

Did Stalin's signature on the Nazi-Soviet Pact constitute a betrayal of Bolshevism?

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Firstly, in order to answer this question we have to define what do we exactly mean by the notion of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks were originally the revolutionary wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party led by Lenin. They advocated violent revolution instead of the gradual change proposed by their opponents, the Mensheviks. As Marxists, the Bolsheviks believed the basic source of all social evils was private ownership of the means of production and that its abolition would pave the way to Communism, a society of truly free individuals without exploitation, oppression or alienation. Lenin and his followers believed this could be achieved only by a dictatorship of the proletariat, which in practice meant the dictatorship of the Communist Party. (1)

Following their victory in October 1917, every sphere of life in the Soviet Union became the monopoly of a designated organization run by a command hierarchy of party members and these were all integrated into a single organizational whole by the command hierarchy of the Communist Party. This 'mono-organizational' system began to take shape under Lenin, but by 1921 he started to doubt its effectiveness and his resulting New Economic Policy (NEP) could have led Soviet society in a radically different direction. Unfortunately, with his death and the consolidation of Stalin the 'mono-organizational' system described as socialism was completed. (2) Here a very important question can be asked. Can we regard Stalin to be a Bolshevik at all? Did not most of the features of Stalinism constitute a betrayal of Bolshevism?

In fact, with the personal dictatorship of Stalin all the things Lenin was most afraid of appeared. Stalin's definition of Communism was an extremely distorted one and he completely abandoned the original goals of the Bolsheviks. Stalinism meant the dictatorship of one individual and not the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was a totalitarian regime the structure of which resembled to Hitler's Germany much more than to

the idealistic Communist society. Anyone who did not agree with his policies or was simply suspicious could end up in a GULAG labour camp or could be executed.

Between 1921 and 1945 600,000 thousand people fell victim to Stalin's terror, most of whom were innocent. He was so much afraid of the emergence of another centre of power that between 1936 and 1939 he 'beheaded' the Red Army and Navy by getting rid of the leading officers. Concerning his attitude towards the international Communist movement, with his policy of 'socialism in one country' and increasing

reliance on Russian nationalism, the Comintern served largely as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy.(3) In Lenin's view nationalism was not compatible with Bolshevism and he actually criticized Stalin in his 'Testament' for being a 'Great Russian chauvinist'.(4) There are historians who claim that had Lenin lived, he would have been faced with the same problems and would also have adopted authoritarian solutions. However, we have to conclude that Stalin abandoned so many principles of Bolshevism that it is highly questionable whether he could be called a Bolshevik at all, he was much closer to being a Nationalist.

Secondly, we have to examine the circumstances that led to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Stalin must have been aware of the fact that the number one enemy of both the peace of Europe and the Soviet Union was Hitler, but he had doubts concerning the plans of the Western Powers, especially after the Munich Agreement in September 1938. He was scared that England and France would encourage Hitler to attack Russia. The Pravda even suggested at that time that there were no difference between 'German and English robbers'.(5) Still, Stalin wanted to avoid the war with Germany at all costs, since owing to his paranoia the army was totally disorganized. He had basically two options: he could enter into an alliance with France and Great Britain and thereby effectively checkmate the Third Reich, which could not face a war on two fronts, or to sign a pact with Hitler and unleash the dogs of war westwards.(6)

Obviously, he would have preferred the first possibility, but he was afraid that the Western Powers want Hitler to attack

eastwards. However, he wanted to negotiate with them about a possible alliance of defence and for this reason a French and an English delegation arrived to Moscow in the Spring of 1939. Stalin was utterly disappointed when he saw that the delegations consisted mostly of young officers, who were not empowered to sign any kind of treaty with the Soviet Union. (7) They were just constantly delaying the agreement with the Russians. On the one hand, Stalin wanted them to put pressure on Poland so that Soviet troops could be sent to the endangered country, but the Western Powers rejected it. On the other hand, the Western Powers wanted Stalin to open the Eastern Front against Germany, if Hitler attacked westwards, even though they could only guarantee protecting Poland in case of aggression against the Soviet Union. Stalin, of course, could not accept this either. As he told Churchill in August 1942, he had realized at that time that the Western Powers wanted to restrain Hitler with a mere diplomatic line-up, which would not work according to him. So then he started to approach the other possibility. The first sign of this was when the Jewish Litvinov, a fierce enemy of Hitler, was replaced as Comissar for Foreign Affairs by Molotov in May 1939. (8)

The Germans did not hesitate either to approach Stalin and the Nazi-Soviet pact was under way. Following the German ambassador, Schulenburg's memorandum on 15 August, Molotov proposed 26-27 August as the possible date for the negotiations. However, it would have been too late for Hitler, so the Führer himself sent a telegraph to Stalin asking for an earlier date. Stalin's new proposal was 23 August, which was acceptable for Hitler as well. On the night of 23-24 August Molotov and Ribbentrop finally concluded the agreement that protected Hitler's rear for the imminent war against the West and 'bought in' the Soviet Government as his collaborators by sharing with them in the partition of Eastern Europe. Stalin knew exactly what the consequences of this pact would be, but he thought that the war was unavoidable anyway.(9)

Considering Stalin's situation, we have to admit that he did not have many other choices. Maybe, going on negotiating with the West might have yielded acceptable results. Stalin was impatient and he acted

like a chess player running out of time. We have to accept that he wanted to gain time by the non-aggression pact. It is also true that the Germans had much more to offer than the Western Powers. However, concerning the Secret Additional Protocol he went far beyond his necessities. The partition of Poland and the determination of the spheres of interest constitute an aggressive, imperial policy, which can not be compatible with Bolshevism.

Thirdly, we have to examine how the international Communist movement reacted to the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The greatest recognized authority of Communism, apart from Stalin, was Leo Trotsky at that time. Trotsky was living in exile in Mexico and dedicated his life to his propaganda against Stalin. In my opinion, having kept his hands clean, Trotsky was a true representative of Bolshevism, so we have to take into consideration his point of view when answering the question whether Stalin betrayed Bolshevism or not. Trotsky said the following after the pact was signed: "The mask is off. Stalinism entered into an alliance with Fascism." He also wrote several pamphlets with titles like Hitler's Commissar, Stalin and The Twin Stars of Hitler and Stalin. Trotsky saw Stalin merely as concerned with manipulating Communism to suit his own ends. Unfortunately, he could not escape Stalin either, his revenge reached Trotsky in the shape of an icepick handled by a certain Ramon Mercader in August 1940. (10)

After the signing of the pact, the Soviet Union insisted on the ceasing of the anti-Fascist propaganda maintained by the Communist parties of the world. Stalin could easily achieve this

by using his control over the Comintern. His intention was obviously to avoid provoking Hitler. However, Bolshevists were supposed to fight for creating a world of free individuals, which is the exact opposite of the Fascist view. This opposition can not be simply put aside. This is a point again where we can see how far went Stalin off the way appointed by Lenin. It is hard to understand how could some European Communist parties be so short-sighted to believe Stalin. To illustrate this, here I would like to quote from the announcement of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia responding to the Nazi-Soviet pact.

"With this deed of hers the Soviet Union upsetted the conspiracy of the Western reactionary forces, which were

planning
to trick her into an isolated war with Germany, so that after a while
they
themselves could attack her. With this deed of hers the Soviet Union
has driven
the whole decaying Capitalist World into a blind alley, making way for
her own
policy of peace and her policy of helping the oppressed
nations.” (11)

Finally, we have to conclude that although
basically everything Stalin did was a betrayal of Bolshevism, his being
a
traitor of Communism was displayed in the most blatant way by his
signing the
Nazi-Soviet Pact.

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