
Analyze the methods used by Joseph Stalin to obtain power and to what extent did Stalin follow the aims of his declared ideology?

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The early 20th century was a period of upheaval in Russia: the first World War had just ended, leaving in its aftermath millions of dead Russians and the Russian national pride scarred in defeat; the second industrial revolution left behind a large industrial capacity, but the devastating defeat of Russia during World War I had left Russia's manufacturing sector in a shambles (Daniels 39); the people of Russia, most of whom were peasantry, were expressing their disdain of the Romanov dynasty, the family that was at the head of Russia's Tsarist government. The peasant class was angry at the government's ignorance and abuse of the peasantry. The state practiced progressive terrorization and enserfment of the peasantry, ignoring their conditions, with shortages rampant and growing unrest. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Party, spoke of creating a new socialist state and removing the incompetent government: a call for revolution. The October Revolution in November of 1917—also known as the Bolshevik Revolution—was the culmination of the frustrations of the people of Russia, and thrust Stalin into the political scene as Lenin's protégé. Stalin used his influence as Lenin's direct subordinate to slowly build his network of political allies, all the while weeding out his enemies, until he was able to consolidate political power. After gaining power, Stalin only followed his declared ideology—Marxism-Leninism-Leninism—to a moderate extent: while he did nationalize industry and implement some level of redistribution, he never created a socialist state, instead heading a centralized government.

I Origins

The origins of Stalin's single-party state stem to the period two decades before the Bolshevik revolution. While there is no single universally accepted cause of the Bolshevik Revolution, it is generally agreed upon that the Bolshevik Revolution was a product of previous trends; it was not a spontaneous event (Daniels 331). The rapid industrialization of Russia's economy through the late 19th and into the early 20th century showcased the corresponding stagnancy of the Russian political system. Mistreatment of the growing permanent working class—composed primarily of extorted, abused serfs— incited more and more strikes and mutinies, paralyzing the government (Sorokin 32). The Russian Empire was composed of institutions that were increasingly obsolete in the new century, and was ill-suited to deal with a changing political and economic climate. (18).

Lenin led the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, a Marxist group that was among the many entities disillusioned with the current government. The creation of the Bolshevik Party came around 1903, when Lenin's party fractured into the Bolsheviks—those who wanted revolution immediately—and the Mensheviks—those who wanted to wait longer before the revolution (Sorokin 37). Stalin, attracted by Lenin's call for revolution and vision of a Marxist state, joined the Bolsheviks (Service 54). Stalin became known for his crude, simple and yet pragmatic approach to politics, recognizing, like Lenin, the importance of propaganda and organization, and though he and Lenin did not agree on everything, Lenin promoted the still obscure Stalin in the Bolshevik Party, taking him under his patronage and promoting his

career (77,124).

After world war I, the resentment harbored by the people began to boil over. Bloody Sunday, the humiliation of the Russo-Japanese war, and now, the destruction of World War I all contributed to a common feeling that the Romanov government was inadequate (Sorokin 18,26,32). The government's credibility was further compromised with the Rasputin scandal, disintegrating the government from the inside, causing the State Duma—the legislative assembly of the Russian Empire—to create a provisional government controlled by the Bolsheviks' rivals, the Mensheviks (44). The State Duma was already viewed as a travesty of an institution by the people; the provisional government it created was not viewed any better, and was seen as an incompetent institution (Daniels 338; Kuromiya 32). Lenin played upon the mood of the masses to further antagonize the people, not afraid of inciting violence in the revolution (Daniels 335).

The October Revolution took place in early November. By the end of the revolution, the Preparliament and Constituent assemblies were dismantled, and Lenin's Bolshevik party was in complete power (Basil 46-47). More importantly, however, Stalin was appointed the People's Commissar, publicly creating direct association between himself and Lenin, opening for Stalin the pathway to consolidating influence and power in the new government (Service 124).

II Establishment

What Stalin was able to do with his newfound political influence as the People's Commissar —and, more importantly, Lenin's direct subordinate—was build up a following in the Bolshevik Party and project policies in the interests of wide circles of the party (Rigby 3). Stalin was skilled with political tactics, manipulation, and bargaining, which would frequently allow him to get others to do what he wanted them to do (Rigby 3; Carr 4); Stalin's "human touch" in negotiations misled others into trusting him, after which he would use them for his own gain (Kuromiya 718). As Stalin consolidated more political power, he was able to be more vocal about his ideologies; he was most serious about his support of Marxism-Leninism (Ree 27).

This does not mean he was incapable of change, however. Stalin constantly adjusted to his surroundings with regards to his ideology, making sure that while he was maintaining a Marxist ideology, he was also remaining flexible in changing times (Kuromiya 720). Stalin was, for example, an orthodox Marxist with regards to his belief that nothing good could come from a bourgeois state (Ree 29). However, he did inject "Russian tradition" into his version of Marxism-Leninism, centralizing it slightly to concur with the Russian "cult of personality" (Ree 23; Hingley 32). Even before he was the leader of his single-party state, he was building his "cult of personality" so as to gain influence over the public, as well as the government.

This maneuvering was for a metaphorical "charge" to power. When Lenin suffered a stroke in 1922, his position of leadership in the Bolshevik Party was effectively terminated. At this point, Stalin was a member of the Politburo—

a group of six people that carried out many of the executive decisions in the government—and, more importantly, in this case, he was the General Secretary of the government; with these credentials Stalin now had—for the most part—the ability to influence without the support of Lenin, which Lenin recognized as the source of Stalin’s growing power (Kort 160,167). Lenin had originally tapped Trotsky as his preferred successor, but Trotsky did not place his supporters in the party (167). Stalin used this opportunity to fill the party with his patrons; patronage was, after all, common in the Soviet government (Rigby 4-5).

After filling the Bolshevik Party with his supporters, all that remained for Stalin to do to consolidate power was to remove political enemies. Stalin’s greatest political enemy at this time was—arguably—Leon Trotsky (Kort 167). In 1927, Stalin used his supporters in the congress to remove Trotsky from the Bolshevik Party and exile him from the country, removing his greatest political enemy, and leaving him on the top of the Soviet Union

III Rule

Stalin, after gaining power, followed only parts of his ideology. One of the first things Stalin on gaining power the Five Year Plan, a plan that would end private ownership of all land (Basil 51). Having the government take control of all private land is, essentially, a Marxist economic decision. Stalin was also actively nationalizing industries, again a Marxist economic decision (Remington 44). Stalin's decisions while in power, at face value, are concurrent with his Marxist ideology. However, Stalin's decisions were not completely "Marxist", nor was he setting up a pure Marxist government; on the contrary, Stalin's centralized rule was against the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism (49).

Events like the Great Terror highlight how Stalin ruled; in response to fear of opposition within his party, Stalin launched the Great Terror: a campaign to forcibly remove political dissidents by exiling them or killing them (Kuromiya 716). What Stalin accomplished with the Great Terror was that he increased his political power by removing political opponents, and he also increased his public influence. Stalin heavily used terror tactics to keep the public—or, more specifically, dissidents—in check; the amount of terror in society was an accurate measure of the political and social malleability of the population (Conquest 386). The reason why Stalin used terror tactics so heavily can be traced back to the tsars: most had an explosive temper and doled out harsh punishments to deter further deviance (Hingley 64). Stalin admired the heavy handed policies of the tsars, and those policies, evidently, made their way into his rule (Remington 26).

Stalin's relationship with the economy was slightly more standard with respect to his Marxist ideology. Stalin's economic policies were essentially centred around the belief that state direction of the economy was a necessary social development (Remington 50). Stalin nationalized land, nationalized industry, and collectivized agriculture (50). His belief that the economy should eventually be run by the armed proletariat, though not fully realized, was a basic statement of Marxist economic policy (Ree 29). Stalin, publicly, at least, focused on the "distribution" of the economy—as in, distribution of control—heavily while in power. In the background, however, he sometimes made economic decisions that were essentially for progress at all costs, be it human or otherwise. Stalin's labor conscription in the name of industrializing the state was not an acceptable Marxist policy, yet he implemented it anyway (Remington 49). Ultimately, Stalin's economic policy can be described as a mixture of both his ideology and his desire for economic progress.

With regards to the public—or, more accurately, the public's social space—Stalin's actions were not entirely concurrent with his Marxist ideology. Stalin implemented heavy censorship laws as single-party leader; all newspapers were taken under control of the Bolshevik government, even if they were not opposing the government in any way (Basil 47-49). Later, even newspapers that were supportive of the government were taken under the control of the state, censored or propagandized (49). Through censorship and propaganda, Stalin was able to hone his "cult of personality", elevating his image in the eyes of the public (Kuromiya 718). Stalin used his "cult of personality" to control the public, even though elevating the image of an individual is not permissible in Marxism-Leninism-Leninism (718). Essentially, with regards

to the public, Stalin's rule meant that information was changed or lost for the purpose of further centralizing Stalin's state.

After gaining power, Stalin only partially followed the aims of his declared ideology. While he did carry out many of the nationalization or collectivization tasks that were expected in his ideology, his usage of terror to control the public as well as the extensive promotion of his public image go against his declared ideology. This is partially due to the fact that Stalin's ideology—and, through that, rule—was very much influenced by the example set by the tsars and traditional Russian culture. Concepts like the “cult of personality” were traits seen even in the first tsars. Policies like the Great Terror were also reminiscent of the punishments given out to dissidents by the tsars. As such, the best way to describe Stalin's actual ideology would be a kind of “Russianized” Marxism-Leninism; it takes the economic policies of Marxism- Leninism and melds it with the political and social policies of the tsars. One thing to note, however, is that Stalin did not always follow his ideology with respect to the economy, either. Conscribed labor is not a desired economic policy in Marxism-Leninism; it is what Stalin believed he had to do to industrialize the Soviet Union. Ultimately, Stalin is closest to his declared ideology in economic policy; all in all, however, Stalin only followed his declared political ideology—Marxism-Leninism—to a moderate extent.

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