

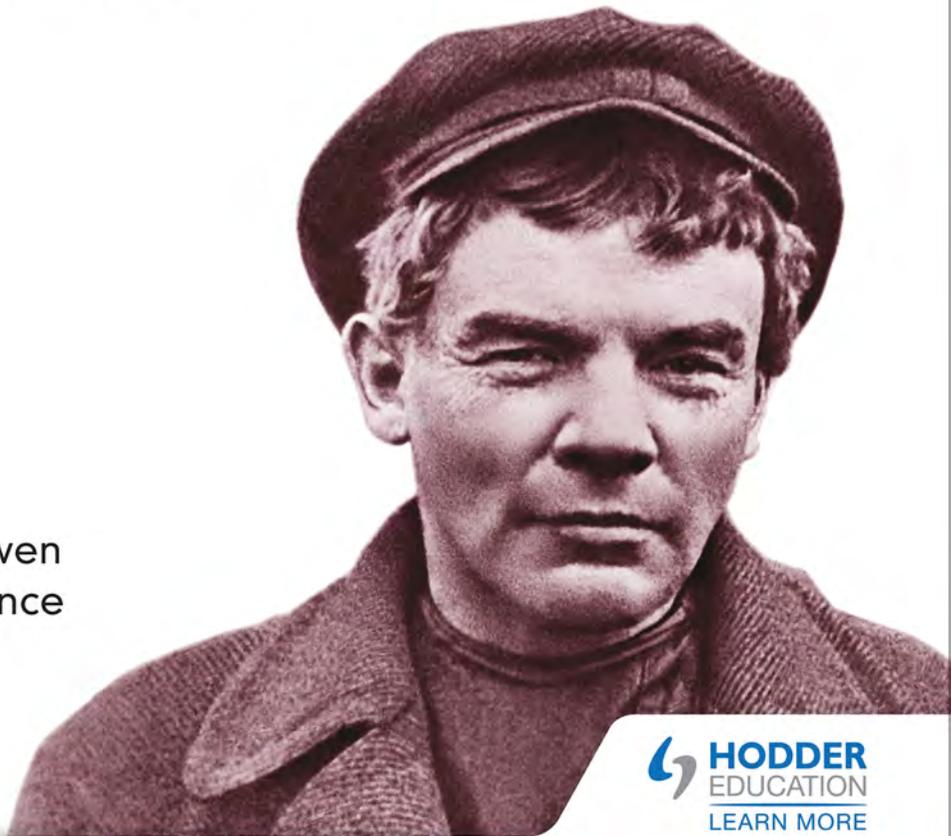
my **revision** notes

AQA AS/A-level History

REVOLUTION AND DICTATORSHIP

RUSSIA
1917–1953

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3 Stalin's rise to power, 1924–29

The power vacuum and power struggle

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Lenin's death in 1924 shocked the Russian people. Lenin's coffin was displayed in Red Square and crowds of people queued to pay their final respects. The Politburo decided to preserve his body and place it in a mausoleum on Red Square. A cult of personality developed; Petrograd was renamed Leningrad, Lenin's statue was built in every Russian city and children were named after the Communist leader.

The leadership struggle had begun before Lenin's death, being prompted by his declining health. Lenin had become unwell towards the end of 1921, and in May 1922 he had the first of a series of strokes that left him unable to work. By mid-1923 it was obvious that Lenin would never return to government. Therefore, a struggle began at the top of the party which had a profound impact on the Government of the Soviet Union. When Lenin died, there was no obvious successor. A collective leadership was therefore established to govern Russia. From 1922 to 1929, a relentless struggle for supremacy was waged by Politburo leaders.

Ideology and the nature of leadership

Lenin's leadership was based on his personality and his authority. He was able to lead because he had the respect of all his senior colleagues. They knew that he had masterminded the revolution, and that the Government that emerged reflected his vision. In that sense, he was leader of the Soviet Union because he was Lenin, not because he held official positions.

The Politburo had emerged as the most powerful part of the Government. Therefore, gaining a majority on the Politburo was the key to power in the Soviet Union. Winning a majority on the Politburo meant winning votes at the Party Congress, as the Party Congress elected the Central Committee, which in turn elected the Politburo. The battle for leadership was a battle for support within the party, not a battle for support within the Soviet Union, which was not a democracy.

Lenin's Testament

Lenin's Testament was written a year before his death in 1924. The notes were addressed to the Central Committee and were highly critical of the main contenders for power. The testament

- accused Trotsky of arrogance, and in coded language of being too willing to use violence
- accused Stalin of impatience and rudeness
- reminded the Central Committee that Zinoviev and Kamenev had been disloyal to the party immediately before the October Revolution
- argued that Bukharin did not fully understand Lenin's ideology.

When Lenin died, his widow Krupskaya handed the testament to the Politburo with the intention that it would be made public in the Party Congress in May 1924. Key members of the Central Committee declined to read it out. If it was to be published, they would all be damaged by its contents. The testament was therefore suppressed.

i Developing an argument

Below is a sample AS-level exam-style question, a list of key points to be made in the essay and a paragraph from the essay. Read the question, the plan and the sample paragraph. This supports the view put forward in the question. Rewrite the paragraph, using a similar number of words, putting forward a counter-argument. Your paragraph should explain why the situation may have been different from that put forward in the sample paragraph. When you have completed your writing, read both paragraphs. Is one or the other more convincing? Or does the truth – in your view – lie somewhere between the two claims?

‘Stalin emerged victorious in the power struggle to succeed Lenin because of the ruthlessness of Stalin.’ Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

Key points

- Stalin's determination
- Weaknesses of opposition
- Trotsky's failure to build alliances
- Economic debates within the party
- Stalin's influence within the party
- Failure of Lenin's Testament to be released

Sample paragraph

One of the most significant factors why Stalin would emerge victorious in the power struggle to succeed Lenin can be credited to luck. First, there is no doubt that Stalin was fortunate regarding Lenin's declining health, including his incapability of speech in the years leading up to his death. On 22 December 1922, Lenin began writing his testament, on the very same day Stalin had argued with Lenin's wife, Krupskaya. Consequently, Lenin condemned Stalin, saying 'I am not sure he always knows how to exercise that power with sufficient caution', and would then urge the party in his testament 'to think about ways of removing Comrade Stalin'. Stalin, however, luckily avoided dismissal due to the fact Lenin's Testament was never read publicly. The reason for this was that Lenin had criticised so many of the key party members, though none worse than Stalin, that the majority of them agreed against its publication due to personal concern.

i Identify the emphasis and tone of the source

Study the source below. Don't focus on the content as such; focus on:

- the language
- the sentence structure
- the emphasis of the source
- the overall tone.

What does the tone and emphasis of the source suggest about its value – in terms of:

- the reliability of the evidence
- the utility of the evidence for studying the qualities of the main contenders to succeed Lenin as leader?

SOURCE

Extracts from Lenin's words about the contenders in his testament, 25 December 1922.

Comrade Stalin, having become **General Secretary**, has concentrated enormous power in his hands; I am not sure that he always knows how to use the power with sufficient caution. On the other hand, Comrade Trotsky is distinguished not only by his exceptional abilities – personally he is, to be sure, the most able man in the present Central Committee – but also by his far-reaching self-confidence and a disposition to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs.

These two qualities of the two most able leaders of the present Central Committee might lead to a split, if our party does not take measures to prevent it ...

4th January. Stalin is too rude, and this fault becomes unbearable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position, and appoint another man more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades ...

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Ideological debates and issues in the leadership struggle

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If one man was to dominate Russia after Lenin's death, he would have to emerge from the members of the Politburo in 1924.

Character, strengths and weaknesses of the main contenders

Stalin

- Stalin was born into a poor family in Georgia in 1879. His background in the Bolshevik party was being an agitator and fundraiser, and he was sent to Siberia many times for his actions.
- He could claim to be a true Leninist as he had joined the Bolsheviks at the very beginning, in 1903, and had been loyal to Lenin through the whole period from 1903 to 1921.
- Lenin held Stalin in high regard, referring to him as 'that wonderful Georgian'. Lenin trusted Stalin with important administrative tasks, and supported his promotion to the position of General Secretary in 1921.

Trotsky

- Trotsky was born in 1883 and was a talented writer and orator. Other than Lenin, Trotsky was the most famous member of the Government. He was well known as a revolutionary hero due to the role he played in the October Revolution and the civil war. Moreover, from 1917 he had been Lenin's right-hand man and closest political collaborator.
- However, he was not popular within the Communist Party. Trotsky had joined the Bolsheviks in mid-1917, and therefore many Bolsheviks believed that he joined the party to gain power rather than because he was a true Leninist.
- Trotsky retained his position on the Politburo until 1927, but he was unable to influence the direction of policy. He was continually in opposition to the ruling alliances.

Tomsky

- Tomsky was born in 1880 and had a background in the trade union movement.
- After 1918, he was Chairman of the Central Council of Trade Unions.
- He had clashed with Lenin after 1917 over the limited role trade unions had in Soviet society.

Bukharin

- Bukharin was born in 1888 into a family where his parents were teachers. From 1925 to early 1928, Bukharin was the most prominent figure in the Soviet Government.

- Bukharin could claim to be a true Leninist as he joined the Bolshevik faction in 1906, and supported Lenin consistently until Lenin's death in 1924. Lenin and Bukharin were close, and Lenin entrusted Bukharin with a series of important jobs, including the editorship of the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*.
- However, it was widely known that Bukharin and Lenin had disagreed over a series of issues. For example, in 1918 they disagreed over ending the First World War, and in 1921 they disagreed over the introduction of the NEP. Moreover, as he was the youngest of the contenders for power, some in the party thought he was too young and inexperienced to be the new leader.

Kamenev

- Kamenev was born in 1883 and from 1905 was a committed Bolshevik.
- Kamenev was initially close to Lenin but opposed to Lenin's April Theses in 1917 and his desire to work for a revolution in October 1917.
- In 1922 he formed a **triumvirate** with Zinoviev and Stalin to prevent Trotsky becoming more powerful.

Rykov

- Rykov was born in 1881 into a peasant family, and had a long history of fighting for the Bolsheviks, which meant he spent time in exile in Siberia.
- He was elected to succeed Lenin as the Chairman of the *Sovmarkom* and Prime Minister of the USSR.
- He supported the New Economic Policy (NEP).

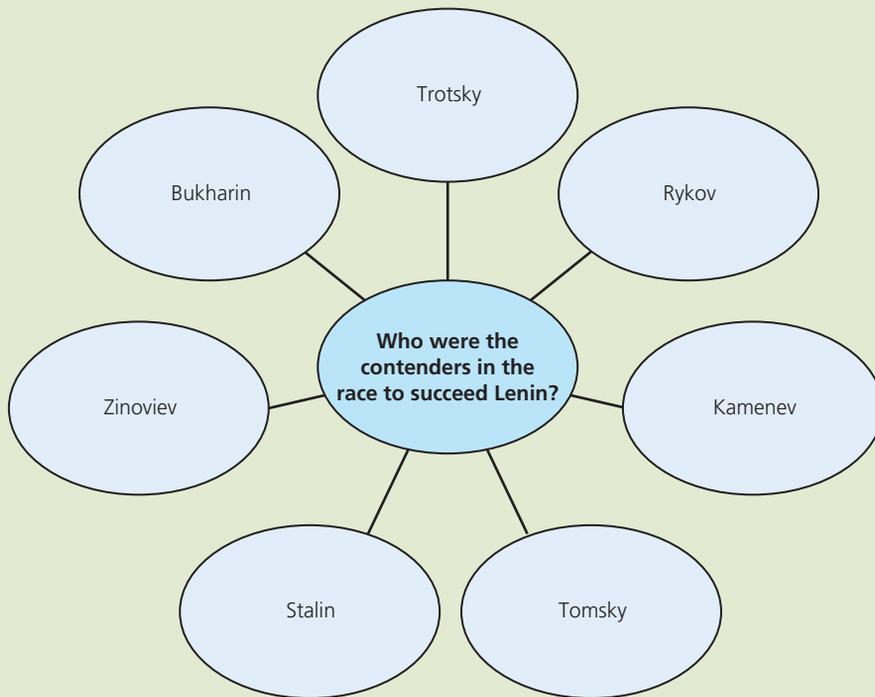
Zinoviev

- Zinoviev was born in 1883 into a Jewish family and could claim to be a true Leninist as he was Lenin's closest friend. Zinoviev had supported Lenin since the beginning of the Bolshevik movement in 1903.
- Between 1923 and 1925, Zinoviev led the triumvirate, which formed a majority on the Politburo. Zinoviev and Kamenev persuaded the Central Committee to ignore Lenin's Testament.
- Zinoviev made a series of speeches about the differences between Leninism and Trotskyism. The purpose of these speeches was to demonstrate that Trotsky was not a Leninist and therefore should not lead the Government.



Mind map

Use the information on the opposite page to summarise each contender's claim to succeed Lenin.



Identify relevant content

Read the following source and the question. Go through the source and highlight the sections that are relevant to the focus of the question, and annotate the main points in the margin.

How valuable is the source for explaining why Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Union?

SOURCE

An extract from an article by L. Trotsky, 'On the Suppressed Testament of Lenin', published in 1932.

Lenin no doubt valued highly certain of Stalin's characteristics; his firmness of character, tenacity, stubbornness, even ruthlessness and craftiness – qualities necessary in war and consequently in its general staff. But Lenin was far from thinking that these gifts were sufficient for the leadership of the party and the state. Lenin saw in Stalin a revolutionist, but not a statesman in the grand style. Theory was too important for Lenin, and Stalin's weak theoretical grounding was known in a small circle. Stalin was not acquainted with the West. He was not included in international discussions, and he was not a writer or an orator. His articles are full of crude sins against the Russian language ... In his position as General Secretary he became the giver of favour and fortune.

How did Stalin rise to power?

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Stalin held key positions within the Communist Party. In 1919, Stalin was made head of the *Orgburo* and in 1922 assumed the position as Secretary-General, which put him in charge of the party organisation. These positions afforded Stalin the opportunity to appoint lower and middle ranks of the party and gave him significant powers of patronage.

In 1924, Stalin initiated the **Lenin Enrolment**. From May 1924, this enrolment drive allowed 128,000 people to join the Communist Party. Stalin justified this by arguing that the party needed new working-class members. Because they were interested in getting well paid party jobs they tended to support Stalin, who was able to promote them within the party.

NEP and industrialisation

The NEP was a source of debate within the party.

- Ideologically it was criticised for not conforming to communist principles with the emergence of a richer class of peasants and **Nepmen**, who prospered under NEP.
- Lenin had insisted it was a 'temporary measure' to help Russia recover from the Russian Civil War, so the party hierarchy was divided on how long they should continue with the policy.
- By 1925, NEP was causing industrial and agricultural concerns as workers' standards of living declined and peasants were hoarding grain rather than selling it.

The NEP debate formed a key part of the leadership struggle.

- The left of the party, led by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, wanted to end NEP and focus on rapid industrialisation.
- The right of the party, led by Bukharin, argued that NEP should continue as it was stabilising the economy and pacifying the peasantry.

By 1928, Stalin, who had previously supported the NEP, abandoned his alliance with Bukharin and came out in favour of rapid industrialisation.

'Permanent Revolution' versus 'Socialism in One Country'

The left of the party believed in the theory of Permanent Revolution. According to this view:

- Russian communism could not survive alone as it didn't have the economic resources and the proletariat was too small and underdeveloped
- spreading the revolution would mean communist regimes in more developed countries could support Russia in completing the building of **socialism** around the world.

The right of the party, on the other hand, believed in the theory of Socialism in One Country. They reasoned that:

- a world revolution was unlikely, as revolutions had failed in Germany and Hungary
- the preservation of the Soviet Union should be the dominant aim, as a workers' state could be created to rival the capitalist powers.

Stalin, who initially gravitated towards exporting the revolution, put forward the idea of Socialism in One Country in 1924. It appealed to Russian patriotism, portraying Trotsky's ideas as out of touch.

Outcome for the other contenders

Stalin was seen as the 'grey blur' and his leadership ambitions were consistently underestimated by other members of the Politburo. However, by 1929 his victory had been assured by virtue of his positions within the party, the mistakes of others and Stalin's shrewd political skills.

- Stalin defeated the left opposition by forming an alliance with Zinoviev and Kamenev in undermining Trotsky, who was the most popular contender in the leadership struggle.
- Stalin formed an alliance with Bukharin by initially advocating the continuation of NEP. When he was attacked by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky for this, Stalin was supported by Communist Party members and managed to get all three expelled from the party. Trotsky was even expelled from the USSR altogether in 1929.
- Stalin defeated the right opposition when he came out in favour of rapid industrialisation. When Bukharin attempted to defend the NEP in 1929, Stalin moved his supporters to vote against him. Bukharin was then removed from his positions in the Politburo and Comintern.

