#214

EVIDENCE OF AESOPIAN LANGUAGE IN THE WRITINGS OF JOSEPH STALIN

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Why did Stalin emphasize that a particular economic plan was "without quotation marks"? Why in his report on the Fifth Party Congress did he mention Lenin only once--and then not report what he said? Why at the close of a speech on the third anniversary of the October Revolution did Stalin, an atheist, pose as Martin Luther and appeal for help from "the god of history"? Why in a eulogy on Lenin did he offer as proof of the deceased leader's "genius" his mistaken beliefs that fraternization would break the German armies on the Eastern Front, and that October would inspire a European civil war? And what was the significance of the name of the Polish intelligence officer who, according to the 1938 show trial transcript, worked with Bukharin and his fellow "spies"?

Although these questions are not those usually asked when considering Soviet history, they are utterly crucial for understanding Stalin. Pursuing them leads to a discovery which gives new importance to his writings as a historical source: his extensive use of Aesopian language. This essay will demonstrate this by examining several of Stalin's works over a span of four decades.

Once deciphered, Stalin's Aesopic usage yields radically new conclusions about his ideas and attitudes. These conclusions are likely to be controversial. Although full discussion of them is beyond the scope of this brief essay, some attention will be devoted to them, the conflict between them, and orthodox notions about Stalin. However, the primary purpose of this essay remains to establish that Stalin did use Aesopic language.

Because the interpretation of Stalin's writing presented here is different from any in previous literature, this interpretation may be subject to the charge that it rests on an arbitrary reading of Stalin's words. The

basic considerations that validate the Aesopian nature of some of his writings should be defined. First, Aesopic techniques are frequently repeated, constituting patterns of usage. Although only a few of Stalin's writings can be examined here, a sufficient number of cases of repetition will be shown within a single work or across several works to suggest the widespread existence of patterns. Second, the Aesopian character of much of Stalin's usage can be denied only by assuming that he was either ignorant of current affairs, weak-minded, or a careless writer. None of these assumptions are tenable.[1] Third, Stalin himself occasionally "points" to Aesopian "keys" by italicizing them or by other means. Fourth, a reading of Stalin's Aesopian language yields a consistent and coherent political viewpoint and a comprehensible response to his political environment. And fifth, elements of this outlook are confirmed by contemporary statements he made without Aesopic disguise. These five factors confirm the Aesopian character of much of Stalin's writing.

Stalin wrote a letter to Lenin a few days after the 10th Party Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) concluded on March 16, 1921. He praised the proposals of the State Commission for the Electrification of Russia (Goelro) and disparaged other plans for revitalizing the economy. He called for the immediate implementation of the Goelro plan, which he said was "a truly *integrated* [*edinyi*] and truly *state* economic plan *without quotation marks.*"[2] Because support for electrification was hardly novel among Bolsheviks, Stalin's remarks might seem insignificant. But why did he emphatically include the words, "without quotation marks"?

The purpose of Stalin's words was to signify that his support for the Goelro plan was genuine. He implies a contrast between the use of his own

words to characterize the plan and someone else's use of a quotation (i.e., borrowed words) to describe it. Stalin's choice of words affirmed his own sincerity and implied criticism of an unidentified person for insincere "support" of Goelro's proposals. The emphasis that Stalin accorded his own words indicates that he intended this implication.[3] But to whom was he alluding?

One month earlier, on February 22, Lenin had published his assessment of the Goelro plan. He rebuked Goelro's critics and reminded them, with quotation marks, that the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) had called for this "'scientifically produced state plan for the whole national economy and [for] its subsequent implementation.'" "Clear enough?" he chided, "A 'scientifically produced state plan for the whole national economy'--can anyone misunderstand these words in the decision of our highest authority?" However, ignoring part of the directive he quoted, Lenin backed away from rapid implementation of the plan and attacked partisans of action for not recognizing the need to resolve technical and other problems. An especially serious obstacle was the widespread infection of the Soviet bureaucracy with "'communist' conceit," i.e., the attitude of the party big-wigs who were overly fond of issuing orders and arbitrarily exercising their authority. More appreciation for the viewpoint of bourgeois specialists was needed, Lenin stressed. Indeed this was a case, he said, where "the engineer's way to communism" took precedence over "that of the underground propagandist."[4] Thus, although Lenin remained a supporter of electrification on paper, he opposed prompt implementation of the Goelro plan.

A quick glance at Stalin's letter might not clearly suggest that he was referring to Lenin's article. Stalin expressed his views with an enthusiastic

and personable tone, which gave the impression that he was unaware of Lenin's opposition to implementation. However, this was a pose of political and personal innocence that served to camouflage his political and personal attacks on Lenin.

Because Lenin had borrowed words from the VTsIK to describe the Goelro plan, and because Stalin's letter set him at odds with Lenin on the implementation issue, it seems reasonable to conclude that it was Lenin whom Stalin criticized for inconsistency. Moreover, Lenin's conduct gave cause for this charge. His quoting VTsIK's call for the plan and for its implementation, while actually opposing implementation, can be regarded as hypocritical. These factors point to the conclusion that Stalin was levelling a personal though veiled attack on Lenin.

This conclusion is confirmed by other evidence in the letter. Near its end, Stalin stated that "there is *only one* 'integrated economic plan'--it is 'the plan for electrification.'" The first three words Stalin quoted--*edinyi khoziaistvennyi plan*--come from the title of Lenin's article, "*Ob edinom khoziaistvennom plane*." Stalin's reference to Lenin is unmistakable.[5]

Because attacking Lenin was an enterprise not to be entered upon lightly, something serious must have prompted Stalin. It seems unlikely that disagreement over the Goelro proposals alone could have provoked him. Something greater encouraged Stalin's attack.

The answer lies in Stalin's characterization of the Goelro and other plans. Consider his assertion that the Goelro proposals were the "*only one* 'integrated economic plan.'" Logically, this implies rejection of all other economic plans and Stalin's emphasis on the words "only one" indicates that he intended this implication. After the 10th Party Congress, however, there was

only one other economic plan, the New Economic Policy (NEP), which Lenin had unveiled just a few days before Stalin wrote. Thus when Stalin quoted Lenin's description of the Goelro plan and reminded Lenin that there was indeed "*only one* 'integrated economic plan,'" he was attacking Lenin for having abandoned it in favor of the NEP. Stalin did not mention the NEP, but his words pointedly imply a challenge to it.

This implication is not isolated, but is repeated several times in Stalin's letter. It is present in his claim that compared to the Goelro plan "all other 'plans' are just idle talk, empty and harmful." It is also present in his characterization of "the dozens of 'integrated plans' which to our shame appear from time to time in our press" as "the childish prattle of preschoolers." And when Stalin called the Goelro plan "the only Marxist attempt in our time to place the Soviet superstructure of economically backward Russia on a truly practical technical-productive basis, the only one possible under present conditions," he implied that the NEP could not move Russia forward. To conclude that Stalin was antagonistic toward the NEP may seem radical, but it is implied four times by Stalin's remarks.

The five passages cited from Stalin's letter demonstrate its Aesopian character. The unmistakable references to Lenin's article of February 22 prove that Stalin knew of Lenin's opposition to immediate implementation of the Goelro plan. They show that Stalin feigned the personable and enthusiastic tone of the letter in order to camouflage his personal criticism of Lenin. His charge of insincerity against Lenin is understandable in view of Lenin's backing away from the Goelro plan, and its presence in the letter is compatible with the fact that Stalin disagreed with Lenin about implementation.

Stalin's charge of insincerity against Lenin is implied by allusions, and his attack on the NEP is conveyed by another basic device, an implied syllogism. His characterization of the Goelro plan and all other plans implies that all other economic plans were bad. This is the first premise of the syllogism. The category, "other economic plans," necessarily and obviously includes the NEP. That the NEP is another economic plan is implied as the second premise. Stalin leaves the moral to be inferred, but the conclusion of the syllogism, that the NEP is bad, follows unavoidably.

In view of Stalin's evident antagonism toward the NEP, the significance of the Goelro plan for him becomes clearer. His description of the Goelro plan as "a truly *integrated* and truly *state* economic plan" suggests that the characteristics he valued in the plan were based on those of War Communism, in the furtherance of which the plan had been commissioned. These characteristics were alien to the NEP, which brought on the partial revival of capitalism. The question of whether to implement the Goelro plan thus represented the broader question of whether to build socialism. Hence, when Stalin charged Lenin with insincerity on the Goelro issue, he was indirectly accusing him of insincerity on the question of whether socialism could be built in the Soviet Union--the only point that mattered in the end. Despite Lenin's words, Stalin concluded, Lenin's actions proved that he did not believe it could be.

By disputing Lenin's faith in the possibility of building socialism Stalin was challenging Lenin's standing as a socialist. This conclusion is confirmed by several direct implications in the letter. First, when Stalin called the Goelro plan "the only Marxist attempt in our time to place the Soviet superstructure of economically backward Russia on a truly practical

technical-productive basis," he implied that all other attempts, including the NEP, were not Marxist. Because Stalin did not regard the NEP as a Marxist plan, it follows that he questioned whether its author was truly Marxist.

Second, the wording of Stalin's attack on other economic plans as "the childish prattle of preschoolers" echoes Lenin's attack in 1920 on the "childishness" of Mensheviks who deserted "to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat."[6] Stalin's mimicking of Lenin's words is an ironic allusion that suggests that Lenin was not a Bolshevik at all but a Menshevik. This was an appropriate innuendo from one who thought that the NEP was an un-Marxist concession to the bourgeoisie.

Another attack on Lenin's Bolshevism is evident in Stalin's recommendations for implementing the electrification plan. The Goelro leadership, he said, "must include without fail ... live practical men who act on the principle--'Report the fulfillment,' 'Fulfill on time,' and so forth." This call stands in pointed contrast to Lenin's criticism on February 22 of Soviet administrators who showed too much love of issuing orders and too little appreciation of the views of bourgeois specialists. Lenin even read these bureaucrats, the former "underground propagandists," figuratively out of the party. He would "happily trade dozens of them for one conscientious, scientifically qualified bourgeois expert."[7] Stalin, a former underground agitator, probably took this as a personal attack on himself and certainly as an attack on his concept of the party. If Lenin had wanted a party without men of Stalin's type, Stalin's response suggests that he wanted a party purged of men of Lenin's type.

Although there is more Aesopian language in Stalin's letter, the evidence presented is sufficient to arrive at the conclusion that Stalin used Aesopian

language. One possible obstacle to accepting Stalin's use of Aesopian language is that the view of Stalin revealed by decoding the March 1921 letter is contrary to one of the fundamental tenets of Western wisdom about Stalin, i.e. that he was Lenin's faithful disciple.

The view that Stalin was Lenin's loyal disciple has been a central assumption for over half a century.[8] It is closely related to the school of thought, long dominant in Western thinking about the relation of Stalinism to Leninism, that regards Stalin's work as the fulfillment of Leninism.[9] It is equally compatible, however, with the rival view that Stalinism was only one of several ways to fulfill Lenin's diverse legacy.[10] So widely accepted is the view of Stalin as disciple that most of his biographers do not document it. They merely assert it as established "truth."[11]

The disciple view is typified by Robert C. Tucker, who argues that Stalin psychologically identified with Lenin. Unlike most biographers of the *vozhd'*, however, Tucker marshals evidence to buttress the claim of Stalin's closeness to Lenin. Beside reference to specific issues, such as Brest-Litovsk, on which Stalin agreed with Lenin, Tucker advances four supporting arguments: that the young Stalin greatly respected and even emulated Lenin; that he took the name "Stalin" to liken himself to Lenin; that he adopted the Russian nationality because Lenin was Russian; and that his claims from 1924 to be "the best Leninist" indicate his lifelong reverence for Lenin.[12]
Although Tucker makes the best possible case for these views, there is little to support the case for Stalin's discipleship other than Stalin's own claim.

Stalin's testimony naturally demands serious consideration, but several factors warrant skepticism. It was in the early stages of the struggle for the succession, in the month Lenin died, that Stalin first asserted his

discipleship.[13] This does not mean that his claim was mere posturing to gain political advantage, but it does arouse that suspicion. Stalin's devious character does nothing to dispel this doubt. The failure of Stalin's biographers to produce even a single passage from his writings from 1905 through 1923 documenting admiration for Lenin further suggests that Stalin's regard for Lenin was invented in 1924. More important is that Stalin attempted to buttress his self-characterization as Lenin's disciple by embellishing and falsifying the historical record. Ronald Hingley, who has analyzed Stalin's myth-making, observes that Stalin's claims of closeness to Lenin are "all false or grossly exaggerated."[14] Stalin's flagrant tampering with history shows that the truth was unlikely to support his claims.

There are yet other reasons to dispute Stalin's word. First, the record of the Stalin-Lenin relationship is replete with instances of conflict. So frequent were such cases that there is scarcely a year from 1906 until Lenin's death when Stalin did not clash with Lenin.[15] This record is suggestive more of chronic antagonism than of comradely admiration, and its significance must be discounted by advocates of the "disciple" view.[16] Second, there is Stalin's downgrading of Lenin's image from the 1930s onward.[17] Furthermore, as Herbert J. Ellison has noted, there is evidence that Stalin had "no deep personal respect for Lenin." Indeed, Stalin's erstwhile secretary, Boris Bazhanov, reported that Stalin detested Lenin.[18] Perhaps the most revealing instance of Stalin's attitude toward Lenin is Stalin's verbal abuse of Krupskaya in December 1922. As Lenin understood, what was done to his wife was done also to him.[19]

During the more than three decades after his death, no convincing evidence has been advanced to support the orthodox view of Stalin. This is an

inadequate basis for the interpretation of one of the most fundamental questions of modern Russian history. If one is to understand Stalin's attitude toward Lenin, one's understanding must be based on compelling evidence, not on surmise.

On November 6, 1920, just a few months before he wrote to Lenin, Stalin gave a major speech in Baku to celebrate the third anniversary of the revolution. At the conclusion of his remarks, he declared that "our path [in the coming period] is not an easy one, but ... we are not frightened by difficulties." He continued, "paraphrasing the well-known words of Luther, Russia might say: 'Here I stand, on the border between the old, capitalistic and the new, socialistic worlds, here on this border I unite the forces of the proletarians ... and the forces of the peasants ... in order to smash the old world. May the god of history help me!'"[20]

These are uncharacteristically dramatic words for Stalin. They are also unusual for an atheist, particularly on the holiest of Soviet holy days. What is strangest about them, however, is that they stand in sharp contrast to the assessment of Russia's situation earlier in the speech. The Entente's intervention had been beaten back, and it had "even begun to fear Russia," which was "becoming a great socialist people's power;" "no new external enemies are so far in sight;" the worst economic problems were "now a thing of the past;" and Russia had become "rich" in "the revolutionary sense." Why then stress that there were difficulties ahead for "us" that demanded fearlessness and help from "the god of history"? And why invoke "Luther's speech in his defense at the Diet of Worms, where the Catholic Church proposed to Luther to repudiate his beliefs"?[21] Was the reference to Luther meant to imply that the Soviet "pope" was pressing Stalin to renounce his beliefs?

The answer lies in two parallel sequences of pertinent events that Stalin weaves into this speech. One is the sequence implicit in Stalin's assertion that he stands "on the border between the old, capitalistic and the new, socialistic worlds." The other is contained in his division of Soviet history into four periods. The first period, initiated by the October Revolution, culminated in the nationalization of banks and industry and the establishment of a state system for the procurement and distribution of food. In mid-1918, this led to a period of socialist construction, or War Communism, which was hampered by the need to fight the Entente and the Whites. Stalin gave no date for the end of the second period, but the latter of several events by which he characterized this period--the defeats of Yudenich and Kolchak and the opening of the Turkish nationalist campaign to oust Entente forces--places the end of the second period at the end of 1919 or the beginning of 1920. The third period was the present, a period of "new tasks, the tasks of economic construction," and it was "a transition period." The fourth period was the future, the character of which Stalin significantly did not specify.

Juxtaposed, these analogous sequences explain why Stalin, despite his glowing assessment of Soviet Russia's achievements and prospects, said that "our path" would be beset by terrible difficulties. In the first sequence, the present is where Stalin stands--between capitalism and socialism. The second sequence makes the present a transition between building socialism and the future. Together, they imply that the future will bring the restoration of capitalism in Russia, contrary to the Marxist order of things.

This conclusion depends upon the assumption that Stalin intended the two sequences to intimate that building socialism was soon to be displaced by a capitalist revival. The validity of this assumption is indicated by Stalin's

dating the end of War Communism in early 1920, though it was still in effect as he spoke in November 1920, and by his looking back on it, "What we were building was not a bourgeois economy in which everyone pursues his own private interest, not concerning himself with the state or the whole, not involving himself in the question of the planned organization of the economy on a state-wide scale. No, we were building a socialist society." It had been a heroic period when "we had to build under fire." Besides intimating that War Communism was as good as dead, Stalin's words betray his pride in the era and his bitterness at its passing.

His remarks also indicate his belief that War Communism did not have to be abandoned. The era's "constructive efforts," he acknowledged, had not produced "the maximum results," but this was only because of the need to devote nearly all "of our creative energy" to "the mortal struggle against the forces of the Entente." With this danger past, Russia could devote its full energy to socialist construction with successful results. The proof was that already "our food agencies ... have improved, have learned how to procure grain." Because War Communism could work, Stalin stressed that it should be continued. Correct economic policy, he insisted, "*must* take into account the requirement of society as a whole, *must* be a socialistically planned and organized economy for the whole of Russia." It was therefore not surprising that four months later he would champion the Goelro plan and scorn the NEP.

The idea that Stalin was a partisan of War Communism and a foe of the NEP might be hard for some readers to accept. This is not because he has been portrayed as a critic of War Communism. His attitude toward War Communism has not been examined by historians. Although he was not involved in a major way with economic affairs from 1918-20, he made clear his enthusiasm for socialist

construction. For example, in April 1918 he spoke warmly of "the start of the planned reconstruction of the outmoded social-economic system in a new, socialist manner" and called it a fundamental task of the Soviet dictatorship. He proposed measures in 1919 to facilitate "the building of socialist Russia ... more quickly," and in Vladikavkaz in October 1920 he voiced his confidence that a "socialist revolution not only can begin in a capitalistically backward country, but can be crowned with success."[22] These straightforward assertions confirm Stalin's zeal for War Communism and provide the basis for understanding why the period 1929-33 was, in Stephen Cohen's apt phrase, a "Civil War re-enactment."[23] Stalin's devotion to War Communism in 1920-21 and his later return to it in 1929 suggests that he never ceased to regard it as the only legitimate approach to economic policy, and that his "support" for the NEP was never genuine.

The myth of "Stalin, the defender of the NEP," originated as a central element in the larger myth of "Stalin, the disciple of Lenin." As Lenin's NEP was already in place, Stalin necessarily had to appear to support it if his pose as "the best Leninist" was to appear credible. This was also important in enabling Stalin to take the political middle ground so he could use Lenin's tactic of proving his orthodoxy by striking at deviationists on both the right and the left. Indeed, by attacking such deviationists, Stalin led readers to infer that he supported the NEP. However, a close reading of Stalin's writings of the 1920s indicates that his "support" was hedged, evasive, or indirect. More important, it reveals that he continued to use Aesopian techniques to express his antagonism toward the NEP.

This is evident, for example, in Stalin's theses on the nationalities question published in *Pravda* on March 24, 1923.[24] Russia was faced, said

Stalin, with "a grave evil," namely the revival of local nationalisms and "the 'new,' Smena Vekh, Great Russian chauvinism." "All these forms of chauvinism," he explained, "are fostered by the conditions of the NEP and of economic competition." Moreover, nationalist revivals are "becoming ever stronger because of the NEP." Even if one does not look for veiled meanings in Stalin's words, it is clear that he was criticizing the NEP as the source of "a grave evil."

Not far beneath the surface, however, there was an even more serious attack on the NEP. It was not Great Russian chauvinism that Stalin said was reviving, but something called "the 'new,' Smena Vekh, Great Russian chauvinism." Smena Vekh, as a note in *Sochineniia* points out, was a Russian émigré group that believed "in the gradual transformation of the Soviet system into bourgeois democracy in connection with the transition of Soviet Russia to the New Economic Policy."[25] "Smena Vekh Great Russian chauvinism" therefore represented the political counterpart of the economic process Lenin had initiated with the NEP. Thus, although Stalin might seem to have been criticizing Great Russian chauvinism, however disingenuously, the definition he gave his words transformed them into an attack on the NEP for promoting a very "grave evil"--the revival of bourgeois political ideas and aspirations.

A few weeks later, at the 12th Party Congress, Stalin played a similar game with "Smena Vekh Great Russian chauvinism." The chauvinist revival, he stressed, grew because of "the so-called NEP." If "we do not give decisive battle to this new force, if we do not cut it off at its root--and NEP conditions foster it--we risk" the dictatorship of the proletariat.[26] Stalin's intent was obvious; he desired to do away with the NEP.

Stalin's desire to scrap the NEP and return to socialist construction is also implied in his statement on the sixth anniversary of the revolution. The Bolsheviks, he recalled, had won peasant support in 1917 "under the flag of socialism," and he called for new efforts to promote socialism in the countryside, confident that peasants and nationalities would rally once again to "the red banner."[27] Although such statements might once have sounded like insignificant ritual, the outlook revealed by removing Stalin's Aesopian mask gives them new importance.

The examples of Aesopian language presented thus far indicate that Stalin questioned Lenin's standing as the leader of Bolshevism, primarily because Lenin turned from War Communism to the NEP. A fuller examination of these documents, especially the Baku speech, shows that Stalin's judgment of Lenin was not based solely on the NEP issue. Disagreements about policy toward the Entente and Germany, the issue of revolution in Europe, and the treatment of domestic enemies all played a part. However, the issue of War Communism versus the NEP was decisive because it embodied the question of whether socialism could be built or not.

Stalin's reaction to Lenin's move toward the NEP testifies to his inflexible belief that Marxism was first and foremost a doctrine of uncompromising class warfare,[28] and to his compulsive desire to build socialism. His doubts about Lenin also indicate the workings of his self-image as a great leader.[29] One should not be surprised to find this self-image so fully developed at this time, as Stalin was 40 years old when he spoke in Baku.

Because Stalin's self-image and rigid concept of revolutionary Marxism was long standing, one might wonder how long before 1920-21 he was disposed to

question Lenin's fitness as a leader. Aesopian evidence shows that he had serious doubts about Lenin almost from the first.

In Baku in the summer of 1907, Stalin published a report on the Fifth (London) Party Congress. Curiously, although the report is quite long--it takes up 32 pages in Stalin's *Sochineniia*--Lenin's name is mentioned only once. The reference is contained in Stalin's account of the debate about the attitude to take toward bourgeois political parties in the State Duma. The Bolshevik position, he said, was one of uncompromising opposition to the bourgeoisie, in contrast to the conciliatory line of the Mensheviks. "Within the framework of these two positions," Stalin said, "revolved the speeches of the rapporteurs, Lenin and Martynov, and of all the other speakers."[30] Stalin did not relate the substance of Lenin's remarks, although he devoted a paragraph to Martynov's comments and provided lengthy summaries of others' speeches.[31]

Stalin's treatment of Lenin's speech was probably intended to minimize the importance of Lenin's remarks. Far sharper criticism, however, is indicated by the precise wording of Stalin's solitary mention of Lenin. Stalin was ambiguous. He did not identify Lenin as a Bolshevik, but instead placed him somewhere "within the framework" of Russian Social Democracy. Stalin's words can be taken as a deliberate evasion, which implies doubt about the authenticity of Lenin's Bolshevism. That they were meant to challenge Lenin's standing as a Bolshevik is confirmed by Stalin's use of a very similar device the year before concerning the earlier issue of whether to participate in elections to the Duma.

At the Tammerfors Party Conference in 1905 and the Fourth (Stockholm) Party Congress in 1906, Stalin staunchly advocated boycotting the elections to

the State Duma. At Tammerfors Lenin sided with him, but then in Stockholm Lenin came out for participating in the Duma. After the Fourth Congress approved participation, Stalin had to accept the new policy as a matter of party discipline. But he would not acknowledge it as correct. In 1908, 1913, and even as late as 1920 he criticized the decision to participate.[32] This harping on the Stockholm Congress' decision indicates that Stalin firmly regarded it as a major error.

Stalin's report to Georgian readers on the Fourth Congress also leaves no doubt that he regarded the decision to participate in the Duma as a major blunder.[33] His treatment of Lenin, who supported participation, is noteworthy. Stalin's report makes no mention of Lenin or his disagreement with Lenin. Instead, Stalin said simply that "the Bolsheviks" opposed entering the Duma.[34] This definition of the Bolshevik position is arbitrary and untrue, and it implies that, on this issue at least, Lenin was no Bolshevik.

Stalin made a similar implication early in his report when he said that Russia was "divided into two hostile camps, the camp of revolution and the camp of counterrevolution." Between these two, he said, there was no ground for conciliation. "Between these two stools," "floating in mid-air," was the "miserable Duma," "and whoever sits between two stools," he stressed, "betrays the revolution. Whoever is not with us is against us!"[35] In the immediate context of these sentences, Stalin mentioned only the Cadets among the Duma's supporters, but his stark division of Russia into two camps logically consigned all who wanted to sit in the Duma to "mid-air." Underscoring this conclusion are his subsequent strong criticism of the pro-participation position and his observation that the Cadets enthusiastically

welcomed the decisions of the Congress, which he said "utterly fail to express the class tasks of the proletariat."[36]

When Stalin later placed Lenin "within the framework" of Bolshevism and Menshevism, he repeated what he did when he divided all Russia into two camps and placed the proponents of Duma participation between them. Both times he questioned whether Lenin was a real revolutionary. In 1906 it was Lenin's support for entering the Duma that provoked Stalin's attack. In 1907, it was the question of relations with bourgeois parties in the Duma--a problem that resulted from the "mistaken" decision of 1906 to participate. Although Lenin took a hard line on this question, Stalin's renewed criticism indicates that he regarded the only true Bolsheviks as those who remained unreconciled to participation and that he still held Lenin responsible for the 1906 decision.

Underlying Stalin's criticism of Lenin in 1906-07 was the same inflexible devotion to a revolution of uncompromising class war that in 1920-21 underlay his rejection of Lenin. Despite the ebbing of the revolutionary tide, Stalin still resolutely believed that armed revolt was the only course for the revolutionary proletariat,[37] and he challenged the commitment of fellow socialists who differed with him. His quickness to judge his colleagues and elders, including Lenin, testifies that even in his twenties his self-image encouraged him to brook no human rival. Given these basic concepts of self and revolution, it was only a short way from questioning Lenin's revolutionism in 1906-07 to reading him out of the party in 1921.

As suggested by the enduring contrast between Stalin's ideological rigidity and Lenin's flexibility, the aspirations and the inevitable resentments born of Stalin's self-image, and the established record of

conflict between Stalin and Lenin from 1906 to the latter's death, Stalin's writings during this period are rich in Aesopian content.

In several of Stalin's works written after Lenin died, he continued his cryptic attack on his erstwhile rival. On January 28, 1924, Stalin spoke at a memorial meeting at the Kremlin military school, where he pointed out some of "Lenin's characteristics as a man and as a public figure." The chief of these characteristics was the quality of "genius," which Stalin illustrated with two "facts." First, after listing factors that made an uprising in October 1917 risky, Stalin said that:

> Lenin was not afraid to take the risk, because he knew, he saw with his clear-sighted gaze, that an uprising was inevitable, that an uprising would be victorious, that an uprising in Russia would pave the way for ending the imperialist war, that an uprising in Russia would stir up the exhausted masses of the West, that an uprising in Russia would transform the imperialist war into a civil war, that an uprising would create the Republic of Soviets, and that the Republic of Soviets would serve as a bulwark for the revolutionary movement of the entire world.
>
> It is well known that this revolutionary foresight of Lenin was subsequently realized with unequaled precision.[38]

The second "fact" concerned Lenin's efforts just after the October Revolution to end hostilities with the Entente. Faced with insubordination by General Dukhonin, Lenin appealed directly to the soldiers "to surround the generals, cease military activity, establish contact with the Austro-German soldiers and take the cause of peace into their own hands." Stalin said that this was risky, but that Lenin took this approach because:

> he knew that the army wanted peace and that it would win peace, sweeping from the path to peace each and every obstacle, because he knew that such a method of asserting peace would have an effect on the Austro-German soldiers, that it would unleash the yearning for peace on all fronts without exception.
>
> It is well known that this revolutionary foresight of Lenin was subsequently realized with total precision.[39]

Stalin gives his words an enthusiastic and laudatory cast, but what does he actually say? Regarding the first "fact," did October really "pave the way for ending the imperialist war"? Did it "stir up the exhausted masses of the West" and "transform the imperialist war into a civil war"? Or, regarding the second "fact," did Lenin's ploy work? Did fraternization "have an effect on the Austro-German soldiers" and bring peace? Did it "unleash the yearning for peace on all fronts without exception"? Because the answer to all these questions is "no," what Stalin has done--while posing as Lenin's admirer--is to mock Lenin's "genius" by showing that at times he was naive and incorrect.

Stalin's other eulogy on Lenin, the great "oath" speech of January 26, 1924, also contains veiled slurs against Lenin. Consider the assertion in Stalin's opening paragraph that:

> There is nothing higher than the honor of membership in the party which was founded and led by comrade Lenin. It is not given to everyone to be a member of such a party. It is not given to everyone to withstand the stresses and storms connected with membership in such a party. The sons of the working class, the sons of need and struggle, the sons of incredible deprivation and heroic effort--these are the ones who, before all others, should be members of such a party.[40]

Significantly, Stalin chose to assign the foremost place in the party not to the proletariat but to the sons of the working class. This choice was purposeful, as Stalin's repetition of "the sons of" indicates. Although this wording is hardly heretical, it is contrary to the normal formula, for it was workers Marx had urged to unite, not their children. Stalin's change enabled him to do something he could not do otherwise: to assert his right quickly, as the son of working class parents, to primacy in the party. Stalin's unusual wording also allowed him to imply a question about Lenin's standing in his own party because Lenin, of course, was the son not of workers but of an ennobled family. Lenin was not exempt from Stalin's well-known prejudice

against the well-born, or as other statements show, from prejudices against intellectuals and émigrés.

Another example of the veiled anti-Lenin content of the "oath" speech is Stalin's statement about the worker-peasant alliance. This alliance, in the form of military cooperation during the Civil War, helped establish the Soviet republic. "But the struggle to consolidate the Republic of Soviets is still far from over," said Stalin:

> it has taken on a new form .... Now the union of workers and peasants must take on the form of economic cooperation between town and countryside, between workers and peasants, because it is directed against the merchant and the kulak, because it has as its goal the mutual supply by peasants and workers of all their needs. You know that no one worked for this end as persistently as comrade Lenin.[41]

Perhaps the most striking phrase in this passage is that the worker-peasant alliance "is directed against the merchant and the kulak." This is a clear repudiation of the NEP. Correspondingly, socialist construction is endorsed by Stalin's statement that the worker-peasant alliance "has as its goal the mutual supply by workers and peasants of all their needs." The Lenin being praised is the long dead Lenin of War Communism, not the freshly deceased Lenin of the NEP. Stalin is already busy shaping the memory and legacy of Lenin to his own purposes, with a bit of tongue-in-cheek sardonic humor at Lenin's expense.

Stalin's attacks on Lenin did not stop when Lenin was tucked away in his display box. Consider, for example, background information given about two defendants in the 1938 show trial, Ivanov and Zelensky. Ivanov, we are told, had become an Okhrana agent in 1911 in Tula. He was given the cover name "Samarin." Zelensky likewise had become a police spy in 1911. He worked for the Samara police under the pseudonyms "Ochkasty" and "Salaf."[42] Because

Ivanov and Zelensky both became Okhrana agents in the same year, they might be said to mirror each other. And because Ivanov, who was recruited in Tula, had the pseudonym "man of Samara," it follows that Zelensky, who was recruited in Samara, should have had the pseudonym "man of Tula," or "Tulin." "Tulin," of course, was one of Lenin's early pseudonyms. Hence, one might conclude that these two souls were selected for trial and death so that Stalin could use them to convey against Lenin the innuendo that he had been an agent of the Tsarist secret police.[43]

Stalin veiled his charge against Lenin by giving Zelensky other pseudonyms and by adding to the cast of spies another character, a certain Zubarev. But that Stalin meant to imply the charge against Lenin is indicated by a similar accusation he leveled against Lenin during the trial with only the most diaphanous of disguises. This accusation is conveyed in Vyshinsky's interrogation of Rykov:

> Vyshinsky: Were you aware of the treasonable activities of the Polish spy Ulyanov?
>
> Rykov: I was ....
>
> Vyshinsky: Permit me then, Comrade President, to read page 127 of the record .... And what you deposed there was about Benek, about Ulyanov ... did you depose that?
>
> Rykov: And something else besides ....
>
> Vyshinsky: No, you will not wriggle out of this, I shall read further .... It refers to the treasonable espionage work of Ulyanov--pages 125 and 126 of the record.[44]

"The Polish spy Ulyanov"! Unless we assume that there really was a Polish spy named Ulyanov, that Rykov and his fellows really were spies--in short, unless we believe that all the testimony in the trial is true--we must recognize that Vyshinsky's words were deliberately inserted to defame Ulyanov, better known by the pseudonym "Lenin." It should be equally clear

that Vyshinsky's words could only have been uttered and published on the authority and at the instigation of Stalin. The conclusion that Stalin was indicting Lenin as a foreign agent is inescapable.

Stalin's accusations do not mean that Lenin was an agent of the Okhrana or a foreign power. They indicate either that Stalin thought Lenin had been an agent or that Stalin himself had been an agent and now sought to purge himself of guilt by transferring his crimes to Lenin. Of these two possible explanations, the first is more likely in both cases. We have already seen that Stalin's frustrated self-image predisposed him to find reasons to judge Lenin unfit for leadership. It is quite possible that first, Stalin came to suspect Lenin of Okhrana connections, perhaps because of Lenin's association with Roman Malinovsky, and that second, in 1917 Stalin believed the charge that Lenin was a German agent. The second possible explanation might have merit with regard to the charge that Lenin had Okhrana links if Stalin himself had such ties.[45] Although these explanations must remain speculative unless confirmed by independent evidence, the fact of Stalin's assault on the long-dead Lenin is incontrovertible.

The samples from Stalin's writings examined above have been selected primarily because they are among the clearest examples of Stalin's Aesopian language. Most of them have been chosen because they illustrate two or more of the factors that confirm Stalin's use of Aesopic techniques. Some show Stalin's repeated use of the same technique within a document (e.g., the repetition of the implied syllogism in the March 1921 letter to Lenin) or in several documents (e.g., the challenges to Lenin's revolutionism in 1906-07). Most of them show Stalin's great reliance on games of logic (Stalin valued logic as one of the essential characteristics of a leader).[46] The Aesopian

character of several of the examples cannot be denied. Stalin's use of "keys" to point to his use of Aesopian language has also been illustrated (e.g., his use of quotation marks and italics to point out his references to Lenin's article on the Goelro plan, or the *Sochineniia's* footnote drawing attention to the circumstances and purpose of Luther's speech).

All of Stalin's Aesopian writings yield significant information about his political outlook, but none of the examples analyzed here have been chosen because they yield particularly important conclusions, and none has been tapped for information as thoroughly as possible. Nonetheless, these writings yield an internally consistent and coherent political outlook that is compatible with central elements of Stalin's personality, constitutes an understandable response to events by this personality, and is confirmed, at least in part, by undisguised statements of Stalin's views. Even if the picture of Stalin that begins to emerge from these explorations clashes with orthodox notions, readers might still find elements that are consonant with other aspects of his character and behavior, suggesting new and potentially more satisfying explanations for some of the most important and puzzling of his actions. The credibility of the conclusions that compose this picture should depend, however, not on whether they fit this or that bit of old wisdom, but on the strength of the evidence that supports them.

Notes

1. Leon Lipson's discovery of an "almost perfect parallelism" in the structure of a chapter of *Foundations of Leninism* indicates that Stalin was a more skilled and deliberate stylist than is generally assumed. See L. S. Lipson, "Stalin's Style," *Yale Review* 70, no. 4 (Summer 1981), pp. 500-05.

2. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1946-1952), 5, pp. 50-51. All emphases in quotations from Stalin's writings in this article are Stalin's.

3. Because the tone of Stalin's letter and his numerous enthusiastic descriptions of the Goelro plan (cited below) amply attest to his support, it was unnecessary for him to underscore this with an implied contrast. His use of the device thus suggests that his purpose was more to imply criticism than to assert his own approval.

4. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958-1965) 42, pp. 339-47. Lenin's remarks appeared in *Pravda*, 22 February 1921.

5. There are also paraphrases of Lenin's words in Stalin's phrases, "Masterskii nabrosok deistvitel'no *edinogo* i deistvitel'no *gosudarstvennogo* khoziaistvennogo plana *bez kavychek*" and "a chevo stoiat desiatki 'edinykh planov.'"

6. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 41, pp. 21-22.

7. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 42, p. 346.

8. S. Dmitrievskii, *Stalin* (Berlin, 1931), p. 19; I. D. Levine, *Stalin* (New York, 1931), p. 120; Walter Duranty, *Duranty Reports Russia* (New York, 1934), pp. 168-70, 187, 235, and *I Write As I Please* (New York, 1935), pp. 119-20, 179-81; Henri Barbusse, *Stalin: A New World Seen Through One Man* (New York, 1935), esp. pp. 30, 47; Eugene Lyons, *Moscow Carrousel* (New York, 1935), p. 129, and *Assignment in Utopia* (New York, 1937), p. 643; Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (1939; reprint ed., New York, 1972), esp. pp. 116, 206, 212; Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics* (New York, 1941), p. 75; David M. Cole, *Josef Stalin: Man of Steel* (London, 1942), p. 120; Emil Ludwig, *Stalin* (New York, 1942), pp. 54, 86-87; William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Enigma* (New York, 1943), pp. 124, 133; J. T. Murphy, *Stalin 1879-1944* (London, 1945), pp. 29, 71, 102, and 242; Nikolaus Basseches, *Stalin* (New York, 1952), pp. 23, 35, 46, 97-98, 251; Issac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York, Vintage edition, 1960), pp. 69, 116-17, 141; Robert Payne, *The Rise and Fall of Stalin* (New York, 1965), pp. 86, 96-97; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879-1929: A Study in History and Personality* (New York, 1973), pp. 130-37, 285; Adam Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and His Era* (New York, 1973), p. 233; and Ian Grey, *Stalin: Man of History* (Garden City, N.Y., 1979), p. 191.

9. See the critique of the orthodox school by Stephen F. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* Robert C. Tucker (ed.), (New York, 1977), pp. 3-29.

10. Perhaps the best evidence of this is that one of the leading revisionists, Robert C. Tucker, has carried the disciple view to a farther extreme than any Westerner save Barbusse. See Tucker's *Stalin as Revolutionary* and his "The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 4 (December 1977) pp. 563-89.

11. The only recent Western biographer of Stalin to challenge this "truth" is Ronald Hingley, *Joseph Stalin: Man and Legend* (New York, 1974).

12. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, esp. pp. 122-43, 467-72.

13. See especially Stalin's remarks at the Thirteenth Party Conference, 17-18 January 1924, his speeches of 26 and 28 January 1924 on the death of Lenin, and his *Foundations of Leninism*, in Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, pp. 5-64, 69-188.

14. Hingley, *Joseph Stalin: Man and Legend*, p. xix.

15. Stalin opposed Lenin on the land and Duma issues at the Stockholm Party Congress in 1906; he repeatedly criticized Lenin in 1908-11 for engaging in a "tempest in a teapot" with A. A. Bogdanov; in 1912 he was in conflict with Lenin's views on the direction of *Pravda*; after the February Revolution he apparently helped suppress Lenin's "Letters from Afar" and opposed Lenin's position on the war and the Provisional Government; in July 1917 he favored surrendering Lenin to face charges of high treason; on the eve of the October Revolution he defended the "strikebreakers" G. K. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev; during the Civil and Polish Wars his actions were often independent and brusquely critical of central direction, including Lenin's; and, finally, he engaged in protracted disputes with Lenin in 1921-23 over the monopoly of foreign trade and nationalities policy.

16. This is made explicit by Tucker's admission that his "line of interpretation assumes that Stalin's basic attitude toward Lenin did not turn hostile under the tensions" of the conflicts of 1921-23. *Stalin as Revolutionary*, p. 284.

17. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," pp. 18-19.

18. Herbert J. Ellison, "Stalin and His Biographers: The Lenin-Stalin Relationship," in *Reconsiderations of the Russian Revolution* R. C. Elwood, (ed.), (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 256-69; Boris Bazhanov, *Bajanow révèle Staline: Souvenirs d'un ancien secrétaire de Staline* (Paris, 1979), pp. 83, 104. Adam Ulam (*Stalin*, pp. 213-14) also notes that Stalin was capable of "insolence" toward Lenin "inconceivable on the part of any other member of the ruling group."

19. Lenin to Stalin, March 5, 1923, in Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 54, pp. 329-30.

20. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 4, pp. 382-93.

21. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 4, p. 439, n. 109.

22. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 4, p. 74, 79-80, 224, 375.

23. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," p. 23.

24. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 5, pp. 187-93.

25. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 5, pp. 415-16.

26. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 5, pp. 238-39.

27. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 5, pp. 342-48.

28. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, pp. 119-21.

29. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, pp. 75-76.

30. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 2, p. 63.

31. For example, Martov and Rosa Luxemburg each received about one page in the *Sochineniia* version, while the Bolsheviks A. A. Bogdanov and G. D. Leiteisen received three and two pages, respectively.

32. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 2, p. 135, 271; 4, p. 312. See also Leon Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* (1940; reprint ed., New York, n.d.), p. 71.

33. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 1, pp. 250-76.

34. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 1, p. 265.

35. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 1, pp. 251-52.

36. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 1, pp. 275-76.

37. E.g., Stalin, *Sochineniia* 1, pp. 250-53.

38. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, p. 52, 61-62.

39. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, pp. 62-63.

40. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, p. 46.

41. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, pp. 48-49.

42. *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet "Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" Heard before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, Moscow, March 2-13, 1938* (Moscow, 1938), p. 7.

43. This assumes that the information about their pasts is true. It is equally possible, however, that their pasts were invented for the trial.

44. *Report of Court Proceedings*, pp. 415-17.

45. As has been suggested by Edward Ellis Smith, *The Young Stalin: The Early Years of an Elusive Revolutionary* (New York, 1967).

46. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 6, p. 55.