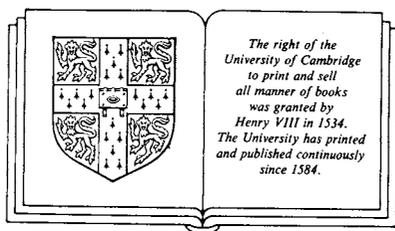


THE ORIGINS OF THE STALINIST POLITICAL SYSTEM

GRAEME GILL

Department of Government, The University of Sydney



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
New York Port Chester
Melbourne Sydney

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 1990

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1990
First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Gill, Graeme J.

The origins of the Stalinist political system / Graeme Gill.
p. cm. – (Soviet and East European studies: 74)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 38266 1

1. Soviet Union – Politics and government – 1917–1936. 2. Soviet Union –
Politics and government – 1936–1953. 3. Stalin, Joseph, 1879–1953. I. Title.
JN6511.G53 1990

320.947–dc20 89-25153 CIP

ISBN 0 521 38266 1 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52936 0 paperback

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	Page xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction: What is Stalinism?	1
PART I COHESIVE OLIGARCHY, 1917–1922	
1 The structure of sub-national politics	23
2 The structure of elite politics	51
PART II THE FRACTURED OLIGARCHY 1922–1929	
3 A strong party structure?	113
4 The divided elite	135
PART III THE RE-FORMED OLIGARCHY 1930–1934	
5 Regions under pressure	201
6 The Stalinist elite?	219
PART IV THE OLIGARCHY SUBDUED 1935–1941	
7 The enduring structures of sub-national politics	259
8 Elite ravaged	275
Conclusion: Why Stalinism?	307
<i>Notes</i>	328
<i>Bibliography</i>	427
<i>Index</i>	443

Introduction: What is Stalinism?

Stalinism is a much abused term. In the discourse of public politics in the West, particularly on the left of the political spectrum, it has become a form of abuse with little substantive content. In academic pursuits, too, the term has had a distinctly pejorative air. But even where it has been used in an analytical rather than a combative fashion, its use has often been characterised by a looseness of terminology and of thinking which clearly compromises its utility as a tool of both analysis and understanding. Furthermore, the difficulties with the use of the term reflect problems with the concept of Stalinism itself. The major difficulty is a lack of agreement about what should constitute Stalinism. All of those who have studied Stalinism – and there are surprisingly few studies of Stalinism as a system as opposed to Stalin as a person – have their own conceptions of what it means and these different conceptions are not always easily reconcilable. However, this is very often less a result of different positions in debate than of different foci of analysis; students often talk past one another rather than to one another. This problem of focus is well illustrated by the contemporary disputes about the role and nature of social history as applied to Stalinism.¹

Although social history had made earlier incursions into the question of Stalinism and its origins,² it did not begin to make a major impact upon our conception of Stalinism until the late 1970s and early 1980s.³ In the middle of the 1980s, a crop of new, younger historians has been making an impact upon our understanding of the Stalinist period in the USSR.⁴ This 'new cohort', to use Sheila Fitzpatrick's term,⁵ has been critical of the effect the totalitarian model has had upon our approach to and understanding of the Soviet system in general and Stalinism in particular. In their view, the focus upon the upper levels of the political system and the use of a cold war concept like totalitarianism obscured the reality of the system as it operated. It

imposed upon that system a rationality and a consistency which did not exist. Moreover, it cast the situation in terms of an active state operating upon a passive society. In contrast to this, they argued for the adoption of the 'perspective from below'. Such a perspective highlighted the chaos and irrationalities attendant upon policy implementation, emphasised the limits of central power and portrayed the society as less a passive subject and more a partner with the state in the on-going course of Soviet development.

The social historians' 'perspective from below' raised the ire of many students of Soviet affairs. The most important criticism made of this approach is that it underestimates the importance and power of the central political authorities. By focusing upon the weakness of political controls in the countryside, the limitations of party record-keeping, or the extent of popular initiative in the collectivisation campaign, they tend at best to downplay and at worst to ignore the high degree of centralisation and the significant capacity to exercise power enjoyed by the central political authorities. Reflective of this tendency is the charge that 'the terror is ignored, obscured or minimized' in many of these works and that Stalinism is reduced to 'humdrum politics'.⁶

There is some substance to these charges in that some of the more recent works do pay scant attention to the central political authorities, to Stalin and to the Terror. However, we need to be careful in levelling this charge. It is not legitimate to argue that *all* aspects of life in the Soviet Union in the 1930s can be understood only through the prism of Stalin and the Terror. It is legitimate to demand that the study of all aspects of life in the USSR at that time, from local administration through policy implementation to social mobility, takes due account of the importance and role of Stalin and the Terror for that aspect of life. To the extent that the critics of the social historians do not accept the former position, they are being unreasonable. To the extent that individual social historians ignore the latter position, they are being unrealistic.⁷

Part of the problem is the different foci of attention of the different groups of scholars and the generalisations that have flowed from these foci. In principle, two ways of approaching Stalinism have been evident. The first can be called the descending approach. Reflected most commonly in the totalitarian model, in biographies of Stalin and in what have been called 'regime studies',⁸ this approach focuses upon the structuring of national politics and the impact this has upon the society. The imagery is overwhelmingly one of an activist state

dominated by a single leader who wields the political instruments of power to transform the society. The latter may be passive, as in the totalitarian model, but even when it is not so conceived, it is able to have very little influence on the internal structuring and life of the regime.

In contrast, the ascending approach utilised principally by the social historians focuses upon the mass society and, sometimes, the lower levels of the regime. At a minimum, this approach emphasises the limits of central control and the high level of improvisation on the part of local political authorities. At a maximum, it assumes that many policies are the product of initiative from below, not direction from above.⁹ The political system appears much more ramshackle and much less able to impose its will on society than it does in the descending approach. Neither perspective is incorrect, but nor is either completely satisfactory.

The differences in what flows from the descending and ascending approaches simply reflect the different directions from which both approaches have come. It should not be surprising that a single phenomenon approached from different directions should appear to take on different forms. This has clearly happened to our understanding of Stalinism. But what has exacerbated this problem has been a tendency for some proponents of both approaches to reject out of hand the alternative approach, thereby claiming for their own particular position a monopoly of understanding of Stalinism. While such a position may be an understandable reaction in terms of partisan conflict, it is of little use in seeking to understand the Stalinist phenomenon and its implications. If we are to understand Stalinism, both perspectives, from above and below, must be taken into consideration.

There have been many discussions of Stalinism, but these have often involved a characterisation of Stalinism rather than an explanation of it. This is ably demonstrated by citing the words of three of the most acute observers of this period of Soviet history:

Stalinism was not simply nationalism, bureaucratization, absence of democracy, censorship, police repression, and the rest in any predated sense . . . Instead Stalinism was excess, extraordinary extremism, in each. It was not, for example, merely coercive peasant policies, but a virtual civil war against the peasantry; not merely police repression, or even civil war-style terror, but a holocaust by terror that victimized tens of millions of people for twenty-five years; not merely a Thermidorean revival of nationalist tradition, but an

almost fascist-like chauvinism; not merely a leader cult, but deification of a despot . . . Excesses were the essence of historical Stalinism, and they are what really require explanation.¹⁰

Stalinism as revolution from above.¹¹

Stalinism is 'Marxism of the illiterate.'¹²

None of these authors is so naive as to suggest that any of these formulations adequately summarises Stalinism either as a concept of academic discourse or a phenomenon of Soviet history. Each offers an analysis that is much more sophisticated and complete than the formulations reproduced above. However, these are useful because they demonstrate the short-hand, truncated conceptions with which many of us work when we are confronted with a phenomenon as diverse and rich as Stalinism. The problem with these formulations is not that they are wrong, but that they are all restricted and incomplete: the first relates to a mode of operation throughout much of the Stalin period without being specific about the substance of operation, the second is relevant only to the 1930s and not to the later periods of Stalinism, and the third relates only to one aspect of Stalinist life, the ideological.

The phenomenon of Stalinism is totalist. This does not mean that it embodies some totality of political control like that implied in the totalitarian model, but that Stalinism infected and shaped all spheres of life. If we are to understand Stalinism, and get away from the types of characterisations outlined above, we must see what is meant by Stalinism in each of the major spheres of Soviet life: political, economic, social and cultural. These constitute the four faces of Stalinism and will be treated in turn, but two preliminary points must be made. First, Stalinism was not a static phenomenon in any of these spheres; quite substantial changes occurred over time. Secondly, the threshold of Stalinism was not reached in all of these spheres at the same time. Only at the end of the so-called Great Terror of 1936–38¹³ could one say that they all came together and that the full-blown Stalinist system was in existence; prior to that Stalinism dominated some spheres of life, but not all.

The Stalinist political system was ushered into existence through the medium of the Great Terror. Its principal features were the personal dictatorship and the associated weakness of leading political institutions, the use of terror as an instrument of governance, and the weakness of the central authorities' capacity to exercise *continuing* control over the lower levels of the political system. Each of these

main points was linked, and each had significant implications for the structuring of the system as a whole.

Personal dictatorship bolstered by an extravagant leader cult is considered by most scholars to be the core of a Stalinist polity.¹⁴ Such a perception is accurate. This does not, of course, mean that Stalin personally resolved all questions that arose. However, he did decide whatever questions he chose to decide, and whenever he intervened in an issue, that intervention was decisive. In this sense, all decision-making power ultimately was concentrated in his hands. His dominance is reflected in the way in which argument over policy issues proceeded among his leadership colleagues only until Stalin made his views known, at which point all fell in publicly behind the view that he proffered. Following 1938 he was never openly challenged on policy issues, at least as far as we know. But what is equally as important as this decision-making power was the fact that his personal position of primacy was unchallengeable. Regardless of the outcome of policy associated with his name, his position was never under threat. He was clearly superior to his colleagues and was not expendable in the same way that they were. It was only through the Terror and the resulting elimination of all potential opposition and the cowing of those who remained that he was able to consolidate this unchallenged position of primacy.

An important aspect of his personal power was the associated weakness of the leading political organs of the system. Under Stalinism, these lacked organisational integrity and coherence. This meant that Stalin could interfere at will in the operations of all political institutions, that these institutions did not have discrete spheres of responsibility and power within which they could act free from the involvement of other political actors, and that their own internal operations were not structured by a stable body of organisational norms stemming from within the institution itself. In short, all political organisations were the instruments of the *vozhd'*, of Stalin, and were not independent from him. As this study shows, the political institutions that comprised the Soviet system never had a firmly based sense of organisational integrity or coherence, but it was the Terror which transformed them into the instruments of Stalin personally rather than of the political leadership more generally.

Being instruments of the leader does not mean that such bodies as the party, state commissariats/ministries, police, trade unions and the military did not have their own institutional interests or were active only when Stalin chose to use them. While the leading party organs

atrophied,¹⁵ along with many other bodies, much of the party and state apparatus continued in existence, even if only as a result of inertia. They continued to function, with policy suggestions still emanating from them, efforts still being made to implement central instructions and internecine bureaucratic conflicts over power and influence continuing unabated. However they were always subject to intervention from Stalin, with the result that their activities were always contingent upon the absence of objection from the leader.

One aspect of the weakness of these institutions was the importance of personalised linkages in the structuring of political life. The weakness of the formal rules designed to structure political life meant that the most important channels of political intercourse were personal. Bonds of friendship, political alliance or support became the main currency of political life. Furthermore, it was these personal relationships which were the major sinews binding the system together and the most important mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of policy. Given that the system's functioning could not be maintained through the weak institutional norms, personalised linkages were the only means through which this could be achieved. The most notable instance of this sort of phenomenon was the structure of supporters which Stalin was able to place throughout the system, but this was merely the most important instance of what was a more general phenomenon.

An important element in reducing the political organs to this instrumental state and ensuring that they remained in it was the Terror. What is crucial for the emergence of the Stalinist political system is the transformation of the Terror from an instrument of policy into an instrument of governance. Terror, defined as the use of coercion unrestrained by established rules or norms, had been used in various earlier phases of Soviet history. The most important of these was during the Civil War and at the time of agricultural collectivisation.¹⁶ What differentiates the terror of these two periods from that of the late 1930s is that the former was generally directed at achieving specific, if large, regime goals. It was, therefore, directed at regime policy implementation. The Great Terror of 1936–38 seems to have been directed much more at consolidating the power of Stalin and his immediate supporters by destroying both potential opposition and possible institutional buffers against personal rule. At least this was its effect. Moreover, for the first time, terror was directed against functionaries of the regime itself and its principal institutional structures. In this sense, the Terror of 1936–38 was qualitatively different to

that which preceded it. Similarly, the scale of the suffering rendered it qualitatively different. But what also needs to be recognised is the fundamental transformation that the Terror brought over the Soviet polity. By demolishing the barrier that previously had existed to the use of terror against political opposition within the regime, the Great Terror fundamentally altered the rules whereby politics were played out. Henceforth, the threat of terror was always present, even when it was not being used openly on the scale of 1936–38, with the result that the controller of the terror machine possessed a potent weapon which could be held over the heads of his colleagues. This constituted a firm buttress for Stalin's position.

It was thus the transformation of the Terror into an instrument of governance, reflected in the recognition by all that it could again be unleashed at the dictator's will, that fundamentally differentiated the Stalinist from the non-Stalinist political system. Always present, this potentiality pervaded all aspects of life in the USSR. Its presence was reaffirmed by those occasions in which it was openly used, most importantly the deportations from those areas incorporated into the USSR at the time of the war, the Leningrad affair of 1948 and the doctors' plot, and by the institutional prominence of the police in the Stalinist system. Indeed, the position of the police, personified by Beria's membership of the Politburo after 1939, meant that in institutional terms this was a much more important organ of the political system than were either the party or the state machines. Its prominence was always enjoyed in the shadow of the dictator, but this did nothing to ameliorate the ethos of the Terror which it exuded.

The centralisation of political power reflected in Stalin's personal dictatorship and the weakness of elite political organs was paralleled by the inability of the central authorities to exercise continuing close control over political life at sub-national levels of the Stalinist system. This does not mean that Moscow was powerless in the face of lower level intransigence or opposition. Whenever the Moscow leadership turned its attention to particular sub-national organisations, it could bring about whatever changes in membership it desired and it could ensure the implementation of central directives. However the national leadership did not have the capacity to exercise on-going close supervision of affairs in all localities. Its direct involvement in local affairs was therefore episodic rather than continuing, and the political system (including the party) was more a ramshackle structure than a highly integrated, smoothly operating entity.

The absence of continuing close supervision meant that sub-

national political organs were effectively largely autonomous in their day-to-day activities. The local political machines, generally dominated by the party first secretaries, ruled their regions like medieval fiefs, ultimately answerable to Moscow but in practice able to conduct their affairs with little outside interference. Local dictators, the so-called 'little Stalins',¹⁷ were the real powers at sub-national levels throughout the Soviet Union. The political machine under Stalinism was thus a highly segmented structure. Here lies one of the paradoxes of the Stalinist political system: a high degree of centralism was accompanied by significant practical autonomy on the part of sub-national political organs.

The second face of Stalinism is the economic. The Stalinist economic model has received considerable attention because of the rates of growth which the Soviet Union was able to achieve using this model during the 1930s. Its chief element is its directive nature. The main impetus behind economic development was not to be the interplay of market forces but the instructions and directives handed down from the central planning agencies in Moscow. While many of these directives were encapsulated in the official five year plans, too much should not be made of the extent of precise planning that was involved. Plan targets, particularly in the first half of the 1930s, rarely reflected rational economic calculations about what was feasible. They were more in the form of ambit figures reflecting the desires of the central planners, themselves under pressure from the political authorities, for increased growth at almost any cost. Better termed a command than a planned economy, its directive nature meant that it was a much more suitable instrument for the pursuit of political ends than it would have been had it relied upon market forces. The form in which it was organised also meant that, in principle if not always in practice, the low-level production units had only limited autonomy; all of the most important decisions about their operations were to be made in Moscow.

The directive nature of the economy meant that Soviet economic development was structured around the political priorities of its leaders. During the entire Stalinist period, the first priority was clearly the promotion of heavy industry, with its defence industry spin offs. Although the overwhelming emphasis upon heavy industry in the First Five Year Plan was lessened somewhat in later plan periods, popular consumption remained the poor cousin of heavy industry in terms of economic priorities. This means that economic development was unbalanced, and although it enabled rapid advances to be made

in the heavy industry sector, this was at the cost of the failure to satisfy other sorts of demands elsewhere in the system.

Reliance on central direction rather than market forces plus the general emphasis upon rapid, large-scale growth meant that gross output was considered more important than quality considerations. Short-term fulfilment of plan targets expressed in quantitative terms was a higher priority than the design and production of goods to meet certain specified needs. As a result, although large quantities of goods were produced, they were often unsatisfactory for the purpose for which they were meant. The cult of bigness overshadowed considerations of utility.

This mode of operation was very wasteful of resources. Not only was much produced that was of little use, but the economic strategy was one which relied heavily upon continuing large inputs of labour and capital. This strategy was able to work only because the peasants could continually be exploited in order to produce surpluses to generate the capital required, and because of the huge labour force provided by the peasant shift to the cities. This continuing supply of labour discouraged efforts to move to a more intensive style of economic development and enabled a profligacy with resources that would have been impossible with a tighter labour market.

Reliance on continuing labour inputs was one aspect of the mobilisational nature¹⁸ of the economic strategy. The attempt was made to mobilise all efforts into the task of economic development, something which had direct implications for social and cultural life. But the mobilisation of these forces could not rely on a market-based system of incentives because of the low priority given to the production of consumer goods. Mobilisation thus rested on a combination of material incentives, provided principally through a highly differentiated wage structure and a system of rationing of food and consumer goods, a highly developed system of symbolic and status rewards, and the use of coercion. The weighting of each of these elements differed over time, but all were present throughout the Stalinist period.

Mobilisation, and in particular its coercive aspects, was particularly evident at the time of the events which most scholars associate with the Stalinist growth model, agricultural collectivisation and forced-pace industrialisation during the First Five Year Plan. This was when the formulation 'revolution from above' was most applicable to the Stalinist economic system. Principally through a combination of enthusiastic commitment and the application of significant force, with

a resulting considerable loss of life, centrally decreed economic transformation was achieved. But it is here that the limitations of the 'revolution from above' formula as a characterisation of Stalinism are most evident: the attempt at revolutionary transformation reached its peak in the early 1930s, but by the late 1940s the priority had shifted from revolutionary change to routine administration. While some echoes of the rhetoric of the earlier period may have remained and while the mobilisation of labour resources was still a primary lever of economic growth, the aim had become the running of an industrialised economy, not the transformation of an agricultural one.

Thus, while the basic ethos behind Stalinist economic development changed fundamentally from the introduction of the Stalinist economic system in 1929–30 until its mature years in the late 1940s to early 1950s, throughout this period its major structural aspects remained substantially unchanged. With its centrally directive nature, the Stalinist economic system was a clear contrast to the NEP period which preceded it.

The third face of Stalinism is the social, and here too the term 'revolution from above' is appropriate. One of the most important effects of the policies of economic transformation set in train at the end of the 1920s was the massive social mobility which they involved. Clearly there were losers in this process: those classified as kulaks, many who had owned and operated private businesses under NEP and significant numbers of technical specialists were casualties of the First Five Year Plan. Perhaps it can be said that the peasants more generally were also casualties in the sense that they were transformed from being legally free farmers into producers tied to their respective collective or state farms. At the time of the Great Terror too there were countless casualties, including those untold numbers who were killed or incarcerated in the labour camps. But at the same time, these periods witnessed unprecedented levels of upward mobility. The economic changes created large numbers of managerial and technical positions in the countryside which had to be filled principally from among those for whom such posts were a promotion. But more importantly, the industrialisation drive created an immense need for an urban labour force which could be satisfied only through the displacement of peasants from the land. Although a wrenching process for those who went into the cities, it was also a process which set their feet upon the ladder of social mobility. Furthermore, the continuing high level of demand for foremen, managerial staff and white-collar workers in the burgeoning governmental and industrial

bureaucracies meant that those with ability were able to ascend swiftly to positions which their fathers did not dream of. Paradoxically, the purges contributed to this process; for everyone purged from a leading position, a replacement had to be found. The war and post-war reconstruction also provided scope for upward mobility but at a reduced level compared with the 1930s. Nevertheless, channels of mobility remained open throughout the Stalinist period.

The massive social mobility that was a central aspect of Stalinism brought about a transformation of the social structure in the USSR. This is not the place for an extended analysis of the nature of that social structure, but a couple of aspects should be mentioned. More than ever before, the contours of the social structure reflected political imperatives as perceived by the leadership. This can be seen clearly if we look at certain aspects of the structural location of four broad groups in the society. The first, and those on the lowest rung of the social ladder, were those in the labour camps scattered across the country. Although the numbers are disputed, they were clearly high. The vast majority of these people were in the camps for 'crimes' which, in other systems, would not have merited such treatment. This was particularly true of those who entered the camps during the Terror, but also applied to other people at other times who suffered as a result of what were essentially political factors. The second group were the peasants. The collectivisation of agriculture was meant to eliminate stratification in the countryside, but it was unable to do this. Peasant incomes remained dependent on the productivity of the farms on which they worked, with the result that those in poor areas were at a disadvantage compared with those in the better producing regions. Furthermore, the restrictions on private enterprise limited the capacity of many peasants to improve their standard of living; they could not produce as much as they might have done for the open market. Political constraint was also evident in the limitations on movement imposed on the peasants by the internal passport system. For many, the days of serfdom appeared to have returned.

Differentiation also appeared among the third group, the workers, as a result of the policy of highly stratified wage scales. While there was an element of payment for performance, wage inequalities also reflected vague notions of the value of different occupations for the course of socialist construction. Notions of a labour aristocracy are relevant to this sort of analysis. But differential value for different occupations was also reflected in the system of privileges. This is best seen in terms of the fourth group, the responsible office holders, or

so-called *nomenklatura*. This group obtained their positions through appointment from above, and it was under Stalinism that the direct linkage between office and privilege that had emerged earlier became cemented into place. Each gradation of office had its own gradation of privilege. This was a means of rationing goods that were in short supply and providing an incentive for service and loyalty. The provision of these privileges for those in official positions clearly set them apart from the rest of the population; their positions and privileges were thus administratively, not market, determined. In sum, the stratification system which emerged with Stalinism was politically moulded.

Another element of the social face of Stalinism was the educational revolution. The demands of the economy stimulated the massive expansion of educational facilities and a sharp rise over a relatively short period of time in the educational level of the population. The thrust behind much of this expansion was purely instrumental; technical education was required to satisfy economic needs. While the state's massive educational effort did succeed in satisfying the need for technical cadres, it also had the important effect of increasing general educational levels.

The final face of Stalinism was the cultural. Stalinist culture became dominant in the last part of the First Five Year Plan period when it displaced the revolutionary ethos that had been evident during the cultural revolution of 1929–31. During this time culture had had a clear anti-elitist ethos; the masses were at the forefront of literature and art while all notion of hierarchy, of managers and bosses, was a distinctly subordinate strain. However from 1931 this changed. There was a new emphasis on hierarchy and on leaders, with a shift away from the 'little man' on to the 'big man', the hero, the role model.¹⁹ Increasingly the focus was on larger than life figures who performed heroic feats in the struggle for socialism; the Stakhanovite worker was the clearest instance of this.²⁰ The masses became the subordinate backdrop for the stage on which the hero figure could perform his deeds.

The doctrine of socialist realism was applied, tying all cultural endeavour to the wheel of socialist construction. Cultural production was valuable as long as it contributed to the building of socialism, a demand which imposed upon the society a stultifying uniformity and conformity. Furthermore it reflected the developments fostered in other aspects of Stalinism. It confirmed economic and status stratification, reinforced the value of heavy industry over light and the urban worker over the peasant, and it embodied the sort of middle-class

values which characterised many of those who had profited from the opportunities for social mobility created by the revolution from above.

Nationalism was also important in Stalinist culture, beginning during the mid-1930s and becoming highly significant during the war. The internationalist ethos of the revolution's early years was completely submerged as Russian nationalist themes moved to a prominent place in the regime's symbolic universe. The virtues of the Russian past, its great figures and cultural heritage, ceased to be objects of scorn and criticism and became major symbolic pillars of the regime's public legitimation programme. Particularly during the war, the symbolism of the past became overwhelming; the builders of the Russian state, such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great; the soldiers who defended its integrity and led it to victory, such as Nevsky, Suvorov and Kutuzov; the symbols of Russian greatness, such as the Kremlin; and the pillars of Russian identity, such as the Orthodox Church were all projected as key aspects of the Soviet regime's symbolism. Indeed, the strength of this Russian revivalism was so great that it may best be described as chauvinism. Everything Russian was glorified, while all of the major advances made in virtually all spheres of endeavour from the theory of relativity to the invention of the submarine were attributed to Russians. The obverse side of this was that all things foreign were attacked and excoriated.

One of the most important aspects of Stalinism was the lavish cult of the leader which was projected throughout Soviet society during this period. Beginning in December 1929, the Stalin cult interacted with the growing cultural emphasis on heroes and on the great figures of the Russian past. It joined this symbolism with the myth of the October Revolution and Lenin to create a broad basis of legitimation both for the regime as a whole and for Stalin individually. By the mid-1930s, Stalin was the predominant cultural symbol in the USSR; he became the source of orthodoxy in all walks of life, the symbolism thereby matching the political power which he had acquired by the end of that decade.

The orthodoxy implied by the cult had dire implications for the growth and development of ideology. Under Stalinism this became highly stylised and formalised, a standardised set of concepts and formulae whose role in Soviet public life had become primarily rhetorical. Ideological language and concepts were used principally as a means of expressing policy and conducting discourse, but without themselves being major forces generating new thinking on the matters under review. Ideology became even more instrumental than