard it is understandable why he needed to form an alliance with Stalin. A majority was needed in the Politburo and Stalin's line at the time had condoned the continuation of the *Smychka*. Stephen Cohen, in his biography of Bukharin, has indicated that Bukharin's alliance with Stalin in 1925 was not without its misgivings. Bukharin had disdained the 'arbitrariness' and 'lawlessness' of the 'privileged Communist groups.' Cohen has also suggested that Bukharin had been one of the first to identify the demons in Stalin's personality. He had once talked about how Stalin was intensely jealous of anyone who knew more than he did, or was able to undertake tasks better than he could.²³⁶

According to Martin Malia, in order to appreciate the case of Bukharin, we must consider the paradox in which the Soviet Union existed. The basic premise is that a 'proletarian' regime existed in a state which was overwhelmingly made up of the peasantry.²³⁷ There is, in Marxist terminology, the idea of 'base' and 'superstructure'. To put it simply, this was a building-like metaphor which was used by Marx and Engels in order to explain the connection between the economic 'base', the social 'relations of production' which corresponded to the development of material productive forces, and

²³⁴ L.T. Lih, 'Political Testament of Lenin and Bukharin and the Meaning of NEP,' *Slavic Review* 50 (Summer, 1991), p.244., p.246., pp.248-249. & p.252.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.250.

²³⁶ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp.241-242.

²³⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.151.

the 'superstructure'. The 'superstructure' was, in essence, ideology, and all other factors which were not directly related to productive factors.²³⁸ The Soviet Union existed in a state of contradiction because this 'superstructure' existed without the adjunct industrial 'base'. Ironically, the revolution, which was supposed to liberate the productive factors of the Imperial regime, had practically destroyed it.²³⁹

Robert V. Daniels has stated that the leftists were more driven by the struggle of the working classes. For them, this struggle was characterised by the need for rapid industrialisation.²⁴⁰ Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, the prime economist in the Trotsky camp, detailed many of the major factors which would be involved in such a move in *The New Economics* (1926), which had been available in partial release from as early as 1924. The primary idea behind this piece was 'primitive socialist accumulation.' This was a play on a term used by Karl Marx, 'primitive accumulation'. The term 'primitive accumulation' was used to explain the thinking of classical economists such as Adam Smith. In a brutally oversimplified sense, this term was the idea of general urbanisation, industrialisation and the formation of the proletariat.²⁴¹

Preobrazhensky's piece was not under any illusions about Soviet agricultural and industrial backwardness. It would require a serious effort to bring the Soviet Union to the same level of development as the capitalist west. Industrial development was seen not only as necessary; there was also an additional emphasis on speed. Indeed, the following quote from the text states clearly just how much emphasis he put on the latter point: 'To traverse this period rapidly, to reach quickly the moment when the socialist system will have developed all its natural advantages over capitalism - this is a question of life or death for the socialist state.'²⁴²

²³⁸ T. Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1991), pp.45-48.

²³⁹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.151.

²⁴⁰ R.V. Daniels, 'The Left Opposition as an Alternative to Stalinism,' *Slavic Review* 50 (Summer 1991), pp.278-279.

²⁴¹ Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p.444.

²⁴² Y. Preobrazhensky, 'The New Economics' in Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism*, p.178.

The left recognised that there was a danger in relying on market forces. Trotsky had pointed to this earlier, with the message coming across forcefully in his *Theses on Industry* (1923). If market forces were given free reign then heavy industry would inevitably lose out to lighter industry. In consequence, this would not only stall industrial growth, but also agriculture, as the heavy machinery required to mechanise farming would not be produced in the quantities needed. Trotsky also wished to convey dissention towards economic mismanagement, which harkens back to the points which were discussed in previous chapters. 'The system of actual one-man management must be applied in the organisation of industry from top to bottom.'²⁴³ This was only necessary to point out because it was not the case at the time, (and never would be). Trotsky's insistence was on organisation and clear planning. However, by 1925, he had lost an enormous amount of his power. As already discussed, his fate was mainly the result of Stalin's bureaucracy and the rest of the Politburo acting against him. What is troubling to realise is that this same bureaucracy that was used to muzzle the leadership's opposition, chosen for loyalty rather than ability, was in control of much of the state's economic apparatus.

The reader should not mistake any assertions made here as support for the sympathy which came through in Isaac Deutscher's *The Prophet Unarmed*.²⁴⁴ Like Dmitri Volkogonov, Robert Service and the many others who have since written on the enigmatic character, the present writer is in no doubt that Trotsky had misanthropic tendencies and a cruel streak to him.²⁴⁵ He did have principles however, and one of them was an appreciation of what, to him at least, was best for the state. By extension, this made the role of the state's economy, to his mind, the ultimate consideration. Testament to this is the sheer number of pieces he produced throughout his career which had an appreciation of economic questions. Geoffrey Swain is correct in highlighting Trotsky's appreciation of the technical intelligentsia.²⁴⁶ He is also right to point out Trotsky's concern with economic

²⁴³ Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism*, p.159.

²⁴⁴ See Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*.

²⁴⁵ See Volkogonov, *Trotsky: Eternal Revolutionary*; Service, *Trotsky*.

²⁴⁶ Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*, p.116.

planning in the context of the leadership struggle. All too often the Politburo, without any serious preparation, and largely without the technical knowledge required, would decide enormous issues which involved the economy in a short session. Often only minutes were spent on any one topic; this was not planning.²⁴⁷ Indeed, this rather *laissez faire* attitude triumphed in the earlier years of NEP.

The actual progress of the economy has not been mentioned in any significant capacity since the second chapter. Briefly then, we shall look into the affairs which led up to 1927. The NEP had achieved relative success in regards the reason behind its introduction - breathing space. Food shortages had affected certain areas, as had shortfalls in industrial goods; the one strange caveat to this being, what Trotsky dubbed, the 'scissor's crisis' of 1923-1924 where, strangely, the Soviet Union had an abundance of industrial goods. This led to the peasants not purchasing in quantities desired, and so less grain had appeared.²⁴⁸ When the scissors closed, a period known as 'high NEP' emerged, a window in which living conditions for a great many did improve. Living standards did not approach the levels that were enjoyed by the west, but for a collection of peoples who had undergone so many years of war and turmoil, in addition to the autocracy of the Imperial Russian regime prior to the revolution, there had been significant improvements. This only lasted from 1924-1926, which is a very limited time for a golden age to exist.²⁴⁹

Here there is agreement with Michael Reiman's assertion that rapid industrial progress had been achieved with tangible results and yet with little detrimental impact on peoples' lives. A reason as to why this had been possible was due to the fact that progress had been occupied with restoring the industrial capacity which had already existed before the wars. Essentially this was a process of refurbishing old plants with new machinery.²⁵⁰ Overall, this had not needed a Herculean mobilisation of resources, although it gave an impression to naive spectators that this upturn had been due to the regime's careful handling. The latter point was a falsehood. The economy was fragile and the

²⁴⁷ Swain, *Trotsky: Profiles in Power*, p.139.

²⁴⁸ L. Viola, et al (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry*, p.15.

²⁴⁹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.149.

²⁵⁰ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp. 8-9.

economic recovery had not been strong. It is worth observing the core defects in the economy in 1927, in particular, towards industrialisation.

To be succinct, there had been faults in industrial restoration. This was brought on by mishandling. This was in no small part due to Stalin's bureaucracy. An issue existed with efficiency and quality control and so, while the regime had by this stage managed to attain pre-war levels of production, the value of industrial output was dubious. Internal resources had been strained; this was due to mismanagement. The sheer immensity of Russia's natural resources had not been utilised properly. At times, money had to be printed, which would eventually come back to affect the population. To compound this, agriculture had struggled to keep in pace with industrial redevelopment. Such an issue would only worsen with further industrialisation were it not approached in a considered manner.²⁵¹

The territories of the Soviet state had been devastated by war and this meant that time would be required to repair and restore pre-existing infrastructure and facilities. While this occurred, it should be considered that the west had not stood idly by. Indeed, many countries had enjoyed a time of stabilisation and technological innovation, which acted to further the gap between the Soviet Union and the world it had become isolated from. This was important because much of the Party's rhetoric had been occupied with championing the superiority of socialism. With the gap only having widened, the legitimacy of such claims diminished. It is worth noting that some two million city dwellers had been unemployed by 1925, which only compounded the opposition's need for rapid industrial investment on both political and ideological grounds.²⁵²

With industrial restoration nearing completion, capital investment would have to be acquired. Indeed, by the time of 1927, the task was no longer the refurbishment of pre-existing manufactories, (those remaining few were increasingly out of date and in need of evermore extensive repairs); it

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.4. & p.6.

²⁵² Ibid., p.5. & pp.8-9.

had become a matter of constructing entirely new plants.²⁵³ Bukharin had revised his former line in light of this, having recognised from 1926 onwards that industrialisation would not be able to continue at such a swift pace without significant state intervention. It was not so much a *volte face* as he still, according to Cohen, kept his thinking within the context of NEP. However, Bukharin's outlook did change in two main respects; there would need to be greater expenditure than was originally planned, and market forces could no longer be depended upon because, as Trotsky and many of the leftists had identified, heavy industry would lag.²⁵⁴

This does not mean the capitalist path will at once be discarded. Nothing of the kind! There will be a struggle... There are many comrades who do not understand... They believe that a development of the village on non-capitalist lines is utterly impossible, they believe that the building up of socialism through the co-operatives under the guidance of industry is practically impossible. On the basis of the above analysis, however, it is necessary to affirm that if we separate socialism from State industry, if we separate the co-operatives and their socialist development from State industry, then there is absolutely nothing left of the plan which Lenin bequeathed to us for our guidance.²⁵⁵

The above quotation from 'The Tasks of the Russian Communist Party' (1926) demonstrates that, even in the face of serious questions around the future viability of NEP, Bukharin remained sure that it was the best way to proceed. It is worth noting that his various speeches on NEP had been nothing short of contentious. For example, he had hailed the peasantry to 'enrich yourselves!' in 1925.²⁵⁶ While he had been correct in declaring that the peasant had to cease fearing the state, it is easy to see how Stalin would later be able to portray Bukharin as a betrayer of the Bolshevik cause, as a *Kulak* lover and capitalist.

The term 'socialist accumulation,' Preobrazhensky's phrase, appeared in Stalin's pieces over the next couple of years. Stalin delivered a report to the Leningrad Party Organisation in April 1926 where he identified that 'the demand for manufactured products is growing faster than industry itself... the

²⁵³ Malia, *The Soviet tragedy*, p.163.

²⁵⁴ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.245.

²⁵⁵ N. Bukharin, 'The Tasks of the Russian Communist Party' in *The Labour Monthly* 8 (January 1926), pp.18-36.

²⁵⁶ McLellan, *Marxism After Marx*, p.124.

goods shortage we are now experiencing, with all its attendant consequences, is a reflection and outcome of this discrepancy.²⁵⁷ He goes on,

In order to renovate our industry on the basis of new technical equipment, we need considerable, very considerable, amounts of capital... We have to expand our industry as swiftly as possible, to double or treble the number of workers. We have to convert our country from an agrarian into an industrial country - and the sooner the better. But all this requires considerable capital.²⁵⁸

This was a move very much towards the position of the leftist opposition. One of the key points of the piece was the declaration that two periods of NEP existed. Whilst the first was centred on agriculture and restoration, the second would be focused on industrial expansion.²⁵⁹ This was interesting to consider because it shows that he had started to make his own assertions, which did not correspond with the rest of the leadership.

The inevitable question arose over where the funds for further industrialisation would come from. This would have to be levied from the peasantry and the 'well-to-do' strata of both rural and urban origin, namely the *Kulaks* and the NEPmen. The international market had been one of the key methods in which Imperial Russia had been able to acquire credit for its industrialisation programmes of the later 19th Century. Following in these footsteps, protected by the foreign trade monopoly, seeking international credit became another way in which capital could be raised for a new industrialisation programme.²⁶⁰

Events unfolded in a way which made this approach untenable during 1927. The breaking of diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom occurred after a series of scandals; primarily the fault of Soviet agitation in British assets in China. Until this point, Britain had been the greatest international

²⁵⁷ J. Stalin, *Works* Volume 8 January-November 1926 (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p.127.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.127-128.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.124-126.

²⁶⁰ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, p.7.

trade partner of the Soviet state and the discord caused a significant reduction in potential exchange.²⁶¹

Briefly, we shall bring political factors up to the point of 1927 too. At the Fourteenth Party Congress of late 1925, Zinoviev and Kamenev came out together against Stalin. Some of Kamenev's delivery was covered in the previous chapter. While Zinoviev had concentrated on the key issues of state capitalism, Kamenev's approach was a blunt attack against Stalin and the threat of dictatorship. Stalin had, through the apparatus, secured the support of the Congress and, as a consequence, his two former allies were heckled.²⁶² Eventually Zinoviev and Kamenev lost the fight. With the tide against them, they had united with the defeated Trotskyist camp to make the 'united opposition.' It should be considered that most of their activity was reduced to underground conspiracy work. The 'Declaration of the Thirteen' (July, 1926) was a desperate plea for support from the rank and file. This piece criticised the leadership intensely, with accusations of bureaucratic perversions and a defence of having to resort to subversive activity.²⁶³ There is something strikingly similar between the core messages between *The New Course* (1923) and the 'Declaration of the Thirteen' which will not be lost on many readers; nor will be the irony that Zinoviev and Kamenev had been the primary instigators in attacking the former work.

Michael Reiman makes a point that the opposition, even with their various posts removed, and holding little to no official power, have been underestimated in literature, and had been able to take advantage of the confused atmosphere. When we consider the positions and prestige of the three principle members of the 'united opposition,' there is little reason to doubt that much of the rank and file of the party still had a level of support for them. Zinoviev and Kamenev had until recently

²⁶¹ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp.11-18.

²⁶² Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism*, p.183.

²⁶³ 'Declaration of the Thirteen' in A.G. Cummins (ed.) *Documents in Soviet History Volume 4: Stalin Grasps power 1926-1928* (Gulf Breeze, Academic International Press, 1998), pp.49-52.

chaired the Leningrad and Moscow soviets respectively, only having recently had their power snatched from them. The sympathies of their former colleagues are understandable.²⁶⁴

By the Fifteenth Party Congress resolutions in December 1927, the Lashevich affair had taken place, whereby Zinoviev's friend and supporter Lashevich, Deputy War Commissar and candidate member to the Central Committee, had been charged with holding secret opposition meetings. The fallout of this was primarily the expulsion of Zinoviev from the Politburo prior to the Fifteenth Party Congress, thus causing a serious reduction in his powers.²⁶⁵ The ultimate conclusion of the Fifteenth Party Congress, in relation to politics, was to end the 'united opposition' as a political force in its own right. The 'left deviation' had ultimately secured its fate at the Fifteenth Party Congress with their attempted march in Moscow to commemorate the tenth anniversary, being broken up.²⁶⁶ The political conflict had dragged on and came at the expense of progressing economic discussion.

Another issue of enormous importance was the war scare of 1927. However unreal it seems that the United Kingdom wanted a large scale war, the threat that an anti-Soviet bloc could form in the west was a very sober consideration. This had a radicalising effect on the entire Politburo, which had taken on a 'pogrom atmosphere,' from which Stalin, of all, would benefit most handsomely.²⁶⁷ The aggressiveness displayed by the leadership would translate into a virtual manhunt of the subversive leftist elements, and arguably, it was only because of the advent of war hysteria that the moderates were in a position where they were willing to go through with expelling the left altogether. On the surface, it appeared that the moderates had superiority over Stalin, and that his individual rise in this time was of no concern. This was a facade however, as Stalin's control over the apparatus was becoming absolute.²⁶⁸ The radicalisation of Bukharin's own line had been down to the threat of war. No longer could the patient principles of state capitalism suffice. Instead, amidst the fit of hysteria,

²⁶⁴ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp.19-21.

²⁶⁵ 'Lashevich Affair' in Cummins (ed.), *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 4, pp.47-48.

²⁶⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.145.

²⁶⁷ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.264.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.264-265.

he had declared that the state had to catch up to, and surpass, the capitalist nations in as short a time as possible.²⁶⁹ Indeed, Jerry Hough and Merle Fainsod have correctly identified the irony that while a two year long war had been fought against the left, the leadership's own policy had been growing ever leftward itself.²⁷⁰

In a recent study, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* by Olga Velikanova, she would examine the question of whether or not higher officials saw the threat of war as a serious legitimate threat, or whether it had been wryly used in order to mobilise the population and better lay the ground to strike at opponents. 'Fear, rather than cold calculation, stood behind war-scare politics,'²⁷¹ Indeed, she argued that there was little reason to implicate Stalin as using this as a tool for greater political designs. What was worrying for the state was the general and growing discontentment among the peasantry - they were at the end of their tether in regards to their grain being undercut in price by state procurement. In addition to the fact that their meagre savings could do little to purchase consumer goods, they also had to endure the weak local administrators enforcing a class system onto them. One of the primary reactions to the war scare was to hoard grain.

Many works have been released regarding the investigation of the workings of everyday people and culture. These are important in our understanding of the 1920s Soviet Union. It must be remembered that the high politics of the Kremlin was very far away, and the matters of intrigue and the development of theory were very remote matters to the millions outside, especially when we head further away from the cities.²⁷²

When the war scare had become known to the public, a volume of the 'Annals of Communism' series:

The War Against the Peasantry 1927-1930, has brought many recently declassified documents to our

²⁶⁹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.263.

²⁷⁰ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, p.142.

²⁷¹ O. Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.80.

²⁷² W.G. Rosenberg, 'Understanding NEP society and Culture in Light of New Research,' in Fitzpatrick, et al. (eds.), *Russia in the Era of the NEP*, pp.310-311.

attention. One of the major discoveries found by the research team was the ever increasing role of the OGPU.²⁷³ On the subject of the war scare, there are a number OGPU reports which gauged a worrying reaction from the peasantry. 'Defeatist agitation' was rife and it is worth our time to briefly explore some of the more striking examples of this. One 'middle' peasant from Kursk Gubernia had cried out, 'What are we going to go fight for? We don't have enough land, and our land was taken away by the state farm, which is leasing it back to us... we're not going to fight, they can shoot us.' Indeed, this general discontent is voiced further by a 'well-to-do' peasant of Moscow Gubernia, 'We're not going to fight. The people who've gotten an improvement out of Soviet power should fight, not us peasant[s].'²⁷⁴

There had also been an amount of serious anti-government sentiment at this time. It is worth taking into account another document from *The War Against the Peasantry*. Here, upon the background of mob justice being dealt against a thief, one 'agitator' called out, 'We must smash the government, it breeds thieves, it only defends the interests of [the] workers. Long live the Union of Working Peasantry! Long live the Party of Peasants! Smash all the yids who are against the peasantry!'²⁷⁵ These were not isolated occasions of defeatism and anger; it reflected the mindset of a worrying number of the population. Against such a backdrop, there can be little wonder how and why the secret police was able to ascertain so much power.

A new scissor crisis had emerged in 1927 as a result of the industrial drive. The emphasis on heavy industry had come at the expense of the light industry. This had several knock-on effects. As a result of the light industry not being invested in, the price of consumer goods increased significantly. Consequently, (although the war scare had helped in this), the peasants had hoarded their grain. The

²⁷³ The successor to the Cheka and GPU. OGPU directly stands for 'United State Political Directorate'.

²⁷⁴ L. Viola, et al (eds.), *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1929* p.24

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37

effect of this was twofold; without the grain required for export, credits from the few contracts abroad could not be yielded, and in addition, there would be a breakdown in the food supply.²⁷⁶

What was supposed to be a full draft of the prospective 'five year plan' by the Fifteenth Party Congress resolutions in December 1927 had only set out general guidelines, rather than a considered set of policies. Indeed, in Stalin's report to the Congress we find only general assertions: 'conclusion: our country is becoming an industrial country. The Party's task: to take all measures further to promote the industrialisation of our country.'²⁷⁷ Bukharin's own thought had not wholly come together by this stage. Only after the all-important Fifteenth Congress had he been able to rationalise the situation faced by the Soviet Union. However, by 1928, the general atmosphere turned into insanity.²⁷⁸

By early 1928, time had run out. The Soviet Union was subjected to an acute economic crisis over the severe grain shortage. A harvest which had a below average yield was partially to blame for this, but hoarding had been prevalent. There is no question that the people suffered greatly in this time, and that much of the burden of economic struggle had been passed on to them. As a direct result, working and living conditions plummeted. Crime, prostitution, alcoholism, work shirking and all other symptoms of an unwell society had become common place in the bigger cities. The harrowing cries of the participants of long bread lines had an echo with a previous epoch - 'Just like 1919!'²⁷⁹

The OGPU, inflated by its witch hunts in response to cracking down on the opposition, in addition to countering the threat of foreign and nationalist sabotage, had been sent to the countryside to forcibly requisition grain stocks.²⁸⁰ The violence was resonant of the 'War Communism' era, where any grain surpluses would be forcibly confiscated, along with arbitrary secondary searches. The

²⁷⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, pp.149-150.

²⁷⁷ J. Stalin, *Works Volume 10 August-December 1927* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p.304.

²⁷⁸ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.248.

²⁷⁹ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp.51-55.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.37-44. - It is noteworthy that the OGPU had infected many vestiges of the government structures, this was not an organisation which could be strictly controlled in practice by anyone, even Stalin.

moderates had accepted the necessity of the emergency procurement measures, but they had been appalled by the excesses which had been committed.

It is interesting to note that Stalin had taken the time to briefly visit Siberia in January 1928, an area where harvests were supposedly bountiful. Stalin had begun to show a freer hand in his actions. While the idea of collectivisation had been circulating for a little while, it is interesting that, in an address to his demoralised audience he would advocate the policy so boldly and resolutely:

Our country cannot live with an eye only to today's needs. We must also give thought to the morrow, to the prospects for the development of our agriculture and, lastly, to the fate of socialism in our country. The grain problem is part of the agricultural problem, and the agricultural problem is an integral part of the problem of building socialism in our country... All areas of our country, without exception, must be covered with collective farms (and state farms) capable of replacing not only the kulaks, but the individual peasants as well, as suppliers of grain.²⁸¹

This is important to consider as these were his first utterances which were geared towards total collectivisation.²⁸² Indeed, this would mark the start of the 'Ural-Siberian method,' named so because its first uses was in various Siberian districts. This method of 'War Communism' like behaviour had been very arbitrary in practice. To Stalin, the traditional peasantry methods stood in the way of progress and ultimately would have to be destroyed.²⁸³

The outrage by the moderates was extreme, and by April the 'extraordinary measures' had to be pulled off. As Cohen has pointed to, the 1928 procurement campaign was where the first true divide between Stalin and the moderates had opened up. The moderates' plans for the emergency palliative had been structured, and generally more humane. Stalin had been the one to take the reins in organising and orchestrating the execution of the measures however.²⁸⁴ At a joint plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission in April 1928, a meeting of practical matters rather than party disputes, Stalin had given a report on two particular subjects. The first had been around the 'success' of grain procurement measures. While he referred to the menacing

²⁸¹ J. Stalin, 'Grain Procurement and the Prospects for the Development of Agriculture' in Cummins (ed.), *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 4, p.280.

²⁸² Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp.278-279.

²⁸³ P. Boobbyer, *The Stalin Era* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), p.29.

²⁸⁴ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp p.278.

nature of the programme, it was a rather fleeting reference when put against his recommendations of stronger controls and indeed, talks on the success of expanding the crop areas.²⁸⁵

Another subject of importance, one which would start a trend which would continue over the following decade or so, was the use of scapegoats in order to divert the populace's anger from the government. While this had arguably begun in Lenin's era with the subjugation of the other socialist factions, the true over-dramatisation which can be associated with the show trials in the 1930s had begun with the Shakhty affair. As a simplified explanation, a group of technical specialists had been accused of sabotaging a mine in the Shakhty district of Donbas. The charges were at best tenuous, and with the trial having taken place in the months of May through to July 1928, the trial concluded with fifty people being found guilty with ten of this number facing summary execution. Shakhty was only the first attempt by the regime to mask its own major faults behind a perceived enemy. The non-party technical intelligentsia would come to be treated with suspicion as a result of this trial. Indeed, other targets would become the target of the regime's attacks. Notably, the Jews would suffer extensively in time to come.²⁸⁶ It is worth mentioning that a number of German engineers stood among those accused at the show trial. While these experts would later be acquitted, the German government was slow to forgive such an arbitrary attack on its own specialist personnel. Stalin at the April Joint Plenum had said, 'The Shakhty affair marks another serious attack on the Soviet regime launched by international capital and its agents in our country.'²⁸⁷ The theme of inciting fear of capitalist encirclement had been a weapon which strengthened the idea of 'socialism in one country.'

The position of Bukharin in this mess is well known. By July 1928 it had become obvious that Stalin's personal power had expanded mightily in the leadership positions. His control over the apparatus

²⁸⁵ J. Stalin, 'The Work of the April Joint Plenum of the CC and CCC' in Cummins (ed.) *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 4, pp.291-296.

²⁸⁶ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp.57-63.

²⁸⁷ Stalin, 'The Work of the April Joint Plenum of the CC and CCC' in *Documents in Soviet History* Volume 4, p.301.

had become awe inspiring. He had also been able to surround himself with allies of his own camp in the Politburo over the course of the later 1920s. The dogma of Stalin's course of action with the 'five year plan' and talk of collectivisation with the unmentioned, yet obvious, intention of using coercion, could not be rationally accounted for by the moderates. At a Central Committee meeting of July, Bukharin had pleaded for a course of moderation in what could have been interpreted as an affront to Stalin. Stalin, clearly unstirred by Bukharin's fears and warnings, was able to joke, 'The Son is terrifying but God is gracious.'²⁸⁸

The swan song of the moderates was in full swing. A conversation between Kamenev and Bukharin, in the day which followed the same Central Committee, had proven how extensive Bukharin's fears were. It is difficult to not feel some compassion for Bukharin in this circumstance, who correctly identified the enormous dangers the regime faced. During their talk, Kamenev opens with the simple line 'Is the struggle really serious?' It is worth us appreciating Bukharin's response.

...We feel that Stalin's line is ruinous for the entire revolution. With this we could be done for... I, Rykov and Tomsy agree on formulating the position thus: "It would be much better if now we had in the Politburo instead of Stalin - Zinoviev and Kamenev"... I have not spoken to Stalin for several weeks. This is an unprincipled intriguer, who subordinates everything to the preservation of his own power. He changes theory to please whom he at the present moment should remove. In the "Seven" we argued with him to the point of saying, "false," "you lie," etc. He has now made concessions in order to cut our throats... His line is 1) Capitalism grew either on account of colonies, or loans, or the exploitation of the workers. We have no colonies, we can get no loans, *therefore our basis is tribute from the peasantry*. You understand this is also what Preobrazhensky's theory is. 2) The more socialism grows, the greater will be the resistance to it. This is idiotic illiteracy. 3) Since tribute is necessary and resistance will grow, firm leadership is necessary. Self criticism must not apply to the leadership, but only to those who carry out orders.²⁸⁹

In the later months of 1928, it appeared that the tide was set against the moderates. Kuibyshev, the dominant economic spokesman for the Stalinist camp, had released a report in the September of 1928 on the industrial question. In this report, the sheer grandiose nature of demands, and the

²⁸⁸ Bukharin, 'Speech to the Central Committee, July 10th, 1928' in Daniels (ed.) *A Documentary History of Communism*, p.205.

²⁸⁹ 'Secret Meeting Between Bukharin and Kamenev, July 11th, 1928' in Cummins (ed.), *Documents in Soviet History*, pp.302-303. - It is worth quickly mentioning the concept of 'self-criticism,' whereby members of the party who had done wrong would be 'encouraged' to understand and (publicly) reflect on their mistakes in the ideological sphere. By exempting himself and his clique, Stalin would be taking another step towards making himself invulnerable to rebuttal.

many inbuilt assumptions of progress were staggering. Bukharin's response in the same month, in the form of his *Notes of an Economist* would, in great detail, cry for restraint and caution in the face of extreme measures. This was the closest Bukharin had come to a direct, public attack on Stalin.²⁹⁰

The course of events over the following months would lead to, by April 1929, the Sixteenth Party Congress completely approving the 'optimum' version of the 'five year plan.' Indeed, in effect, this had been in action since October 1928. As the moderates' influence steadily decreased in this timeframe, they had been collectively relegated to a role of issuing criticism, rather than policy making. While there were times in which it looked plausible that they may have been able to regroup and pose a challenge, Stalin had been clinical in his constant approach of tactical retreat followed by an immediate counter attack. The methods of Stalin's attacks were not limited to just accusations of factionalism, they had involved such manoeuvres which were reminiscent of the Trotsky 'whispering campaign.' For instance, the 'right danger' was brought about as a rumour at various meetings, and surprisingly intensively at the Sixth congress of the Comintern, (a traditional stronghold of the moderates), where such derogative terms as '*Kulak* lovers' and 'capitalists' went from mere gossip to an official recognition of the 'struggle' against the right. Curiously, the nail in the coffins of the moderates was a leaflet which was released by the left. This had intended to cause a split between the moderate and Stalinist camps. The message it had was the conversation which took place between Bukharin and Kamenev as displayed on the previous page.²⁹¹

The 'five year plan,' even in its basic form went beyond the imagination of any rationally minded person. The optimum version advocated essentially a break with reality. Here is the beginning of true Stalinism, with the origins of the personality cult finding its roots in the fact that suddenly objecting to Stalin would mean a loss of career, or much worse. It meant the denial of reality - many of the crops given over to the collectivisation programme simply did not exist. The harvest in its present state would no longer cover the needs of the population, even if intense industrialisation

²⁹⁰ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p.278.

²⁹¹ Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, pp.92-93. & pp.100-101.

was not underway - this was institutionalised famine, but no longer could anyone say as much. The OGPU had powers which were extreme by this point. If by any chance the peasantry thought it could not have gotten worse than the opening months of 1928, they would be in for a surprise.²⁹²

It is worth appreciating some of the factors associated with Stalin's personality. A chapter in Robert C. Tucker's *Stalin as Revolutionary* made reference to what Lenin had once said about Stalin's personality: '[This] may seem an insignificant trifle but it may just be a trifle with decisive historical significance.' Stalin had a thirst for glory which had had not been satiated in the revolution. He did not have the revolutionary record of his hated rival, Trotsky. After Lenin's departure, he was unable to take a joke in good humour but was openly receptive to praise. Certainly, in the later 1920s, he was in an atmosphere where this need of his personality could be catered for. Indeed, such a future figure as Beria had gotten into his good books by lavishing him with flattery in a style which Stalin's daughter Svetlana would recall as being so over indulgent that it would cause embarrassment among friends.²⁹³

He had also presented himself a pillar of modesty, the sort of man who would give an impression that he was merely selflessly absorbed in the concerns of the Communist movement. However, according to Tucker, there was an anger there. Svetlana would later recall that, no matter how long you had known him, if you had crossed him, the metamorphous into cruelty would take shape. Indeed, Tucker posits that towards his final victory in the power struggle, he saw those other Bolshevik members opposed to him as enemies who had merely worn a mask of loyalty and had all but betrayed their party with their actions of opposition. According to Tucker, he made himself out as the hero and the oppositionists were, to his mind, the villains, no matter how long their friendship had been prior. This afflicted him later, as he would, according to Tucker, see enemies where they did not exist.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Ibid., pp.103-111.

²⁹³ Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p.421., pp.429-430., p.438. & p.442.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p.443., p.449., pp.453-454. & p.461.

It is also important to consider how he went about political correspondence, briefly. *Stalin's Letters to Molotov* is formed from a collection of political correspondence that Molotov had later handed over to state. These give us an insight into the inner mechanics of the man in his private communications. As a general, over-arching comment, the letters, unlike those sent by other higher personnel, lacked pleasantries beyond what was strictly necessary. Indeed the sobriety and straight forward nature came across in his to-the-point numbered paragraphs. Flashes of anger overcame him at times, one such paragraph from 'letter 42' dating from 1929, on the subject of Bukharin, comfortably links the context of the latter half of this chapter with our recognition of Stalin's uncompromising personality:

You're right when you say that Bukharin is going downhill. It's sad, but a fact. What can you say? - it must be "fate." It's strange, though, that he hopes to *trick* the party with petty underhanded "manoeuvres." He is a typical representative of the spineless, effete *intelligent* in politics, leaning in the direction of a Kadet lawyer. The hell with him...²⁹⁵

It is difficult to look at the excerpt and believe Stalin can be serious in his supposition of demonising Bukharin, but if we are to believe Tucker, this is the exactly how he had come to view him.

Generally speaking, the passage of events in the latter half of the 1920s has been portrayed as a reaction to an ever worsening socio-economic situation. Argument from Moshe Lewin in *The Making of the Soviet Union* has brought across the angle that the state of affairs had 'slipped' as a result of certain issues. The situation the leadership had found themselves in had necessitated industrialisation, which could not be achieved without 'tribute' and an enormous effort from the entire country. In Lewin's view, it is possible to hypothesise that a series of factors could have come together to have made an alternative possible. He goes on to argue that it would be inconceivable to suggest that Stalin had any foreknowledge of how events would turn out. Indeed, it is difficult to assume that Stalin, on the eve of the social and economic crises in 1926, had any idea that this

²⁹⁵ L.T. Lih, et al (eds.), *Stalin's Letters to Molotov*, p.168.

episode would end with him having seized complete power and beginning the great 'leap forward.'²⁹⁶

However, alternatives to this idea do exist. One worthy of our consideration is, as Martin Malia has suggested, that the crisis was intrinsically political in nature and that the solution too, was a political one. From February 1927, the party had frequently intervened by raising consumer good prices whilst simultaneously lowering procurement costs of foodstuffs. This had been based on ideological and party principles that the developing industrial base was more important than the needs of the peasantry. Therefore, the problem was not with the *Kulak* withholding grain, it was with the party for offering such unfavourable circumstances to them. Malia has made a deeply considered point in suggesting that the excesses were to do with the vehicle of the Bolshevik Party as opposed to the driver of it. 1929, and the 'great break' was not the personal ingenuity of Stalin at work or even a mistake, but rather a result of the radicalised Bolshevik mindset. The Bolsheviks were not going to allow themselves to be dragged down by the peasantry for decades. Like Brest-Livotsk, the setback of NEP had only been a temporary delay, and so over the course of the 1920s, the Bolsheviks had brought themselves to a position where they were raring to commence battle once more.²⁹⁷

There is not enough emphasis on the personal role of Stalin in either of these two analyses. Referring back to Robert Himmer, he had mentioned that there was a reluctance from any of the other party leaders to 'renew pre-NEP militance.' Considering the taste that Stalin had for building socialism under fire, as proven by his vigour in carrying out 'War Communism' a decade earlier, and having been disappointed by its cessation, there is a link between why the brutal methods used in the 'Revolution from Above' had been so reminiscent of 'War Communism.' Stalin had kept faith with the programme which was set out in 1918. It could be argued by extension that the reluctance shown by the various party leaders to agree with this mindset had given Stalin no choice but to play

²⁹⁶ M. Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System* (New York, New Press, 1985), p.118.

²⁹⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, pp.165-167.

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his long political game. He would have to gather support over a decade and grasp power when the opportunity arose.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Himmer, 'The Transition from War Communism to the New Economic Policy: An Analysis of Stalin's Views,' p.529.

Conclusion: From Revolution to Despotism

'He [Stalin] is gifted with practicality, a strong will, and persistence in carrying out his aims.

His political horizon is restricted, his theoretical equipment primitive.'²⁹⁹ - Trotsky, *My Life*.

Stalinism and Leninism

It is important for us not to view the 1920s as a separate and isolated entity. We should take the time to appreciate, albeit briefly, the era of Stalin. Stalin's method of rule in the decisive decade of the Soviet Union, the 1930s (especially between 1929-1934), has been referred to as 'the great break,' 'the revolution from above,' and 'primitive accumulation by methods of Tamerlane.' The sheer grandiose nature and break from the relative calm of the 1920s was so absolute that the question has come about as to whether there was any continuation between Lenin and Leninism and what became Stalinism.³⁰⁰

To investigate this question briefly, it is worth our while to observe a number of key historians' viewpoints on the matter. As Martin Malia reminds us, two revisionist schools have existed on the topic. While the first is concentrated on detaching Stalin from the October revolution and Leninism altogether, the second school is bolder insofar as it has suggested that, if we were to take away some of the excesses associated with Stalinism, it is in fact the fulfilment of Leninism. It is within this second school that we get such terms as the 'cultural revolution,' which is said to have existed in the party, which primarily targeted the 'bourgeois specialists.'³⁰¹

An essay by Stephen F. Cohen, *Bolshevism and Stalinism*, has examined many of the core points which have surrounded this debate. It is worth our time to consider this piece. In this, Cohen has broken up many historians into various camps. The 'Leninist heritage' line of thought is characterised by such notable scholars as Robert H. McNeal and Robert V. Daniels. Isaac Deutscher and E.H. Carr

²⁹⁹ L. Trotsky, *My Life* (New York, Pathfinder, 1970, originally published in 1930), p.506.

³⁰⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.178.

³⁰¹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p.11.

are said to have formed a somewhat counter-traditional point of view which, while they do not completely break with the idea of continuity, they recognised that significant changes had occurred, such as the disposal of internationalism.³⁰²

Cohen, by contrast, has put forward the case that while Bolshevism was a strong authoritarian movement, the principle departures which occurred after 1929 are crucial in our understanding of the Stalinist era. Stalinism, by contrast to the 1920s, was an epoch entirely surrounded by excess of the most extreme form. The 'great terror' was not just the police repression that the masses were subjected to in the 1920s, it was a virtual holocaust. Indeed, it was not just a leader cult, like that which surrounded Lenin, but an all out deification of a single individual. Cohen is of the mind that to disregard the sheer level of extremism that took place as its own, distinctly unique, epoch is to obscure the very nature of Stalinism.³⁰³

Indeed, there is the capacity to look at the period as the 'revolution from above,' a term we associate most commonly with Robert C. Tucker, which is elaborated upon in his biography *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above*. A brief excerpt from his essay in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, gives a strong impression:

Stalinism as revolution from above was a state-building process, the construction of a powerful, highly centralised, bureaucratic, military-industrial Soviet Russian state... Stalinist "socialism" was a socialism of mass poverty rather than plenty; of sharp stratification rather than relative equality; of universal, constant fear rather than emancipation.³⁰⁴

The aim of the above quote is to mark the difference between Stalinism and Leninism. As Philip Boobbyer has commented, the term 'Stalinism' does embrace the uniqueness of the Stalinist era, but other problems do develop from trusting the term too closely.³⁰⁵ While this goes beyond the prerogative of the current dissertation, it is worth quickly mentioning the longevity of Stalin's

³⁰² S.F. Cohen, 'Bolshevism and Stalinism' in R.C. Tucker (ed.) *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, Norton, 1977), pp.6-10.

³⁰³ Ibid., p.12.

³⁰⁴ R.C. Tucker, 'Stalinism as Revolution from Above' in R.C. Tucker (ed.) *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, Norton, 1977) p.95

³⁰⁵ Boobbyer, *The Stalin Era*, p.5.

autocratic leadership. The 'Stalinist' era was not one homogenous epoch; the state of 1929 differed in many respects from the state of 1953. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the state ideology changed immensely. Revolutionary practices and values were replaced by more conservative, *Russian virtues*.³⁰⁶

Andrzej Walicki has offered an interesting viewpoint of his own in which ideology is given a prominent role. Indeed, Walicki does not write about the interim era between Lenin's death and Stalin's final rise in much detail at all in *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, as a result of his understanding that the final ideas and ambitions of the Bolshevik state did not shift.³⁰⁷ In Walicki's opinion there was an essential continuity between Lenin's rule and Stalin's, but with a number of important differences. While, as Trotsky had said, there had been a restoration approach in the 1930s, there was also an enormous swing towards right-wing totalitarianism. According to Walicki, Lenin had always been willing to subordinate everything so long as it progressed towards the communist ideal. Stalin, as a state builder, had found that tightening state controls was more important than these said communist ideals. To succinctly capture Walicki's core message - totalitarian communism had become communist totalitarianism.³⁰⁸

Another debate of this era is to speculate as to what would have happened to the Bolshevik revolution had Stalin not come out as the victor of the power struggle. It is worth taking the small time to consider such a question, namely the event that the left opposition had come out on top, and in direct opposition, had the moderates taken the primary role, following Bukharin's line on policy.

In regards to the left opposition, Robert V. Daniels has argued that the left failure was so absolute because of the fact that its leadership was never truly united, and that they were never able to capitalise on opportunities. He points to the irony that Zinoviev had been the one who had saved

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p.5.

³⁰⁷ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.393.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p.419.

Stalin from political catastrophe, only to go on to be betrayed a few years later. The left, as a group, could not be characterised as schemers. Trotsky, for all of his brilliance as a wartime commander and as the effective 'voice' of the revolution, had no skill for underhanded tactics or coalition building. In this regard, Daniels, in an article which was named 'The Left Opposition as an Alternative to Stalinism,' concluded that studying the left as an alternative is not particularly fruitful as an exercise. Still, he identified the differences in the stances which the leftists had. While their emphasis was far more on industrialisation at speed, when compared to the moderates, they had never contemplated the sort of crash course associated with the 'five year plan.' In addition, whilst the left was characterised far more with the idea of including international support, Daniels has admitted that not even Trotsky was willing to jeopardise the fragile Soviet position by declaring an all out war in the mid to late 1920s.³⁰⁹

In Geoffrey Swain's his view, Trotsky had never rejected the principle of building socialism in Russia alone, even if he had never implicitly said so. Swain has taken the thought that if Trotsky had somehow managed to come to power, it is possible to speculate on what he may have done. It should be remembered that Trotsky, in his later writings, was not opposed to Stalin's industrialisation, just the degeneration which had formed around it. Therefore, the argument could be made that Trotsky would have embarked on a similar industrial course, one which would have been at a slower pace however, and would have been more open to the technical intelligentsia (as opposed to alienation). The bureaucracy had proven to be a bane for Trotsky, so it is possible to state that secretarial powers would have been reduced.³¹⁰

The case of Bukharin as a viable alternative has also been considered. Cohen has written in *Rethinking the Soviet Experience* about the idea of Bukharinism forming a relatively substantial substitute. Indeed, in the course of this paper, the viewpoint of Bukharin has been touched on a number of times. Cohen has posited that the 'socialist humanist' approach of allowing 'the peasant

³⁰⁹ Daniels, 'The Left Opposition as an Alternative to Stalinism,' p.283-285.

³¹⁰ Swain, *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*, p.118.

majority and private sector to prosper and "to grow into socialism" through market relations,³¹¹ could have gone ahead. However it is difficult to seriously consider the possibility of Bukharin beating Stalin in the course of the leadership struggle. Like Trotsky, he did not have the guile and wit about him which were necessary.

Martin Malia has written on the topic of Bukharin as an alternative as well. The key issue to remember is the primacy of ideology, however. Bukharin's system could have worked as an economic arrangement. However, it is also important to remember that Bukharin did not operate in a rational climate. While it may have succeeded, it was not in line with party principle. When consideration is given to the fact that most of the Party leadership positions had fallen into the hands of Stalin's supporters, who shared the same militarised mind-set, it becomes impossible to think that 'the Leninist Party [would]... capitulate, under pressure of a crisis, to the class enemies it had been created to destroy.'³¹²

Concluding Remarks

Robert C. Tucker in his introduction to *Stalin's Letters to Molotov* brought up a number of notable points about Stalin as an intriguer, a leader, and as a personality. One simple line, in particular, resonated with the current writer deeply: 'How much control did he [Stalin] have over events?'³¹³

In the first chapter the aim was primarily to cover the idea of the 'revolutionary right' the Bolsheviks felt they had. However much the revolution was detached from the auspices of orthodox Marxian socialism, there is something to be considered in that they dared to go through with the enterprise anyway. 'War Communism' came as a result. While it has been argued that this was implemented merely as a result of the dire situation the Bolsheviks faced in the light of the civil war and the need

³¹¹ Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, p.77.

³¹² Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, pp.173-174.

³¹³ Tucker Introduction to Lih, et al (eds.), *Stalin's Letter to Molotov*, p.62.

to regiment the food supply, the ideological implications seem to be of greater significance. Walicki has posited that Lenin was of the mind-set that anything which would aid the revolution was moral, and anything which hindered it was immoral.³¹⁴ Indeed, the callous manner in which the higher leadership undertook tasks associated with fighting the revolutionary war showed how little value they placed on human life. A naive yet audacious view on events existed. Lenin, for instance, assumed in the early days that socialism could have actually been built in a small number of months, and assumed again that there would be a large number of inbuilt benefits to this.³¹⁵

In the second chapter of this dissertation we discussed the core principles which surrounded Lenin's last years. Primarily this involved the question of the New Economic Policy and the profound effect this had on the state. The introduction of NEP was an ideological retreat which had to be made up for with political tightening. A misanthropic streak did not cease to exist with the cessation of 'War Communism.' Lenin had created the autocracy of the party, removing the naysayers and any other factionalists with an iron hand. This dictatorship of the party, rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat, would outlast him. Additionally, Stalin had begun to emerge as man who could start to make his own bold assertions. Contrary to previous belief, Stalin was depended upon largely by Lenin in policy making. While the Georgian Affair had invariably led to Lenin's falling out with Stalin, it is worth noting that their relationship prior to this sequence of events had been, at least superficially, cordial.³¹⁶ Indeed, if Stalin had in fact looked up to Lenin, then the core principles set out in the Bolshevik programme, (strict, centralised leadership), would have invariably rubbed off on him.³¹⁷

With Lenin's death, we entered the crucial stage of interregnum. The purpose of discussion within this third chapter was threefold. Firstly, this was to discuss the fallout of Comintern's failure. This brought on political international isolation: the world's one 'proletarian' state was truly alone.

³¹⁴ Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, p.304.

³¹⁵ Van Ree, 'Lenin's Conception of Socialism in One Country,' p.172.

³¹⁶ Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, p.9.

³¹⁷ See Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*.

Secondly, we discussed bureaucracy and how Stalin had gathered an enormous amount of power through the enormous party apparatus, allowing him to dominate in the Party Congresses as well as in the party structures through the inflated secretariat. Crucially however, with Trotsky's 'The New Course' (1923) setting out to combat the excesses which had become invariably associated with the state bureaucracy, the Triumvirs along with the rest of the leadership counterattacked. The point of discussion here was to not only appreciate the doggedness of political combat in the mid-1920s, but to assert that Stalin had broken onto the field of theory. While he had been, broadly speaking, overlooked, it showed that he was in a position to assert his own views in a concerted form. Such works as *The Foundations of Leninism* (1924) had seen him assume the mantle of the defender of Leninist principles, able to assert principles in his own distinct fashion in order to fight Trotsky's opposition.

This theme was elaborated upon in the fourth chapter which went far more into Stalin's thought processes. He was an avid believer in building socialism under fire and believed that it could be achieved in Russia alone through 'War Communism.' This brought him into conflict with Lenin over NEP, but only through Aesopian language was he able to say anything. Through association with Bukharin were the first seeds of the idea of 'socialism in one country' able to take root and grow in his mind. In many ways, it was used as a weapon to directly juxtapose Trotsky's 'permanent revolution' against Leninist principles. There was more to it than just this however. 'Socialism in one country' had given the tired state the ray of hope that it sorely needed in order to roll on, despite its international isolation.³¹⁸ 'Socialism in one country' was a flexible tool which could, and was, twisted to support Stalin's designs.

The fifth chapter was, chiefly, an appreciation of the extent of the degradation suffered by the Soviet Union as a result of number of factors. Predominantly this was heavily tied to the economic questions which surrounded the nation's affairs at this stage. Industrial restoration came about

³¹⁸ Deutscher, *Stalin*, p.287.

around 1927. Suddenly the state would have to create new industry rather than outfit old plants. One of the questions which surrounded this was where such funds could be acquired from. International trade had been severely reduced as a result of affairs which took place. Suddenly, with the war scare of 1927, events took a chaotic downhill spiral. The moderate mindset was radicalised through this, and an even greater industrial drive came about. What this led to was a self-feeding chaotic spiral in both society and economics.

The question of why Stalin took the course of action he did is deep in historical argument. The general course of this dissertation takes two principles. Stalin had developed into a leadership position inside the Leninist regime which had time and again ensured the primacy of the party, and was consumed by the belief that it had a historical mission to perform. Stalin, in his thought, had generally followed Lenin, but he held, according to David Priestland, even more voluntaristic and anti-bourgeois views.³¹⁹ Stalin, through his apparatus, had secured power and 'socialism in one country' had given him the power to legitimise his viewpoints as directly related to Leninism. Thus, when the country ran into the crises which surrounded the years 1927 and 1928, Stalin was able to manipulate the situation to complete his assumption to power. However, he was no gifted economist, and the situation he faced was soon out of his control. His reaction therefore, surrounded by those who had only reached the heights they had because of his patronage, was to do away with those who he saw as 'deviations', and to embark on his all-out attack on the peasantry in a heightened version of 'War Communism.'

³¹⁹ D. Priestland, 'Stalin as Bolshevik Romantic,' in Davies and Harris (eds.), *Stalin a New History*, p.187.

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