

Engines of Utopia: Personal Power, Ideological Performance, and the Making of Revolution in Stalinist  
and Gandhian Movements

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Revolutions

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## Introduction: Framing Gandhi and Stalin, 1928-32

*Every period has its great men, and if these are lacking, it invents them.*

— Claude Adrien

Helvétius<sup>1</sup>

What happens when revolutions do not find great men, but forge them – when history shapes personality as much as personality shapes history? It is in this context that we must establish what ‘personality’ looks like. In addition to being charismatic and temperamental, personality can also be understood as what historian E.A. Rees describes as a “deliberately constructed and managed mechanism”<sup>2</sup> that integrates the political system around the leader’s persona. While revolutionary actors may derive authority from structural positions, the mobilisation and stylisation of an authoritative figure’s *personality* propels the culmination of a revolution. The intersection between personality, authority, and revolutionary scripts can be best understood through the contrasting yet convergent cases of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (M.K.G.) and Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. They remain two figures who have been able to transform their personalities into central instruments of revolutionary power. This essay argues that between 1928 and 1932, Gandhi and Stalin transformed revolutionary possibility into political reality by imprinting mass movements with the force of their personalities. In addition to ideology, structure, and authority, I maintain that personality works in conjunction with this trifecta as the key to wielding authority effectively.

To understand these revolutionary scripts,<sup>3</sup> it is necessary to situate them within the specific historical, political, and social contexts from which they emerged. Stalin, in 1928, consolidated power following Lenin’s death and the waning of the NEP (1928), launching the First Five-Year Plan (October 1, 1928) to industrialise the Soviet Union through state-driven transformation. This initiated a revolution from above, marked by collectivisation, dekulakization, and the 1932–33 famine, that violently subordinated society to the state. Gandhi, in 1928, began emerging as the face of mass resistance following the Rowlatt Act (21st March, 1919) and the Jallianwala Bagh (13 April 1919) massacre,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helvétius, quoted in Leon Trotsky, *My life*, [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch41.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch41.htm) (accessed 5 Jul. 2025).

<sup>2</sup> E.A. Rees, ‘Introduction: leader cults: varieties, preconditions and functions’, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Script, in this context, refers to a model that organizes sequences of revolutionary action, thought, and rhetoric.

<sup>4</sup> The Rowlatt Act, officially known as the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, empowered the British colonial government in India to detain individuals without trial, provoking widespread unrest. This culminated in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on 13 April 1919, when General Reginald Dyer ordered troops to fire on a peaceful gathering in Amritsar, killing hundreds. For a detailed account, see Kim A. Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

which shattered Indian trust in British liberalism and exposed the colonial state as fundamentally authoritarian. From the Lahore Session's demand for *Purna Swaraj* (self-rule) to the Salt March (March-April, 1930) and Round Table Conferences (1930-1932), he transformed nationalist sentiment into disciplined mass civil disobedience. The effect was the radical expansion of political participation and a permanent rupture in colonial legitimacy. While both leaders existed in starkly different contexts, they each leveraged systemic instability to redefine the relationship between state and society. Despite operating in vastly different geopolitical and ideological milieus, both Gandhi and Stalin emerged at a time of profound systemic volatility. Each, in his own way, exploited this instability to recalibrate the nexus between state and society. Yet, what unfolds when radically divergent personalities mobilise similar configurations of authority? This essay undertakes a parallel reading of the Gandhian and Stalinist revolutionary scripts to highlight how personality, in addition to ideology, structure, and authority, becomes instrumental in wielding power. Such a juxtaposition enables a more granular and philosophically attentive understanding of the mechanics of revolutionary authority.

### **Two Revolutionary Scripts**

A revolution is conventionally understood as a rapid, often violent overthrow of an existing political order, an event marked by rupture, mass mobilisation, and the pursuit of a radically new regime. Yet, revolution is as much a narrative as it is a sequence of events: it entails the remaking of political subjectivity, the reconfiguration of legitimacy, and the redefinition of time itself.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, in addition to regime change, revolutions entail new ways of thinking (Gandhi's idea of non-violence) and legitimise new forms of authority (Stalin's rewriting of history to situate himself as Lenin's true heir). To that end, the revolutionary nature of both Stalinist and Gandhian trajectories demands recognition because of the structural transformations they enacted.

While they existed in distinct geopolitical contexts, their authority emerged from a similar capacity to reconstitute the relationship between power, people, and history. This makes the idea of revolutionary script a particularly potent concept when establishing a compelling comparison between these two revolutionary figures during the same time period. Using their own unique ways of wielding authority - Gandhi and Stalin - remade political subjectivity and reconfigured legitimacy. Their sense of authority was very similar - unquestioning submission, an ability to advance their agenda under the guise of popular will. But these similarities end when we closely assess the consequences of their authority, and the consequences depended on and were shaped by the personalities of Gandhi and Stalin.

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<sup>5</sup> Dan, Edelstein. *The Revolution to Come: A History of an Idea from Thucydides to Lenin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025.

While the revolutionary model is central to the potency of a revolution, it is the script writer's personality which plays a defining role.

While Stalin's Revolution from Above has found traction in academic scholarship, Gandhi's revolutionary potential has been studied and characterised as “Movements”. Both the colonial and postcolonial scholarship have chosen to box his revolutionary script into an anticolonial movement. This paper aims to liberate this potential and rediscover the revolutionary nature of Gandhi's actions. The Indian Civil Disobedience Movement, though conventionally termed a “movement” under the colonial gaze, functioned in every substantive sense as a revolution. It mobilised millions across caste, class, and gender, reanimating the masses as active political agents under Gandhi's nonviolent Satyagraha.<sup>6</sup> Women, in particular, emerged as symbolic and strategic actors, lending moral authority and reshaping the terms of revolutionary participation; their participation lent moral gravitas and broadened the revolutionary imagination, by expanding the political space for action.<sup>7</sup> From the Salt March to the Lahore Resolution, Gandhi challenged the legitimacy of the empire, rendering colonial sovereignty ideologically indefensible.

Stalin's revolution, by contrast, was one from above. While the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 promised worker-led socialism, Stalin re-scripted the revolution after Lenin's death, not by the proletariat but by the state, as the true agent of transformation. He went so far as to say, “*We are a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us.*”<sup>8</sup> The First Five-Year Plan, collectivisation, and dekulakisation marked a cultural revolution – a redirection of capital, time, and life itself toward an industrial utopia.<sup>9</sup> Through planned economies, the liquidation of the NEPmen<sup>10</sup>, and the vision of the New Soviet Man, Stalin's revolution redefined the telos of state and citizen alike. Stalin cared very little for the will of the people. Stalin's

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<sup>6</sup> The term *Satyagraha* denotes a philosophy and praxis of nonviolent resistance grounded in truth (*satya*) and firmness (*agraha*). It emerged as a distinct mode of political struggle during Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa and was later central to anti-colonial mobilisations in India. See M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, trans. Valji Govindji Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1928). [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/satyagraha\\_in\\_south\\_africa.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/satyagraha_in_south_africa.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Dan, Edelstein, “Revolutionary Futures” in *The Revolution to Come: A History of an Idea from Thucydides to Lenin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025, 258-276.

<sup>8</sup> J.V. Stalin. *The Tasks of Business Executives*. Speech delivered at the First All-Union Conference of Leading Personnel of Socialist Industry. February 4, 1931. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/02/04.htm>

<sup>9</sup> The Stalinist Project was both a continuation and radicalisation of Lenin's ideology. While Lenin had already instituted a progressive, future-oriented conception of historical time, Stalin reengineered this horizon through a top-down accelerationism that demanded the total subordination of individual and collective life to the industrial utopia envisioned by the Five-Year Plans. See Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*; George Orwell, 1984; Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (Metropolitan Books, 2007) to understand Stalin's radicalisation. See Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (Knopf, 2007); Bertram Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (Dial Press, 1948) for analyses that underscore the structural continuities between Leninist and Stalinist statecraft.

<sup>10</sup> NEPmen were businessmen and women (NEPmenshi) who took advantage of the opportunities for private trade and small-scale manufacturing created by the New Economic Policy (NEP).

will was the only will. (See appendix for literary comment on revolutionary narratives under Stalinist Russia).

Stalin and Gandhi both introduced practices which reshaped the nature of their nations - Gandhi's is celebrated for being a unique example of anticolonial struggle while Stalin's is denounced for its bloodthirsty purges. This required challenging the pre-existing order - the colonial state in Gandhi's case and the Leninist state in the case of Stalin. Gandhi offered a civilizational alternative to the colonial state while Stalin showed that the potential for violence in the Leninist system, when juxtaposed with technological advancements, was practically unlimited. Both these men did not work alone. No leader can - after all, a leader needs followers. Despite the fact that the running joke in Soviet Russia was that Stalin's followers never aged - not because they had conquered age but because they didn't live so long, Stalin too had his set of loyal admirers. Gandhi, sanitized and pure, had his staunch critics both during his life and his afterlife, the latter has increased voluminously. Their revolutions led to changes in national life - Stalin's became, in Orlando Figes' famous phrasing, a nation of whisperers while Gandhi's has inherited a vocabulary of public action unmatched in other democracies. Thus, the methods and moral vocabularies of Gandhi and Stalin diverged, both orchestrated revolutions that shattered inherited structures of legitimacy, produced new political actors, and inscribed new temporalities into national life.

### **Saint and Stalinist: Two Divergent Paths to Revolutionary Authority**

If revolutions follow a script for seizing and legitimising power, then Gandhi and Stalin offer two divergent stagings of revolutionary authority: one mobilising spiritual force and ethical exemplarity, the other deploying institutional control and coercive acceleration. Both operated within the same grammar of transformation, yet their mechanisms, saintly charisma versus sovereign centralisation, rendered the revolutionary subject legible in radically different ways.

### Conflicting Moralities

How does personal authority mediate the morality of revolutions? What does this reveal about the nature of political legitimacy at large? The personalities of Gandhi and Stalin – respectively ascetic and autocratic – encode divergent moral frameworks that shape their actions and moral structures.

Gandhi's personality, marked by self-discipline, spiritual interiority, and a consistent commitment to self-limitation, gave rise to a moral universe in which *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence) were epistemic and ethical commitments. As Syed A. Sayeed contends, Gandhi's morality

did not emerge from doctrinal abstraction but from the evolutionary integrity of a self that refused to separate moral judgment from lived experience.<sup>11</sup> Stalin, by contrast, constructed a political morality rooted in necessity, coercion, and ideological absolutism, an ethic justified by historical determinism and enforced through systematic violence. His personality, shaped by paranoia and a drive for control, generated a moral logic in which terror could be reframed as virtue, and dissent as moral defect. The juxtaposition suggests that morality and personality operate dialectically: one's moral worldview is not only shaped by psychological disposition but also recursively shapes how the self comes to be constituted within political action. For Gandhi, truth was approached asymptotically, held with humility, and enacted through the refusal to impose. For Stalin, truth was teleologically fixed, inseparable from state power, and morally obligated to be imposed.

I believe that personality shapes morality, which in turn undergirds revolutionary authority. First, from a philosophical standpoint, one must consider that morality is not a set of universally held principles applied objectively; rather, it is always mediated through subjective dispositions. As Neera Chandhoke notes in her analysis of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, moral judgment requires rational assent and the internal cultivation of self-discipline, humility, and a readiness to suffer, traits rooted in personal formation.<sup>12</sup> Personality is thus the medium through which moral orientation is not only interpreted but embodied.

Secondly, morality, once embodied becomes political when it is enacted as a vision for the collective. The moral universe a leader inhabits defines what kinds of violence are permissible, what kinds of sacrifice are valorized, and what kinds of legitimacy are possible. For instance, Gandhi's moral code of non-violence becomes the ethic for a mode of resistance. Similarly, Stalin's personality translated into a morality of state violence that rendered terror as a fulfillment of moral order.

Third, the link to authority is institutional. The revolutionary state is often born in conditions of instability, where charisma and symbolic power supplant bureaucratic or legal-rational legitimacy. In the absence of stable institutions, the leader's personality and moral vision become the source of political legitimacy. Stalin's cult of personality and Gandhi's moral aura functioned as organizing principles for political obedience. In both cases, the leader's authority derived not simply from doctrine or coercion, but from the moral grammar inscribed in their personalities, which structured how followers interpreted loyalty, dissent, and sacrifice.

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<sup>11</sup> Sayeed, Syed A. "Ethics of Truth: Non-Violence and Truth." *Social Scientist* 34, no. 5/6 (2006): 84–103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27644143>.

<sup>12</sup> Chandhoke, Neera. "Quest for Justice: The Gandhian Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 18 (2008): 37–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40277664>.

Therefore, the relationship remains recursive. Personality forms the conditions for moral vision; morality provides the criteria for justifying authority; authority, once achieved, enshrines the personality in institutional memory. However, to understand the divergent mechanisms of Gandhi and Stalin's personality, we read them individually.

### Gandhi's Non-Violent Path

*Who is the true warrior – he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others?*

—  
Gandhi<sup>13</sup>

This section focuses on Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. Gandhi, unlike his contemporaries, forged revolutionary authority from the ground up, through moral persuasion, civic self-discipline, and ethical self-suffering.<sup>14</sup> His authority, unlike Stalin's bureaucratic consolidation, was neither derivative of the state nor grounded in institutional violence, but constructed through the performativity of truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*), as theorised in his Satyagraha campaigns.

Gandhi's personality played a crucial role in shaping the anti-colonial engine of the Indian independence movement. His authority, unlike that of Stalin, was not derived from the state, party, or class, but from *moral legitimacy and self-sacrifice*, thereby transforming the nature of revolution itself.<sup>15</sup> The *Satyagraha Leaflet* (fig. 1) called upon Indians to "break unjust laws" as a moral imperative, not an act of sedition, establishing Gandhi's method of civic disobedience as deeply ethical, performative, and constructive. The leaflet exemplifies what Michael Salla calls Gandhi's "view of human nature"<sup>16</sup> as spiritually inclined yet susceptible to evil, demanding constant ethical purification through nonviolence. In embodying this purification, Gandhi became both a symbol and a pedagogue, his self-suffering (fasts,

<sup>13</sup> Harcourt, Bernard. "Banu Bargu | Gandhi's Fasts." *Uprising 13/13 - Columbia Law School Blogs*, November 29, 2017. Accessed July 4, 2025. <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/banu-bargu-gandhis-fasts/>

<sup>14</sup> Mahatma Gandhi saw suffering as an indispensable element of true sacrifice. It was through suffering that the individual was refined, becoming a transformed moral agent. Whereas violent revolutions sought the physical destruction of the adversary, Gandhi emphasized the eradication of internal evils. *Satyagraha*, anchored in self-mastery, relied on love, empathy, and nonviolent resistance. Retaliation was not only inadequate but contrary to the goal of inner and relational transformation. In *Young India* (August 11, 1920) Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "Suffering is the mark of the human tribe. It is an eternal law."

<sup>15</sup> The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22) marked Gandhi's first major national mobilization, wherein he called for the boycott of British institutions and goods following the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It was the first time mass *satyagraha* was deployed as a cohesive political instrument. A decade later, the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), inaugurated by the Salt March, deepened this revolutionary strategy by openly challenging colonial law and tax regimes. Both movements reveal Gandhi's mobilisation of non-violent resistance rather than military authority. These movements are often seen as drastic shifts from previous models of revolution – as theorised by thinkers from Rousseau and Robespierre to Lenin. See Judith Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928–34* (Cambridge University Press, 1977); Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Salla, Michael Emin. "SATYAGRAHA IN MAHATMA GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY." *Peace Research* 25, no. 1 (1993): 39–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23607222>.

arrests, discipline) enacting *swaraj* not as political independence alone, but as inner self-rule. Unlike Stalin's top-down revolution, which we will later confront, Gandhi's was "from below," structured by personal example and the reconstitution of social conscience. The 1930 *Manchester Guardian* (fig. 2) report, detailing Gandhi's deliberate attempt to provoke arrest by breaking the salt laws, reveals a paradox: he *invited* repression to unmask colonial hypocrisy. His disappointment at not being arrested confirms that the revolution he led was not about violent confrontation, but about dramatising injustice through presence, not power.

Another facet of Gandhi's personality, which propelled him both as an intellectual and a revolutionary leader, was his unique capacity to absorb dissent. This feature paradoxically revealed both the strength and fragility of his charisma. The *Manchester Guardian* article describing untouchable counter-satyagrahis physically obstructing Gandhi's salt movement at Jalapur indicates that even the most marginalised could challenge his authority, not through violence, but by deploying his moral weapons against him. Yet Gandhi did not collapse under contradiction. He consistently reframed resistance as dialogue and criticism as a crucible for ethical renewal. Nowhere is this clearer than in his confrontation with Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference, where Gandhi insisted, with striking ego, that "I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the untouchables,"<sup>17</sup> even stating he would top a referendum over Ambedkar. This moment reveals Gandhi not as an infallible saint, but as a deeply political figure, willing to universalise his personal authority at the cost of denying Dalit autonomy. As Lelyveld observes, this clash was "heavily laden with meanings": a personal wound, a constitutional struggle, and a battle over who could script the revolution from below. Gandhi's insistence on rejecting separate electorates for untouchables, despite Ambedkar's powerful critique that the Congress was a Brahmanical formation, underscored his belief that institutionalising caste difference would fossilise social division. But in claiming to represent the "dumb millions," Gandhi also revealed the blind spots of his paternalistic universalism.

Unlike Stalin, who eliminated dissent to protect a monolithic vision of revolution, Gandhi welcomed dissent to refine it, but only insofar as it did not undermine his moral authority or challenge his role as the public face of the revolution. Stalin's authority expanded through silencing; Gandhi's through moral noise, fasts, speeches, and salt. Yet both were builders of *totalising scripts*: Stalin remade society through state power; Gandhi reshaped political participation by redefining the ideal revolutionary as one guided by moral discipline, inner transformation, and collective sacrifice. Their

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, "Hail, Deliverer" in *Great Soul: Mahatma and His Struggle with India* (HarperCollins, 2011), 244.



paths diverge not only methodologically but also metaphysically: Stalin demanded obedience to the future; Gandhi demanded fidelity to truth. However, both ultimately remade the political imagination by transforming their personalities into the architectures of revolution.

### Stalin's Violent Path

*A Prince must possess the nature of both beast and man*

— Machiavelli<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Stalin's rise to power can be understood as both a continuation and a radical departure from the revolutionary goals of 1917. Only a few years after the Bolshevik seizure of power and the assassination of Tsar Nicholas II in 1918, the promise of a stateless, classless society was supplanted by a regime in which Lenin (and then Stalin) centralised immense personal authority. This phenomenon, what Trotsky called the "thermidorian" turn, reveals a deep contradiction: how did a revolution premised on the dissolution of centralised government produce leaders more autocratic than the Romanovs?

Stalin's rise, especially between 1928 and 1932, exemplifies this paradox. As Robert Tucker argues, the Stalin cult was a strategic mechanism for reinforcing personal domination within the Party and across Soviet society.<sup>19</sup> Stalin, unlike his predecessor Lenin, embraced adulation, orchestrating rituals of hero-worship while using collectivisation and purges to entrench his control. These campaigns were mechanisms of revolutionary authority repurposed to sanctify Stalin's supremacy. Here, revolution as an emancipatory act curdles into revolution as a justification for mass repression. The question we must ask ourselves, then, is what was it about Stalin, this once peripheral revolutionary from the Caucasus, that enabled him to bend an entire revolutionary state to his will? How did a man, forged not in charismatic appeal but in bureaucratic manoeuvring and ruthless suspicion, come to embody the revolution itself in a society founded on the abolition of personal rule?

The central irony, essential to understanding Stalin's ascendancy, is that within a decade of the Bolsheviks promising the dissolution of autocracy, the USSR had elevated Stalin to a position of unchallengeable personal authority. This authority did not stem from institutional legitimacy or ideological clarity, but from the sheer gravitational force of Stalin's personality, his relentless will, affectation of modesty, and pathological control. Stalin can be understood as a figure who was able to weaponise the legacy Lenin left behind. Collectivisation, the purges, and the mythologised struggle

<sup>18</sup> Robert Conquest, "Architect of Terror" in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, (2007), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker, Robert C. "The Rise of Stalin's Personality Cult." *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (1979): 347–66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1855137>.

against “enemies” (these were also some of his closest friends from the Politburo – for instance, Nikolai Bukharin writes to him saying, “*Koba, why do you need my death?*”)<sup>20</sup> became not just state policy but expressions of Stalin’s inner psychology, enacted on a national stage. His personality complemented, consumed, and redefined the revolution. In Stalin, the revolution found not its mirror.

When revolution mirrors a man, purges and policy are not isolating factors. It is estimated that during the Great Terror, 5.2 million people died, and no more than 2 million people suffered due to policies of collectivisation and dekulakisation.<sup>21</sup> Stalin’s rule was characterised by the use of visual expression in the propaganda posters of the era, where Stalin’s personality was mythologised and made central to the revolutionary experience itself. This is evident in the following poster, created in the 1930s by Viktor Govorkov (fig. 4), which helps draw attention to the transformation of Stalin from party official into national patriarch. The poster exemplifies how Stalin’s personality was visually mythologised to recast revolutionary authority as affective loyalty. Stalin stands encircled by adoring children, their upward gazes displaying a quasi-religious veneration. His figure, in being slightly elevated, draws attention to a visual cue that stabilises his presence as the moral and emotional centre of the Soviet future. Moreover, the absence of overt communist iconography (lack of hammer, sickle, or red banners dominating the frame) highlights the shift from a *party* to a *person*. That is to say, the revolution is no longer symbolised by class struggle, but rather by the image of Stalin as a provider, protector, and ultimately *father*. In this way, these posters help to substantiate the claim that visual culture serves to dissolve the boundary between state, ideology, and leader. However, I think the implications of propaganda go far beyond its function as visual culture. I think ultimately, these posters help serve a dual purpose to become sites that portray Stalin’s personality as a symbol and source of authority. The children, for instance, do not thank the Five-Year Plans or policies of collectivisation, instead, they think of and thank Stalin himself – personally as an embodiment of those abstractions. This personalisation of power reveals how emotional intimacy with the leader was not incidental but central to revolutionary governance. Moreover, a centralised ideal and portrayal of Stalin help translate bureaucratic violence into a politics of reassurance. It substantiates the claim that Stalin’s personality functioned as a political technology, one that fused the public and the private, the structural and the

<sup>20</sup> Roy, Medvedev and Zhores Medvedev. *Stalin's Personal Archive: Hidden or Destroyed Facts and Theories*. Overlook Books, 2004, pg. 70.

Koba was one of Joseph Stalin’s revolutionary pseudonyms, derived from a swashbuckling Georgian folk hero admired for his vengeance and justice. In his final letter to Stalin, written shortly before his execution during the Great Purge of 1938, Bolshevik leader Nikolai Bukharin, once a close ally of Stalin and a prominent Marxist theorist ended his letter with this haunting plea.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Rosefield; Documented Homicides and Excess Deaths: New Insights into the Scale Killing in the USSR During the 1930s. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 1 September 1997; 30 (3): 321–331. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X\(97\)00011-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(97)00011-1)

psychological, and in doing so, made him not just the face of the revolution but made his image function as a public utility – ever-present, stabilising, and above all, indispensable to the very machinery of revolutionary rule.

In sum, it can be argued that Stalin's revolution turned inward – its telos became the consolidation of revolutionary power rather than its abolition. In doing so, Stalin stands as a testament to the fact that, in addition to ideology and structure, authority must work in tandem with personality to produce a form of rule that is total, intimate, and inescapable. His rise cannot be explained by political circumstances alone; he could embody contradictions, appearing modest while demanding absolute loyalty, and speaking in the name of the people while operating above them, which gave his rule its unique intensity. In the end, his personality became the binding agent between revolutionary myth and political reality, ensuring that the power of the state, the authority of personality, and the machinery of terror all converged in a single, unchallengeable figure.

### **Converging Divergences: Historiographical Reflections on Two Models of Revolutionary Authority**

In reading Gandhi and Stalin side by side, we must ask ourselves, How is it that Stalin, presiding over the centralised scaffolding of the Soviet state, consolidated total power through purges and grain quotas, while Gandhi, leading a non-state movement grounded in spiritual dissent, governed mass politics with prayer and silence? Why does one revolutionary claim legitimacy through terror and teleology, while the other builds authority through renunciation and pluralistic dialogue? In the revolutionary scripts of Gandhi and Stalin, we encounter two antithetical visions of authority: one moral, the other mechanised; one rooted in charismatic self-effacement, the other in bureaucratic omnipotence. These two scripts illustrate divergent epistemologies of revolution.

As Dan Edelstein argues, modern revolutions, born of Enlightenment progressivism, inherit an anti-pluralist impulse, a belief that truth can only have one expression, and those who dissent are counterrevolutionary or, as the French call it, “enemies of the human race.”<sup>22</sup> Stalin begins to embody this trajectory, and his cult of personality becomes a vehicle for coherence among ideological splintering. The revolution cannot self-correct, and therefore, the leader becomes its pillar. Gandhi, conversely, resists this framework. Even as he personalises the revolution, he does so by opening it to

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<sup>22</sup> Dan, Edelstein, “Revolutionary Futures” in *The Revolution to Come: A History of an Idea from Thucydides to Lenin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025, 30-31.

dialogue – with Ambedkar, with Nehru, with dissenters within the Congress. Gandhi almost emerges as a classical revolutionary in a modern anti-colonial dress – with his ashram as a polity and his fasts a form of legislative restraint.<sup>23</sup> Here, it becomes evident that the role of personality is structural and authoritative. As recent scholarship attests, revolutionary ideology lacks internal corrective mechanisms in times of strain; it is the revolutionary's *personality* that supplies coherence when institutional authority is inchoate.<sup>24</sup> In this light, personality is not antithetical to revolution; I think it operates at the centre of revolutionary coherence. When revolutionary 'ideology' falters under strain, the leader's personality becomes an interpretative structure – the means by which authority is reasserted, the narrative stabilised, and mass participation orchestrated.<sup>25</sup> Stalin and Gandhi, despite their divergent models and geopolitical contexts, thus demonstrate that revolutions require not only structure, ideology, and force, but a *centre of gravity*, a consensus, or a personality that renders the revolution legible to itself. After all, when revolution collapses consensus and dismantles institutions, what else can hold the centre if not a personality powerful enough to stand in for the state itself?

### **The White Leviathan? The Revolutionary Need for Authority<sup>26</sup>**

*In the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death*

— Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*<sup>27</sup>

Revolutions create vacuums where institutional authority collapses, and personality steps in to structure meaning and coherence. Gandhi and Stalin, though diametrically opposing in every sense, both became the central processors of revolutionary legitimacy – defining what could be said, done, or believed. Their authority shows that in moments of institutional breakdown, personality functions as the primary mechanism through which order, legitimacy, and decision-making are restored. In the case of

<sup>23</sup> Classical revolutions are typically cyclical, often following the model of anacyclosis, where governments evolve in a predictable rotation of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (and their corrupt forms). Modern revolutions, by contrast, aim to advance society through ideology, social engineering, or institutional redesign, often emphasizing progress, equality, or liberation as central goals.

<sup>24</sup> Moghaddam, Fathali M. "The Role of Personality in Revolutions." Chapter. In *The Psychology of Revolution*, 133–52. Progressive Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> The notion of the White Leviathan has been inspired by Dan Edelstein's concept of Red Leviathan which is used to refer to Mao, Stalin and Pol Pot. Red being the colour of communism - Gandhi's non-violence can arguably find its colour equivalent in white.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XI, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Gandhi this can be seen during his launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement - as he encouraged his fellow nationalists to break laws, the legitimate extent of these actions were decided by him. Similarly, Stalin's decision making reigned supreme during his Revolution from above, ranging from the lists of potential murders to grain quotas. They needed others to implement these decisions, however, the decisions themselves were conceived and executed through the iron will of their personalities.

Stalin and Gandhi both lived during periods marked by a lack of revolutionary consensus. That is to say, Stalin, after Lenin's death amid a fragmented Party elite, and Gandhi, as the Indian nationalist factions and the British rule were constantly struggling for governance. In the absence of consensus, each became the necessary centre of revolutionary coherence.

### Mechanisms of Authority

In Leviathan, Hobbes argues that without a central authority, someone to whom all wills are submitted, the "War against all" renders life to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." That is to say, in the absence of a unifying power that can render order, meaning and obedience collapse within a social contract. Revolutions, by nature, collapse the very institutions that once served as a unifying force. They create power vacuums in both epistemic and structural senses by compelling us to ask: Who defines truth? Who determines orthodoxy? Who names the enemy? It is in such moments that personality becomes a framework through which revolutionary coherence is re-established. As modern revolutions often collapse under the weight of competing visions, it is often this absence of consensus that invites a strongman or an extraordinary personality; a figure, like Hobbes's Leviathan, becomes the visible body of an otherwise broken polity.

So, then, we must ask: how do Stalin and Gandhi fit within such a framework? First, I think Stalin fits within this framework in a classical sense. In Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" (fig. 5), it is revealed that Stalin transformed from a revolutionary leader into the sole interpreter of the revolution's meaning. He says, "*he [Stalin] abandoned the method of ideological struggle for that of administrative violence, mass repressions and terror. He acted on an increasingly larger scale and more stubbornly through punitive organs, at the same time often violating all existing norms of morality and of Soviet laws.*" Moreover, he also goes so far as to say:

It is clear that here Stalin showed in a whole series of cases his intolerance, his brutality and his abuse of power. *Instead of proving his political correctness and mobilizing the masses, he often chose the path of repression and physical annihilation, not only against*

actual enemies, but also against individuals who had not committed any crimes against the Party and the Soviet Government.<sup>28</sup>

The same is substantiated through other sources, namely a French poster showing Lenin's General Staff of The Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, 1917 (fig. 6), which Stalin, conveniently purged during the Moscow Trials and the Great Terror. The question of an enemy becomes extremely interesting because the legitimacy of the Soviet Government is often predicated on the existence of an enemy. Anthropologist Phillip Smith highlights that “*images of 'evil' must be present in the forest of symbols surrounding each charismatic leader. There must be something for them to fight against, something from which their followers can be saved ... . As a general rule of thumb, charismatic authority will attain its greatest force when images of evil are at their most threatening.*”<sup>29</sup> This is the Leviathan in revolutionary form – the centralisation of interpretive authority into a single figure who governs by the power to define political reality and historical narratives themselves.<sup>30</sup>

In comparison to this, Gandhi turned the revolution inward. That is to say, while Stalin exerted mass authority through physical annihilation and propelling a revolution from above, Gandhi did so by individualising and relativising this experience to forge a revolution from below. A people's revolution. While his mechanisms to do so were fasting, silence, and symbolic sacrifice, he must also be understood as a Leviathan, not of a state, but of a modern anti-colonial struggle for independence. His March 2, 1930, letter to Lord Irwin (fig. 3) articulates, “It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces.” In doing so, he equates himself as a moral equal to an empire. He goes beyond contesting British Authority and substitutes for it. He begins to articulate the grievances of the “voiceless millions,” adjudicates legitimate protest, and constructs an alternative moral order rooted in *swaraj*, non-violence, and self-rule. That is to say, his self-discipline becomes the very basis *for* and *of* national discipline. When he writes to the Viceroy, “If the people join me, as I expect they will, the sufferings they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts,” one can infer the tight centralisation of the forthcoming civil

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<sup>28</sup> Emphasis my own.

<sup>29</sup> Phillip, Smith. “Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory.” *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 2 (2000): 101–10, 103–05. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4201192>.

<sup>30</sup> Under Stalin, Soviet history was systematically rewritten to elevate his role and erase rivals. For example, the official history textbook, *The History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (1938), was personally approved by Stalin and portrayed him as Lenin's closest and most trusted ally, minimizing or omitting figures like Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin. In visual records, Trotsky and others were literally erased: in the famous 1920 photo of Lenin addressing troops in Moscow, Trotsky and Kamenev were originally visible on the steps but were later removed in altered versions circulated by the state.

disobedience movement. This demonstrates how Gandhi positioned himself as the ultimate arbiter of orthodoxy, a role that is later more explicitly evident in his definition of Dalit inclusion.<sup>31</sup>

More importantly, in both cases, the self becomes the battleground of revolutionary transformation. Gandhi's authority stems from *self-fashioning* – his fasting, celibacy, and discipline position his body as a site of political legitimacy and moral persuasion. Stalin, by contrast, operationalised the collective self through state machinery, using the concept of a 'New Soviet Man' as a model for engineered citizenship, enforced through his policies of the Five-Year Plan and purges. Both strategies, however, reflect how revolutionary authority can be enacted through both institutions and the formulation of a 'subjectivity.' Thus, while Stalin's Leviathan is forged through coercion and surveillance, Gandhi, the White Leviathan, is constructed through symbolic suffering and moral appeal. Both models reveal the same structural truth: that in revolutionary crises, personality plays a role in wielding authority. One key vector through which personality manifests itself and exerts authority is through the self. By the self, I mean both the private identity of an individual and the publicly constructed and politically charged one. Gandhi's authority operated through the symbolic politics of self-discipline, including his fasting, celibacy, and austerity. However, he also employed public displays, such as the Salt March and Non-Cooperation Movements, which helped model a new form of subjectivity necessary for *swaraj*. The transformation of the self was thus a precondition for national liberation. Likewise, Stalin's carefully constructed personality became the central pillar of Soviet authority. He cultivated an aura of infallibility: appearing modest in speech but absolute in power, omnipresent yet opaque. This allowed him to collapse institutional decision-making into himself. Everything was connected with the name of Stalin, illustrating how he positioned himself as the final interpreter of ideology, the living embodiment of revolutionary truth.

Thus, personalities shape revolutions by rendering abstract ideology into concrete, actionable form, embodying the revolution when institutions cannot. They centralise interpretive authority, enabling coherence amidst ideological fragmentation. In doing so, the revolutionary leader's self becomes both the symbol and structure of power, transforming personal will into political order.

### Conclusion

So then, we must ask ourselves, what happens when personalities shape history as much as history shapes personalities? Revolutions do not simply unfold through ideology, institutional

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<sup>31</sup> See pg. 182-183 from *The Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India (2011)* to understand Gandhi's authoritative nature.

separation, or structural reconfiguration. They are often staged, embodied, and made legible through personality. This essay has argued that between 1928 and 1932, both Gandhi and Stalin converted revolutionary aspiration into political reality by inscribing their singular selves onto mass politics. Their trajectories could not have been more divergent – one ascetic, the other autocratic – but both reveal a shared truth: that personality wields authority. It does not replace ideology, structure, or legitimacy, but animates them, renders them coercive or compelling. In Stalin's case, personality became the framework through which the state exercised totalising control. In Gandhi's philosophy, it became the moral compass that reshaped power as renunciation and self-discipline. Both reveal that the revolutionary leader is not merely a conduit of ideology but often its embodiment.

So what does this tell us about revolution itself? It tells us that revolutions, in addition to being regime changes, are also crises of representation. Who speaks for the people? Who embodies the future? They are as much about the affective authority of individuals who become proxies for collective aspiration as they are about their political contexts. The revolutionary subject (whether revered or feared) serves as a vessel through which disorder is reorganised into a new political order. These case studies compel us to reconsider the dynamics of revolutionary legitimacy, suggesting that charisma, narrative control, and authority are central to the success of revolutions.

This raises a final, enduring question: if revolutions hinge not only on ideas and institutions, but on the moral and political force of individual personalities, how are we to assess the legitimacy of revolutionary authority, when that authority emerges not from democratic deliberation, but from the persuasive power of a single, commanding self?



## Appendix

A satirical literary device offers a helpful literary encapsulation of the erasure of individual will under Stalinist rule:

“Come the revolution,” the orator declared, “everyone will live the good life and eat strawberries and cream.”

“I don’t like strawberries and cream!” responded one of his listeners.

“Come the revolution,” the orator declared, “you’ll eat strawberries and cream – and like it!”

“But this tastes like lemon and curd,” responded one of his listeners.

“Come the revolution,” the orator declared, “lemon and curd *will be* strawberries and cream.”

“But it’s not!” responded all of his listeners.

“Come the revolution,” the orator declared, “you’ll call it strawberries and cream – and thank us for it.”

But when the revolution came, the “strawberries” were sour and the “cream” was bitter.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This device is adapted from a version cited in the introduction of Dan Edelstein, *The Revolution to Come* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025), pg. 9

**Figure 1: Satyagraha Leaflet No. 20**

[https://www.gandhipedia150.in/static/data/highlighted\\_pdfs\\_output/satyagraha\\_volume15\\_book\\_272.pdf](https://www.gandhipedia150.in/static/data/highlighted_pdfs_output/satyagraha_volume15_book_272.pdf)

## 272. SATYAGRAHA LEAFLET NO. 20

May 10, 1919

### HATRED EVER KILLS-LOVE EVER DIES

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

My one request to Hindus, Mahomedans, Parsis, Christians and Jews is that by our conduct tomorrow we may demonstrate to the Government our absolutely harmless intentions and show that nobody in Bombay wishes to commit a breach of the peace, and further show that Bombay is capable of discharging heavy responsibilities with patient calmness. We should at the same time demonstrate that we are capable of acting in perfect unity and determined to secure a fulfilment of our cherished will. But we do not desire to obtain justice by harbouring ill will against the Government but by goodwill. Hatred ever kills, love ever dies. Such is the vast difference between the two. What is obtained by love is retained for all time. What is obtained by hatred proves a burden in reality, for it increases hatred. The duty of human beings is to diminish hatred and to promote love. I pray that Bombay will observe full hartal, fast and pray and do all this in a loving spirit.

M. K. GANDHI

Printed by Rustom N. Vatchaghandy at the Sanj Vartaman Press, Nos. 22-24-26, Mint Road, Fort, Bombay.  
From the printed original preserved in Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Delhi. Courtesy : H. S. L. Polak

**Figure 2: From the archive, 7 April 1930: Gandhi's civil disobedience plans go wrong**

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/apr/07/archive-1930-gandhi-civil-disobedience>

BOMBAY, SUNDAY

The great test has come for "Mahatma" Gandhi, the Indian Nationalist leader, in his efforts to obtain the complete independence of **India** from British rule. Wading into the sea this morning at Dandi, the lonely village on the Arabian Sea shore, Gandhi and his followers broke the salt monopoly laws and so inaugurated the campaign of mass civil disobedience. There was no interference by the authorities, although a detachment of 150 police officers had been drafted into Dandi and a further force of 400 police was at Jalalpur.

The actual breaking of the salt monopoly law was witnessed by a large crowd who gathered at the seashore. Surrounded by about 100 volunteers—including those who had made the 200-mile march from Ahmedabad,—Gandhi waded into the sea and bathed. Pots were then filled with sea-water and boiled or left in the sunshine and the salt residue sprinkled on the ground. Gandhi was hailed by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poetess, as "the lawbreaker."

By that action Gandhi contends that he has broken the salt laws, but apparently the authorities are of another opinion. It is stated that the salt manufactured by Gandhi is unfit for human consumption unless properly treated, and therefore does not infringe the salt monopoly laws. The attitude of the authorities has perplexed Gandhi, who stated in an interview that he could not imagine it was due to any change of heart. He would, he added, have to devise other plans if there was no interference at Dandi.

Gandhi's statement is significant. It reveals that he was hoping for arrest, but there has been strong determination on the part of the authorities to avoid giving the Nationalist leader the opportunity of "martyrdom." Yet though

the authorities have adopted a policy of non-interference a situation has arisen which is likely to impede the plans of Gandhi. A message from Jalalpur states that a deputation of untouchables (members of the depressed classes in India) had an interview with the Nationalist leader and placed their case before him. They failed to get satisfaction, however, and, following the interview, the leaders of the deputation declared their intention of practising a satyagraha (passive resistance) toward Gandhi and his followers.

This counter-satyagraha, it is stated, will attempt to prevent Gandhi from removing the salt which he has illegally manufactured. Large numbers of untouchables will lie in front of the Nationalist leader's volunteers. As an untouchable cannot be touched by those people of caste, Gandhi's adherents will not be able to get beyond them without violating religious principles.

**Figure 3: 1930 Open Letter from Gandhi to Lord Viceroy**

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/selectedletters/62viceroy.php>

DEAR FRIEND,

Before embarking on civil disobedience, and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out.

My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend any harm to a single Englishman, or to any legitimate interest, he may have in India.

I must not be misunderstood. Though I hold the British rule in India to be a curse, I do not, therefore, consider Englishmen in general, to be worse than any other people on earth. I have the privilege of claiming many Englishmen as dearest friends. Indeed much that I have learnt of the evil of the British rule is due to the writings of frank and courageous Englishmen, who have not hesitated to tell the unpalatable truth about that rule.

And why do I regard the British rule as a curse?

It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation, and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford.

It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture. And, by the policy of cruel disarmament, it has degraded us spiritually.

Lacking the inward strength, we have been reduced, by all but universal disarmament, to a state bordering on cowardly helplessness.

In common with many of my countrymen, I had hugged the fond hope that the proposed Round Table Conference might furnish a solution. But when you said plainly that you could not give any assurance that you or the British Cabinet would pledge yourselves to support a scheme of full dominion status, the Round Table Conference could not possibly furnish the solution for which vocal India is consciously, and the dumb millions are unconsciously, thirsting. Needless to say, there never was any question of Parliament's verdict being anticipated. Instances are not wanting of the British Cabinet, in anticipation of the parliamentary verdict, having itself pledged to a particular policy.

The Delhi interview having miscarried, there was no option for Pandit Motilal Nehru and me, but to take steps, to carry out the solemn resolution of the Congress arrived at in Calcutta at its session in 1928.

But the resolution of independence should cause no alarm, if the word dominion status mentioned in your announcement had been used in its accepted sense. For, has it not been admitted by the responsible British

statesmen, that dominion status is virtual independence? What, however, I fear is that there never has been any intention of granting such dominion status to India, in the immediate future.

But this is past history. Since the announcement many events have happened which show unmistakably the trend of British policy.

It seems as clear as daylight that responsible British statesmen do not contemplate any alteration in British policy, that might adversely affect Britain's commerce with India, or require a close and impartial scrutiny of Britain's transactions with India. If nothing is done to end the process of exploitation, India must be bled with an ever increasing speed. The Finance Member regards as a settled fact the ratio which by a stroke of the pen drains India of a few crores. And when a serious attempt is being made through a civil form of direct action, to unsettle this fact, among many others, even you cannot help appealing to the wealthy landed classes, to help you to crush that attempt, in the name of an order that grinds India to atoms.

Unless those who work in the name of the nation understand and keep before all concerned, the motive that lies behind this craving for independence, there is every danger of independence itself coming to us so charged as to be of no value to those toiling voiceless millions, for whom it is sought, and for whom it is worth taking. It is for that reason, that I have been recently telling the public what independence should really mean.

Let me put before you some of the salient points.

The terrific pressure of land revenue, which furnishes a large part of the total, must undergo a considerable modification, in an independent India. Even the much vaunted permanent settlement benefits few rich zamindars, not the ryots. The ryot has remained as helpless as ever. He is a mere tenant at will. Not only, then, has land revenue to be considerably reduced, but the whole revenue system has to be so revised, as to make the ryot's good its primary concern. But the British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of him. Even the salt he must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him, if only because of the heartless impartiality of its incidence. The tax shows itself more burdensome on the poor man; when it is remembered that salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich, both individually and collectively. The drink and drug revenue, too, is derived from the poor. It saps the foundations both of their health and morals. It is defended under the false plea of individual freedom, but, in reality, is maintained for its own sake. The ingenuity of the authors of the reforms of 1919 transferred this revenue to the so-called responsible part of dyarchy, so as to throw the burden of prohibition on it, thus, from the very beginning, rendering it powerless for good. If the unhappy Minister wipes out this revenue he must starve education, since in the existing circumstances he has no new source of replacing that revenue. If the weight of taxation has crushed the poor from above, the destruction of the central supplementary industry, that is, hand-spinning, has undermined their capacity for producing wealth. The tale of India's ruination is not complete without reference to the liabilities incurred in her name. Sufficient has been recently said about these in the public press. It must be the duty of a free India to subject all the liabilities to the strictest investigation, and repudiate those that may be adjudged by an impartial tribunal to be unjust and unfair.

The iniquities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000 per month besides many other indirect additions. The British Prime Minister gets £ 5,000 per year, that is, Rs. 5,400/- per month, at the present rate of exchange. You are getting over Rs. 700 per day, against India's average income of less than two annas per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs. 180 per day, against Great Britain's average income of nearly Rs. 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. On bended knee I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon. I have taken a personal illustration to drive home a painful truth. I have too great a regard for you as a man to wish to hurt your feelings. I know that you do not need the salary you get. But a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped. What is true of the Viceregal salary is true generally of the whole administration.

A radical cutting down of the revenue, therefore, depends upon an equally radical reduction in the expenses of the administration. This means a transformation of the scheme of government. This transformation is impossible

without independence. And hence the spontaneous demonstration of 26th January, in which hundreds of thousands of villagers instinctively participated. To them independence means deliverance from the killing weight.

Not one of the great British political parties, it seems to me, is prepared to give up the Indian spoils to which Great Britain helps herself from day to day, often, in spite of the unanimous opposition of Indian opinion.

Nevertheless, if India is to live as a nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed conference is certainly not the remedy. It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.

It is common cause that, however disorganized, and, for the time being, insignificant, it may be, the party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt. Its end is the same as mine. But I am convinced that it cannot bring the desired relief to the dumb millions. The conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but unadulterated non-violence can check the organized violence of the British Government. Many think that non-violence is not an active force. My experience, limited though it surely is, shows that non-violence can be an intensely active force. It is my purpose to set in motion that force as well against the organized violent force of the British rule, as the unorganized violent force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above-mentioned. Having an unquestioning and immovable faith in the efficacy of non-violence, as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer.

This non-violence will be expressed through civil disobedience, for the moment confined to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations.

I know that in embarking on non-violence, I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk. But the victories of truth have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another, far more numerous, far more ancient, and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk.

I have deliberately used the word conversion. For my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence, and thus to make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own. I believe that I have always served them.

I served them up to 1919, blindly. But when my eyes were opened and I conceived non-co-operation, the object still was to serve them. I employed the same weapon that I have, in all humility, successfully used against the dearest members of my family. If I have equal love for your people with mine, it will not long remain hidden. It will be acknowledged by them, even as the members of my family acknowledged, after they had tried me for several years. If the people join me, as I expect they will, the sufferings they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts.

The plan through civil disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out. If we want to sever the British connection it is because of such evils. When they are removed, the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognizing our independence. I invite you then to pave the way for immediate removal of those evils, and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce equally suited to both. You have unnecessarily laid stress upon communal problems that unhappily affect this land. Important though they undoubtedly are for the consideration of any scheme of Government they have little bearing on the greater problems which are above communities and which affect them all equally. But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the eleventh day of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the

land, the beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is that we have submitted to the cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me, and, in the act of disobeying the Salt Act, to lay themselves open to the penalties of a law that should never have disfigured the statute book.

I have no desire to cause you unnecessary embarrassment, or any at all, so far as I can help. If you think that there is any substance in my letter, and if you will care to discuss matters with me, and if to that end you would like me to postpone publication of this letter, I shall gladly refrain on receipt of a telegram to that effect soon after this reaches you. You will, however, do me the favour not to deflect me from my course, unless you can see your way to conform to the substance of this letter.

This letter is not in any way intended as a threat, but is a simple and sacred duty, peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore, I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence and whom Providence seems to have sent to me, as it were, for the very purpose.

I remain,  
Your sincere friend,  
M.K. Gandhi

*Mahatma*, Vol. III, pp. 18-23

**Figure 4:** "Thank you beloved Stalin for our happy childhood," Viktor Govorkov, Izogiz, 71 x 103.2 cm





Source: Russian State Library

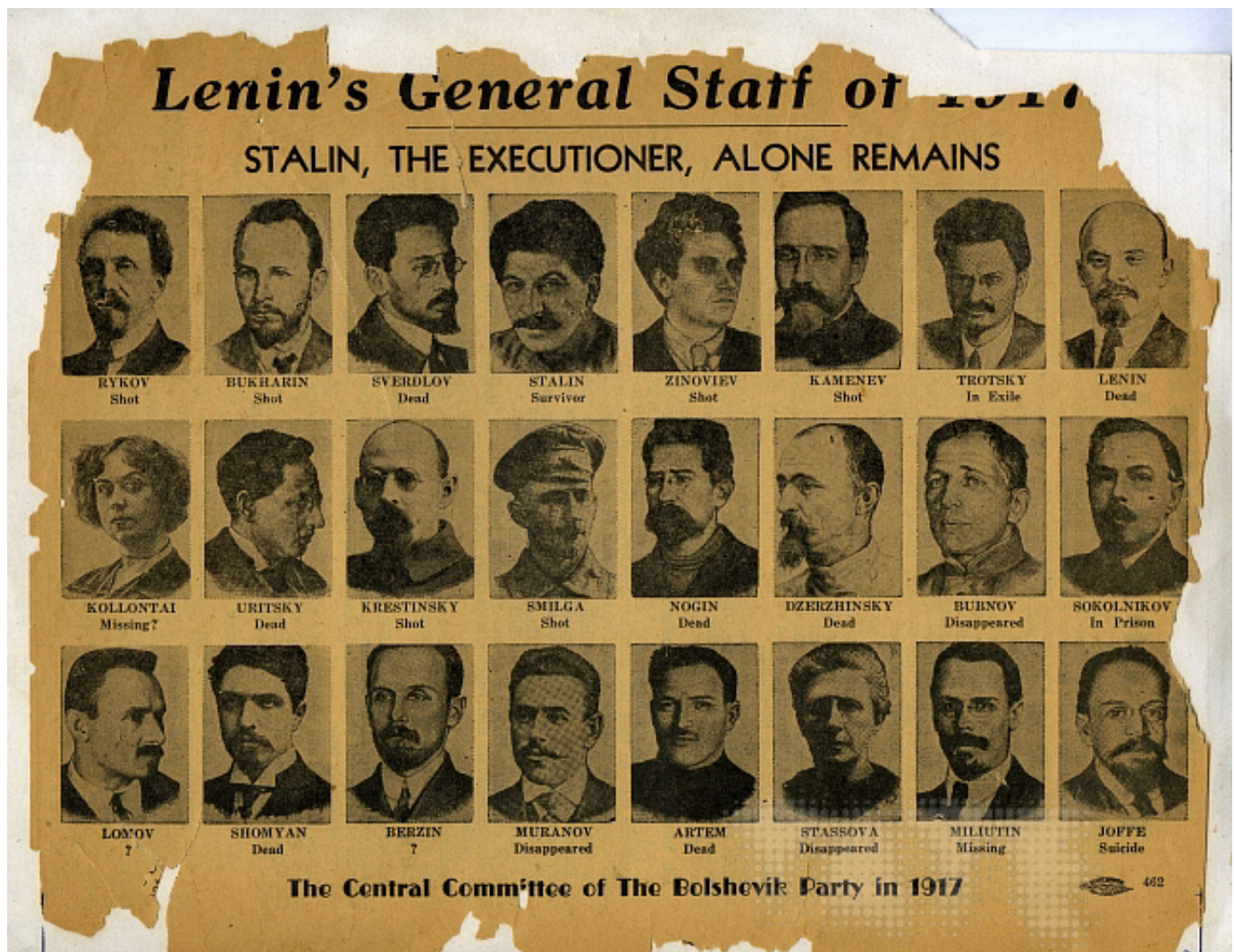
**Figure 5: Secret Speech Delivered by First Party Secretary at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, February 25, 1956**

Due to the considerable length of Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech," the full text has not been reproduced here. For comprehensive reference, the complete speech is accessible at the following link:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>

**Figure 6: Lenin's General Staff of 1917**

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