

## The rise to power of Stalin

Over the next few lessons we will be looking at how and why Stalin emerged as leader of the USSR

Step	What we will cover
• Stalin's actions	- The actions taken by Stalin that allowed him to outmanoeuvre his opponents
• Weaknesses and mistakes of Stalin's opponents	- Defeating the Left opposition - Defeating the Right opposition

## The Rise of Stalin - Stalin V Trotsky

When Lenin died there was no clear idea of who would succeed him. Most people within the party expected Trotsky to take over. Few people would have expected Stalin to emerge victorious. The fact that he did so is down partly to the miscalculations and personality weaknesses of Trotsky and partly to the single-mindedness of Stalin and his ability to use his positions in the party and the circumstances he encountered to his own advantage.

Heinemann Cpt 8.

1. When did Lenin die? p71
2. Why was there uncertainty over who should succeed Lenin? p71
3. What kind of personality did Stalin have? p71
4. Why was Stalin considered by Lenin and by his colleagues as an unlikely future leader? (make sure to cover Stalin in Georgia) p72
5. What were Trotsky's strengths? p73
6. What factors worked against Trotsky's acceptance by other Bolsheviks? p72-3 (consider his personality, background and actions)
7. If your notes so far have not already covered the points in the box on page 74 then copy it out.
8. Make a table showing the different positions held by Stalin, when he got that position and how it helped him to increase his influence in the party. It is particularly important to cover in detail his position as General Secretary. p75-76

Year	Position	How it helped Stalin to increase his influence
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9. What was the 'Lenin Enrolment' and how did it help to extend Stalin's influence in the party? p77
10. How did Stalin take advantage of Lenin's funeral to advance his position, and how did Trotsky lose out? p77-8
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14. How was Stalin able to use Lenin's rule against factionalism to isolate Trotsky? p80

## Stalin's rise to power

When Lenin died in 1924 a collective leadership was formed – rule would be exercised by the Politburo rather than one individual. The Politburo was the Party's inner group of leaders – Zinoviev, Kamenev, Tomsky, Bukharin, Rykov, Stalin and Trotsky.

To most members of the Party in 1924, Trotsky was the most likely successor to Lenin. Trotsky had taken a leading role in the October Revolution and in the civil war that followed. He was seen as Lenin's 'right-hand man'. Stalin was seen as an administrator and a rather dull personality.

If Stalin was to become supreme leader he would have to defeat Trotsky.

Despite his obvious intelligence Trotsky was unpopular in the Party. He was Jewish and this led to some anti-Semitic prejudice. He came from a wealthy background. He was arrogant and lost potential allies by his abrasive manner. He was a loner – he did not see the urgency of building up a power base. Until the summer of 1917 he had been a Menshevik – his late conversion to the Bolsheviks was seen as a lack of commitment. He rarely attended Party meetings. He did not go out of his way to make friends and allies, preferring to work as an individual rather than as part of a team. He had organised the Red Army during the civil war – and some saw this as an indication that he might use force to gain power.

Jonathan Haslam (2011): 'Trotsky made others nervous while Stalin put them at ease. Trotsky could not be bothered to attend meetings even of crucial importance, whereas Stalin never missed one'.

Even before the death of Lenin, Stalin had begun to lay the foundations for his rise to power.

His positions as Commissar for Nationalities, Liaison Officer between the Politburo and the Orgburo (the Party's bureau of organisation) and Head of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate gave him valuable experience.

1922 - He became General Secretary of the Communist Party – he used this position to gather information e.g. bugging Lenin's home. This position also gave him the power to make appointments within the Party – he could use this power to ensure that people appointed to key posts were loyal to him. As time went on more and more people owed their jobs to him and when it came to important votes, Stalin could rely on support from his appointees. His post as General Secretary also gave him access to over 26,000 personal files of party members – he could use this information against rivals e.g. blackmail.

1923-5 - Stalin's position was strengthened by the 'Lenin Enrolment' – this was a drive to increase Party membership among industrial workers – over 500,000 workers were recruited (doubling the Party's membership). These new members were largely poor, uneducated and politically inexperienced. Stalin was responsible for supervising the 'Lenin Enrolment' – he made sure to identify with the needs and

demands of the new members. He was able to capitalise on his own humble background in order to win support.

1924 – Stalin improved his position in the Party by attaching himself to the legacy of Lenin – encouraging a 'cult of Lenin'. Despite the wishes of Lenin himself and of his widow, he arranged a public funeral and had Lenin's body embalmed and put on public show (Lenin had wanted a simple burial with no fuss and had been against the idea of developing a 'cult of personality'). Stalin delivered the oration at Lenin's funeral (Trotsky did not attend the funeral). Many Party members saw this as a sign of Stalin's loyalty to Lenin and of Trotsky's lack of respect. In the years to come, Stalin constantly emphasised his closeness to Lenin – this even involved cutting out Trotsky in photographs where Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky appeared, to give the impression that he was Lenin's closest friend. He memorised speeches made by Lenin so that, in political debates, he could undermine the arguments of opponents by quoting Lenin's words. He was able to present himself as Lenin's heir and the upholder of Lenin's policies. Trotsky, on the other hand, made criticisms of Lenin's policies – he completely misjudged the mood of the country that was devastated by Lenin's death.

1924 – Lenin's Last Will and Testament – Stalin benefited from the fact that members of the Politburo, including Trotsky, decided not to make Lenin's Last Will and Testament public. In this document Lenin had described Stalin as 'too rude' and had recommended his removal from the position as General Secretary. Unfortunately, Lenin had also said some negative things about other Politburo members – so it was in their interests to keep it quiet.

### **Defeating Trotsky and the Left**

Stalin was able to out-manoeuvre Trotsky on a number of issues ...

In 1924 Trotsky launched an attack on the growth of party bureaucracy – this was unpopular with the party. Stalin was able to ally himself with Zinoviev and Kamenev to isolate Trotsky – he was able to accuse Trotsky of 'factionalism' i.e. causing divisions within the party (Lenin had spoken out against factionalism in 1921 in a document called '*On Party Unity*' so, once again, this served to reinforce Stalin's 'closeness' to Lenin).

In 1926 Trotsky joined forces with Zinoviev and Kamenev to form the United Opposition – a grouping of the Left of the party. The views of the Left concerned the future of the New Economic Policy (NEP). (NEP allowed the return of small-scale industries to private ownership and put an end to grain requisitions – this was a step back from communism). When Lenin had brought in NEP in 1921 he had made it clear that it was a temporary measure to solve the problems of food shortages and industrial collapse. The Left saw NEP as a betrayal of the aims of the revolution – it was holding back the move to socialism. On the other hand, the Right saw NEP as the right policy for the circumstances Russia was in e.g. while it did tolerate some 'capitalist' elements it was at least working in that food was being produced to meet the population's needs. Stalin, at this point, stayed neutral.

Trotsky was also concerned about the issue of 'Permanent Revolution'. He thought it was vital to spread world revolution – he believed that without world revolution the revolution in Russia would not survive. Stalin, in contrast, argued for 'Socialism in One Country' – this called for the economic modernisation of the Soviet Union using its own industrial resources – strengthening the revolution at home was more important than spreading revolution abroad.

The United Opposition were defeated at a meeting of the Central Committee in 1926 and a year later were not even allowed to speak. From then on they had to work in secret. They were accused of factionalism and expelled from the Politburo. Zinoviev and Kamenev were allowed to stay in the party after renouncing their views. Trotsky refused and was exiled to Central Asia.

### **Defeating the Right**

By 1927-8 Stalin had decided that the future of Russia lay in forced industrialisation – he aimed to launch the first Five Year Plan to stimulate the economy. This involved setting targets for industrial output – to be achieved by 5 years – it involved rapid growth.

The disagreement was over when and how industrialisation should take place. All the Bolshevik leaders were in agreement that industrialisation was necessary for the consolidation of socialism – but were divided in how this could be achieved. In order to industrialise, more food would be needed to support the growth of urban and industrial workers. The Left saw the use of force as the only way to make the peasants grow more food. The Right preferred a policy of persuasion. In early 1928, the proposals for the Five Year Plan led to the emergence of a Right Opposition group which argued the case for the continuation of the NEP and opposed the policy of rapid industrialisation under the plan. The leaders of the Right in the Politburo were Tomsky, Rykov and Bukharin.

Stalin saw the views of the Right as standing in the way of his policy of 'Socialism in One Country' – threatening to slow down economic progress. In the previous conflict with the Left Stalin had stayed neutral over the issue of NEP. Now that the Left had been defeated he saw the advantage in abandoning NEP. He used his power and influence in the party to ensure that the Right was defeated in votes over policy decisions. By early 1929 the members of the Right Opposition in the Politburo were identified by name and removed from their posts except for Rykov, who remained Head of the Government until 1930.

Stalin had defeated the Left and the Right opposition groups within the party. The collective leadership set up at the time of Lenin's death was no more. Stalin had whittled away at the power and positions of his main rivals until by early 1929 he was in a dominant position.

## Stalin's rise to power

Stalin's personality	Power base in the Party
Use of Lenin's Enrolment 1923-25	Lenin's funeral
Using Lenin's Will	Cult of Personality
Trotsky's personality	Disputes over Party bureaucracy
Disputes over NEP	Disputes over future of the revolution
Typical 8 mark questions	Typical 22 mark questions
<p>Explain why Stalin was able to defeat his political rivals by 1929.</p> <p>For what reasons was Stalin able to defeat his political rivals by 1929?</p>	<p>How far was Stalin's victory in the power struggle between 1922 and 1928 due to the mistakes of his rivals?</p> <p>To what extent was Stalin's victory in the power struggle between 1922 and 1928 due to the mistakes of his rivals?</p> <p>Stalin was fortunate to succeed in the power struggle between 1922 and 1928. How far do you agree with this statement?</p>

## Stalin's rise to power

### Marking exercise

How did Stalin defeat his political rivals by 1929? (8)

#### Answer 1

Stalin defeated his rivals because he was clever and took advantage of situations to gain an advantage. He used his position as General Secretary to gain influence. He also used the Lenin Enrolment and the Cult of Lenin. He also took advantage of Lenin's Will in which Lenin had criticised Trotsky. He also took advantage of disputes in the Party over bureaucracy and the future of NEP.

**Mark:**

**Reason for mark:**

#### Answer 2

Stalin was able to build a power base in the Party e.g. becoming Commissar for Nationalities, Liaison Officer between the Politburo and Orgburo and Head of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate. His most important position was as General Secretary of the Communist Party. This position was regarded by others as an administrative post which reinforced the idea of Stalin as a 'paper pusher' leading to his nick names 'Comrade Filing Card' and the 'Grey blur'. However, Stalin saw the potential in such positions. As General Secretary he had the power to make appointments within the Party. He appointed people whose loyalty was first of all to him. As time went on more and more people in leading positions in the Party owed their loyalty to him. This position also gave him access to the personal files of Party members which he could use to blackmail rivals.

Stalin also took advantage of Trotsky's unpopularity in the Party. Trotsky was arrogant and did not see the need to build up a power base. His Jewish background was also a disadvantage. Trotsky also made mistakes such as failing to attend Lenin's funeral and criticising the growth in Party bureaucracy, which threatened jobs. Trotsky's championing of 'permanent revolution' as opposed to Stalin's argument for 'socialism in one country' was also unpopular.

**Mark:**

**Reason for mark:**

### Answer 3

One reason why Stalin defeated his political rivals was that he was able to use his positions in the Party to build a power base e.g. as General Secretary he had access to the personal files of Party members and used this information to blackmail rivals. He also had power over appointments in the Party and used this to ensure that people appointed to leading positions owed their loyalty to him. He also used his position as General Secretary to bug telephones, including Lenin's, which allowed him to anticipate threats.

Another reason why Stalin defeated his rivals was because he was responsible for the Lenin Enrolment begun in 1923. This was aimed at encouraging more industrial workers to join the Party so that it could become a truly proletarian Party. Many of the workers who joined were uneducated and politically naive. Stalin capitalised on his own humble background to gain their confidence. The new members identified with Stalin as a 'man of the people' as opposed to the more middle class, intellectual Trotsky.

Another reason why Stalin defeated his rivals was because he capitalised on Lenin's funeral and on the suppression of Lenin's Will. Lenin's widow had asked for a modest funeral in line with Lenin's wishes but Stalin turned the funeral into a grand occasion where he gave the main speeches. Trotsky was absent from the funeral as he did not appreciate the importance of attending. Lenin had left a Will in which he had described Stalin as being 'too rude' and recommended that he be removed from key positions. However, he had also criticised other leading Bolsheviks such as Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. They did not want these criticisms to be made public and so agreed with Stalin's suggestion that the Will be kept secret.

After Lenin's death Stalin developed the Cult of Lenin which also helped him to undermine his rivals. The Cult of Lenin meant that Stalin constantly associated himself with Lenin and quoted from his speeches. This had the effect of making people see him as Lenin's natural successor.

Stalin was also able to take advantage of disputes within the Party to undermine his rivals e.g. in 1924 Trotsky launched an attack on the growth in Party bureaucracy. This was not popular within the Party because it threatened jobs. Zinoviev and Kamenev allied themselves with Stalin to isolate Trotsky, who was then accused of factionalism.

Stalin also used disputes over the future of the revolution to his advantage in undermining rivals. Some in the Party, such as Trotsky, believed in the idea of permanent revolution. This was the idea that communism in Russia could not survive on its own and that they should focus on encouraging communist revolutions elsewhere. Stalin argued instead for 'socialism in one country'. This was the belief that they should focus on building up communism in Russia first. Stalin's ideas were more popular in a Party and country that were tired of war and felt a need for a period of stability.

Stalin also used differences over the direction of economic policy to undermine rivals. Zinoviev and Kamenev realised too late that Stalin was making a bid for power. They now allied themselves with Trotsky in the dispute over the future of NEP, forming the Left Opposition. The Left Opposition believed that NEP had only been a temporary solution to the problems caused by the civil war and was a betrayal of communist ideals. They now wanted a return to Marxist economic policies. Stalin



## Stalin's political objectives 1924 – 1929

**What were Stalin's political objectives between 1924 and 1929? (8)**

Stalin's overall aim between 1924 and 1929 was to achieve power. To achieve this he had a number of specific objectives:	
Objective	Explanation / evidence
To gain influence within the party as preparation for a bid for power	Cover: positions in the party / Lenin's funeral / Cult of Lenin
To win support from the proletariat	Cover: Lenin Enrolment
To outmanoeuvre political rivals from the Left	Cover: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev (factionalism / future of revolution)
To outmanoeuvre political opponents from the Right in preparation for move to collectivisation / 5 Year Plans for industry	Cover: Bukharin (disputes over NEP)

# Time Machine

Every month we ask a historian which year they'd most like to visit in our Time Machine

## 1924: Why did Trotsky miss his opportunity to rule?

Robert Service asks Rob Attar to set the time machine to the year when Lenin's death sparked a power struggle among the leading Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union

ILLUSTRATION BY DAN PARRY-JONES



Why have you chosen 1924? Lenin died in January 1924 and I want to interview Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), who was thought at the time to be his most likely successor. He had, after all, been the joint leader of the 1917 October revolution. I would like to ask Trotsky what he was thinking and planning at the time, because he had his best chances then and didn't make the most of them. Trotsky missed Lenin's funeral and the next couple of months of politics when he was in the Black Sea Coast recuperating from an illness. The funeral was organised by his rival Josef Stalin and it was at this point that Stalin became prominent for the first time.

Trotsky had been very effective in the October revolution and subsequent civil war, so what changed after Lenin's death? This is something I would put to him: "Why was it that you could recover from your illnesses when the civil war was going on, yet you didn't drag yourself off the sofa afterwards?" I think it had a lot to do with the role of the revolutionary in Trotsky's eyes. He didn't want to be sitting in meetings. Trotsky was more interested in writing about literature and questions of everyday life than he was about sorting out the problems of the Russian Revolution. He was also arrogant. Most Bolshevik leaders had a superfluity of self-confidence but Trotsky had more than all the others put together.

In 1923, before Lenin died, Trotsky did have a go at trying to succeed him and he was criticised for making too obvious a bid for power. Then he stood up and said: "You've got the wrong person if you think I want to be the



Robert Service is professor of Russian history at the University of Oxford. He has written acclaimed biographies of Lenin and Stalin and is currently working on a life of Trotsky, due to be published in 2009

single dominant leader as Lenin was. You've forgotten who I am. I'm a Jew and a Jew can't rule Russia. We still have so much anti-Semitism in this country".

So on the one hand he was a very boisterous leader, thinking he was the only one who could take the place of Lenin, and on the other he gave an almost pitiful speech saying that because of his ethnic background he could never have put himself forward for that position. If I got the chance to interview him today I would force him to explain what he really intended in 1923–4.

What disadvantages did Trotsky have compared to the eventual victor Stalin? Trotsky was a pretty lousy politician. He offended people quite unnecessarily and he didn't have the concentrated focus on being a politician that other Bolsheviks had. Stalin focused his energies on getting power and exercising it. He had the same sort of confidence as Trotsky on matters such as politics, economics, society, culture and international relations but he didn't take himself off for these long periods away from the source of power.

Had Trotsky succeeded Lenin, how different might the USSR have been? Trotsky, in his later years, said he would have concentrated on rapid industrialisation, world revolution and

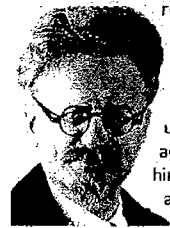
on restoring the political zeal of the Communist party, and that Stalin headed the forces of bureaucratisation. My own feeling is

that this is a misjudgement of what happened under Stalin and what would have happened under Trotsky. What is the evidence Stalin wasn't interested in rapid industrial growth, when that is what happened in 1928? What is the evidence Stalin didn't want to expand the revolution westwards, when that is what he did when a real chance came in 1945? What evidence is there that Stalin was satisfied with heading a new bureaucratic elite, when he exterminated that same elite in the late 1930s?

I think the two men were more like twins than members of different political species. If Trotsky had won, then the Soviet Union wouldn't have had so vast a Gulag, it would have been much more astute in handling Hitler's rise to power and had a more flourishing cultural scene. However, it would still have been a one party, one ideology state and would still have relied upon the political police to carry out acts of terror. It would still have been a gruesome dictatorship. ■

### What happened next?

After five years Trotsky and the others had been routed by Stalin in the leadership battle. Trotsky was forced into exile where he wrote influential books about the USSR and secured his reputation as Stalin's first major victim. Stalin continued to see Trotsky as a thorn in his side, until in 1940 one of his agents caught up with him in Mexico and left an ice pick in his skull.



### On the podcast



Hear more of this interview with Robert Service  
▶ [www.bbchistorymagazine.com/podcast.asp](http://www.bbchistorymagazine.com/podcast.asp)

DAN PARRY-JONES/ILLUSTRATION ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

...of the NHS doctor ...

Roderick Gordon

# STALIN vs TROTSKY

## LEADERSHIP 1923-27

Why was Stalin able to defeat his rival Trotsky and establish his dominance of the Soviet Union by the end of the 1920s?

The leadership struggle between Stalin and Trotsky began with the incapacitation of Lenin in 1923 and effectively ended with Trotsky's expulsion from the Bolshevik Party in 1927. In 1928 Trotsky was banished to Central Asia, being sent into exile abroad in 1929. Unquestionably Stalin received substantial assistance from the fact that Lenin and Trotsky were both seriously ill from 1922, a fact which seems to have engendered political paralysis in the latter.

The chronological structure of the contest, delineated by Allan Bullock, is as follows. From 1923 to 1925, Zinoviev and Kamenev allied with Stalin against Trotsky, resulting in Trotsky's temporary defeat and withdrawal from the political arena, after which Stalin aligned himself with Bukharin against Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1925-26. In 1926, Stalin entered the political fray to help Bukharin and defeat the Left Opposition against Stalin, in alliance with his former opponents. This culminated in their complete defeat at the end of 1927 and entailed the expulsion of Zinoviev and Trotsky from the Bolshevik Party. Political conflict was played out in the various congresses, conferences and meetings of the Politburo which were convened during this period; to a lesser extent the Soviet press and political pamphlets were also employed as weapons in the struggle.

Until his emergence as the dominant figure in Soviet politics, Joseph Stalin resembled much more a 'grey eminence', efficient, yet unassuming, one who 'seeks power, but not its glare'. It was this superficial drabness and obscurity which helped to conceal the significance of the enormously strong position which he had created for himself by the time of Lenin's first stroke in 1922, and also the deadly persistence of his ambitions and the ingenuity and subtlety he employed in order to achieve them. He was further assisted by outward comparisons with Trotsky, which were invariably so unflattering: Trotsky was the hero of the October Revolution, the creator of the Red Army, the victor of the Civil War, Lenin's second-in-command and the Bolshevik Party's

most brilliant and voluminous intellectual. Because there seemed to be such a ludicrous disparity between 'the grey blur', Stalin and the Bolshevik paladin, Trotsky, it gave Stalin a clear awareness of how clever and strong he was going to have to be if he was going to be successful, whereas Trotsky somehow seemed to believe that his past success would mean that the leadership would fall into his lap and that personal exertion was unnecessary.

### THE RISE OF STALIN

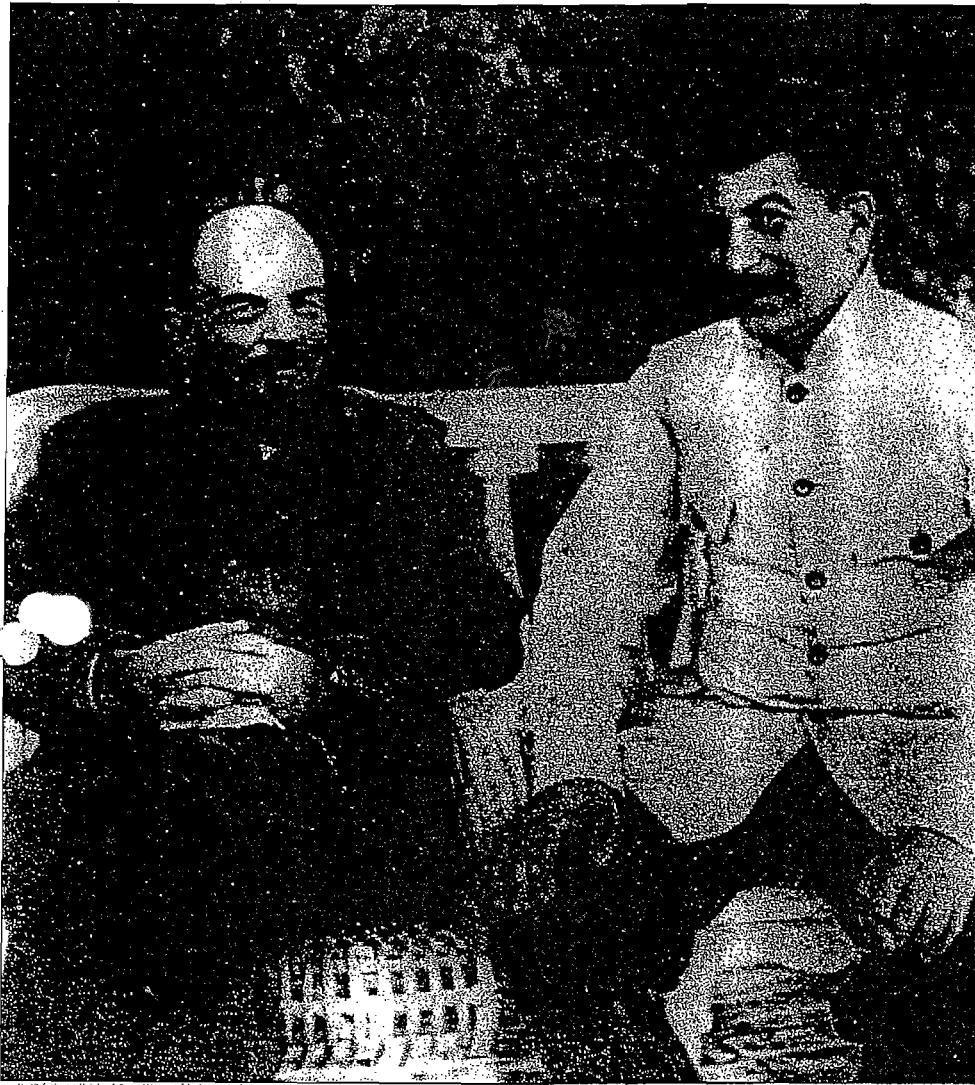
Stalin entered the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1912 and achieved his first major appointment as Commissar for Nationalities in 1917, a reflection of the high opinion in which he was held by Lenin, who called him 'that wonderful Georgian'. In character, he appeared restrained and self-disciplined, his aspirations and abilities as an intellectual were modest, but he was practical, efficient, hard-working, and most importantly, invariably got results. Stalin's first achievements were in the key post — revolutionary field of administration, which was certain to be of enormous significance because of the centralising and restructuring tendencies of the Bolshevik regime; despite Lenin's diatribes against bureaucracy, its continued rise was certain. Temperamentally, Stalin does not seem to have been very well-suited to administration, but he appears to have realised that bureaucratic power could be translated into political power. Also it was a way of making himself indispensable, as the more Europeanised and glamorous Bolsheviks disdained such pedestrian activity. Lenin knew he could rely on Stalin to take on any number of tasks. Between 1917 and 1922, Stalin became head of the Rabkrin, which supervised the implementation of government instructions in agriculture and industry, and of the Control Commission, which oversaw the appointment and dismissal of the local *apparatchiks* (or 'cadres', hence the contemporary wisdom 'the choice of cadres determines

everything'). This meant that Stalin acquired wide knowledge of local conditions, was frequently in sympathetic contact with local politicians (who preferred his down-to-earth style to the patronising intellectualism of the more prominent Bolsheviks) and by being given control of hiring and firing of Bolshevik officials all over the country, he was able to create solid and loyal support based on mutual self-interest. He was also Liaison Officer, between the Orgburo and the Politburo and had links with the GPU. All these responsibilities were crowned on 4 April 1922, when he was appointed General Secretary of the Party.

By 1922, Stalin had acquired a reputation for abrasiveness despite his outward appearance of humility; Lenin noted 'that cook will concoct nothing but peppery dishes'. But he also attracted to him a body of completely loyal functionaries who, in exchange for personal servitude, came to form the 'Stalin Clique', which effectively governed Russia from the late 1920s. These included Molotov (who later allowed Stalin to send his wife to a labour camp), Kaganovich (who was later to fail to object to a proposal that his own brother be shot), Anastas Mikoyan, who managed to survive in Soviet politics until 1966 and Stalin's secretary, Poskrebyshev who, in his capacity for both efficient management of Stalin's affairs and subservience, resembled Martin Bormann and his relationship to Hitler.

### LENIN'S ILLNESS

In May 1922, Stalin's position could have been seriously weakened by Lenin's first stroke. When Lenin recovered he for the first time became uneasy about Stalin, realising that in the event of his own death power could ultimately devolve upon him; Lenin did not have confidence that he would use this power responsibly. He questioned the brutality of Stalin's purge of the Georgian Bolshevik Party and was antagonised by Stalin's rudeness to Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, in the course of a



Stalin was keen to foster the impression of a close relationship with Lenin.

by Lenin and his control of the War Commissariat. Throughout 1923 he made only sporadic attempts to engage in battle with Stalin and at several crucial moments he was incapacitated by malaria, which entailed politically inconvenient convalescence on the Black Sea coast. After Lenin's death he signally failed to build a power base in the party from which to launch attacks on Stalin. He was hampered by a number of weaknesses; with the death of Lenin, he lost his complementary role as the executor of Lenin's policies; he had little talent for political manoeuvring and was hampered by scruples about splitting the party and the prejudice against him which he felt was partly anti-semitic. The dislike with which many people regarded him was really a result of his personal and intellectual arrogance; also many Bolsheviks were assiduous students of the French Revolution. They saw in Trotsky as Commissar for War, an analogue of Bonaparte in the 1790s who, trading on the military prestige he had acquired in the Italian campaign, seized power in the coup of the 18th Brumaire in Paris in 1799. Trotsky was thus accused of Bonapartism; quite unjustifiably in that the use of force against the party was anathema to him. Temperamentally, Trotsky was hampered by a kind of fastidiousness and vanity which made him despise the day-to-day tedium of politics. He was also distrusted as an ex-Menshevik. Finally, he made a catastrophic error in failing to attend Lenin's funeral.

### THE CULT OF LENIN

The death of Lenin in 1924 was brilliantly exploited by Stalin. He himself was jubilant at Lenin's death, and a remarkable photograph exists in which Stalin stands beside Lenin's corpse, his expression that of barely concealed satisfaction. Stalin was quick to establish himself as Lenin's heir; he was a pall-bearer at Lenin's funeral and delivered an impassioned eulogy which appeared to award Lenin the god-like status which was later taken for granted in the Soviet Union. He invented the term 'Leninism', and was careful to link his own ideas with those of Lenin's, particularly the NEP. He even managed to link his own idea of 'socialism in one country' with those of Lenin through skilful ideological hair-splitting, in that Lenin, despite reservations about 'permanent revolution', was really an internationalist. He established the Lenin Institute and gave a series of lectures entitled 'The Foundations of Leninism'. He also famously doctored photos, to indicate a much closer relationship with Lenin than in fact existed. However, as Alan Bullock avers, this may not simply have been a cynical political tactic, but may in addition have reflected an emotional need to reclaim the association which Stalin had enjoyed with Lenin until 1922. He was also able to use Lenin's attacks on factionalism to delegitimise opposition attempts to criticise party policy, with which Stalin was now so clearly identified.

Stalin is too rude, and this fault, quite tolerable in our midst or in relations amongst Communists, becomes intolerable for one who holds the office of General Secretary. Therefore I propose to comrades that they consider a means of removing Stalin from the post and appointing another person, who in all respects differs from Stalin in one advantage alone, namely, that he is more patient, more polite, more loyal and more considerate to comrades.

Though not generally revealed until after Lenin's death and only to a very limited extent within the Soviet Union, this Testament could, possibly, have wrecked Stalin's chances of securing the succession. However this calculation reckons without the inertia and political incompetence of his fellow-Bolsheviks; when the Testament was read out to the Central Committee in May 1924, four months after Lenin's death in January, Zinoviev and Kamenev were foremost in claiming Stalin had reformed, a verdict which was accepted. Also Trotsky made no effort to exploit the criticism expressed in the Testament.

### TROTSKY'S ACTIONS

Trotsky's behaviour between 1923 and 1925 is hard to understand. The figure who an American newspaperman called 'the greatest Jew since Christ,' became a political cipher, despite the strength of his position as most favoured

and Stalin, during Lenin's convalescence. Lenin now attempted to enlist the aid of Trotsky and urged that he become Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (effectively the Soviet Parliament). Trotsky both refused to assume the latter position and to attack Stalin (with Lenin's encouragement) over his handling of the Georgian question. After Lenin's third stroke in 1923, Stalin aligned himself for tactical reasons with Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky.

Lenin by this time had been deprived of the power of speech and was powerless to influence events except at a distance and sporadically. The existence of the famous Testament, which was dictated between 23 December 1922 and 4 January 1923, to which a postscript was added shortly before his death, was known. This document contained Lenin's evaluation of each of the Bolshevik leaders and, surprisingly, does not explicitly indicate which of them he would choose as his successor. He was most favourable towards Trotsky, but even so accused him of 'excessive self-confidence' and of being 'overly attracted by the administrative aspect of affairs'. But it is famous to a much greater degree for its verdict on Stalin. Lenin comments as follows: 'Comrade Stalin has acquired immense power in his hands and I am not certain that he will always know how to use this power with sufficient caution'; in the Postscript, he goes much further:

## STALIN'S CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

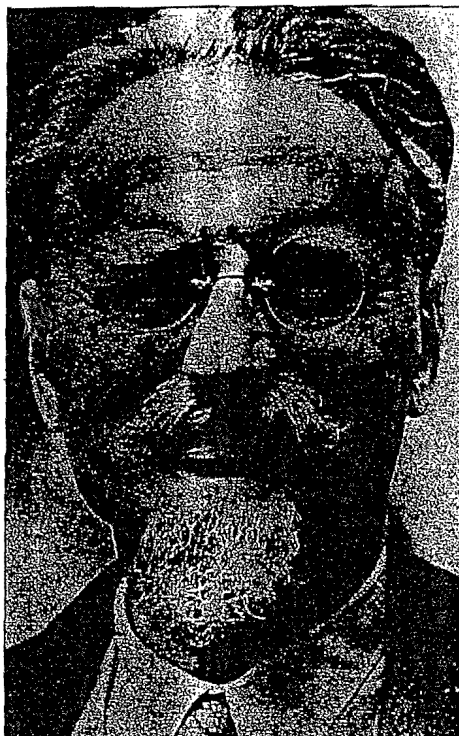
By the summer of 1924, Stalin was in a very strong position. His followers controlled most of the committees and elections associated with Party Conferences, Congresses and meetings of the Central Committee. He had also benefited from the 'Lenin Enrolment', under which ill-educated, working-class Soviet citizens were encouraged to join the party. These new members naturally gravitated towards Stalin rather than Trotsky. He was assisted further by the continuing ineptitude of Trotsky who, in January 1925, not only resigned as Commissar for War, but also issued a pamphlet entitled the 'Lessons of October', which pictured Zinoviev and Kamenev as the 'October Deserters', because of their non-participation in the revolution; he also criticised the inertia of the Comintern in the crisis in Germany in 1923.

Stalin exploited this by gaining the support of his civil war crony, Voroshilov, as War Commissar; Trotsky's attacks on Zinoviev and Kamenev led to the invention of 'Trotskyism', purely a negative term under which heading all Trotsky's ideas were fitted: rapid industrialisation, permanent revolution, collectivisation, rejection of the NEP and Trotsky's Menshevism, which he only repudiated in 1917. Trotsky was made to appear unpatriotic and ideologically unworthy to be the heir of Lenin. Trotsky himself was undermined by his own feeling that 'one cannot be right against the party'. The hostility of the party was personally demoralising to him.

Particularly effective criticism was made of Trotsky's idea of 'permanent revolution', which gave top priority to encouraging Communist Revolution all over the world. This was not an appropriate doctrine in the light of the defeat of the Red Army by the Poles, the crushing of the Red Hungarians by the Romanians and the failure of the Spartakist rising in Germany in 1919. It also called upon the Russian people, after all the travails and miseries of war to make further sacrifices. Stalin's opposing doctrine 'socialism in one country', proclaimed faith in the resilience of the Russian Revolution and made the consolidation of the Revolution a much higher priority. Stalin expressed himself succinctly on the subject: 'one Soviet tractor is worth 8 or 10 foreign communists'.

## FINAL STAGE

In 1925 Trotsky temporarily dropped out of sight and devoted himself to the role of literary critic and the writer of homilies on family life; he still attended political meetings but only as a spectator, who was on occasion to be seen reading French novels during debates. This allowed Stalin to turn against his erstwhile allies, Zinoviev and Kamenev. He was assisted by complete control of the Bolshevik press, which published attacks on them and distorted their views, and accused them of 'Trotskyism', which was increasingly associated with treason. At the 14th Party Congress in 1925 Stalin won a huge majority and claimed 559



Leon Trotsky (1879-1940)

votes, while his opponents could only manage 65.

Trotsky returned to the struggle in the summer of 1926 and belatedly formed the Left Opposition with Zinoviev and Kamenev. Almost at once Stalin succeeded in getting Zinoviev thrown out of the Politburo and gained appointment to that most important body, six members of the Stalin Clique: Rudzutak, Ordzhonikidze, Andreyev, Kirov, Mikoyan and Kaganovich. The Opposition then staged a demonstration at the Putilov works in Leningrad, events in which place had been one of the catalysts of the October Revolution. But they followed this with a politically disastrous *volte face* in a document in which they abjured further factional activity. However, Trotsky began to step up his attacks against Stalin and in a meeting of the Politburo called Stalin the 'gravedigger of the revolution' (October 1926).

However, just as Trotsky appeared to be pressing Stalin hard, the position of his chief allies, Zinoviev and Kamenev, began to disintegrate. By 1927 Zinoviev had lost control of the Comintern and had been replaced as head of the Leningrad Bolshevik Party by Stalin's henchman, Kirov. Whilst Kamenev lost the chairmanship of the Council of People's Commissars, one of his chief supporters lost control of the Moscow Party organisation. Then in 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Bolshevik Party. The rest of his life was spent in exile, first in Central Asia in 1928, then in Turkey in 1929; he found his last resting place in Mexico, where he was murdered by an agent of Stalin's GPU in 1940.

## CONCLUSION

The reasons for Trotsky's failure against Stalin between 1923 and 1927 are very

numerous, though to reduce the matter to its simplest terms: Stalin was absolutely determined to achieve a dominant position, while Trotsky was not. As Nicholas Mosley has written: 'Trotsky was a leader of exploits, like Achilles';<sup>2</sup> the drudgery of everyday politics was anathema to him. Such a temperament was well-suited to the Heroic Age of the Bolshevik Party, which ended in 1921. The type who was likely to succeed in the subsequent period, with the transformation of central and local government and the structure of agriculture and industry, combined with the institution of regular party congresses, conferences and meetings of the Politburo, was a hard-working bureaucrat and a ruthless and subtle political tactician; Stalin was of course all these things, par excellence. Trotsky's designation of him as the 'party's most eminent mediocrity', is absurd and evidence of Trotsky's astounding ignorance of the forces at work in the post-revolutionary period, and indeed of Stalin himself.

Stalin was assisted first by Lenin's confidence in him 1917-22, which enabled him to establish his administrative power base; then by Lenin's illness and death, which removed from contention the one man who might have defeated him in a political struggle. Lenin's failure to nominate a successor created a political vacuum, which only the most ruthless could dominate.

The most enigmatic feature of this period is the political paralysis of Trotsky, his political ineptitude and reluctance to act, for fear of splitting the party. He only acted with determination in 1926, when it was too late. His opportunity had come in 1923-24 and he had refused to take it, and did not exploit Stalin's controversial handling of the Georgian question and the incriminating data contained in the Testament. However, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that even if Trotsky had made all the right political moves, Stalin could not possibly have been defeated. That is unless Trotsky had been willing to use the army against Stalin and establish himself as a Red Bonaparte. As is known, Trotsky would not have contemplated such a course of action.

## NOTES

- (1) Fest, J. (1963) *The Face of the Third Reich*, London.
- (2) Mosley, N. (1972) *The Assassination of Trotsky*, London.

## FURTHER READING

- Bullock, A. (1991) *Parallel Lives: Hitler and Stalin*, London.
- Lynch, M. (1990) *Stalin, Khrushchev and the Soviet Union 1924-64*, London.
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