Stalin in October

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The July Days and Their Aftermath

The Bolsheviks' Evaluation of the June 18 Demonstration

By Bolshevik standards the June 18 demonstration had been a great success, revealing the tremendous power latent in the capital's masses of workers and soldiers and their strong affinity for the slogans and policies of the Bolshevik party. The Mensheviks, who had originally proposed the demonstration, proved incapable of swaying it in the direction they desired, support for the Provisional Government and their own brand of moderate socialism. Paradoxically, however, the immediate sequel to the demonstration was a resurgence of popular support for the government and the adoption of a policy of tactical retreat by the Bolsheviks.

Had the Bolsheviks miscalculated? No, Stalin explained to the Sixth Party Congress on July 27; the reason lay in the intrusion of a new factor into the situation. “The comrades know,” Stalin said,

how the demonstrations of June 18 went off. Even the bourgeois papers said that the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators marched under the slogans of the Bolsheviks. The principal slogan was “All Power to the Soviets!” No fewer than 400,000 persons marched in the procession. . . . It
was the general conviction that the demonstration of June 18, which was more imposing than the demonstration of April 21, was bound to have its effect. And it should have had its effect. But that very day our armies launched an offensive, a successful offensive, and the “Blacks” [right-wing extremists] began a demonstration in the Nevsky Prospect in honor of it. That obliterated the moral victory gained by the Bolsheviks at the demonstration. It also obliterated the chances of the practical results. The Provisional Government remained in power.

Whatever one may think of Stalin’s explanation for the shift in the popular mood (and there is independent evidence that the government’s announcement of the Kerensky offensive did evoke a widespread, if ephemeral, outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm, especially among the well-to-do sections of society), his explanation is valuable for its revelation that some Bolsheviks, and presumably Stalin himself, saw the June 18 demonstration as a means of achieving “practical results,” which might well include the overthrow of the Provisional Government. In Stalin’s reasoning, the April 21 demonstrations had shaken the Provisional Government and forced it to sacrifice two key ministers; the far more impressive demonstration of June 18 should have had correspondingly impressive “practical results.”

Thus, the Bolshevik leadership recognized that the immediate sequel to the June 18 demonstration would probably not be a further heightening of their influence and authority among the masses. Bolshevik strategy at this point, Stalin continued in his report to the Sixth Congress, stressed the importance of delay:

We decided to wait until the moment of the attack on the front was over, to give the offensive [an opportunity] definitely to fail in the eyes of the masses, not to yield to provocation and, as long as the offensive was under way, under no circumstances to demonstrate, to wait it out and allow the Provisional Government to exhaust itself.

Stalin said nothing of the wider considerations that might have prompted the Bolshevik leadership to observe caution in their strategy. It was Lenin who articulated this aspect of the situation most clearly, in a speech to a session of the conference of Bolshevik Military Organizations on June 20, at which he warned that

One false move on our part can wreck everything. If we were now able to seize power it is naive to think that having taken it we would be able to hold it.

The problem, as Lenin saw it, was that the Bolsheviks did not yet enjoy sufficient influence among the masses and their elected repre-
sentative bodies, the soviets. Lenin was particularly concerned to prevent attempts at an unsupported coup d'état:

In order to gain power seriously (not by Blanquist methods), the proletarian party must fight for influence inside the Soviet.

But he expressed firm faith in the underlying social forces that he felt were bringing the socialist revolution closer:

Events should not be anticipated. Time is on our side. ²

Still under the influence of the shock that had led to his reversal of position on June 12, Lenin now advocated caution and restraint in terms virtually indistinguishable from those used by Kamenev. It was only with the greatest difficulty, however, that Lenin was able to impose a bridle on the impetuous advocates of immediate action in the Military Organization and the Petersburg Committee. At a meeting of the committee on June 20 there was strong pressure for a radical line, and two days later the left-wingers pushed further with their demands before an unofficial joint meeting of the party Central Committee, the Executive Commission of the Petersburg Committee, and the Military Organization. Undeterred by the leadership's official policy of caution, the proponents of immediate action in the Military Organization began systematic, though unacknowledged, preparations for a new demonstration, which they hoped would develop into a full-scale uprising.

Stalin evidently took no direct part in these debates, though he had already shown that his sympathies lay with the left wing. When he addressed the conference of military organizations on June 21 it was to deliver a report on the national minority regiments in the army, a subject in line with his public identification as the party's leading specialist on the national question.

Stalin's apparent restraint coincided with a strengthening of his political position within the soviet bureaucracy. At its final session, on June 24, the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets elected an all-Russian central executive committee (Russian initials VTsIK) to function as its policy-making body between congresses, and Stalin was one of thirty-four Bolsheviks named to this new body. As a member of the VTsIK Stalin was given the opportunity to participate in official gatherings and to observe at close quarters the working of a semigovernmental institution. For Stalin, this was congenial work, and it is suggestive that the muting of his sympathies with the left-wing hotheads coincided with his assumption of new responsibilities in the VTsIK.
Buildup for the Military Uprising

Definite plans for a military demonstration against the Provisional Government were under way at least as early as July 1, the date on which members of the All-Russian Bureau of Military Organizations learned that the First Machine Gun Regiment was planning to organize a demonstration. Podvoisky, leader of the Bolshevik Military Organization, later reported at the party's Sixth Congress that by July 2 the Military Organization was cognizant of plans for an uprising on the following day. In an exceptionally frank and revealing article published in 1932, V. I. Nevsky, another member of the Military Organization, disclosed that the organization's actions, though ostensibly aimed at holding back the troops, in line with the official Bolshevik policy of restraint, had actually contributed to the soldiers' readiness to demonstrate and to their belief that they would have Bolshevik support.

In so doing, the Military Organization was violating the spirit, if not the letter, of a Central Committee directive adopted on July 2, which categorically forbade the Military Organization to take part in preparations for the demonstration and which ordered it to take all necessary measures to prevent an outbreak. Lenin was not present at this meeting, having left Petrograd on June 29 to recuperate from an illness, but the decision was fully in line with his views.

The July Days: Outbreak

With Lenin temporarily absent from the capital, Stalin had an opportunity to demonstrate his growing influence as one of the leaders of the Bolshevik party. The record of the period is incomplete and at times confused to the point of chaos, but the nature of Stalin's role emerges with reasonable clarity. It is that of a skilled negotiator, trusted in the VTsIK as well as in the Bolshevik Central Committee, trying to steer a cautious course for himself and for the party in a rapidly changing situation.

The initiative for the armed demonstrations that broke out on July 3 evidently came from the soldiers themselves, spurred on by the imminent threat of transfer from garrison duty in the capital to service in the front line, to stiffen the sagging offensive. Members of the Military Organization continued to provide encouragement and guidance for the insurgent troops, notwithstanding the fact that official Bolshevik policy, as formulated by the Central Committee on July 2, was to abstain from participation in an armed demonstration. Even as late as the afternoon of July 3, at a time when the troop movements in
the street were already in full swing, the Bolshevik Central Committee voted against participation in the demonstration. A report to this effect was carried by Stalin to a joint meeting of the VTsIK and the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, at which the problem presented by the troop demonstrations was being hotly debated.

The sense of urgency which pervaded the joint meeting of the executive committees was due in part to the fact that the stability of the Provisional Government was being threatened not only on the streets but also from within. Late on July 2 Kerensky and two government ministers, Tseretelli and Tereshchenko, returned from Kiev following negotiations with the separatist Ukrainian Rada. The concessions to Ukrainian nationalism agreed to by the three-man commission were too much for the Cadet ministers in the cabinet, and three of them announced their resignation late on July 3.

Acutely aware of the danger that the weakened Provisional Government might succumb to new popular pressures, the joint meeting of the executive committees adopted a resolution banning all demonstrations, an action fully supported by Zinoviev and Kamenev. So strong was the soldiers' surge toward direct action, however, that the Bolsheviks' resolve to keep their hands off soon began to crumble. The Second All-City Petrograd Bolshevik Conference, meeting on the afternoon of the third to debate the question of establishing its own newspaper (a proposal strongly opposed by Lenin, who feared it as a threat to the party's centralized control), found itself confronted by the growing insurgency of the troops, especially the First Machine Gun Regiment, and voted not merely to support the demonstration but also to demand that the VTsIK assume power.

Encouraged by the conference's support, the soldiers redoubled their pressure on the Bolshevik leadership to sanction and lead their action. Early in the evening of the third the workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet, having learned of the conference's pro-demonstration decision, followed suit by voting to support the demonstrations. Cautiously, however, the workers' section decided that they would try to keep the movement in peaceful channels.

Now the pressure began to mount on central Bolshevik headquarters, located in the Kshesinskaya mansion. Hurried and informal debates were conducted with regard to the proper course of action, combined with unavailing efforts to calm the restless soldiers. Recognizing that the soldiers were determined come what may to march on the Provisional Government's meeting place in the Tauride Palace, the Military Organization finally agreed to lead a demonstration for the avowed purpose of presenting the soldiers' demands to the Provisional Government. Carried away by the contagious air of insurgency
which pervaded the talks, even the usually cautious Zinoviev joined
Trotzky, one of the soldiers' favorite orators, in demanding the peace­
ful transfer of power to the soviets. A formal vote to this effect was
taken by the Central Committee.

The Kronstadt Sailors Join the Demonstration

There is general agreement among contemporary observers that the
arrival in Petrograd of an armed contingent of sailors from the Kron­
stadt naval base early on July 4 made an exceptionally strong impact
on the tension that gripped the capital. For this episode the historian
is fortunate in having available the memoirs of F. F. Raskol'nikov
(pseudonym of F. F. II'in).\(^5\)

In 1917 Raskol'nikov, a young midshipman in the Baltic Fleet, held
the post of deputy chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet of Sailors' Depu­
ties. An ardent Bolshevik, Raskol'nikov served as principal liaison
man between the Kronstadt Soviet and Bolshevik headquarters in
Petrograd. At Lenin's insistence, regular telephone contact had been
established in May. In Raskol'nikov's words,

> We had a very good system whereby I rang Petersburg [Petrograd] every
day and, asking to speak to Lenin, Zinoviev or Kamenev, reported to them
everything that had happened at Kronstadt and received the instructions
needed for our current work.\(^6\)

On July 3 a group of soldiers from the First Machine Gun Regiment
came to Kronstadt to urge the sailors to join the demonstrations that
were planned or that were already in progress. Before the machine
gunner delegates were permitted to address a meeting of sailors,
Raskol'nikov called Bolshevik headquarters and was warned by Ka­
menev that the soldiers were ignoring the party's opposition to demo­
strations and were already cruising the streets of Petrograd in ar­
mored cars mounted with machine guns. Kamenev reiterated the
party's opposition to demonstrations.

Meanwhile, the soldiers at Kronstadt had succeeded in convoking
an impromptu gathering of sailors and were urging them to join the
action in Petrograd without delay.

In accordance with Kamenev's instructions Raskol'nikov called for
restraint, pointing out the danger of provocation from right-wing
elements. To gain time he proposed the establishment of an organiza­
tional commission to check on the situation in Petrograd and to
ascertain the mood of the fleet. The sailors having reluctantly ac­
cepted the proposal, Raskol'nikov, as a newly elected member of the
investigating commission, again telephoned Bolshevik headquarters
for guidance and information. This time it was Zinoviev who an-
swered the phone, to tell Raskol’nikov of the Central Committee’s
newly adopted decision to support the demonstrations planned for
July 4 as armed, organized, and peaceful (Zinoviev stressed the word).

This decision, reported by Raskol’nikov to the sailors, was enthusi-
astically received, and the meeting unanimously decided to take part
in a peaceful but armed demonstration on the following day.

The night of July 3 was taken up with preparations, and on the
morning of July 4 an improvised flotilla assembled to take the armed
sailors, joined by some workers and soldiers, to Petrograd. It was a
formidable expedition, numbering some ten thousand demonstrators,
of whom perhaps twenty-five hundred were sailors with rifles.7

In Raskol’nikov’s account there is no suggestion that at any time
did the leaders of the Kronstadt sailors or the sailors themselves con-
sider taking part in an unarmed demonstration or that the question of
whether or not the demonstrators should be armed was raised in the
telephone contacts between Kronstadt and Bolshevik headquarters in
Petrograd. Raskol’nikov provides the following rationale in favor of
an armed demonstration:

It was easy to foresee that an unarmed demonstration would have been
dealt with by “armed force.”

Furthermore,

The need for arms, the only means of defense in the event of blood-letting,
was also dictated by the circumstance that, while announcing a demon-
stration, we retained the right at any moment to turn it into an armed
uprising.8

Thus, it was with a deliberately open-ended strategy that the sailors
were led into the tumultuous situation in Petrograd on July 4.

The Question of Lenin’s Real Aims

All during the hectic events of July 3 Lenin was absent from Petro-
grad, so that the debates, decisions, and reversals of decisions by the
Bolshevik leadership were taken without the benefit of his immediate
guidance. As to his real intentions in the crisis there is a fundamental
split in the sources, Bolshevik historians maintaining that Lenin still
favored a policy of caution and restraint, whereas the Menshevik
memoirist N. N. Sukhanov asserted that Lenin was really aiming at
the seizure of power, using the military demonstrations as his spring-
board.9 The nonavailability of the protocols of the Bolshevik Central
Committee for this period renders full certainty impossible, but the
evidence indicates that even at the height of the action Lenin was still urging a policy of restraint. Hurriedly summoned back to the capital by his colleagues early on the morning of July 4, Lenin, shaky from illness, addressed a restless assembly of soldiers and sailors from the balcony of the Kshesinskaya mansion in an attempt to moderate their ardor. His advice was to maintain order, resist provocations, and return peacefully to their barracks.

Lenin’s impromptu address, which was to be his last public appearance before the seizure of power in October, had little visible effect on his audience, but his continued advocacy of caution and restraint had a sobering influence on those in the party who favored an all-out test of strength with the Provisional Government. No one in the party was willing to challenge Lenin directly, and even those who privately hoped for a successful armed uprising were loath to assume its leadership in the absence of Lenin’s sanction. Deprived of the kind of disciplined and organized party control which had helped make the June 18 demonstration a success, the troop movement on July 4 began to falter and lose momentum.

The Bolsheviks Accept Leadership in the Demonstrations

Part of the confusion which hangs over the July Days is due to the fact that Pravda’s editorial board found itself unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing situation and the sharp reversals of policy within various party bodies. The early morning edition of Pravda on July 4 was originally intended to feature an appeal drafted by Zinoviev and Kamenev calling on the masses to observe restraint, but when the Central Committee decided late on July 3 to support the demonstrations the appeal was pulled out of the matrix for the following day’s edition without anything being substituted, so that the July 4 edition came out with a blank space prominently featured on the front page. Someone—possibly Stalin—had meanwhile drafted a proclamation calling attention to the internal difficulties besetting the Provisional Government and demanding its replacement by a “new power”—the Soviet of Workers’, Soldiers’, and Peasants’ Deputies.10

Officially the July 4 proclamation is not claimed as the work of Stalin, and its real authorship must remain a matter for conjecture. It can be argued, however, that its basic line is consistent with that of the June 10 and 18 proclamations, the authorship of which is officially ascribed to Stalin. Whoever wrote it evidently believed that the long-awaited moment was at hand when the Provisional Government would go down in defeat before the triumphant masses.

If it was not Stalin who wrote the leaflet—and the evidence in favor
of his authorship is at best slender—who was its author? The most likely candidate is S. Ya. Bagdatiev, who had called for the overthrow of the Provisional Government in April and who is reported to have written a leaflet over the signature of the Petersburg Committee calling for a demonstration on July 3.\(^\text{11}\)

Armed with the new proclamation, Bolshevik agitators on the morning of July 4 hurried out to factories and barracks to supervise the election of delegates charged with carrying to the executive committees the demand for transfer of "All Power to the Soviets." While the revolutionary spirit of the workers remained high, however, the mood of the garrison troops was becoming less militant.\(^\text{12}\)

The Provisional Government Prepares to Defend Itself

At the same time that the troops’ militancy was dimming, the Provisional Government was initiating a series of moves for its own defense and the defeat of its most threatening adversary, the Bolshevik party. One of the first and, as events were to prove, most successful moves in this direction was a propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting Lenin. Late on the evening of July 3, P. N. Pereverzev, minister of justice, suggested that stories be put out alleging that Lenin had been accepting financial support from the German General Staff. Ever since Lenin’s return in April, charges of Bolshevik disloyalty and subservience to German interests had circulated in the capital, and they had had a profound effect, especially in the army. By early July, investigators employed by the Provisional Government had unearthed some of the details surrounding Lenin’s clandestine contacts with the Germans, and while the government’s information was neither complete nor accurate, enough was known to provide the basis for a plausible prima facie case of treason on the part of Lenin and the Bolshevik party.

Pereverzev’s suggestion was taken up with enthusiasm in the Provisional Government, and a former member of the Bolshevik party, Gregory Alexinsky, was persuaded to serve as sponsor for a collection of forged documents designed to prove Lenin’s treachery. By the afternoon of July 4 Pereverzev’s preparations were complete, and calls were made to all the city’s newspaper editors to attend a press conference at which the story would be released.

Patriotism and a sense of duty were still potent factors among the army rank-and-file, and for many soldiers the idea of taking part in a direct assault on the government was repellent. During the afternoon of July 4, reports about Lenin’s link with the Germans were presented to a number of garrison units, and the resultant swing in the troops’
attitude away from the Bolshevik leader fully confirmed Pereverzev’s judgment that this propaganda weapon could have a devastating effect on the Bolsheviks’ standing and influence among the troops.

In this emergency—a real crisis for Lenin, since he could not be sure just how much the Provisional Government had been able to piece together with regard to his German dealings—the man who came to Lenin’s aid was Stalin. It was Stalin, playing on the comradely feelings of a fellow Georgian, who went personally to N. S. Chkheidze, one of the chairmen of the VTsIK, with the urgent request that he take immediate action to block publication of the story. The feeling of solidarity within the “revolutionary democracy” of socialist parties, still regarded as including the Bolsheviks, was potent enough to persuade Chkheidze, reluctantly backed by the more skeptical Tseretelli, to accede to Stalin’s plea. Nearly all the editors accepted Chkheidze’s request that they kill the story, but one small afternoon tabloid, the Zhivoe slovo, carried it, under the heading “Lenin, Ganetsky & Co.—German Spies.” Stalin’s effort to block its publication had therefore failed in its primary aim, but there was an important secondary effect that profoundly strengthened his standing in the eyes of the party’s leader. The question of whether or not the attempt to block the story succeeded was of secondary importance for Lenin—after all, the government had shown that it could easily find other ways to circulate the story, even if all the newspapers refused to print it. What was important for Lenin was that Stalin had stood firmly beside him at a moment of acute personal crisis. Probably no other action by Stalin throughout his long association with Lenin did so much to solidify his standing with the party leader, and the depth of Lenin’s publicly expressed gratitude is a measure of the acute anxiety he felt at the prospect of seeing his entire revolutionary career torpedoed by disclosure of his financial links with the German General Staff.13

Pereverzev’s effort to discredit Lenin was only one of the measures of self-defense adopted by the Provisional Government at the height of the July crisis. On the afternoon of July 4, the government ordered the disarming of workers and soldiers and drafted plans for the eviction of the Bolshevik Central Committee from its headquarters in the Kshesinskaya mansion. At the same time, urgent messages were sent out to a number of field unit commanders calling on them to come to the defense of the regime. These measures were taken with the support of the Soviet executive committees and the Mensheviks and SR’s who controlled their policies. At a turbulent meeting of the executive committees, which lasted until dawn on the morning of the fourth, it was demanded that “demonstrations which bring shame to revolutionary Petrograd [must] be ended once and for all.” When the meet-
ing broke up, around 5 A.M., the Menshevik and SR delegates hurried off to the factories and barracks to explain the meeting’s decision to the workers and soldiers.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the afternoon of July 4, meanwhile, conservative and right-wing elements in Petrograd were firing on the workers’ demonstrations, either to drive the workers to take cover or to provoke them into the use of arms so as to have an excuse for crushing them by force.

**Lenin Enforces the Policy of Retreat**

While the Provisional Government was trying to pull itself together, organize its defenses, and take steps to blunt the insurgent threat, the soldiers and workers who had been marching, assembling, and demonstrating for nearly two days and nights were beginning to show signs of weariness, uncertainty, and lack of leadership. The effect of the call for transfer of power to the soviets voiced in the Bolsheviks’ July 4 proclamation had been blunted by Lenin’s impromptu address to the soldiers and sailors advising them to return peacefully to their barracks. Whatever truth there may be in the reports that Lenin had been planning to use the July demonstrations as the basis for an assault on the Provisional Government, it is incontrovertible that by the morning of July 4 he had decided to call off the demonstrations and stage a general retreat. Notwithstanding the fact that the Bolshevik party at this time was far from disciplined or unified in its organization and policies, its members still looked to Lenin for guidance. Decisive for the party's tactical stance was the attitude adopted by the top echelon of Lenin’s lieutenants, who were accustomed to taking their cue from Lenin. Two of these men, Zinoviev and Kamenev, needed no persuasion to adopt a policy of caution. Trotsky was not yet a member of the party during the July Days and had no voice in shaping its policies. If it was indeed Stalin who drafted the July 4 proclamation calling for the transfer of power to the soviets, he did so on his own authority, without the backing of Lenin or the party leadership. By the time the proclamation had been issued, in any event, the change to retreat was already in full swing.

With his alertness to shifts in the balance of social forces, Lenin had decided by the morning of July 4 that the insurgent wave had already crested and that a descent into an as yet unfathomed trough was inevitable. It must remain an open question just how far Lenin’s gloomy prognosis was due to his evaluation of events in the streets of the capital and how much was due to his fear that the truth about his financial support from the German General Staff was in imminent
danger of disclosure. Unmistakably clear, however, is his determination to impose a policy of general retreat on the party, beginning with his talk to the soldiers and sailors on the morning of July 4.

Bringing the Central Committee to accept the need for retreat presented few obstacles; far more difficult was the problem of reining in the firebrands of the Petersburg Committee and the Military Organization. Even in a party that enjoyed a considerable degree of local autonomy and independence in policy making, however, it was obviously essential that on such an important question as this, discipline must be enforced. But it took a series of sharp clashes, stretching over the next two days, before Lenin was able to obtain general compliance with the policy of retreat.

By the evening of July 4, the cumulative evidence pointing to the necessity for an immediate retreat on the part of the Bolsheviks had convinced all but the most fanatic advocates of an armed uprising. At 8 P.M. an enlarged session of the party's Central Committee was held in the Tauride Palace, with representatives of the Petersburg Committee, the Military Organization, and Trotsky's Mezhraiontsy group present. It was a stormy and somber session, but Stalin, in his speech to the Sixth Party Congress, smoothed over the rough spots and presented matters from an unconvincingly optimistic angle:

It is decided that now that the revolutionary workers and soldiers have demonstrated their will, the action should be stopped. An appeal is drawn up on these lines: "The demonstration is over. . . . Our watchword is staunchness, restraint, calm."

The Moderate Socialists Decide to Prop Up the Provisional Government

Earlier on the evening of the fourth, around 6 P.M., the executive committees of the soviets opened a joint meeting that was to have decisive significance for the fate of the Provisional Government, the Bolshevik party, and the revolution. A clear-cut choice confronted the Mensheviks and the SR's: either they must throw their support to the Provisional Government, still reeling under the impact of the Cadet ministers' resignation, or they must accede to the demonstrators' demand—backed by some members of the Bolshevik party—that they themselves take power in the name of the revolutionary masses.

Since no Bolsheviks were present at the meeting, it fell to the lot of a member of the Mezhraiontsy group, Lunacharsky, to introduce a proposal condemning the Provisional Government and demanding the transfer of power to the soviets. Sustained by their conviction that the revolution was essentially a middle-class, bourgeois phenomenon
and that Russia was not yet prepared for a socialist revolution, the moderate socialists brushed aside Lunacharsky’s proposal—as they had similar ones presented by various workers’ delegations earlier that afternoon—and in the early morning hours of July 5 adopted a resolution voicing conditional support for the Provisional Government and asserting that should the question of transferring power to the soviets arise, “only a full meeting of the executive committees has the right to decide this question.”  

For the moderate socialists, this resolution represented the historic parting of the ways, their reluctant but nevertheless definite decision to tag along with the middle-class parties rather than risk their fate and that of Russia on the uncharted seas of a full-scale popular revolt led by the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks on the Defensive

While the executive committees were holding their long, tense meeting, a decisive shift occurred in the balance of military power in Petrograd. Throughout July 3 and into the following day, insurgent troops had controlled the streets of the capital, bolstered by throngs of aroused workers carrying placards and slogans. By the afternoon of the fourth, the troop movement had begun to subside; the workers, however, still kept up their demonstrations, and as late as 8 p.m. a noisy group of them pushed into the meeting hall where the executive committees were in session, demanding that the soviets take power. It was with a tremendous feeling of relief, therefore, that the harried delegates in the executive committee session greeted the midnight arrival of troops of the Izmailovsky Regiment, straight from the northern front, from whence it had marched to the defense of the Provisional Government and the Soviet.

The shift in the military balance was accompanied by a sharp stepping up of the government’s assault on the Bolsheviks. Early on the morning of July 5, a detachment of troops was sent to the printing press where Pravda was published with orders to wreck it, orders that the troops enthusiastically carried out. Some arrests were made, but none of Pravda’s editors, including Lenin and Stalin, were caught. On the following days the campaign to throttle the Bolsheviks’ press continued with raids on Soldatskaia pravda and Trud. With the help of sympathetic printers, however, the Bolsheviks were able to find a new press from which, on July 6, a substitute for Pravda, entitled Listok pravdy, was issued.

The next target for repression was the Kshesinskaya mansion, where the Bolsheviks had established their headquarters. An order to occupy the building was issued by the Provisional Government on
July 4, with the approval of the executive committees of the soviets. General P. A. Polovtsev, commander of the Petrograd Military District, at once began assembling a task force to execute the order. For its part the Bolshevik Military Organization, recognizing the imminence of an attack and forewarned by rumors of Polovtsev's preparations, set up patrols at the mansion and prepared to defend it by force of arms. Preparations were also made to defend the nearby Peter and Paul Fortress, where the Bolsheviks had established their reserve headquarters.

While government forces were preparing for the assault, the Bolshevik leadership, meeting on the afternoon of the fifth, reaffirmed their decision to conduct a tactical retreat. Zinoviev, now clearly identified as an opponent of further demonstrations, was sent by Lenin to the Peter and Paul Fortress to order its surrender, an order that the Military Organization ignored. The difficult task of negotiating the surrender of the forces defending the Kshesinskaya mansion was assigned to Stalin. In a talk with Tseretelli late on the afternoon of the fifth, Stalin sought assurances that there would be no bloodshed and that the Bolsheviks would be provided with new meeting quarters in return for an agreement to hand over the mansion without resistance. Stalin evidently believed that an agreement was reached along these lines; the moderate socialists, however, reneged on their promise to find alternate quarters for the Bolsheviks.18

Stalin was also called on to negotiate the disarming of a detachment of Kronstadt sailors who were defending the Peter and Paul Fortress. With little or no room for maneuver, Stalin's task was limited to securing the voluntary submission of the sailors and their agreement to return to Kronstadt peacefully and unarmed.19

Viewed from the standpoint of the Soviet and the Provisional Government, Stalin had played a useful role in these negotiations, and there seems little doubt that his services earned him some grudging respect in those quarters. It is probably for that reason that his name was not included in the list of Bolshevik leaders subject to arrest which the Provisional Government issued on July 6.

For the Bolsheviks, however, the outcome of Stalin's negotiations was a sharp worsening of their position—the loss of their centrally located headquarters, eviction from the Peter and Paul Fortress, and the graphic demonstration to the troops of their inability or unwillingness to lead or defend them.

Even after these setbacks, nevertheless, there were still some Bolsheviks who wanted to continue the struggle. There was a final flareup of the spirit of resistance among members of the Petersburg Committee at a session held on the afternoon of July 6, at which there was
sentiment for calling a general strike. Lenin, who attended the meeting, not only firmly vetoed the strike proposal but personally drafted a back-to-work proclamation for distribution among the workers. At a hastily summoned meeting of the Central Committee that evening, Lenin announced a momentous change in the party's tactics: in view of the domination of the Soviets by the Mensheviks and the SR's, he argued, the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" must be withdrawn in favor of one calling for the direct seizure of power by the Bolsheviks—not immediately, but at some later time when changed conditions made success a realistic possibility. Despite the harsh repression it faced, Lenin insisted, the Bolshevik party must meanwhile use every legal avenue open to it for political action.  

The Question of Lenin's Arrest and Trial

The order for the arrest of Lenin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, which the Provisional Government had issued earlier on the sixth, provided a test of Lenin's new line. The question now was whether the use of legal means ought to include his submission to arrest and trial. Lenin himself was undecided at the outset of the debate, at one point going so far as to draft a letter to the Provisional Government offering to submit to arrest under certain conditions. There were weighty arguments on both sides of the question. A trial, it might be argued, could be used to attack the government—the history of the Russian revolutionary movement provided plenty of instances where tactics of that kind had been effectively employed by revolutionaries. A decision to avoid arrest, on the other hand, might be interpreted as an implied confession of guilt, and thus further damage the Bolsheviks' standing among the workers and soldiers. What guarantees were there, however, that if Lenin and his aides tamely submitted to arrest they would be given a fair trial, or that they would not be lynched by some fanatical anti-Bolshevik officer or guard? For Lenin there was always the additional unspoken worry: how much did the government really know about his German contacts? If there was a trial, the question would certainly be brought up, and there could be no assurance that he would be able successfully to defend his innocence.

In the first of what was to become a prolonged series of debates on this thorny question, the Central Committee on July 6 decided against permitting Lenin to submit to arrest. Preparations were immediately launched to find a secure hiding place for him and his indicted comrades. Once again Stalin was given an opportunity to earn Lenin's gratitude. It was in Stalin's rooms with the Alliluevs that Lenin and Zinoviev spent the tense days from July 7 to 11, in fear of
imminent discovery. Stalin, with his bona fides firmly established in
Soviet circles, was not molested, and served as contact man for the
concealed Lenin. When Lenin finally decided that security demanded
that he get out of the city, Stalin was one of the small group who
accompanied him to the Maritime Station for the journey, in disguise
and under an assumed name, to a small village, Razliv, in the vicinity
of Petrograd, where the gendarmes and investigators of the Provi­
sional Government would have difficulty in finding him.

There was probably never a moment in the nearly two-decade-long
association between Lenin and Stalin when their personal relations
were more warm and cordial than in the period between Lenin’s flight
from Petrograd in July and his further move, a month later, to a more
secure hideout across the border into quasi-independent Finland.
Throughout the July crisis Stalin had stood firmly beside him, render­
ing him invaluable personal services. It was Stalin who had publicly
come to Lenin’s defense against the government’s charge of treason. It
was Stalin who arranged for the temporary quarters where Lenin and
Zinoviev took refuge July 7–11. Stalin was one of the small group of
comrades who escorted Lenin to the Maritime Station on July 11.

Even Trotsky grudgingly acknowledged the closeness between the
two men at this time. Lenin, he writes, “undoubtedly trusted him
[Stalin] as a cautious conspirator.” But it was not mere recognition
on Lenin’s part of Stalin’s conspiratorial talents; the bond between
them at this point was stronger than Trotsky was prepared to admit.
The immediate aftermath of the July Days was an organizational crisis
for the Bolshevik party, but it was also an acute personal crisis for
Lenin; and it was Stalin, more than anyone else, who helped him
weather this storm. The credit that Stalin earned in Lenin’s eyes
during the July crisis was to remain for years a reserve against which
he could draw in their personal relations, outweighing his many blun­
ders and serving to conceal from Lenin until almost the end of his life
the fact that on a number of important issues he and Stalin held
fundamentally different views.

Impact of the Military Defeat

In his report to the Sixth Congress, Stalin asserted that Bolshevik
policy immediately after the June 18 demonstration was to remain
quiet, avoid further antigovernment actions, and await the moment
when the newly launched offensive had run its course before resuming
an active policy. Bolshevik behavior during the July Days hardly fitted
into that strategy, a fact that strengthens the view that it was really
the insurgent masses rather than the Bolshevik leadership who had
precipitated that action. Late on the evening of July 6, when the Bolshevik rout was nearly complete—ousted from their headquarters, their newspapers banned, their principal leaders proscribed and fugitive—the first reports began to come in of a Russian defeat, the beginning of the inglorious end of the ill-starred Kerensky offensive which had been launched in June with so much fanfare and such high hopes. Had they been able to avoid identification with the excesses of the July Days, had they been able to stick to the strategy outlined by Stalin in his Sixth Congress speech, this was the moment at which the Bolsheviks could have capitalized on the military defeat, which rapidly assumed the dimensions of a full-scale disaster, a disaster for which the Kerensky government should have borne the primary responsibility. Instead, the Bolsheviks provided the excuse by which the government attempted, with some success, to explain away the military defeat. Press accounts in newspapers sympathetic to the government appeared on July 7 with accusations that the Bolsheviks had been a principal factor in the army’s setback, through their advocacy of defeatism and their all-too-successful efforts at undermining military discipline.

The heated debate over the question of Lenin’s arrest and trial was resumed on July 7 in Stalin’s rooms at the Alliluevs’ apartment. To explore the possibility of a guarantee of Lenin’s security, someone—possibly Stalin—undertook to ascertain whether the soviets could offer such a guarantee. Receiving a negative response, Stalin, it is said, joined the majority of the Central Committee in opposing Lenin’s submission to arrest and trial.22

Existing records of this important debate are inconsistent and confused. In some, Stalin is identified as the negotiator who sounded out the Executive Committee of the Soviet on the question of a guarantee; in others this role is assigned to Ordzhonikidze. On one point only is there nearly complete agreement, that of Stalin’s position. Even Trotsky, citing Krupskaya in support, affirms that “Stalin held out more tenaciously [against Lenin’s arrest and trial] than the others and was proved right.”23 Three weeks later, however, when this question came up once more for discussion, at the Sixth Congress, Stalin not only treated it as one not already decisively answered but even attempted to revive the project of obtaining guarantees for Lenin’s safety from the Executive Committee of the Soviet.

Kerensky Takes Power; Lenin Slips Out of Petrograd

Throughout the government crisis of early July, Kerensky was the central figure in the Provisional Government, although he was not yet
formally its leader. It was Kerensky whose actions had helped precipitate the double crisis that nearly brought down the government: by sponsoring the military offensive, thereby goading a number of military units in the Petrograd garrison into open revolt, and by negotiating the compromise with the Ukrainian nationalists, thereby provoking the Cadet ministers into the withdrawal that triggered the cabinet crisis.

Fittingly, then, it was Kerensky who emerged at the end of the July crisis as the formal and generally acknowledged leader of the Provisional Government. Prince George Lvov, a well-meaning but ineffective Cadet politician, resigned as premier on July 8, and Kerensky took his place on the following day. One of his first actions was to order a thorough investigation of the near-insurrection that had just ended. At about the same time, orders were issued to break up the First Machine Gun Regiment and send its members to front-line units.

Deprived of its founder and leader, harried and persecuted by the authorities, the Bolshevik party in the second half of July faced its greatest challenge. That it emerged from the ordeal strengthened, confident, and ready for action was due in large part to the hard work and unshaken faith of Sverdlov and Stalin.

For Stalin, the party's time of troubles was the opportunity for which he had been preparing himself. In March he had shown his eagerness to play a leading role for which he was totally unprepared. Since mid-April, however, he had been undergoing a crash apprenticeship in revolutionary tactics and principles at the hands of Lenin, master craftsman of the revolution. Now, armed with the theoretical knowledge he had previously lacked and schooled by participation alongside Lenin in a succession of crises, Stalin felt ready to step forward as the party's acting leader.

At one stroke, by ordering the arrest of Lenin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, the government had cleared the path for Stalin's rise to power. Now, too, Stalin's shrewd political maneuvering, the wisdom of his decision to retain a footing in the Executive Committee of the Soviet through his Georgian contacts and his "honest broker" negotiations with the insurgents during the July Days, paid off handsomely. The omission of Stalin's name from the list of those to be arrested reflected not merely an underestimate of his political strength on the part of the government but a positive evaluation of his status by the moderate socialist leaders in the VTsIK.

It was a stroke of luck for Stalin that Trotsky took himself out of the running by volunteering for imprisonment on July 10, thereby removing a threat to Stalin's position as acting leader of the party.
Fate seemed to have taken a hand in furthering Stalin's cause. Now it was up to him to show how well he could use the opportunity thus provided.

**The “Pencil Story”: Stalin's Daydream**

Any comprehensive attempt to trace Stalin's activities during the July Days of 1917 must take into account a curious report that first appeared in print toward the end of 1929. This report, which I call the “pencil story,” was given by the popular poet Demian Bedny (pseudonym of Yefim Alekseevich Pridvorov) in one of his contributions to Pravda's celebration of Stalin's fiftieth birthday, which fell on December 21, 1929. Two issues of Pravda were devoted to the anniversary, those of December 20 and 21, and Bedny contributed to both issues. In Pravda for December 20 he published an article entitled “Completely True,” while in the issue of December 21 his contributions took the form of a poem, “I Am Sure,” and an article entitled “Fragments.”

The pencil story occurs toward the end of “Fragments,” the major part of which consists of a discussion of Stalin's use of the “mountain eagle” image to characterize Lenin. Almost as an afterthought, Bedny then shifts to events in 1917, “on the eve of the July Days,” which establishes the date as July 3, 1917, Old Style. On that day, Bedny says, he was sitting in the editorial office of Pravda talking with Stalin. Suddenly the telephone rang and Stalin took the call. It proved to be from a sailor at the Kronstadt naval base who wanted Stalin's advice on a momentous question: should the sailors come armed to the demonstration in Petrograd then in preparation, or should they come without weapons?

Bedny found the situation extremely funny, not because of the question, which was serious enough, but because of Stalin's behavior in answering it. Puffing on his pipe and stroking his moustache, Stalin thought for a moment, then gave an answer that reduced Bedny to helpless laughter. “We scribblers,” said Stalin, “always carry our weapons—our pens—with us wherever we go. As to your weapons, comrade, you can be the best judges of that.”

As Bedny admiringly points out, Stalin had avoided recommending in so many words that the sailors come armed to the demonstration, but that was clearly his implication. In the event the demonstration turned out badly, no one could charge that Stalin had called for the use of armed force against the government. It was that aspect of Stalin's reply which earned Bedny's admiration for Stalin's “cunning.”
“Fragments” was included in a collective volume published toward the end of 1929; in the following year, a second mass edition was published.\textsuperscript{25} Thereafter, however, the article dropped out of sight. It was not included in Bedny’s \textit{Collected Works} (nineteen volumes, 1928–32), nor in the eight-volume \textit{Collected Works}, published in 1965.

Before examining the treatment that historians of the revolution and biographers of Stalin have given the pencil story, it will be useful to consider Bedny’s other major contribution to the celebration of Stalin’s birthday, the article “Completely True.” In this article Bedny uses a newspaper column by a Socialist Revolutionary émigré, Semyon Vereshchak, as the basis for a laudatory account of Stalin’s reportedly courageous behavior as an inmate in the Baku prison in 1908.\textsuperscript{26} At the bottom of the article appears the date February 7, 1928; an editorial note explains that “in connection with the fiftieth birthday of Comrade Stalin, the editorial board of \textit{Pravda} considered it appropriate to remind the readers of \textit{Pravda} of a feuilleton of Comrade D. Bedny which reflects in artistic form one of the moments in the heroic past of Comrade Stalin.”

Contrary to what one biographer of Stalin has assumed, the 1928 date does not indicate prior publication in \textit{Pravda}.\textsuperscript{27} More cautiously, Tucker states, “Bedny’s article was dated Feb. 7, 1928, but I have not been able to ascertain whether or not it appeared in print before the birthday celebration in 1929.” In fact, Bedny’s article did not appear in \textit{Pravda} in February 1928; it was, however, included in volume 12 of his \textit{Collected Works}, which came out in 1928.\textsuperscript{28}

“Completely True,” like the Vereshchak column on which it is based, has attracted favorable attention from Stalin’s biographers because of its lively portrayal of the young Stalin’s staunch behavior under the harsh conditions of prison existence. The fact that the story was told by an SR émigré, who would normally have had no reason to praise Stalin, has convinced a number of Stalin’s biographers that the story must be substantially accurate. H. Montgomery Hyde, for example, calls it “one of the most vivid and at the same time most trustworthy [reminiscences] of the young Stalin to have survived.”\textsuperscript{29}

The first of Bedny’s writings produced specifically for the birthday celebration, the poem “I Am Sure,” is a slight thing, even by Bedny’s customary lightweight standards; it amounts to little more than a plea of not being able to produce anything suitable for so momentous an occasion. It evidently served as a warm-up exercise, however, for an editorial note at the end states that the author did, nevertheless, write the article “Fragments,” which follows immediately.

Most historians of the Russian Revolution have treated the pencil story with distrust or have ignored it entirely. A number of Stalin’s
biographers, on the other hand, have been attracted to it, in part because it lends a touch of color to the account of Stalin’s activities in the July Days, in part because it brings out something of the man’s character and behavior.

The first of Stalin’s biographers to consider the pencil story was Trotsky, who called it “the enigmatic testimony of Demian Bedny,” adding, “The story was probably stylized. But one senses a grain of truth in it.” Thus, Trotsky accepted the story as essentially true, cautioning, however, that

one must not exaggerate the significance of that episode. The question probably came from the Kronstadt Committee of the Party. As for the sailors, they would have gone out with their arms anyway.  

Trotsky’s commentary marks the beginning of a tendency among Stalin’s biographers to strengthen the pencil story by adding details in an attempt to fit it into the known framework of events. Thus, Trotsky provides the hypothesis that the question “probably came from the Kronstadt Committee of the Party”; that is, it was a question to which the Kronstadt Bolsheviks really wanted an answer. But Trotsky immediately undercuts this suggestion by commenting, “As for the sailors, they would have gone out with their arms anyway.” Why, then, would the Kronstadt Committee raise the question in the first place? And why would they not identify themselves in making the call? And why would the call be directed to Stalin, at the editorial office of Pravda, rather than to the headquarters of the Bolshevik Central Committee in the Kshesinskaya mansion? Trotsky provides no answer to these questions.

Several biographers of Stalin, reluctant to abandon the pencil story but troubled by questions of this kind, have followed Trotsky’s lead in adding details that were not in the original. Thus, Boris Souvarine writes,

He [Stalin] assumed administrative work at the headquarters of the Party and of its journals, and was careful to say and do nothing which would commit him irrevocably. Demian Bedny relates with admiration the following example of his method.

Souvarine then retells the pencil story. He sees it as evidence that Stalin assumed administrative tasks and slurs over the question of Stalin’s relation to the Central Committee with the phrase, “at the headquarters of the party and of its journals.” But the sailor’s question was hardly of an administrative nature, nor would the sailors have been likely to call the Pravda editorial office in regard to a matter that required an authoritative ruling from the Central Committee.
Ulam performs a similar operation on the pencil story to increase its verisimilitude. "Stalin," he writes,

a famous story has it, was the member of the Central Committee of whom the sailors inquired by telephone whether they should bring their rifles along.\textsuperscript{12}

In Ulam's version, two significant "improvements" have been added: first, that Stalin was being consulted in his capacity as a member of the Central Committee; second, that it was "the sailors," that is, a significant body of them, not merely an unidentified individual, who were asking for Stalin's counsel.

Other biographers of Stalin who have given the pencil story some weight include Edward Ellis Smith, who notes that the story may be "unauthentic," but who nevertheless builds an elaborate structure on it, marred by a number of factual errors, for example, the date.\textsuperscript{33} Ronald Hingley ignores the question of authenticity but brings out the relevance of the story to an understanding of Stalin's character:

The [sailor's] query was embarrassing to Stalin. As an enthusiastic disruptor of the existing semi-order, he, of course, preferred armed to pacific protesters any day. After all, even under the Provisional Government incitement to armed insurrection was a punishable offense. Here was a delicate diplomatic problem which called into play both Stalin's sense of irony and his natural caution. Screwing up his face in an expression crafty in the ultimate degree, and stroking his mustache with his free hand, he spoke his Delphic reply into the telephone.\textsuperscript{14}

Misled by Smith's errors, Hyde uses the story as the basis for asserting that the demonstration of July 4 began "with Stalin, on Lenin's initiative, summoning the sailors from the naval base at Kronstadt to a 'peaceful demonstration.'"\textsuperscript{35} Alex de Jonge falls into the same trap.\textsuperscript{36}

Several biographers of Stalin, including Tucker and Payne, pass over the pencil story in silence, evidently judging it to be worthless as a historical record. Understandable and even laudable as reflecting a strict sense of what constitutes valid historical evidence, this restraint is regrettable in that it leaves the puzzle of the pencil story unsolved. After all, the story did appear in Pravda; Stalin liked it well enough to see to its republication twice; and Trotsky had a point when he said, "One senses a grain of truth in it."

What, then, is the real meaning of the pencil story? To understand its significance, it is necessary to place it in the context of known events during the July Days. Of special relevance are the available data on contacts between Kronstadt and Bolshevik headquarters in

158
Petrograd. As noted above, the memoirs of Raskol’nikov are the best available source for this question.

It is obvious that Raskol’nikov’s testimony conflicts at every point with the pencil story. The story does not give a true account of events in 1917; it is not merely “stylized,” as Trotsky put it, but palpably false. It is noteworthy that the story did not appear in print until the end of 1929; it could not, in fact, have been published earlier because it would have made Stalin look ridiculous. Only after he had won a decisive victory over all his major political rivals could such a transparent fiction have been published. But Trotsky’s assertion that “one senses a grain of truth in it” should not be disregarded. Something happened; the story was told, and it was published and republished with Stalin’s implicit endorsement. The solution to Trotsky’s “enigma” may be found in the sequence of Bedny’s contributions to Pravda on December 20 and 21, 1929. The following reconstruction appears to be probable:

First, Pravda’s editors decided to go all out in celebrating Stalin’s fiftieth birthday, devoting two issues to the event. In preparing their copy for the December 20 issue they came across Bedny’s article, “Completely True,” which he had submitted on February 7, 1928, but which at that time they considered unsuitable. In view of the heated political struggle then in progress, it would have been harmful to Stalin’s interests to cite an SR émigré, even in praise of Stalin. Bedny’s article was therefore consigned to the files, though Bedny liked it well enough to include it in volume 12 of his Collected Works later that year.

The situation was completely different in December 1929, when Stalin had emerged the victor in the struggle for power. Now there could be no danger in publishing the article. Thus, it was published in the issue for December 20. Stalin was understandably delighted. Bedny, who was a regular visitor to the Pravda offices, received a cordial invitation to meet Stalin, probably on the afternoon of December 20. In the euphoric mood engendered by his recent political victory, Stalin relaxed and disclosed some of his inner feelings.

The conversation began with a discussion of Stalin’s concept of Lenin. With a poet’s psychological insight, Bedny recognized that Stalin’s image of Lenin as a “mountain eagle” revealed more about Stalin than it did about Lenin.37

Just as the visit was drawing to a close, Stalin’s mind reverted to 1917, the July Days, and he told Bedny the pencil story, with the appropriate facial expressions and gestures. Bedny found Stalin’s performance highly amusing, but he also recognized that the story was in some way important to Stalin.
Shortly after the visit, Bedny wrote an account of its two major topics, the mountain eagle image and the pencil story. Since the article had no overt unity, Bedny called it "Fragments." (The underlying unity, Stalin's psychology, could hardly be admitted publicly.)

Why did Stalin tell the pencil story, and what psychological needs did it meet for him? Two possibilities suggest themselves. First, the story soothed an old wound to Stalin's ego. Though he had been formally a member of the ruling inner circle of the Bolshevik party in July 1917, no one had thought to ask his opinion on such an urgent question as the appearance of a contingent of Kronstadt sailors in the July 4 demonstration. Instead, it was Kamenev and Zinoviev, two other members of the center, who received the calls from Raskol'nikov at Kronstadt and who gave him authoritative direction.

Raskol'nikov's memoirs, published in 1923 and republished in 1925, must have been acutely painful to Stalin because of their casual disregard of his existence in July 1917. In recompense, the pencil story portrays Stalin as the sole Bolshevik leader whom the Kronstadt sailors consulted. (Pace Souvarine, Ulam, et al., there is nothing in the story to indicate that the sailors were consulting Stalin in his capacity as a member of the CC; the clear import of the story is that Stalin answered the query about weapons on his own authority, without reference to his colleagues.)

It seems probable that the pencil story, with its focus on the question of arming the sailors, reflects a sense of guilt on Stalin's part concerning his role in disarming the sailors at the Peter and Paul Fortress on the morning of July 6, 1917. For obvious reasons, that was an episode in which he could take little pride. He had done his duty, in fulfillment of a task assigned to him by the CC, but there was nothing heroic about his action, nothing that ministered to his need for self-glorification. If, as the pencil story would have us believe, Stalin had refrained from advising the sailors to carry arms at the July 4 demonstration, then he bore no responsibility for arranging the surrender of their arms on July 6; that responsibility fell on others.

It is noteworthy that Bedny, with his insight into Stalin's psychology, made three major contributions to the Stalin cult of personality at the time of the fiftieth birthday celebration: first, the Baku prison story in "Completely True"; second, the mountain eagle image in "Fragments"; and third, the pencil story, also in "Fragments." Bedny's role in regard to the first two was simply that of reporter and commentator; no manipulation of the data was required. In the case of the pencil story, the situation was more complex. Simply to relate the facts—that Stalin in December 1929 had spun this tall tale about long-ago events—would not suffice. What was needed, Bedny must have...
realized, was to give the story the stamp of historical authenticity by altering the dates and making it appear that his visit with Stalin in the Pravda office took place at the time of the events described in the story.

It was not Bedny's fault that the pencil story suffered from a number of obvious weaknesses, the most glaring of which was its direct conflict with established historical facts. That weakness could be met for the time being by Bedny's assertion that the story was true (Bedny was in effect saying, "I was there"). Later, it would require the suppression of materials that invalidated it, especially Raskol'nikov's memoirs and those of his brother, Il'in-Zhenevsky; finally, it would strengthen Stalin's motive for extermination of the Il'in brothers.

The pencil story suffered, however, from another, less easily remediable weakness. It disclosed all too frankly a significant aspect of Stalin's situation in 1917, his physical isolation at the Pravda office and his failure to maintain close contact with the other members of the Bolshevik leadership. For Stalin in 1917, the Pravda office served as a refuge from the tumult and uproar of revolutionary events. It can thus be seen as one of a series of refuges which mark Stalin's career, from his isolated, one-man hut in Siberian exile in 1915-16 to his Kremlin office and Moscow-region dacha in the period of his full dictatorship.

For Stalin in 1917, however, the Pravda office was a refuge that became a trap. In July, as later in October, Stalin remained outside the mainstream of events and missed some of the crucial developments of the revolution. It was in large part because the pencil story disclosed this aspect of Stalin's situation in 1917 that it was found unsuitable for use by Soviet biographers and historians, even during the period of Stalin's cult of personality.

For the insight it can provide into Stalin's mentality and unconscious motivation, however, the pencil story is a valuable historical document. Its telling to Bedny and its publication in Pravda mark the moment in Stalin's career when he instinctively felt that his recent political victory gave him power not only to determine the future course of Soviet policy but also to revise the past, to correct the historical record, to expunge evidence he found distasteful, and to substitute his own version of what should have happened, free of the fear that anyone would dare to contradict him. It was to take more than ten years and the lives of countless victims, including the Il'in brothers, before Stalin had fully achieved this goal. By that time the pencil story had been largely forgotten, ignored by Stalin's court historians and surviving elsewhere as a historical curiosity.
Historians of 1917 have been right to ignore the pencil story; its overt meaning tells us nothing useful about the history of the revolution. On the other hand, those biographers of Stalin who have attempted to use the story as evidence, however distorted, of Stalin's actions in 1917 have been misled. Seen as a mental construct dating from a period long after the events it purports to describe, it has value not for our historical understanding of 1917 but for our psychological understanding of Stalin as he was at the end of 1929.

Mid-July: Stalin Emergent

For the Bolshevik party as a whole, the July Days and their aftermath represented a serious though not fatal setback. For Stalin, however, they meant a sudden, entirely unexpected emergence as one of the party's top and most active leaders. The reasons had little to do with Stalin's own capabilities; they were due in large part to the removal of those who stood in his way, either actually, like Lenin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, or potentially, like Trotsky. By its order for the arrest of some of the Bolsheviks' top leaders, the Provisional Government temporarily muffled the voice of Lenin. Zinoviev, forced into hiding with Lenin, dropped out of active participation in the formulation of policy. Kamenev, jailed, lost the opportunity to influence either Stalin or the party as a whole. Trotsky, jailed at his own request, not yet formally a Bolshevik, presented no immediate threat to Stalin as writer, orator, or party leader.

The only potential rival facing Stalin was Sverdlov, but the latter chose to pursue a complementary rather than a competing role. Mainly concerned with management of the party machine, Sverdlov was content to leave the visible and vocal leadership of the party to Stalin.

The period from Lenin's departure from Petrograd on July 12 to the end of the Sixth Party Congress in early August, therefore, was a windfall for Stalin in which his dreams of glory seemed miraculously to have materialized. Not until the end of the 1920s was he to have such a clear field in which to demonstrate his leadership capacity.

Stalin and Sverdlov in Control

What was the relationship between Stalin and Sverdlov at this point? Was there a division of labor, or did they collaborate on the tasks facing the party? In his biography of Stalin, Trotsky assumed that they collaborated. "The daily leadership," he wrote,
fell to Sverdlov and Stalin as the most influential members of the Central Committee remaining at liberty. The mass movement had in the meantime weakened considerably. Half of the party had gone underground. The preponderance of the machine had grown correspondingly. Inside of the machine the role of Stalin grew automatically. That law operates automatically throughout his entire political biography and forms, as it were, its mainspring.

Several factors combined to lead Trotsky to that conclusion—a mistaken one, in my judgment. Most influential was Trotsky's experience during the 1920s with Stalin's masterful employment of the party machine in the struggle for power. Projecting that experience back onto the revolution, Trotsky believed he had found a recurring pattern in Stalin's career. Always intent on finding the "law" underlying surface appearances, Trotsky equated the situation facing the party in July 1917 with the entirely different one that existed after Stalin's appointment as general secretary in April 1922.

To suppose that Stalin collaborated with Sverdlov in managing the party machinery in mid-July 1917 would mean believing that as early as 1917 Stalin recognized the importance of the machine and understood how to manipulate it. Nothing in the historical record supports that conclusion, however, and there is much to refute it. Sverdlov was the first party official to master the skill of organizational control of the party machine, and his very mastery left little opportunity for Stalin to collaborate with him or learn from him. In July 1917, Stalin served as the top active party leader, while Sverdlov tended to the daily grind of party management. Even at the Sixth Party Congress Sverdlov spoke only on organizational questions, leaving the policy questions to Stalin, or, as Sverdlov himself put it in his second report to the congress,

The report of Comrade Stalin has fully illuminated the activity of the Central Committee. There remains for me to limit myself to the narrow sphere of the organizational activity of the Central Committee.

In 1917 Stalin was still searching for power through imitation of Lenin as top party leader and policy maker, little suspecting that the key to success was unobtrusively present in the organizational work of Sverdlov.

Lenin Redefines the Party Line: The "July Theses"

Though forced into hiding, Lenin had no intention of yielding his right to define the Bolshevik party line. On July 10, his last full day in Petrograd, he dashed off an article, "The Most Recent Political Situa-
tion (Four Theses),” in which he defined the existing balance of power and the response that he believed the party should make. The article constituted in effect a major realignment of Bolshevik policies toward the Provisional Government, the other socialist parties, and the Soviets.

In Lenin’s view, a military dictatorship had taken power “with the deliberate or semi-deliberate assistance of Kerensky.” The leaders of the Mensheviks and the SR’s had “completely betrayed the revolution by putting it into the hands of counter-revolutionaries and by turning themselves, their parties, and the Soviets into mere fig-leaves of the counter-revolution.” Under these conditions,

all hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian revolution have vanished for good.

Lenin saw only two possible outcomes:

either complete victory for the military dictatorship, or victory for the workers’ armed uprising.

Thus, Lenin’s immediate reaction to the party’s setback was to greatly extend his vision of the future possibilities open to the party. This was the first time since the February Revolution that he had posited an armed uprising as the next step for which the party should prepare itself.

Lenin’s most startling conclusion concerned the Soviets, or rather the slogan, “All Power to the Soviets,” which the Bolsheviks had been using with increasing response since mid-April. This slogan, Lenin now argued,

was a slogan for peaceful development of the revolution, which was possible in April, May, June, and up to July 5-9, i.e., up to the time when actual power passed into the hands of the military dictatorship. This slogan is no longer correct, for it does not take into account that power has changed hands and that the revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the SR’s and Mensheviks.

The party’s role, therefore, was to

gather forces, reorganize them, and resolutely prepare for the armed uprising . . . [whose aim] can only be to transfer power to the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our Party program into effect.

As to the party, it must revert to its practices of 1912-14, combining legal with illegal activities, making use of every legally permitted opportunity but under no “constitutional or ‘peaceful’ illusion.”
The textological history of Lenin's July 10 article is complex, but an analysis of it is necessary in order to understand Stalin's activities and policies at this time. Stalin, as we shall see, admitted under questioning at a party conference on July 16 that he did not have Lenin's theses with him, and for many years it was believed that they were lost. Meanwhile the article, "The Most Recent Political Situation," stripped of its subtitle, "Four Theses," and toned down by the removal of all references to an armed uprising, appeared in the July 20 issue of Proletarskoe delo, the organ of the Bolshevik fraction of the Kronstadt Soviet. This text, with an altered heading, "The Political Mood" (Politicheskoje nastroenie), was signed with the initial W and was not recognized as substantially the Lenin article until 1959, when A. M. Sovokin published an article on the Bolshevik Central Committee meeting of July 13-14.41

The original manuscript of Lenin's article had meanwhile been found in the party archives not long after his death and was published in 1926.42 Kamenev, who edited the volume, failed to note the crossed-out subtitle and also failed to recognize the article as the supposedly lost "July Theses." The manuscript, as published in 1926, showed editorial changes, the most important of which was the replacement of the expression "armed uprising" with the words "a determined struggle of the workers." Kamenev assumed that the changes had been made by Lenin himself for the purpose of evading government censorship and thus making possible the publication of the article, adding, however, "The article did not appear in the press."

Sovokin asserts that it was Stalin who made the editorial changes. "It has been established," he writes,

by indications on the manuscript of V. I. Lenin's article, that J. V. Stalin prepared it for publication. Guided by indications given in the article, Stalin, for conspiratorial considerations, changed the expression "armed uprising" to "a resolute struggle" and deleted the end of the article.43

Sovokin does not mention the crossing out of the subtitle, "Four Theses." Was this also part of Stalin's "editorial preparation" of the article for publication? It would seem highly probable, since it was Stalin's failure to produce the "theses" on demand which sparked a partial repudiation of Lenin's new policy line at a Petrograd Bolshevik conference July 16-20.

Stalin was entrusted with the task of presenting and defending Lenin's new policy. The first opportunity arose on July 13 and 14, when the Central Committee held an enlarged meeting, including delegates from the Military Organization, several Moscow organizations of the party, and possibly Trotsky's Mezhraionsy group.
The protocols of this important meeting remain unpublished—Sovokin says, "They have not been found"—and Stalin's part in the proceedings is unknown, but the results speak for themselves. Instead of endorsing Lenin's theses, the meeting adopted a half-way position, in effect rejecting the Leninist analysis:

On the key question of relations with the soviet, the CC chose to sit on the fence . . . unlike Lenin . . . this meeting apparently concluded that the correct path to power was still a peaceful one through the Soviet.44

While concrete proof of Stalin's contribution to this outcome is lacking, his subsequent position indicates that he disagreed with Lenin on the role of the soviets and gave only lip service to Lenin's demand for a change of orientation.

The question came up again on July 16 at a conference of the Petersburg Committee, resuming now after the interruption of the July Days. The protocols of this conference, which were published in 1927, throw a revealing light on Stalin's behavior as spokesman of Lenin's new line.45

Resumption of the Second Petrograd All-City Bolshevik Conference

On the morning of July 16, a handful of Petrograd Bolshevik delegates assembled to continue and conclude the all-city conference that had begun on July 1 but that had been interrupted by the July Days. Stalin, as the ranking party leader, was scheduled to deliver two reports: one on the current situation, the other for the Central Committee on its actions during the July Days.

The agenda called for the report on the current situation to be presented first, but on the morning of July 16 Stalin objected that because so few delegates were present the report would not be given. After some debate, a compromise was agreed on under which Stalin would present the CC report first, then the report on the current situation. (Eventually seventy-two delegates showed up.)

In his "Report by the Central Committee on the July Events," delivered at the morning session, Stalin endeavored to refute the charge that the Bolsheviks had incited and organized the demonstration of July 3 and 4, with the object of compelling the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets to take power, and if they refused to do so of seizing power ourselves.46

His defense took the form of a chronology of the events of July 3–5, beginning with the sudden intrusion into the Bolshevik all-city con-
ference of two representatives of the First Machine Gun Regiment early on the third and ending with the surrender of the Peter and Paul Fortress on the fifth. In speaking of the party's tactics, Stalin made no reference to Lenin. When he came to the surrender of the fortress, however, Stalin stressed his own role. Faced with a demand from an SR, Kuzmin, for the evacuation of the fortress, Stalin said,

The Central Committee of our party decided to do everything in its power to avoid bloodshed. It delegated me to the Fortress of Peter and Paul where I succeeded in persuading the sailors garrisoned there not to accept battle, since the situation had taken such a turn that we might find ourselves face to face not with the counter-revolution but with the right wing of the democracy [i.e., the SR's].

"It is clear to me," Stalin continued,

that the right wing wanted bloodshed so as to administer a "lesson" to the workers, soldiers and sailors. We prevented them from carrying out their plan.47

Stalin thus cast himself in an honorable role. His was the only name of an individual Bolshevik leader mentioned in the entire report. Even when he came to the charge of disloyalty directed against Lenin, Stalin omitted any reference to Lenin:

As to the infamous slander that our leaders are backed by German gold, the Central Committee considers this accusation to be completely groundless and not serious.48

During his report, Stalin was asked about the Central Committee's attitude toward the appearance in court of Lenin and Zinoviev to stand trial on the charge of treason. In reply, Stalin asserted the innocence of the party leaders but said it had been decided that they should not submit to trial, since

the Bolshevik fraction of the Central Executive Committee has no guarantee that our comrades would not be torn to pieces by illegal bands in view of the rabid calumny that is being carried on against us.

Here, too, however, Stalin contrived to stress his personal contribution to the decision:

I personally raised the question of an appearance [in court] with Lieber and Anisimov and they answered that they could not give any guarantee whatsoever.49

In his report on the July Days, Stalin minimized the importance of
Lenin’s guidance and highlighted his own direct participation in events—significantly, as a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet rather than of the Bolshevik CC.

At the evening session of July 16, Stalin presented the report “On the Current Situation.” It was to provide the basis for this report that Lenin had written “The Most Recent Political Situation (Four Theses).” A comparison of Stalin’s July 16 report with Lenin’s July 10 article reveals that Stalin either failed to grasp Lenin’s concepts or was unwilling to lend them his support. In place of Lenin’s clear-cut analysis of power relationships, Stalin offered a confused medley of ideas in which his own efforts at analysis appeared side by side with disjointed fragments from Lenin’s theses. In place of Lenin’s stark alternatives—either a right-wing military dictatorship or an armed uprising by the workers and poorest peasants—Stalin portrayed a confused and inconsistent future:

The peaceful period of development of the revolution has come to an end. A new period has begun, a period of sharp conflicts, clashes, collisions. Times will be turbulent, crisis will follow crisis.

On the question of the party’s attitude toward the soviets, Stalin failed to give a clear-cut answer. He raised the question toward the end of his report but then simply turned away from it, suggesting that the party extend an offer of unification to the left-wing socialists in the soviets; the Menshevik-Internationalists, led by Martov; and the Left SR’s, led by Kamkov. Completely missing was Lenin’s sharp break with the soviets and his demand for withdrawal of the slogan “All Power to the Soviets.” In its place, Stalin reverted to his stance of March and April.

The editors of Stalin’s Works have made numerous changes in the text, one of which might mislead the incautious reader into believing that Stalin did in fact support Lenin’s negative position on the soviets. According to the text in Stalin’s Works, he said,

The working class has proved to be more sensible than its enemies thought. When it realized that the Soviets had betrayed it, it declined to accept battle on July 4 and 5.

What Stalin actually said, according to the protocols of the conference published in 1927, was,

When it [the working class] realized that the right wing of the revolution [i.e., the Mensheviks and the SR’s] had betrayed it...
In making this suggestion, Stalin again stressed his own part in events. “On July 5,” he said,

when the Central Committee of our party issued a call to end the demonstrations, at a session of the Central Executive Committee I said, the counter-revolution is on the march, it is strangling us, but you [i.e., the Mensheviks and the SR’s] will be next, give us a hand in fighting the counter-revolution. When this proposal was presented ... they laughed at us: what kind of unity can there be with people who have disfigured themselves with blood and espionage. On July 5 and 6 it became completely clear that the Mensheviks and SR’s were against us in alliance with the counter-revolution. Now we must reject in the most decisive manner the idea of union with the allies of the counter-revolution whose hands are stained with the blood of workers and soldiers. We should help those Mensheviks and SR’s who want to fight the counter-revolution, to break away from the defencists, the betrayers of the revolution. I propose to you the plan of uniting with the left flank of the revolution.51

The key issues that Stalin had ignored or slurred over in his report were brought into sharp focus in the discussion that followed by delegates whose questions indicate that word of Lenin’s new stance had spread through the party ranks. The first questioner was a delegate named Mazlovsky, who asked whether the party, in the event of future conflicts, would lead “an armed protest.”54 In reply, Stalin failed to endorse Lenin’s call for a nationwide armed uprising; instead, he spoke of the likelihood of “armed uprisings” in the future and said the party “must not wash its hands of them,” but instead of providing a chart for the future he reverted to the July Days, arguing that the party had been right in refusing to make a bid for power.

We could have taken power on July 3 and 4; we could have compelled the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet to sanction our taking power. But the question is, could we have retained power? The front, the provinces, the Soviets would have risen against us. Power which did not rest upon the provinces would have proved to be baseless. By taking power under such circumstances we would have disgraced ourselves.

Next, a delegate named Ivanov asked Stalin,

What is our attitude toward the slogan “Power to the Soviets”? Is it time to call for “dictatorship of the proletariat”?

Cornered, Stalin finally responded with what was essentially Lenin’s position, though with a few added touches of his own:
When a crisis of power is resolved, it means that a certain class has come to power—in this case, the bourgeoisie. Can we then continue to adhere to the old slogan, “All power to the Soviets!”? Of course not. To transfer power to the soviets, which in fact are tacitly working hand-in-glove with the bourgeoisie, would mean helping the enemy. If we win, we can transfer power only to the working class, supported by the poorer strata of the rural population. We must advocate another, a more expedient form of organization of the Soviets of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. The form of power remains as before, but we change the class content of the slogan and we say in the language of the class struggle: All power to the workers and poor peasants, who will conduct a revolutionary policy.

Again, Stalin failed to make Lenin’s point about the soviets, nor did he clearly express Lenin’s call for preparations for an armed uprising.

After an impassioned but inconclusive discussion, a group of delegates asked that Lenin’s theses be read. To his embarrassment, Stalin was forced to admit that he did not have them with him but said that they boiled down to three points: (1) the counterrevolution has triumphed; (2) the Mensheviks and the SR’s have betrayed the revolution; (3) the slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” under present conditions, was a “quixotic” slogan; power must be transferred to classes, not to institutions.55

This was at best a highly oversimplified summary of Lenin’s theses; completely missing was his call for preparations for an armed uprising in place of reliance on the soviets.

In his concluding remarks, Stalin repeated his own concept of the attitude the party should adopt toward the soviets. “We are unequivocally in favor,” he said,

of those soviets where we have a majority, and we shall try to set up such soviets. We cannot, however, give power to soviets which are defending a union with the counter-revolution.

Stalin then presented an eleven-point draft resolution, “On the Current Situation.” Far from withdrawing the slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” Stalin, in the first point, called for

the concentration of all power in the hands of revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ soviets.56

It was now late in the evening, and the delegates decided to take a break, resuming their discussion on the evening of July 17. The most remarkable thing about this session was the complete absence of Stalin. He neither took part in the discussion nor defended the resolution he had introduced. The awkward matter of Lenin’s missing theses was
raised at the very outset by a group of delegates from the Vyborg district who again asked that the theses be presented. In Stalin’s absence, it was the chairman of the session, Gleb Bokii, who replied that

the theses of Comrade Lenin are not available to the presidium [of the conference].

In Stalin’s absence, it fell primarily to Volodarsky to defend the resolution on the current situation and cope with the criticisms and suggestions for change offered by various delegates. At the conclusion of the debate, but before a vote was taken, Narchuk, on behalf of a group of delegates from the Vyborg district, announced that they would refrain from voting, “since the theses of Comrade Lenin were not presented and the reporter [i.e., Stalin] did not defend the resolution.” The reproof to Stalin was unmistakable. The results were clear in the voting: 28 in favor, 3 against, 28 abstaining.

Stalin reappeared at the final session of the conference, on the evening of July 20, taking an active part in the discussion of such topics as the municipal elections in Petrograd and preparations for the coming party congress. Overall, however, he could not take pride in his performance at the conference. He had neither offered the deleg­ates a clear lead of his own nor faithfully discharged his responsibili­ties as stand-in for Lenin.

**Lenin Explains His Strategy**

The double rebuff to Lenin’s new line—at the enlarged meeting of the CC July 14–16 and the Second Petrograd Bolshevik conference July 16–20—forced him to reconsider, not his overall strategy—of that he was completely confident—but his method of presenting it to the party. Clearly, there were doubts and misgivings to be overcome, especially in regard to the soviets.

At some undetermined date in mid-July, therefore, Lenin addressed himself to the task of explaining his new policy in fuller detail. The result was the article “On Slogans,” which constitutes Lenin’s most explicit statement on the role of the soviets.

The slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” Lenin now argued, had been correct for an earlier stage of the revolution—“say, from February 27 to July 4”—but “it has patently ceased to be correct now.” The slogan, in Lenin’s view, had been appropriate only in regard to “the peaceful path for the progress of the revolution.” That period had ended “suddenly” on July 4 when “power passed into the hands of the
counterrevolution"—and Lenin reminded his readers that "the issue of power is the fundamental issue of every revolution." Under these conditions,

The slogan calling for the transfer of state power to the Soviets would now sound quixotic or misleading. Objectively it would be deceiving the public. (N.B.: Lenin's use of the term "quixotic," which Stalin picked up in his reply to questions at the Second All-City Conference on July 14, helps to place Lenin's article shortly before that date.)

How was the power of the counterrevolution to be overcome? Lenin's answer was clear.

No one, no force can overthrow the bourgeois counterrevolution except the revolutionary proletariat... The only solution is for power to be in the hands of the proletariat, and for the latter to be supported by the poor peasants and semi-proletarians.

Only when such a revolution had taken place, in Lenin's view, would the opportunity and the need for soviets arise again,

but not the present soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favor of building the whole state on the model of the soviets. It is not a question of soviets in general, but combating the present counter-revolution and the treachery of the present soviets.

Lenin steadfastly opposed any role for the existing soviets:

The present soviets have failed, have suffered complete defeat, because they are dominated by the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties.

It must remain an open question whether Lenin could have secured the adoption of his sharp turn in strategy had he been able to lead the discussion in person. His success in putting through his radical policy on the national question against stubborn opposition at the April Conference is proof that he had the power, by persuasion, prestige, and political manipulation, to impose his will on the party. In April, however, Stalin had acted effectively on Lenin's side. In mid-July Stalin gave only reluctant and grudging support to Lenin.

Lenin's condemnation of the existing soviets and his refusal to admit the possibility of their regeneration along Bolshevik-approved lines continued from his first statement of this position on July 10 for another two months. Not until his article "One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution" was published on September 14 did he retreat from his position. The question may be raised whether Lenin ever fully understood the appeal of the soviets to those who elected
them—workers, peasants, soldiers. Basically, Lenin regarded the soviets as a tactical device to be used or discarded at will. For Lenin, the slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” one of the party’s most popular, could be advanced or withdrawn on purely tactical considerations.

In the preparation and execution of the Bolshevik seizure of power in October, Lenin was again to show his disregard for the soviets and his impatience with those who differed from him on this point. His mid-July demand for withdrawal of the slogan “All Power to the Soviets” failed, in part because of Stalin’s insubordination, but also because it went against the grain of many party members and workers.

Stalin on the Role of the Soviets

In an article published in Pravda on November 26, 1924, as part of the triumvirate’s polemic against Trotsky, Stalin asserted that “after the July defeat, disagreement did indeed arise between the Central Committee and Lenin on the question of the future of the soviets.”

It is known that Lenin, wishing to concentrate the Party’s attention on the task of preparing the uprising outside the soviets, warned against any infatuation with the latter, for he was of the opinion that, having been defiled by the defencists, they had become useless. The Central Committee and the Sixth Party Congress took a more cautious line and decided that there were no grounds for excluding the possibility that the Soviets would revive.

Did Stalin in 1924 accurately report the attitude of the party leadership, other than Lenin, toward the soviets in mid-July 1917, or was his statement colored by his knowledge of later events, especially the Bolshevik seizure of power in the name of the soviets in October 1917? Contemporary evidence from mid-July 1917 indicates that at that time Stalin was not unwilling to follow Lenin’s lead in repudiating the soviets as hopelessly compromised. In an unsigned article published in Rabochii i soldat on July 17, 1917, Stalin wrote,

Yesterday the defencists renounced even the pitiful “control” over the government which they had—and reduced the “Soviets” to the role of useless rubber stamps of the counterrevolution.60

Stalin’s continuing doubts about Lenin’s uncompromising rejection of the soviets were made clear, however, in an article he published on July 20, 1917, “What Do the Capitalists Want?”61 “The fact is,” Stalin wrote,

that the soviets, before which the capitalists grovelled yesterday, and which are now defeated, have still retained a modicum of power and now
the capitalists want to strip from the soviets those last crumbs in order to strengthen their own power more fundamentally.

By July 27, just as the Sixth Party Congress was getting under way, Stalin had clarified his ideas on the soviets, broken with Lenin on this point, and was, in effect, giving renewed support to the slogan “All Power to the Soviets.”

Stalin's turnabout was made public on July 27 in his article “The Constituent Assembly Elections.” Here Stalin called for agreement between the Bolshevik party and “non-party groups of propertyless peasants” and “non-party organizations of soldiers and sailors.” The article provided a “model platform” which might serve as a basis of agreement with such non-party organizations of peasants and soldiers.

Point 20, the final one in the platform, reads as follows:

Lastly, we are in favor of all power in the country being turned over to revolutionary Soviets of workers and peasants, for only such power can lead the country out of the impasse into which it has been driven by the war, the economic disruption, and the high cost of living, and by the capitalists and landlords who are fattening on the people's need.

**Was There a Military Conference July 21–22, 1917?**

According to Trotsky,

On the 21st and 22nd of July [1917] an exceptionally important conference, which remained unnoticed by the authorities and the press, was held in Petrograd.

“The conference,” Trotsky continues,

was attended by representatives of 29 front-line regiments, of 90 Petrograd factories, of Kronstadt sailors and of several surrounding garrisons.

“It would seem,” Trotsky reluctantly conceded,

that the leading roles in this remarkable conference were played by Sverdlov and Stalin.

Except for Trotsky's statement, however, there appears to be no record of this “exceptionally important conference.” Not only did it remain “unnoticed by the authorities and the press,” it has remained unnoticed by historians and biographers of Stalin, other than Trotsky, down to the present. Was the conference, then, a figment of Trotsky's imagination?
The most likely explanation is that Trotsky misdated the military conference of June 21–22, 1917. The June conference, at which Stalin spoke on the national question in relation to the armed forces, is well documented and attracted plenty of attention by "the authorities and the press."

Trotsky's error is instructive for the light it throws on his work habits. Having misdated the conference, he tried to adjust it to the situation prevailing in mid-July; that is, the period of the emergence of Stalin and Sverdlov as leaders of the party. The effect is to put the reader of Trotsky's biography of Stalin on guard and to reinforce the lesson that Trotsky's knowledge of events during the period of his imprisonment was unreliable.

The Sixth Party Congress

Preparation: Lenin Meets Stalin

Lenin had good cause to be concerned about Stalin's stubborn refusal to toe the party line, as defined by Lenin, in regard to such a fundamental question as the role of the soviets. Since his written words had proved unavailing, it might be expected that he would make an effort to see Stalin in person and try to win him over. In any case, the imminent opening of the Sixth Party Congress on July 26 presented a challenge to Lenin to reassert his authority and to ensure that Stalin, as his spokesman, would faithfully present his views on the major questions facing the party.

A meeting between the two men shortly before July 26 would therefore be logical, and there is archival evidence that one took place. Unfortunately, the Soviet reference provides no details—neither the place of meeting nor the subjects discussed. Presumably Stalin met Lenin at his hideout in Finland, and almost certainly they discussed strategy for the congress, but until the archival reference is published in full, we can only speculate on its content.

A clue to the substance of the discussion is provided by an article, "Constitutional Illusions," which Lenin wrote on July 26, shortly after his talk with Stalin. This is another in the series of articles, beginning with "The Most Recent Political Situation," in which Lenin hammered home his conviction that the bourgeoisie, led by the Cadets, had established a military dictatorship to which the moderate socialist leaders in the Petrograd Soviet were rendering support.

Lenin mentioned the soviets only in passing; the soviets, he wrote, are trembling for their own fate as they receive message after message that the Cossacks may come and smash them up. The Black Hundred
wing extremists] and Cadet force, which led the hounding of the Bolsheviks, is beginning to hound the soviets.

Lenin saw nothing positive in the soviets and foresaw no place for them in his strategy of revolution. The article, one of Lenin's most uncompromising, took aim against exactly such "constitutional illusions" as Stalin had manifested in his article of July 24, "What Do the Capitalists Want?"

Lenin's diatribes did have an effect on Stalin, as can be seen from the latter's article, "The New Government," published on July 26. Here Stalin went a long way toward accepting Lenin's conviction that the soviets had hopelessly compromised themselves. "The Cadets," he wrote,

wanted the government strengthened at the expense of the Soviets, and they wanted it to be independent of the Soviets. The Soviets, led by "bad shepherds," have conceded this, thus signing their own death warrant.

But with characteristic stubbornness Stalin stopped short of fully endorsing Lenin's negative appraisal of the soviets. "The Central Executive Committee," Stalin wrote,

the representative of all the Soviets, is now following the lead of the Provisional Government and is masking the latter's counter-revolutionary physiognomy with revolutionary phrases.

Roles, evidently, have changed, and not in favor of the Soviets.

On the Eve: The Delegates Convene

On July 25, the day before the Sixth Congress was to open, a meeting was held to discuss procedures for the congress. Fifty delegates were present, of whom thirty had the right to vote, the remaining twenty having consultative rights only. M. S. Ol'minsky, a party member since 1898 and a representative of the Moscow organization of the party, presided at the meeting, but Sverdlov was its principal organizer; it was his proposals that were discussed and, with virtually no dissent, adopted.

The protocols of the meeting, published in Rabochii i soldat at the time and reprinted with the congress protocols in 1958, made no reference to Stalin's participation, a fact that raises some doubt about the widely expressed view that Stalin shared with Sverdlov responsibility for organizing the congress. Stalin's apparent absence from this important meeting and Sverdlov's dominant role point to the conclusion that the organizational aspect of the congress was fully in
Sverdlov's hands, with Stalin neither offering nor being asked to assist him.

**The Opening Session**

The Sixth Congress opened on the evening of July 26. Party members in the Vyborg district had worked out the logistical arrangements—lodging, subsistence, transportation, provision of a meeting place—despite the fears of some delegates that it would be impossible to hold the congress in Petrograd in view of the Provisional Government's hostile attitude.

Stalin did not attend the opening session, just as he had missed the preparatory meeting on the preceding day. Again, it was Sverdlov who provided organizational direction, presenting the regulations of the congress and its agenda. After discussion, the delegates unanimously elected a five-man presidium consisting of Sverdlov, Ol'minsky, Lenin, Yurenev, and Stalin—two of whose members would later die in Stalin's purge. Bokii proposed the election of Lenin as honorary chairman, a proposal that was adopted unanimously. On Sverdlov's proposal the delegates then voted to name five additional honorary chairmen: Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky, Kollontai, and Lunacharsky. Thus, the Mezhraiontsy made their formal entry into the congress, along with the Leninist Old Guard and the party's leading token female.

**The Second Session: Stalin Is Late**

The possibility that Stalin was engaged in image building is suggested by an incident that took place on the morning of July 27. At the designated hour of 10 A.M., only a handful of delegates—far less than a quorum—had showed up. Sverdlov was present but left when it became clear that no business could be conducted for the time being. A group of delegates—some thirty-four in all—thereupon drew up and signed a formal protest against the tardiness of their comrades. In their protest the signatories proposed the adoption of a sign-in sheet for delegates, including the time of arrival.

The principal item of business for the second session was the report for the Central Committee, which Stalin was to present. Was his tardiness inadvertent, or was it a deliberate maneuver designed to increase his stature in the eyes of the delegates? The suspicion that it was the latter is enhanced by a curious passage in one of Stalin's later writings in which he defined his concept of political greatness. The
occasion was a reminiscence of Stalin's first encounter with Lenin, at the Tammerfors Conference in December 1905. "Usually," Stalin wrote,

a great man comes late to a meeting so that his appearance may be awaited with bated breath. Then, just before the great man enters the warning goes round, "Hush . . . silence . . . he's coming." The rite did not seem to me superfluous, because it created an impressive and inspired response. How great was my disappointment to see that Lenin had arrived at the conference before the other delegates were there and had settled himself somewhere in a corner and was unassumingly carrying on a conversation, a most ordinary conversation, with the most ordinary delegates. I will not conceal from you that at that time this seemed to me to be rather a violation of certain essential rules.

It was a violation that Stalin had no intention of repeating, to judge by his late arrival at the second session. The trouble, from Stalin's point of view, was that the Bolshevik party had not yet been through the Stalin school of the thirties and had not yet learned to play its part in the ritual of charismatic leadership and devoted followers which was Stalin's concept.

The Report for the Central Committee

Had Sverdlov planned to chair the second session, as he had the first, and as he was to do in the great majority of the remaining thirteen sessions of the congress? The protocols are silent on this question; they simply omit naming any chairman for the second session. It fell to the lot of M. S. Ol'minsky to lead off.

The session opened at 10:45 A.M., three-quarters of an hour late, with Ol'minsky's reading of the statement of protest by the thirty-four delegates who had arrived on time. After a short greeting to the congress from a Latvian factory, Stalin delivered the report for the CC.

As so often in Bolshevik history, there is a tangled web of textual evidence which must be unraveled before we consider the substance of Stalin's report. The report exists in two major variants, which for convenience can be designated A and B. Variant A is the text as given in the first (1919) edition of the protocols and, with minor factual corrections, in all subsequent editions (1927, 1934, 1958). Variation A was also printed in the 1925 collection of Stalin's speeches and writings from 1917. This is an important benchmark, for it shows that in 1925 Stalin acknowledged the validity of the text published in the 1919 edition of the congress protocols.
It was not this text, however, but variant B that the editors of Stalin’s Sochineniya used in 1946. In terms of original date of publication this variant has priority, since it first appeared shortly after the report was delivered, in Rabochii i soldat for July 30 and August 8, 1917. As first published, however, variant B dealt only with the July crisis, omitting those sections of Stalin’s report which covered May and June. For volume 3 of Stalin’s Sochineniya, therefore, the editors simply lifted the appropriate sections from variant A and tacked them on at the beginning. The editors also used their blue pencils to delete or add materials they considered appropriate.

Comparison of the two variants indicates that B is, in all probability, an early draft of the report, with A representing approximately the text as delivered at the congress by Stalin. Variant B is less polished, less comprehensive, closer to the original documents on which Stalin’s report was based. From internal evidence it appears that these included a log of events for the July Days which must have been maintained at party headquarters by one of the secretaries.

Since variant A is in nearly all respects a better product, and since it was eventually recognized as the official text, the question arises, why was variant B published in 1917, and why did the editors of Stalin’s Sochineniya use it instead of variant A? A reasonable hypothesis would be that variant B represents Stalin’s original draft, whereas variant A is an edited and revised text. Edited and revised by whom? Not by Stalin himself, evidently, since in that case he would have provided the revised text, not the draft, to Rabochii i soldat. Similarly, the editors of his Sochineniya in 1946 would have used the improved, revised text. Someone other than Stalin, therefore, revised the rough draft of the report before it was delivered. Who?

Suspicion falls first of all on Lenin, whom we have seen meeting with Stalin shortly before July 26. The report as delivered by Stalin on July 27, however, expresses points of view which Stalin is known to have held but with which Lenin disagreed. If Lenin did see the draft of Stalin’s report before it was delivered, therefore, he was unable to win Stalin over to his point of view.

Other likely candidates for the role of editor are Sverdlov and Bukharin, both present at the congress and both well prepared to render Stalin this service. Bukharin had just arrived in Petrograd, however. He had to prepare his own report on the international situation and could hardly have found time to edit Stalin’s draft.

That leaves Sverdlov as the most likely candidate for the role of editor. It would appear highly probable, in any case, that Sverdlov, as acting joint leader of the party, would have had a chance to read Stalin’s rough draft.
Stalin's report (using variant A) opened with a concise and well-organized analysis of the current stage of the revolution. "Before I go on to the report on the political activity of the CC for the past two and a half months," Stalin said,

I consider it necessary to note a basic fact, defining the activity of the CC. I have in mind the fact of the development of our revolution, raising the question of intervention in the sphere of economic relations in the form of control over production, the transfer of land into the hands of the peasants, the transfer of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie into the hands of the Soviets of workers' and peasants' deputies. All of this defines the profound character of our revolution. It has begun to take on the character of a socialist workers' revolution. Under the pressure of this fact the bourgeoisie has begun to organize itself and to wait for a suitable moment for an attack. Such a moment is considered the moment of retreat on the front, or, more accurately, the moment of retreat if Germany succeeds in attacking us.

This passage, coming at the beginning of Stalin's report and in effect summarizing its conclusion, creates the impression of an editorial insertion. Omission of the passage from the text as given in Stalin's Sochineniya strengthens the view that it was not written by Stalin himself. Emphasis on the transfer of power to the Soviets rules out Lenin as its author. Again, Sverdlov appears to be the most likely candidate.

Stalin then took up the CC's activities in May, in a passage I have already quoted (see pp. 105-6). As we have seen, Stalin defined three major areas of party work in May: the reelection to the Soviets, the campaign of protest against the death sentence at the front, and the municipal elections in Petrograd.

Stalin's account of the CC's activities in June centered around the major demonstrations mounted in that month, the abortive one of June 10 and the successful one of June 18. This section of Stalin's report has also been used earlier (see pp. 137-38). There are no significant textual differences between the various versions of the report which are available.

"I now come," Stalin continued, "to what is most interesting to you [the delegates], the events of 3-5 July."

Stalin began his account with the arrival, at 3 p.m. on July 3, of two representatives of the First Machine Gun Regiment at the Petrograd City Conference of Bolsheviks, which was meeting in the Kshesinskaya mansion. In response to the soldiers' announcement of their plans for a demonstration, Volodarsky informed them that the party had decided not to demonstrate.
At this point, the two variants of Stalin’s report differ significantly. Variant A quotes Volodarsky as telling the soldiers, “‘The party has decided not to demonstrate, and party members of the regiment must not dare to disobey the party’s decision.’” Variant B strikes a less authoritative tone. After stating that Volodarsky told the soldiers of the party’s decision not to demonstrate, B adds the following explanation:

For the CC it was clear that both the bourgeoisie and the Black Hundreds wanted to provoke us into an uprising in order to fasten on us responsibility for the risky offensive. We had decided to wait for the moment of the attack at the front, to allow the attack to be thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the masses, not to yield to provocation and, while the attack was in progress, not to demonstrate under any circumstances, to wait and allow the Provisional Government to exhaust itself.71

Only after this explanation, in variant B, does Stalin’s report give Volodarsky’s warning to the soldiers, and in notably less brusque terms:

Comrade Volodarsky answered the delegates that the party had [made] a decision not to demonstrate and members of the party in their regiment must obey this decision. The delegates of the regiment departed with a protest.75

At 4 P.M., Stalin continued, the Bolshevik Central Committee, meeting in the Tauride Palace, formally endorsed the decision not to demonstrate. Stalin, on the instructions of the CC, reported this decision to the Bureau of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Soviet.

At this point, variant A takes on a personal note as Stalin states,

I gave them all the facts, informed them that delegates of the machine-gun regiment had sent their delegates to the plants and factories. I suggested that the Bureau take all means to ensure that the action [vystuplenie] did not take place. This statement, on our demand, was recorded in the protocols. Messrs. SR’s and Mensheviks, who now accuse us of preparing a demonstration, forget about this.76

In place of this graphic personal account, variant B has the following brief summary:

On the instructions of the Central Committee of the party, Comrade Stalin presents to the Bureau of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet a statement about everything which has taken place, including the decision [not to demonstrate].77
Here, it would seem, Stalin touched up and made more graphic the rough draft of his report. It is odd, however, that the editors of his Sochineniya chose the dry, colorless text of variant B in this passage. Both variants of Stalin’s report then proceed with an hour-by-hour chronicle of the mounting tension in Petrograd as columns of workers joined the soldiers’ demonstration. In a highly significant insertion, however, variant A gives the following information, completely lacking from variant B:

Incidentally, concerning Lenin. He was not present; he left on 29 June and returned to Petrograd only on 4 July, in the morning, only after our decision to intervene in the demonstration had already been taken. Lenin approved of our decision.78

The striking thing about this passage is its bare, almost perfunctory character. It says nothing about the party leaders’ decision to send a message to Lenin urging him to return to Petrograd nor about his impromptu address to the demonstrators on the morning of July 4. Far from playing a leadership role, Lenin in this portrayal is limited to endorsing a decision already taken by the party CC.

What are we to make of this grudging and minimal portrayal? A plausible conjecture would be that someone—Sverdlov, perhaps—insisted that Stalin add a statement about Lenin’s participation in the events of July 4 but that Stalin did so only to the barest minimum and with the obvious intent of reducing as far as possible Lenin’s part in decision making. In Stalin’s version, “we,” that is, the leaders on the spot, had reached a sound decision well in advance of Lenin’s return.

In preparing Stalin’s report for presentation, the editor cut out much of the detail that had appeared in the rough draft. In its place the edited text stressed the attack on Lenin as a German agent, calling it “the turning point” in the July events. In this connection Stalin mentioned his telephone request to kill the story, but asserted that the call was to Tseretelli. (In actual fact, as we have seen on p. 146, the call was to Chkheidze, though Tseretelli was also consulted.)

Variant A gives details on the negotiations of July 6 which are missing from variant B:

On 6 July our comrades Kamenev and Zinoviev conducted conversations with Liber about the protection of members of the party and party organizers from hooligan attacks, on the re-establishment of Pravda’s editorial office, etc. The conversations ended in an agreement in accordance with which armored cars would be withdrawn from the Kshesinskaya mansion. The bridges would be lowered, those soldiers remaining in the Peter and Paul Fortress would depart unhindered, and a guard would be established.
at the Khesinskaya mansion. But the agreement was not kept, since
behind the back of the Central Executive Committee a military clique,
having established a right-wing dictatorship, began to act.29

Variant A also includes (as B does not) Stalin’s curiously muted ac-
count of his own part in these abortive negotiations:

I went to the CEC with a proposal to end the matter without bloodshed.
In answer to my question, What do you want? Will you fire on us? We are
not rising against the soviet . . . Bogdanov answered that they wanted to
avoid bloodshed. We went to the staff. The military received us in an
unfriendly way, they said the order had already been given. I got the
impression that these gentlemen wanted at all costs to carry out a blood-
letting.82

The report said nothing about Stalin’s part in arranging the disarming
and surrender of the Kronstadt sailors. Variant A concludes with a
defense of the party’s behavior during the July Days, to the effect that
“our party always moved with the masses.” The party’s actions had
served to limit the bloodshed; it had played the part of a “regulator.”
This essentially defensive summing up is another obvious editorial
insertion into Stalin’s report. The rough draft, variant B, closes in-
stead with an analysis of the fateful consequences for the Mensheviks
and the SR’s of their decision to turn against the Bolsheviks and side
with the bourgeois parties:

It became clear that in betraying the Bolsheviks the SR’s and Mensheviks
have betrayed themselves, have betrayed the revolution and have un-
leashed and unbridled the forces of counterrevolution.81

The Discussion of Stalin’s Report

The pressures under which the Sixth Congress operated are reflected
in the debate that followed Stalin’s report. Twenty-nine delegates
asked to speak, but a majority voted to cut off the discussion after
only eight had spoken. A prominent theme was that the Central
Committee report had concentrated exclusively on events in Petro-
grad, to the detriment of the provinces.

A number of delegates raised questions about the CC’s conduct at
the time of the June 10 demonstration. Manuilsky was the most criti-
cal, characterizing the CC’s sudden reversals as “hysterical decisions
[which] only compromise our Central organ.”82

The CC’s actions during the July Days also came in for criticism. S.
N. Ravich, a thirty-eight-year-old delegate from the Petrograd organi-
zation, faulted the party leadership for negotiating with the CEC to
end the demonstration, rather than by a direct appeal to the workers.\(^{83}\) (Ravich's future in Stalin's Russia was not a happy one; after a number of oppositional actions he joined the Trotskyite faction and was ousted from the party in 1928; following temporary readmission he was ousted again in 1935. Sentenced to the camps in the Great Purge, he managed somehow to survive until 1955.)\(^{84}\)

With regard to the slogan "All Power to the Soviets," the most striking thing about the debate was that no one showed an awareness of Lenin's demand that it be withdrawn. Milyutin asserted that the slogan "has now become generally recognized and only those people abandon it who fear to take power, who betray it in the name of civic peace"—a thrust against the Mensheviks and the SR's but inadvertently grazing Lenin as well.\(^{85}\)

Even before Stalin had a chance to reply, V. P. Nogin, a member of the Central Committee, defended the CC against the charge that it had given too much attention to Petrograd and had neglected to inform the provinces of its plans.\(^{86}\) Petrograd, he affirmed, "is the center of the revolutionary movement." Nogin conceded, however, that there were some errors in the CC's record, especially its repeated decision not to conduct demonstrations at a time when the masses spontaneously demonstrated, forcing the CC to alter its decision. Nogin also reminded the delegates of the CC's lack of technical facilities for keeping the provinces abreast of current developments in the capital.

**Stalin Replies to the Debate**

Following Nogin's defense of the CC, the session chairman (Ol'minsky?) called for a vote on a motion to end the discussion. A majority of the delegates, anxious to get on with the proceedings, voted in favor of closure.

At this point the historian has only one text at his disposal, that of the congress protocols. The editors of Stalin's *Works* use the congress text, with editorial changes that are sometimes significant. Stalin's statements have the ring of authority. He spoke firmly but with a new degree of flexibility. He opened with a strong defense of the CC's policies:

Comrades, no one has criticized the political line of the Central Committee or objected to its slogans. The Central Committee put forward three major slogans: All power to the Soviets, [workers'] control over production, and confiscation of the landed estates. These slogans won sympathy among the masses of the workers and among the soldiers. They proved to
be correct, and by waging the fight on that basis we retained the support of the masses. I consider this a major fact in the Central Committee's favor. If it issues correct slogans at the most difficult moments, that shows that in the main the Central Committee is right. 87

There was nothing here about withdrawal of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets"; Stalin simply ignored the whole direction of Lenin's strategy since mid-July.

Turning to specific criticisms, Stalin replied first to the charge that the CC had concentrated too much on Petrograd and had neglected the provinces. With uncustomary moderation, Stalin granted the justice of the charge:

The reproach of isolation from the provinces is not without foundation. But it was simply impossible to cover all actions.

The charge that the CC virtually became the Petersburg Committee is to some extent justified. This is a fact. But it is here, in Petrograd, that the policy of Russia is being hammered out. It is here that the directing forces of the revolution are located. The provinces react to what is done in Petrograd. This is because the Provisional Government is here, in whose hands all power is concentrated. Here is the Central Executive Committee, the voice of the entire organized democracy. 88

No trace here of Lenin's bold assertion that the Provisional Government had been replaced by a right-wing military dictatorship; no echo of his call for repudiation of the CEC together with the entire soviet network.

Other weighty considerations, Stalin argued, forced the CC to act boldly, without consulting the provinces:

events are moving fast, an open struggle is in progress, and there is no assurance that the existing government may not disappear any day. Under such circumstances, to wait until our friends in the provinces catch up with us would be senseless.

Significantly, Stalin pointed to the modus operandi of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet, which

decides questions of the revolution without consulting the provinces. The whole government apparatus is in their hands. And what have we got? Our only force is in the revolutionary workers and soldiers [Works 3:180 has "And what have we got? The apparatus of the Central Committee"]. To demand of the Central Committee that it take no steps without first consulting the provinces is tantamount to demanding that the Central Committee should not march ahead of events but trail behind them. But then it would not be a Central Committee. Only by following the method
which we did follow could the Central Committee keep abreast of the situation.

Stalin's defense of the CC was reasonable and well founded. The moderation of his tone and his willingness to grant the validity of the charges against the CC may reflect the fact that he had often been in the opposite situation as a provincial party worker critical of the policies laid down by the party's central leadership. Now he was seeing just how difficult it was to coordinate policies at the center with those in the provinces.

Ignoring the criticism of the CC's vacillation at the time of the June 12 demonstration, Stalin dealt briefly with the events of July 3-5. He admitted that there was failure but insisted that what had taken place was a demonstration (demonstratsiya), not an uprising (vosstanie).

As to Manuilsky's reproach that the CC had failed to put out leaflets explaining the events of July 3-5, Stalin reminded the delegates that

our printing press had been wrecked and it was physically impossible to get anything printed in other printing plants, as this would have exposed them to the danger of being wrecked like ours.

He ended on an optimistic note:

All the same, things here are not so bad; if in some of the districts we were arrested, in others we found a welcome and were greeted with extraordinary enthusiasm. And now, too, the spirit of the Petrograd workers is splendid and the prestige of the Bolsheviks is immense.

With that inspiring message Stalin concluded his reply to the discussion, but he still had something to add. "I should like," he said, "to raise a few questions." First was a proposal to prepare a manifesto explaining the facts about the slander of the party leaders. (Lenin was not specifically mentioned.) The commission charged with drafting this manifesto, Stalin suggested, should also issue a proclamation to the revolutionary workers and soldiers of Germany, France, England, and so on, informing them of the events of July 3-5.

Stalin's second point was to reopen the question of a trial for Lenin and Zinoviev. "Just now," he said, "it is still unclear who holds power"—a statement that would have shocked Lenin. Even more startling was Stalin's conclusion:

If at the head [of the government] there will be a power which can guarantee our comrades against violence, which will have at least some honor, they will appear.
Thus, Stalin of his own free will reopened a question that had seemingly been disposed of before the congress. The delegates were unsure of how to deal with the question but voted to add it to the agenda. They also voted to set up a commission to prepare the manifesto and proclamation called for by Stalin, naming him a member of the commission, together with Bukharin, Sokol'nikov, Ol'minsky, Manuilsky, and Skrypnik.

The Third Session

The third session of the congress opened on the afternoon of July 27, with Sverdlov presiding. The first item on the agenda was the question raised by Stalin of the appearance in court of Lenin and Zinoviev. Of the nine delegates who spoke on this topic, only three—Volodarsky, Manuilsky, and Lashevich—considered it desirable that the party leaders submit to arrest. Their chief spokesman, Volodarsky, explained that their position was based on the assumption that a trial would turn into a countertrial of the Provisional Government, and he offered a resolution to that effect. The majority of speakers, however, strongly opposed the idea of a trial under existing conditions. Ordzhonikidze, Dzerzhinsky, and Skrypnik, who led off the debate, were especially firm.

Bukharin argued that under existing conditions there could be no guarantee that the trial would be fair or that the accused would be secure against violence. A resolution to this effect, which Bukharin introduced, was approved unanimously, in preference to one offered by Volodarsky and a much stronger one proposed by A. G. Shlikhter, a veteran of the revolutionary movement. A noteworthy feature of Bukharin's resolution was the inclusion of Trotsky's name, along with those of Lenin and Zinoviev, as one of the party leaders to whom the congress sent its greetings—the first reference at the congress to Trotsky in this capacity.

Stalin took no part in the discussion of the question he had raised; if he had hoped to sway the congress toward approving Lenin's submission to arrest, the mood of the delegates ruled out such a decision.

With that question disposed of, at least for the time being, Sverdlov proceeded to give the organizational report for the Central Committee. Of particular interest in the present context is a brief statement at the end:

The report by comrade Stalin has fully clarified the work of the Central Committee.
Sverdlov's report highlighted the rapid growth of the party, from 78 party organizations with 80,000 members in April to 162 organizations and 200,000 members in July. Adding 10,000 from Siberia, 4,000 for the Minsk region, and 26,000 for the military organizations, Sverdlov reached a grand total of 240,000 party members.

Like other delegates, Sverdlov took up the question of relations between the CC and the Petersburg Committee, offering a fresh argument that directly involved Stalin. The CC, said Sverdlov, had in fact led the party as a whole, including the provincial centers, in large part through the editorials and news reporting in Pravda. "The Central Committee," he said,

through Pravda ensured both the intellectual and the organizational leadership of the party. In Pravda the comrades found answers to all theoretical questions.

Conspicuously overlooking Stalin's role as a member of Pravda’s editorial board, Sverdlov continued,

Lenin and Zinoviev set forth all their views in Pravda.31

Following Sverdlov, Smilga gave the financial report for the CC, noting at the outset that he would have to limit himself to approximate figures because government security forces had seized the documents on which his report was to have been based.

There was no debate on Sverdlov’s and Smilga’s reports; instead, the third session continued with three brief statements on the relation of the CC to the provinces and to the Petersburg Committee. A nearly unanimous vote of approval for Sverdlov’s and Smilga’s reports brought the session to a close.

Regional Reports: Fourth to Eighth Sessions

Beginning with the fourth session, on the evening of July 27, and continuing through the seventh session, on the evening of the following day, the delegates listened to reports by representatives of regional organizations of the party, beginning with Volodarsky for the Petersburg Committee, continuing with Yurenev for the Mezhraiontsy and Kaminsky for the Ukraine, all on July 27; followed by Podbel’sky for Moscow, Podvoisky for the Military Organization in Petrograd, Yaroslavsky for the military organizations in Russia as a whole, Myasnikov for Minsk, Larin for the Menshevik-Internationalists, and Rimsha for the Riga front, all on the morning of July 28; followed by Zalezhsky for Helsingfors, Flerovsky for Kronstadt, Bubnov for the Moscow oblast, Preobrazhensky for the Urals, Shumiatsky for western
Siberia, and Mostovenko for the Rumanian front, all on the after­
noon of July 28; and concluding with Dizhbit for the Baltic provinces,
Vasil’ev-Yuzhin for the Volga district, Kapsukas for Lithuania,
Epshtein (Yakovlev) for the Donetsk oblast, Anisimov for Grozny, and
Kavtaradze for the Transcaucasus on the evening of July 28. Stalin
was silent throughout these reports.

The eighth session, on July 29, was a short one; immediately after
its opening a recess was called. The editors of the 1958 edition of the
congress protocols link this development with a decree adopted by
the Provisional Government on July 28 empowering the ministers of
the army, navy, and internal affairs to close conferences dangerous to
the war effort and state security, a decree framed in general terms but
clearly aimed at the Bolsheviks. The editors also suggest that on this
occasion the “small congress,” composed of the congress presidium
and members of the Central Committee, elected the new Central
Committee.92 Sovokin disputes this, defining the “small congress” as
“the presidium and representation of the most important party orga­
nization and which was concerned with a number of especially impor­
tant questions and a few organizational questions.”93 This leaves open
the possibility that the election of the new CC—an “organizational
question”—took place at this session.

The Ninth Session: Report by Bukharin

Delegates at the ninth session of the congress, on the afternoon of July
30, heard two major reports, one on the war and the international
situation by Bukharin, the other on the political situation by Stalin.

Bukharin was a rising star in the party. Born in 1888, he joined the
party in 1906. This was his first appearance as a speaker at a party
congress. The choice of Bukharin as the party’s spokesman on one of
the most important issues facing the nation reflected his growing
popularity as well as his emergence as one of the party’s ablest, most
articulate theorists and strategists. Even Lenin admitted being influ­
enced by him; the work on which Lenin was engaged in August,
“State and Revolution,” was an exploration of questions which
Bukharin had raised in 1915—questions about the organization of a
future socialist society and its development.

In familiar Bolshevik terms, Bukharin traced the origins of the war
to international imperialist rivalries; only worldwide proletarian revo­
lution, he asserted, could end it. Revolution might come first either in
Russia, in the form of a proletarian-peasant uprising, or in western
Europe and elsewhere. If Russia took the lead—and Bukharin treated
that as no more than a possibility—it would thereby assume an obliga­
tion to declare a revolutionary war on behalf of the proletariat in other countries. Even if its army was incapable of launching an offensive, it would have to wage a defensive revolutionary war. In that event, Bukharin said,

we will have the right to announce to the proletariat of the entire world that we are waging a sacred war in the interests of the entire proletariat. By means of such a revolutionary war we shall ignite the flames of the world socialist revolution.91

With those words Bukharin established a position that was to bring him into direct conflict with Lenin in the spring of 1918. He also presented a strategy sharply differing from the one Stalin would offer in his report on the current situation. In his concluding remarks, however, after a brief and inconclusive debate on his report, Bukharin attempted to link his position with that of Lenin:

In the present stage of the Russian revolution, the poorest sector of the peasantry, by the force of objective factors, will be our allies—and it gives us the basis to say that the Russian revolution has laid the foundation for the world revolution.95

Stalin’s “Report on the Political Situation”

After a short break, the delegates reassembled to hear Stalin's “Report on the Political Situation.” As was the case for his report for the Central Committee, the textual history of this second report is complex.*

*Two variants are available, which can be designated C and D. Variant C is the text as published in the 1919 and all subsequent editions of the party protocols; variant D is the text as published in Proletarii, no. 3 on August 16, 1917, and reprinted in an appendix to the 1958 edition of the protocols (pp. 281-85). Variant C was also published verbatim in the 1925 collection of Stalin’s writings and speeches from 1917, Na putiakh k Oktiabriu (pp. 122-29). Unlike the situation with regard to Stalin’s report for the CC, however, the text used by the editors of Stalin’s Sochineniya is an amalgam of both variants, with the usual editorial changes. Thus, there appears to be no evidence pointing to a reworking of Stalin’s original draft; rather, it seems probable that both variants represent the text that Stalin read at the congress, with variant D sometimes giving a better exposition, sometimes the reverse. Here I shall draw on both variants, assuming that the sum of both represents approximately what Stalin said at the congress.
Did Stalin in fact write the report, or did he merely read a text prepared by Lenin? The question has been raised by Sovokin, who marshals a mass of evidence purporting to prove that both Stalin's report and the resolution "On the Political Situation," which the congress adopted, were the work of Lenin, with Stalin merely serving as his mouthpiece. If this conclusion is correct—and I find Sovokin's argument persuasive—then the question Stalin's biographer must raise is not, what can we learn about Stalin's ideas from the report, but how should we envisage the relationship between him and Lenin at this point and how effectively did he serve as Lenin's mouthpiece at the congress? Evidence cited by Sovokin indicates that shortly before the congress Lenin wrote a series of theses to serve as the basis for the "Report on the Political Situation." These have not been found, but Sovokin believes that a reasonably accurate version of them was obtained by A. Z. Shumiatsky, a delegate to the congress from the Central Siberian Bureau of the party, and published in the newspapers, Krasnoyarski rabochii. Stalin, as we have seen (p. 175), met with Lenin shortly before the congress; this meeting would appear to be the most likely occasion on which Lenin could have given Stalin a copy of his theses.

The principal themes of the report are those familiar from Lenin's writings of mid-July: the sharp turn of events following the July Days; the establishment of a military dictatorship combining right-wing political figures with the army high command and supported by the moderate socialist parties; the end of the period of peaceful development of the revolution, as well as any possibility of a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets; the loss of power by the soviets; and the need for the party to prepare for the overthrow of the right-wing dictatorship by a new revolution led by the urban proletariat and supported by the poorer strata of the peasantry.

The report was noteworthy for the frankness of its analysis of Russia's structure:

It is our misfortune that Russia is a country of the petty bourgeoisie and that it still follows the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionaries, who are compromising with the Cadets. And until the peasantry become disillusioned with the idea of compromise with the bourgeoisie, we will suffer and the revolution will go haltingly.

This being the case, the reporter felt it necessary to address the question of how a proletarian revolution could be made in a petty bourgeois country:

Some comrades argue that since capitalism is poorly developed in our country, it would be utopian to raise the question of a socialist revolution.
They would be right if there were no war, if there were no economic disruption, if the foundations of the national economy were not shaken.

Furthermore,

The question of intervening in the economic sphere is arising in all countries as something essential in time of war.

Unlike Germany, however, where “this question is being settled without the direct and active participation of the masses,” in Russia the workers were being drawn directly into the economic life of the country, thereby “raising the practical question of the socialist revolution.”

Answering the question raised by Rykov at the April Conference—could backward, petty bourgeois Russia take the lead in carrying out a socialist revolution?—the reporter asserted,

It would be rank pedantry to assert that Russia should “wait” with socialist changes until Europe “begins.” That country “begins” which has the greater opportunities.

Thus, the reporter swept away as “rank pedantry” the scruples of literal-minded Marxists who insisted that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution.

As to the form the revolution would take, the reporter foresaw a national uprising:

Overthrow of the dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie—that is what the immediate slogan of the party must be. The realization of this slogan is possible only if there is a powerful upsurge on a nation-wide scale.

The main forces of the new movement will be the urban proletariat and the poorer strata of peasantry. It is they that will take power in the event of victory.

Lenin’s strategy included the possibility of proletarian revolutions in the west, as one of its essential components. As published in the August 1917 issue of Proletarii (variant D), this theme, only glancingly touched on in the congress protocols (variant C), is given crucial significance:

Seizing power is not difficult. It is necessary to hold onto it in order to effect a socialist transformation. This requires support from the revolutionary workers of the west. Recent events have disclosed with special clarity the close ties between the imperialists of Russia and the imperialists of the west. From this, however, it follows that the tie between the Russian workers and the revolutionary workers of the west must be just as close. Without such a tie and support it will be easy for the united imperialists of Russia and the west to strangle the Russian revolution.
Therefore the task of the party is: together with strengthening and broadening the proletarian army in Russia, to strengthen and broaden the tie of this army with the revolutionary workers in the west.98

This key passage shows that the basic idea later thought to be characteristic of Trotsky's theory of revolution was fully shared by Lenin in 1917.

Discussion of Stalin's Report: The Ninth and Tenth Sessions

If the report presented by Stalin was actually written by Lenin, a number of the delegates were unaware of that fact, to judge by the vigor with which they tore it apart in the discussion.99 "The leap proposed by comrade Stalin," said N. S. Angarsky (Klestov), a Moscow delegate, "is not a Marxist tactic but a tactic of despair." Preobrazhensky said he could not agree with the assertion about the inevitability of new outbreaks. Yurenev found "a series of radical contradictions" in the report.

The center of the attack was Stalin's call for withdrawal of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets." As Volodarsky put it, "It is wrong to stigmatize the form just because the content has proved unsuccessful."

Debate was still raging when the chairman brought the ninth session to a close, and it picked up where it had left off when the tenth session opened at 10 A.M. on July 31. A group of delegates led by V. N. Podbel'sky, a Moscow delegate, had drawn up a list of questions to which they wanted Stalin to respond, all related in one way or another to the party's attitude toward the soviets:

1. What form of fighting organization of the working class does the reporter [Stalin] propose instead of the soviets of workers' deputies?
2. What is to be our practical relationship to the existing soviets of workers' deputies?
3. [What is to be] our relationship to the soviets of workers' deputies in which we now have a majority?
4. [What is the] concrete definition of the concept, "the poorest peasantry," and [how should we] define the form of its organization in connection with our relationship to the existing soviets of peasants' deputies?100

In replying, Stalin had his first opportunity to enter personally into the debate, and he handled himself rather well. His main argument was that classes, not organizational forms, were decisive. The party's new line was to demand the transfer of power to the workers and poor
peasants; it was not calling for the overthrow of the soviets but simply shifting its strategy from the soviets as institutions to specific classes.

Support for Stalin's position was voiced by G. Ya. Sokol'nikov, a delegate from the Moscow oblast. Harking back to Lenin's formulation in 1905, he called the soviets "organs of uprising"; only in that capacity were they suitable vehicles for the assumption of power by the workers. V. P. Nogin disagreed: the slogan "All Power to the Soviets," he said, "remains valid and will attract the masses to us."

In all, some dozen speakers were given the opportunity to air their views before the chairman called on Stalin for the concluding remarks. His position was close to that of Lenin: the existing soviets were nothing more than bodies for the organization of the masses; their political power no longer existed. Nevertheless, he favored remaining in the existing soviets, and in the Central Executive Committee. Even control of all the soviets, Stalin warned, would not give power to the Bolsheviks; the existing government must first be overthrown. Once the party had taken power, it would be able to organize the government. Basing his analysis squarely on Lenin's, Stalin named three factors on which the party must base its strategy: the Russian proletariat, the peasantry, and the European proletariat.

The tenth session closed with the election of a seven-man editorial commission to prepare the final draft of the resolution on the political situation; Stalin, inevitably, was named a member, together with Bukharin, Bubnov, Sokol'nikov, Milyutin, Nogin, and Lomov. In electing this body, the delegates were taking into account a certain difference of opinion which had developed between the main body of delegates, who supported Stalin's and Lenin's position, and the delegates from Moscow, who favored using an alternative text.

The Eleventh Session: Reports on the Party Press and the Economic Situation

On the evening of July 31, the delegates assembled for the eleventh session. No chairman is indicated in the protocols, but Sverdlov was evidently in charge, to judge by his authoritative instructions at the close of the session. Stalin was either absent or silent; the protocols contain no reference to him.

Two major reports occupied the delegates' attention: Kharitonov on the party press and Milyutin on the economic situation. According to Kharitonov, the number of the party journals and newspapers after the July Days stood at the same figure—forty-one—as before. Eight newspapers, including Pravda, had been closed by the government; but of those, five, again including Pravda, had reappeared under
different names—a simple device, the effectiveness of which is an accurate index of the government's weakness.

Milyutin's report stressed the imminence of a major catastrophe. Government expenditures on the army, he said, were the principal cause; in the first half of 1917 the figure had reached ten and one-half billion rubles; he forecast a figure over twenty billion for the entire year, an estimate on the low side, considering the rapidly worsening position of both the army and the government.

The economic plight of the working class, already serious, would get still worse, according to Milyutin. There would be a sharp increase in the number of strikes; the Bolsheviks, unlike the Mensheviks and the SR's, must support the strikers. When the political and economic crisis reached its climax, the party's principles, including workers' control, would emerge victorious. But Milyutin gave no indication of how the party should meet this challenge.

In closing the session, Sverdlov pointed to the need for work in the sections charged with preparing resolutions; a majority of the delegates agreed and voted to cancel the session scheduled for 9 A.M. on the following day. August 1, therefore, was a day of intense editorial labor by the editorial commissions, among whose members was Stalin.

The Twelfth Session

The delegates reassembled at 11 A.M. on August 2 for one of the congress's most demanding sessions. A single topic dominated the discussion: preparation of new party statutes, to replace the ones adopted at the Second Congress in 1903. Sverdlov, presiding, called on Kharitonov to present the draft of the new statutes.

Several points, Kharitonov said, had provoked controversy in the drafting commission, among them Article 13 concerning the Central Committee. Its size was to be raised to twenty-one members; from this body a smaller group, designated the "narrow composition" (uzkii sostav) would be established, but for reasons of security its location would not be disclosed. It was in this conspiratorial form that the party's top policy-making body, forerunner of the Politburo, made its first documented appearance in party history. There had also been debate, Kharitonov said, on Article 4, dealing with expulsion from the party—another omen of things to come.

Sverdlov then called on S. M. Zaks (Gladkov) to read the draft statutes article by article. Discussion of articles 1 (definition of party members), 2 (admission of new members), and 3 (party dues) produced no surprises; these three articles were adopted as drafted by the commission. Expulsion from the party (Article 4) was to be performed by
local party bodies, with the possibility of appeals to raion or oblast conferences; the ultimate authority was to be the party congress. In the discussion of Article 4, Sverdlov made one of his rare substantive contributions, adding the Central Committee as one of the “higher party bodies” to which expulsion could be referred. Unwilling to see the authority of the party congress diluted in this way, a majority of delegates voted against Sverdlov’s proposal.

Discussion of other articles was uneventful. No one spoke on the uzkii sostav, either in opposition or in support; evidently the delegates accepted this centralizing move as necessary and desirable.

At Preobrazhensky’s suggestion, a discussion of the party’s attitude toward the question of national minorities was held; Stalin took no part in the discussion, nor did anyone call for his opinion, notwithstanding his semiofficial standing as party expert on this question.

The Fifteenth Session: Stalin Presents the Resolution “On the Political Situation”

The final session of the congress, which met on the afternoon of August 3, was one of the congress’s most important, both for Stalin and for the party as a whole. Sverdlov again chaired the session, which opened with a report on the trade unions by N. P. Glebov (Avilov), a delegate from the Petrograd organization who was to serve in the first Bolshevik cabinet as commissar of posts and telegraphs. Glebov presented a draft resolution “On the Tasks of the Trade Union Movement,” but before it was submitted to a vote Sverdlov called on Skrypnik to present a co-report, “The Party and the Trade Unions.” There was virtually no discussion of these reports, though several delegates attempted to get one started; instead, a majority of the delegates voted in favor of the proposal by Nogin to turn over the draft resolutions to the Central Committee for final editing.

Sverdlov found time for an unscheduled report on the party’s national policies in the Transcaucasus, delivered by A. Iusuf-zade, a delegate from Baku. As on the day before, Stalin was absent from the discussion, evidently preferring the role of acting party leader to that of expert on the national question. Nor had Stalin anything to say on unification of the party with left Mensheviks, a topic presented by Yanson, a member of Trotsky’s Mezhraionka group.

The report entitled “On the Political Situation,” which Stalin presented at the fifteenth session, was a revised draft of the one he had presented at the ninth session (p. 191). In the absence of the original text (omitted from the protocols), Sovokin has presented evidence pointing to the conclusion that the revision served to bring the text
more fully into line with Lenin's ideas and that the resolution presented by Stalin was in fact Lenin's work.\textsuperscript{104} Even if one accepts Sovokin's argument, however (and he makes a strong case), Stalin still faced the need to defend Lenin's position as he presented the resolution article by article.\textsuperscript{105}

Article 1 set forth in concise terms Lenin's conclusion that Russia was now ruled by

a dictatorship of the counter-revolutionary imperialist bourgeoisie, based on a military clique from the army high command and provided with a revolutionary cover by the leaders of petty bourgeois socialism.

Article 2 provided Lenin's class analysis of the Provisional Government and its relationship with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Only the support rendered the government by the SR and Menshevik leaders of the Soviet, in Lenin's view, saved the government and prevented the peaceful transfer of power to the soviets.

A. J. Ioffe, a Mezhraionets, proposed adding a reference to "the voluntary refusal of the leaders of the proletariat to take power," but Stalin argued that while there had indeed been such a refusal,

what is important for us is the objective fact, the insufficient consciousness rather than the subjective motive, the unwillingness of the leaders to take power.

On the basis of this fairly subtle distinction Stalin opposed Ioffe's amendment, and the delegates voted it down.

An obscure nonvoting delegate named Pavlovich (neither his initials nor his organization are indicated in the protocols) proposed adding "for example" or "mainly" before the reference to "capitalist pillage," on the grounds that pillage of military supplies was only one of the forms of bourgeois pillage. Stalin conceded the point's validity but suggested adding the words "in the main"; the delegates supported his proposal.

Ravich wanted to stress the role of "international imperialism" in the revolution, specifically in regard to the bourgeoisie's assumption of power—an unnecessary addition, Stalin replied, since the role of Allied capital was already cited in the preceding article. A majority of the delegates agreed.

Article 3 cited the "petty bourgeois character of the predominant masses of the population of Russia" as one of the principal reasons for the people's dreams of peaceful cooperation between workers and capitalists, peasants and landowners. There was no discussion; the article was accepted as read.

Article 4 depicted the decline of the soviets under the leadership of
the petty bourgeois parties. The soviets had “ceased to be organs of uprising as well as organs of governmental power.” The soviets supported the bourgeoisie in delaying the Constituent Assembly, hindering the transfer of land to the peasantry, sabotaging any attempt to combat the economic crisis, and preparing an offensive.

Sverdlov suggested replacing the word “supported,” in regard to the offensive, by “approved by the majority of the soviets,” a change that Stalin found acceptable and that the delegates approved.

Article 5 summarized in Leninist terms the course of the class struggle as manifested in the June demonstrations and the “spontaneous movement of July 3–4,” culminating in the shift of the petty bourgeois parties to a coalition with the Cadets and an “open struggle against the revolutionary proletariat and the revolutionary troops.” The same obscure Pavlovich suggested adding a reference to “revolutionary troops” at the beginning of the article, but Stalin opposed the suggestion as unnecessary and the delegates agreed. Stalin also successfully opposed several verbal changes offered by Yurenev, a Mezhraionets.

Article 6 reiterated Lenin’s concept of an “imperialist dictatorship” as the actual wielder of power, coupling with it a description of the Central Executive Committee of the soviets as “completely powerless and inactive.” Stalin then proposed adding to Article 6 the following passage, which the editing committee had deleted from Article 7:

The Soviets are undergoing an excruciating agony, demoralized as a consequence of the fact that they did not take governmental power at the appropriate time.

V. I. Solov’ev, a twenty-seven-year-old delegate from the Moscow district organization, argued against Stalin’s proposal on the grounds that its description of the soviets was not applicable to the provincial soviets, which were continuing to develop, but Stalin stuck to his guns:

Not only in Petrograd but also in the provinces the soviets have lost their power. Just let them now try to arrest or remove from office any functionary, as used to happen! The counterrevolution is stronger in the capital, but it is also on the attack in the provinces.

The delegates approved Stalin’s suggestion, which did not prevent Yurenev from trying to soften its harsh characterization of the soviets by deleting the reference to their “demoralization.” Again, Stalin held firm. “Comrades,” he said,
the demoralization of the soviets is an objective fact, and it is not for us Bolsheviks to hide the facts.

It was a rhetorical trick, but it worked: the delegates approved Stalin's proposal, and with it the text of Article 6 as amended.

Article 7 set forth Lenin's demand for the replacement of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets," with the unwieldy slogan "Complete Liquidation of the Dictatorship of the Counterrevolutionary Bourgeoisie."

In the discussion Skrypnik called for an even sharper formulation of the need for struggle against the counterrevolution in order to mark the difference between the party and those Skrypnik called "opportunists." Good-humoredly, Stalin agreed in principle but pointed out that Skrypnik had not made a specific proposal. Smilga remedied that lack by suggesting the addition of a sentence which the drafting committee had deleted:

Only the revolutionary proletariat, on condition of its being supported by the poorest peasantry, has the power to fulfill this task, which constitutes the task of a new revolution in Russia.

After further comments by Skrypnik and Nogin (Stalin took no part in the debate), Article 7 was approved with Smilga's amendment.

The thrust of Article 8 was the definition of the party's role in the revolutionary upsurge. Under its leadership, the proletariat must organize and prepare for the moment when a general national crisis and a profound mass uprising create favorable conditions for the shift of the urban and rural poor to the side of the workers against the bourgeoisie.

Yurenev proposed sharpening the article's reference to the soviets, a proposal Stalin accepted and the delegates approved. Solov'ev called for the deletion of the adjective "all-national" in reference to the approaching crisis, a proposal Stalin opposed, saying,

In that particular spot we want to indicate specifically the extent of that crisis, its all-national character.

The delegates followed Stalin.

Article 9, the final section of the resolution, constituted the culmination of everything that had gone before. "The task of the revolutionary classes," it stated,

is then to strain all forces for taking governmental power into their hands and for directing it, in alliance with the revolutionary proletariat of the
advance countries, toward peace and toward a socialist reconstruction of society.

Preobrazhensky suggested a more cautious conclusion:

for directing it toward peace and, on condition of proletarian revolutions taking place in the West, toward socialism.

Preobrazhensky’s suggestion anticipated the position Trotsky would later be accused of taking; at the moment Preobrazhensky made it, however, it was party orthodoxy shared by Lenin; the delegates had already approved Bukharin’s resolution, “On the Current Moment and the War,” which clearly implied the necessity of an international proletarian revolution as a precondition for the overthrow of capitalism in Russia. Nonetheless, Preobrazhensky’s suggestion triggered a response from Stalin which has become famous. “The possibility is not excluded,” Stalin said,

that Russia will be the country which paves the way to socialism. Up until now there is no country which enjoys such freedoms as there are in Russia, which has tried to establish workers’ control over production. Furthermore, the basis of our revolution is broader than in western Europe, where the proletariat confronts the bourgeoisie in complete isolation. With us the proletariat is supported by the poorest strata of the peasantry. Finally, in Germany the apparatus of government power works incomparably better than the imperfect apparatus of our bourgeoisie which is a dependency of European capital. We must reject the out-of-date view that only Europe can show us the way. There is dogmatic Marxism and creative Marxism. I stand on the ground of the latter.

Just as Preobrazhensky’s proposal prefigured the Trotskyite stance of the mid-twenties, so Stalin’s rejoinder anticipated the later theory of “Socialism in One Country.” Stalin’s position was not, however, completely novel; Lenin had said more or less the same thing in reply to Rykov at the April Conference (see p. 78), but with one significant difference: in his reply to Preobrazhensky, Stalin shifted the discussion to the higher ground of “creative Marxism,” an astonishing claim that went further than Lenin or any other of the party’s leaders. The protocols give no indication that anyone recognized Stalin’s boldness; they merely record the decisive vote against Preobrazhensky’s proposal.

Harking back to Article 8, Yurenev proposed changing the word “battle” (boi) to “action” (vystuplenie), in order to remove the “criminal” (i.e., antigovernmental) connotation of “battle.” Stalin disagreed:
the congress cannot proceed on the basis of the "criminality" of this or that expression. If we replace the word "battle" by "action," the impression would be created that we are renouncing all action (demonstrations, strikes, etc.), whereas we wish to restrain the proletariat only from battle to which the bourgeoisie hopes to provoke it.

Yurenev’s proposal was rejected. That just about wound up the discussion; Stalin did not reply to two proposals by Skrypnik, and the delegates approved Article 9 as amended.

In an abrupt shift of ground, Stalin next proposed a slate of party leaders as candidates for the Constituent Assembly: Lenin, Zinoviev, Kollontai, Trotsky, Lunacharsky—an odd grouping: why was Kamenev omitted, or Bukharin? Why was Lunacharsky included? That the proposal was an influence-building maneuver on Stalin’s part seems probable; we will find Stalin performing a similar action in October, a few days before the seizure of power. The protocols record “strong applause” but no vote, indicating the tactical nature of Stalin’s proposal.

The question of what to call the congress received the delegates’ attention briefly. Yurenev proposed designating it the “Petersburg Congress,” in order not to arouse unnecessary conflict with the Menshevik-Internationalists, who could hardly be expected to accept this purely Bolshevik congress as the one following the Fifth Congress, at which the Mensheviks had been represented in force. It was Stalin who argued in favor of boldly calling it the Sixth Congress, claiming that the Bolsheviks represented the majority of the proletariat. The congress protocols allot this proposal to Preobrazhensky, but the editors of the 1958 edition, citing contemporary press accounts, assert that the proposal was made by Stalin. In any event, the delegates accepted the proposal.

**Trotsky Joins the Leadership**

The closed session at which the new Central Committee was chosen, Sverdlov informed the delegates, had adopted a resolution to publish the names of the new CC “in case of the normal conclusion of the congress,” that is, in case the government did not disrupt its proceedings. Put to a vote, the proposal was defeated. Clearly, the sense of the congress was to maintain secrecy about its chosen leaders. Some publicity was desirable, however; Ordzhonikidze offered a proposal.
to publish the names of the four members of the CC who received the largest number of votes. I consider it essential to do this in order to express the solidarity of the congress with the elected leaders of the party.\textsuperscript{109}

Was Ordzhonikidze aware that the top four members of the CC elected at the April Conference had constituted the inner core of the CC, its *ugkii sostav*? Were the delegates aware? The protocols leave these questions unanswered; they merely note the “noisy applause” that greeted Ordzhonikidze’s proposal, and its prompt implementation. Lenin, it was announced, had received 133 votes out of a possible 134, Zinoviev 132, and Kamenev and Trotsky 131 each.

Up to this point, the congress had gone well for Stalin—he had delivered two of the major reports and had acquitted himself well as spokesman for Lenin’s policies. Disclosure of the top four leaders of the party, however, with Trotsky’s name displacing that of Stalin, must have been a nasty shock. Whatever their personal relations had been up to this point—and the seeds of enmity had already been planted—this setback to Stalin’s aspirations could only foster resentment and hostility.

Another jolt to Stalin’s ego was administered by Sverdlov when he called on Nogin rather than Stalin to deliver the congress’s concluding statement. Briefly but eloquently, Nogin contrasted the difficulties the party faced under existing conditions with the glorious future that awaited it as the architect of a new socialist society. The honor was international in scope, said Nogin:

> Our congress is first and foremost a congress of internationalists’ action, the first congress taking steps toward socialism.

“Noisy applause” greeted this statement, followed by the singing of the “Internationale.” Using its newly approved designation, Sverdlov then declared the Sixth Congress closed.

**The New Central Committee**

According to the editors of the 1958 edition of the congress protocols, “The list of members of the CC elected at the VI Party Congress has not yet been found.”\textsuperscript{110} According to the same source, Stalin later, in response to a questionnaire by Istpart, stated that “it would seem” that the number of CC members was twenty-three. K. A. Kozlov, a congress delegate whose notes are among the sources used by the 1958 editors, stated there were twenty-one full members and ten candidate members. As to specific individuals, the 1958 edition lists the following full members:
Candidate members, according to the same source, included the following:

P. A. Dzhaparidze
A. S. Kiselev
G. I. Lomov
N. A. Skrypnik
Ye. D. Stasova

This listing, on the face of it, is radically defective, since it omits three of the four new CC members receiving the highest number of votes—Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky. Even adding these names, however, there are still six or eight (depending on whose total figure we accept) unaccounted for. The official multivolume *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* is more reliable; to the 1958 list it adds not only Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky, but also Bukharin, Krestinsky, Milyutin, Rykov, Smilga, and Sokol’nikov—that is, it includes the names of a number of party leaders whom Stalin later purged. As candidate members the same source lists (in addition to those named in the 1958 edition of the protocols) the following:

A. A. Ioffe
A. Lomov
Ye. A. Preobrazhensky
V. N. Yakovleva

Again, the later purging of individuals accounts for most of the names missing from the 1958 list.
Stalin at the Sixth Congress: A Balance Sheet

How effectively did Stalin conduct himself at the Sixth Party Congress? The answer to that question depends on the yardstick used to measure his performance. If the criterion is faithfulness to Lenin's views and obedience in voicing them, Stalin earns a respectable but hardly outstanding score. On the main points of Lenin's analysis—dictatorship of the "counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie"; withdrawal of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets"; preparation of an armed uprising based on the workers and poor peasants, leading to a socialist revolution—Stalin performed well.

On the negative side was Stalin's move, early in the congress, to reopen the question of Lenin's standing trial and his suggestion that, given suitable guarantees as to his safety, he should submit to arrest and trial. When the question was debated in the aftermath of the July Days, Stalin had stood foursquare against Lenin's submission to trial. Why did he later waver on this issue? Could Stalin have seen Lenin's arrest and trial under a more favorable light by late July? Coinciding as it did with his emergence as one of the party's top leaders, is there a possibility that Stalin, perhaps not consciously, welcomed a scenario in which his path to the summit was at least temporarily cleared by Lenin's elimination?

That Stalin might have been thinking along these lines is indicated by his astonishing statement on "creative Marxism." To claim the right to interpret Marxism "creatively" is equivalent to claiming the right to top leadership of the party, for there is no attribute of leadership more sacred than the right to define current strategy in terms of basic Marxist doctrine. Lenin freely exercised this right—his claim to party preeminence depended on it. But Lenin was almost always able to find something in Marx's writings, of which he was an avid and knowledgeable reader, to justify his innovations. Stalin, far less well versed in the Marxist scriptures, took the shortcut of "creativity" to justify his stance.

It would have been easy for Stalin to cite Lenin as his authority—after all, it was Lenin's views that he was defending. At no time during the Sixth Congress, however, did Stalin refer to Lenin in this capacity, and the editorial insertion of a reference to Lenin in the report for the Central Committee (see p. 182) was brief and grudging in the extreme.

In his statement at party gatherings immediately after the July Days, Stalin had showed an unwillingness to accept Lenin's downgrading of the soviets. A few weeks later, at the Sixth Party Congress, he had made some adjustments to Lenin's position. Having rejected the soviets as the basic mechanism of the revolution, Lenin was now
calling for a general armed uprising of workers and poor peasants. In accepting this vision, Stalin was embracing a strategy that differed significantly from the course events were to take in October.

Trotsky's appearance at the Sixth Congress was symbolic rather than physical, but no less effective for that; his gamble on courting arrest had paid off handsomely, as the vote for the CC showed. Had he been present at the congress Trotsky would have had to take part in discussion, define his priorities on controversial issues, submit to questions. Absent, Trotsky loomed larger than life.

For Stalin, Trotsky's entry into the party was a most unwelcome development. With his customary caution, Stalin had included Trotsky's name in his list of candidates for the Constituent Assembly, but he could not rejoice in Trotsky's swift rise to eminence in the party.

Trotsky was to remain in jail until early September; Lenin did not return to Petrograd until early October. For Stalin, the month of August was to be his last opportunity to show his potential as party leader.