STALIN RISE TO POWER STUDY NOTES

**CONDITIONS AND RISE TO POWER**

Rise to power

* When Lenin died in January 1924, the question on who would be his successor was still unanswered.
* Initially, Stalin’s chances seemed remote especially in view of Lenin’s Testament and its codicil, which were read out at a meeting of the Party Central Committee.
* However, the other party members agreed that Stalin had improved his reputation during the course of 1923 and therefore voted to put aside the recommendations of the codicil.
* Meanwhile, Kamenev and Zinoviev came to the conclusion that Trotsky was the main threat to the Party’s stability thus paving the way for Stalin’s succession effectively.
* They collaborated with Stalin, with a power sharing Triumvirate emerging, with Stalin remaining in his post of General Secretary.
* Indeed, Stalin’s total control of the party in 1929 can be attributed to three main phases:

1. **Between 1923 and 1925, a major split between the Triumvirate and Trotsky emerged, expressed in ideological debate between ‘Permanent revolution’ and ‘Socialism in one country’.**

***Permanent revolution***

***Trotsky (and Lenin) had believed that the Russian Revolution would soon be followed by***

***revolutions elsewhere. Support would then be given by the more industrialized countries (e.g.***

***Germany) to help modernize the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, within the Soviet Union harsh***

***methods would have to be used to push it towards communism. Military discipline would be***

***required to organize workers, and peasants would be forced to accept collectivization.***

***Socialism in One Country***

***Stalin pointed out that the communist revolution had not succeeded elsewhere (by the end***

***of the 1920s, Mongolia was the only other communist country) and it was unlikely to succeed***

***in Germany or France, for example, in the near future. The Soviet Union, therefore, had to***

***depend upon its own resources and to focus on building socialism at home, an idea known as***

***‘Socialism in One Country’. The methods Stalin would use to achieve this, however, were rather***

***similar to the methods Trotsky proposed to achieve permanent revolution.***

* Stalin was far less deeply committed to the economic principles of the ‘right-wing’ strategy than Trotsky was to the ‘left’, his motive being the political isolation of Trotsky.
* In this he succeeded as in 1925 at the 14th Party Congress he received overwhelming support, though not from Kamenev and Zinoviev.
* Trotsky’s political days were over and thus Stalin’s biggest threat to his political power was defeated.

1. **The second stage was the disposal of Kamenev and Zinoviev, occurring in 1925 and 1927**.

* Stalin was not one to share power for long and he aligned himself with the most obvious ‘rightist’ elements within the party, including Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky.
* The party conference of 1927 gave its approval to ‘socialism in one country’ and denounced ‘permanent revolution’.
* Trotsky was expelled from the Politburo, along with Kamenev and Zinoviev. He was exiled from Russia in 1929 while both Kamenev and Zinoviev perished in the purges of 1930.

1. **The third stage was predictable and involved the elimination of Bukharin and the rest of the right, accomplished by 1929.**

* Stalin began to implement his own, hardened economic ideas with the total transformation of industry at the expense of the peasantry-the programme of Trotsky, in effect, minus the spreading of revolution to the rest of Europe.
* This was strongly opposed by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky and they became more outspoken as Stalin gradually introduced measures against the wealthy peasantry, or “kulaks”.
* Stalin accused them of plotting against the party’s agreed strategy and forced them to resign from the Politburo.

So why was he successful?

* Stalin seemed to be the least impressive of all the candidates, having been totally eclipsed by Trotsky in the October revolution and having never gained the friendship or confidence of Lenin.
* However he was seriously underestimated as he had skills that whilst being less obvious, were very deadly.
* He was able to put across a primitive appeal- to Russian self-reliance, even isolationism. This provided a solution to one of Stalin’s major problems- his intellectual inferiority to most of his contemporaries.
* However, with the collapse of communism in Europe, Stalin’s Slavic background could be seen as strength rather than a deficiency.
* He seemed to have the best qualification to move Russia away from any ideological or economic dependence on the West.
* Among Stalin’s political advantages was his ability to maneuver between factions. He avoided permanent commitments and loyalties to any grouping, as is shown by his treatment of Kamenev and Zinoviev, and then of Bukharin.
* At the same time, he always posed as a moderate, often a centrist, which increased his chance of being misjudged or underestimated by his opponents.
* Indeed, opponents were unlikely to be aware that they were in any real danger until Stalin had emerged from his ‘moderate’ cover to launch a deadly offensive.

Why did the opposition fail?

* Zinoviev was too hesitant and had no gifts as an organiser, whilst Kamenev lacked a clear vision and a capacity to lead men.
* Bukharin, despite being an economist, failed to produce a convincing programme which could have saved the NEP and discredited Stalin.
* Perhaps the biggest failure was Trotsky, especially since he, at first sight, seemed ideally placed to assume power.
* One part of Stalin’s succession was his rapid accumulation of power within the Bolshevik party which enabled to outmanoeuvre Trotsky.
* However, one has to also acknowledge a number of serious disadvantages that helped turn some of Trotsky's apparent strengths to weaknesses.
* Trotsky was incompatible with other leading members of the party as he towered over them intellectually in a way that brought him suspicion.
* He had a profoundly Western attitude, but after Lenin’s death, few Bolshevik leaders had any Western experience and were therefore more sympathetic towards Stalin’s pro-Slavic line.
* Trotsky was seen as an intruder as he had previously been sympathetic towards the Mensheviks and did not join the Bolsheviks until 1917.
* He also neglected to consolidate his own position in the party and was unable to adapt to Party politics, making him particularly unpopular. Thus in the end, the party was always to side with Stalin whom they believed to be a better option.

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES**

The Great Turn

* Stalin implemented massive economic changes which completely transformed Russian society. This is known as the Great Turn and the NEP abandoned and the Five Year Plans for industry and agriculture.
* Stalin wished to increase Russia’s military strength and achieve self-sufficiency. He also wished to see an increase in grain supply as well as a move towards a socialist state. He wanted to establish his credentials and improve standards of living.

Collectivisation

**Reasons**

* Russia was backwards, with her agriculture being under-productive, whilst the farming system was very old-fashioned. Thus the leadership wanted to take Russia into 20th century technology.
* There was also a need to increase grain supplies as during the best years of the NEP (1918-21), only 3 million tonnes of grain was being exported, compared to 12 million tonnes in 1912.
* Furthermore, under collectivisation, the government could take control over agriculture under collectivisation as farmland was privately owned by peasants, some by kulaks.
* Kulaks were seen to be holding the state to ransom and the leadership did not want the kulaks to hoard grain and therefore halt progress.
* There was a desire for the kulaks to become subservient to the proletariat and therefore collectivisation was seen to be a necessary attack on the “class enemy”.

**Chronology**

* Initially, in 1927, collectivisation was simply “encouraged” with the hope that the peasants would willingly work together with socialist parties in agriculture.
* However peasants were not willingly collectivising and in 1928 Stalin became convinced that kulaks were indoctrinating the poorer peasants to avoid collectivisation. Dekulanisation was therefore carried out, with communists rallying the poorer peasants to drive out kulaks. By March 1930, 15 million people had been forced into collective farms.
* Collectivisation was temporarily relaxed, however, due to the perceived over-zealousness of officials. Some 9 million people were taken out of the collective farms, demonstrating Stalin’s power over the USSR.
* In early summer 1930 collectivisation was reinstated but in a slower manner, however, by 1932 all peasants were put into larger “Kolkhozes.” These were state run plots and peasants had to produce a quota of grain.

**Results**

* Peasants became alienated, with many consuming their crops and slaughtering their livestock in order to spite the authorities. They responded with fiercer coercion.
* There was also a disastrous fall in livestock as well as grain production, with cattle falling from 70 million in 1928 to 34 million whilst pigs fell from 26 million to 9 million. Meat production did not reach pre-collectivisation levels until after 1953.
* Grain production fell from 73.3 million tonnes in 1928 to 67.7 tonnes in 1934 and collectivisation failed in its aim of raising capital for industrialisation.
* However, collectivisation did collect enough grain to feed the workforce and more of the workers became available to work in the cities with 17.7 million peasants going to towns in search of work.
* However it also resulted in widespread famine, especially during 1932-33 when 40% of Kazakhstan’s population was wiped out.
* Stalin even placed guards at borders to ensure that food did not enter the Ukraine as he believed that they were hoarding grain, leading to 5 million deaths.
* Collectivisation proved to be a political, as well as ideological success as peasants were brought under Stalin’s control and the countryside was smashed into submission. Furthermore it saw the end of the private market and the emergence of a more socialist system.

Industrialisation

**Reasons**

* The USSR was seen as being too weak to fight a war against Western capitalists. It was believed that Russia needed to catch up with the West so that huge quantities of weapons and munitions could be produced.
* The USSR needed to be self sufficient as the communist takeover of 1917 had led to declining trade between Russia and the rest of the world.
* The majority of leaders believed that socialism would not survive unless society was truly industrialised.
* It was believed that industrialisation would get rid of Nepmen, private business owners and traders–all seen as class enemies.
* Workers were not doing well under the NEP and Stalin did not want Russia to be an advert for the failure of communism.

**Methods**

* There were three Five Year Plans as well as a short on year and quarterly plans. Targets were often reassessed upwards because targets had been reached early.

**First Five Year Plans (1928-32)**

* This saw a focus on coal, oil, iron, steel and electricity as well as a decline in consumer industries.

Successes

* Electricity production trebled, coal and iron output doubled and steel production also increased.
* The engineering industry developed and huge new industrial complexes were built, as well as huge new tractor works in Stalingrad, Kharkov and other places in order to meet the needs of the mechanized agriculture.

Weaknesses

* There was very little growth and even a decline in consumer industries such as house building, fertilizers, food processing and textiles.
* Small workshops were squeezed out partly because of the drive against Nepmen and partly because of shortages of material and fuel.
* The lack of skilled workmen created major problems. Workers were constantly changing jobs and this created instability.

**Second Five Year Plans (1933-37)**

* This saw a focus on heavy industry once again but new industries were opened up and there was greater emphasis on communications

Successes

* Heavy industries benefited from plants which had been set up during the first plan and now on stream.
* By 1937, the USSR was virtually self-sufficient in machine making and metal working with transport and communications growing rapidly.

Weaknesses

* Consumer goods industries were still lagging, although they were showing signs of recovery. There was growth in footwear and food processing but not enough.
* Oil production did not make the expected advances.

**Third Five Year Plans (1938-41)**

* Once again, heavy industry was emphasised as the need for armaments became increasingly urgent due to the USSR’s entry into WWII.

Successes

* Heavy industry continued to grow, for example, machinery and engineering, but the picture was uneven and some areas did poorly.
* Defence and armaments grew rapidly as resources were diverted to them.

Weaknesses

* Steel output grew insignificantly, oil production failed to meet targets leading to a fuel crisis, consumer industries once again took a back seat and many factories ran short of material.
* Propaganda was used to convince workers that they were working collectively for the state, sacrificing their selfish interests in order to build a socialist state that could sustain itself economically.
* Public trials were held to expose and make an example of saboteurs and there was also forced labour, for example, 300,000 prisoners worked on the Baltic-White Sea canal; lumber camps in the frozen north.

**Results**

* The USSR was victorious in WWII and was able to withstand the attack of the Nazi German army.
* Heavy industry saw substantial growth though there was a negative impact on consumer industries.
* Living standards for the majority had improved by 1936, though this was after having gone through harsh conditions between 1928 and 1933.
* Public transport was developed and there was very little unemployment, though the work on offer was hard, repetitive and mentally unchallenging.
* Living standards for workers who exceeded their targets were much improved, with decent housing, better pay being some of the privileges.

**CONSOLIDATION OF POWER**

Purges

**Reasons**

* Stalin was deeply paranoid, using violence as a first resort, and desired absolute power and wanted to bring the party and the Russian people under his complete control so that he would carry out his policies without question.
* A downturn of the USSR economy in 1936 saw the need for scapegoats and this led to workers often identifying managers and officials as failures, though these changes were dubious.
* There was also criticism of the regime among the city-dwellers and so Stalin resorted to terror of the purges in order to control people, with these purges providing gulags with slave labour which helped to provide money for foreign exports to buy Western technology.

**Nature of the purges**

* Workers who refused to back industrialisation were accused of sabotage and any peasant that resisted collectivisation was also purged.
* Additionally around 1 million supporters of Ryutin, the former Moscow Party Secretary who had denounced Stalin, were tried and expelled from the party between 1933 and 34 thus being an example of a non-violent purge.
* Show trials were held between 1936-8 to lend an air of legitimacy to Stalin’s purges and Stalin revealed the extent of the conspiracy against him and got people onside, proving the need for the purges to continue.
* The army were themselves purged with Tukhachevsky and seven other generals being accused of treason, when in reality they had simply voiced opposition against collectivisation. All were found guilty and shot.
* Furthermore, eleven war commissars were removed, seventy-five of the eighty men in the Supreme Military Council were dismissed and half of all the commissioned officer corps were shot or imprisoned and all of the USSR’s navy admirals were shot, leading to incompetent replacements.
* Ordinary Russian people were also purged, especially minorities, in order to keep them under submission and writers, artists, academics, lawyers, historians, priests, scientists and other people were also purged.

Censorship

* This was rife in theatre and film with many films being removed out of circulation or withdrawn and many writers who in anyway denounced Stalin and his regime were also censored and often killed or sent to gulags.

**Definitions:**

**Authoritarian:**This term refers to regimes that are essentially conservative and traditional and that try to defend existing institutions and keep all sections of society politically and organizationally passive.

**Ideology:** This term usually refers to the logically related set of ideas that are basis of a political or economic theory or system. In single-party states, ideology has often been promoted via propaganda and censorship. Ex. (Hitler/Joseph Goebbels)

**Congress:**In theory, this was the Communist Party’s supreme decision-making body, made up of delegates elected by local party organs. At first, Congresses were held frequently, as were Conferences which were held to decide on specific problems.

**Central Committee:**In theory, this was the Communist Party’s ruling body between Congresses. It was elected by Congress delegates. The Central Committee then elected the Politburo. In practice, the Politburo soon came to dominate the Central Committee and Congresses.

**Pravda:**This was Bolshevik/Communist Party newspaper. Its name is Russian for ‘truth’. It was first edited by Stalin and later by Bukharin.

Rise of Stalin 1920s and Russia

**Stalin’s rise to power can be divided into three stages:**

Early moves against Leon Trotsky.

The defeat of the left.

The defeat of the right.

Stage 1: The early moves against Trotsky, 1923-24

- In April 1923 at the 12th congress, the triumvirs’ campaign began against Trotsky.

- While Vladimir Lenin was alive, Stalin was hardly mentioned and was not a very important leader.

- After Lenin’s death, the congress isolated Leon Trotsky and re-elected Stalin as general secretary and elected a new enlarged central committee of the 40 members, only 3 were strong supporters of Trotsky.

- Stalin then started to replace all Trotsky supporters with those of the triumvirs’, especially those who were loyal to him.

- By the end of 1923, Stalin had enough control of the party machine at local level to ensure that most of his nominees were elected to future congresses.

The formation of the Left Opposition

- In 1923, Trotsky formed the Left Opposition with the others opposed to the policies of the triumvirs.

- In January 1924, the 13th party conference condemned Trotsky’s views.

- Trotsky did not attend Lenin’s funeral, because Stalin had given him the wrong date, though Stalin raised suspicions about Trotsky absence.

Stage 2: The defeat of the Left Opposition

- At first, Stalin removed/dismissed many oppositionists from posts of responsibility.

- In May 1924 before the 13th party congress, Lenin’s widow revealed his Testament to the central committee and senior congress delegates.

- This testament was not published, because Zinoviev and Kamenev persuaded the central committee not to do so. They thought that Stalin would now be seriously weakened and under their control.

Divisions within the triumvirate

- In 1925 the disagreements of the new economic policy caused a split between the triumvirs, and left, centre and right factions emerged.

- The Left was led by Zinoviev and Kamenev.

- In summer 1925, Zinoviev attacked Bukharin’s rightist views.

- Stalin began to remove Kamenev’s supporters from their positions in the Moscow party, but Zinoviev’s Leningrad base resisted.

- At the 14th congress in December 1925, Stalin ensured that the majority supported him and Bukharin.

- A new central committee and politburo were elected, both with a Stalinist-Bukharinist majority.

- Zinoviev was accused of Trotskyism b y Stalin. In early 1926 Zinoviev lost the leadership of the Leningrad party to Sergei Kirov, of Stalin’s supporters. ‘Zinovievists’ then lost their positions in the party.

The United Opposition – formation and defeat

- In July 1926, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev formed the United (Joint Left) Opposition, with some supporters from Nadya Krupskaya (Lenin’s widow) and a few other prominent party members.

- Stalin banned their meetings and dismissed their supporters.

- He accused them of breaking the 1921 ban on factions and persuaded the central committee to remove Zinoviev from the politburo.

- Only Trotsky remained there to oppose Stalin.

- Trotsky was expelled from the politburo when one of his supporters published Lenin’s testament.

- The obvious isolation of the three opposition leaders led Krupskaya to make her peace with Stalin, because she feared splitting the communist party.

- In June 1927, Stalin tried to have Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the central committee, but he failed.

- On 14 November, Stalin succeeded in having Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the communist party, and Kamenev expelled from the central committee.

- Both Zinoviev and Kamenev feared that the continued opposition to Stalin would result in the splitting of the communist party and the formation of an opposition party. This was known us **gravest menace to Lenin’s cause.**

- Both ended their criticism, because Stalin was about to abandon the NEP (New Economic Policy).

- By 10 December 1927 the united opposition was over.

- In January 1928, Trotsky was forcibly deported to Alma/Ata, near the Chinese border.

Stage 3: The defeat of the right, 1927-29

The final stage of the power struggle began almost immediately after the united opposition had been defeated.

- By the autumn of 1927, bread storages and high food prices led Stalin to adopt a new ‘left’ course for industry and agriculture.

- This caused a split/rift between the Bukharinists and the Stalinists over the continuation of the NEP.

- Many Bukharinists were removed from positions of power, thus strengthening Stalin’s position.

- Through Trotsky’s perspectives, he had seen Bukharin’s faction as more dangerous to the gains of the November Revolution than Stalin

- By May 1928, with Stalin clearly planning a ‘second revolution’ (to move from per/capitalist NEP to full socialism).

- Hence some of Trotsky’s supporters thought they should join Stalin against Bukharin and the right.

- During July the food crisis became worse.

- Temporarily, it seemed that Bukharin’s faction was gaining the upper hand when he won a vote in the central committee to slow Stalin’s left turn.

- By August, Stalin had renewed his leftward course, and the breach with Bukharin was confirmed.

- Both factions (Stalinists & Bukharinists) turned to the defeated left Oppositionists for support. But Stalin made no direct contacts.

- Bukharin persuaded Kamenev to contact Trotsky, saying he feared Stalin would ‘strangle us’. Bukharin argued that Stalin was preparing to create a police state and take total power.

- In September 1928, Trotsky and Bukharin considered an alliance to restore party and soviet democracy, but their respective supporters were reluctant.

- The right, who wanted the New Economic Policy to be continued, were generally opposed to the left, who wished the end of the NEP.

- The left seemed preferred an alliance with Stalin and the centre rather than with the right.

- Trotsky lost some of his supporters, because of his willingness to consider such an alliance, thus making it easier for Stalin to isolate him.

- Bukharin and the right were in panic and surrendered to Stalin.

- Thus Stalin had managed to defeat both factions (Left & Right) relying only on his own supporters.

- Stalin persuaded the politburo to expel Trotsky from the Soviet Russia.

- This was partly because Stalin feared a left-right in the future and partly because he suspected some of his own faction had some sympathy with the opposition.

- In February, 1929, Trotsky was finally departed from Alma-Ata in Turkestan to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul).

- In January 1928, on the fifth anniversary of Lenin’s death, Bukharin made a speech entitled ‘Lenin’s political testament’ – a clear allusion to Lenin’s call in 1923 for Stalin to be dismissed from his posts.

- This led Stalin to accuse Bukharin of ‘factionalism’ at a meeting of the central committee.

- In April 1929, Bukharin was removed as editor of **Pravda.**

- In November 1929, he was removed from the politburo.

- Stalin now appeared to have almost complete control of the communist party.

Factions of the Communist Party 1925

**Leaders**

**Positions**

**Practices**

**Results**

**Left**

Zinoviev/Kamenev

Leaders

**Centre**

**Right**

Bukharin

Marxism

The political roots of Marxism can be traced back to the writings of one man,

Karl Marx (1818–83) – or two men, if Marx’s close collaborator Friedrich Engels

(1820–95) is included. The writings of Marx were based on the materialist

conception of history that he developed, and on his theory that human history

was largely determined by the ‘history of class struggles’ between ruling

and oppressed classes. Marx believed that if the workers were successful in

overthrowing capitalism, they would be able to construct a socialist society.

This would still be a class-based society but one in which, for the fi rst time in

human history, the ruling class would be the majority of the population (i.e. the

working class).

From this new form of human society, Marx believed it would eventually be

possible to move to an even better one: a communist society. This would be

a classless society, and a society of plenty rather than scarcity because it

would be based on the economic advances of industrial capitalism.

However, Marx did not write much about the political forms that

would be adopted under socialism and communism, other than

to say that it would be more democratic and less repressive than

previous societies, as the majority of the population would be

in control.

Marxist theory of stages

Marx believed in the idea of ‘permanent revolution’ or

‘uninterrupted revolution’ – a series of revolutionary

stages in which, after one stage had been achieved, the

next class struggle would begin almost immediately.

He did not believe that ‘progression’ through the

stages of society was inevitable. He also argued

that, in special circumstances, a relatively

backward society could ‘jump’ a stage. However,

this would only happen if that state was aided

by sympathetic advanced societies. He certainly

did not believe that a poor agricultural society

could move to socialism on its own, as socialism

required an advanced industrial base.

Leninism

Marx did not refer to himself as a ‘Marxist’. He

preferred the term ‘communist’, as in the title of the book he and Engels wrote

in 1847, The Communist Manifesto. However, many of Marx’s followers preferred to

call themselves Marxists as well as communists. In this way, they distinguished

themselves from other groups that claimed to be communist, and emphasised

that Marxism and its methods formed a distinct philosophy.

One such Marxist was the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–

1924). Lenin developed some of Marx’s economic ideas but his most important

contribution to Marxist theory related to political organisation. His main ideas,

based on the extremely undemocratic political system operating in tsarist

Russia, were ‘democratic centralism’ (see page 27) and the need for a small

‘vanguard’ party (a leading group) of fully committed revolutionaries.

Marxist stages

theory

10

1 Introduction

However, Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), a leading Russian Marxist, disagreed with

Lenin. From 1903 to 1917, Trotsky argued that Lenin’s system would allow an

unscrupulous leader to become a dictator over the party. Nevertheless, both

Lenin and Trotsky believed in the possibility of a society moving through the

revolutionary stages quickly to the socialist phase. This idea was similar to

Marx’s idea of ‘permanent revolution’, which argued that, as soon as one stage

had been achieved, the struggle for the next would begin almost immediately.

Like Marx, Lenin and Trotsky both believed that Russia could not succeed in

carrying through any ‘uninterrupted revolution’ without outside economic and

technical assistance. When this assistance failed to materialise, despite their

earlier hopes of successful workers’ revolutions in other European states after

1918, Lenin proved to be an extremely pragmatic – or opportunistic – ruler. He

was quite prepared to adopt policies that seemed to be in total conflict with

communist goals and even with those of the ‘lower’ socialist stage: these

policies were seen as adaptations to the prevailing circumstances.

Marxism–Leninism

The term Marxism–Leninism, invented by Stalin, was not used until after Lenin’s

death in 1924. It soon came to be used in Stalin’s Soviet Union to refer to what he

described as ‘orthodox Marxism’, which increasingly came to mean what Stalin

himself had to say about political and economic issues. Essentially, Marxism–

Leninism was the ‘official’ ideology of the Soviet state and of all communist

parties loyal to Stalin and his successors. Many Marxists – and even members

of the Communist Party itself – believed that Stalin’s ideas and practices (such

as ‘socialism in one country’ and the purges – see Chapter 2) were in fact almost

total distortions of what Marx and Lenin had said and done.