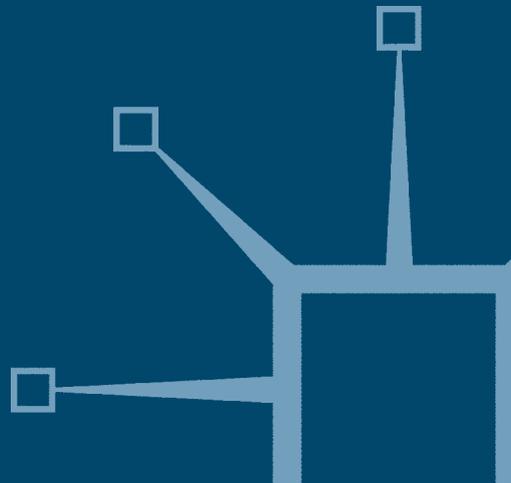


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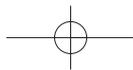
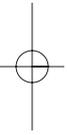
The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships

Stalin and the Eastern Bloc

Edited by
Balázs Apor, Jan C. Behrends,
Polly Jones and E. A. Rees



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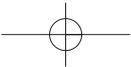
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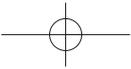
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Introduction



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1

Leader Cults: Varieties, Preconditions and Functions

E. A. Rees¹

Max Weber famously outlined three different types of authority: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic. The leadership systems of the twentieth century which generated their own leader cults (I. V. Stalin, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Mao Zedong), might be seen as embodying what Weber characterised as the 'routinisation' of charismatic authority. Whilst Weber's typology offers a useful starting point for discussing leader cults it is also in some ways misleading.² The Communist, Nazi and Fascist regimes of the twentieth century sought to legitimise themselves through a combination of appeals to tradition, legal right and charisma. What is unique and striking about them is the way in which they sought to construct legitimacy, by investing ideas, events, institutions, particular offices and personalities with charisma. Part of this strategy involved the promotion of leader cults, aimed at creating a bond between leader and subject. In this book we examine the leader cults in communist ruled states of the USSR and of Eastern Europe, and seek to explore further the nature of the strategies of constructing legitimacy that these states engaged in.

The leader cult and the 'cult of the individual'

The communist regime under Stalin was highly authoritarian and developed an extraordinary cult of veneration around the figure of the leader.³ At the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956 N. S. Khrushchev attacked Stalin's 'despotic' system of rule. He used the term *kult' lichnosti*, translated as the 'cult of the individual' or 'cult of personality', to explain the changes in the Soviet leadership system after 1934: the consolidation of Stalin's personal dictatorship, the ensuing criminal abuses of power, and the extraordinary adulation of Stalin, which turned him into an omniscient and infallible being.⁴

Khrushchev's term 'cult of the individual' placed stress on Stalin's psychology as an explanatory factor for what followed. But Khrushchev also related the rise of Stalin's despotic rule to specific changes in the structure

of power in the USSR in the early 1930s. In his memoirs he even acknowledged that policy choices after 1928, such as forced collectivisation, might have contributed to this development. But Khrushchev refused to see Stalin's despotism as in any way related to the system of Bolshevik rule, to its structures, its practices and its psychology. Similarly he offered no real insight into the cultural and situational factors that provided the basis for such a system. In this work an attempt is made to explore the communist leader cult in all its complex manifestations and dimensions.⁵

A leader cult is an established system of veneration of a political leader, to which all members of the society are expected to subscribe, a system that is omnipresent and ubiquitous and one that is expected to persist indefinitely. It is thus a deliberately constructed and managed mechanism, which aims at the integration of the political system around the leader's persona. In Soviet Russia Dzhughashvili assumed the persona Stalin.

The rise of modern leader cults is closely related to the aspirations and methods of twentieth-century revolutionary regimes. Gerhard Ritter long ago noted the demonic aspect of their politics: the reliance on violence, force and deception.⁶ For the Bolsheviks, with their notion of class struggle and class war, politics was akin to warfare. The great leader cults of the twentieth century were associated with leaders who were variously depicted as demi-gods, supermen, gangsters, megalomaniacs and monsters. The regimes over which they presided witnessed unprecedented domestic convulsions, were drawn into the greatest wars of the twentieth century.

The cult of the leader needs to be placed in the context of the various strategies of legitimation of communist rule. The Soviet regime could not base its legitimacy on tradition, nor on rational-legal authority, but instead sought to persuade the population of its right to rule. In opposition to Weber we might propose three basic strategies of legitimation: (a) Symbolic or affective attachment, based on popular identification with the regime, its ideology, institutions, leaders and events in its history. (b) Ideological and programmatic support, based on perception of the realism and desirability of the regime's ideological goals and the way these goals were modified over time in accordance with changing circumstances (War Communism, the New Economic Policy the Command Economy, the War Economy, the Post-War Reconstruction, the Soviet Welfare Economy). (c) Performance attainment, based on the public's perception of the state's capacity to satisfy the basic needs of society and of its individual members, taking into account domestic and international constraints.

States beset by economic failure and by social conflict invariably respond by seeking to strengthen symbolic legitimation. Where there is low consensus on ideological and programmatic goals, regime's seek to reinforce symbolic attachment; appeal is made to the loyalty of their citizens, loyalty to the state, to the party, and to the leader. This is common particularly to ideological, mobilising regimes. This situation is also common in circum-

stances of war. Here, it might be argued, acute privation may give great strength to such symbolic attachment, where shared sacrifice is seen as offering some future good.

The three bases of legitimation outlined above are themselves fragile, in that they are dependent on the power of the state to secure some measure of acceptance. In the Soviet case these factors were tied to the emergence of the propaganda state.⁷ How far regimes command popular assent, and how far they survive because of fear, deference, apathy or resignation is problematical. Obedience is secured by fear and perceptions of the strength and durability of the regime.

Cults: religious, royal and secular

The phenomenon of leader cults is extremely ancient, and can be traced back to classical times, and early human societies where political and religious authority were united. The deification of dead emperors and then of living emperors was used to legitimise personal power in ancient Greece and Rome, especially with the dynasty of Augustus.⁸ Stalin, who read widely, was certainly familiar with these traditions.⁹

Twentieth century leader cults possess certain similarities with earlier religious and monarchical cults. The leader figures venerated in the twentieth century were attributed with quasi-miraculous powers. They were gifts of providence, with seemingly wondrous powers, as saviours of their nations with the power to 'heal' the land. They did not offer salvation in the after-life, but were concerned with the life of mortals here and now on earth. They were free of the pomp and ceremony of royal rituals based on blood, lineage and descent, and their ties to other royal dynasties and to the hereditary aristocracy.

Like monarchy, the modern revolutionary leader cults of the twentieth century sought to fuse and to reinforce the charisma of the office and the charisma of its occupant, and sought to gain authority through association with other powerful and respected figures, including foreign dignitaries. All leader cults make a presumption, which never needs to be justified, to command the support and affection of its subjects. Like monarchical regimes the leader cult demanded carefully developed protocol to preserve the venerated figure's mystique. Like monarchs the leader dispenses state honours and awards for services rendered, serving to bind the subject to the leader and to the state. Modern constitutional monarchies, developed in an age of mass democracy, were intended to channel mass sentiment, which was seen as potentially irrational, away from the actual functioning of government.¹⁰

The study of religious movements tends to locate the emergence of cults in the early phases of new religious movements, when the sect of believers is still fairly exclusive, in which new converts are being drawn in. This is

the period of the charismatic development, of the creative generation of new ideas and symbols; the initiation of new believers into the mysteries of the faith.¹¹ The communist leader cults should also be seen against the background of the great messianic and millenarian movements of the past, with their accompanying visions of apocalyptic transformation, of immense battles of great historic significance, which only in time yield the new harmonious order.¹²

The French Revolution promoted the notion of the religion of civic virtue, reason, patriotism and revolutionary resolve. Such civic religions cannot tolerate the claim of other competing religions, and are thus militantly atheistic. It is with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period that we can date the rise of modern dictatorial systems and their leader cults. This new concern with the role of great, charismatic figures in history is seen in Hegel's concept of the 'world historical individual', in Marx and Engels' discussion on Bonapartism, and on 'revolution from above' as embodied by Otto von Bismarck, and in Nietzsche's notion of the superman. In Russia, Pisarev's idea of the 'benefactors of mankind' addresses the same theme and it is also found in Plekhanov's writings.¹³

Communist cults and the sacramentalisation of politics

From its inception the Soviet communist regime displayed a strong proclivity towards cultic practices, in which the role of the leader assumed a central position. On Lenin's death in 1924 a committee was set to oversee the 'immortalisation' of his memory. An institute was established to study his brain, a mausoleum was erected to house his remains, and his relics were preserved in church-like museums. The Soviet slogan: 'Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live' embodied this aspiration towards immortalising the dead leader's memory. The transformation of Lenin into an icon was strongly opposed by his widow Nadezhda Krupskaya and by other senior political figures, but this was overruled. The critics of the project saw it variously as medieval, oriental or Asiatic, a practice akin to ancestor worship.

The Lenin Mausoleum combined elements of the Russian practice of venerating tsars and saints. It was designed as an awe-inspiring shrine and place of pilgrimage, situated at the very heart of the country's capital. The embalmed corpse symbolised the non-putrefaction of the body, the sign of holiness. Its inspiration may have lain in the monumental tombs constructed for Napoleon Bonaparte (Dome des Invalides) and Otto von Bismarck (Friedrichsruh).¹⁴ The Lenin Mausoleum also invokes the image of the Egyptian pyramids, and was similarly intended to outlast the centuries.¹⁵ This is one of the most extraordinary manifestations of the leader cults of the twentieth century. In Nazi Germany, Hitler and his architect, Hermann Giesler, also had their plans for a mausoleum in Linz.

As Berdyaev long ago argued, Soviet communism, as an ideological and cultural force, was deeply indebted to Russian Orthodoxy.¹⁶ The Italian scholar Zincone compares totalitarian regimes to 'secular religions', and their parties, he argues, were akin to 'militant, confessional sects' such as the Jesuits and Dominicans.¹⁷ They had their own shrines, festivals and pilgrimages. They had their own prophets, apostles, priests and disciples. They had their own holy scripts. They possessed their pantheon of revolutionary heroes. Their great festivals and parades replaced religious services and processions. The system of indoctrination was based on catechisms and homilies. The Red/Lenin corners replaced the place of the icon.

The manifestation of these cults appears almost trans-national and trans-historical, with the veneration of the leader as an omniscient, all-powerful being, as a benign and universal genius. The cult strives to confer a certain transcendent significance on the present moment of history, to which the past and future must all relate. Leader cults, like religious cults, attempt to create a point of reference for the whole belief system, centred on one man, the embodiment of the doctrine. The belief system aspires to universality; and exceptions to this rule are inherently subversive of the authority of the cult. Moreover, in its projection, the cult is ubiquitous, it is everywhere. This is why leader cults are seen as inherent in regimes that aspire towards 'totalitarian' control. The 'totalitarian' regimes of the twentieth century, with their powerful leader cults, their elitist organisations and doctrines, had as their avowed aim the integration of the masses into the political process as a community of believers.

Cults in open polities

Embryonic cults exist even in relatively open, democratic political systems. It is as though human society has a strong predisposition towards the creation of cults, reflected in the cults of film idols, pop stars and sporting idols. But political leader cults are qualitatively different because of the bearing they have on the way that power is exercised. Support for such cults has little to do with levels of education. In the twentieth century many of the outstanding intellectuals of the age proved very gullible in accepting the claims of such regimes.¹⁸ All political systems have some cultic aspects, in terms of national symbolism, the veneration of the flag and anthem, the ceremonials associated with the assumption of office, national holidays, and the ceremonies commemorating their war dead.

The state, with the power to kill its own citizens and to wage war, has to be sanctified in some way, to legitimise itself; the pressure towards obedience and conformity is immense when its interests are invoked. Leader cults are part of the general process whereby the new power is symbolised and celebrated – in flags, hymns and anthems, medals, awards, prizes, stamps and coins, in the renaming of towns, streets and institutions. Leader cults

are closely tied to the founding myths of new states, as in the Soviet case of the 'Great October Socialist Revolution' and the Civil War.

In open societies cults develop around particular offices as well as individuals. The presidency of the USA is perhaps the most striking example of this. The investment of the office of president, also the commander-in-chief, with charisma developed very strongly from the 1930s onwards, with the huge growth in the powers of the office, and the enormous expansion of the power of the federal government both domestically and internationally. The status of the office is reinforced by various symbols (The White House, The Seal, The State-of-the-Union address, Air Force One). The memorials to past great presidents – Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt – on the Mall in Washington, can be seen as part of the cult of the office of president.

But one might also identify powerful cults in other mobilising regimes, such as the cult of Kemal Attaturk in Turkey, or the cult of Eva Peron in Argentina. In newly independent colonies from the 1950s onwards the leaders of the struggle for independence often became the objects of cults (Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Kaunda, Nasser or Saddam Hussein).¹⁹ The most developed leader cults are associated with what scholars have in the past identified as 'totalitarian' states.

Leader cults need to be distinguished from the glorification of political leaders in other more open political systems: where the 'public sphere' exists and retains its autonomy, where open, competitive structures function, the growth of such cults is limited. It is only the closure of the public sphere that allows the leader cult to incubate and become fully developed.²⁰ Leader cults flourish in closed political systems (closed both domestically and in their relations to the outside world), in regimes that foster a siege mentality. In comparison to the instrumental view of politics in the more stable democratic regimes, in revolutionary regimes politics was projected as a matter of vocation, a life's calling, and a cause to fight and die for. In these societies politics remained a matter of deep belief and conviction. But, as in all belief systems, faith may merge into dogma and superstition.

The rise of these leader cults can be taken as a barometer of certain development within a political system. Firstly, it is symptomatic of the extent to which political power has been personalised, and centred on one individual. Secondly, it provides testimony of how far political debate has been circumscribed and regulated. Thirdly, it offers some indication of how far control and censorship of the media has been established, and the extent to which the leader might be criticised, censured or mocked. Fourthly, it provides a measure of how far the authorities have control over the process of socialisation and education in the society.

The relations between leader and led need to be mediated, they need to be distanced from each other. The cult can only really develop where it has

functionaries in charge of controlling this intermediation: editors, journalists, broadcasters, censors, educators and opinion shapers. The cult around Stalin was consciously promoted, to foster love and devotion to both the leader and the socialist motherland.²¹ In this, language itself played a fundamental role, not just as a means of communication, but as a code, as a medium of defining issues, labelling groups and individuals.²²

Hierarchies of the Stalin cult

The posthumous cult of Lenin was used to legitimise his successor. The Stalin cult was at first constructed, on the basis of Stalin's close association with Lenin.²³ By 1925 the major city of Tsaritsyn had been renamed Stalingrad, in honour of Stalin's civil war exploits. Stalin's deputies actively worked to promote his cult, as noted by the Russian historian Shitts, who describes how in 1929–30, in a period of difficulty for the Soviet regime, these leaders worked together to promote Stalin's cult, as a symbol of their unity.²⁴ For a systematic study of the evolution of the Stalin cult, readers are referred to the various biographies of Stalin.²⁵

Stalin was quite conscious of the way that the Bolsheviks could invoke parallels with religious practice, as was reflected in his famous funeral oration to Lenin.²⁶ He used the Russian's veneration of the tsar (*tsar batyushka* – the little father) to bolster his own position, but viewed his own cult in a highly instrumental and sceptical manner (see Chapter 2).

The Stalin cult became the central basis for the legitimisation of the Soviet regime. It was based on the notion of Marxism-Leninism as a rarefied science and the embodiment of truth, with the leader as someone possessed of almost superhuman powers – extraordinary intuition, foresight, exceptional powers to formulate solutions to problems, and an uncommon ability to inspire and mobilise those around him to achieve his ends. The Stalin era was a period of prolonged and acute economic adversity for the great majority of the Soviet people.

The projection of the Stalin cult was first made dramatically apparent in the celebration of his 50th birthday in December 1929. At this time Stalin was certainly more than *primus inter pares* within the ruling group. Stalin's personal dictatorship might be dated from the start of 1933, but elements of collective decision-making survived up until 1937 (see Chapter 5).²⁷ With the Great Terror of 1936–38 Stalin acquired the power of life and death over his colleagues, and was thereafter something qualitatively different to a simple dictator. Khrushchev characterised him in the last 15 years of his life as a 'despot'. But Stalin's rule was never simply a personal despotism, but rather an 'ideocratic despotism'.²⁸ In place of the Politburo the leader developed around him his own court, reminiscent of the court of an absolutist monarch.

Stalin's cult was buttressed by a series of cults around virtually all Politburo members. V. M. Molotov, head of government (Sovnarkom), L. M. Kaganovich, first secretary of the Moscow party organisation 1933–34, and thereafter head of the railway commissariat, and K. E. Voroshilov, minister of defence, had their own cults. N. I. Ezhov, as head of NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) for a brief period in 1936–38, saw a flourishing of his cult, as did his successor in this post, L. P. Beria. S. M. Kirov and then A. A. Zhdanov, as first secretaries of Leningrad, had their own cults too. This pattern was extended to the party bosses in the major cities, and in the republics. Even the directors of major enterprises had their own cults, and had their portraits carried in triumph by their workers on public holidays.

The cults of the subordinate leaders, those in the inner ruling circle, were similar to those of the *vozhd'*. Towns, factories, collective farms, schools, streets and other places were named in their honour. Their writings and speeches were published. Their biographies constituted a distinct literary genre with its idealisation of the revolutionary life of service and the celebration of their subjects as gifted administrators, executives and problem solvers (*rukovoditeli* or *khozyaini*). Their birthdays were celebrated and on their deaths their apartments might be turned into museums.

In the USSR of the Lenin and Stalin era the image of politics in general was heroic and the party-state manufactured heroes on a mass scale. There were heroes of the revolutionary movement and the Civil War (Chapaev), the 'twenty-five thousanders' who were sent to assist in the collectivisation of agriculture, Komsomol and Pioneer heroes (Pavlik Morozov), mother heroines, Stakhanovite heroes of labour, the Chekists and Red Army men who were the guardians of the revolutions, the Panfilovtsy and the other heroes of the Great Patriotic War. A central motif in much of the regime's imagery is that of sacrifice, martyrdom, and the pathos of the fallen comrade, a rekindling of the idealism of the underground and Civil War era. The Stalinist artistic style was 'Socialist Realist' which aspired towards the epic, whilst the architectural style was monumental.

The rise of Stalin's cult coincided with the defeat of the last major opposition group, the proclamation of 'monolithic' unity and adherence to the 'general line'. It coincided with a new period of ideological offensive of the 'revolution from above' and of the Cultural Revolution. The underground and Civil War experience was reflected in an extraordinary militarisation of politics, in terms of language and imagery, in terms of administrative structures, with the aspiration of ordering society like an army (what Engels, in the nineteenth century, had mocked as 'barracks socialism'). The system of forced labour, the dragooning of the peasants into the collective farms was redolent of this militarisation. Stalin, who favoured military uniform, was the chief (*vozhd'*), who demanded obedience, duty and vigilance.

Cultic thought and practice

The cult was intended as cement to cover over such divisions, to reinforce a sense of purpose and unity. Unity was related to the truth of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and adherence to this truth (*pravda*) was central to the party's sense of itself. Lenin in 'What is to be Done?' spelt out this Manichean view of the world: there were only two world-views – proletarian and bourgeois – and between them there was no middle position. The power to interpret the ideology was an absolute power that defined the parameters of political debate. The veneration of the leader, the interpreter of the doctrine, required its antithesis. Oppositionists charged with Trotskyism, Zinovievism, Bukharinism, were anathematised as apostates, heretics and schismatics.

The leader cult was only one aspect of cultic thought and practice that infused the life of the Communist Party. There was the cult of the founding fathers (Marx, Engels and Lenin), the cult of the Revolution, the cult of the proletariat and the cult of the party, the cult of the state itself – the USSR – each of which fostered its own myths. The cult of the party was especially powerful, requiring total obedience and obliging its members to reconstruct and re-educate themselves, to make themselves worthy members.²⁹ Not only the party but also other key institutions – the Red Army, the Cheka, the Komsomol, the Pioneers – each was the focus of the loyalties of particular constituencies. In the French Revolution it was the cult of the revolution, the nation (*patrie*) and the citizen. With the Nazi regime it was the cult of the race, the Volk and the Reich. The leader had to symbolise something greater than himself. The cult of the leader was always part of a much more densely structured argument to defend and justify the regime and its actions.

Initially the cult of Stalin stood in tension with the cult of Lenin, the cult of the party and the cult of the Revolution. The consolidation of Stalin's cult required a weakening of these other objects of veneration, or, at least, a reconfiguration of their relations to one another, and thus involved an important shift in the way the regime was legitimised. It reflected the reality that Stalin could command more public support than either the state or the party, and certainly more support than the regime's representatives and agents in the localities.

After the October Revolution the Russian political landscape was 'Sovietised' and stripped of the symbols of the old order. Social rituals and mass celebrations of the Revolution were woven into the daily lives of Soviet citizens; the calendar was organised around the commemoration of dates of great revolutionary significance; the dates of important Church rituals were commandeered by the regime.³⁰ It became an important aspect of the political culture of everyday life, fusing traditional attitudes to authority to the new symbolism of power.³¹ The leader cult was part of the strategy whereby communist regimes invented their own traditions.³²

The cult was projected through radio, film, music, the press and posters. The projection of the cult was part of a wider management of propaganda and cultural production, of which the mass production of *Staliniana* was one feature. It was modulated for different audiences, most obviously in the way it was adapted for children (see Chapter 6) and to take account of different regional, national and ethnic interests (see Chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8).

The reception of the cult

Such systems of veneration serve certain psychological needs of leaders and their followers.³³ For leaders, the adulation of followers is an intoxicant, it serves to ward away uncertainty and insecurity, it gives the individual a great sense of strength and power, and places him beyond the bounds of criticism. For the adherents of the cult, it invests their lives with a broader significance, a sense of wider purpose and achievement, and meets a longing for the fabulous, the mythopoeic, which transcends the mundane and the banal.

The cult changed in response to changing regime priorities; it changed also from one period to another, acquiring a different meaning and a different resonance with different social groups. Under the Stalin regime it is impossible to speak of any public opinion in the USSR, and to gauge popular sentiments is very difficult. The Soviet population in the 1920s and 1930s was in large measure alienated from the state. Stalin in the 1930s was not a popular figure. Even under his rule, Soviet citizens did not lose the capacity to distinguish between those aspects of the regime they supported and those they condemned.³⁴

The base of the cult as it developed from the late 1920s was amongst the regime's officials, activists and sympathisers, those whom Martov referred to in 1917 as the 'pensioners of the State'.³⁵ The party activists (*aktiv*) provided the hardcore of support, as the regime's social agents, as agitators and propagandists, as volunteers during Civil War and collectivisation. Within the Red Army and the Cheka (and its successors), the two key bastions of communist power, which had their own cultic associations, care was taken to inculcate a particular sense of loyalty to the leader. Within the working class and intelligentsia there was a core of Stalinist supporters. The beneficiaries of Soviet power, particularly those who were advanced by the new opportunities for upward mobility, may have been the real base of the cult. The Bolsheviks were a young party in 1917, and in successive waves in 1928–31 and in 1936–38 they promoted a younger generation of cadres into leading posts.³⁶ And in this the youngest, who had been educated by the regime, could be turned against the more 'backward' older generations. From the late 1930s a major shift occurred in terms of the regime's base of support. The new Soviet intelligentsia, especially the beneficiaries of the purges, was defined as the main social base of the regime.

The cult also drew on Russian traditions, the tradition of authoritarian leadership, a deep étatist tradition with its own bureaucratic culture, and even a tradition of popular monarchism that had deep roots.³⁷ But it may also have drawn on the strong patriarchal peasant culture with its respect for the elder (*starosta*) with its strong collectivist ethic. The Stalinist regime, like the tsarist regime, sought to link itself with the popular classes as a counterweight to the middle ranks and the nobility.

But the cult drew on other traditional values that were in tension with the regime's revolutionary protestations. For the elite it could be seen as a guarantee of their power. For the disadvantaged the Stalin cult offered the hope of redress. As the regime passed from its revolutionary phase to its phase of consolidation, from the late 1930s onwards, the cult came to symbolise the new social order that had been created. Whereas Nicholas I had stood for 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationalism', Stalin might have been seen to stand for 'Autocracy, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, and Soviet Patriotism'. This Soviet Patriotism was allied to militarisation of the regime and of popular consciousness.

There are, of course, limits to how far states can control society, or indoctrinate citizens. Totalitarian theory exaggerated the powers of states in this regard. Given the function of cognitive dissonance such indoctrination is always problematic, but the aspiration to such control was a central defining feature of these regimes. The constant projection of the leader cult over decades must have had a deep impact. Repressive regimes, even where terror is not employed, foster anxiety, helplessness, conformity and a desire to evade personal responsibility.³⁸ The Stalin regime's strength and its capacity for social mobilisation created even amongst its critics a desire to be reconciled with it, a belief that this was perhaps the wave of the future, which they were unable to recognise.³⁹

The legitimisation of the regime was not based simply on empty propaganda, but also on real achievements. All great achievements could be identified with the *vozhd'*. The great projects of the state – the five year plans, the huge new towns, the new factories, the giant showcase achievements such as the Moscow Metro – were intended to win public support. They were intended to offset the darker, more repressive side of its rule. Similarly the exploits of modern heroes – the Soviet flying aces, explorers, Stakhanovite workers, artists and scientists, military heroes – were also associated with the leader.

The cult reflected and bolstered cultural and intellectual traditions that offered a simplified view of the world where contradictions were overcome. It offered psychological and emotional reassurance, a focus of stability and unity, in a world of uncertainties. It aimed at something other than simple acquiescence to communist rule. It aimed at an emotional bonding of the community of believers, it sought to instil enthusiastic commitment, the faith of true believers in the leader and the regime. Marxism-Leninism,

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