The Rise of Stalin’s Personality Cult

ROBERT C. TUCKER

The cult of Lenin, which Lenin himself opposed and managed to keep in check until incapacitated by a stroke in March 1923, subsequently became a pervasive part of Soviet public life. No single cause explains its rise. Undoubtedly, the Bolsheviks genuinely venerated their vozhd’ as the man whose personal leadership had been critically important for the movement from its origin to its assumption of power and for the creation and consolidation of the Soviet regime in the ensuing years. But it is also true that after Lenin’s death that regime had a pragmatic need for a prestigious unifying symbol. The Lenin cult, whose obvious religious overtones were at variance with the Communist Party’s professed secularism, is likewise an example of how Soviet culture came to incorporate certain elements of the Russian past, in this case the ruler cult. For centuries the Russian people, overwhelmingly composed of peasants, had been monarchist in outlook. The Revolution had opened the door for many peasant sons to have careers in the new society. Industrialization and collectivization resulted in the recruitment of millions of people of peasant stock into the working class. They brought with them, along with their Soviet schooling and experience, residues of the traditional peasant mentality, including respect for personal authority, whether it emanated from the immediate boss or from the head of the party and state. The social condition of Russia at the time of the “great turn” (1929–33) was, therefore, receptive to the cult of a deceased leader—or a living one.

Lenin refused to tolerate public adulation—save, with extreme reluctance, on his fiftieth birthday in 1920—and even then he showed dry disapproval of the eulogizing to which his comrades subjected him. Thus, as the public adulation of a living leader, the Stalin cult deviated from previous Bolshevik practice. How and why, then, did the Stalin cult arise?

Realpolitik fused with psychological needs. Politically, a Stalin cult alongside of and integrated into the Lenin cult promised to make Stalin’s position

A preliminary version of this article was presented at a conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, held in Washington, D.C. in October 1977. I wish to thank the commentator, Vera Dunham, and all others who took part in the discussion for their comments and questions and Alexander Nekrich for his subsequent written communication about Stalin and Deborin. And I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for supporting some of the research in a Fellowship for Independent Study during 1975–76.
more impregnable than it was at the start of the 1930s. Although he had won considerable support and even popularity inside party circles during the early post-Lenin years, Stalin never enjoyed a prestige even remotely comparable to Lenin’s. His popularity, moreover, plummeted in the early 1930s as a result of forced collectivization and the concomitant famine of 1932–33. No evidence suggests that he was then in danger of being overthrown; still, his power was not yet absolute, the argumentative-critical tradition lived on (at least in higher party circles), and he had no guarantee against the rise of new opposition in response to new tribulation. So Stalin was undoubtedly concerned to forestall future trouble by making his political supremacy more unassailable. He was shrewd enough to realize that his elevation to a Lenin-like eminence in the regime’s publicity would be useful for this purpose. But, important as it was, the political motive does not provide a sufficient explanation. Not only did the cult continue to grow after Stalin’s power became increasingly absolute later in the 1930s, but both direct and indirect evidence indicates that it was a prop for his psyche as well as for his power. Boundlessly ambitious, yet inwardly insecure, he had an imperative need for the hero worship that Lenin found repugnant.

That the name “Stalin” symbolized a lofty idealized self to its seemingly earthy bearer was not widely known in Russia. In part, this reflected Stalin’s studied effort to emulate in public Lenin’s example of modestly unassuming deportment. In private, moreover, Stalin repeatedly affected disdain for adulation. For example, he concluded a letter to an Old Bolshevik, Ia. M. Shatunovskii, in August 1930 by saying, “You speak of your ‘devotion’ to me. Perhaps that phrase slipped out accidentally. Perhaps. But if it isn’t an accidental phrase, I’d advise you to thrust aside the ‘principle’ of devotion to persons. It isn’t the Bolshevik way. Have devotion to the working class, its party, its state. That’s needed and good. But don’t mix it with devotion to persons, that empty and needless bauble of intellectuals.”

But the man behind the mask of modesty was hungry for the devotion he professed to scorn. He showed it by his own actions and by those of functionaries representing him—and by his acceptance of the officially inspired adulation as it rose in intensity during the 1930s. Indeed, in the very month in which he wrote the letter to Shatunovskii, Stalin, also in private, gave lie to that same advice. In June-July 1930 the Sixteenth Party Congress witnessed an outpouring of public tributes to him. Louis Fischer, who covered that event for The Nation, concluded his post-Congress dispatch by saying, A good friend might also advise Stalin to put a stop to the orgy of personal glorification of Stalin which has been permitted to sweep the country.... Daily, hundreds of telegrams pour in on him brimming over with Oriental super-compliments: “Thou art the greatest leader . . . , the most devoted disciple of Lenin,” and the like. Three cities, innumerable villages, collectives, schools, factories, and institutions have been named after him, and now somebody has started a movement to christen the Turksib

1 I. V. Stalin, Sochineniia, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1946-52), 13: 19. The letter was first published in Stalin’s collected works after the Second World War.
the "Stalin Railway." I have gone back over the newspapers from 1919 to 1922: Lenin never permitted such antics and he was more popular than Stalin can ever hope to be. It exposes a weak side of Stalin's character which his enemies, who are numerous, are sure to exploit, for it is as un-Bolshevik as it is politically unwise. If Stalin is not responsible for this performance he at least tolerates it. He could stop it by pressing a button.²

A press section officer of the Foreign Commissariat, whose duties included the briefing of Stalin on foreign press coverage of Soviet affairs, later confided to Fischer that, when he translated the passage just quoted, Stalin responded with an expletive: "the bastard!" (svoloch'!).³ Evidently, he was stung by the truth of Fischer's observation that he himself bore responsibility for the emerging Stalin cult.

Precisely when this cult took on a life and momentum of its own is not easy to pinpoint. If the official celebration of Stalin's fiftieth birthday in 1929 is taken as the opening episode, there is no immediate sequel. The marking of Lenin's fiftieth birthday had been a one-time affair, and many in high positions may have assumed that Stalin's fiftieth would be similarly observed. Six months later came the acclaim at the Sixteenth Congress. But again the wave subsided. Although his name appeared often in the Soviet press, no steady stream of Stalin idolatry appeared in Soviet publicity in 1930 and most of 1931. Shortly afterwards, however, the cult began to grow. And Stalin himself took certain steps to make it happen.

One such step was in philosophy, one of the numerous fields in which different schools of thought contended for primacy in the relatively pluralistic atmosphere of the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In the mid-1920s the so-called mechanistic materialists lost their previously influential position, and a school of devotees of Hegelian dialectics, led by A. M. Deborin, won dominance. Theirs was a positive response to Lenin's invitation to Soviet philosophers in 1922 to constitute themselves a society of "materialist friends of Hegelian dialectics."

Although Lenin had some philosophical writings to his credit, it was not uncommon in the 1920s to place him below Georgii Plekhanov as a Marxist philosopher. Deborin's disciples, moreover, tended to rate Deborin as the Engels of his own time in the field of philosophy.⁴ Stalin, by contrast, was widely regarded in Communist Party circles as a praktik, save for his theoretical work on the nationalities problem and his codification of Leninist doctrine in The Foundations of Leninism; thus, his standing in Marxist philosophy was virtually nil. Interesting evidence on this point exists in the form of a list, published in 1929, of writings with which students entering graduate work in the Communist Academy's Institute of Philosophy were supposed to be

---

² The Nation, August 13, 1930, p. 176.
³ Louis Fischer gave me this information in a personal conversation in 1965.
familiar in advance. Thirty-three works were listed under dialectical and historical materialism—that is, philosophy. Six works by Marx and Engels came first, followed by six works by Lenin, then four by Plekhanov, and then seven by Deborin. Then came entry number 23, Stalin’s *Problems of Leninism*, which even at that low ranking was very probably included for diplomatic reasons. The list ended (Western philosophers will be interested to note) with Descartes, Hobbes, Hume, and Berkeley.  

For both political and personal reasons, Stalin could not be content with this situation. As the party’s *vozh’d* in succession to Lenin, he was duty-bound, in terms of Bolshevik culture, to be a creative Marxist theoretical mind of the first rank—in the political if not in the technical philosophical sense. But beyond those political expectations imposed by the *vozh’d*-role, Stalin had a personal craving for renown as a Marxist theoretician. Nikolai Bukharin, who knew him well, saw this and stressed it in his clandestine conversation with Lev Kamenev in 1928. For many years Stalin had harbored pretensions in Marxist philosophy. He had set forth what he saw as the fundamentals of dialectical materialism in his treatise of 1906–07, *Anarchism or Socialism?* In correspondence in 1908 that vexed Lenin, Stalin had characterized Lenin’s philosophical polemics with the Bogdanov group over Machism as a “tempest in a teacup” and commended A. A. Bogdanov for pointing out some “individual faults of Ilyich.”

Stalin quietly continued, in the midst of intense political activities of later years, to try to enhance his command of Marxism as philosophy. He called upon Jan Sten, a leading philosopher of the Deborin school, to guide him in the study of Hegelian dialectics. Sten’s teaching method, the one then used in the Institute of Red Professors, involved the parallel study of Marx’s *Capital* and Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of the Mind*. Stalin continued to have twice-weekly sessions with Sten from 1925 until some time in 1928, after which Stalin called a halt. Sten reportedly was depressed by the difficulty Stalin had in mastering Hegelian dialectics.

Stalin sounded the characteristic note of the future Stalin school when he told a conference of agrarian Marxists on December 27, 1929 that Marxist theory always needed to keep in step with current practice. Not long afterwards, two young, clever, opportunist-minded philosophers from the Institute of Red Professors, Pavel F. Iudin and Mark B. Mitin, took up the same theme. Along with a third professor, V. Ral’tsevich, they published in *Pravda* on June 7, 1930 a long article that championed the notion that philosophy should apply itself in a new way to the theoretical problems of practice in building socialism. They lauded Stalin for showing an example of “deepened under-

---


9 I. Dubinskii-Mukhadze, *Ordzhonikidze* (Moscow, 1963), 93. For Bukharin’s comment, see the Bukharin-Kamenev Conversations of July 11–12, 1928, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., Trotsky Archives, T 1867.

standing of Marxist-Leninist dialectics” in his theoretical formulation of the idea of a struggle on two fronts—that is, against deviations of both Left and Right—and called for a corresponding philosophical struggle on two fronts. Although the authors did not openly attack Deborin, the article pointed to his school as the enemy on the philosophical second front. The authors came forward, in effect, as the nucleus of a new, Stalin school in Soviet philosophy. Stalin’s approbation—if not inspiration as well—was reflected in the unusual note, published along with the article, that claimed that “the editors associate[d] themselves with the main propositions of the present article.”

Soon Stalin personally intervened on the philosophical front. On December 9, 1930 he spoke out on philosophical matters in an interview with a group of philosophers from the Institute of Red Professors. Mitin later quoted him as saying that it was necessary to “rake and dig up all of the manure that has accumulated in questions of philosophy and natural science.” In particular, it was necessary to “rake up everything written by the Deborinite group—all that is erroneous on the philosophical sector.” Deborin’s school was a philosophical form of revisionism that according to Stalin, who had a special talent for coining caustic neologisms, could be called “Menshevizing idealism.” It was necessary, he continued, to expose a number of erroneous philosophical positions of Plekhanov, who had always looked down upon Lenin. Stalin kept emphasizing in the interview that Lenin had raised dialectical materialism to a new plane. Before Lenin, he said, materialism had been atomistic. On the basis of new scientific advances, Lenin produced a Marxist analysis of the electronic theory of matter. But, although he created much that was new in all spheres of Marxism, Lenin was very modest and did not like to talk about his contributions. It was incumbent upon his disciples, however, to clarify all aspects of his innovative role.*

Stalin was assuming the role of the premier living Marxist philosopher. Albeit coarsely, he spoke as one philosopher, and the authoritative one, to other philosophers. He was clearing the way for self-elevation by mobilizing the subservent, young, would-be disciples to dethrone Deborin and Plekhanov from their positions of eminence in the minds of Soviet Marxist philosophers. “Deborinism” along with “Menshevizing idealism” now became polemical by-words for philosophical heresy in the philosophical journal, Under the Banner of Marxism, and other publications. Future lists of mandatory advance reading for graduate students in philosophy no longer put Stalin in twenty-third place, and Deborin’s learned treatises did not figure in them at all.

In the interview Stalin did not directly refer to his own philosophical credentials, although he implied them by his pronouncements. But he employed an indirect strategy of cult-building by the way in which he dealt with Lenin. Since he did not actually harbor much enthusiasm for Lenin’s philosophical merits, why did he studiously praise Lenin as a philosopher and

warn the audience not to be put off by Lenin’s modest forbearance to speak about his contributions in this field? For one thing, there was the subtle Aesopian message, which could not have escaped the minds of the alert Iudin and Mitin, that they should not be put off by Stalin’s own modesty on the same count. But, more importantly, Stalin was promoting Lenin’s primacy in philosophy as a vehicle for his own claim to similar primacy. The party’s erstwhile politico-ideological chief was presented as its philosophical chief as well—in place of Plekhanov, the acknowledged father of Russian Marxism, who had later become a Menshevik. By thus putting supreme philosophical authority into Lenin’s vozhd’-role, Stalin helped the philosophers to grasp this broadened conception of that role as applicable to Lenin’s successor.

They were quick to do so. In 1931 the organ of the Central Committee, Bolshevik, carried a bitter criticism of “Menshevizing idealism” as found in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Deborin’s Encyclopedia article on Hegel was the first object of attack. In castigating Deborin and others of his school as carriers of Menshevizing idealism, the Bolshevik author stated, “Materialist dialectics really must be elaborated. But this elaboration must be carried out on the basis of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin....”9 Here appeared the holy quartet—Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin—who together became the symbolic centerpiece of Stalinist thought and culture, replete with the four huge, equal-sized portraits on the facade of Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater for May Day, November 7, and other special occasions.

The cult of Stalin as Communism’s first philosopher in succession to Marx, Engels, and Lenin had now been founded. But this was not all. Embryonic in this development was the monolithism that became a hallmark of Stalinist intellectual culture in all fields and that distinguished it from pre-Stalinist Bolshevism. To treat, for example, Lenin’s philosophical writings, much less Stalin’s, as sacrosanct dogma had never before been mandatory.10 Stalin himself became not only the first philosopher but also the authority figure in some other fields, and in still others a Stalin-surrogate—Andrei Vyshinskii, for example, in jurisprudence—was, so to speak, subenthroned as the authority figure. Part of the role of such Stalin-surrogates was to glorify Stalin’s thought in the process of hunting for heresy and establishing Stalinist truth for their own disciplines. Consequently, those chosen as Stalin-surrogates were scholars who combined intellectual acumen, in most cases, with absolutely reliable servility. Anyone with any independence of mind, no matter how zealous a servitor of Communism, was unacceptable.

If Marxist philosophy was the first area Stalin selected for building the stately edifice of the Stalin cult, party history was the second. Here he moved into a field of great political sensitivity, for the annals of the Bolshevik past were the movement’s inner sanctum. But he also trod on ground of intense

---

10 For a discussion by a former Soviet economist of this aspect of Stalinism and the use of “monolithism” to describe it, see Aron Katsenelenboigen, “Conflicting Trends in Soviet Economics in the Post-Stalin Era,” Russian Review, October 1976, pp. 374–76.
personal concern, namely his own revolutionary biography. Nothing was of more importance to a man who felt driven to view himself as Bolshevism’s second Lenin, in the past as well as the present. He made his move in the familiar manner that so many have chosen in their effort to set the record straight: he wrote a letter to the editors.

At the outset of the 1930s, research on the history of the Marxist movement was still pursued with a certain freedom, contentious issues were seriously debated, and work of genuine scholarly character was still produced in Soviet Russia. One set of questions, those concerning the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the pre-1914 Second International, was deemed of sufficient interest that in 1929 the Communist Academy’s Institute of History established a special group to study them; the group’s academic secretary was A. G. Slutskii. Various articles by members of the group were published, one of which appeared in the journal *Proletarian Revolution* in 1930. Slutskii’s main topic was Lenin’s position in connection with the internal divisions in the pre-1914 SPD. The revisionist wing of that party, led by Eduard Bernstein, was opposed by a dominant centrist group, whose leaders were Karl Kautsky and August Bebel and whose viewpoint was taken by many—Lenin included—to be genuine revolutionary Marxism. On the extreme Left was a group of radicals led by Rosa Luxemburg. Slutskii claimed that as early as 1911 she had grasped and openly discussed the basically “opportunistic” nature of Kautskyan centrism, whereas Lenin, though he had shown a certain critical caution toward the Kautsky-Bebel leadership ever since 1907, had continued to base his hopes on it. Lenin himself admitted in a letter of October 1914 that “Rosa Luxemburg was right”; he had not seen through Kautsky’s pseudo-revolutionism as early as had the German left radicals. Slutskii concluded that Lenin had displayed “a certain underestimation of the centrist danger in the German party before the war.”

The publication of this article demonstrates that, although a Soviet Lenin cult existed in the early 1930s, it was still possible to publish an article that did not treat Lenin as an icon—infallible, preternaturally foresightful, beyond human limitations. True, the editors of *Proletarian Revolution*—the Old Bolsheviks M. Saveliev, V. V. Adoratskii, M. S. Ol’minskii, D. Baevskii, and P. Gorin—seemed to sense the potential danger, for they inserted an introductory footnote disclaiming any agreement with Slutskii’s interpretation of Lenin and announcing the printing of his essay “for purposes of discussion” only. But they clearly were unprepared for the thunderbolt that its appearance provoked from on high. Stalin was infuriated. He wrote a letter of article length, entitled “On Some Questions of the History of Bolshevism,” which was simultaneously printed in *Proletarian Revolution* and *Bolshevik* at the end of October 1931.

---

First, Stalin mauled Slutskii’s position beyond recognition, contending that to accuse Lenin of underestimating the danger of “veiled opportunism” was to accuse him of not having been a “real Bolshevik” before 1914: a real Bolshevik could never understate the danger of veiled opportunism. It was simply axiomatic that Bolshevism arose and grew strong in its ruthless struggle against all shades of centrism. Thus, the editors should never have accepted Slutskii’s “balderdash” and “crooked pettifogging” even as a piece for discussion; the genuineness of Lenin’s Bolshevism was not discussable. Second, Stalin protested Slutskii’s favorable treatment of Rosa Luxemburg and the left radicals in the pre-1914 SPD. He was profoundly irked by the very idea that Lenin might have had something to learn from these people.

The strong Russian-nationalist tinge of Stalin’s Bolshevism was also evident in his letter. He presented a Russocentric view of the history of the European Marxist movement: “Russian Bolsheviks” had a right to treat their own positions as the test of the Marxist revolutionary validity of those of left Social Democrats abroad. Lenin’s forecast of 1902 in What Is To Be Done?—that the Russian proletariat might yet become “the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat”—had been brilliantly confirmed by subsequent events. “But does it not follow from this that the Russian Revolution was (and remains) the key point of the world revolution, that the fundamental questions of the Russian Revolution were at the same time (as they are now) the fundamental questions of the world revolution? Is it not clear that only on these basic questions could one really test the revolutionism of the left Social Democrats in the West?” Neither before nor after the war were Western Marxists to give lessons to their Russian brethren, but vice versa.

To say or imply otherwise, as Slutskii did, was “Trotskyist contraband.” To give weight to this ugly charge, Stalin asserted that Slutskii’s thesis about Lenin’s pre-1914 underestimation of centrism was a cunning way of suggesting to the “unsophisticated reader” that Lenin had only become a real revolutionary after the war started and after he had “re-armed” himself with the help of Trotsky’s theory that bourgeois-democratic revolutions grow into socialist ones (the theory of permanent revolution); Lenin himself, Stalin recalled, had written in 1905 that “we stand for uninterrupted revolution” and “we will not stop half way.” But “contrabandists” like Slutskii were not interested in such facts, which were verifiable from Lenin’s writings. Slutskii, Stalin noted elsewhere in the letter, had spoken in his article of the unavailability of some Lenin documents pertaining to the period in question. “But who except hopeless bureaucrats can rely on paper documents alone? Who but archive rats fail to realize that parties and leaders must be tested by their deeds primarily and not simply by their declarations?”

Toward the end of the letter, Stalin’s language shifted from the rude to the sinister. In giving Slutskii a forum for his contraband, the editors were guilty of that “rotten liberalism” toward Trotskyist tendencies that was current among a segment of Bolsheviks who failed to understand that Trotskyism had long since ceased to be a faction of Communism but had turned into a forward
detachment of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie, making war on Communism, the Soviet regime, and the building of socialism in the USSR. Such, for example, was the purpose of the Trotskyist theses on the impossibility of building socialism in Russia and the inevitability of Bolshevism’s degeneration.

Here Stalin repeated in public the argument of a memorandum he had written in 1929. Its purport had been to transfer Trotskyist affiliation or sympathies from the category of political error to that of crime against the Soviet state and, hence, to justify repressive action against persons accused of being Trotskyist. As Stalin now spelled out the conclusion to his argument, “Liberalism toward Trotskyism, even though defeated and masked, is thus a form of bungling that borders on crime, treason to the working class.” Hence, the editors’ task, Stalin continued (mixing his metaphors), was “to put the study of party history onto scientific Bolshevik rails and to sharpen vigilance against Trotskyist and all other falsifiers of the history of our party, systematically ripping off their masks.” This task was all the more necessary in that certain genuinely Bolshevik party historians were themselves guilty of errors that poured water on the mills of the Slutskii. Unfortunately, said Stalin at the end, one such person was Comrade Emelian Iaroslavskii (the dean of Bolshevik party historians as well as the secretary of the Central Party Control Commission), whose books on party history, in spite of their merits, contained a number of errors in principle and of historical character.

Considering what Stalin had said earlier about centrism, it is easy to see why he was outraged by Slutskii’s argument that Lenin had underestimated the centrist danger in the German Social Democratic Party. To fight against deviations of the Left and Right was not to be a centrist, Stalin had contended in 1928, any more than it had been centrist of Lenin to combat both Menshevism on the Right and the sectarianism condemned in Left-Wing Communism on the Left. Centrism meant “adaptation” and on that account was “alien and repulsive to Leninism.” How then—no matter what documents the archive rats might turn up—could a real revolutionary (that is, a Bolshevik), ever, even briefly, underestimate the centrist danger? To a mind that so reasoned, people like Slutskii fully deserved the merciless bawling out that the letter gave them and severe punishment as well. Slutskii was arrested in the later Stalin terror and spent many years in a concentration camp.

But Stalin’s letter, in addition to expressing his rage, pursued a tripartite purpose in cult-building. Though it did not mention his own name (how could it?), the letter solicited a Stalin cult in party history just because Stalin wrote it and by the tone and content. First, in writing it (or, conceivably, having it written to his specifications and issued in his name), he arrogated to

---

12 Stalin, “Dokatilis,” in Sochinenia, 11: 315-17. This document has the appearance of an internal Politburo memorandum.
14 Stalin, Sochinenia, 11: 281-82, 284.
15 I am indebted to Roy A. Medvedev and Stephen F. Cohen for the information on Slutskii’s subsequent arrest and imprisonment.
himself the position of premier party historian and arbiter of contentious issues in that sensitive area. For this the letter did not have to mention Stalin’s name, but only to be the thoroughly dogmatic document that it was and to bear his signature. Merely by publishing the letter Stalin asserted his place as the supreme authority on the very subject that formed the core of the personality cult as it mushroomed in the 1930s: Bolshevism’s past and the parts that he and others had played in it.\footnote{On the effect of the letter’s rude style and tone, see, for example, V. A. Dunaevskii, “Bol’sheviki i germanskie levye na mezhduunarodnoi aren,” in \textit{Evropa v nove i novishee vremia: Sbornik statei pamiati Akademika N. M. Lukina} (Moscow, 1966). A modern Soviet historian, Dunaevskii has claimed that “the form of Stalin’s pronouncement—sharp expressions against the authors he mentioned and politically characterizing them as ‘rotten liberals,’ ‘Trotskyist contrabandists,’ and the like—led to the impossibility of creative discussions on matters of principle and subsequently to repressions against individuals whom he had subjected to criticism”; \textit{ibid.}, 506.}

Second, in the letter just as in the earlier interview with the Mitin-Iudin group of philosophers, Stalin followed the strategy of cult-building via the assertion of Lenin’s infallibility. By making the party’s previous 
\textit{vozhd}’ an iconographic figure, beyond limitation and beyond criticism, Stalin’s letter implicitly nominated the successor-
\textit{vozhd}’ for similar treatment. Since Stalin was the man whom the party had saluted in 1929 as its acknowledged chief in succession to Lenin, it behooved party historians to be as careful not to find lapses or blemishes in his political past as the letter in effect ordered scholars to be where Lenin’s past was concerned. People as experienced in reading delphic utterances as were Bolshevik party intellectuals were bound to draw this inference as they pondered or discussed with one another the implications of the letter. Stalin even gave them a broad hint with a phrase used twice in the letter: “Lenin (the Bolsheviks).” Lenin, by Stalin’s fiat, stood for true Bolshevik revolutionism as distinct from any and all false varieties—left, right, or center. The words in parentheses pluralized his revolutionary rectitude; they made it more inclusive without giving names. But anyone with intelligence enough to be a party historian could guess whose name ought to come next on the list of “Bolsheviks” in Stalin’s normative sense of the term.

Third, the letter demanded quite explicitly that the party pasts of real revolutionaries be evaluated not on the basis of documents that archive rats might turn up or fail to uncover but on the basis of their “deeds.” Naturally, such deeds would have to be documented insofar as possible. Stalin was to become the arch-archive rat of the Soviet Union or, more precisely, the leader of a whole pack, although he often hungered as much for the destruction or concealment of documents as for their discovery or publication. To those capable of discerning his letter’s implications, they were that a party historian should not be guided, as had Slutskii, by what he could document, but by what he knew \textit{a priori} must be true—that Lenin, being a “real Bolshevik,” could never have underestimated centrism or that Stalin, also a “real Bolshevik,” could never have taken an un-Bolshevik position at any juncture. The function of documentary materials, or of their concealment, was to help establish such higher truths. To use them otherwise was to slander and to
falsify. Consequently, the message of Stalin's tirade against falsifiers was that scholars had to be ready to falsify (in the normal meaning of the word) whenever a priori party-historical truth—as revealed by word from Stalin or his spokesmen—should so dictate.

The cult-building purport of Stalin's letter may be shown further by reference to one work—namely that of Iaroslavskii—that it criticized. Stalin did not clearly specify the nature of the errors to which he was alluding, and Iaroslavskii himself seems to have been somewhat baffled. He wrote Stalin several letters requesting clarification but received no answer. From Stalin's standpoint, such a position was certainly "rotten liberalism" and, hence, an error in principle. As for historical errors, a quick glance through volume four of the party history, covering the period 1917 to 1921 and published under Iaroslavskii's editorship, could have indicated to Iaroslavskii at least one area of difficulty: while poisonously anti-Trotsky in its account, for instance, of Trotsky's position in the Soviet trade-union controversy of 1920, the book treated Trotskyism as the (wrongheaded) faction of Communism that Stalin now said it had "long since" ceased to be; the book did not show Trotskyism to be, even incipiently, the forward detachment of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie that Stalin declared it had become. Even the reprinted photographs seemed ill chosen in some cases. Here, for example, was Lenin's original fifteen-man Council of People's Commissars; Trotsky appeared to the left of Lenin (and Alexei Rykov, appropriately, flanked Lenin on the right), while Stalin appeared in the bottom row, next to the Kremlin wall. And here, too, on another page, was an old photograph of the Soviet delegation to the Brest talks, with Trotsky, its leader, looking handsome and impressive in the top row. What Iaroslavskii may have been a little slow in grasping was that affirmation of Stalin necessitated the retrospective denigration of many others who had played more prominent roles in the Revolution than had Stalin.

Further, this volume of the party history made brief reference to the well-known fact, acknowledged by Stalin himself in a speech in 1924, that in March 1917, prior to Lenin's return to Russia and the issuance of his "April Theses," Stalin had shared with Kamenev and M. K. Muranov an erroneous position on policy toward the Provisional Government (they had advocated that the party merely put pressure on the government to leave the war). This easily documentable truth of party history as written before 1929 was one of the Iaroslavskii "mistakes" to which Stalin's letter alluded. It became an un-

17 Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie o merakh uluchshenii podgotovki nauchno-pedagogicheskikh kadrov po istoricheskim nau-
kam. 18-21 dekabria 1962 g. (Moscow, 1964), 363.
19 E. M. Iaroslavskii, gen. ed., Istoria VKP(b), 4 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1929): pt. 1, 230, pt. 2, 291. Iaroslavskii explained in his editorial foreword that the volume had been in preparation for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution (1917) "but for a whole series of reasons was delayed for a year." He did not explain what those reasons were.
fact" in party history as rewritten in the 1930s by Iaroslavskii and others. The system of falsification extended to retrospective censorship by or for Stalin of his own earlier writings—the deletion, for example, from later printings of Problems of Leninism of Stalin's reference in 1924 to the position he took in March 1917. Subservient writers falsified actual party history in conformity with an idealized image of the "real Bolshevik" for whom straying from the path of revolutionary rectitude was clearly impossible—an image representing Stalin's self-concept. The logical groundwork of this system of falsification was laid in Stalin's letter to Proletarian Revolution.20

Hell broke loose on the party history and theory fronts as soon as Stalin's letter appeared. The Communist Academy's institutes hastily called meetings to discuss the document's implications for their work. Many editors and scholars were dismissed from their jobs and expelled from the party. Proletarian Revolution, after putting out the issue containing the letter, suspended publication in 1932. On reappearing in early 1933, it had a wholly new editorial board, one of whose members was Ivan Tovstukha, Stalin's one-time personal secretary.

Soviet archival sources reveal that all of the Soviet historical journals received instructions to print the text of Stalin's letter and to carry appropriate editorials on its meaning for their respective areas. In a confidential letter of November 26, 1931 to the editorial board of one such journal, The Class Struggle, Stalin's erstwhile personal assistant—by then secretary of Pravda's editorial board—L. Z. Mekhlis said that materials in preparation should be written through the prism of Stalin's propositions. The Communist Academy's presidium met on November 31 to review its affiliates' responses to the Stalin letter. K. G. Lur'ë, academic secretary of the Society of Marxist Historians, reported that all of the society's sections had been instructed to review the whole literature on the party's history critically in the light of Stalin's "article."21 Trotskyist contraband had already been brought to light in numerous works. Many writers, for example, had failed to show the earlier leading role of the Russian Bolsheviks on the international Marxist arena. And Lur'ë combined the unmasking of contrabandists with criticism of three well-known party figures—Iaroslavskii, Karl Radek, and I. I. Mints.

Proceedings and reports from other academic groups show that not only historians and their histories but all members and sectors of the theoretical front were being brought into line with higher-level, authoritative interpretation of Stalin's letter. A representative of literary criticism denounced the

20 For a different interpretation of the key purpose of Stalin's letter, see John Barber, "Stalin's Letter to the Editors of Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya," Soviet Studies, 28 (1976): 21-41. Ignoring the cult question, Barber has suggested that the letter was chiefly occasioned by the "falling quality of party recruits" and an insecure regime's "concern over the tendency of its Marxist intellectuals to engage in too much controversy and speculation," and he has questioned whether the letter was intended to have the effect it did or was conceived as the vital turning point it proved to be. To me Barber's position is unpersuasive.

21 Vsesoiuznoe soveshchaniye, 19, 362, 457, 75. Also see Dunaevskii, "Bolesheiki i germankie levne na mezhdunarodnoi arene," 508-09.
“Menshevik-Trotskyist view” of Maxim Gorky’s writings, without indicating what that view was, and said that Stalin’s letter necessitated criticism of the literary policy—also not identified—of the Second International. A writer named Butaev reported that the Institute of Economics had set up a special brigade to re-examine economic theory in light of Stalin’s letter and to “bring to light Trotskyist contraband in the literature on economics.” Examples of such contraband were the still-prevalent petty-bourgeois and Trotskyist ideas that equated socialism with equal remuneration and the view, voiced in a book published in 1931, that Henry Ford’s factories and assembly lines were a model for Soviet rationalization of labor processes. The legal theorist E. B. Pashukanis, speaking for the Institute of Soviet Construction and Law, criticized a textbook by two authors (one of them Butaev) that contained no account of what Stalin had said in 1927 about the proletarian state. K. V. Ostrovitianov, an economist, objected to the hitherto-accepted notion that the writings of Lenin and Stalin belonged to “politics” as distinct from “economics,” whereas in fact they presented the basic laws of socialism’s construction and Soviet economic life. Not surprisingly, Ostrovitianov in later years became the Stalin-surrogate for economics.22

A speaker from the Institute of Technology assailed the “narrow technicism” that he said was characteristic of Trotskyism, condemned the “technological policy of social-fascism,” and asserted that a review of “literally the entire technological literature” was now needed. A representative of the Institute of Philosophy, in addition to discussing its new tasks, remarked that the Institute of Technology should produce in short order “a work systematizing all of the basic theses of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin on technology.” The representative of the Association of Natural Science wondered why the basic methodological postulates about physics provided by Lenin in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism were not being taken as a guide in an attempt “to create a conception of physics, to produce our Marxist-Leninist conception of the structure of matter.”23 Nadezhda Mandelstam, then working in the editorial offices of the journal For a Communist Education, recalled later how “all of the manuscripts were rechecked in great panic and we went through huge piles of them, cutting mercilessly. This was called ‘reorganization in the light of Comrade Stalin’s remarks.’”24

The pell-mell rush to ferret out “Trotskyist contraband” and “rotten liberalism” was deeply troubling to many in responsible posts, in part, no doubt—but only in part—because of the pressure and embarrassment they themselves were in some cases experiencing. Stalin was not yet an absolute dictator; some in high places failed to realize that he was on the way to

22 According to Katsenelinboigen, “In the forties, K. V. Ostrovitianov was appointed as the curator of economics. All he did was provide commentaries for Stalin’s work; he had no opinions of his own, and made no practical recommendations.” “Conflicting Trends in Soviet Economics in the Post-Stalin Era,” 375.
24 Nadezhda Mandelstam, Hope against Hope: A Memoir, trans. Max Hayward (New York, 1970), 259. Although she spoke of it as a letter of 1930 in Bolshesvik, it is clear from the context that Mandelstam was referring to the 1931 letter to Proletarian Revolution, also printed in Bolshesvik.
becoming one or to understand what was driving him to it. Several prominent Old Bolsheviks—including Ol’minskii, Iaroslavskii, V. Knorin, and N. Lukin—sought to restrain those “glorifiers” (as Iaroslavskii called them in a handwritten note found decades later in the party archives) who were taking Stalin’s letter as a new gospel. Knorin suggested to a meeting of the party group of the Society of Marxist Historians on November 11, 1931 that the letter should simply be seen as a restatement of some basic Leninist tenets. Lur’e, on the other hand, said that party history had lacked all methodology before Stalin’s letter appeared and that historians did not grasp the relation between theory and practice. I. I. Mints, who was present at the meeting, wrote a letter to Iaroslavskii, who was out of town, saying that Lur’e, in her “nasty and unsound” speech, had put things less charitably: “Before Stalin’s letter there was nothing, and only now does she understand the relation between theory and practice.” Yet three weeks later Lur’e reported to the Communist Academy’s presidium on the situation in the Society of Marxist Historians. At about the same time, Iaroslavskii warned against certain unprincipled people who wanted “to make capital on this question” of the Stalin letter. But this statement, along with his handwritten note recalling “how the glorifiers ‘worked me over’ in 1931,” did not see publication until 1966.25

One month after Stalin’s letter appeared, his headquarters began to take action against those who pleaded for restraint. Lazar Kaganovich gave a long speech at the Institute of Red Professors on December 1, 1931—the occasion of its tenth anniversary. When the text appeared in Pravda some days later, it became clear that the address was meant to reach the whole intelligentsia. But “address” is a misnomer. The document is best described as a several-thousand-word, peremptory command by drill sergeant Kaganovich ordering the army of the intelligentsia to snap to attention in the light of General Stalin’s letter.

Kaganovich introduced his discussion of the letter by stressing the great importance of Marxist-Leninist indoctrination at a time when individuals who had only been members of the party for three to five years comprised one and a half to two million out of a total of two and a half million party members and when the Komsomol numbered five and a half million Young Communists. No one in the party would have disputed the statistics and their general implications, but Kaganovich quickly made it clear that what was at issue was the specific content of party indoctrination. The millions of new members must learn that, if the country once thought the most backward in the world was now the land of socialism, “We owe this to the selfless struggle waged for decades by the best people, headed by Lenin, against the narodniki, legal Marxists, economists, Mensheviks, Trotskyists, rightists, and conciliatory elements in the party.” Clearly, Stalin was the best of “the best people.” Kaganovich then spoke of the “criminality” of slanderer-falsifiers like Slutskii.

Radek, Kaganovich continued, had acknowledged his own errors to the party group of the Society of Marxist Historians: he had recognized, furthermore, that Rosa Luxemburg did not always take “a correct Bolshevik position” but had argued that Rosa was a “bridge” to Bolshevism for the best Social Democratic workers. In fact, Kaganovich charged, Radek himself had been a bridge between Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky.

The importance of Stalin’s letter, Kaganovich said, did not lie in its attack on the insignificant ex-Menshevik Slutskii, whom Stalin had pulverized in passing, but in exposing the rotten liberalism shown by the editors of *Proletarian Revolution* toward deviations from Bolshevism and distortions of party history. And this journal was not the only weak spot. A still weaker one was Comrade Iaroslavskii’s four-volume history, criticism of the errors of which would “undoubtedly develop further.” Among his illustrations of the history’s grave errors, Kaganovich mentioned its “erroneous and harmful assessment of the role of the Bolsheviks in the first period of 1917, [its] foul slander of the Bolsheviks.” Kaganovich delivered this veiled rebuke to Iaroslavskii for his reference to Stalin’s “erroneous position” in March 1917. Then came a methodological pointer: the key to a comprehensive party history was the “flexibility of Lenin’s tactics,” not passages in which Lenin said, in so many words, “Kautsky is a bastard.” What, in short, a “real Bolshevik” said or failed to say at a particular time was not the touchstone of party-historical truth; the documents must be interpreted according to the canons of the real-Bolshevik-revolutionary-can-do-no-wrong school.

Kaganovich ended with an implicit call for an intensification of the ongoing hunt for heresy. Difficulties were rife, the fight was not over, the class struggle was continuing. “Opportunism is now trying to creep into our ranks, covering itself up, embellishing itself, crawling on its belly, trying to penetrate into crannies, and trying, in particular, to crawl through the gates of the history of our party.” In his recent speech Radek was wrong to describe the Comintern as a channel through which many different currents and brochures flowed into the Bolshevik party. The party was no meeting place of turbid brochures but a “monolithic stream” capable of smashing all obstacles in its path. The meaning was as clear as the metaphor was mixed: fall in line or be destroyed.26

The pleaders for restraint—and others—fell into line. Within the twelve days following Kaganovich’s speech of December 1, *Pravda* carried letters of recantation from Radek, Iaroslavskii, and the party historian Konstantin Popov. Radek pleaded guilty to all of Kaganovich’s charges and joined the attack on “Luxemburgianism.” Iaroslavskii acknowledged a whole series of “the grossest mistakes” in the four-volume history, including “an objective, essentially Trotskyist treatment of the Bolsheviks’ position in the February-March period of the Revolution of 1917” (Trotskyist, presumably, because

---

26 *Pravda*, December 12, 1931. Dunaevskii has observed that “Kaganovich’s speech, filled with shouted threats, was designed to pin the label of Trotskyist on all from now on who would dare to deviate from Stalin’s propositions”; “Bol’shevi i germanskie levye na mezhdunarodnoi aren,” 511.
Trotsky was one of those who had called attention to the generally known facts about Stalin’s position at that time). He also disavowed the view, reportedly expressed by Mints in a recent speech, that the authors of the four-volume history had erred in their objectivity and that what was now being asked of party historians was “not so much objectivity as political expediency.” No, lied Iaroslavskii, the party had not and could not demand that historians surrender their objectivity; the problem was that the authors of the four-volume work had sinned against objectivity.27 Resigning himself to the situation, Iaroslavskii started work on the glorifying biography of Stalin that was published in 1939.

Plainly, to confess to heresy was not enough; the heretic had to join the inquisition. Only by entering the ranks of the accusers could he expect to have his recantation taken seriously. To denounce Trotskyist contraband on the part of others demonstrated the genuineness of one’s own “real” Bolshevism—that is, Stalinism. Recantation followed by denunciation was becoming a ritual of Soviet political culture. Iaroslavskii’s public disavowal of his friend Mints was but one of many examples.

Still, Stalin did not yet wield absolute power. Those higher in the hierarchy of power than Iaroslavskii could suggest the need for restraint. Among them was P. P. Postyshev, then a full member of the party Central Committee, a member of its Orgburo, and one of four Central Committee secretaries serving under General Secretary Stalin. As a secretary, Postyshev was in charge of the Central Committee’s Organizational Department and its Department of Agitation and Propaganda, whose functions included oversight of the press. In a speech at a district party conference in Moscow, he stressed the great significance of Stalin’s letter and then took various party cells to task for their failure to distinguish between an individual’s particular mistakes and a “system of views.” Of course, there were concealed Trotskyists in the party’s ranks, who must be exposed and expelled. But there were also comrades who had simply erred. Instead of denouncing them as deviationists and kicking them out of the party—as did some who had been asleep but now wanted to “show themselves” (and then go back to sleep)—errant comrades should be criticized in a comradely way. Postyshev’s fate after trying to curb the excesses of the heresy hunt was instructive: arrested in 1938, he was killed in 1940 in one of Stalin’s concentration camps.28

The master-builder of the Stalin cult was the cult-object himself. But many others, ranging from men in Stalin’s entourage like Kaganovich and Mekhlis to obscure ideological workers like Lur’e, assisted. Who, we may now ask, were the glorifiers? Some, without doubt, were persons devoted to Stalin or to the man they idealistically perceived him to be; others were simply careerists who may have lacked strong qualification in intellectual work but who were shrewd or, perhaps, cynical enough to grasp the opportunities for self-ad-

27 Iaroslavskii’s letter appeared in Pravda on December 10, 1932; Radek’s on December 12; Popov’s on December 8.
28 T. Mariagin, Postyshev (Moscow, 1965), 299–300. The speech in question was reported in Pravda on January 11, 1932.
vancement inherent in the Stalin-glorifying enterprise. One climber who made his way to the top by this route was the head of the Georgian secret police, Lavrentii Beria, who with Stalin’s backing became party chief of the Transcaucasus in 1932. The one indispensable quality shared by all of the glorifiers, high and low, was pliability. In very many ways the aggrandizement of Stalin required the twisting of truth and the falsification of historical fact. As Iaroslavskii himself expressed it, the glorifiers had to be “unprincipled,” pliable enough to ignore their scruples and still their consciences insofar as the cult-building enterprise required.

The letter to Proletarian Revolution was a turning point in the cult’s evolution. From the time of its appearance forward, idolatry of Stalin became one of Russia’s major growth industries. No field of Soviet culture was exempted from finding inspiration for its activities in Stalin’s letter. The journal For Proletarian Music, for example, devoted its editorial in January 1932 to “Our Tasks on the Musical Front” in light of the letter, and the corresponding editorial in the February 1932 issue of For a Socialist Accounting bore the title, “For Bolshevik Vigilance on the Book-Keeping Theory Front.” But revolutionary history and Stalin’s place in it remained the central concern. A small example, typical of many, was an article published in Pravda shortly after Stalin’s letter appeared. It denounced a book on Comintern history on the grounds that Stalin’s name was only mentioned twice and said, “Without showing Comrade Stalin’s leading role in the history of the Comintern, there can be no Bolshevik textbook on the history of the Comintern.”

Having asserted himself as premier party historian, Stalin delivered another lecture in reply to two party members, Olekhnovich and Aristov, who had written separately to him in response to the letter; and his answers, dated January 15 and 25, 1932, were published in Bolshevik (and then in other publications) the following August. Olekhnovich, apparently, had tried to show himself more Stalinist than Stalin and suggested that “Trotskyism never was a faction of Communism” but “was all the time a faction of Menshevism,” although for a certain period of time the Communist Party had wrongly regarded Trotsky and the Trotskyists as real Bolsheviks. In knocking this construction down, Stalin showed the hair-splitting quality of his mind. Undeniably, he said, Trotskyism was once a faction of Communism but oscillated continually between Bolshevism and Menshevism; even when the Trotskyists did belong to the Bolshevik party, they “were not real Bolsheviks.” Thus, “in actual fact, Trotskyism was a faction of Menshevism before the Trotskyists joined our party, temporarily became a faction of Communism after the Trotskyists entered our party, and again became a faction of Menshevism after the Trotskyists were banished from our party. ‘The dog went back to its puke.’

29 Pravda, December 29, 1931.
These further pronouncements only confirmed to professionals that they should look to Stalin’s writings and sayings as scripture. As if to meet their need, party publications in 1932 started printing early Staliniana, such as Stalin’s virtually unknown letter of 1910 to Lenin from Sol’vychegodsk exile and his little-known “Letters from the Caucasus” of that same year. Meanwhile, the glorifiers set about rewriting history in accordance with Stalin’s canons and in a manner calculated to accentuate his role and merits in the party’s revolutionary past, while discrediting those of his enemies. The skewed Stalinist version of Bolshevism’s biography began to emerge. Grosser falsification still lay ahead.

The rise of the Stalin cult did not bring the eclipse of the Lenin cult, only its far-reaching modification. Instead of two cults in juxtaposition, there emerged a hyphenate cult of an infallible Lenin-Stalin. In some respects, Lenin now “grew” in stature: he became the original “real Bolshevik” who could not have erred. But by being tied like a Siamese twin to his successor, he was inescapably diminished in certain ways. Only those facets of his life and work that could be connected with Stalin’s were available for full-scale idealization, and whatever did not in some way include Stalin had to be kept in the background. In effect, some parts of Lenin’s life had to be de-emphasized and others rearranged, modified, or touched up to put Stalin in the idealized picture.

Thus, Stalin was now portrayed as sharing in Lenin’s exploits, was declared to be from an early time Lenin’s right-hand man, on whom the leader leaned for counsel and support at key points in the development of the Revolution and after. The marking on May 5, 1932 of the twentieth anniversary of Pravda’s founding may be taken as an illustration. At the beginning, said Pravda’s anniversary editorial, Lenin “wrote articles for the paper nearly every day—with the closest participation and guidance of Comrade Stalin, particularly when Lenin was hiding underground.” So in the dual cult the younger figure emerged as Lenin’s alter ego, who naturally took over when Lenin himself was away from the immediate scene of action. Symptomatically, the article was accompanied by a large portrait not of Lenin but of Stalin and contained a lengthy quotation from Stalin’s recollection of 1922 on the paper’s early days.

By now Iaroslavskii had not simply fallen in line but had joined the vanguard of the glorifiers. Invited to contribute an article in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Prague Conference of January 1912, he found a shrewd way of enthroning Stalin in retrospect practically as a founder of the Bolshevik party. As Lenin had testified, Bolshevism had existed as a political current from 1903, when the Bolshevik-Menshevik schism occurred at the Russian Marxist party’s Second Congress. But the Bolshevik Party’s formal existence dated only from the all-Bolshevik Prague Conference of 1912, at which Lenin converted what had been a faction into a separate party no longer organizationally tied to the Mensheviks. In the aftermath of the Prague Conference Stalin was elevated (by cooption, not election) for the first time to membership in the party’s Central Committee. Iaroslavskii obscured the
embarrassing fact of Stalin's co-optation by saying, "At the conference a Bolshevik Central Committee was elected in the persons of Lenin, Stalin, Zinoviev, Ordzhonikidze, Belostotskii, Shvartsman, Goloshchekin, Spondarian, and Ia. M. Sverdlov (some of these comrades were co-opted into the Central Committee subsequently)." And by writing with heavy emphasis—"The Prague Conference was a turning point in the history of the Bolshevik Party"—he contrived to portray Stalin by indirection as having been present at the party's creation.  

Even clever party theorists were in some cases slow in comprehending the transformed personality cult and in applying its special canons. One person who illustrates the early confusion was S. E. Sef, a zealous glorifier, who was managing secretary of the journal Marxist Historian. He gave the provisional title "Marx, Engels, Stalin" to the lead article of a planned special issue commemorating the upcoming fiftieth anniversary, in March 1933, of the death of Marx. His omission of Lenin was corrected before the issue appeared. Sef had failed to grasp that Lenin qua co-leader remained a cult-object. In the dual cult, however, the figure of the successor in some ways now began to tower over that of the predecessor. For example, a foreign correspondent's count of "political icons" (portraits and busts of leaders) in display windows along several blocks of Moscow's Gorky Street on November 7, 1933 showed Stalin leading Lenin by 103 to 58.

Stalin was now being sung, especially by poets from the Orient, where versified flattery of rulers is a centuries-old art. "To the Vozhd', to Comrade Stalin" was the title of a long poem by A. A. Lakhuti, translated from Persian into Russian. A typical stanza reads,

Wise master, Marxist gardener!
Thou art tending the vine of communism.
Thou art cultivating it to perfection.
After Lenin, vozhd' of Leninists.

Meanwhile, scholars in Oriental studies were enjoined to apply the works of Stalin as well as those of Lenin to problems of the national-colonial revolution in the East. A pamphlet on the history of the Georgian Communist Party was attacked for treating the period from 1917 to 1927 in a spirit of "national deviationism" (that is, Georgian nationalism) contrary to Stalin's orientation; and among those who were later reported from Tbilisi to have condemned the offensive pamphlet was Lavrentii Beria. Stalin's early revolutionary years in Transcaucasia now began to attract reverent attention. A pamphlet published in Georgia portrayed the young Stalin as a heroic leader directing underground revolutionary activities in Batum in 1901-02.  

31 Pravda, January 22, 1932.
32 Dunaevskii, "Bolshevik i germanskie levy na mezhdunarodnoi arene," 511-12.
33 Eugene Lyons, Moscow Carousel (New York, 1935), 140-41.
34 Pravda, November 29, 1932. Iranian by origin, Lakhuti had emigrated to the USSR and become a Soviet citizen.
35 Pravda, March 21 and 25, 1932.
36 Stalin i Khashim (1901-1902 gody): Nekotorye epizody iz batumskogo podpol'ia (Sukhum, 1934).
The cult kept growing in official publicity during 1933. Pravda marked the fiftieth anniversary of Marx's death on March 14 by lauding Stalin's theoretical contributions to materialist dialectics and concluded, "Stalin's name ranks with the great names of the theoreticians and leaders of the world proletariat—Marx, Engels, and Lenin." The phrase "classical works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin" was now commonplace. Partizdat, the party publishing house, was savagely criticized for its failure to eliminate a series of minor misprints in the latest printing of the fastest selling of the classics, Stalin's Problems of Leninism. "As if 'minor' misprints are allowable in a book by Comrade Stalin!" the critic parenthetically exclaimed. Overall figures released in early 1934 show that the classics had been published in 1932-33 in the following numbers: seven million copies of the works of Marx and Engels, fourteen million of those of Lenin, and sixteen and a half million of those of Stalin, including two million copies of Problems of Leninism. That collection of Stalin's articles and speeches was by then well on the way to becoming probably the world's best seller of the second quarter of the twentieth century.

From that time forward, to the end of Stalin's life, his aggrandizement through the personality cult continued incessantly.

37 Pravda, February 22, 1933.
38 XVII s'ezd vsesoiuznoi komunisticheskoi partii (b) 26 ianvaria-10 fevralia 1934 g. Stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow, 1934), 620.
39 By 1949 almost seventeen million copies in fifty-two languages were in print. See Bol'shevik, no. 23, December 1949, p. 48.