

Stalin

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Isaac Deutscher born in 1907 was a Polish communist but critical of Stalin, which resulted in his expulsion from the party in 1932. He later fled to England learned the local idiom and wrote a number of well-received books, including biographies of Stalin and Trotsky. The present one on Stalin is billed as a political biography. It is well structured and focused exclusively on the politician Stalin with very little of so called human interest. As Stalin did not really exist out of politics, this is not a very serious restriction. In particular there is essentially no personal gossip, the personal life of Stalin being very elusive. The book was written in 1948 and ends with what is almost an eulogy on Stalin in spite of the very critical approach that inspires the book. In retrospect this is not so surprising, after all for all intents and purposes it was Stalin that defeated Hitler, and any kind of balance of his work was bound to be positive. In fact Deutscher compares directly Stalin and Hitler, admits that they did share many characteristics, both being ruthless dictators, but makes the important distinction, that while the end of Hitler brought nothing but catastrophe, Stalin after all had a legacy of positive achievements. Hitler left Germany much worse off than he had found it, and as opposed to the case of Stalin no enduring achievement of his remains. His reign was totally negative. Now there are even legacies of the Nazi times that have survived their demise, a trivial example being the Autobahns; but most importantly the biggest difference is that Stalin won the war, while Hitler lost it. One ought to shudder at the prospects of a victorious Hitler and the list of wonders he may have bequeathed to the world. However, later on Deutscher added a Post Script to his book, pertaining to the post-war years of Stalin. While his position was glorious in 1945 and its aftermath, he soon aged quickly, became paranoid, his paranoia essentially putting the entire Soviet Society into a deep freeze, He clearly had outlived himself, and the end did not come too soon.

But let us start from the beginning, the obscure Georgian boy, who was the grandson of an emancipated serf. He was good at school, sent to a seminary, where he became an avid reader and was eventually expelled. Then followed a long apprentice as an underground man in radical circles, taking the code name Koba. He learned of the Bolsheviks, and in particular Lenin for whom he formed a kind of hero-worship. When he finally met him at a conference, he was struck by the unassuming physical statute of the man.

Those were heady times. Various radical socialists lived in exile in Western Europe, carrying on a fervent ideological debate. Lenin was a big name, and so was Trotsky. A toppling of the capitalist system was inevitable, at least in Western Europe, where there already was a big and politically conscious proletarian mass of people. Russia, of course, was hopelessly backwards, most of its population still being agrarian. But during the 19th century radical political thought had found a home in Russia, and maybe even the modern variety of the intellectual is a kind of Russian invention. The political and social debate was particularly intense, and well-known is the conflict between the Westerners and

the Slavophiles. There was Czarist repression of course, but it was moderate. Just severe enough to stimulate opposition, not severe enough to crush it. Lenin was sent to Siberia, so was Stalin a few times. Those were not exactly vacations, after all random executions were sometimes the order of the day, yet many of the convicts found time to educate themselves, and if it became too boring, escape was a relatively easy option, as Koba himself demonstrated a few times. The first great event was 1904-05. The uprisings that shook the Czarist regime, after the debacle against Japan, did not dismantle it. This was in some sense seen, at least in retrospect, as the dress-rehearsal of the revolution to come 1917, but that was hardly how it looked to the contemporaries. Lenin was very disappointed and believed that another chance might not come about in thirty years, and went abroad. Stalin stayed, doing his rather tedious and unexciting work, but extremely important for his own subsequent rise. He was not a public speaker, he lacked all natural rhetorical or literary ability, and his command of abstract theory and ideology was weak. He had of course published articles, but none, according to Deutscher, revealing any imagination of thought. In comparison with Lenin and Trotsky he cut a very dull figure. Yet, he was biding his time, at least this is the inevitable retroactive interpretation. In political intrigue, a command of information is crucial, and that was what he was steadily compiling¹.

As everyone knows there was a war. The specter of a War greatly excited Lenin and his followers and gave them new hope and courage. Surely in the chaos of a war the lower masses would seize the power from the upper classes. The Germans fought a war on two fronts. There was soon a stalemate on the West, on which nothing happened, but in the east there were more spectacular events taking place. The Russian army simply collapsed, and as a result the Czar and his government was more deeply shaken than after the Japanese war. In fact things went from bad to worse, there were mutinies, desertions, and the Czar Nicholas II resigned in favor of his brother Count Michael, whose tenure was to be counted in hours rather than years. That was the end of the Romanov dynasty. The Duma now was in charge, but split into warring factions. Kerensky, a leftist, acted as the leading figure but without much authority. The big mistake in retrospect was of course their commitment to continue the war. The Bolsheviks, with Lenin at their head, was of course opposed to war, which in effect meant that they could be thought of as German collaborators. The Germans consequently sent Lenin in a sealed car to Russia, where he appeared on the scene somewhat belatedly. Trotsky, who had belonged to the warring Mensheviks, actually a moderate majority of the left, had recently joined the Bolsheviks as the winning horse, and in so doing adding much prestige to the cause. The battle-cry was 'All power to the Soviets', and so somehow, it is not exactly clear how exactly it came about, the Bolsheviks were in power. And as they say, the rest is history.

But it was not, or rather it was. After the successful revolution, whose most immediate consequence was the treaty at Brest-Litovsk, which entailed the dismemberment of Czarist imperial Russia, with the detachment of Finland, the Baltic States, and large parts of White Russia and the Ukraine to the newly formed Polish state. In fact this was very much approved by Stalin, whose theoretical expertise if any, was on nationalities and as

¹ While his rhetorical prose was dull and repetitive, Deutscher points out that his dispatches from underground work or later in the front during the Civil War, he displayed great clarity of thought and economy of expression. He was a practical man with a good eye for a problem.

such he was appointed as the commissar of nationalities, during which he in particular 'gave freedom' to the Finns, a fact which Deutscher would attach some non-trivial significance to. Then there followed the steel bath of a Civil War, during which foreign troops invaded trying to topple the new Government. It was during this time Trotsky distinguished himself as the head of the Red Army. What actually happened during that war is not so easy to get an idea of. As usual fortunes of war wax and wane and then suddenly it all collapses for one of the participants and the war is over. After the Civil War the government was securely in the saddle, but society itself was in ruins. The economy had to be put on working order again, and the only solution feasible was a tactical retreat from socialist principles under the euphemism of 'New Economic Policy' (The same initials in Russian of course). This meant that transportation and heavy industry was under the government, but smaller and middle-sized business were allowed to operate freely as in the past in competition with socialist business, the idea being that the latter would eventually get the upper hand through superior performance.

Lenin's tenure turned out not to be very long. In 1922 he suffered a stroke, was out of action for months and returned to work in the fall. A new stroke felled him before Christmas, and then later another one. He lingered on though until early 1924. During the descent of Lenin there was a struggle going on behind the scenes. Trotsky was of course by far the most flamboyant and popular of all the leaders behind Lenin, and in many ways the most natural successor. But then of course they had not counted on Stalin. Stalin had amassed power in the interim by shouldering tasks too boring for the leading stars. In fact he had been commissar of Worker's and Peasant's Inspectorat, whose purpose it was to keep an eye on the administration and party work. This gave him invaluable insight in the working of the party, as well as many important contacts. Stalin was not a great talker, but he listened patiently, never revealing his own position, but bringing forth reconciliations. In fact the trade mark of a dictator is not cruelty per se, of that there is no shortage, but hard work. Of that Stalin had an impressive capacity for. So in spite of growing misgivings of Lenin he maneuvered himself into a position of power. Lenin might have stopped him, but Lenin was too weak, and if not Lenin himself at least his will, but that last threat to his ascent to power was somehow dissipated. What Stalin had working for him was his very colorlessness. He was thought of a moderate person in the middle, but as Deutscher points out that in extreme revolutionary situations there is no middle, and Stalin was adept at jumping abruptly from one side to another. He was elected as the secretary of the party, a position he would keep to his death, and be the source for all his power.

The 1920's was, at least in retrospect, a rather benign period in Soviet history. The vibrant artistic activity of those years is well-documented. In the party there were power struggles, and at those Stalin showed himself a true master, whether by unconscious instinct or conscious deviousness is hard to impossible to know. A typical case being his championship of the triumvirate consisting of him and Zinoviev and Kamenev, two senior Bolsheviks who thought of Stalin as a junior figure. They overpowered by numbers alone the other fraction in the Central Committee, and wisely Stalin let his henchmen do all the attacks on Trotsky while he pretended to take a more reconciliatory position. The rivalry between Stalin and Trotsky was of course of long provenience, and Deutscher attributes it

to the envy of Stalin, whose ambitious and insecure nature was affronted by the dazzling success of a Trotsky, especially during the Civil War. Trotsky on the other hand, hardly surprisingly, underestimated his opponent. Thus after a while when Stalin was ready to turn on his former collaborators and allies, they went to Trotsky for support. By doing so they only made themselves look ridiculous and of course that ridicule was bound to attach to Trotsky himself as well. So in this way, the standing and authority of his main rival - Trotsky was slowly but surely eroded. In the late twenties he was forced into exile, Stalin not yet feeling confident to have his opponents killed. By that time a certain ritual of humiliation had started to develop. Someone was repelled then encouraged to recant only to be taken back to the fold. When someone had undergone that process, he was bound to Stalin. As more and more people had to do that, more and more became dependent and subservient to the master. This was an eerie foretaste of what would transpire in the 30's.

Now it is truly remarkable that one man can dominate so many others, who if joined together easily could have crushed him physically. Why does not that happen? One explanation is the role of ideology. The Bolshevik creed became in many ways a religious one. This makes it very powerful. Just as one may powerfully allude to a rational argument to quench opposition, one may also evoke common beliefs to justify a stand. To oppose Stalin would thus be lifted to the level of opposing the common ideology that provided the whole rationale and motivation for the quest for power in the first case. This is very powerful, and without such a shared belief among the members, the domination by Stalin, or by any person, would not be possible. Much has been made of the religious overtones of the revolutionary zeal. And for good reasons, they do indeed provide a lot of explanatory power.

Deutscher's book is a very structured biography, and a closely argued one. Thus every sentence advances the plot. It is not like a modern biography, which in tedious detail tells you everything that the author knows and has ferreted out. Deutscher has obviously much more up his sleeve than he feels there is a need to disclose. Deutscher is also at his best until about 1929. He knows the machinery of internal power struggles intimately, it is something he can identify with and dissect for the reader. After all he is famous for his trilogy of Trotsky, in which he needs to excel in such expert knowledge. Consequently when we move into the thirties and forties the outmoded nature of this biography becomes more apparent to the modern reader. Since then a huge amount of archival material has become available which makes it much harder to maintain such an apologetic picture that contemporaries tended to paint of Stalin, even if they were, as was Deutscher himself committed ant-Stalinists.

1929 amounts to a much more radical departure from the past than does 1917, Deutscher claims. In the 20's Stalin had not yet consolidated his power, there was still the potential for opposition that Trotsky represented. In fact in his early exile in Turkey the latter would edit his own journal and which he expressed his criticism of Stalin, very much like a modern man might write a blog. Stalin, who was shrewd read it, and in this way derived very useful information. The economy was mixed, and in particular the emancipated peasants could cultivate their plots privately. Some were more successful than others and became kulaks hiring less successful peasants to do labour. This was indeed capitalism working. Also during the 20's the old Russian bureaucracy had made peace with the new

men in power and been integrated into the bureaucracy, where they were able to pursue old imperial ambitions of Czarist Russia. Trotsky had been advocating 'permanent Revolution' being committed to the export of Communism, ultimately making the whole world under Socialist tutelage. Stalin appeared in comparison to be one of moderation. 'Socialism in one country' was to be the slogan under which he presided. He was very good in sensing the mood of the country, after all he was an expert politician, the expertise of which lies less in fiery speeches to educate the ignorant and lead them appropriately, than in sensing what people want and at least giving the impression that he wants to give them that. So while Trotsky came across as an adventurer, Stalin appeared much calmer. World-revolution was out, and Stalin would never ever brandish that slogan.

The thirties are characterized by two things. First war against the Kulaks, and as typically Stalin, he came to his ultimate decisions not directly but by a tortuous route; second a rapid industrialization. This was the decades of the grandiose Five-year plans, in which the imagination of Stalin knew no realistic bounds. The forceful collectivization of the peasants was a cruel and devastating process, the full horror of which has only become publicly known recently. Deutscher touches upon that but lightly, speaking about famines, the need for forceful requisitions in order to feed the growing industries. When it comes to the rapid industrialization Deutscher is full of admiration. That was a project on a truly herculean scale, and as a result Stalin himself, who became more and more of an elusive character, attained almost heroic, not to say godlike proportions. What the west had taken generations to accomplish, Stalin managed in only a decade. To do this no sacrifice seemed too big. Workers were constantly extolled to overreach themselves. As a consequence work was payed not on an egalitarian basis but according to result in a highly competitive spirit. It was referred to as the methods of Stakhanovich. Thus very abruptly Russia, a predominantly agrarian country in the 1920's became almost overnight one of the greater industrial countries in the world. This might seem to be a miracle, on the other hand Russia was after all a large country, with a very large population and very rich natural resources. Almost nowhere else could such a huge experiment be undertaken at that scale, except possibly in China and India. Both those agrarian giants would try it in the 50's. In the case of China this is not so surprising, but also the impeccably democratic Nehru envisioned a rapid industrialization of India on the Soviet model, replete with five year plans. The thirties was in many ways the high-point of Stalinism, its most heroic phase. Inspiring not only socialists but also the Nazis. The thirties was the decade of fascism, the beauty of the big collective. And then it was also in Russia the time of purges. That became known to the West during the shame trials of the political high brass. Stalin more or less purged the party of the old guard, as well as purging the army of its leading officers. In many cases there were the false accusations, the forced recantations, and unlike the case of the 20's, the inevitable executions. No one was safe, not even those who most ardently were in charge of the accusations, the hunts and the trials. They were assured of subsequent liquidation once they were no longer of use. And so it continued. Still the most spectacular purges only involved a few thousand party officials, and that was only the tip of the iceberg. The persecution penetrated deeper into the social fabric, the story of which was not fully known when Deutscher was writing. In the book there are scattered references to camps in Siberia, but not to the GULAG.

The s treaty is considered the most shameful act of Stalin, renouncing all the holy principles of his Bolshevism in order to strike a temporary deal with what really should be considered the arch enemy. Just as Hitler in his early rantings had made no secrets of his attitudes to the Jews, he had let no one remain in doubt what was his ultimate ambitions as to Russia - to be cleared for German Lebensraum². However, in the telling of Deutscher, the whole incident is given a very understanding spin. In short Stalin had been pressing for an alliance with the western powers for some time against the common threat. His very reasonable fear was that the Western powers would actually prefer a war between Russia and Germany, and then after both those giant had exhausted themselves step onto the scene. He wanted a commitment of sorts that would free Russia from taking the whole brunt of German aggression. The west was reluctant to commit themselves, Stalin true to nature played both cards up to the very end. Western lukewarmness forced his hand and he had this temporary truce with Hitler signed. It gave Hitler a free hand in the West, and it protected Russia from attack, giving it supposedly valuable breathing space to rearm itself. To us it seems incredibly cynical, but Deutscher argues it was just realistic policy. After all, was it not the same game as that Alexander I played against Napoleon? Now the agreement involved a new partition of Poland. Deutscher presents Stalin as an unwilling participant, in fact having him being nudged by impatient Germans to seize his piece of the cake. In fact Stalin eventually obliged by restoring to Russia those pieces of White Russia and the Ukraine that had been negotiated away at Brest-Litovsk. Now modern archival research reveals a much more sombre picture. Stalin also demanded military basis in the Baltic States, something Deutscher likewise considers a most rational not to say conventional step to be taken by a great power eager to secure its defense. When those requests were resisted he simply incorporated them into the Soviet Union. Supposedly he also wanted to do the same thing with Finland. Here international reaction was more adamant condemning his aggression³. His first attempt failed, his second somehow rehabilitated him, but he let the Finns alone after some territorial concessions. According to Deutscher, simply because of sentimental reasons, twenty odd years earlier he had in fact given them their independence,

Then in 1941 the Germans invaded. The catastrophe was unprecedented. It had been bad enough during Napoleon, but his army had been located within a narrow corridor, constantly harassed by a Russian army which was intact. It had been even worse during the German invasion of the First World War, when the Russian armies collapsed everywhere and the Germans spread out all over, occupying large swathes of the Ukraine. But 1941 surpassed all that. Why? Had Stalin been taken unawares? Was he badly prepared for the onslaught, the event of which was a more or less foregone conclusion. Had Stalin failed to take the necessary precautions? And perhaps more to the point, had his repeated purges deprived the army of its most competent leadership.

The Germans almost came to Moscow. They shelled its suburbs. But Stalin stayed

² Hitler's extermination of the Jews has of course occupied prime of place in the list of his heinous barbarity, but had he had his way, there is reason to suspect that this crime would have been swamped by an even greater one, the total extermination of the Slavs.

³ Reading the collected works of Orwell in the 70's, I recall him writing to the effect, what is the fuss, and that it would be perfectly good policy by any other great power.

at the Kremlin, as a moral example. And then the tide was turned. The Germans were stopped outside the gates of the capital, but did not enter. How come? Had they too overextended themselves. But the Germans did not retreat for the winter, as they ought to have done. And the winter was cold, and the German army had not been equipped for a winter campaign, and they suffered. But unlike Napoleon they were not beaten. The war continued for another year, and then in the winter of early 1943 there was the conclusion of the battle of Stalingrad, where the besieging German army was itself isolated and besieged. In the end it was worn down by attrition.

Deutscher has Stalin leading the army, organizing the defense, and most important of all seeing to the logistics of supplying an army with the necessary fighting material. This necessitated moving heavy armament factories to beyond the Urals⁴. The communist method of production has usually been looked down upon as inefficient to that of the market. Still in those years they made a very impressive show. Of course planned economy is nothing newfangled, it has been practiced for years, and in exceptional circumstances, such as war, even market economies resort to it.

So why was Russia able to revive after almost being crushed? Once again the vastness of its territory, and also the huge reservoir of manpower. What did it matter really that so many able men had been purged, be it in the military or the party, or the administration? There was a lot of untapped potential left.

The war also meant a transformation of the country. Its old history became once again a source of inspiration and pride. There was a reconciliation with the Orthodox Church, although part of it had collaborated with the invading Germans. And the war was not one of Communism against the capitalist world, it was one of the Fatherland against invaders. Those invaders were not Fascists, nor capitalists, but Germans. There was an almost racial animosity against the enemy.

The losses were terrible. Deutscher mentions a figure of 21 million. The authorities did not reveal this to the public lest to depress it, nor to the outside world lest it expose the weakness of the country. The author does not mention the slaughter of Jews, not because he did not know, but because it really did not matter for the main line of the story. That was indeed, cynical as it may appear, a sideshow, which had marginal effect on the conduct of the war⁵. The big reduction in the male population had very definite demographic consequences. For the most productive age group there was indeed a large predominance of women, who then were more or less forced to join the workforce, what in the West would have been termed an emancipation of the women.

⁴ Deutscher also has imprisoned people, including party members, be released from captivity in order to join in the war effort. I wonder how much this is true. The vast number of people in camps was probably not appreciated at the time Deutscher was writing, and although most of them was enlisted for the war effort, I suspect that was on location engaging in slave work, comparable to the slave work that was going on in Germany by captured populations. In so many ways the Soviet Union was treating itself as a colony, as the Polish journalist Kapucinsky has pointed out.

⁵ The German atrocities, not only against the Jews, for which there was collaboration with locals, but also against the local populations themselves antagonized a population which initially may have been welcoming the invaders. Also the German obsession with Jewish extermination derailed valuable military resources. From the point of view of world-conquest it was certainly very irrational.

Was Stalin the main commander? Deutscher makes him out to be so. In fact he pits him against Hitler and makes him emerge as the most realistic of the two. Which of course given the choices does not mean terribly much. Stalin gambled on the arrogance of Hitler, and he was proven right. Hitler willingly let himself be trapped. While his daring had inspired timid generals to outdo themselves in the Blitzkrieg in the West, the contribution by Hitler in the east was negative, at least from the point of view of Germany. His generals advised caution, but he ignored their advice. What would have happened had he heeded it? Maybe the German occupation would have lasted a few more years, but would they been able to maintain control over the country. Most of the production was taking place in Siberia⁶. Of course after the tide had turned the eventual triumph was inevitable. While the German advantage in troops and material inexorably diminished, those of the Russians increased.

Stalin participated in three conferences together with the other two, those being Churchill and Roosevelt in Teheran in 43 and Yalta in early 45, with Truman succeeding the recently deceased Roosevelt in Potsdam. Of those three, the first was the most momentous. For the first time the western saw Stalin eye to eye. At that time, Stalin having turned the German tide, he had a lot of prestige, after all he was the saviour, and the Russians had carried the heaviest burden. He was pressing for a second front, and that one to take place in the West. Churchill wanted to instead have an invasion through the soft belly of Italy and the Balkans. Of that Stalin wanted none, considering the traditional Russian interests in the Balkans⁷. Churchill had to back down, as Stalin's demands were backed by Roosevelt. That would eventually mean the domination of Eastern Europe.

As to the re-conquest of Poland, there is indeed a very strange and upsetting story of the inactivity of the Red Army during the Warsaw uprising. Deutscher almost manages it to sound as it was the fault of the Poles, and that Stalin almost acted impeccably. The cynical reason was of course to let the Polish resistance movement wear itself out. The author reveals with great clarity the diplomatic blunders committed by the Western allies as to Poland. The Polish provisional government was housed in London, and was seen as it legal alternative when occupying forces had disembarked. Yet the British succumbed to pressure and recognized the Curzon line as the new eastern border. As the provisional government did not recognize it, the British were committed to a government which did. Also as Stalin requested a government friendly to the Russians, the provisional government lost even more legitimacy. In the end a pro-Russian government took power.

And Berlin was conquered, and soon thereafter the war was over. In the aftermath Stalin secured control over buffer states from the Baltic down to the Black Sea, but not the Mediterranean, as the British had ensured Greek within its sphere of interest. During a period of a few years the Communist parties gained power everywhere, sometimes from the top, sometimes, as in Czechoslovakia, at least partly from the bottom. Yet, as Deutscher remarks, it was a new kind of revolutions, not the classical ones rising spontaneously from

⁶ From a documentary of Stalingrad I recall the testimony of a German officer. He had been on the Volga, and realized that on the other side Russia just continued and continued. The German forces had in no way penetrated it. They had just started.

⁷ The Russians had liberated a large part of it in the 1870's, but were deprived of the full fruit of their labors by the diplomatic machinations of a Bismarck.

the bottom, but more modern one, directed from the top. In the end Stalin was victorious, yet his influence in Europe was to prove to be limited. The international Communist organization, which had been ordered to lay low during the war, actually encouraged leftists in Western Europe to work with the established bourgeois parties. When it came to seizing power they were abandoned. Stalin's old slogan of Socialism in one country, still held sway, if extended to a few European satellites. Notably Stalin was not incorporating Finland, and he seemed powerless to prevent the independence of Tito. And, that should not be forgotten. Even if the iron-curtain enclosed the Soviet satellites, the real water-tight division was between the Soviet Union and its buffer states.

Now what did Stalin gain by the pact with the Devil? Two years to build up their strength. On the other hand, as Deutscher points out, so did the Germans. It is not clear that on the balance there was an advantage. Had the Germans been forced to conduct a war on two fronts from the beginning, as they did back during the First World War, their spectacular successes may not have been quite as spectacular. Deutscher does not speculate counterfactually, yet what would have happened had the Soviet Union sacrificed itself initially. Would there have been less of a bloodshed? The gains the Soviets achieved by securing one part of Poland and the Baltic States, were dissipated within weeks.

Now Deutscher's biography ends during the immediate post-war years. Stalinism after its temporary flirt with nationalism reverts back to the party. Stalin also becomes more remote and inaccessible. The war years have taken their physical toll. He is now an old man, not at all as he appears on the heroic portraits. He also becomes more paranoid, and that is hardly surprising. The military had been given quite a lot of leeway during the war, and as such built up an organization of independent cadres. Consequently Stalin did anything to disparage the part of the generals in the conduct of the war and enhance his own role. Due to a tradition of historic revisionism this was not too hard to effect. Also, for some reason, anti-semitism became rampant. Why? Stalin was no racist, this is a point in his favor, that the author repeatedly harks back to. In the end Stalinism has outlived itself and shortly thereafter he dies. And that is of course the end of our story. The lifetime of Stalin would prove to span as many years as the Soviet Union would exist. There were a fair amount of people who saw it rise in their youth and decline and fall in their old age.

Now was Stalin a monster? I guess it is easy to find a lot of people who would be willing to play the role of a ruthless dictator, only a few get the chance to do so, and those themselves belong to a minority. Although cruelty and callousness is a prerequisite, that is, as mentioned above, not in short supply. What is in short supply is the energy and the obsession of being able to work extremely hard, and to maintain complete control over also seemingly minute details. A dictator who delegates too much work and does not keep abreast of everything of importance going on, eventually loses his authority. Authority is based on the ability to make decisions, which only can be made by a thorough knowledge of the issues. The dictator who starts to lose interest in all the details, who becomes lazy, will find himself vested of any real power, although the formal one may still be maintained. Indeed if need be, even a dead man can hold formal power.

Now Deutscher is at his best in analyzing the phenomenon of a revolution, how excitement quickly fades and turns to regret even despair, as the original principles are being

contradicted. As Deutscher writes 'The party was now at loggerheads with its own nature, it contradicted itself while it was trying to assert itself'. And also observing that once the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had been consolidated, the proletariat itself had vanished as a class-conscious element directing events. Furthermore having abolished the standing army, the working population was turned into one. In fact after the first year or two, if the Soviets had been able to freely elect the Government the Bolsheviks would surely have been ousted and replaced by Mensheviks or Anarchists. In short a revolution in order to prevail cannot afford the luxury of democratic procedures, as a revolution provokes a counter revolution that needs to be stopped at all costs. Of course from a logical point of view this makes sense, the paramount problem is how to sustain power. To reconcile this with its ideals is like squaring a circle, the author remarks, instead it has to suppress the spontaneous rhythm of the country's political life. As a consequence the administrator took precedence over the ideologue, and who would be more favored by such a development than Stalin, in the words of Deutscher being the committee-man writ large. The key to his success at the critical juncture was the authority the secretariat exercised over the Politbureau by virtue of setting the agendas for their meetings. Deutscher emphasizes over and over again, that the work to which Stalin had been relegated was not of the kind that would attract the bright intellectuals, instead 'what was needed there was an enormous capacity for hard and uninspiring toil and a patient and sustained interest in every detail of the organization'. As Deutscher remarks, no one begrudged Stalin his assignments. Over and over again the relative obscurity of Stalin turned out to be his main asset in his power struggle against Trotsky. Trotsky was too flamboyant, a potential Danton or Bonaparte. What was striking about Stalin, Deutscher writes was that there was nothing striking about him. 'His almost impersonal personality seemed to be the ideal vehicle for the anonymous forces of class and party. His bearing seemed of utmost modesty', the author continues, stressing that Stalin always closely followed the course of a debate (as opposed to its subject) in order to gauge which way the wind was blowing, in order to be able to cast his vote with the majority. One wonders how much of Stalin's course of action was really premeditated, and how much was the natural outcome of instinct and fortuitous circumstances. The great danger of any historical explanation is to make the sequence of events flow inevitably. But of course this is the purpose of any explanation based on reason, as the latter aided by logic has a tendency to become far too compelling. Still, as already noted, the 20's was a relatively free, not to say prosperous time, although all the seeds for future developments had already been sown and could in retrospect be clearly discerned. While Stalin was still seeking power he was vulnerable and observable, after he had consolidated his power, he became more invisible, in spite of all the portraits displayed of him, and consequently the analysis of Deutscher suffers from a dearth of material. The analysis of a totalitarian state is beyond him.

Was it all worth it? Deutscher seems to judge it to have been so. Stalin was a dictator, and he did horrible things, but on the balance he did achieve a rapid industrialization, without which, he argues, the Russians would not have been able to withstand the German onslaught ten years later. And of course by checking the German advance, he did not only his own country a favor. Although he may have been culpable as to the initial collapse and catastrophe, his steady, unwavering control of the government was essential in resisting

Hitler. He proved to be a moral example. Thus Deutscher's summing up appears to us to be somewhat of an eulogy, only mildly qualified by his added Post Script. But it rests on some premisses which are taken for granted. Why is industrialization considered such a good thing? This is taken for granted by Deutscher, and I believe by most people at the time. Industrialization is the only route out of poverty and misery, never mind that its implementation may involve even more poverty and misery. The blessings were considered as an unquestioned dogma, who could be against the abolition of poverty and need? But if Russia had remained a predominantly agrarian country, what would have been so bad about that? Deutscher argues, that as an agrarian country it would have been without resources to resist a German invasion. But this was a consequence, not a motivation for the rapid industrialization. It is always tempting to speculate counterfactually. An agrarian Russia would have been on par with India. On the other hand in many ways modern Russia is on par with modern India. Given the terror of Stalinism would not the alternate route have been more humane? Deutscher had no way of knowing, and one should respect his conclusions.

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