

# STALIN'S CULT OF PERSONALITY

Among a nation so deeply divided by ethnicity, building unity and consensus was perhaps the major challenge to the Soviet government. With the revolution, a change was necessary. The result was the "cult of personality," the deliberate fixation of individual dedication and loyalty on the all-powerful leader, whose personality exemplified the challenge of creating socialist man and socialist woman.

The first selection by A.O. Avdienko illustrates by what emotional bonds the individual was tied to Stalin, and through Stalin the extraordinary transformation of the Russian state and society that he was attempting. The second selection by the Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, is taken from his book, *Precocious Autobiography* (1963), and looks back to the raw days of intellectual repression under Stalin.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thank you, Stalin. Thank you because I am joyful. Thank you because I am well. No matter how old I become, I shall never forget how we received Stalin two days ago. Centuries will pass, and the generations still to come will regard us as the happiest of mortals, as the most fortunate of men, because we lived in the century of centuries, because we were privileged to see Stalin, our inspired leader. Yes, and we regard ourselves as the happiest of mortals because we are the contemporaries of a man who never had an equal in world history.

The men of all ages will call on thy name, which is strong, beautiful, wise and marvelous. Thy name is engraved on every factory, every machine, every place on the earth, and in the hearts of all men. Every time I have found myself in his presence I have been in awe of his strength, his charm, his grandeur. I have experienced a great desire to sing, to cry out, and to shout with joy and happiness. And now see me!--on the same platform where the Great Stalin stood a year ago. In what country, in what part of the world could such a thing happen?

I write books. I am an author. All thanks to thee, O great educator, Stalin. I love a young woman with a renewed love - all thanks to thee, great educator, Stalin. I shall be eternally happy and joyous, all thanks to thee, great educator, Stalin. Everything belongs to thee, chief of our great country. And when the woman I love presents me with a child the first word it shall utter will be: Stalin.



1. How does this man feel about Stalin? Pick out two quotes that show his feelings towards Stalin.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How could we consider his "cult of personality" almost as a brainwashing? Why would people feel this way towards him?

\* \* \* \* \*

How was it possible for even gifted and intelligent people to be deceived? To begin with, Stalin was a strong and vivid personality. When he wanted to do something, Stalin knew how to charm people. In the second place, in the minds of the Soviet people, Stalin's name was linked with Lenin's. Stalin knew how popular Lenin was and saw to it that history was rewritten in such a way as to make his own relations with Lenin seem much friendlier than they had been in fact. The rewriting was so thorough that perhaps Stalin himself believed his own version in the end.



There can be no doubt of Stalin's love for Lenin. He wanted to stand as Lenin's heir not only in other people's eyes, but in his own eyes too. He deceived himself as well as the others. In reality, however, Stalin distorted Lenin's ideas, because to Lenin -- and this was the whole meaning of his work -- communism was to serve man, whereas under Stalin it appeared that man served communism. Stalin's theory that people were the little cogwheels of communism was put into practice and with horrifying results...

Poets visited factories and construction sites but wrote more about machines than about the men who made them work. If machines could read, they might have found such poems interesting. Human beings did not. As a result bookstores were cluttered up with books of poetry which no one wanted. Poetry remained unpopular. The older poets were silent, and when they did break their silence, it was even worse. The generation of poets that had been spawned by the war and that had raised so many hopes had died out. Life in peacetime turned out to be more complicated than life at the front. Two of the greatest Russian poets, Zablotsky and Smelyakov, were in concentration camps. The young poet Mandel (Korzhev) had been deported. I don't know if Mandel's name will be remembered in the history of Russian poets but it will certainly be remembered in the history of Russian social thought.

He was the only poet who openly wrote and recited verses against Stalin while Stalin was alive. In one poem he wrote of Stalin:

**There in Moscow, in whirling darkness,  
Wrapped in his military coat,  
Not understanding Pasternak {a very famous Russian poet}  
A hard and cruel man stared at the snow.**

... Now that ten years have gone by [Stalin died in 1953], I realize that Stalin's greatest crime was not the arrests and the shootings he ordered. His greatest crime was the corruption of the human spirit.

3. Why did Lenin cast a larger shadow over Stalin? How did that make him feel?

4. Analyze the poem. What is the message Mandel is trying to present about Stalin as a leader?