Stalin in October

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The Return of Lenin

On the evening of Monday, April 3, another group of Bolsheviks arrived in Petrograd, this time not from Siberian exile but from emigration in the West. This was no routine group of party figures, however, since it included the party leader himself, Lenin, now returning to his native land for the first time in more than ten years. Life in the West had made him a more cosmopolitan figure than many of his party comrades—Stalin, for example—who had spent most of their lives in Russia, and he brought with him a point of view which placed events in Russia in an international context.

Before the train reached the Finland Station, the terminus of its run, it made a brief stop at Belo Ostrov on the Russo-Finnish border, and there a group of party officials, headed by Kamenev, climbed aboard to greet Lenin. Conveniently for the historian, one of the Bolsheviks present was a Kronstadt sailor named F. F. Raskol'nikov, who later published his recollections of the scene.1 Raskol'nikov vividly remembered the first words uttered by Lenin, words not of greeting but of sharp reproof:

“What’s this you’re writing in Pravda? We have seen several issues and really swore at you!”
As Raskol'nikov later recollected the scene, it was Kamenev who bore the brunt of Lenin's wrath; Stalin was not present, and no contemporary witness recalled his presence. Even though he first published his account in 1923, at a time when he was under no pressure to whitewash the record as far as Stalin was concerned, Raskol'nikov remembered that Lenin made no specific reference to Stalin, but Lenin's stinging rebuke obviously applied to him as well, for Stalin shared full responsibility with Kamenev for Pravda's recent editorial line. (A footnote in the 1964 edition of Raskol'nikov's memoirs, added at a time of renewed debunking of the Stalin cult, explicitly identifies Stalin as one of the principal targets of Lenin's wrath.

Meanwhile, the main welcoming party for Lenin was getting ready at the Finland Station, with the faithful Shlyapnikov as master of ceremonies and the Soviet leader Chkheidze as the spokesman of "revolutionary democracy" to extend a formal welcome to the returning Bolshevik chief. For the Finland Station festivities we have an eyewitness account by that indispensable historian-diaryist of the revolution, the Menshevik N. N. Sukhanov (Himmer). His description of the scene has become a classic that should be read by everyone interested in Lenin's place in the Russian Revolution. For present purposes, however, Sukhanov's report is of interest chiefly for the fact that, like Raskol'nikov's recollections of the Belo Ostrov encounter, it makes no mention of Stalin as among those present. Other reliable observers lend confirmation by their silence: Stalin was not present at the Finland Station.

The point may seem of relatively slight importance. What significance could there be, one may ask, in the presence or absence of a given party figure at what was, after all, merely another arrival of a group of tired, bone-weary travelers, anxious to find their bearings in the confusing new Russia of the revolutionary era? (Lenin, uncertain of the temper of the authorities in revolutionary Petrograd, half expected to be carted off to jail on arrival.) Reasoning thus, some biographers of Stalin simply pass over the entire episode in silence, hurrying on to other, in their eyes more significant developments.

Stalin felt otherwise, for he subsequently went to enormous lengths to "correct" the historical record, either inserting himself into the Belo Ostrov greeting party or, more frequently, assigning himself the principal role in the welcoming ceremonies at the Finland Station. Anything less, he evidently felt, would have cast a shadow of doubt on his claim to being Lenin's closest, most faithful disciple. The unfortunate memoirists—Raskol'nikov, Sukhanov, and others who failed to remember and report Stalin's presence—were later made to pay a
bitter price for their inconveniently accurate memories: Sukhanov was executed on trumped-up charges in one of the early Stalin-era show trials, while Raskol'nikov was rubbed out (the gangster term is fully justified) by Stalin’s secret police thugs after refusing to return to Russia for virtually certain extermination during the Great Purge.

Eliminating inconvenient witnesses was a step toward establishing a more seemly version of the event, but something more positive was required. For this purpose Stalin’s court painters, using all the illusionistic techniques of “socialist realism,” were pressed into service, and imposing canvases were created depicting Stalin extending the hand of greeting to Lenin as he dismounted from the train. Photographs are stubborn things, and while an awkward and inconvenient figure can be blotted out with a little erasing fluid, it is not so easy to insert a new figure into an existing group. Luckily for Stalin, camera techniques in 1917 had not progressed far enough to permit the recording of such a tumultuous, rapidly shifting scene under artificial light as the one at the reception rooms of the Finland Station, so that there are no contemporary newsreel shots of the event. But there was nothing to hinder Soviet film makers from creating “historical reconstructions” of the event, under Stalin’s orders.

As reconstructed, the Stalinist version of the April 3 ceremonies featured a historic meeting between the two titans of the revolution: the Great Lenin, who had guided the party from abroad, at last joins hands with the equally Great Stalin, who had faithfully supported him through all the difficult prerevolutionary years. Now finally united, the two are ready to lead the party step by step to victory in October.

This is exactly how the flexible Yaroslavsky, after suitable “instruction,” described the “meeting” between Lenin and Stalin:

On April 3, Stalin went to Belo Ostrov to meet Lenin. It was with great joy that the two leaders of the revolution, the two leaders of Bolshevism, met after their long separation. They were both about to launch into the struggle for the dictatorship of the working class, to lead the struggle of the revolutionary people of Russia. During the journey to Petrograd Stalin informed Lenin of the state of affairs in the party and of the progress of the revolution. So firmly established did the legend of Stalin’s presence as head of the greeting party for Lenin become in Soviet writings that as late as 1960, seven years after Stalin’s death and four years after Khrushchev’s attack on his “cult of personality,” the official party biography of Lenin still listed Stalin as among those present at the welcome for
Lenin.\textsuperscript{5} It took the second wave of Khrushchev's anti-Stalin campaign, launched at the Twenty-second Party Congress in October 1961, to discredit for a time this persistent falsification. Yet party historians are a stubborn breed, and in volume 4 of the official chronology of Lenin's life issued in 1974 under the auspices of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, the ghostly figure of Stalin has somehow reappeared in that long-distant welcoming ceremony for Lenin.\textsuperscript{6}

Granted, then, that Stalin was not among those present to welcome Lenin, what explanation can be found for his absence? Various suggestions have been offered. Edward E. Smith, for example, argues that Stalin may have "anticipated Lenin's criticism and this was the reason he had absented himself from greeting him upon his arrival."\textsuperscript{7} Whatever faults Stalin may have possessed, however, cowardice was not among them; caution, certainly, but not cowardice. And even if he had foreseen Lenin's rebuke, it was a mistake for him to pass up the opportunity to be present at a historical moment.

Trotsky, never loath to make a damaging point at Stalin's expense, draws an obvious moral from Stalin's absence:

That little fact shows better than anything else that there was nothing even remotely resembling personal intimacy between him and Lenin.\textsuperscript{8}

Trotsky's charge is valid, at least for the period before Lenin's return, but it tells only part of the story: Stalin's absence represented an error in judgment, a faulty scale of values. The real reason Stalin was absent was because he had, or thought he had, something better to do than hurry off to meet Lenin. Caught up in the party conference that he had been guiding, and sharing the political outlook of his associates in the Executive Committee of the Soviet, Stalin on April 3 was attending a preparatory conference looking to the eventual merger of the Bolsheviks with the left-wing Mensheviks. It was this concern, not cowardice or a lack of intimacy with Lenin, which best explains his absence from the welcoming ceremonies.

It was only because Stalin later made such enormous claims for himself and his role in the revolution that he came to feel so keenly the disgrace of his absence from the meeting with Lenin. His failure in April, though relatively small in scale, foreshadowed his far more serious failure in October, and the reasons that lay behind it—obtuseness, faulty judgment, preoccupation with secondary issues—were to recur in magnified form in October. Perhaps that is why Stalin came to assign such apparently excessive importance to the task of "correcting" the historical record with regard to the nonmeeting between him and Lenin in early April.
Lenin Presents the “April Theses”

Lenin’s return marked the opening of a third phase in Bolshevik policy since the overthrow of tsarism. During the first phase, from February 18 to March 12, the party, represented primarily by the Russian Bureau and the Vyborg Raion Committee, tried to develop its own independent line: supportive of the Petrograd Soviet, distrustful of the Provisional Government, insistent on an immediate end to the war, hostile to other socialist and left-wing parties. The inexperienced young men who led the party in this phase tried to the best of their ability to steer the frail party vessel through the exhilarating but risky rapids of the revolutionary torrent, but they lacked the assurance or the authority to unite the party behind them.

The return of Muranov, Kamenev, and Stalin on March 12 brought the first phase of Bolshevik policy to an abrupt end and substituted in its place a more moderate line, characterized by the attempt to reach a *modus vivendi* with the new institutions that had emerged to take the place of the discredited autocracy. Though opposed by many militant workers and resented by the leaders of the first phase, the line adopted by the spokesmen of the second phase helped the Bolshevik party find a secure if limited place in the emerging world of pluralistic revolutionary politics.

Like the first phase, the second came to an abrupt end with the arrival of a new group of returning party figures. This time, however, the shift was fundamental, radical, and permanent. The new era inaugurated by Lenin is one that continues in an unbroken line from that time down to the present.

Briefly summarized, the “April Theses,” which Lenin presented to a party gathering late on the evening of April 3 and then repeated before a mixed audience on the following day, represent a bold and imaginative amalgam of three diverse elements: first, an analysis of the existing situation not only in Russia but in the wider perspective of a world at war; second, a set of prescriptions for political action, designed to advance the revolution farther along the road to socialism; and third, a list of specific steps to be taken by the party to enable it to play the leading role in the revolution as thus conceived.

Lenin began his “April Theses” with the war, which had been at the center of his thoughts ever since its outbreak and which to him represented the touchstone against which all other questions must be tested. In line with the analysis he had offered in his book, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin defined the war strictly in class terms. Capitalism, he argued, leads inevitably to to imperialism,
while a capitalist nation in the era of imperialism is driven to wage war for profits, the annexation of territories, and the weakening or destruction of rival capitalist nations. Since the Provisional Government, headed by Prince Lvov and dominated by the middle-class Cadet and Octobrist parties, was by its nature capitalist (Lenin treated this proposition as a self-evident one not requiring proof), the war “unquestionably remains a predatory imperialist war.”

Without mentioning Pravda or its editorial board, Lenin brusquely rejected the policy of conditional support for a defensive war, which the newspaper had advocated when Kamenev and Stalin were directing its policies. Only with the overthrow of capitalism in Russia, Lenin asserted, would a “truly democratic peace” be possible; it was the task of the party to explain this to the masses, “who are being deceived by the bourgeoisie.” Lenin made a special point of calling for “the most widespread campaign for this view . . . in the army at the front” and for “fraternization” between Russian soldiers and those of the armies opposing them. (Within two weeks the Bolsheviks, using funds provided by the German General Staff, were able to begin publication of a special newspaper for the field army, Okopnaia pravda).

Having staked out his position on the war in his first thesis, Lenin turned for his second to the question of the nature of the revolution and the specific stage it had currently attained—matters of fundamental concern to any Marxist, since the agenda for the next round of actions would be determined by knowing exactly where one found oneself at the moment. The Menshevik leaders of the Soviet Executive Committee had their own answer to this question, based on their reading of Marxism: since the socioeconomic conditions in Russia were objectively suitable only for a bourgeois liberal-democratic revolution, the proper course of action for the workers’ parties was to aid the bourgeoisie in carrying through its revolution in order to help create the conditions that would ultimately make possible a workers’ revolution leading to the establishment of socialism. Though he was no Menshevik, Stalin, along with many other Bolsheviks, shared this perspective before Lenin’s return.

To the indignation and shock of the Mensheviks in the audience that listened to Lenin’s presentation of the “April Theses,” and to the bewilderment of many of his own followers, Lenin now unceremoniously jettisoned this time-honored reading of the Marxist scriptures and asserted that the assumption of power by the bourgeoisie during the February Revolution was the result not of historical necessity but of a regrettable failure on the part of the proletariat, its “inadequate organization and insufficient class consciousness.” Far from having
achieved its goals, the revolution was in transition from its first phase, marked by the assumption of power by the bourgeoisie, to
its second stage, which is to place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest strata of the peasantry.

Almost in passing, Lenin mentioned the genuine liberties the Russian people were currently enjoying:

This transition is characterized, on the one hand, by a maximum of legality (Russia is now the freest of all the belligerent countries of the world); on the other, by the absence of oppression of the masses.

Lenin's view of the proletariat's failure in February dismissed Marx's assertion that the workers could make their own, socialist revolution only when the objective conditions for it were present.

In his Theory of Permanent Revolution, Leon Trotsky had devised an ingenious mechanism whereby backward Russia could escape from this apparently ironclad historical law: the workers of Russia, Trotsky argued, could initiate by their action a wave of revolutions which would quickly spread to the advanced capitalist nations of the West, and then the small but militant proletariat of Russia would find powerful allies in its worker-brothers of Western Europe. Without acknowledging his intellectual debt to Trotsky, Lenin developed a strikingly similar concept in his theory of the "uninterrupted revolution" and in his analysis of imperialism. Even though these premises are never set forth specifically in the "April Theses," they underlie Lenin's concept of "the present situation in Russia." No wonder that his audience, steeped in traditional Marxism, reacted in surprise, shock, or disbelief to Lenin's apparent disregard of the basic Marxist verities.

Having just paid tribute to the democratic internal policies of the Provisional Government, Lenin in his third thesis uncompromisingly condemned it as "a government of capitalists" and hence "imperialist" in its foreign policy, including its war aims. For Lenin there was no separation between foreign and internalpolicy: since, he asserted, the Provisional Government was capitalist, and hence, by definition, imperialistic, it could not renounce the goal of annexations and therefore all its promises were "utterly false." The Bolshevik party, Lenin insisted, must adopt a policy of no support toward it, not just the "insofar as" policy of the Menshevik-SR leadership in the Soviet Executive Committee (or of Kamenev and Stalin in Pravda).

In place of the Provisional Government, Lenin asserted in his fourth thesis, "the Soviet of Workers' Deputies is the only possible form of revolutionary government"—this, despite the fact that, as Lenin candidly admitted, the Bolshevik party "constitutes a minority,
APRIL

and a small one at that . . . in most of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.” It was the task of the party, Lenin urged,

to present a patient, systematic, and persistent analysis of its [the Soviet's] errors and tactics, an analysis especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

Even the Constituent Assembly, in Lenin's view, must be brought within the scope of the Soviet as a government: in the impromptu speech with which he accompanied the “Theses” (which he had written out beforehand), Lenin asserted that “the Soviet is the only government that can convocate the Constituent Assembly,” and, in any case, the work of the Constituent Assembly would be in effect determined for it in advance, since Russia needed (according to Lenin’s fifth thesis),

Not a parliamentary republic—a return to it from the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies would be a step backward—but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the land, from top to bottom.

For his concept of the Soviet as a revolutionary government Lenin drew heavily on Marx’s analysis of the nature and policies of the Paris Commune of 1870–71:

Abolition of the police, the army, the bureaucracy. All officers to be elected and to be subject to recall at any time, their salaries not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker’s.

Turning to the agrarian question for his sixth thesis, Lenin revealed that even his boldness had limits. At a time when individual peasant seizures of gentry land were only beginning—a phenomenon that was to grow, with Bolshevik approval and encouragement, into a massive, fundamental peasant revolt by the late summer of 1917—Lenin still envisaged a fairly orderly process geared to an eventual socialization of the land:

Nationalization of all lands in the country, and management of such lands by local Soviets of Agricultural Laborers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. . . . Creation of model agricultural establishments out of large estates . . . under the control of the Soviet of Agricultural Laborers’ Deputies, and at public expense.

The basic point was emphasized in his accompanying commentary, “Agriculture on a Communal Basis.” Only reluctantly over the next few months was Lenin to recognize that the peasants wanted to seize the land for themselves, not for socialism.
Centralization of the entire banking system of the nation, another point borrowed from Marx’s analysis of the Paris Commune, constituted Lenin’s seventh thesis, with the proviso that the “one general national bank” should be under the control of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies. The same body, in the eighth thesis, was to exercise “control of social production and distribution of goods,” a task that Lenin was careful to distinguish from “the ‘initiation’ of Socialism as an immediate task.”

As to the party, in his ninth thesis, Lenin demanded the “immediate calling of a party congress,” changes in the party program to bring it into line with the theses on the war and the state, and—a symbolic step, but one to which Lenin attached great importance—the change of the party’s name from “Social Democratic,” a label now tarnished by the “betrayal of Socialism” by the majority of Social Democratic parties at the outbreak of the war, to “Communist.”

In his tenth and final thesis Lenin reminded his listeners that for him the socialist revolutionary movement was an international phenomenon. Since, the Leninist argument ran, the parties of the Second International had “betrayed socialism” by voting national war credits in August 1914, the Bolsheviks had the obligation of taking the initiative in the creation of a revolutionary International, an International against the social-chauvinists and the “center.”

By the latter phrase, as applied to Russia, Lenin had in mind the left-internationalist group of Mensheviks represented by the Soviet leaders Chkheidze and Tseretelli—that group, in other words, with regard to whom Stalin, a few days earlier, had obtained approval from the March conference for exploratory talks looking to an eventual merger. It was with unmistakable reference to precisely this development that Lenin concluded his presentation of the “April Theses.” “I hear,” he said,

that in Russia there is a movement towards unity, unity with the defenders. This is a betrayal of Socialism. I think that it is better to stand alone, like Liebknecht, one against one hundred and ten.

There was no need for Lenin to identify the specific individual in the party against whom these fighting words were directed: by his signed articles in Pravda and his eloquent pleading at the March conference, Stalin had identified himself as the leader of the “movement” that Lenin now condemned as a “betrayal of Socialism.” For Stalin the bitterness he must have felt at that moment was compounded by the fact that the reproof was delivered before the very audience, in the same meeting place, where he had expected to carry
through to completion his plan for a merger of the Bolsheviks and the left-wing Mensheviks.

For Stalin, the third phase in revolutionary Bolshevik policy began even more inauspiciously than had the second. In March, with the help of a few comrades and his own forceful personality, he had emerged from the reproof of his party judges virtually unscathed. But on that occasion his opponents had been either junior and inexperienced functionaries whom he could easily thrust aside, or denouncers and gossip-mongers who sheltered themselves behind the cloak of anonymity (to this day we cannot be sure who told the Russian Bureau about Stalin's undesirable "personal characteristics"). Furthermore, the earlier setback had been administered in the privacy of a closed party meeting, and the record of it had been consigned to the archives, unknown to all but a few party members and to everyone outside the party. Stalin's quick recovery in March made it possible for him to treat the entire episode as something that had never taken place (only his complete forgetting of the March 12 reproof can explain the survival of the unretouched protocol of that session in the party archives during the decades of his unlimited power).

In contrast, the setback Stalin experienced at the start of the third phase took place in a public gathering, before a mixed party and nonparty audience; it was administered by the party's recognized leader, in terms that permitted no rejoinder and in a tone that left no apparent hope for recovery. The only aspect of the affair in which Stalin could take comfort was that Lenin had stopped just short of specifically identifying him as the figure personally responsible for the movement toward merger with the left-wing Mensheviks. And therein, as Stalin slowly came to perceive, lay the path by which he could find his way out of this new humiliation. Lenin, who never hesitated to employ the most violent and abusive language against those he regarded as enemies or rivals, could be extraordinarily patient and understanding in dealing with party members whom he saw as potential recruits for leading roles in the party. It was this pedagogical characteristic of Lenin, and the response it evoked in Stalin, which enabled the latter to emerge from his discomfiture at the outset of the third phase not merely with his old status in the party unimpaired but with an ascent to a position of which he had previously only dreamed.

**Stalin and the "April Theses"**

It took some time for Stalin fully to comprehend what had happened. The positions set forth in the "April Theses" were too radical, too little related to the questions he had been concerned with, for him to
incorporate them immediately into his mental world. Nor was he disposed to accept automatically whatever Lenin advocated simply out of a sense of personal loyalty or party discipline.

When the “April Theses” were discussed at a meeting of the Russian Bureau on April 6, Stalin spoke against them. (The record of his brief remarks, stripped to their elements, was another of those “uncorrected” documents of 1917 which somehow survived in the archives, to be dug out and published as part of the anti-Stalin campaign under Khrushchev.) In the skeletal protocols, which are all that survives of the April 6 session, Stalin is quoted as saying,

The picture of the bridge between the West and the East—destruction of the colonies. A sketch, but no facts, and therefore unsatisfactory. There are no answers about small nations.10

Brief though it is, this summary tells us a good deal about the stand Stalin took. It shows that he was still concentrating on his specialty, the national question (a question, incidentally, on which, as far as the record shows, Lenin said nothing in the “April Theses”). Stalin seems to have ignored entirely Lenin’s central themes—the war, the Provisional Government, the Soviet. Furthermore, as Tucker has pointed out, Stalin’s criticism fits in closely with the position taken by Kamenev at the same meeting, a position he was still defending at the April Conference, to the effect that “the general sociological scheme [in the “April Theses”] has not been filled in with concrete political content.”11

For a description of what Stalin later wished he had done in the discussion of the “April Theses,” we can turn to the ever-pliant Yaroslavsky, who writes,

On April 4, Lenin addressed a conference and read his celebrated April Theses, in which he outlined the plan for the further development of the revolution, the plan for the capture of power by the Soviets. When Zinoviev and Kamenev, those traitors to the revolution, opposed this plan, they met with a severe rebuff at the hands of Stalin, who ardently defended Lenin’s plan for the growth of the bourgeois democratic revolution into the socialist revolution.12

As of April 6, then, Stalin was still groping for a way to reject Lenin’s new program, attacking it on a peripheral issue and relying for support on the familiar figure of Kamenev to provide him with a general critique. Thereafter, however, it was Kamenev, rather than Stalin, who carried the brunt of the fight against what he regarded as Lenin’s unorthodox and dangerous proposals. When the “Theses” were published in Pravda on April 7 (the delay is in itself symptomatic
of resistance), they were accompanied by an editorial note to the effect that they represented only Lenin's personal views, not those of the party. Since Stalin was still, at that point, one of the co-editors of Pravda, the note must have passed his scrutiny. As far as it goes, that fact indicates a wait-and-see attitude rather than one of outright condemnation and may be taken as the starting point of Stalin's reorientation toward a position closer to that of Lenin.

Kamenev's critique of the "April Theses" was developed more fully in an article he published in Pravda on April 8 under the title "Our Differences." Again he emphasized that for him the "Theses" represented "the personal opinion" of Lenin, but he praised them as "concise" and "thorough." Defending the editorial line of Pravda, which he had helped establish, Kamenev pointed out that it had been supported by the Bolshevik delegates to the All-Russian Conference of Soviets in March, as formulated in the resolution on the Provisional Government and the soviets.

As his principal theoretical difference with Lenin, Kamenev named their divergent views on the character of the revolution. Lenin's general line, he said,

> appears to us unacceptable inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution has been completed and it builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a Socialist revolution.

Kamenev called for a "broad discussion" of the issue in which he hoped to vindicate his point of view

> as the only possible one for revolutionary Social-Democracy in so far as it wishes to be and must remain to the end the one and only party of the revolutionary masses of the proletariat without turning into a group of Communist propagandists.

With the April 8 article Kamenev emerged as the most prominent Bolshevik critic of the "April Theses." As far as the record shows, Stalin, who had tacitly supported Kamenev as late as April 7, thereafter took no action and made no further statements, oral or written, which could be construed as a criticism of the "Theses." A basic shift in his allegiance from Kamenev to Lenin was under way. Once started, the process of rethinking by Stalin gathered momentum rapidly, and when he resumed publication of signed articles in Pravda on April 11 it was clear that he had executed a sharp change of position.
Stalin Swings Over to Support of Lenin

Between April 11 and the opening of the Seventh Party Conference on April 24, Stalin published three short articles in Pravda, two signed with his usual pseudonym, “K. Stalin,” and one unsigned editorial. In addition he gave his first recorded speech of the revolution. Brief though they are, these materials are enough to enable us to chart the general flow of his reorientation.

In the first, a signed article published on April 11 under the title “Two Resolutions,” Stalin showed how far he had already moved toward accepting Lenin’s view of the war. The Provisional Government had just announced the floating of a so-called Liberty Loan to raise funds for various purposes, principally continuation of the war. The Executive Committee of the Soviet, true to its policy of limited support of the Provisional Government, thereupon adopted a resolution calling on the population to support the loan. Defying both the government and the Soviet, a group of workers in the machine shops of the Russo-Baltic Railway Car Works came out against the loan, charging that it was

being floated with the aim of continuing the fratricidal slaughter, which is advantageous only to the imperialist bourgeoisie.

The workers’ resolution, in a clear indication of the Bolshevik influence that lay behind it, accused the Executive Committee of “betraying the International” by supporting the loan, a charge that Stalin in his article flatly endorsed. Thus he gave public notice that he now accepted Lenin’s position on the war and had parted company with the supporters of a defensist position in the Soviet.

Three days later, on April 14, Stalin published a second article in Pravda, the message of which was conveyed in its title, “The Land to the Peasants.” In the sixth of his “April Theses,” Lenin had called for “confiscation of all private lands” and their cultivation on a communal basis. Stalin now added his voice to this demand, spelling it out in detail:

We therefore call upon the peasants, upon the peasant poor of all Russia, to take their cause into their own hands and push it forward. We call upon them to organize and form revolutionary peasant committees . . . , take over the landed estates through these committees, and cultivate the land in an organized manner without authorization.

Before Lenin’s return, Stalin had written nothing as incendiary as this.
Along with his new militancy on the peasant question went a far more critical attitude toward the Executive Committee of the Soviet. There, the SR leaders, fearing to alienate the middle-class liberals by championing the peasant demand to take over privately owned estates, had counseled the peasants to be patient and await the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, which would settle the land question in a legal, orderly manner. In words that showed how far he had shifted from his earlier stance, Stalin brushed aside such scruples:

We are told that immediate seizure of the landed estates would disrupt the “unity” of the revolution by splitting off the “progressive strata” of society from it.

But it would be naive to think that it is possible to advance the revolution without quarreling with the manufacturers and landlords.

Unauthorized cultivation of the landed estates and their seizure by the peasants will undoubtedly “split off” the landlords and their ilk from the revolution. But who would venture to assert that by rallying the millions of poor peasants around the revolution we shall be weakening the forces of the revolution?

Fully accepting Lenin’s concept of the basic forces of the revolution and its future course, Stalin continued,

The policy of waiting and procrastinating until the Constituent Assembly is convened, the policy recommended by the Narodniks [i.e., the SR’s], Trudoviks, and Mensheviks of “temporarily” renouncing confiscation, the policy of zigzagging between the classes (so as not to offend anybody!) and of shamefully marking time, is not the policy of the revolutionary proletariat.

In his first two Pravda articles in April Stalin showed that a momentous shift had taken place not only in his ideas but in his intellectual allegiance. Where he had previously relied on the moderate Kamenev and the conciliatory Menshevik-SR leadership in the Soviet for guidance, Stalin was now deriving his ideas directly from Lenin. For the first time in his revolutionary career Stalin was sharing an office with Lenin and discussing with him the problems and opportunities that arose from day to day in the editing of the party newspaper. The close working relationship between the two men quickly led to a sharing of their editorial responsibilities. For example, the immediate point of departure for Stalin’s article “The Land to the Peasants” was a telegram from Minister of Agriculture Shingaryov to the peasants of Ryazan’ gubernia calling on them to abstain from illegal seizure of gentry lands. On April 15, the day after Stalin’s article appeared, Lenin contributed a short follow-up to Pravda, reiterating the princi-
pal points Stalin had made and for good measure giving the full text of Shingaryov’s telegram as printed in that morning’s edition of the Cadet newspaper, Rech’.

The third contribution by Stalin to Pravda in April, an unsigned editorial entitled “May Day,” carried even clearer indications of the guiding role that Lenin had now assumed in shaping Stalin’s thinking. Previously (for example, in his March 16 article, “The War”), Stalin’s vision had been confined to Russia. Now it widened to take in the whole of war-torn Europe:

The world has begun to stifle in the grip of war...[leaders in the original]. The peoples of Europe can bear it no longer, and are already rising up against the bellicose bourgeoisie.

If an echo of Lenin’s slogan “Convert the imperialist war into a civil war” could be detected in that statement, the Leninist inspiration of Stalin’s next assertion was even more unmistakable:

The Russian revolution is the first to be forcing a breach in the wall that divides the workers from one another. The Russian workers, at this time of universal “patriotic” frenzy, are the first to proclaim the forgotten slogan: “Workers of all countries, unite!”

For the first time in his career, Stalin now seemed to grasp the relationship between the Russian Revolution and the larger international socialist revolution about which Lenin and Trotsky had been talking and writing for years:

Amidst the thunder of the Russian revolution, the workers of the West too are rising from their slumber. The strikes and demonstrations in Germany, the demonstrations in Austria and Bulgaria, the strikes and meetings in neutral countries, the growing unrest in Britain and France, the mass fraternization on the battle fronts—these are the first harbingers of the socialist revolution that is brewing.

The war, the land, the international socialist revolution—one by one, Stalin was directing his attention to the principal issues facing the Bolshevik party and showing the change in his outlook caused by Lenin’s influence. A fourth major issue, policy toward the Provisional Government, was added in a speech Stalin delivered on April 18. In March Stalin had favored the “insofar as” formula of conditional support of the Provisional Government. Now, under the influence of Lenin, he dropped all qualifications and called on the workers and soldiers to “support only the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies which they themselves elected.”
The First All-Petrograd Conference of Bolsheviks

In preparation for the party congress for which Lenin had called in the “April Theses,” the Bolsheviks of Petrograd met in an all-city conference between April 14 and 22. Stalin’s name occurs only once in the protocols of the conference, and then not as a speaker but simply as one of those elected to a seven-man committee, along with Lenin, Molotov, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, to draft a resolution on the Provisional Government and the war. (The other two members of the committee were S. Ya. Bagdatiev, using the party pseudonym “Sergei,” and K. I. Shutko [“Mikhail”], both members of the Petersburg Committee. Neither Bagdatiev nor Shutko published any memoirs of their experiences in the revolution, a fact that may explain their survival through the Great Purge. Bagdatiev died in 1949, Shutko in 1941.)

It is possible that Stalin was not present at the conference. Trotsky asserts that

Stalin did not even show up. Obviously, he sought to be forgotten for a while.

For the rank-and-file delegates at the conference, Stalin’s name was still not one to be reckoned with, and when they elected a presidium at their opening session, Stalin was not included. Lenin’s stature was recognized by designating him “honorary chairman”; the actual work of the conference was assigned to his lieutenant, Zinoviev. Molotov, whom the party organization remembered as a leader in the February Revolution, was named a member of the presidium.

On April 14, the date of the conference’s opening session, the delegates had only Stalin’s April 11 article, “Two Resolutions,” and “The Land to the Peasants” in Pravda for April 14 by which to evaluate his changing outlook. It took the party organization some time to realize that the moderate Stalin of the period before Lenin’s return was now changing rapidly into a staunch Leninist. Stalin’s virtual eclipse and lack of recognition at the Petrograd conference is a telling indication of his modest standing in the party as of mid-April.

Nevertheless it is difficult to accept Trotsky’s explanation of Stalin’s comparative obscurity at the Petrograd conference as the result of a withdrawal into protective silence. After all, at the very time the conference was in session Stalin was publicly proclaiming his new pro-Lenin stance in the pages of Pravda. A more cogent reason for Stalin’s silence was that Lenin, at this point, simply felt no need to call on him for support.

There was, in fact, no special need for Stalin to speak at the Petro-
grad conference. The agenda, as announced by Pravda on April 12, included a report on the current situation, to be delivered by Lenin, and discussion of the party’s attitude toward the Soviet, the structure of the party, the immediate arming of the workers, the municipal elections, and the attitude to be adopted toward other socialist parties, none of which called for any contribution on the part of Stalin.

For Stalin, the period between April 7, when Pravda published Lenin’s “April Theses,” and April 24, when the Seventh Party Conference opened, was a time of rapidly expanding horizons. Working side by side with Lenin in the Pravda office, Stalin readily absorbed the older man’s point of view, the more so because his own outlook was only tentative and was based more on impulse than on firmly held principles.

During the first phase of his participation in the revolution Stalin had adopted the stance of Muranov and Kamenev; then, as his familiarity with the Executive Committee of the Soviet increased, he fell under the influence of Tseretelli, Chkheidze, and other left-wing Mensheviks in that milieu. He had little or nothing original to contribute by way of ideas, but he was eager, ambitious, and reasonably articulate and compensated for his intellectual shallowness by a doggedness that made him a valuable asset to any group.

What he did not have, except in his own fancy, were the attributes of leadership. He was still searching for a role that suited his talents and for an authority figure on whom he could model his own personality. In Lenin he seemed to have found what he was searching for, and the attempt to establish himself as a second Lenin was to dominate his later career, especially after the Leader’s death in 1924. For Stalin, however, the Leninist path was to prove another of those false trails that he was to follow in his quest for power and glory, for it was not Lenin who ultimately provided Stalin with the key wherewith to unlock the gates of power but another party figure, Yakov Sverdlov. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say that Stalin’s ultimately successful formula for total power represented a unique blend of attributes derived from two principal models: Lenin, the party leader, and Sverdlov, the party organizer. It was on his use of the legacy of Sverdlov that Stalin’s real power came to be based.

The April Crisis

While the Petrograd all-city conference was in progress, a sudden political crisis broke out that shook the Provisional Government, troubled the Soviet Executive Committee, and galvanized the Bolshevik party into frenzied action. The root of the crisis was the still
unresolved discrepancy between the war aims of the Provisional Government, as defined by its foreign minister, Milyukov, and the very different goals of the Petrograd Soviet, as set forth in its Appeal to the Peoples of the World of March 14.

With a political insight for which he is sometimes not given sufficient credit, Stalin had called attention to this conflict in his *Pravda* article of March 26, "Either—Or." In that article he demanded either that the Soviet apply pressure to the Provisional Government to bring its war aims into line with those of the Soviet or that Milyukov resign. It was by means of the former of these alternatives that the conflict was temporarily resolved. The Provisional Government on March 27 issued a statement signifying its acceptance of the formula "no annexations, no indemnities," and tension temporarily subsided. But the restored harmony was more apparent than real, for Milyukov had by no means accepted the Soviet's definition of war aims, not only because he did not share them, but because he was under intense pressure from the British ambassador to reaffirm in categorical terms Russia's loyalty to her allies and to the agreements she had reached with them.

Given this situation it was merely a question of time before the conflict would break out again, and on April 20 it did, with the publication of a note written by Milyukov on the eighteenth to the British and French ambassadors formally endorsing the government's redefinition of war aims of March 27 but actually undercutting it by assuring the Allies that Russia would carry the war "to a definite conclusion" with the aim of obtaining certain "sanctions and guarantees."

Publication of Milyukov's note touched off a series of angry demonstrations by workers and soldiers which soon raised the threat of an attempt at armed overthrow of the government. Some eager Bolsheviks in the Petersburg Committee and the Bolshevik Military Organization, notably Bagdatiev, were prominently associated with these actions, a fact that forced Lenin soberly to evaluate the party's prospects for success in the event of a test of strength between the Provisional Government and the Soviet.

Meetings of the Bolshevik Central Committee were held daily while the crisis raged (April 20-22), with Lenin drafting the resolutions that defined the party line. On the morning of the twentieth the committee resolved that the Milyukov note fully confirmed the party's condemnation of the Provisional Government as "imperialist through and through, tied hand and foot to Anglo-French and Russian capital." The resolution called on the revolutionary proletariat, with the support of the revolutionary army, to take "the entire power
of the state into its own hands... in the form of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies," an injunction that could be, and in some quarters was, read as an open invitation to try to overthrow the Provisional Government by force.

On the twenty-first, with violence in the streets mounting rapidly and some militant Bolsheviks calling for a direct assault on the government, the Petrograd Soviet tried to calm the storm by issuing a two-day ban on all street meetings and demonstrations. On the same day the Provisional Government made public an "explanation" of Milyukov's note which amounted to a repudiation of it and of him. The effect of these moves was to put a damper on the demonstrations, cooling the ardor of the angry crowds besieging government headquarters in the Mariinsky Palace.

For Lenin and the Bolshevik Central Committee, the Soviet order was a danger signal, a warning to weigh the risks and opportunities that the mass demonstrations posed for the party. It was Lenin's reluctant judgment, expressed in a Central Committee resolution adopted late on the twenty-first, that the risks outweighed the opportunities and that further actions should be limited to "peaceful discussions and peaceful demonstrations." To mollify the frustrated insurgents, the resolution called on the workers and soldiers to hold new elections to the Soviet as a means of forcing it to alter its policy of confidence in the Provisional Government. Finally, on April 22, the crisis subsided, and the Central Committee drew up a balance sheet on the whole episode in the form of yet another resolution, as usual drafted by Lenin. The slogan "'Down with the Provisional Government,'" the resolution asserted,

is an incorrect one at present [italics added]... because in the absence of a firm (i.e., a class-conscious and organized) majority of the people on the side of the revolutionary proletariat, such a slogan is either an empty phrase or, objectively, it leads to attempts of an adventurist nature.

In words that looked ahead to September the resolution continued,

We will favor a transfer of power into the hands of the proletarians and semi-proletarians only when the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies adopt our policy and are willing to take the power into their own hands.

The protocols of the Central Committee sessions for April have not been published and apparently no longer exist. From the available evidence it seems that Lenin encountered no serious opposition to his views, and there is no record of any discussion of his draft resolutions.

As to Stalin, we know that he took part in one brief but significant
action during the April Crisis, as a member of a committee set up by the Executive Committee of the Soviet to draft a telegram to the army headquarters in the Petrograd area “demanding that they not send military units to Petrograd without the explicit written invitation of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.”

Trotsky’s comment on this action is characteristically barbed:

From the official protocols we note, not without surprise, that the text of the telegram was composed by a commission that consisted of two Compromisers [i.e., Lv. M. Steklov and G. M. Erlikh, both Mensheviks] and one Bolshevik, and that this Bolshevik was Stalin. It is a minor episode (we find no important episodes pertaining to him throughout that period), but decidedly a typical one. The reassuring telegram was a classic little example of that “control” which was an indispensable element in the mechanics of dual power. . . . The Compromisers placed Stalin on the commission because the Bolsheviks alone enjoyed any authority in Kronstadt. That was all the more reason for declining the appointment. But Stalin did not refuse it.21

Thus during the height of the April Crisis Stalin was dividing his time between the Bolshevik Central Committee (assuming that he attended the sessions of April 20–22) and the Soviet Executive Committee. This policy of keeping a foot in both camps helps to explain the continued good standing he enjoyed among the Soviet leaders, even at a time when he was publicly identifying himself with Lenin’s harsh criticism of them.

There is also evidence that Stalin, in his capacity as a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet, attended a meeting between that body and the Provisional Government on April 22 at which an effort was made to patch together an agreement in order to overcome the crisis. Since Stalin’s report on this meeting was delivered orally during the Seventh Conference and published a day later, it will be convenient to postpone discussion of it until we take up that party gathering.

Finland Raises the National Question

Just before the April Crisis broke, the Bolshevik Central Committee was turning its attention to one of the fundamental problems of the revolution, the national question. At a meeting on April 19 the committee heard and considered an appeal from the Social Democratic party of Finland concerning the growing movement for Finnish autonomy. In response Lenin advocated full support for the Finnish
appeal, and he was even prepared to sanction the withdrawal of Finland from the Russian state and the establishment of an independent Finland. Lenin evidently failed to win majority support for this policy, however, for the resolution he drew up was not adopted.25

In view of Stalin’s established reputation as the party’s leading authority on the national question, it would be interesting to know what position he adopted at the April 19 session, if he attended it. Was he one of those whose opposition helped defeat Lenin’s resolution, or did he speak in its support? Most likely neither: cautious silence when confronted by a new challenge was Stalin’s favored tactic. If that is the line he took, it was a wise one, for the April 19 debate on the national question proved to be a springboard for an action by Lenin which completely transformed Stalin’s position in the party and his relations with Lenin.

Lenin’s failure to carry the Central Committee with him on the national question, to which he assigned cardinal importance in his overall strategy, must have made it clear to him that he faced an uphill fight over that subject at the forthcoming party conference. (The preliminary agenda for the conference, published in Pravda on April 13, listed the national question as the sixth and last substantive item for discussion, just before the elections to central party bodies.)

Lenin could expect opposition to his line on the national question not so much from ethnic Russians in the party as from representatives of the national minorities, for example, the Pole Felix Dzerzhinsky, who, despite his general endorsement of Lenin’s line, refused to follow him in his policy on the national question. Clearly what Lenin needed most at this point was a non-Russian spokesman for his views who could effectively counter the attacks on them to be expected from other non-Russians in the party such as Dzerzhinsky. The solution to the problem was obvious: Stalin had all the necessary qualifications and had just been demonstrating, by his writings in Pravda since April 11, that he was amenable to Lenin’s influence. What more natural than to ask Stalin to report on the national question at the conference whose opening was now just a week away? The fact that Stalin’s most recent writings on the subject, his Pravda articles of the period before Lenin’s return, were by no means to Lenin’s liking, was of little importance: Stalin had shown a cavalier disregard for consistency once he had decided to shift his allegiance and ideas.

But Lenin had an even more potent inducement to offer Stalin. Made aware by the April Crisis of the need to strengthen the party’s organization, Lenin was on the lookout for suitable recruits to the party’s leadership. Stalin, he decided at some point, met his require-
ments. What Lenin had to offer Stalin, then, was an irresistible combination of power and policy. It was this offer, and Stalin's acceptance of it, which made the April Conference a major landmark in the latter's rise to power.

The Opening of the Seventh Conference

With his very first introductory statement to the Bolsheviks’ Seventh Party Congress, on the morning of Monday, April 24, Lenin set the Russian Revolution within the framework of the world socialist revolution, which he foresaw as the inevitable outcome of the World War. “Comrades,” he said,

our conference is meeting ... under conditions not only of the Russian revolution but of the growing international revolution. The time is approaching when the assertions of the founders of scientific socialism [i.e., Marx and Engels], and the unanimous forecast of the socialists who gathered at the Basle Congress [of the Second International in 1912], that world war would inevitably lead to revolution, are being everywhere proved correct.26

In the nineteenth century, Lenin asserted, Marx and Engels had prophesied that “the French worker will begin [the socialist revolution], the German will finish it.” Instead,

The great honor of beginning the revolution has fallen to the Russian proletariat. But the Russian proletariat must not forget that its movement and the revolution are only part of a world proletarian movement, which in Germany, for example, is gaining momentum with every passing day. Only from this point of view can we define our tasks.

With those wide-ranging words ringing in their ears, the delegates proceeded to the first formal action of the conference, the election of a five-man presidium. As at the Petrograd all-city conference a week earlier, the action served as a partial indication of the popularity and standing of the party leaders as viewed by the delegates. Of these there were a total of 151—133 with full voting privileges and 18 with consultative rights only. The delegates represented some 80,000 party members, in seventy-eight party organizations—still a minuscule figure in a state numbering over 125 million inhabitants, but up sharply from the January 1917 estimate of 40,000.27

Lenin, of course, easily won membership on the presidium, as did his close associate G. Ye. Zinoviev, one of those who had accompanied him on his “sealed train” return from Switzerland. The third
member of the presidium, Ya. M. Sverdlov, was something of a surprise: had he not been sent off to the remote Urals at the end of March? But Sverdlov was not to be sidetracked by mere bureaucratic measures: himself a master at the art of political manipulation, he lost no time in reorganizing the party committee in Yekaterinburg to which he was assigned and was returned by that organization to Petrograd as its representative to the Seventh Conference. Henceforward, until his untimely death in March 1919, Sverdlov would never leave the center of power except for trips undertaken on behalf of the party leadership.

As the fourth member of the presidium the conference chose G. F. Fedorov, a member of both the Petersburg Committee and the Executive Committee of the Soviet. Something of the temper of the man can be gleaned from his later career: in 1927 he was ousted from the party as a Trotskyite; readmitted subsequently, he was again thrown out in 1934 and died, almost certainly in one of Stalin’s labor camps, in 1940.

The fifth presidium member was our old friend M. K. Muranov, appearing at the conference as a delegate from the Kharkov party organization. Kharkov was his native city; evidently he had returned there shortly after the takeover of Pravda in mid-March. Was that move of his own choosing, or was he, like Sverdlov, given an assignment in the provinces by a party leadership consisting of Stalin and Kamenev—a move designed to remove him from the center? In any case his return to Kharkov left the field clear for Kamenev and Stalin to assume editorial responsibility for Pravda. Muranov was a less potent figure than Sverdlov, but he was nevertheless well enough regarded to be chosen to report on the entire southern region: in the interests of time, the conference voted to hear reports, not from delegates representing individual towns or cities, but about some ten to twelve broad regions of Russia. Neither Stalin nor Kamenev won a place on the presidium, an indication that the policies with which they were identified were not overly popular in the party.

The conference next chose a five-man mandate commission, the names of the members of which have not been preserved. (When the commission’s report was presented on April 16, it was delivered by G. I. Bokii, a member of the Petersburg Committee.) It then established a twelve-point agenda. In comparison with the preliminary agenda published by Pravda on April 13, the new one was far more comprehensive, including, for example, discussion of the Constituent Assembly as well as the revision of the party program demanded by Lenin in the “April Theses.” Like the April 13 draft, however, the new agenda still
placed the election of party bodies at the end of the proceedings, following discussion of all substantive points on the agenda, including the report on the national question.

**Lenin versus Kamenev (April 24)**

The first day's work of the conference was dominated by a lengthy report by Lenin on "The Current Situation." In forceful terms Lenin reiterated and developed his by now familiar stand on the war, the Provisional Government, and the Soviets of Workers' Deputies. An element of conflict was added to the proceedings by the submission of a draft resolution from the Moscow regional party conference, the gist of which was to add the idea of "control" by the soviets over the Provisional Government and local governmental agencies. The Moscow draft resolution was presented by A. S. Bubnov, a delegate from the textile center of Ivanovo-Voznesensk. It defined "control" in broad terms and concluded with a forecast of the transformation of control over the existing governmental agencies into control of them:

This control in the development of the victorious proletarian-peasant revolution will inevitably be transformed into control over all elements of state-administrative existence and will be a stage on the road to seizure of the entire governmental power by the organized masses of the proletariat and the poor peasants.  

Lenin seemed somewhat disconcerted by the Moscow proposal, which marred the appearance of unity behind his policies which he was striving to project. In his speech, he simply took note of the Moscow draft, refraining from comment on the ground that he had not previously had a chance to study it. Following Lenin's report the delegates took a three-hour break.

When the conference resumed its work, the first speaker was a gaunt, emaciated figure, the Pole Felix Dzerzhinsky, only recently freed from a tsarist jail in Moscow and not yet fully recovered from the effects of his prolonged imprisonment. Characteristically, however, Dzerzhinsky ignored his physical weakness and plunged directly into party controversy. "From private conversations," he said, "it has become clear that many [of the delegates] are not in agreement in principle with the theses of the reporter [Lenin]." Implying that Lenin's views were based on a faulty perspective in the eyes of those "who together with us lived through the revolution," Dzerzhinsky proposed that the conference hear a second, alternative report on the current situation. If Lenin had hoped the conference would accept
his report without debate, he misjudged the temper of the delegates, for by a majority they adopted Dzerzhinsky's proposal.

As their spokesman the Moscow delegation chose Kamenev, who had emerged before the conference as the party's most consistent and thoroughgoing critic of Lenin's tactics. Kamenev opened his co-report with a brief summary of the stages through which the party had passed since February, then launched into a detailed critique of Lenin's report. His most serious charge, already familiar from his April 7 article, "Our Differences," was that Lenin was trying to push the party along at too rapid a pace. At a time when the gentry still owned the feudal lands, Kamenev asked, how was it possible to speak of the bourgeois-democratic revolution against feudalism as being already completed? Similarly, Kamenev argued, the situation in the soviets differed from the analysis offered by Lenin. Everyone recognized the soviets as the center of the workers' movement, yet there too the revolution had not yet reached the stage where the workers' party could successfully advance its own socialist program: in the soviets the parties of the petty bourgeoisie were in control, and the Bolsheviks were forced to work with them in a temporary bloc. Even Lenin, argued Kamenev, admitted that, as long as the Soviet placed its trust in the Provisional Government, it was impossible to talk of overthrowing the latter.

Eventually, Kamenev asserted, conflict was inevitable between the government and the petty bourgeois-proletarian bloc in the Soviet over the basic questions of the war, food, and democratic freedoms. It was not the task of the party, however, to try to speed up this process; let the revolution ripen at its own pace, thereby avoiding the kind of embarrassing zigzags that had characterized party policy during the April Crisis. With deliberate irony Kamenev agreed with Lenin that the slogan "Down with the Provisional Government" was unwise, but he said he would have welcomed a warning to that effect a little sooner—a sly dig at Lenin for having encouraged the hotheads in the party.

Speaking on the basis of his experience as the party's ranking representative in the Executive Committee of the Soviet, Kamenev complained that Lenin's policies provided no clear guidance to party members in the existing situation, whereas "control," in the sense of the Moscow resolution, had proved itself effective. As an example, Kamenev cited an order issued on April 21 by General Lavr Kornilov, commandant of the Petrograd Military Region, to deploy two artillery batteries on Palace Square to defend the government against the demonstrators. The order had been nullified, however, by a statement
by the Soviet to the effect that the troops of the Petrograd garrison were answerable only to it. This action, said Kamenev, was "more than fine words"; in blocking Kornilov's order, the Soviet "had exercised a fair degree of governmental power." In Moscow and the provinces, he continued, the soviets were the real leaders of the revolution to an even greater extent than in Petrograd.

"Control" of this kind, Kamenev argued, would serve to hasten the transfer of power to the soviets, through a series of well-defined steps, a policy he contrasted with Lenin's tactics of awaiting the moment when the party had achieved a dominant position in the soviets, meanwhile patiently explaining party policies to the masses.

As to the war, Kamenev accepted Lenin's general analysis, which he called a "splendidly developed maximum program," but again he asked that the general outline be reinforced by specific measures toward which the party could work. As an example he cited the demand for publication of the secret treaties with the Allies, not because he thought Milyukov would agree to make the texts public but because his refusal would serve to enlighten the masses as to the government's real war aims.

Having heard both reports, the delegates plunged enthusiastically into a discussion that showed almost as many points of view as there were speakers. Six delegates mounted the speaker's rostrum one after another without significantly contributing to the clarification of the issues; what did emerge unmistakably was that none of them wholeheartedly supported Lenin, while several—Bubnov, for example, and Bagdatiev—sharply criticized Lenin's report and indicated their preference for Kamenev's stand.

With another thirty delegates requesting the right to speak, the prospect loomed of the transformation of the conference into a free-for-all. What had begun as a modest proposal by the Moscow delegation for a procedural addition to Lenin's report now threatened to develop into a widespread revolt against his leadership. (Kamenev, it should be noted, had been careful to avoid any direct challenge to Lenin, and made a noticeable effort to identify himself with as much of Lenin's position as he could.)

A series of procedural moves, undertaken on the initiative of delegates whose names are unfortunately not recorded, shut off this incipient mutiny and brought the conference back to a more disciplined mode of procedure. First, it was decided to close off the list of would-be speakers; then the delegates voted to conclude the debate by allowing two speakers to defend each of the principal positions which had emerged, Lenin's and Kamenev's.

During the discussion of these measures, Kamenev made the concil-
atory gesture of reducing his disagreements with Lenin to a single issue, "control." The effect of this move was to bury the far more serious differences of principle which separated him from Lenin on the nature of the revolution and its future prospects, but it opened the way for a reconciliation—on Lenin's terms.

Stalin Comes Out in Support of Lenin

After a ten-minute break, the delegates reassembled to listen to the first champion of Lenin's cause. This turned out to be Stalin, perhaps to the surprise of some provincial delegates who had not kept up with his recent articles in Pravda but who remembered how far from Lenin's position he had been before Lenin's return.

Taking advantage of Kamenev's reduction of the disagreement to the single issue of "control," Stalin heaped heavy sarcasm on the whole proposal, arguing that the crisis over the Milyukov note showed that the Provisional Government was now in control of policy, while "the Soviet is following the government."

The government attacks the Soviet. The Soviet retreats. To suggest after this that the Soviet controls the government is just idle talk. That is why I propose that Bubnov's amendment on control be not accepted. 31

Stalin's speech was, of course, grossly unfair; it completely ignored Kamenev's serious criticisms of Lenin's position on the revolution, just as it misrepresented Kamenev's and Bubnov's patient explanation of how "control," as they envisaged it, would serve the needs of the party and advance the workers' cause. Stalin's ridicule of "control" was also premature: within a few weeks, Milyukov and his colleague Guchkov resigned, thereby providing a striking demonstration of exactly the kind of "control" which Kamenev and the Moscow delegation had in mind. In the long run it was the Provisional Government that had to retreat, not the Soviet. Nevertheless, Stalin's speech was undeniably effective, not merely because of its bluntness but also because in making it Stalin was serving public notice of his switch from the position he had shared with Kamenev to unqualified support of Lenin.

In contrast to Stalin's short speech, the statement by Zinoviev, who served as Lenin's second advocate, was wordy, involved, and unconvincing. 32 Clearly Stalin had come through with a solid hit for Lenin in a tight situation. And just as clearly he had not done so merely of his own volition: limited to two speakers, Lenin had deliberately chosen Stalin as his lead-off man in the concluding debate.

In the records of the Seventh Conference Stalin's statement of
APRIL

April 24 stands out for its crudity: it is a startling prefiguration of the style, tone, and intellectual aridity of political discourse in the Stalin era. Whereas other delegates, no matter how impassioned their ideas, always clothed them in the texture of a closely reasoned intellectual analysis, Stalin reduced complex questions to a simple antithesis between his own (i.e., Lenin’s) position, which he claimed made obvious good sense, and that of his opponents, which he derided as patent nonsense. Only fools, he implied, could support the position advocated by Kamenev, conveniently forgetting that only a few weeks earlier he himself had done just that.

The most important point about the statement, however, was not so much what it revealed about Stalin as what it implied about the relationship between him and Lenin. Lenin’s obvious approval of the crudeness of Stalin’s method indicates the concern he felt at the direction in which the conference appeared to be moving: here, at the opening session, his first major report was encountering not approbation but questioning and even opposition. Acting on Dzerzhinsky’s suggestion, the conference had challenged Lenin by calling for a coreport on the current situation and had compounded the affront by selecting for that purpose Kamenev, the man who more than any other had voiced the hesitations, questions, and outright skepticism felt by many party members with regard to Lenin’s policies. The debate on the two reports, before it was shut off by a procedural motion, showed all too clearly that the delegates were in no mood to accept Lenin’s analysis docilely. In his report Kamenev had scored some damaging points. What Lenin needed now was not further intellectual hair-splitting but a sharp, brutal assault on the Kamenev position, and this Stalin effectively supplied.

Trotsky, alert as always to indications of Stalin’s mental processes, contrasts Stalin’s April 24 statement with Lenin’s habitual method of analysis:

Lenin’s conception of the revolution was based on the interrelationship of classes, not on some isolated diplomatic note, which differed little from other acts of the government. But Stalin was not interested in general ideas. All he needed was some obvious pretext in order that he might make his shift with the least damage to his vanity. He was “doling out” his retreat.13

But Trotsky, as frequently happened when he was analyzing Stalin’s tactical skills, missed the essential point. Stalin was not simply rising to make a statement as one among the many delegates who wished to join the debate; he was speaking on behalf of Lenin, as Lenin’s number one chosen spokesman, ahead even of Zinoviev.
Trotsky was right in describing Stalin's statement as a characteristic sample of his mental processes, but he failed to recognize that the statement was made with Lenin's approval and was designed to achieve an important tactical goal: reassertion of Lenin's control over the party. Trotsky's handling of the episode thus casts a revealing light on his mental processes: acute in his judgment of Stalin, he was blind to the evidence of Lenin's use of Stalin to quell incipient opposition.

The spokesmen for the Kamenev-Moscow position were Viktor P. Nogin and Aleksei I. Rykov, an old associate of Lenin (he had been one of the Iskra agents in the period 1901–3), who was attending the conference as a representative of the Moscow organization. Nogin's report went over familiar ground, but Rykov introduced some new ideas. Like Kamenev, Rykov questioned Lenin's view that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia was already completed, adding the criticism that Russia, as "the most petty bourgeois country in Europe," could not be considered ripe for a proletarian revolution. That, said Rykov, must come from the advanced capitalist nations of the West. In Rykov's view, the party must realistically recognize the limitations it faced and adapt its program to existing conditions. For Rykov this included the continuation of the bloc between the party and other elements of "revolutionary democracy."

The conference concluded its first full day's work with an evening session at which the two co-reporters, Lenin and Kamenev, delivered their concluding statements. Kamenev's summing up amounted to a clarification and restatement of his principal points, especially the concept of "control." Again he called for the addition of concrete directives to Lenin's general propositions, so that party workers would have clear guidance in their work; again he criticized the Central Committee—that is, Lenin—for its misleading slogans and sudden changes of front during the April Crisis. But on the essential questions of the war, the Provisional Government, and the international socialist revolution he took a stand not significantly different from that of Lenin.

Responding to Kamenev, Lenin frankly admitted that there had been a regrettable lack of coordination between the Central Committee and the "adventurists" of the Petersburg Committee during the April Crisis, and he added darkly,

In the future we will take all measures so that we have the kind of organization in which there are no Pekisty [members of the Petersburg Committee] who do not listen to the Central Committee.

Like Kamenev, Lenin reduced their differences to the single issue of "control," but he denied that this question was isolating the party
from its former allies in the soviets: the real reason for the party's present isolation, Lenin said—and this was, for him, a significant concession—was that the peasants still supported the war (Lenin used the term "chauvinist" to define their position). Under these conditions, he frankly admitted, a worker-peasant alliance was out of the question. Logically, in a country of predominantly peasant population such as Russia, this should have led Lenin to see merit in Rykov's view that a Marxist-style socialist revolution could not succeed in Russia. Instead, Lenin simply denied the relevance of Rykov's objection:

Comrade Rykov says that socialism must come from other countries, with a more developed industry. But this is not so. Nobody can say who will begin it and who will end it. That is not Marxism: it is a parody of Marxism.

This was as close as Lenin ever came to defending his view that Russia could make a socialist revolution notwithstanding the comparative weakness of her working class. A few months later, in July, we will find Stalin making essentially the same point in addressing a party congress, and defending it as an example of "creative Marxism."

Following Lenin's summing up, the conference elected a commission to draft the resolution on the current situation. The voting clearly reflected the mood of the delegates: Lenin and his supporters (Zinoviev and Stalin) were outnumbered by Kamenev, Bubnov, Mil'ytin, and Nogin. The remaining two members of the commission, I. G. Pravdin, representing a Urals district party organization, and I. A. Teodorovich, from Petrograd, had not joined the discussion but could hardly be classified as staunch Leninists.

Stalin Reports on Relations between the Soviet and the Provisional Government

While the April Conference was in session, Prawda on April 25 published a signed article by Stalin entitled, "The Conference in the Mariinsky Palace." Although it was not included in the protocols of the April Conference, it seems that the article was first delivered as a report to the conference delegates, probably on the opening day, April 24. One delegate, S. I. Gopner, later recalled,

During the discussion of Lenin's report on the current situation we were informed that a comrade would at once provide information about yesterday evening's session of the Provisional Government jointly with representatives of the Petrograd Soviet in the Mariinsky Palace.

Gopner, who claimed to have heard Stalin speak, characterized his
report as "clear and accurate" and even used the term "eloquent" to describe his account of the meeting. The published article is hardly eloquent, but it is undeniably effective in its crisp dissection of the motives of the Provisional Government spokesmen, Milyukov, Guchkov, and Shingaryov.

Surprisingly, in view of the brutal verbal assault on Kamenev, which Stalin delivered later on the twenty-fourth, his article concluded with an account of how Kamenev, as Bolshevik representative on the Soviet Executive Committee, had charged that the Provisional Government, because of its determination to fight the war to a victorious finish, was incapable of solving the nation's problems. The solution, Kamenev asserted,

therefore lay in the transfer of power to another class, a class capable of leading the country out of the impasse... (Leaders in the original)

Perhaps inadvertently, Stalin's article provides valuable evidence of a noteworthy shift that had taken place in Kamenev's thinking on the war and the Provisional Government, one that brought him much closer to Lenin's position.

Was it Stalin's report on the meeting in the Mariinsky Palace which suggested to Lenin the idea of using Stalin as one of his two spokesmen in the debate during the second half of the April 24 session? It seems likely. Whether Lenin heard Stalin's report himself or simply learned of it from other delegates to the conference, he must have recognized that it provided a perfect basis for attacking Kamenev on the issue of "control." Choosing Stalin as his lead-off defender involved a certain element of risk: this would be the younger man's first appearance at a major party conference in defense of Lenin, and he might well fail. But the gains would be proportionately great if he succeeded: as late as April 6 Stalin had sided with Kamenev against Lenin; if he now publicly attacked Kamenev and supported Lenin, the switch might well help a number of hesitant party delegates to make up their minds in favor of Lenin.

Organizational Work (April 25–28)

After his uncharacteristic burst of activity on the opening day of the conference, Stalin sank back into the mass of delegates who listened in silence to the party leaders and who registered their views only through their votes. But Stalin was by no means idle during the next three days. He had been named a member of the commission to draft the resolution on the current situation, and even though Lenin supplied the driving force and the principal ideas, the other committee
members were expected to take an active part in the work, since it was their collective responsibility to see that the finished resolution was framed with due regard to all relevant aspects of the problems facing the party in “the current situation.”

No text of Stalin’s April 24 report has survived, nor do we have any memoirs that might provide information on what contributions he made, if any, to the discussion of the report on the current situation. In any case, he was more concerned with absorbing Lenin’s point of view and helping defend it than with expressing original ideas of his own. Far more challenging was the second task assigned to Stalin during these days: he had been chosen by Lenin to present the report on the national question, and he needed all the concentration he could muster to discharge that task worthily.

While Stalin was engaged in his editorial labors, the conference was proceeding with its organizational business. According to Lenin’s original plan, most of the responsibility for this work was to be discharged by Zinoviev. It was Zinoviev who presided over all sessions of the conference for which the protocols indicate a chairman, and he may well have chaired some or all of the other sessions. Increasingly as the conference proceeded, however, the role of Lenin’s troubleshooter and master organizer was taken over by the efficient and hard-working delegate from Yekaterinburg, Yakov Sverdlov. From the very outset of the conference, where, as we have seen, his stature in the eyes of the delegates was registered by election to the conference presidium, Sverdlov showed that he intended to take an active part in the proceedings. Even before the formal opening of the conference, he joined with Nogin in sponsoring an addition to the agenda, a report on the Social Democratic “peace conference” being organized in Stockholm.

It was Nogin who delivered the report on the Stockholm gathering, but the resourceful Sverdlov had his turn later in the April 25 session when he opened the series of reports from local areas. For his sphere of responsibility Sverdlov covered the Ural region, one of Russia’s principal industrial areas and a Bolshevik stronghold only a little less powerful than Petrograd and Moscow.

At the fifth session of the conference, on the morning of April 26, Sverdlov made a key organizational move by proposing that the delegates split up into five sections in order to prepare the final reports. When Lenin rose to support the proposal, its adoption was assured. Under Sverdlov’s watchful guidance the delegates settled down to the hard work of drafting reports, dutifully sacrificing the luxury of uninhibited debate which had marked the opening session.
By the seventh session on the morning of April 27, Sverdlov had established himself so firmly in Lenin's estimation that he was given the responsible task of reading the draft "Resolution on the War" paragraph by paragraph, and when the delegates assembled for the next to last time on the evening of April 29, it was Sverdlov who gave them instructions on how to turn in their secret ballots in the voting for the Central Committee.

The Election to the Central Committee (Evening, April 29)

Both the preliminary agenda of April 13 and the final agenda adopted at the outset of the April Conference placed the election of new party bodies at the very end of the proceedings, following debate on all the principal substantive issues. Instead, for reasons about which the protocols are silent, the election of a new central committee—the first in five years—was moved up to the first half of the ninth session, on the evening of April 29, ahead of the reports and discussion on the national question.

The mood of the delegates was tense: even from the laconic summary provided by the protocols, it is clear that they realized how much depended on the choices they would make. In the Bolshevik party, with its emphasis on central control and guidance, choosing able leaders was fully as important as formulating correct tactics.

By a number of procedural votes the delegates showed that they were in no mood to accept direction from Lenin or anyone else. At the outset Lenin proposed that the size of the Central Committee be increased from nine to thirteen members, including the core of the old CC dating back to 1912 but with new recruits to share the heavy burdens that the revolution was likely to place on the leadership of the party. Zinoviev seconded Lenin's proposal, arguing that experience showed that a nine-member CC was too small. Unimpressed, the delegates rejected Lenin's proposal, obviously clinging to the established forms of the party.

A proposal by Zinoviev that the election be preceded by a discussion of candidates fared a little better: it squeaked by with a bare plurality, 35 to 33, with at least one-third of the delegates not voting. Although Lenin had prudently refrained from personally sponsoring this motion, he showed that he supported it by taking an active part in the discussion of candidates.

Probably the single most valuable document dug out of the long-sealed party archives and published for the first time as part of the 1958 edition of the Seventh Conference protocols was the record of
the discussion of candidates for the Central Committee. It is a vital source of information on Lenin's tactics, as well as an indispensable clue to Stalin's emergence as one of the party's top leaders.

Even while they were relaxing their controls, however, the custodians of the party archives stopped short of full disclosure of the record. The protocols of the Central Committee for the period from early April through late July 1917 still remain unpublished, even though they were announced for publication in that same permissive year, 1958. A Soviet scholarly article published in 1977 purports to provide a summary of the missing protocols, but it is far from adequate as a substitute for the original texts.40

Twenty-six names were proposed for the Central Committee, ranging from the obvious and inevitable one of Lenin to relatively obscure figures of only local significance. Of the twenty-six, seven were not discussed at all—Lenin and Zinoviev because they were too well known, the others because no one felt the need to discuss their candidacies. Of those formally presented to the delegates, another eight attracted neither supporters nor opponents; these included Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, and his mistress, Inessa Armand.

Part of the drama of the election lay in the latent conflict between the two teams that had led the party before Lenin's return. Molotov, Shlyapnikov, and Zalutsky, all candidates for the CC, had provided leadership along Leninist lines in the initial period of the revolution; Stalin and Kamenev (Muranov was not a candidate) had veered sharply to the right.

Despite their fealty to Leninist principles, not a single member of the original team was elected to the CC, whereas both Kamenev and Stalin were, and by convincing votes: Stalin, with 97 votes, appeared to be the third most popular figure in the party, after Lenin (with 104 votes) and Zinoviev (with 101), while Kamenev lagged only a few votes behind, with 95 votes to his credit. There followed, at a considerable distance, Milyutin, with 82 votes, Nogin with 76, Sverdlov with 71, then (another sharp drop) Smilga with 53 and Fedorov with 48.41

The record of the discussion helps to explain these striking results. First, a fact of cardinal significance, Lenin himself spoke on behalf of only two candidates: not, as a naive delegate might have expected, Krupskaya and Inessa—their loyalty and services were assured Lenin in any case, and he had no need for them on the CC—but the two culprits of the second phase, Stalin and Kamenev.

Consideration of Kamenev's candidacy was the third item on the agenda, following those of Lenin and Zinoviev, both hors concours. A brash delegate named Soloviev (there were two with that surname at the conference, and the protocols do not make it clear which one
spoke on this occasion) led off with a blistering attack on Kamenev’s record, first, because of his behavior in the trial of the Bolshevik deputies to the Duma in 1915, and second, because of his March 1917 writings in Pravda, especially those in which he voiced his support of a defensist position on the war.  

The anti-Kamenev feeling among the delegates was evidently widespread, for in 1926–27 a number of party members who had been delegates to the Seventh Conference joined in a general attack on him (undoubtedly with Stalin’s support), which took the form of recollections of how, at preliminary meetings of delegates before the formal session on the evening of April 29, Kamenev’s candidacy had been rejected, both because of the 1915 trial and because of the telegram of congratulations to Michael Romanov, which he had co-signed in March 1917. There was thus a groundswell of anti-Kamenev sentiment among the delegates as the voting for the CC got under way, and Soloviev was no doubt confident of speaking for a popular cause when he attacked Kamenev.

Lenin’s method of meeting this challenge must have disconcerted many delegates. He began by simply ignoring Soloviev’s second point,

in the first place, because I don’t remember and, in the second place because after all many comrades wavered in the first phases of the revolution.

As for Kamenev’s behavior at the 1915 trial, Lenin conceded that the point was a serious one, but asserted that it no longer counted against him:

At the time the behavior of comrade Kamenev was condemned by the CC. In the central party organ abroad it was stated that the behavior of the deputies in the trial, and of Kamenev in particular, was inadmissible. With this the incident was closed. Some comrades felt that these measures were insufficiently harsh, but in my opinion they were sufficient. Therefore it is impossible to object to his candidacy on the grounds of a lapse for which comrade Kamenev has already been brought to trial and adequately evaluated and condemned. The incident is closed. There is no evidence of wavering.

Having thus drawn a veil over the past, and completely ignoring Soloviev’s reference to Kamenev’s recent misdeeds as one of the editors of Pravda, Lenin turned to the positive side of Kamenev’s candidacy. “The activity of comrade Kamenev,” he said,

has extended over ten years and it is very valuable. He is a valuable worker, both in the Executive Committee [of the Soviet] and on the edito-
rial board [of Pravda]. There is no point in dwelling on the incident further. The fact that we disagree with comrade Kamenev yields only positive results. The presence of comrade Kamenev is very valuable. After convincing him, with difficulty, you will find that at the same time you have overcome those difficulties which arise among the masses.

Seeing which way the wind was blowing, and anxious to play down his differences with Lenin, Nogin jumped to Kamenev's defense, twisting the facts a little in the process. The Moscow oblast bureau of the party, Nogin said, had sharply censured Kamenev for his behavior at the Duma deputies' trial, but then, after impassioned debate, had selected him to report on the war (evidently at its conference on April 19-21). A footnote in the 1958 edition of the conference protocols points out that Nogin was in error: it was at the all-Russian conference on March 27-April 2, not at that of the Moscow oblast committee, that Kamenev delivered the report on the war. More to the point, it was Kamenev who had been selected by the Moscow delegation to present their position in the debate on the current situation. In accordance with that decision, Nogin expressed "full confidence" in Kamenev.

By his endorsement of Lenin's favorable judgment on Kamenev, Nogin strengthened his own position: in the balloting he ranked second in the group just below the Big Four, despite an adverse verdict by Rosalia S. Zemliachka (Samoilova), one of the power brokers in the Moscow city committee. By contrast, the rash and impetuous Soloviev, who dared to speak against Kamenev before Lenin's position was disclosed, remains a cipher in party history; it is not even known which of the two Solovievs present at the conference opposed Kamenev.

Following the discussion of Kamenev's candidacy the delegates turned to that of I. A. Teodorovich, a member of the Petersburg Committee and a veteran of political struggle, including long years of imprisonment. Zinoviev spoke on his behalf, recalling his services in the socialist movement and praising him as "one of the model Marxists." In contrast, F. I. Goloshchekin ("Filipp"), another member of the Petersburg Committee, spoke against Teodorovich with a complete lack of regard for any past services to the party. "Previously," said Goloshchekin,

he [Teodorovich] was a prominent figure, but ten years of hard labor and being cut off from the party life have left a distinct mark, and the man is not capable of work."
For good measure, Goloshchekin added that newspaper reports from Krasnoyarsk indicated that Teodorovich had appeared there as a right-wing speaker. Not surprisingly, he failed to attract the necessary votes for inclusion in the CC, an indication that Zinoviev's recommendations carried no special weight with the delegates.

Overall, Zinoviev spoke on behalf of four candidates—Teodorovich, Nogin, Milyutin, and N. P. Glebov (Avilov), another Petersburg Committee member. Of these only two, Nogin and Milyutin, were elected to the CC, and their active participation in the conference would probably have ensured their election even without Zinoviev's support. Clearly the power wielded by Lenin had not rubbed off onto Zinoviev.

The fifth candidate presented to the delegates for consideration was Stalin, and only one speaker took the floor, Lenin. But Lenin's brief statement said it all, in words of authority which none of the delegates ventured to challenge. "Comrade Koba," Lenin said,

has been known to us for a great many years. We saw him in Cracow, where our bureau was located. His activity in the Caucasus was important. A good worker in all responsible jobs.38

So much for Stalin's spotty record as a prominent party figure and as editor of Pravda in March! Clearly, Lenin had made up his mind to give Stalin his unqualified support and to overlook entirely all the false starts and faulty perceptions of which Stalin had been guilty over the years. It must have been a great moment for Stalin, a personal triumph equaled only by the results of the balloting, which showed Stalin with the third highest total—97, just behind Lenin with 104 and Zinoviev with 101, and a few votes ahead of Kamenev.

Writing in ignorance of the discussion of candidates first published in 1958, a number of authors have argued that the large number of votes cast for Stalin is proof that he had now achieved a strong position in the party on the basis of his record. Deutscher, for example, writes,

This was the first time Stalin was confirmed in leadership by a large vote in a direct, open election. To the cadres of the party he was now a familiar figure, although to outsiders he was still a name only.49

Ulam concurs:

His current stature in the Party was attested to by the fact that in the secret balloting he received ninety-seven of the hundred and nine delegate votes. . . . The barely known Caucasian of 1912, the man who five weeks
earlier it had been proposed should be kept out of the Party councils because of his bad temper and manners, was now freely acknowledged by his fellow Bolsheviks to be the leading “practitioner” in the Party.  

These opinions, however, and others like them, cannot be sustained in the light of the evidence provided by the discussion of candidates. The 1958 document shows unmistakably that it was Lenin’s personal intercession on behalf of Stalin, far more than any personal merits of the latter, which earned him his high vote. After the sharp reproof implied to critics like Soloviev in Lenin’s statement on behalf of Kamenev, none of the delegates cared to remind their comrades of the faulty guidance provided by Stalin before Lenin’s return. If Lenin was willing to forget the mistakes of the recent past, the delegates were content to follow his lead. The high votes cast for Stalin and Kamenev reflect Lenin’s popularity and power in the party, not theirs. Robert Payne is close to the mark when he writes, 

As usual, the Central Committee had been hand-picked by Lenin and the voting was a mere formality.  

If Trotsky is to be believed, Lenin later recalled that Sverdlov’s name was not included in the original list of members to be elected to the CC. “Fortunately,” said Lenin, as reported by Trotsky, “we were corrected from below.” In other words, the delegates voted for Sverdlov, even though he had not been included in the master list drawn up by Lenin and his closest aides. Trotsky suggests that Lenin’s failure to include Sverdlov was the result of Stalin’s influence over Lenin (which Trotsky is otherwise inclined to minimize). Recalling the incidents at the Pravda office in 1912 and the period of exile in Siberia when relations between Stalin and Sverdlov had further worsened, Trotsky writes, 

He [Stalin] apparently tried to take his revenge at the conference and in one way or another, we can only guess how, managed to win Lenin’s support, but his attempt did not succeed. If in 1912 Lenin met with the resistance of the delegates when he tried to get Stalin onto the Central Committee, he now met with no less resistance when he tried to keep Sverdlov off.  

Trotsky overstates his case: the published discussion of candidates indicates that Lenin did not actively oppose Sverdlov’s candidacy. Only one speaker took part in the discussion of Sverdlov’s candidacy, V. V. Kuibyshev from the Samara party organization, who said, 

Comrade Sverdlov is an old party worker, an irreplaceable organizer. His presence on the CC is essential.
This concise but essentially accurate statement, representing as it un­
doubtedly did the viewpoint of a sizable group of delegates, was suffi­
cient to earn Sverdlov inclusion on the CC, though with significantly fewer votes than the Big Four. Trotsky’s recollection, based as it neces­sarily was on hearsay and later comments by Lenin, since he himself
was not a delegate to the April Conference, implies the existence of a master list of candidates for the CC which Lenin drew up and which was circulated to the delegates before the voting began. It was this list, presumably, from which Sverdlov’s name was omitted. Trotsky’s anec­dote also strongly implies that Stalin had a hand in helping Lenin prepare the list; in other words, that he was now effectively function­
ing as a member of the party’s top leadership group. Confirmation of that deduction is provided by evidence from a variety of sources. First, however, it will be useful to consider Stalin’s report on the national question.

Stalin and Makharadze Report on the National Question

Contrary to the procedure announced in the advance agenda, the conference took up its discussion of the national question after the elections to the Central Committee—but before the results of the balloting were announced.

What were the reasons for this procedural change? First, as we have seen, Lenin unmistakably wanted Stalin as one of the inner core of party leadership and may have felt it wise to take no chance of having an adverse reaction among the delegates as a result of the position Stalin would take on the hotly debated national question. Better to ensure his election first, Lenin may have reasoned, and then take his chances on the national question debate. The procedural change also had the advantage, from Lenin’s point of view, that it gave him the opportunity to indicate his unconditional support of Stalin before the latter spoke on the national question. In this way the delegates would be aware that Stalin was speaking not merely in his own name but as the spokesman for Lenin’s views.

The question may be asked, why did Lenin not deliver the report on the national question himself? It was an open secret at the confer­ence that it was he who wrote the resolution on the subject which was finally adopted. Lenin had excellent reasons, however, for choosing Stalin as his spokesman on this particular question. Positions that Lenin, as a Russian, could hardly defend convincingly against the onslaughts of non-Russian party stalwarts such as the Pole Dzerzhinsky, the Ukrainian Pyatakov, or the Georgian Makharadze, would be less vulnerable when put forward by a non-Russian—for
example, the “marvelous Georgian,” Dzhugashvili-Stalin. Once again, as in 1913, Lenin was using Stalin to defend a position that was hotly disputed by some of the most articulate and outspoken representatives in the party of those same minority groups.

Just before the Seventh Conference opened, Lenin’s attention had been forcibly drawn to the national question by an appeal from the Finnish Social Democrats for recognition of their support of the Finnish national independence movement. Early in the conference Lenin had been given a reminder that the question was certain to give rise to controversy and that his own position was going to come under attack. At the third session, on April 25, in the debate about the socialist “peace conference” in Stockholm, Dzerzhinsky raised the question of Poland’s independence, which had been included as one of the party’s demands in the draft resolution. “It is not appropriate for us,” Dzerzhinsky argued,

to raise the national question, for that delays the coming of the socialist revolution. I therefore propose that the question about Poland’s independence be dropped from the resolution.\(^55\)

Dzerzhinsky had a further opportunity to press his views as a member of the three-man commission that was set up to draft the conference resolution on the Stockholm conference, but he was evidently outvoted by the other two members of the commission, Lenin and Kamenev, for the resolution as finally adopted retained the paragraph on Polish independence.\(^56\) The incident must have served as a reminder to Lenin of the explosive nature of the national question and the danger it represented of a challenge to his views in the debates of the full conference.

A further indication of the turbulent mood of the delegates with regard to the national question was provided by the conference’s decision on procedure for discussion of the subject. According to S. I. Petrikovsky, a delegate from Petrograd whose notes constitute a valuable supplement to the official conference protocols, the delegates voted to hear thirty-minute reports from two rapporteurs on the national question and to follow the reports with ten-minute statements by two delegates for each report, for and against.\(^57\)

Stalin’s report, delivered at a late hour (midnight was already past when he took the floor), was comparatively brief.\(^58\) Even so, he devoted approximately one-third of his time to a preamble in which he established “certain premises,” in the process correcting some of the cruder mistakes he had perpetrated in his Pravda articles of March. There he had identified the landed aristocracy as the class mainly responsible for national oppression and had singled out Switzerland.
the United States, and Great Britain as democratic states in which national oppression did not exist. Now he prudently restricted his examples of democracy to Great Britain, “where there is a certain degree of democracy and political freedom,” and Switzerland, which “approximates to a democratic society,” adding, for the benefit of Marxist scholars, “By democracy we mean that definite classes are in control of the state power.”

This elementary Marxist premise provided an easy transition to an updating of Stalin’s analysis of the class origin of national oppression. In his March articles he had identified the landed aristocracy as the class principally responsible for national oppression. Reluctantly abandoning an idea to which he was evidently attached (it was, after all, original with him), Stalin now added,

It may be said from this point of view that the closer the old landed aristocracy is to power, as was the case in old Tsarist Russia, the more severe is the oppression and the more monstrous are its forms.

Having thus made an attempt to bring his ideas into line with Marxist principles, Stalin proceeded to the reading of the resolution, as drafted by Lenin. Its most controversial provision was that every nation forming a part of Russia must be recognized as having the right to secede freely and to form an independent state. As an example of the way that denial of this right leads to “a direct continuation of the policy of Tsarism,” Stalin cited the conflict “which has recently broken out between Finland and the Russian Provisional Government.” The resolution was careful to distinguish, however, between “the right of nations to free secession,” and “the expedience of the secession of one nation or another at a given moment” (italics added). This was a question for the proletariat (i.e., the Bolshevik party, claiming to represent the proletariat) to decide “quite independently in each individual case, from the standpoint of the interests of overall social development and of the proletarian class struggle for socialism.”

For nations not choosing the right of secession, the resolution continued, “the party demands broad regional autonomy,” but it “resolutely rejects so-called ‘national cultural autonomy.’” Furthermore, it demands inclusion in the constitution of a fundamental law prohibiting any special privileges whatsoever for one nation and any infringement whatsoever on the rights of a national minority.

But the whole carefully elaborated structure of ideas was fatally
undermined by the final paragraph of the resolution, which ruled out any recognition of national minority rights in the party:

The interests of the working class demand the merging of the workers of all nationalities of Russia into unified proletarian organizations—political, trade union, co-operative-educational, etc. Only such an amalgamation of the workers of different nationalities into single organizations enables the proletariat to wage a victorious struggle against international capital and bourgeois nationalism.

The remainder of Stalin’s report consisted of a gloss on these propositions, presented with a fair show of conviction. Occasionally the strain of defending a position in which he did not really believe proved too much for him, however, and he let his real feelings show through. For example, in defending the Leninist principle of the right of minority nationalities to secession Stalin admitted,

I personally would be opposed to the secession of Transcaucasia, bearing in mind the common development in Transcaucasia and Russia, certain conditions of the struggle of the proletariat, and so forth. But if, nevertheless, the peoples of Transcaucasia were to demand secession, they would, of course, secede without encountering opposition from us.

Stalin concluded his report by “reduc[ing] our views on the national question to the following propositions:”

(a) recognition of the right of nations to secession;
(b) regional autonomy for nations remaining within the given state;
(c) special legislation guaranteeing freedom of development for national minorities;
(d) a single indivisible proletarian collective, a single party, for the proletarians of all nationalities of the given state.

In introducing his co-report Pyatakov announced that the nine-man section for preparation of the conference report on the national question had voted 7 to 2 in favor of a position that, in Pyatakov’s words, “was taken by the revolutionary part of German Social-Democracy, Polish Social-Democracy, and others”—a position differing from that of Lenin, which Stalin had just presented. But Pyatakov recognized that there was general agreement at the conference on many aspects of the national question, and he therefore devoted his report to consideration of those aspects on which disagreement existed.

Gently chiding Stalin, with his emphasis on the landed aristocracy as the chief source of national oppression, for dwelling on past history, Pyatakov drew the delegates’ attention to existing world economic
conditions. These conditions, he said, made national independence an “obsolete” principle, and the demand for national independence was “taken from another historical epoch, it is reactionary, for it tries to turn history backwards.”

In contemporary society, Pyatakov asserted, the split between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat had deepened to such an extent that the “two camps” had virtually nothing in common. If the Polish bourgeoisie, representing a majority of the Polish population, wished to establish an independent Poland, while the Polish proletariat wished to have Poland included “in a general socialist organization,” the Bolshevik party might well “carry on a struggle against the Polish bourgeoisie.” Stalin’s formulation of the question, Pyatakov charged, was “purely metaphysical.”

Another distinguishing characteristic of the present epoch, according to Pyatakov, was the virtual merger between the economic system of capitalism and the state form of bourgeois democracy. Whereas the slogan of an independent state was a progressive demand in an earlier era, “now it is a reactionary factor, directed against socialism.” The movements for national independence at present, Pyatakov argued, led as they are by the nationalistic bourgeoisie and directed “against the socialist revolution . . . have become obviously reactionary.”

Pyatakov said he had nothing against the struggle to end the oppression of national minorities, but it was essential to keep that question separate from the struggle for a socialism “without national boundaries.” Pyatakov noted Stalin’s unguarded admission that he was not in favor of Transcaucasian independence but tactfully refrained from taking advantage of it.

Summing up, Pyatakov called for a concrete definition by the party of its goals on the national question, “not limiting itself to formulating the abstract ‘right of self-determination,’ a formulation which can play into the hands of petty bourgeois reaction.”

In accordance with the ideas developed in his report, the resolution presented by Pyatakov asserted that

the formation of national states under the conditions of the imperialist epoch, i.e., the epoch of the eve of the socialist revolution, is a harmful and reactionary utopia,

and it frankly proclaimed that

the international party of the proletariat, in the event that there is a majority on its side on an all-European scale, cannot take into account the will of the majority of a nation if that will is in conflict with the will of its proletarian minority.62
The resolution accordingly affirmed that

"the right of nations to self-determination" is merely a phrase lacking any specific content,

and it proposed corresponding changes in the party program. Echoing Lenin's draft resolution, the one presented by Pyatakov closed by demanding the "merger [śląanie] of the workers of all nationalities of Russia into common proletarian organizations," on the grounds that such a merger

will make it possible for the proletariat to wage a successful struggle against international capital and bourgeois nationalism.

Lenin himself spoke as the first defender of the resolution that Stalin had presented. The stenographic report of this speech is incomplete, but enough has been preserved to indicate the general trend of his argument. In attempting to respond to Pyatakov's demand for concrete guidance, Lenin virtually admitted that his national policy was a matter of tactics that varied from place to place.

In Russia we must stress the right of separation for the subject nations, while in Poland we must stress the right of such nations to unite. The right to unite implies the right to separate. We Russians must emphasize the right to separate, while the Poles must emphasize the right to unite.

Lenin spent most of his allotted ten minutes berating the Poles, especially Dzerzhinsky, for confusing the question of Poland's freedom with that of the socialist revolution. But no Pole, he charged, gave the party any guidance when it came to Finland, the Ukraine, and other national minority regions. Was the party to support national oppression in these regions? To do so, Lenin asserted, amounted to "chauvinism." Only the example of the revolution could provide effective propaganda for the oppressed masses.

Dzerzhinsky was not convinced by Lenin's arguments. Appearing as the first speaker in support of Pyatakov's draft resolution, he accused Lenin of sharing the position of the Polish, Ukrainian, and other national chauvinists. As far back as the Second Party Congress in 1903, Dzerzhinsky reminded his listeners, the Polish Social Democrats had refused to join the party because of its stand on Polish independence. He castigated Lenin's two-track tactics:

What kind of a social-democratic point of view is that? Our positions must be identical. After all, are not the interests of the Polish and Russian proletariat the same?
As to the "will of the nation," Dzerzhinsky asserted, it can manifest itself only under the conditions of socialism. For Poland the right of independence from Russia would mean, in effect, the right of the bourgeoisie to ensure its domination. The 1905 Revolution, in Dzerzhinsky's view, had ended any nationalist spirit among the Polish workers. As to Lenin's taunt that the Polish Social Democrats had no answer for the party on the national question, Dzerzhinsky categorically denied the charge:

Our concrete answer: national oppression can be destroyed only under the complete democratization of the government, the struggle for socialism, whereas separatist efforts are efforts for the struggle against socialism. We concretely oppose the right of nations to self-determination.

As to Finland,

The fact that Finland is a separate state is by no means evidence in favor of the separation of Finland from Russia. If the Provisional Government wants to take over those rights which the Tsar previously exercised in regard to Finland, our task, the only method for us, is to struggle against this Provisional Government, for the democratization of Russia, for the destruction of this shameful government which wants to coerce the will of the Finnish people.

Following Dzerzhinsky, Zinoviev spoke in support of Lenin's draft resolution. He charged that, whatever his purposes, objectively Pyatakov was taking a nationalist stance. Extension of the socialist revolution to the colonial nations, Zinoviev maintained, demanded that the party adopt a consistently anti-imperialist position. As to Finland, let the Finnish people themselves decide their fate.

The final speaker was the Georgian Filipp Makharadze, representing the Tiflis party organization and speaking in support of Pyatakov's draft. Makharadze made the significant, and for Lenin ominous, point that those comrades who are taking part in the conference, who are for the first time discussing the national question in common and who themselves are representatives of the oppressed nations, almost all unanimously reached the conclusion formulated here by comrade Pyatakov.

Speaking as a party member accustomed to working in the Transcaucasia, with its highly diversified national minority structure, Makharadze charged that adoption of Lenin's (Stalin's) resolution, with its "right to secession" clause, would harm the party's prospects in the minority regions. The national question will be solved,
Makharadze predicted, “only in a socialist order,” and like Pyatakov he asserted that

the national state at the present time is related to the past, not to the future.

Pyatakov used his five-minute “concluding remarks” period to reply to Lenin and Zinoviev, making no substantially new points but pleading for further discussion of the national question in the party. The final statement was made by Stalin, who put the question in terms of tactics: the party must support the independence movement in Finland in order to show that it is opposed to the Provisional Government.

In his critique of Lenin’s “April Theses” on April 6, Stalin had complained that Lenin’s picture of the “bridge” between the socialist revolution in the West and the anti-imperialist movement in the East was a “sketch,” lacking in facts and “therefore unsatisfactory.” Since that time he had had an opportunity to work closely with Lenin and to absorb his outlook on revolutionary strategy and tactics. Now, in a statement that can fairly be described as pure Leninism, Stalin made amends for his April 6 strictures:

Either we consider that we must create a rear for the vanguard of the socialist revolution in the shape of the peoples which are rising against national oppression—and in that case we shall build a bridge between West and East and shall indeed be steering for a world socialist revolution, or we do not do this—and in that case we shall find ourselves isolated and shall be abandoning the tactics of using every revolutionary movement among the oppressed nationalities for the purpose of destroying imperialism.67

In a last-ditch effort to prevent the conference from adopting Stalin’s resolution, Makharadze proposed withdrawing the entire national question and taking no resolution on the subject, but the delegates rejected this proposal by a vote of 42 against 21, with 15 abstentions. Stalin’s resolution then won a substantial victory, 56 to 16, with 18 abstentions, while the vote on Pyatakov’s draft was only a little less decisive—11 for, 48 against, with 19 abstentions. As these figures show, however, there remained a hard core of 30 delegates—more than a quarter of those present—who were unwilling to accept the Stalin/Lenin resolution with its “right of secession” formula. This was by far the largest bloc of votes opposing a policy sponsored by Lenin at the conference, a fact that provides graphic proof of Lenin’s tactical shrewdness in bringing Stalin to his side in the debate. Except for Stalin, not a single representative of the national minorities supported
Lenin on this issue, and the most telling assaults on his position came from the Pole Dzerzhinsky, the Ukrainian Pyatakov, and the Georgian Makharadze.

Immediately following Stalin's concluding remarks the results of the election to the Central Committee were announced, and it became clear to everyone that Stalin had joined the top leadership group in the party—the only representative of a national minority to do so. (It should not be forgotten, of course, that the new CC included three Jews—Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Sverdlov. But their ethnic identity played no part—at this stage at least—in determining their party position, and one of them, Zinoviev, had come out strongly in support of Lenin on the national question.)

There remained only a few formalities to be completed. After a one-hour break, the weary delegates reassembled to listen to Zinoviev present the draft resolution on “The Situation in the International and the Tasks of the RSDLP(b),” which passed with a nearly unanimous vote, marred by one stubborn holdout in opposition and one abstention, following which Lenin brought the delegates back to their starting point with a presentation of the “Resolution on the Current Situation.” Only Soloviev (was it the same brash Soloviev who had opposed Kamenev’s candidacy to the CC?) ventured to offer a “correction” to Lenin’s text, and he was quickly reduced to silence. The resolution passed with no nays but with eight abstentions. After a few more perfunctory votes, approving the resolutions on revision of the party program and on the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, the weary delegates finally broke up. It was 4 o’clock in the morning, and they had earned the right to a few hours’ slumber.

The Origins of the Politburo: Lenin’s Deal with Stalin

It is customary for a new central committee to hold its first plenum immediately following the congress (or in this case the conference) at which it is elected, and there can be little doubt that the CC elected at the Seventh Conference duly observed this by now time-honored practice. Lacking as we do the protocols of the CC for this period, it is not possible, unfortunately, to cite direct documentary evidence for the organizational steps taken by the new post-conference CC, but a convergence of indirect clues enables us to establish one point of cardinal importance in the history of the party and the career of Joseph Stalin. The Central Committee that was elected at the Seventh Conference voted at its first post-conference plenum to establish a bureau or steering committee that was the original form of what
later came to be called the Political Bureau, or Politburo. Furthermore, we can be reasonably certain that this bureau, the exact name of which is unknown, was composed of four members: Lenin, Zinoviev, Stalin, and Kamenev, to name them in order of their vote totals in the balloting for the CC. Finally, there is good reason to believe that behind the action of the CC lay a fait accompli in which the CC merely endorsed a slate that Lenin had designated beforehand.

We have already noted part of the evidence which points to these conclusions, notably the pattern of voting for the CC, in which the four top candidates were marked off by a sizable interval from the next group of elected members of the CC. We have also noted the evidence pointing to the existence of a master list of candidates, drawn up by Lenin and made known to the delegates before the voting.

It is a striking fact that Stalin consistently claimed in later years that he had been elected to the Politburo in May 1917, at the time of its establishment, and had remained a member uninterruptedly thereafter. Perhaps the first time this claim appeared in print was in the authorized biography of Stalin written by I. P. Tovstukha, a Ukrainian party official who became the head of Stalin’s Private Secretariat at some time in the mid-1920s. In Tovstukha’s biography of Stalin, published in the Granat Encyclopedia, the following statements are made:

At the all-Russian Conference of Bolsheviks in April [1917], at which two tendencies came to light in the Party, Stalin stubbornly defended Lenin’s position. In May, the CC Politburo was set up. Stalin was elected to it and has retained his seat on it ever since.

During the October days, the CC elected him [Stalin] a member of the pyatyorka (the group of five organizing the political leadership of the rising) and the semyorka (the group of seven entrusted with organizational control of it). 68

Substantially identical statements appeared in the biographical sketches of Stalin included as part of the appendices of a number of volumes in the third edition of Lenin’s Works, published between 1930 and 1935. 69

Noteworthy is the fact that Tovstukha clearly distinguishes between what he calls the Politburo, which he says was established in May 1917, and the committees of five and seven set up in October 1917. Special interest attaches to the committee of five, since it was this body, although Tovstukha does not say so, which for the first time bore the designation of Political Bureau, or Politburo. This fact has led a number of scholars to conclude that this body constituted the original form of the Politburo, even though the October 1917
Politburo apparently never functioned as an entity and disappeared without a trace in the tumult of the Bolshevik uprising. Officially, the Politburo in the form in which it is best known—that is, the top policy-making institution in the party—was not established until the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919, and that date has generally been regarded as definitive, in part because it carried the endorsement of Merle Fainsod in his authoritative and influential text, How Russia Is Ruled.70

May 1917 has been given as the date of the Politburo's origin in a number of Soviet reference works published after Stalin's death.71 Recently, however, Soviet reference works have dropped that date and have substituted for it October 1917, obviously having in mind the committee of five which Tovstukha specifically distinguished from the genuine Politburo.72

Light is cast on the problem by some entries in the published protocols of the Central Committee for the period October 1917-January 1918. From these we learn that at a meeting of the CC on November 29, 1917 (Old Style), it was decided to refer one knotty problem on the agenda—the renaming of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic party—to a “bureau of the CC” consisting of Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, and Sverdlov.73 “In view of the difficulty of assembling a [plenary] session of the CC,” the protocols explain,

it was decided that this foursome [eto chetvero] shall be given the right to decide all urgent matters, but that they are obliged to include all the CC members in the Smolny at the time of the decision.

This “bureau of the CC” is recognizable as a progenitor of the later Politburo, sharing with it such characteristics as its small size, its mandate to deal with urgent matters, and the obligation to include members of the CC present at the time a decision was taken.

The next reference to the “bureau of the CC” occurs in the protocol for January 8, 1918 (Old Style). In the sharply truncated notes written by the secretary, there is an agenda item, “Bureau of the CC,” which reads,

(1) The CC [is to move] to Moscow.
(2) The Buro [is to function] in Moscow, as in the April days.74

Brief though they are, these entries provide the key to the problem. They tell us, first, that a special “bureau of the CC,” performing tasks later assigned to the Politburo, was functioning by late November 1917 and was still operating early in January of the following year. Second, they tell us that the bureau included the four most powerful men in the party, as would be expected for a policy-making commit-
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tee. Third, they tell us that the bureau was regarded as being in some way continuous with an earlier body that had functioned "in the April days." This can only mean April 1917. Bearing in mind that the CC protocols for the period before February 1918 were still using Old Style dates, whereas the biographies of Stalin cited earlier, as well as the reference works published in the period 1954–1963, employed New Style dates for the events of 1917, the "bureau of the CC" which harked back to "the April days" can be recognized as the Politburo referred to in Tovstukha's biography of Stalin and the Soviet publications that followed his lead in this matter.

The conclusion is virtually inescapable: a "bureau of the CC" was set up immediately after the April Conference, consisting of Lenin, Zinoviev, Stalin, and Kamenev, with the task of providing leadership for the party.

Yaroslavsky formulates the point concisely:

In May 1917, after the April Conference, Stalin was elected a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, and he has remained a member of that body ever since.75

For once, Yaroslavsky was telling the truth—a truth that Western scholars have generally ignored on the grounds that it was simply another of Yaroslavsky's shameless lies on behalf of the Stalin cult.

It would be interesting to know why the Soviet historical profession (read: the Communist party) has decided to suppress the facts about the date of origin of the Politburo and to adopt instead the erroneous version long current in the West. The decision may be in some way related to the parallel decision to withhold from publication the protocols of the CC from the period March–August 1917.

For our present purposes, the cardinal point is that Stalin was chosen by Lenin as a member of his "bureau of the CC" at the time it was set up in May 1917 (New Style). In making that choice Lenin had to overlook, not only Stalin's inept handling of his responsibilities as a member of the editorial board of Pravda in the period before Lenin's return in early April, but also the undesirable "personal characteristics" that had led the Russian Bureau on March 12 to exclude Stalin from full participation in its work. What were the positive features Stalin had to offer which, in Lenin's eyes, outweighed these shortcomings?

There seems little doubt that Stalin's major value to Lenin at this time was as spokesman for Lenin's views on the national question. No other prominent non-Russian party figures (except the Jews Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were unsuitable) were available to Lenin for that purpose, to which he attached cardinal importance. Given the stub-
bornness and the size of the non-Russian opposition to Lenin on this point at the Seventh Conference, it is entirely conceivable that if Stalin had not come out in support of Lenin and lent him his own authority as the party's recognized spokesman on the national question, a majority of the delegates would have defied Lenin and voted either to support Pyatakov's competing draft resolution or to follow Makharadze's proposal to defer consideration of the national question to a later date.

Stalin's value to Lenin in April 1917 transcended the national question, however. Since April 7 Stalin had shown a willingness to place himself entirely in Lenin's hands and accept without hesitation Lenin's views on the major problems facing the party. In pursuit of this purpose, Stalin had served effectively on the opening day of the conference in helping Lenin crush an incipient grass-roots mutiny. Stalin's intellectual crudeness, which led Trotsky and other party intellectuals to belittle his potential as a party leader, was exactly what Lenin needed at that point.

It was the combination of these traits and characteristics in Stalin which recommended him to Lenin. But there must have been something more to make Lenin offer Stalin a position on the policy-making "bureau of the CC." That something more may have been Lenin's recognition that Stalin had aspirations to leadership, that he was already, in his own eyes, one of the party's top figures. Seen in this light, Stalin's blunders in March acquire a different aspect from the one in which they are usually interpreted. What mattered to Lenin was not that Stalin made blunders—tactical errors were forgivable, if the wrongdoer was willing to correct them (and Lenin was happy to provide instruction). What mattered was the innate capacity for leadership, and by his actions in March Stalin had shown that he possessed that quality. He had overcome an initial setback, asserted his authority, redirected the party's course, and influenced the views of the party's membership. The fact that he did these things in pursuit of goals that Lenin regarded as misguided was less important than the fact that he had shown leadership qualities. It was for this above all that Lenin marked him out as one of the members of the ur-Politburo.

Is it possible to name the specific occasion on which Lenin decided to offer Stalin a position on the "bureau of the CC"? Indirect evidence provides some pointers.

Working with Stalin in the editorial office of Pravda in the period between April 7 and the opening of the April Conference on the twenty-fourth gave Lenin his first opportunity to evaluate the "marvelous Georgian" on a day-to-day basis. What he saw was an eager, ambitious young man, uncultured but not illiterate, lacking in origi-
nal ideas and with only a shaky grasp of Marxist principles but willing to learn and able to formulate effectively what he had learned. For Stalin the opening session of the April Conference was a crucial test, and he passed it with flying colors. By choosing Stalin as one of his two defenders in the debate on the current situation at the session of April 24, Lenin indicated that he already regarded Stalin as one of his closest aides. In all probability the decision to invite Stalin to join the "bureau of the CC" had already been tentatively formulated at that point. If Stalin failed to rise to the challenge, Lenin could drop him and look elsewhere. Instead, Stalin made effective use of his opportunity, far surpassing the more experienced Zinoviev in the forcefulness of his defense of Lenin.

In all probability, therefore, the offer was made on or shortly after the first day of the conference and was linked with the invitation to Stalin to present the report on the national question, which was both a mark of confidence on Lenin's part and a responsible service to be performed. In that sense we can speak of a bargain between Lenin and Stalin: in return for supporting Lenin on the national question, Stalin was invited to join Lenin's inner circle. But we know that the offer was made and accepted before the report on the national question was delivered, since the voting on the CC preceded the report. As we have seen, that order of events represented a deviation from the agenda originally planned for the conference. The change must have had Lenin's approval, or rather, must have been initiated by him. The most obvious effect of the change, as far as Stalin was concerned, was to separate his report on the national question from the elections for the CC and consequently to force the delegates to decide on his candidacy entirely on the strength of Lenin's endorsement of him.

Did Lenin fear that Stalin might not handle himself well in presenting the report? Or did he want to make sure of Stalin's election to the CC before the debate on the national question, which was bound to be bitter and which might well damage Stalin's standing in the eyes of the non-Russian opponents of Lenin's national policy? If the vote had been taken after Stalin's report, the hard-core opponents of Lenin's national policy would scarcely have permitted Stalin to run up the third highest number of votes in the elections for the CC. The shift of items on the agenda can therefore best be explained as a tactical move by Lenin to protect Stalin's standing in the party from the potentially adverse effects of his participation in the debate on the national question.

What it cannot be used to explain is the alleged helpful effect of Stalin's report on his vote total in the CC election, since the delegates had to make their choice on the bare evidence of Lenin's endorse-
ment, before Stalin had delivered his report. The high vote they cast for Stalin was therefore an indication of the strength of Lenin's authority in the party, not of Stalin's stature as party expert on the national question.

This analysis may serve to clear up one of the minor mysteries of the revolutionary period, namely why Molotov, who had been pushed aside by Stalin in March, later became one of Stalin's most faithful supporters. In terms of policy, the problem appears a difficult one: in March it was Molotov, not Stalin, who followed a line close to that of Lenin on all the major questions facing the party. If correctness of policy was to be the acid test for leadership roles in the party, it was therefore Molotov, not Stalin, who should have been rewarded by Lenin at the April Conference by elevation to a top position. Instead, Molotov's candidacy for the CC went unsupported by Lenin, and he failed to receive the necessary votes for inclusion.

By disregarding Stalin's blunders in March (and, by the same token, overlooking the correctness of the line pursued by Molotov, Shlyapnikov, and Zalutsky), Lenin provided a graphic demonstration of the relative importance in his eyes of policy and leadership potential. Stalin had the latter, as he had shown; his political blunders were venial, especially because he was eager to leave them behind under Lenin's tutelage. By conferring on Stalin the accolade of recognized leadership, Lenin indicated the prime value he assigned to power capability in his close associates. As to policy, he was fully capable of making that himself; all he required of his colleagues was a willingness to accept his views. It may well have been this demonstration that convinced the young Molotov that Stalin was, in very truth, the potential leader he believed himself to be. Whatever Molotov's reasons were, from the time of the April Conference he accepted Stalin as his personal leader.