

## Why did Stalin become leader of the USSR?

### • Introduction

- Rise of Stalin – superficially surprising
  - Marx – did not believe in single leaders
  - Lenin – called for a collective leadership and for the removal of Stalin
  - Dismissed as a “Grey Blur” by Trotsky, the dynamic Minister of War
- Yet nevertheless he became leader – why?

### • Stalin’s Strengths

#### Stalin’s position in the party made him more powerful than the other contenders

- **It is true that the other contenders were powerful too:**
  - Trotsky – Victorious leader of Red Army
  - Kamenev / Zinoviev – Local power bases in working classes as Soviet leaders
  - Bukharin – Editor of Pravda, lots of influence over public opinion
- **Nevertheless, Stalin’s position was the strongest:**
  - Stalin – General Secretary – has power to appoint, promote and demote; so he is slowly but surely packing out the party apparatus with his own loyal followers

### • Opposition Weaknesses

#### There were divisions in the party which left all the other contenders weakened

##### Lower Level:

Ordinary Workers – had formed the “Workers’ Opposition”

Ordinary Bolsheviks – had formed the “Democratic centralists”

##### Higher Level:

Right Wing: Led by Bukharin (+Rykov, Tomsky) – wanted NEP / Socialism in one Country

Left Wing: Led by Trotsky (+Kamenev, Zinoviev) – wanted War Communism / World Revolution

Stalin: Deliberately remained aloof so that he did not alienate anyone

### • Opposition Mistakes

#### Lenin’s Testament – which called for Stalin’s removal - was ignored

- Lenin had been alarmed at Stalin’s brutality in Georgia and rudeness to his wife
- Stalin was heavily criticised in the “Testament” and Lenin called for his removal (quotes)
- In contrast Lenin had some positive things to say about the others (quotes)
- BUT the other leaders were criticised too (quotes)
- AND they felt that Lenin’s judgement had been impaired by his stroke / his wife
- Therefore they all agreed that it should not be made public and the threat was defused

### • Stalin’s Successes

#### Stalin manipulated the situation to his advantage

- **Stage 1: Allies with the Left to destroy Trotsky**
  - Stalin tricked Trotsky into not attending Lenin’s funeral
  - Trotsky felt to be too arrogant; Stalin in contrast a “team player”
  - Kamenev and Zinoviev agree to side with Stalin against Trotsky
  - Trotsky removed
- **Stage 2: Allies with Right to destroy Kamenev and Zinoviev**
  - With Trotsky gone, the Left-Wing are left weakened
  - Bukharin and Rykov agree to side with Stalin against Kamenev and Zinoviev
  - Kamenev and Zinoviev removed
- **Stage 3: Moves to the centre ground to destroy Bukharin and Rykov**
  - By this time, Stalin had packed the Politburo and the Party with his own followers
  - To appeal to the Left, Stalin calls for rapid industrialisation and collectivisation
  - To appeal to the Right, Stalin calls for “Socialism in One Country”
  - Bukharin and Rykov removed

- The party was divided between the Left (led by Trotsky) and the Right (by Bukharin)
- Stalin was careful to keep his own policy ideas vague during the battle for power
- Lenin was seriously ill for the last three years of his life
- Stalin was regarded as a reliable team player who got things done
- Kamenev was the Chairman of the Moscow Soviet with influence over the workers there
- Zinoviev was the Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet with influence over the workers there
- Bukharin was editor of Pravda with influence over public opinion
- Lenin's "Testament" was kept a secret and its recommendations were ignored
- Lenin's "Testament" described Bukharin as "the most able theorist in the party"
- Economically, the party was divided between the policies of War Communism and NEP
- The democratic centralists opposed the declining power of party members
- The workers' opposition opposed the declining power of the soviets (workers' councils)
- Stalin tricked Trotsky into not attending Lenin's funeral

