



# STALIN'S RISE TO POWER

(THE POLITBURO, THE STRUGGLE TO SUCCEED LENIN, KEY HISTORICAL  
PERSPECTIVE )



# ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. **What** was the **historical context** of Stalin's struggle for power? *(Politburo)*
2. **What** were the **key stages** of the power struggle? *(Struggle of succeeding Lenin)*
3. **Why** did Stalin **emerge** as leader of the Soviet Union? *(key historical perspectives)*

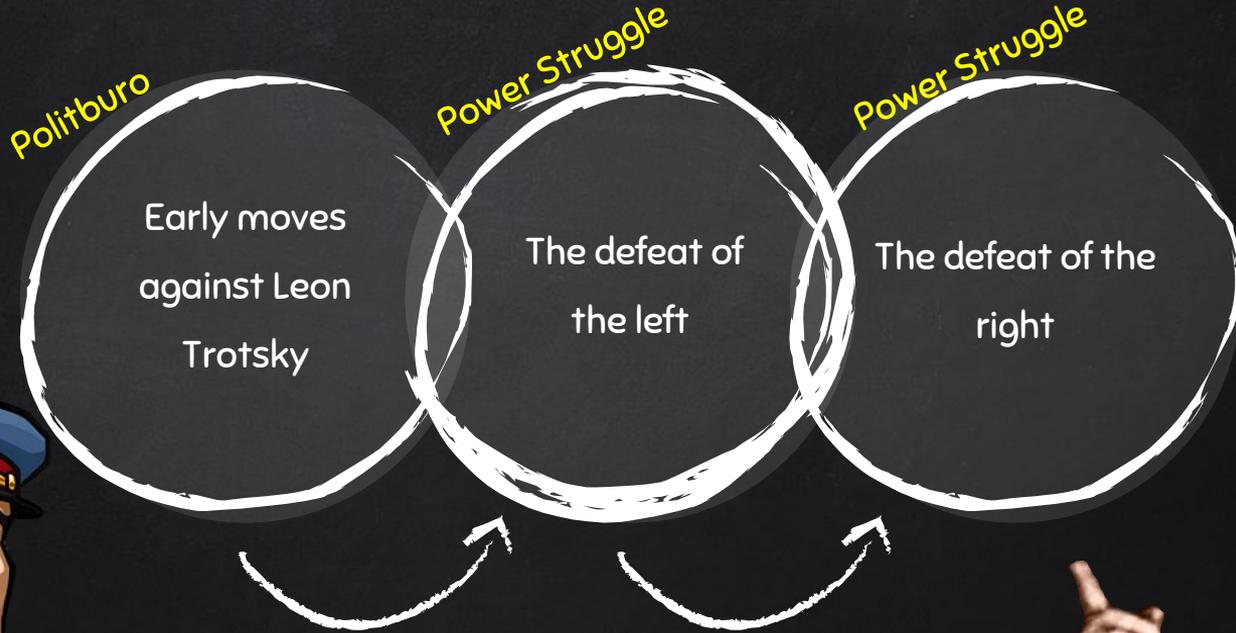
# CONTEXT TO STALIN



- x Lenin's death: January 1924
  - o Soviet Russia = one party state (3 yrs)
- x Stalin's rise to power:
  - o Unexpected
  - o Struggle to succeed = 1922 NOT 1924
- x Not an articulate speech maker/intellectual



# WHAT FACTORS LED TO STALIN'S RISE TO POWER?



# CONTEXT TO STALIN CONT'D

Stalin = 'Betrayal of Socialism'  
- Lenin

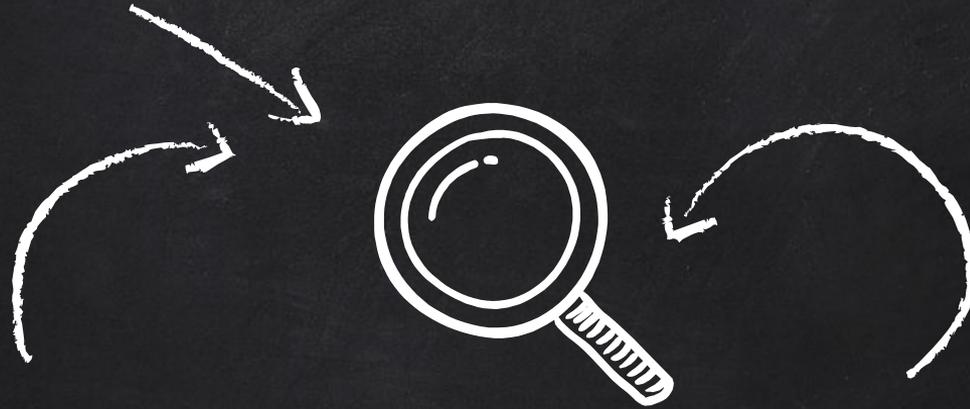


Born in 1878 in Georgia

- Russian => second language

Introduction to Marxism ideology

- Revolutionary Socialist group (Messame Dassy)
- Russian Social Democratic Labour Party
- Organizing Strikes
  - Exile in Siberia
  - Overthrow of Tsardom... RETURN TO PETROGRAD
- Pravda, Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, Commissar for Nationalities.



HOW WAS STALIN ABLE TO SECURE THE LEADERSHIP OF THE  
COMMUNIST PARTY?

Emergence

# INTRO TO THE POLITBURO

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✘ Stalin was a member of the Politburo + Orgburo

- Politburo => Political Bureau
- Communist Party's body : political decisions.

✘ Orgburo *(not as significant as Politburo for Rise to Power)*

- Organisational Bureau
- Key decisions about organizational work

- Seven officials elected from the Central Committee
- Met regularly and was chaired by Lenin
- After his death, it formed a 'collective leadership'

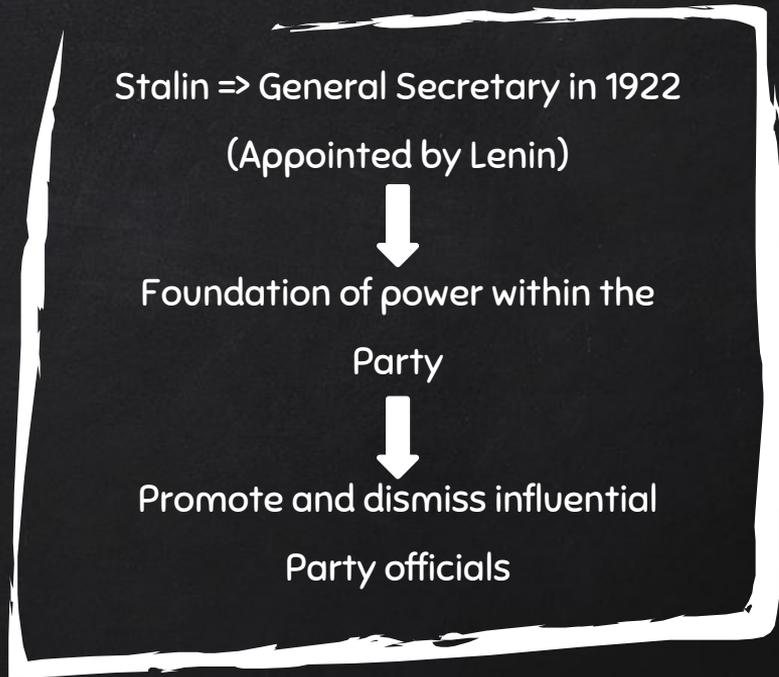
# INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO

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- x Grigory Zinoviev
- x Lev Kamenev
- x Leon Trotsky
- x Nikolai Bukharin
- x Mikhail Tomsky

And of course...

- x Stalin
- x Lenin



Stalin's power within the Politburo

# POLITBURO

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- ✗ Key to power = Party organisation ..... ≠ state institutions
- ✗ The Party grew rapidly, numbering **800,000** members by **1925** and over **1.5 million** by **1929**
- ✗ Trotsky was Stalin's greatest opposition and rival however Trotsky held no significant position
- ✗ Stalin lacked charisma
- ✗ Trotsky saw Stalin as a "Grey Blur"
  - Trotsky was 'supposed' to be the successor to Lenin



*Stalin's rivals underestimated him...*

Centralised Control → Increased membership → Increase in Stalin's Power

# FIRST SIGHT @ BUREAUCRACY...

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- ✗ Manipulation of different factions within the Party leadership against each other
- ✗ What side was Stalin's side? ... Whichever was popular (pragmatist)
- ✗ Personal Rivalry:
  - Kamenev and Zinoviev resented Trotsky
  - 1922–1925: Triumvirate (to be further discussed) : Kamenev + Zinoviev + Stalin
  - **Common goal:** Trotsky to resign



# FIRST SIGHT @ BUREAUCRACY...

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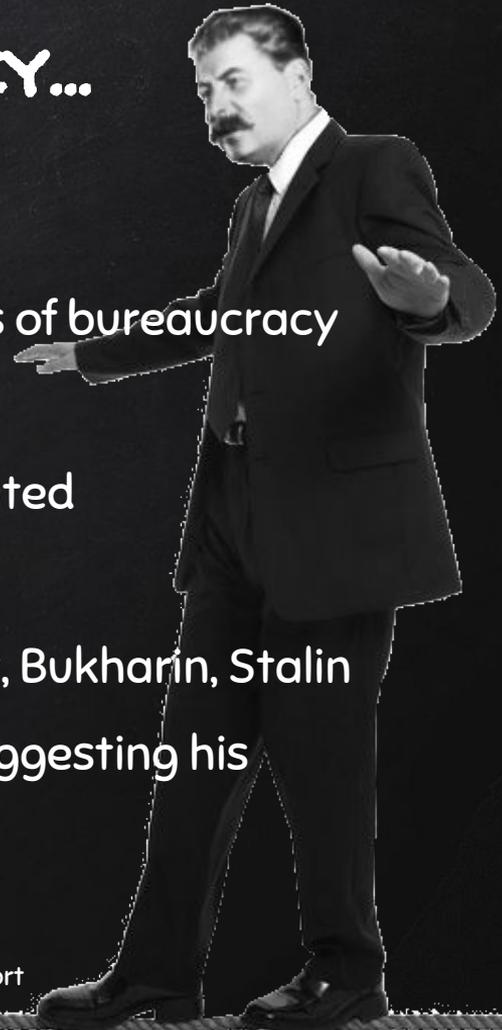
- ✗ Growing tensions concerned Lenin
- ✗ Solution 1: 'Joint Bloc for Democracy' against growing signs of bureaucracy with Trotsky

Lenin became too sick... solution 1 was not executed

## ✗ Testament:

- 5 possible successors: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Stalin
- Lenin resented Stalin calling him 'too rude' and suggesting his dismissal from the Politburo

Stalin on a tightrope: Lenin's resentment had the power to bring down his growing support



## DID LUCK HAVE A MINOR ROLE IN THE RISE TO POWER?

- ✗ Central Committee decided **not** to publish Lenin's Political Testament
  - Some historians question Stalin's ability to gain power had they published the testament...
- ✗ Stalin's influence and blossoming power remained intact
- ✗ Outmanoeuvre Trotsky:
  - Stalin provided Trotsky with the wrong date for Lenin's funeral
  - Trotsky's reputation was in decline



# POLICY DISAGREEMENTS

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- NEP should be replaced
- Rapid Industrialisation
- Collectivisation of agriculture

'Permanent Revolution'

LEFT

- NEP works and should be maintained especially for the wellbeing of the peasants

"Socialism in One Country"

RIGHT



## THE POLITBURO: 1924-1926

'Left Communists'

Trotsky

Zinoviev

Kamenev



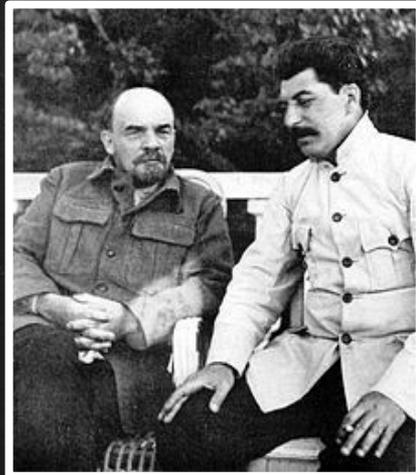
'Right Communists'

Bukharin

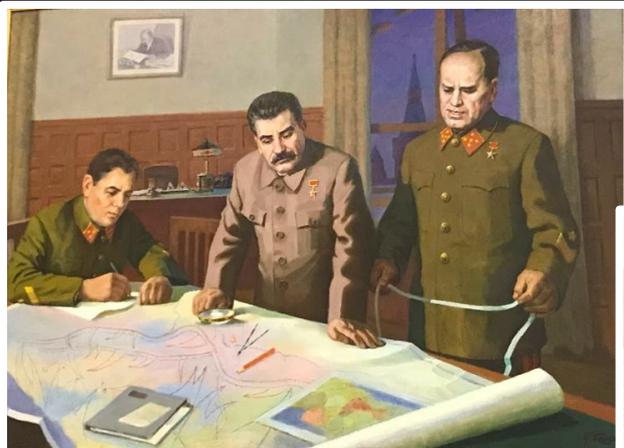
Tomsky

Rykov

← Stalin moved his position between the two factions →



FACTORS: IN DEPTH...



ВЫШЕ ЗНАМЯ МАРКСА, ЭНГЕЛЬСА, ЛЕНИНА И СТАЛИНА!



РОДИНА-МАТЬ  
ЗОВЕТ!

ПУСТЬ ЗАРАДУЕТ  
И ПРОЦВЕТАЕТ НАША РОДИНА!

ДА ЗАРАДУЕТ ВЕЛИКАЯ ПАРТИЯ  
ЛЕНИНА-СТАЛИНА.  
УН ИЩЕТ В СОВЕТСКОМ НАРОДЕ



Славному делу  
отца и сына  
Ленина и Сталина!

1

## EARLY MOVES AGAINST LEON TROTSKY

Triumvirate campaign against Trotsky:

April 1923 @ the 12th Congress

✗ Congress re-elected Stalin as general secretary

1921 Lenin  
introduced a  
faction ban within  
the Communist  
Party

Stalin began to replace Trotsky's supporters with supporters of the triumvirate!

## THE DEFEAT OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION, 1924-27

July 1926: Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev formed the *United Opposition*

- ✗ Breaking the 1921 ban on factions
  - Stalin had enough power to remove Zinoviev + Kamenev
  - Trotsky = only opposition
- ✗ Stalin expels Trotsky after Lenin's Testament is published

10 December 1927 the United Opposition was over

... ISOLATIONIST TACTICS!!

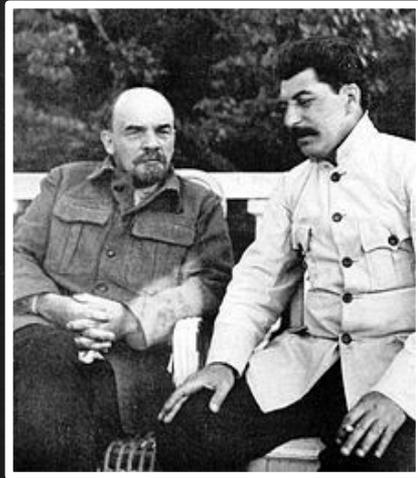
## THE DEFEAT OF THE RIGHT OPPOSITION

- ✗ 1927, bread shortages and high food prices led Stalin to adopt a new 'left' course for industry and agriculture
- ✗ Oppositions to Stalin were removed from positions of power
- ✗ Bukharin began to see the emergence of Stalin's power
- ✗ Further isolationist policies
- ✗ The Right surrendered to Stalin



# WHY DID STALIN EMERGE AS LEADER OF THE SOVIET UNION?

## KEY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES





# POWER POLITICS



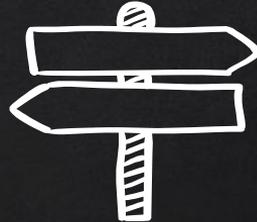
- ✗ Manipulation of genuine political and ideological differences amongst the Bolshevik leaders
- **Robert Conquest:** Stalin's aim was simply to **gain supreme power by crushing all other factions**
- **Tucker:** Stalin's aim was to make himself into a **revolutionary hero** as important and famous as **Lenin**
- **Edward Carl:** Zinoviev and Kamenev ⇒ weak willed according
- **Isaac Deutscher:** Lenin was virtually **isolated** at the top of the party from the beginning

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## STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATIONS

Common theme: Stalin = **product of Russian history** and the administrative system set up after 1917

**Robert Daniels:** 'circular flow of power'



Administrative apparatus grew  $\Rightarrow$  Stalin's power to appoint grew  $\Rightarrow$  Bureaucracy increased  $\Rightarrow$  Enabling Stalin to control party congresses

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## SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS

Closely linked to structural explanations

- ✗ impact of the **social structure on politics and development** of the Communist Party

**Sheila Fitzpatrick:** During Civil War, the Bolsheviks attracted Russian patriots who resented the foreign intervention used by the Whites

- ✗ Manipulated by the party leadership.





## IDEOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

- x Genuine political differences among the communist leaders of the 1920s ( NEP )
- x **E. H. Carr, Alexander Erlich and Moshe Lewin** : ideological positions as more important than mere facades of Stalin

Stalin's rise: political response by the centre to steer a midway policy course by adapting to majority opinion

**Trotsky**: Stalin's victory was the result of unforeseen historical and cultural developments after 1917 rather than the mistakes of his opponents

Perspective	Interpretation
<b>Structuralist Approach: Richard Pipes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Regards Stalin as a <b>product of Russia's circumstances</b>: a strong ruler was required because the country was just emerging from nearly a decade of war and civil war.</li><li>● Stalin was the <b>natural successor</b> to Lenin because of the way the Party had become increasingly <b>bureaucratized</b></li></ul>
<b>Continuity between Leninism: Robert Conquest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Lenin created the single party dictatorship and system of terror, which <b>Stalin continued</b>. So, Stalin was the heir to the Leninist tradition.</li></ul>
<b>Stalinism viewed as a deviation of Leninism: Stephen Cohen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Stalin <b>distorted</b> Lenin's legacy. Lenin used terror during the Civil War only as a temporary, emergency measure; Lenin allowed dissent within the Party; Lenin was hostile to a cult of the leader. Stalin, by contrast, <b>used terror as a normal feature</b> of government when the USSR was at peace; he suppressed debate within the Party; he created a <b>personality cult of monstrous proportions</b>.</li><li>● Historians like Cohen argue that communism could have developed in a very different, <b>less brutal way</b> if another leader, such as <b>Bukharin</b> had succeeded Lenin.</li></ul>