

**'Permanent Revolution'**

What inspired Trotsky's politics was his belief in 'Permanent Revolution' made up of a number of key ideas:

- Revolution was not as a single event but a permanent (continuous) process in which risings took place from country to country.
- The events in Russia since 1917 were simply a first step towards a worldwide proletarian revolution.
- Individual nations did not matter. The interests of the international working class were paramount.
- True revolutionary socialism could be achieved in the USSR only if an international uprising took place.

Trotsky believed that the USSR could not survive alone in a hostile world. With her vast peasant population and undeveloped proletariat, Russia would prove 'incapable of holding her own against conservative Europe'. He contended that the immediate task of the USSR was 'to export revolution'. That was the only way to guarantee its survival.

It should be stressed that at no point did Trotsky call for the Soviet Union to be sacrificed to some theoretical notion of world revolution. His argument was an opposite one; unless there was international revolution the Soviet Union would go under. Stalin, however, ignored the subtlety of his opponent's reasoning. He chose to portray Trotsky as someone intent on damaging the Soviet Union.

**'Socialism in One Country'**

Stalin countered Trotsky's notion of 'Permanent Revolution' with his own concept of 'Socialism in One Country'. He meant by this that the nation's first task was to consolidate Lenin's revolution and the rule of the CPSU by turning the USSR into a modern state, capable of defending itself against its internal and external enemies. The Soviet Union, therefore must work:

- To overcome its present agricultural and industrial problems by its own unaided efforts.
- To go on to build a modern state, the equal of any nation in the world.
- To make the survival of the Soviet Union an absolute priority, even if this meant suspending efforts to create international revolution.

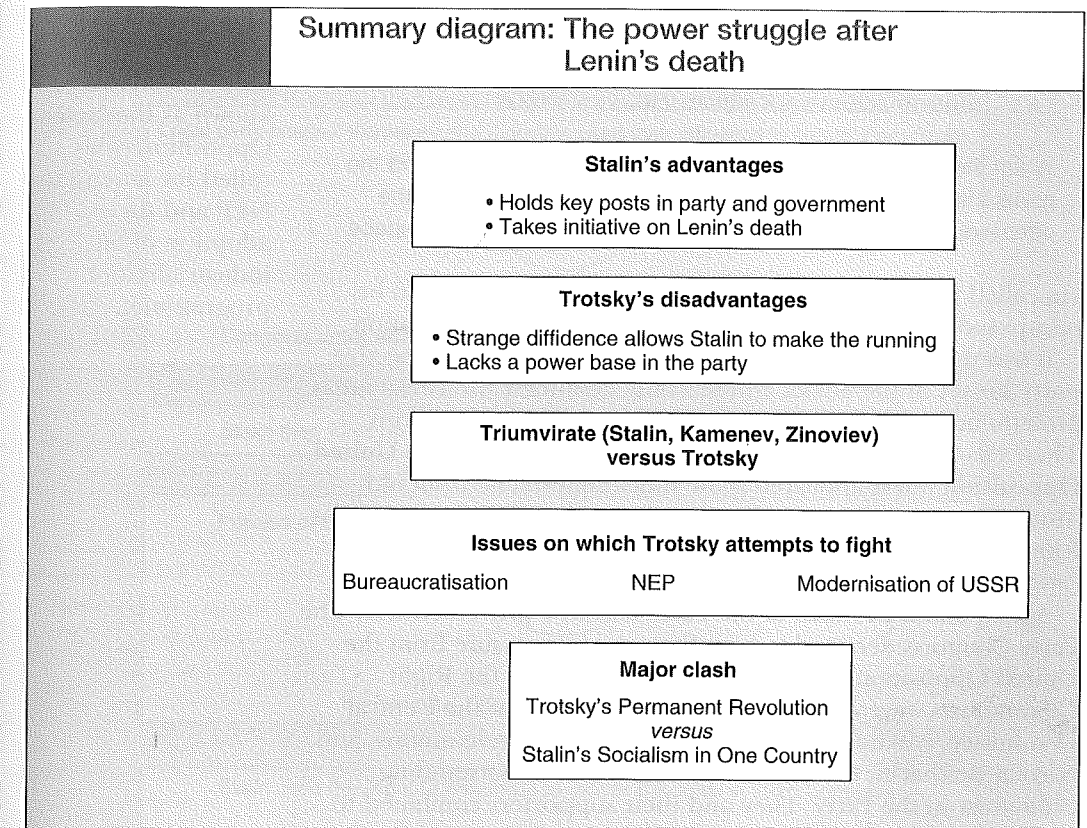
The contrast between this programme and Trotsky's was used by Stalin to characterise his rival as an enemy of the Soviet Union. Trotsky's ideas were condemned as an affront to Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution. An image was created of Trotsky as an isolated figure, a posturing Jewish intellectual, whose vague notions of international revolution threatened the security of the Soviet Union.

**Key question**  
What were the essential features of Trotsky's concept of 'Permanent Revolution'?

**Key question**  
What were the essential features of Stalin's 'Socialism in One Country'?

Trotsky's position was further weakened by the fact that throughout the 1920s the Soviet Union had a constant fear of invasion by the combined capitalist nations. Although this fear was ill-founded, the tense atmosphere it created made Trotsky's notion of the USSR's engaging in foreign revolutionary wars appear even more irresponsible. A number of historians, including E.H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher, have remarked on Stalin's ability to rally support and silence opponents at critical moments by assuming the role of the great Russian patriot concerned to save the nation from the grave dangers that threatened it.

### Summary diagram: The power struggle after Lenin's death



**Key question**  
What were the basic weaknesses of the Left in their challenge to Stalin?

**Key term**

**'To deliver the votes'**  
To use one's control of the party machine to gain majority support in key votes.

**3 | The Defeat of Trotsky and the Left**

Trotsky's failure in the propaganda war of the 1920s meant that he was in no position to persuade either the Politburo or the Central Committee to vote for his proposals. Stalin's ability 'to deliver the votes' in the crucial divisions was decisive. Following a vote against him in the 1925 Party Congress, Trotsky was relieved of his position as Commissar for War. Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, the respective Chairmen of the Moscow and

**Leningrad** Soviets, played a key part in this. They used their influence over the local Party organisations to ensure that it was a pro-Stalin, anti-Trotsky, Congress that gathered.

### Kamenev and Zinoviev

Kamenev and Zinoviev had been motivated by a personal dislike of Trotsky, who at various times had tried to embarrass them by reminding the Party of their failure to support Lenin in October 1917. Now it was their turn to be ousted. With Trotsky weakened, Stalin turned to the problem of how to deal with these two key figures, whom he now saw as potential rivals.

In the event, they created a trap for themselves. In 1925 Kamenev and Zinoviev, worried by the USSR's economic backwardness, publicly stated that it would require the victory of proletarian revolution in the capitalist nations in order for the Soviet Union to achieve socialism. Zinoviev wrote:

When the time comes for the revolution in other countries and the proletariat comes to our aid, then we shall again go over to the offensive. For the time being we have only a little breathing space.

He called for the NEP to be abandoned, for restrictions to be reimposed on the peasants, and for enforced industrialisation.

It was understandable that Kamenev and Zinoviev, respective party bosses in the Soviet Union's only genuinely industrial areas, Moscow and Leningrad, should have thought in these terms. Their viewpoint formed the basis of what was termed the **United Opposition** but it appeared to be indistinguishable from old Trotskyism. It was no surprise, therefore, when Trotsky joined his former opponents in 1926 to form a 'Trotskyite-Kamenevite-Zinovievite' opposition bloc.

Again, Stalin's control of the Party machine proved critical. The Party Congress declined to be influenced by pressure from the United Opposition. Stalin's chief backers among the Right Communists were Aleksei Rykov, the Chairman of the Central Committee, Mikhail Tomsky, the leader of the trade unions, and Nicolai Bukharin, the editor of *Pravda* and the outstanding economist in the Party. They and their supporters combined to outvote the bloc. Kamenev and Zinoviev were dismissed from their posts as Soviet Chairmen, to be replaced by two of Stalin's staunchest allies, Molotov in Moscow and Kirov in Leningrad. Soon afterwards, Trotsky was expelled from both the Politburo and the Central Committee.

### Trotsky exiled

Trotsky still did not admit defeat. In 1927, on the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik rising, he tried to rally support in a direct challenge to Stalin's authority. Even fewer members of Congress than before were prepared to side with him and he was again outvoted. His complete failure led to the acceptance by Congress of Stalin's proposal that Trotsky be expelled from the

CPSU Congress votes against Trotsky: 1925

**Leningrad**  
Petrograd had been renamed in Lenin's honour.

**United Opposition**  
The group led by Kamenev and Zinoviev, sometimes known as the New Opposition, who called for an end to NEP and the adoption of an industrialisation programme.

Key date

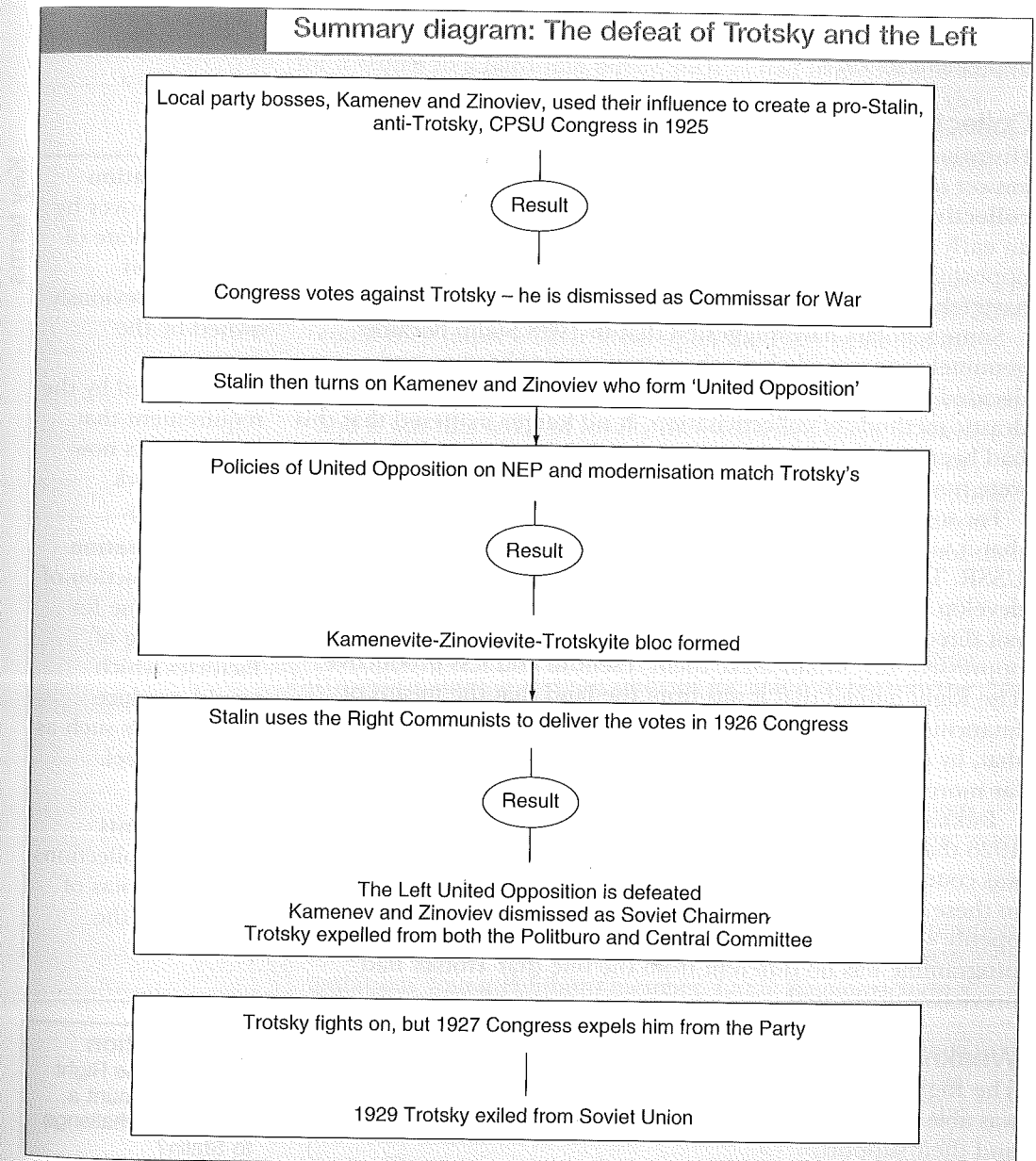
Key terms

Key dates

Trotsky dismissed from Central Committee: October 1927  
Trotsky dismissed from Communist Party: November 1927  
Trotsky sent into internal exile: January 1928  
Trotsky exiled from the Soviet Union: January 1929

Party altogether. An internal exile order against him in 1927 was followed two years later by total exile from the USSR. Stalin's victory over Trotsky was not primarily a matter of ability or principle. Stalin won because Trotsky lacked a power base. Trotsky's superiority as a speaker and writer, and his greater intellectual gifts, counted for little when set against Stalin's grip on the Party machine. It is difficult to see how, after 1924, Trotsky could have ever mounted a serious challenge to his rival. Even had his own particular failings not stopped him from acting at vital moments, Trotsky never had control of the political system as it operated in Soviet Russia. Politics is the art of the possible. After 1924 all the possibilities belonged to Stalin and he used them.

Summary diagram: The defeat of Trotsky and the Left



#### 4 | The Defeat of the Right

Although Stalin's victory over the Right Opposition is best studied as a feature of his industrialisation programme (see page 76), it is important also to see it as the last stage in the consolidation of his authority over the Party and over the USSR. The defeat of the Right marks the end of any serious attempt to limit his power. From the late 1920s to his death in 1953 he would become increasingly dictatorial.

The major representatives of the Right were Rykov, Tomsky and Bukharin, the three who had loyally served Stalin in his outflanking of Trotsky and the Left. Politically the Right were by no means as challenging to Stalin as the Trotskyite bloc had been. What made Stalin move against them was that they stood in the way of the industrial and agricultural schemes that he began to implement in 1928.

#### Collectivisation and industrialisation

Historians are uncertain as to when Stalin finally decided that the answer to the Soviet Union's growth problem was to impose **collectivisation** and **industrialisation**. It is unlikely to have been an early decision; the probability is that it was another piece of opportunism. Having defeated the Left politically he may then have felt free to adopt their economic policies.

Some scholars have suggested that in 1928 Stalin became genuinely concerned about the serious grain shortage and decided that the only way to avoid a crisis was to resort to the drastic methods of collectivisation. It no longer mattered that this had been the very solution that the Left had advanced, since they were now scattered.

For some time it had been the view of Bukharin and the Right that it was unnecessary to force the pace of industrialisation in the USSR. They argued that it would be less disruptive to let industry develop its own momentum. The State should assist, but it should not direct. Similarly, the peasants should not be controlled and oppressed; this would make them resentful and less productive. The Right agreed that it was from the land that the means of financing industrialisation would have to come, but they stressed that, by offering the peasants the chance to become prosperous, far more grain would be produced for sale abroad.

Bukharin argued in the Politburo and at the Party Congress in 1928 that Stalin's aggressive policy of **State grain procurements** was counter-productive. He declared that there were alternatives to these repressive policies. Bukharin was prepared to state openly what everybody knew, but was afraid to admit: that Stalin's programme was no different from the one that Trotsky had previously advocated.

#### Weaknesses of the Right

The Right suffered from a number of weaknesses, which Stalin was able to exploit: these related to their ideas, their organisation and their support.

#### Key question

What was the attitude of the Right towards NEP and industrialisation?

#### Collectivisation

The taking over by the Soviet State of the land and property previously owned by the peasants accompanied by the requirement that the peasants now live and work communally.

#### Industrialisation

The introduction of a vast scheme for the building of factories which would produce heavy goods such as iron and steel.

#### State grain procurements

Enforced collections of fixed quotas of grain from the peasants.

#### Key question

Why were the Right unable to mount a successful challenge to Stalin?

#### Ideas

- Their economic arguments were not unsound, but in the invasion-scared atmosphere of the late 1920s they appeared timid and unrealistic.
- Their plea for a soft line with the peasants did not accord with the Party's needs. The threatening times were judged as requiring a dedicated resistance to the enemies of Revolution both within the USSR and outside.
- Stalin was able to suggest that the Right were guilty of underestimating the crisis facing the Party and the Soviet Union. He declared that it was a time for closing the ranks in keeping with the tradition of 1917.

Stalin showed a shrewd understanding of the mentality of Party members. The majority were far more likely to respond to the call for a return to a hard-line policy, such as had helped them survive the desperate days of the Civil War, than they were to risk the Revolution itself by untimely concessions to a peasantry that had no real place in the proletarian future. The Party of Marx and Lenin would not be well served by the policies of the Right.

#### Organisation

- The difficulty experienced by the Right in advancing their views was the same as that which had confronted the Left. How could they impress their ideas upon the Party while Stalin remained master of the Party's organisation?
- Bukharin and his colleagues wanted to remain good Party men and it was this sense of loyalty that weakened them in their attempts to oppose Stalin. Fearful of creating 'factionalism', they hoped that they could win the whole Party round to their way of thinking without causing deep divisions. On occasion they were sharply outspoken, Bukharin particularly so, but their basic approach was conciliatory.

All this played into Stalin's hands. Since it was largely his supporters who were responsible for drafting and distributing Party information, it was not difficult for Stalin to portray the Right as a weak and irresponsible clique.

#### Support

- The Right's only substantial support lay in the trade unions, whose Central Council was chaired by Tomsky, and in the CPSU's Moscow branch where Uglanov, an admirer of Bukharin, was the leader.
- When Stalin realised that these might be a source of opposition he acted quickly and decisively. He sent the ruthless and ambitious young Politburo member, Lazar Kaganovich, to undertake a purge of the suspect trade unionists.
- The Right proved totally incapable of organising resistance to this political blitz. Molotov, Stalin's faithful henchman, was dispatched to Moscow where he enlisted the support of the pro-Stalin members to achieve a similar purge of the local Party officials.

By early 1929 the Right had been trounced beyond recovery. Tomsky was no longer the national trade union leader; Uglanov had been replaced in the Moscow Party organisation; Rykov had been superseded as Premier by Molotov, and Bukharin had been voted out as Chairman of the Comintern and had lost his place in the Politburo. Tomsky, Rykov and Bukharin, the main trio of the 'Right Opportunists' as they were termed by the Stalinist press, were allowed to remain in the Party but only after they had publicly admitted the error of their ways. Stalin's triumph over both Left and Right was complete. The grey blank was about to become the red tsar.

### Study Guide: AS Questions

#### In the style of AQA

Read the following source and then answer the questions that follow.

*Adapted from: Richard Overy, The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, 2004.*

The five years between 1924 and 1929 were decisive in Stalin's career. During this period he exploited his position as General Secretary to outmanoeuvre and outdistance his colleagues. His first weapon was to appropriate Lenin's legacy.

- (a) What is meant by 'Lenin's legacy' in the context of the USSR between 1924 and 1929? (3 marks)
- (b) Explain why Trotsky was unable to mount a successful bid for the leadership of the USSR in the late 1920s. (7 marks)
- (c) 'It was Stalin's control of the party machine more than any other factor that explains why he overcame his rivals for power.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement. (15 marks)

#### Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

- (a) This requires only a brief answer. Check back (page 51) to remind yourself of the context. Explain what the term means by referring to the structure of government that Lenin had created (page 50) and the ways of exercising power that he bequeathed to those who came after him.
- (b) This needs a fuller answer but do not be tempted into writing a full essay. The following points should help you to develop your answer:
- Trotsky's personal and political deficiencies (pages 53–4).
  - Stalin's party posts (pages 49–50).
  - Stalin's strength of purpose and political skills (pages 56–7).
  - Stalin's exploitation of Lenin's legacy (pages 51–2).
  - Trotsky's unpopularity and lack of a power base (pages 53–4).

Remember not merely to list your points. The question requires you to explain the reasons.

- (c) Pages 49–51 will help you here. The choice to agree or disagree is yours, but you must explain your decision. Points to consider:

- What is meant by Stalin's control of the party machine?
- What powers did this control give him over his rivals?
- Who were Stalin's main rivals?

Note that the question requires you to compare the importance of Stalin's control of the party machine with other factors. So while it is important that you concentrate on the machine you must also evaluate other factors. These might include:

- Trotsky's character weaknesses and political limitations (pages 52–4).
- The inability of the Left Opposition to persuade the party or 'to deliver the votes' (page 57).
- Stalin's skill and luck in playing off his rivals against each other (pages 60–2).
- The Right Opposition's lack of organisation and resolve (pages 62–3).
- The divisions among Stalin's rivals regarding government and party policy (page 63).
- The way the 'Lenin legacy' worked to Stalin's advantage and against Trotsky and the other rivals (page 51).

#### In the style of OCR

Assess the reasons why Stalin's political rivals were unable to prevent his rise to power.

Source: OCR, January 2003

#### Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

Spend time making sure you fully grasp the question and its terms. Notice that, although Stalin appears to be the central figure, the question is asking you to concentrate on his political rivals. Your task, therefore, is to examine why they were unable to prevent his eventually filling Lenin's place as the dominant figure in Soviet government. You could, of course, describe Stalin's attributes and skills and then make a strong comparison by explaining how none of his rivals could match him in these respects. But, whatever approach you choose, you do need to identify who his rivals were and their limitations.

Trotsky (page 53) will obviously loom large, but do not restrict your answer to him. The Left and Right Opposition (pages 59 and 62) deserve attention and analysis. Note that the key instruction in the