2 Stalin's Rise to Power 1924–9

POINTS TO CONSIDER

When Lenin died in 1924 he left no obvious successor. Few Russian Communists gave thought to Stalin as a likely leader. Yet five years later, after a bitter power struggle, it was Stalin who had outmanoeuvred his rivals and established his authority over the party and the nation. How he achieved this is the subject of this chapter whose main themes are:

- The roots of Stalin's power
- The power struggle after Lenin's death
- The defeat of Trotsky and the Left
- The defeat of the Right

Key dates

1924	Death of Lenin – Politburo declared USSR to be ruled by a collective leadership
1925	Trotsky lost his position as War Commissar Kamenev and Zinoviev headed 'the United Opposition'
1926	Trotsky joined Kamenev and Zinoviev in the Left political bloc, which was defeated by Stalin's supporters
1927	Stalin persuaded Congress to expel Trotsky from the CPSU
1928	Stalin attacked the Right (led by Tomsky, Bukharin and Rykov) over agricultural policy
1929	The leading figures on the Right finally defeated by Stalin and demoted in the CPSU Trotsky exiled from the USSR

1 | The Roots of Stalin's Power

Most historians used to accept that Stalin's pre-1924 career was unimportant. A description of him by **Nicolai Sukhanov**, dating from 1922, as a 'dull, grey blank', was regarded as accurate. But recent research in the Soviet archives, which were opened to scholars after the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, has indicated that the notion of Stalin as a nonentity is far from the truth. A leading British authority, Robert Service, has shown that Stalin was very highly regarded by Lenin and played a central role in the Bolshevik Party.

Key question
How significant was Stalin's career before 1924?

Key term
Nicolai Sukhanov
An anti-Bolshevik who wrote one of the most influential accounts of the Revolution.

Before 1917 the Bolshevik Party had been only a few thousand strong and Lenin had known the great majority of members personally. He had been impressed by Stalin's organising ability and willingness to obey orders. He once described him as 'that wonderful Georgian', a reference to his work as an agitator among the non-Russian peoples. With Lenin's backing Stalin had risen by 1912 to become one of the six members of the Central Committee, the policy-making body of the Bolshevik Party. He had also helped to found the Party's newspaper, *Pravda*.

The October Revolution and Civil War

Having spent the war years, 1914–17, in exile in Siberia, Stalin returned to Petrograd in March 1917. His role in the October Revolution is difficult to disentangle. Official accounts, written after he had taken power, were a mixture of distortion and invention, with any unflattering episodes totally omitted. What is reasonably certain is that Stalin was loyal to Lenin after the latter's return to Petrograd in April 1917. Lenin instructed the Bolsheviks to abandon all co-operation with other parties and to devote themselves to preparing for a seizure of power. As a Leninist, Stalin was opposed to the **'October deserters'**, such as Kamenev and Zinoviev (see page 60).

Key terms
October deserters
Those Bolsheviks who in October 1917, believing that the Party was not yet strong enough, had advised against a Bolshevik rising.

Commissar for Nationalities
Minister responsible for liaising with the non-Russian national minorities.

During the period of crisis and civil war that accompanied the efforts of the Bolsheviks to consolidate their authority after 1917, Stalin's non-Russian background proved invaluable. His knowledge of the minority peoples of the old Russian Empire led to his being appointed **Commissar for Nationalities**. Lenin had believed that Stalin, a Georgian, was particularly well qualified for this role. As Commissar, Stalin became the ruthless Bolshevik organiser for the whole of the Caucasus region during the Civil War from 1918 to 1920. This led to a number of disputes with Trotsky, the Bolshevik Commissar for War. Superficially the quarrels were about strategy and tactics, but at a deeper level they were a clash of wills. They proved to be the beginning of a deep personal rivalry between Stalin and Trotsky.

Lenin's testament

Although Stalin had been totally loyal to Lenin, there were two particular occasions when he had aroused Lenin's anger. After the Civil War had ended, Stalin, despite being a Georgian, had been off-hand and dismissive in discussions with the representatives from Georgia. Lenin, anxious to gain the support of the national minorities for the Bolshevik regime, had to intervene personally to prevent the Georgians leaving in a huff. On another occasion, in a more directly personal matter, Lenin learned from his wife, Krupskaya, that in a row over the Georgian question Stalin had subjected her to 'a storm of the coarsest abuse', telling her to keep her nose out of State affairs, and calling her 'a whore'. The very day that Lenin was informed of this, 22 December 1922, he dictated his testament as a direct response.

His main criticism read: 'Comrade Stalin, since becoming General Secretary of the Party in 1922, has concentrated enormous power in his hands; and I am not sure he always knows how to exercise that power with sufficient caution.' In a later post-script, Lenin again stressed Stalin's rudeness, which was unacceptable in a General Secretary who had to be a person of tact so as to prevent divisions developing within the party. Lenin went on to urge the comrades 'to think about ways of removing Comrade Stalin from that position.' But this was not done. Lenin was too ill during the last year of his life to be politically active. At his death in January 1924, he had still not taken any formal steps to remove Stalin, and the 'Testament' had not been made public.

Key date
Death of Lenin: 21 January 1924

Profile: Joseph Stalin (career to 1924)

1879	– Born in Georgia
1899	– His revolutionary activities led to expulsion from Tiflis seminary
1905	– Met Lenin for first time
1912	– Adopted the name Stalin
	– Became a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party
	– Helped to found *Pravda*
1914–17	– In exile in Siberia
1917	– Returned to Petrograd
	– People's Commissar for Nationalities
1919	– Liaison Officer between Politburo and Orgburo
	– Head of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate
1922	– General Secretary of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party
1924	– Delivered the oration at Lenin's funeral

Stalin, meaning 'man of steel', was not his real name. It was simply the last in a series of aliases that Joseph Vissarionovich Djugashvili adopted in order to avoid detection as a revolutionary. He was born in Georgia, a rugged province in the south of the Russian Empire, renowned for the fierceness of its people. Blood feuds and family vendettas were common. Georgia had only recently been incorporated into the Russian Empire. Tsarist government officials often wrote in exasperation of the difficulties of trying to control a savage people who refused to accept their subordination to Russia.

Stalin came from Georgian stock. His drunken father eked out a miserable existence as a cobbler and the family appears to have lived in constant poverty. There have been suggestions that both Stalin's admiration of things Russian and his contempt for middle-class intellectuals derived from a sense of resentment over his humble Georgian origins. Stalin's mother was a particularly devout woman and it was largely through her influence that her son was enrolled as a student in a Georgian-Orthodox seminary in Tbilisi (Tiflis). This did not show religious fervour on Stalin's part. The fact was that at this time in imperial Russia attendance at a church academy was the only way to obtain a Russian-style education, an essential requirement for anyone from the provinces who had ambition. Stalin seems to have been attracted less by theology than by the political ideas with which he came into contact.

In the seminary records for 1899 there is an entry beside Stalin's name that reads 'expelled for not attending lessons – reasons unknown'. We now know the reasons; he had become involved in the Georgian resistance movement, agitating against tsarist control. His anti-government activities drew him into the Social Democratic Workers' Party. From the time of his expulsion from the seminary to the Revolution of 1917 Stalin was a committed follower of Lenin. He threw himself into the task of raising funds for the Bolsheviks; his specialities were bank hold-ups and train robberies. By 1917 he had been arrested eight times and had been sentenced to various periods of imprisonment and exile. Afterwards he tended to despise those revolutionaries who had escaped such experiences by fleeing to the relative comfort of self-imposed exile abroad.

Key question
How had Stalin been able to rise up the Bolshevik ranks?

Stalin's position in 1924

In the uncertain atmosphere that followed Lenin's death, a number of pieces of luck helped Stalin promote his own claims. However, it would be wrong to ascribe his success wholly to good fortune. The luck had to be used. Stalin may have lacked brilliance, but he did not lack ability. His particular qualities of perseverance and willingness to undertake laborious administrative work were ideally suited to the times.

The government of Soviet Russia, as it had developed by 1924, had two main features: the **Council of Peoples' Commissars**, and the **Secretariat**. Both bodies were staffed and controlled by the Bolshevik Party. It has to be stressed that the vital characteristic of this governmental system was that the Party ruled. By 1922 Soviet Russia was a one-party state. Membership of that one party was essential for all who held government posts at whatever level.

As the government grew in scope, certain posts, which initially had not been considered especially significant, began to provide their holders with the levers of power. This had not been the intention, but was the unforeseen result of the emerging pattern of Bolshevik rule. It was in this context that Stalin's previous appointments to key posts in both government and Party proved vital. These had been:

Key terms

Council of Peoples' Commissars
A cabinet of ministers, responsible for creating government policies.

Secretariat
A form of civil service, responsible for carrying out those policies.

- People's Commissar for Nationalities (1917)
  In this post Stalin was in charge of the officials in the many regions and republics that made up the USSR (the official title of the Soviet state after 1922).

- Liaison Officer between Politburo and Orgburo (1919)
  This post placed him in a unique position to monitor both the Party's policy and the Party's personnel.
- Head of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (1919)
  This position entitled him to oversee the work of all government departments.
- General Secretary of the Communist Party (1922)
  In this position, he recorded and conveyed Party policy. This enabled him to build up personal files on all the members of the Party. Nothing of note happened that Stalin did not know about.

Stalin became the indispensable link in the chain of command in the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Above all, what these posts gave him was the power of **patronage**. He used this authority to place his own supporters in key positions. Since they then owed their place to him, Stalin could count on their support in the voting in the various committees which made up the organisation of the party and the government.

Such were the levers in Stalin's possession during the party in-fighting over the succession to Lenin. No other contender came anywhere near matching Stalin in his hold on the party machine. Whatever the ability of the individuals or groups who opposed him, he could always outvote and outmanoeuvre them.

Key terms

Patronage
The right to appoint individuals to official posts in the Party and government.

CPSU
The Communist Party of the Soviet Union

The Lenin enrolment

Key question
What was the significance for Stalin of 'the Lenin enrolment'?

Stalin had also gained advantage from recent changes in the structure of the Communist Party. Between 1923 and 1925 the Party had set out to increase the number of true proletarians in its ranks. This was known as 'the Lenin enrolment'. It resulted in the membership of the **CPSU** rising from 340,000 in 1922 to 600,000 by 1925.

The new members were predominantly poorly educated and politically unsophisticated, but they were fully aware that the many privileges which came with party membership depended on their being loyal to those who had first invited them into the Bolshevik ranks. The task of vetting 'the Lenin enrolment' had fallen largely to the officials in the Secretariat who worked directly under Stalin as General Secretary. In this way, the expansion of the Party added to his growing power of patronage. It provided him with a reliable body of votes in the various Party committees at local and central level.

Attack on factionalism

Key question
How did Lenin's 'attack upon factionalism' help Stalin?

Another lasting feature of Lenin's period that proved of great value to Stalin was what had become known as the 'attack upon factionalism'. This referred to Lenin's condemnation in 1921 of divisions within the Party (see page 31). What this rejection of 'factionalism' effectively did was to frustrate any serious attempt to criticise Party decisions or policies. It became extremely difficult to mount any form of legitimate opposition within the CPSU. Stalin benefited directly from the ban on criticism of the

Party line. The charge of 'factionalism' provided him with a ready weapon for resisting challenges to the authority he had begun to exercise.

Key question
How did the 'Lenin legacy' benefit Stalin?

The Lenin legacy

There was an accompanying factor that legitimised Stalin's position. Stalin became heir to the 'Lenin legacy'. By this is meant the tradition of authority and leadership that Lenin had established during his lifetime, and the veneration in which he was held after his death. It is no exaggeration to say that in the eyes of the Communist Party, Lenin became a god. His actions and decisions became unchallengeable, and all arguments and disputes within the Party were settled by reference to his statements and writings. Lenin became the measure of the correctness of Soviet theory and practice. Soviet Communism became Leninism. After 1924, if a Party member could assume the mantle of Lenin and appear to carry on Lenin's work, he would establish a formidable claim to power. This is exactly what Stalin began to do.

Summary diagram: The roots of Stalin's power

Background
- Stalin had worked closely and loyally with Lenin
- Stalin had been a major worker for the Bolsheviks
- Lenin regarded him as 'that wonderful Georgian'

Key posts taken by Stalin during Lenin's time
- People's Commissar for Nationalities
- Liaison Officer between Politburo and Orgburo
- Head of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate
- Secretary of the Communist Party

Key moment, January 1924
- Lenin's death prevented his 'Testament' from being published
- This saved Stalin from being dismissed as General Secretary

Key benefits to Stalin from developments during Lenin's last years
- The Lenin enrolment
- The attack upon factionalism
- The Lenin legacy

2 | The Power Struggle after Lenin's Death

Lenin's funeral

Immediately after Lenin's death, the **Politburo** publicly proclaimed their intention to continue as a collective leadership, but behind the scenes the competition for individual authority had already begun. In the manoeuvring, Stalin gained an advantage by being the one to deliver the oration at Lenin's funeral. The sight of Stalin as leading mourner suggested a continuity between him and Lenin, an impression heightened by the contents of his speech in which, in the name of the Party, he humbly dedicated himself to follow in the tradition of the departed leader:

> In leaving us, Comrade Lenin commanded us to keep the unity of our Party. We swear to thee, Comrade Lenin, to honour thy command. In leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordered us to maintain and strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat. We swear to thee, Comrade Lenin, to exert our full strength in honouring thy command.

Key question
What were Stalin's advantages in his leadership struggle with Trotsky?

Key term
Politburo
The inner cabinet of the ruling Central Committee of CPSU – at the time of Lenin's death it consisted of Trotsky, Stalin, Rykov, Tomsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev.

Since Stalin's speech was the first crucial move to promote himself as Lenin's successor, it was to be expected that Trotsky, his chief rival, would try to counter it in some way. Yet Trotsky was not even present at the funeral. It was a very conspicuous absence, and it is difficult to understand why Trotsky did not appreciate the importance of appearances following Lenin's death in January 1924. Initially he, not Stalin, had been offered the opportunity of making the major speech at the funeral. But not only did he decline this, he also failed to attend the ceremony itself. His excuse was that Stalin had given him the wrong date, but this simply was not true. The documentation shows that he learned the real date early enough for him to have reached Moscow with time to spare. Instead he continued his planned journey and was on holiday on the day of the funeral. This was hardly the image of a dedicated Leninist.

What makes Trotsky's behaviour even odder is that he was well aware of the danger Stalin represented. In 1924 he prophesied that Stalin would become 'the dictator of the USSR'. He also gave a remarkable analysis of the basis of Stalin's power in the Party:

> He is needed by all of them; by the tired radicals, by the bureaucrats, by the Nepmen, the upstarts, by all the worms that are crawling out of the upturned soil of the manured revolution. He knows how to meet them on their own ground, he speaks their language and he knows how to lead them. He has the deserved reputation of an old revolutionary. He has will and daring. Right now he is organising around himself the sneaks of the Party, the artful dodgers.

This was a bitter but strikingly accurate assessment of how Stalin had made a large part of the Party dependent on him. But logically such awareness on Trotsky's part should have made him eager to prevent Stalin from stealing an advantage. His reluctance to act is a fascinating feature of Trotsky's puzzling character.

Key question
What were Trotsky's weaknesses?

Trotsky's character

Trotsky had a complex personality. He was one of those figures in history who may be described as having been their own worst enemy. Despite his many gifts and intellectual brilliance, he had serious weaknesses that undermined his chances of success. At times, he was unreasonably self-assured; at other critical times, he suffered from diffidence and lack of judgement. An example of this had occurred earlier, at the time of Stalin's mishandling of the Georgian question. Lenin's anger with Stalin had offered Trotsky a golden opportunity for undermining Stalin's position, but for some reason Trotsky had declined to attack.

A possible clue to his reluctance is that he felt inhibited by his Jewishness. Trotsky knew that, in a nation such as Russia with its deeply ingrained **anti-Semitism**, his race made him an outsider. A remarkable example of his awareness of this occurred in 1917, when Lenin offered him the post of Deputy Chairman of the Soviet government. Trotsky rejected it on the grounds that his appointment would be an embarrassment to Lenin and the government. 'It would', he said, 'give enemies grounds for claiming that the country was ruled by a Jew'. It may be that similar reasoning in January 1924 allowed Stalin to gain an advantage over him.

Key date
Lenin's Testament suppressed: May 1924

Suppression of Lenin's testament

A dangerous hurdle in Stalin's way was Lenin's 'Testament'. If it were to be published, Stalin would be gravely damaged by its contents. However, here, as so often during this period, fortune favoured him. Had the document been made public, not only would Lenin's criticisms of Stalin have been revealed, but also those concerning Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Nearly all the members of the Politburo had reason for suppressing the 'Testament'.

When the Central Committee was presented with the document in May 1924, they realised that it was too damning broadly to be used exclusively against any one individual. They agreed to its being shelved indefinitely. Trotsky, for obvious personal reasons, went along with the decision, but in doing so he was declining yet another opportunity to challenge Stalin's right to power. In fact it was Trotsky, not Stalin, whom the Politburo regarded as the greater danger.

Key terms
Anti-Semitism
Hatred of the Jewish race – for centuries Russia had been notorious for the virulence of her anti-Jewish attitude and policies.

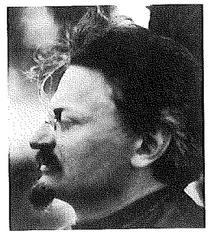
Triumvirate
A ruling or influential bloc of three persons.

Attitudes towards Trotsky

Kamenev and Zinoviev joined Stalin in an unofficial **triumvirate** within the Politburo. Their aim was to isolate Trotsky by exploiting his unpopularity with large sections of the Party. The 'Lenin enrolment' helped them in this. The new proletarian members were hardly the type of men to be impressed by the cultured Trotsky. The seemingly down-to-earth Stalin was much more to their liking.

The attitude of Party members towards Trotsky was an important factor in the weakening of his position. Colleagues tended to regard Trotsky as dangerously ambitious and Stalin as reliably self-effacing. This was because Trotsky was flamboyant

Profile: Lev Trotsky 1879–1940



1879	– Born into a Ukrainian Jewish family
1898	– Convicted of revolutionary activities and exiled to Siberia
1902	– Adopted the name Trotsky
	– Escaped from exile and joined Lenin in London
1903	– Sided with the Mensheviks in the SD split
1905	– Became Chairman of St Petersburg Soviet
1906	– Exiled again to Siberia
1907	– Escaped again and fled abroad
1907–17	– Lived in various European countries and the USA
1917	– Returned to Petrograd after the February Revolution
	– The principal organiser of the October *coup*
	– Appointed Foreign Affairs Commissar
1918	– Negotiated the Brest-Litovsk Treaty
1918–20	– As War Commissar, created the Red Army
1921	– Suppressed the Kronstadt Rising
	– Destroyed the trade unions in Russia
1924–27	– Outmanoeuvred in the power struggle with Stalin
1927	– Sentenced to internal exile at Alma Ata
1929	– Banished from USSR
1929–40	– Lived in various countries
	– Wrote on revolutionary theory, in opposition to Stalin
1940	– Assassinated in Mexico on Stalin's orders

Early career

Trotsky's real name was Leon (Lev) Bronstein. He was born into a Jewish landowning family in the Ukraine in 1879. Rebellious from an early age, he sided with the peasants on his family's estate. Yet, like Lenin, he rejected '**economism**', the attempt to raise the standards of peasants and workers by improving their conditions. He wanted to intensify class warfare by exploiting grievances, not to lessen it by introducing reforms.

As a revolutionary, Trotsky's sympathies lay with the Mensheviks and it was as a Menshevik that he became president of the St Petersburg Soviet during the 1905 Revolution. His activities led to his arrest and exile. Between 1907 and 1917 he lived in a variety of foreign countries, developing his theory of 'permanent revolution' (see page 58).

Following the collapse of tsardom in the February Revolution, Trotsky returned to Petrograd and immediately joined the Bolshevik Party. He became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and it was from this position that he organised the Bolshevik rising, which overthrew the Provisional Government in October 1917.

Key term

Economism
Putting the improvement of the workers' conditions before the need for revolution.

Commissar for Foreign Affairs

In the Bolshevik government that then took over, Trotsky became Commissar for Foreign Affairs. He was the chief negotiator in the Russo-German talks that resulted in Russia's withdrawal from the war in 1918 under the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

Commissar for War

He then became Commissar for War, and achieved what was arguably the greatest success of his career, the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War of 1918–20. As a hardliner, Trotsky fully supported Lenin's repressive policy of War Communism. He plotted the destruction of the Russian trade unions, and in 1921 ordered the suppression of the rebellious Kronstadt workers.

Exile

Trotsky was never fully accepted by his fellow Bolsheviks, which enabled Stalin to isolate him after 1924. In 1929 Trotsky was exiled from the USSR. He spent his last 11 years in a variety of countries. In 1939 he founded the Fourth International, a movement of anti-Stalin Marxists drawn from some 30 countries. Trotsky's end came in 1940 in Mexico City, when a Soviet agent acting on Stalin's direct orders killed him by driving an ice-pick into his head.

and brilliant, while his rival was unspectacular and methodical. Trotsky was the type of person who attracted either admiration or distaste, but seldom loyalty. That was why he lacked a genuine following. It is true that he was highly regarded by the Red Army, whose creator he had been, but this was never matched by any comparable political support. Trotsky failed to build a power base within the Party. This invariably gave him the appearance of an outsider.

Adding to his difficulties in this regard was the doubt about his commitment to Bolshevism. Until 1917, as Lenin had noted in his 'Testament', Trotsky had belonged to the Mensheviks. This led to the suspicion that his conversion had been a matter of expediency rather than conviction. Many of the old-guard Bolsheviks regarded Trotsky as a Menshevik turncoat who could not be trusted.

Key question
What did Trotsky mean by 'bureaucratisation'?

Bureaucratisation

Despite the attacks upon him, Trotsky attempted to fight back. The issue he chose was bureaucratisation. He defined this as the abandonment of genuine discussion within the party and the growth in the centralised power of the Secretariat, which was able to make decisions and operate policies without reference to ordinary Party members.

Trotsky had good reason to think he had chosen a powerful cause. After all, Lenin himself in his last writings had warned the Party against the creeping dangers of bureaucracy. Accordingly, Trotsky pressed his views in the Party Congresses and in the meetings of the Central Committee and the Politburo. His condemnation of the growth of bureaucracy was coupled with an appeal for a return to **'Party democracy'**. He expanded his arguments in a series of essays, the most controversial of which was *Lessons of October*, in which he criticised Kamenev and Zinoviev for their past disagreements with Lenin. The assault was

Key term

Party democracy
Trotsky was not pressing for democracy in the full sense of all party members having a say. His aim was to condemn the centralising of power from which Stalin had gained such benefit.

ill judged, since it invited retaliation in kind. Trotsky's Menshevik past and his divergence from Leninism were highlighted in a number of books and pamphlets, most notably Kamenev's, *Lenin or Trotsky*.

As a contribution to the power struggle Trotsky's campaign for greater party democracy was misjudged. Trotsky's censures on bureaucracy left Stalin largely unscathed. In trying to expose bureaucratic tendencies in the Communist Party, Trotsky overlooked the essential fact that Bolshevik rule since 1917 had always been a bureaucracy. It was because the Soviet state functioned as a bureaucracy that Party members received privileges in political and public life. Trotsky's line was hardly likely to gain significant support from Party members who had a vested interest in bureaucracy.

The NEP

Key question
How was Trotsky weakened by the issue of NEP?

Trotsky's reputation was further damaged by the issue of the New Economic Policy (see page 30). NEP went back to 1921 when Lenin had introduced it as a replacement for the severe economic controls, known as War Communism (see page 23). Lenin admitted that NEP was a relaxing of strict socialism, but had indicated that he regarded it as a temporary measure.

However, at the time of his death in 1924 the question was already being asked as to whether the NEP was to last indefinitely. The Party members who were unhappy with it saw its continuation as a betrayal of revolutionary principle. They objected to the policy of giving preferential treatment to the peasantry. The peasants, they argued, were being allowed to slow the pace of Soviet Russia's advance as a truly proletarian state, which had been the whole object of the 1917 Revolution. Critics of the NEP were broadly referred to as **Left Communists**, while those who supported it were known as **Right Communists**.

It is important not to exaggerate the difference of principle between Left and Right over NEP. Although fierce disputes were to arise, initially the disagreement was simply about timing: how long should the NEP be allowed to run?

However, in the power struggle of the 1920s these minor differences deepened into questions of political correctness and Party loyalty. A rival's attitude towards the NEP might be a weakness to be exploited; if it could be established that his views indicated deviant Marxist thinking it became possible to destroy his position in the Party.

Stalin did precisely this. He used Trotsky's attitude towards the NEP as a way of undermining him. Trotsky had backed Lenin in 1921, but there were strong rumours that his support had not been genuine and that he regarded NEP as a deviation from true socialism. It was certainly the case that in 1923 Trotsky had led a group of Party members, known from their number as 'the Platform of 46', in openly criticising ***Gosplan*** for its 'flagrant errors of economic policy'. Trotsky's charge was that the government had placed the interests of the Nepmen above those of the Revolution and the Russian people. He urged a return to a

Key terms

Left Communists
Those members of the party who opposed the continuation of NEP.

Right Communists
Those members of the party who favoured the continuation of NEP.

Gosplan
The government body responsible for national economic planning.

much tighter state control of industry and warned that under NEP the revolutionary gains made under War Communism would be lost.

Stalin was quick to suggest to Party members, who already looked on Trotsky as a disruptive force, that he was, indeed, suspect. The interesting point here is that Stalin's own view of NEP was far from clear at this stage. He had loyally supported Lenin's introduction of it in 1921, but had given little indication as to whether, or for how long, it should be retained after Lenin's death. He preferred to keep his own views to himself and play on the differences between his colleagues.

Key question
Why was there a Left–Right division over the question of how the USSR should modernise?

Modernisation

The NEP debate was one aspect of the question of how the Soviet Union should plan for the future. This would have been a demanding issue regardless of whether there had been a power struggle. What the rivalry for leadership did was to intensify the argument. The USSR was a poor country. If it were to modernise and overcome its poverty it would have to industrialise. Recent history had shown that a strong industrial base was an absolute essential for a modern state and there was little disagreement among Soviet Communists about that. The quarrel was not over whether the USSR should industrialise, but over how and at what speed.

History had further shown that the industrial expansion that had taken place in the previous century, in such countries as Germany and Britain, had relied on a ready supply of resources and the availability of capital for investment. Russia was rich in natural resources, but these had yet to be effectively exploited, and it certainly did not possess large amounts of capital. Nor could it easily borrow any; after 1917 the Bolsheviks had rejected capitalist methods of finance. Moreover, even if the Bolsheviks had been willing to borrow, there were few countries after 1917 willing to risk the dangers of investing in revolutionary Russia.

The only usable resource, therefore, was the Russian people themselves, 80 per cent of whom were peasants. If the Soviet Union was to industrialise, it would have to be done by persuading or forcing the peasant population to produce a food surplus that could then be sold abroad to raise capital for industrial investment. Both Left and Right agreed that this was the only solution, but, whereas the Right were content to rely on persuasion, the Left demanded that the peasantry be forced into line.

It was Trotsky who most clearly represented the view of the Left on this. He wanted the peasants to be coerced into co-operating. However, for him the industrialisation debate was secondary to the far more demanding question of Soviet Russia's role as the organiser of international revolution. His views on this created a wide divergence between him and Stalin, expressed in terms of a clash between the opposed notions of 'Permanent Revolution' and 'Socialism in One Country'.