

How and why did stalin rise to power? essay



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Vladimir Lenin was the leader of the Bolsheviks who seized power in November 1917. He died in January 1924 after a series of strokes that left him completely paralysed, and eventually killed him.

When he died, he left no clues as to whom he wanted to succeed him as ruler of the USSR, even though he had been very ill for a long time before he died. It was decided that the member of the Politburo that had the most power would succeed Lenin, instead of having leadership elections, because the Communist Party did not want it to work that way. The two leading figures that would fight for power would be Josef Stalin and Leon Trotsky. Lenin's funeral was held on the 27th January 1924. Stalin made an appearance as chief mourner and Lenin's closest friend, but Trotsky was nowhere to be seen. It was revealed later that Trotsky had most likely fallen victim to a trick played by Stalin.

Stalin had told Trotsky (who was away in the south of Russia at the time) that the funeral was to be held on the 26th. Trotsky would not have been able to make it back in time if it was on the 26th, whereas he would've have made it back for the 27th. Trotsky saw it as impossible to get back and therefore did not try. This made Trotsky look extremely bad, whilst making Stalin look loyal and caring. Through the argument between the Left Opposition and the Rightists, Lenin made himself clear about where he stood; he had doubts about them both. At the end of 1922, he wrote a letter to the Party Congress, which displayed his ideas for the future of the USSR after he died.

It also gave his opinions about certain members of the Politburo. After his death this letter became known as his Testament. He also expressed his views about the two leading candidates, Trotsky and Stalin. He described Stalin as 'rude.

.. intolerable as a Secretary General', and advised that they should find someone more 'tolerant, more loyal, more polite, and more considerable.'

On the other hand, he described Trotsky as 'possibly the most capable man in the present central committee, but has displayed excessive self-assurance..

.'. These views made Stalin look like a bad leader, but when shown this testament, other members of the party congress disagreed with Lenin's views, especially Zinoviev, so the testament was never published. When Lenin died, he left Stalin in a good position to rise to power. He had already obtained great power working as the Party General Secretary, and by taking on the jobs that no other members of the Politburo wanted. He was the only link between the party and the government, so he knew the workings of both.

More importantly, as he was head of the Central Commission, he was solely responsible for appointing and firing new members of the Party. New members would be answerable directly to him, and initially would enjoy their job, so stay loyal to him. This gave Stalin a lot of power and votes would always follow him. During the 'Lenin Enrolment', the Party gained 300,000 new members, all appointed under Stalin's control. Therefore, by the time of Lenin's death, Stalin had gained huge support in the Party.

The new members were mainly from the working and peasant classes, whereas they were not before. Stalin spotted this and presented himself as a hard-working farmboy who had suffered exile in Siberia for his Party. He emerged as the man who truly understood the middle classes. The party had now turned into a sprawling bureaucracy.

If Trotsky had tried this sympathetic approach he may have been more successful. To the new Party he was an arrogant Jew who they had little in common with. During meetings he often turned up and then talked over anyone who was speaking. He also often turned his back on his colleagues, read a book for the duration of a meeting, and even stormed out of the room in a temper. His lack of political tact and arrogance left him with no base of support within the party, but even without that, he still could have gained power if he had gained alliances within the Politburo.

The Politburo in 1924 consisted of seven members, but over the two previous years, they had split into two sides - the Rightists and the Left Opposition. The main cause of this split was the disagreement about how to develop the economy of the USSR. The Left Opposition consisted of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. They strongly disagreed with the idea of continuing with the NEP (New Economic Policy). They wanted the USSR to turn into an agricultural country as soon as possible. The west countries hated communism and the Left Opposition were worried that if the USSR remained an agricultural country under the NEP, then the west may try and invade the USSR to crush it.

The Left Opposition therefore decided that the government should take control of the USSR's farming land and force the peasants to make as much food as the towns needed. They also suggested forming ' shock brigades' out of dedicated communists to build new power stations and railways. This would modernise industry but the money for these things would come from taxing the peasants. The Rightists therefore wanted the NEP to continue for at least the next twenty years. The Rightists were led by Bukharin, and also consisted of Stalin, Rykov, and Tomsy, and they hoped that this scheme would encourage peasants to grow more food.

They would then be able to make profits by selling this food to the towns. As peasant's profits went up, the townspeople would be able to get more jobs in factories, which would make consumer goods for the peasants to buy. Gradually, both would become better off. Trotsky, even though being on the same side as Zinoviev and Kamenev, argued with them constantly; they respected his ideas but hated him as a person.

In fact, he was so despised that eventually the two joined with Stalin and formed a triumvirate to solely keep Trotsky from becoming leader. Trotsky now had absolutely no friends within the Politburo. Having completely alienated himself from both the main body of the Party and from the Politburo, Trotsky's last hope was to disclose Lenin's testament. The testament condemned all three of the triumvirate and would have completely ruined Stalin's chances as leader if it had been published, and even though it slightly criticised Trotsky, it would have proven that he was Lenin's clear choice of successor. This highlights Trotsky's naivete and his lack of ruthlessness. Had he pressed for the release of the testament, or <https://assignbuster.com/how-and-why-did-stalin-rise-to-power-essay/>

drummed up more support, Stalin's position could have been weakened considerably.

Trotsky was neither willing to use his loyal Red Army to seize control, so he was unable to lower himself to the drudgery of politics, or to take any action that would damage the Party. This meant that he couldn't manoeuvre himself into power. Stalin proved himself to be extremely clever and manipulative, when by the end of 1925 he had had Trotsky, and the two people that had helped him turn against Trotsky in the first place, Kamenev and Zinoviev, dismissed from the Politburo. He used his friendliness with the Rightists to make sure that Trotsky was always voted down in the Politburo. He arranged for supporters to vote against Trotsky in meetings of the Party Central Committee, and even had him booed in public meetings.

When three of Stalin's old friends were elected for places within the Politburo, Stalin's position strengthened so much that he was able to secure the dismissal of the Left Opposition from the Politburo, and eventually had Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the entire Party. With the Left Opposition now out of his way, Stalin set about cementing his victory. He turned against the Rightists, declaring in 1928 that he was in favour of ending the NEP, the argument previously used by Trotsky. The Rightists tried to argue against him, but now Stalin had so much support within the Politburo, their arguments fell on deaf ears.

Therefore, at the beginning of 1929, all the Rightists (Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky) all resigned from the Politburo. Meanwhile, in 1928, Trotsky had been deported to Alma Ata in Soviet Central Asia, and finally in 1929 was

exiled from the USSR altogether. Stalin was now the supreme leader of the USSR. Stalin had finally proved himself a clever politician, and it is clear that he planned his bid for power carefully.

He made great efforts to relate to Lenin at all times, making a fine start at Lenin's funeral. He used his power carefully within the Communists party, taking pride in doing all the boring but important jobs that had to be done (such as Commissar for Nationalities and General Secretary), and used his position to put his supporters into important posts and transfer his opponents to remote posts. He proved completely ruthless in picking off his opponents, and did not care what tactics he used in getting rid of them, even using the former arguments of Trotsky to get rid of the remaining Rightists. To the people of the USSR, Stalin's ideas of Socialism in one country seemed perfect - they finally thought they had found the man who understood them.