

The power struggle



How far do you agree that the struggle for power following Lenin's death in 1924 was caused by the ideological differences between the contenders for power? The 5 contenders to become leader all had different ideologies which I agree to some extent was an important factor in the struggle for power after Lenin's death. However, there were also 3 other reasons that could have led to a struggle, for example, the fact that they all had different personalities which meant that they connected with Lenin differently and gained respect from other members of the party and people of the public in different ways, such as their revolutionary record, and to a different extent. I also believe that the power struggle was not solely based on logical differences between the contenders but maybe a struggle based on egos.

The first reason is that Stalin, Bukharin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev had different ideologies which contradicted each other, the rules and the practices that Lenin already had in place. Trotsky represented the left wing of the party and believed in the rejection of the New Economic Party, being committed to immediate industrialisation and permanent revolution which was completely different to Bukharin who was on the right wing of the party. Bukharin believed in acceptance of the NEP, he was committed to industrialisation but in the distant future and wanted socialism in one country.

On the other hand, Stalin was in the centre which meant that he had a pragmatic commitment to the NEP, he was committed to industrialisation in the near future and socialism should be in one country, which are both similar to Bukharin's ideas on the right wing. Zinoviev and Kamenev swapped from right to left in 1925, which lost them credibility with the party.

The fact that most of the contenders had such different ideas about how to run the country would have caused a struggle because they would not have been able to agree on something between them and would have been competing against each other in order to gain support from the public and members of the party.

The contenders would have had to prove that they were an ideological heavyweight and a true Leninist as this would gain them lots of support and votes. Moreover, the ideological debate meant that Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin did not attack each other personally but criticised each other's ideas, meaning that it would have been difficult as a voter to decide which side you were on as you would not have known the truth, leading to a struggle for power as many people may not have got involved as they felt there would be no point in voting if they were not being told the right facts. Another reason that would have led to a struggle for power is that the contenders had different roles within the government.

Trotsky's role in the government was as Head of the Red Army, which expanded the respect of young Party members as they saw it as heroic, but it also meant that senior Communists would have been jealous of the attention he was receiving. Stalin's role on the Sovnarkom was Commissar for Nationalities which meant that he was responsible for overseeing the affairs of all the non-Russians within the USSR and was also responsible for communication with senior officials throughout the USSR. He was able to manipulate his position to gain loyalty from those he was responsible for.

Lenin held the central position as Chair of the Sovnarkom when he was alive and Kamenev who served as his deputy, then when Lenin became ill

Kamenev acted as Chair of the Sovnarkom this gave him lots of power inside the government. Stalin was given the power to investigate and expel people who worked for the government increasing his power and ensured that government workers who wanted to keep their jobs would be loyal to him. Zinoviev and Bukharin did not serve on Lenin's Sovnarkom which would have added to the struggle for power as they would have been jealous of the influence that the other three had on the public and would have seen it as unfair towards them as they would not have been able to influence opinions through their roles in the government because they didn't have any.

Furthermore, Stalin would have been the target of all contenders as he had the most power within the Sovnarkom and would have meant many of them were envious of the control and impact he could apply over the public and other members of the government. Trotsky's reputation as a revolutionary was established in the 1905 revolution, he was a leading figure in the short-lived St Petersburg Soviet of November and in 1917 helped win support for the Communists during the planning period of the October Revolution. Trotsky did not always have a good relationship with Lenin as in 1903 he sided with the Mensheviks, rejecting Lenin's beliefs. However, when he returned to Russia in the summer of 1917, he joined the Communists and was able to work closely with Lenin; this led to Lenin later saying that Trotsky was 'the most able man in the present Central Committee' in his Testament.

Trotsky's heroism coupled with his stirring speeches won him the support of many young Communists and students as well as the loyalty of the Red Army. He played a major part in the struggle as it meant many people in the

Party resented the way in which Trotsky had Lenin's trust. Stalin's was a committee member during the October revolution meaning that he carried out the orders of others rather than taking the initiative but he saw himself as a military tactician and refused to accept Trotsky's authority during the Civil War. Lenin relied on Stalin's administrative ability and loyalty, and even described him as 'that wonderful Georgian' but was also, highly critical of him in his Testament and expressed concern that Stalin had 'concentrated an enormous power in his hand' and did not always use it wisely. Stalin had the power to advance the careers of people within the Communist party which meant many people would support him in order to keep their job. Stalin was also able to appeal to the national pride of those he sought to lead. Bukharin was one of the leading lights in the Moscow Communist Party during 1917 and inspired people to seize power in Moscow.

Bukharin admired Lenin and was referred to as the 'golden boy' of the Communist Party in return. Lenin was known as the 'favourite of the whole Party' and was 'named in Russia as the eventual successor to Lenin' which meant that many of the other contenders would have been jealous of the time that Bukharin was given by Lenin. Zinoviev did not take part much in revolutions and during the Civil War remained in Petrograd's most luxurious hotel, far from the fighting. He worked with Lenin on a number of books and pamphlets and even accompanied him into hiding in mid-1917. However, Zinoviev disagreed with Lenin on many issues and was disloyal and had a lack of vision which Lenin remembered in his Testament: 'I will only remind you that the October episode of Zinoviev and Kamenev was not, of course, accidental'.

Zinoviev was the least appealing and one Party member even said that 'after Mussolini, he is the most despicable individual I have ever met' this meant that many of the contenders did not see him as a threat to the struggle for power so focused their energy elsewhere. Kamenev was better known for caution than for revolutionary passion; he disagreed with Lenin on several issues and played no notable part in the Civil War. Kamenev was Lenin's closest friend, but during 1917 opposed the central thrust of Lenin's vision.

Lenin and Kamenev remained close during Lenin's final years but Lenin still reminded his readers of Kamenev's disloyalty in the crucial months of 1917, making him less of a threat, along with Zinoviev, to the other contenders within the Party. In conclusion, I think that the struggle for power was purely down to the fact that all five of the contenders believed that they were the best person to be in charge because of the different roles that they played in the revolutions and if they didn't play much of a part they would use their relationship with Lenin as a way of getting ahead of the other competitors. They all looked for ways that they could pick at each other's weaknesses in order to gain more influence over the other Party members and used their popularity as a way of ensuring they remained a huge party in the battle for leadership.