

# Stalin: The gravedigger of the revolution

David North  
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Seventy years ago, on March 5, 1953, Joseph Stalin died at the age of 73. To the extent that the worst defeats of the working class in the 20th century can be attributed to the crimes and betrayals of an individual, that person is Stalin.

As early as 1927, Trotsky described Stalin, to his face, as the “gravedigger of the revolution.” That proved to be true in the most literal sense of the word.

Stalin is remembered in history as a mass murderer, who ordered the killing of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party and hundreds of thousands of socialists who had fought for the victory of the October Revolution, the creation of the USSR and the victory of world socialism.

But Stalin, the individual, was a mediocrity. His rise to power was entirely bound up with the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. Stalinism was, in essence, the outcome of the bureaucracy’s usurpation of political power from the working class.

The bureaucracy chose Stalin as its leader because he possessed the personal and political characteristics required to defend its interests and privileges, i.e., ruthlessness, lust for personal power, vulgar pragmatism, and nationalist outlook.

The latter element of his political outlook was of decisive importance. The programmatic foundation of Stalinism was the anti-Marxist “theory” of “socialism in one country,” which was first advanced by Stalin in December 1924.

This nationalist revision of Marxism justified the abandonment of the program of world socialist revolution and the subordination of the struggles of the international working class to the national interests of the Soviet bureaucracy.

This was the theoretical and political basis of the Stalinist attack on Trotsky, the denunciation of the theory of permanent revolution, and the Soviet

bureaucracy’s betrayal of the working class.

The Stalinist regime had become, by 1933, a counter-revolutionary force. The victory of Hitler’s Nazis in Germany—a political catastrophe for which Stalin and Stalinism were responsible—led Trotsky to call for the building of the Fourth International.

Trotsky’s analysis of the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism—substantiated in his great book *Revolution Betrayed*—has been vindicated by history. Trotsky warned that the Stalinist regime, unless overthrown by the working class, would result in capitalist restoration.

Stalin’s political heirs—i.e., the bureaucratic flunkys selected to replace the Bolsheviks that he had murdered—continued and completed the process of political betrayal. The Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, only 38 years after Stalin’s death.

Trotsky predicted, “The laws of history are more powerful than the bureaucratic apparatus.” The edifice of Stalinism is a heap of ruins. But as the centenary of the founding of the Trotskyist movement approaches, the Fourth International is growing throughout the world.



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