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Stalin's Betrayal of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917, spearheaded by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, aimed to establish a new social order based on principles of equality, justice, and the emancipation of the working class. Although his communist zeal led to violence and the suppression of opposing voices, Lenin made significant progress in establishing an ideal Marxist state by nationalising industry and redistributing wealth. After his paralysis in 1923 and death in 1924, Joseph Stalin took command of the Soviet Union. He immediately portrayed himself as the only true successor of Lenin, renaming Saint Petersburg to Leningrad and persecuting opposing party members in Lenin's name. However, Stalin's rise to power marked a deliberate end to most of the original goals of Lenin and the revolution.

Stalin betrayed the Bolshevik revolution's anti-imperialist goals by transforming the Soviet Union into what was effectively the Soviet Empire. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders of the early Revolution envisioned a set of separate but equal republics, but Stalin betrayed this ideal by establishing Russia as the predominant entity. Originally, in the name of anti-imperialism, Lenin envisioned a set of separate but equal Soviet Republics within the USSR (Plohy). Stalin reversed these policies, believing in the model of "socialism in one country". He centralised power in Russia, systematically removing the powers of national governments in fellow Soviet nations. Lenin had explicitly attempted to provide more freedom to these countries, recognizing that a union with Russia as the head would be little different from the days of the Russian Empire. He even believed that these smaller republics should have the

right to secede from the USSR (Plohky). Despite being from an ethnic minority himself, Stalin oppressed the minorities in the Soviet Union far more than his predecessor, repealing the authority of local governments and imposing Russian as the official language. Smaller nations had no chance to secede, and much of Stalin's reign was spent suppressing separatist rebellions in places such as Georgia and Chechnya (Roucek 21). Furthermore, some of Stalin's policies and actions were practically designed to beat minority groups into submission; the Holodomor, for instance, was a man-made famine in which Ukraine was forced to export vast quantities of grain, leading to millions of deaths. Many contend that its purpose was to sap the Ukrainian independence movement, allowing for Russian hegemony over the nation (Roucek 25). Stalin's imperialism reached its peak in the early days of the Second World War, where he temporarily allied with Nazi Germany and ordered his forces to invade neutral Poland, Finland, and the Baltic States. Even after the war turned in the Soviet Union's favour, Stalin advanced Russian imperialism and treated smaller nations poorly; his deliberate withholding of aid during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and deportation of Crimean Tatars. Stalin's restoration of the Russian dominion over other ethnic groups in the former Russian Empire reflected the lack of regard he had for the anti-imperialist values of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

Stalin also set up a system of governance that was completely contrary to the type envisioned by the Bolsheviks, replacing Lenin's idealism with ruthless totalitarianism. Marxist theory states that communist governments would fade away along with social classes, but Stalin instead strengthened and centralised the government, creating a system involving hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats and intense control over peoples' lives. The most notable shift was Stalin's cult of personality; Lenin had explicitly tried to prevent such a cult from forming around himself, believing that it would contradict the principles of Marxism, but Stalin encouraged one

to be created (Pittman 539). Believing that the people of the USSR, particularly the urban peasants, needed a strong ruler to look up to, Stalin made efforts to portray himself as a semi-divine, unquestionable ruler. Unfortunately, by exploiting the Tsarist mentality that existed amongst the populace, Stalin ensured the survival of a national trait that the Bolshevik revolution had been trying to cast away. Stalin also posthumously set up a cult of personality around Lenin himself, although he frequently altered Lenin's views and life to suit his own ends ("Stalinism"). He utilised Lenin's image as justification for his purges, portraying himself as the sole interpreter of his will. Stalin also had little commitment to solidarity with fellow members of the Communist Party, summarily executing hundreds of thousands of party members, many of whom had been present since the October Revolution (Lewin 111). Whereas Lenin's regime had at least facilitated open debate on policies, Stalin allowed no dissent, real or perceived (Resis). Stalin's totalitarian government, purges against Bolsheviks, and cult of personality violated Marxist principles of the ideal leader, setting political freedoms in the USSR back and betraying the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Finally, Stalin did not improve the lives of the proletariat or the Soviet peasantry, which the Bolsheviks had at least tried to do. Despite the fraught political and economic situation, some of Lenin's first decrees were to limit the work day to eight hours and implement universal education (Graziosi 236). Raising the standard of living was far less of a priority for Stalin who failed to cause an increase in the living conditions of his people despite the massive increase in productivity. One of Stalin's primary goals was to transform the Soviet Union from an agrarian society into a modern industrial powerhouse. To achieve this, he implemented a series of ambitious Five-Year Plans, emphasising rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. These plans involved the forced collectivization of farms, where individual farmers

were made to join large state-controlled collective farms (Barkunin). The effects of these policies on the rural peasantry was devastating, with hundreds of thousands to millions of peasants dying of starvation. Although Lenin believed that the urban proletarians should lead the revolution, he respected the peasants as potential fellow revolutionaries (Lenin). When peasants under the Lenin regime protested grain requisitions, Lenin implemented the New Economic Policy, allowing for an open grain market. Stalin allowed no such compromises, even when they were necessary to save the lives of his citizens. In the cities, living conditions under Stalin's rule were marked by shortages of food, housing, and basic amenities. Housing was particularly scarce, and many people lived in overcrowded communal apartments or shared dilapidated accommodations. The Soviet people faced rationing and long queues for essential goods, and consumer goods were often of poor quality and limited availability. In contrast to Lenin's labour reforms, Stalin attempted to abolish the weekend (Frost). The frequency of industrial accidents increased, and leisure time decreased (Graziosi 241). Stalin's focus on heavy industry often came at the expense of consumer goods and basic necessities, and the living conditions for ordinary citizens suffered as resources were diverted towards industrial projects and military buildup. Due to his failure to ameliorate poor standards of living amongst both the peasantry and proletariat, Stalin betrayed the pro-worker ideals of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It should be understood as a betrayal because although it was well within Stalin's capabilities to improve the lives of the people, he chose not to in favour of quicker industrialization.

The Revolution and Lenin's regime were undeniably undemocratic, violent, and sometimes excessive. However, they were guided by certain ideological principles that Lenin believed in sincerely, and set in motion events that would improve workers' conditions and remove the legacy of Russian imperialism. Stalin's rise to power reversed these trends and

marked an end of the original idealism of the revolution, to be replaced by cynical politics and ruthless suppression of various groups, from rival political factions to ethnic minorities. Stalin's actions and policies prove that he was a traitor to Lenin and the ideals of the Bolshevik revolution.

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