

Who were the principal contenders for power?

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

Source 12



► The politburo in 1924. Working clockwise from the top left, they are Kamenev, Stalin, Trotsky, Rykov, Bukharin and Zinoviev together, and Tomskey.

Cross reference

You can read more about Socialism in One Country on page 152

Note

The Communist International (Comintern) was set up in March 1918 to spread Communism overseas – believed at the time to be essential for the survival of the Bolshevik regime.

Bukharin

Born in 1888 he was the youngest member of the Politburo, a candidate member in March 1919 and a full member in 1924 after Lenin's death. His parents were teachers in Moscow and he went on to study economics there at university. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1906 when still a teenager. He was arrested and exiled to the Arctic Circle, but escaped and lived abroad until February 1917. He played a major part in the October Revolution in Moscow. Though he was close to Lenin, he had opposed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, believing that revolution would spread if the war continued. He became an enthusiastic supporter of the NEP when he realized that international revolution was not imminent. He probably first coined the expression 'Socialism in One Country'. As editor of *Pravda* from 1918 he had control over the whole Soviet press. Lenin called him 'the party's best theoretician'. He co-wrote the best-selling *ABC of Communism* in 1919 and became Chairman of Comintern in 1925.

Kamenev

Born in 1883 into a Jewish family, he studied law in Moscow. He married Trotsky's sister. Before the First World War he was in exile with Lenin, with whom he edited Bolshevik publications. He returned to St Petersburg in 1914 and was arrested. Released after the February Revolution, he was one of the first Bolshevik leaders to return to the capital. There he urged co-operation with the Provisional Government and a closer working relationship with the Mensheviks. He believed that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution and criticized Lenin's *April Theses*. When the party took the decision to plan a *coup d'état*, he openly criticized the decision in the newspapers! After the October Revolution he resigned his chairmanship of the Central Executive Committee of Soviets when Lenin refused to form a broad left coalition, though he kept his control of the Moscow Soviet. However, he soon found himself deputizing for Lenin at meetings of Sovnarkom. In 1922 he formed a triumvirate with Zinoviev and Stalin to prevent Trotsky becoming more powerful.

Rykov

Born in 1881 into a peasant family, he was regarded as a moderate in the party. He spent the years before 1914 in Russia, escaping from Siberia seven times. With a reputation as a good administrator, he acted as People's Commissar of the Interior 1917–1918 and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy in 1918–1920 and 1923–1924. He was elected to succeed Lenin as the Chairman of Sovnarkom and Prime Minister of the USSR.

Stalin

Born into a poor family in Georgia in 1879, he was sent to a school for training priests. After he was expelled for truancy, he was drawn into underground politics. He joined the RSDLP and worked as an agitator and fundraiser. This meant robbing banks, including a famous raid in Tiflis in 1907. He was sent to Siberia many times, escaping each time. Lenin personally asked that 'that wonderful Georgian' be elected to the party Central Committee in April 1917.

He was made Commissar for Nationalities after the Revolution. This was not a glamorous post for the Communist Party, since it involved supervising the 'backward' peoples of the RSFSR. It did give wide powers to appoint people to senior positions within the regions of Russia. He supported Lenin's line on most matters. During the Civil War he organized food supplies in the south, and had conflicts with Trotsky.

In 1919 he was made head of Rabkrin. This organization was set up to check on the work of those in the government service. It gave Stalin powers to inspect all government departments. He was the only Politburo member to be also a member of the Orgburo, which supervised party affairs. In 1922 he was asked to become General Secretary of the Party, though he tried to decline the offer at first. The post of General Secretary gave Stalin the responsibility of administering the whole Communist Party, another position carrying great powers of patronage. Did he use it to build a strong group of supporters within the party? When Lenin had his first stroke he was part of the unofficial 'triumvirate'. Because of his many posts in the bureaucracy, he was nicknamed 'Comrade Card Index' in the party. He did not have a reputation as a great Marxist theoretician.

Trotsky

Born in 1883 he was a gifted Jewish writer and orator. He was widely travelled and well educated. He criticized Lenin's centralization of the party, and set up his own group Mezraionka. He was Chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet in 1905, after which he was arrested many times. He returned to Petrograd in May 1917 and soon merged his group with the Bolsheviks. He chaired the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which seized power in October. As Commissar for Foreign Affairs he negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, though he disagreed strongly with Lenin. In March 1918 he was made Commissar for War, creating the Red Army from virtually nothing. His determination and energy played an important role in the defeat of the Whites. He was elected to the Politburo in 1919. Always a reluctant supporter of the NEP, in 1923 he spoke out openly against it. He also urged the party to concentrate more on international revolution. He had had bitter disputes with Stalin, though he acknowledged to a colleague in 1924 that he thought Stalin would emerge as 'the dictator of the USSR'.

Zinoviev

Born into a Jewish farming family, he was a passionate orator. He joined the RSDLP in 1901 and remained close to Lenin after the party split in 1903. He spent the next 14 years in exile with Lenin working on the party newspapers. On his return to Petrograd he opposed the October *coup*, co-writing an article in the press criticizing the *coup* before it had happened. He then resigned from the Bolshevik government when Lenin refused to coalesce with other socialist parties. He was quickly rehabilitated and was the first Chairman of Comintern in 1919. In 1922 he formed the triumvirate to combat Trotsky's influence in the party and was Chairman of the Petrograd Party.

Activity

Copy out and fill in this chart using the information in this chapter.

Each of the Politburo members had great influence in the party.

Each had difficulties in his position or in his past record in the party.

Who do you think was best placed to become the dominant figure in the party after Lenin's death?

	<i>Bukharin</i>	<i>Kamenev</i>	<i>Rykov</i>	<i>Stalin</i>	<i>Trotsky</i>	<i>Zinoviev</i>
Character						
Connection to Lenin						
Party popularity						
Powers of patronage						
Service to the party						
Marxist theory						
Links with other Politburo members						
Government experience						

The battleground

Who would become the dominant figure in Russian politics would not only be determined by what these individuals had done in the past, there were also important policy considerations for the future.

Who was the true disciple of Lenin?



Source 13

► The embalmed body of Lenin in his mausoleum.

The sometimes bitter debates in the party did not cease with Lenin's death; in fact they intensified. The so-called 'Literary War' saw each leader trying to prove to the party he was the best interpreter of Lenin, while criticizing the position of others. Each politician strove to take on Lenin's mantle – to identify himself as Lenin's closest comrade and most faithful disciple. But as you know Lenin had altered his policies from time to time. What, therefore, was Leninism?

Economic Policy

The New Economic Policy was not popular in the Communist Party. It was a great defeat for the world's first Communist government to have to reintroduce capitalist competition and private ownership back into the Russian economy. Walter Durranty, the American journalist, in 1923 described the result:

Source 14

Lenin's New Economic policy has put a severe strain on...many members of the Communist Party...there is now staying in the Moscow Guest House a certain Urquhart, who before the Revolution was the head of a huge Anglo-Russian copper corporation in the Urals. He is credited with having been the chief supporter of Kolchak and Denikin. For Communists he has come to personify the arch-fiend of capitalism, but now they see him negotiating concessions with the Soviet government on apparently friendly terms.

■ Think about

- Why were some party members unhappy about the NEP?

Lenin told the party that this was a temporary measure: 'We must take one step back in order to take two steps forward'.

But what was temporary? A few months? A few years? A few decades? Should the party abandon the New Economic Policy? If so, when?

Russia's relations with the rest of the world

Lenin had believed that communism could only survive in Russia if it was supported by other Communist countries. Even when Russians were starving in 1921 the government sent scarce resources to overseas parties to start a revolution abroad.

During the First World War Lenin looked to the soldiers in the western armies to bring about a revolution, spurred on by the Russian example. Later in 1920, during the Polish war, he hoped to march communism into Europe on the points of Russian bayonets. By 1922 the immediate prospects of revolution elsewhere appeared hopeless. How should the Communist government react to this? There were two main approaches:

● 'Permanent Revolution'

Trotsky and others on the left of the party believed that the Soviet Union could not achieve communism without help from other socialist states. In Trotsky's words: 'There is not enough proletarian yeast in our peasant dough'. The first priority of the government, therefore, should be to foster revolutions overseas.

● 'Socialism in One Country'

Stalin put forward this different view at the end of 1924. Now that the last attempt at revolution had failed in Germany in 1923, spreading revolution

■ Think about

- What did Trotsky mean by this?

■ Think about

- Why might Stalin's views have won more support in the party?

overseas looked more and more unlikely. Stalin, therefore, argued that the Soviet Union could achieve communism by its own efforts, without external help.

How should the Communist Party govern?

One of the prices paid for victory in the Civil War was greater party discipline. Not only had all other political parties been banned but also, when faced with calls for more democracy in the party in 1920 and 1921 by such groups as The Workers' Opposition, Lenin had persuaded the party at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 to ban separate factions within the party. This gave huge power to the Party Secretariat and the bureaucracy, especially Stalin. Some members, especially Trotsky, called for more open discussion within the party.

By far the longest and most important debate was on the economy.

'Left' and 'Right' Communists. What should be done about industry?

All Russian Communists believed that industrialization was crucial to the building of a socialist society. As Marxists they believed that true communism could not be achieved until mass production had created a surplus of goods, so that 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs could be met'. The problem was how to achieve this.

The party was divided fundamentally on the issue. The two wings of the party which debated these economic differences were called at the time 'Right' and 'Left' Communists.

'Right' Communists

They believed that, after the economic collapse of the war years, Russia needed time to recover and consolidate. Bukharin said:

Source 15

We tried to take on ourselves the organization of everything – even the organization of the peasants and the small producers...From the viewpoint of economic rationality this was madness.

For them any talk of achieving socialism in the foreseeable future was out of the question. Bukharin talked of decades. He believed that the best way to socialism was by allowing the peasants to improve their farms:

Source 16

Enrich yourselves [To the peasants] We shall ride to socialism at the speed of the peasant nag.

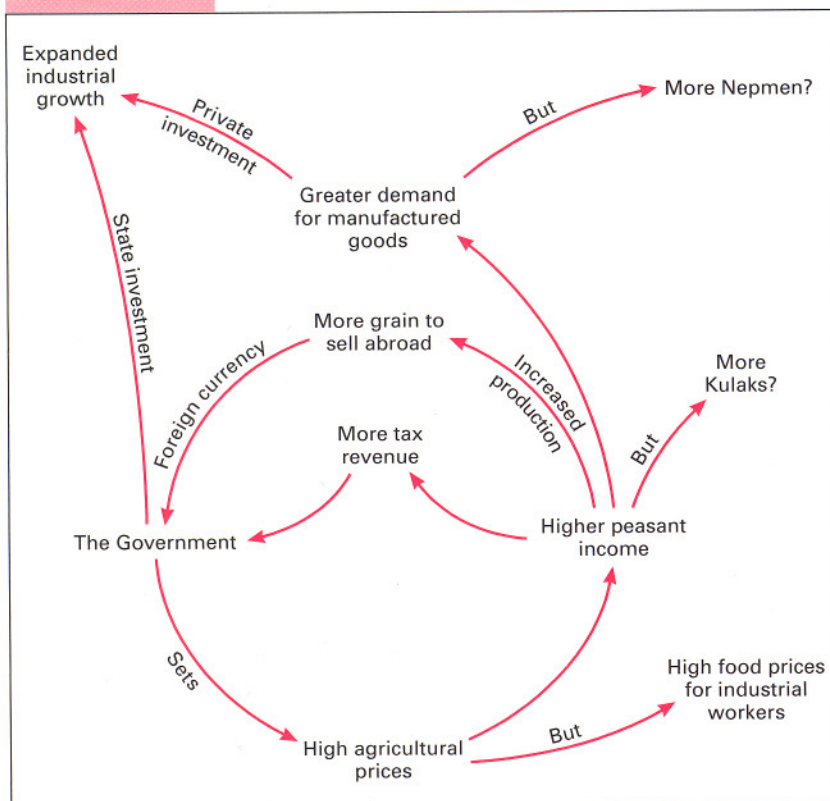
This would not only provide more crops, such as cotton, for industry, but also more and cheaper food for the cities. Surpluses would also provide food exports abroad. With the foreign currency this earned, and rising taxes from successful farmers and Nepmen, there would be capital to invest in industrial expansion.

In this way Russia would become a modern industrialized country.

Note

Nepmen was the party's name for private traders.

Source 17



◀ Bukharin's path to industrialization

Quotation

Lenin in 1921 talked of the 'need to resort to a reformist, gradualist, cautiously roundabout method of activity in...economic reconstruction.'

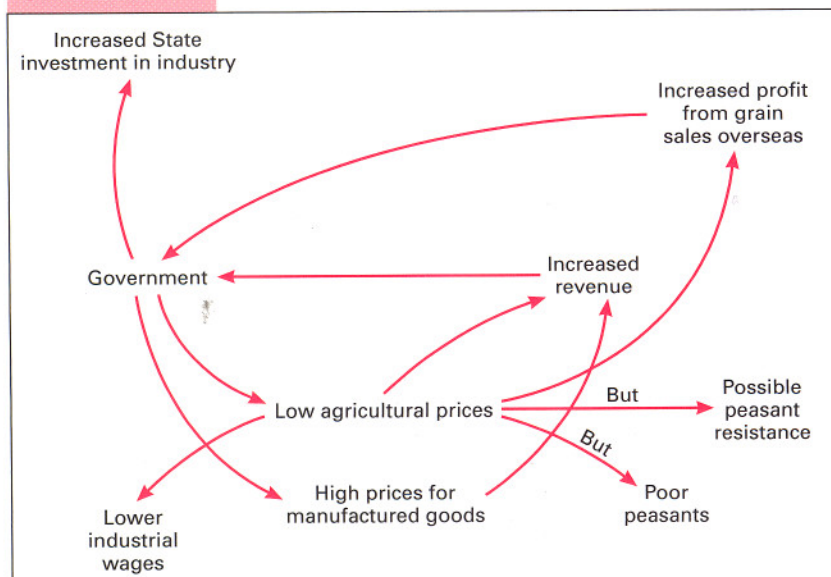
Quotation

Lenin in 1921 said: 'Freedom of trade...leads to white-guardism, to the victory of capital, to its full restoration.'

'Left' Communists

These believed that the NEP was an obstacle to socialism. If it had been necessary in 1921, it was now time for a change. They thought the NEP was creating a new bourgeoisie in the countryside, the so-called *kulaks*, and in the towns in the form of Nepmen. The USSR was also becoming an industrialized society far too slowly.

Source 18



Quotation

Trotsky said of NEP: 'We are merely soldiers in a campaign. We are bivouacking [camping] for a day.'

Quotation

Stalin said in 1927: 'What is the way out? The way out is to turn the small and scattered peasant farms into large collectivized farms...to go over to collective cultivation of the land on the basis of a new higher technique.'

◀ Primitive socialist accumulation

Note

Smychka was the alliance Lenin called for between workers and peasants.

'Primitive socialist accumulation' was the policy desired by many on the left. Preobrazhensky, a friend of Trotsky, thought the price of grain paid to the peasants should be reduced and as much grain as possible should be sold abroad to raise the capital to buy machines and machine tools. A national economic plan should be made to achieve rapid industrialization. The peasants would have to bear the burden of this transformation. This would mean turning away from Lenin's *smychka*.

Economic planning

Vesenkha was set up to plan the economy in 1917. In 1926 a new head was appointed, Kuibyshev, who wanted to expand industry more quickly. In 1921 Vesenkha set up Gosplan to collect statistics. Gosplan also produced a plan to industrialize Russia. At the end of the 1920s these two organizations produced ambitious targets for the economy. Historian J.N. Westwood in 1980 described the economic situation as follows:

Note

Vesenkha was The Supreme Council for National Economy. Communists believed that the direction of the economy should be decided by the government.

Source 19

The situation after 1925 was this: the fast rate of economic improvement of the preceding years was in danger of petering out, for it had been obtained by the relatively easy restoration of pre-war productive assets and future increments could be gained only by investing in completely new plant.

Westwood, *Russia since 1917*, 1980

Activity

Divide yourselves up into pairs. One from each pair should take on the role of 'Left', and the other of 'Right' Communists. Write a short speech explaining why you think your approach to industrializing the USSR is the right one. You can then debate this with your class.

When you have finished, note down what were the key differences between 'Left' and 'Right' Communists.

Think about

- ▶ Had Lenin given a firm direction for the party on this important question?
- ▶ Which of the two groups in the party do you think was likely to win the argument? Why?

To find the answer read on...

The battle for dominance 1922–1929

The struggle for power can be divided into three distinct stages.

Stage One. The defeat of Trotsky

Trotsky was popular in the Red Army, but he lacked a power-base in the party. Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin headed the important party organizations. When they co-operated with each other in the so-called Triumvirate, they were able to outvote Trotsky and his few supporters decisively in the Politburo, the Central Committee and the Party Congresses.

Think about

- ▶ What party organizations did Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin control?

Lenin had given Trotsky advice, especially on the Georgian question, on how to attack Stalin, but he declined to do so. Trotsky's most potent weapon was Lenin's *Political Testament*, which had been so critical of Stalin. However, when the *Testament* was discussed by the party in 1924, Zinoviev and Kamenev spoke for Stalin. The Central Committee after Lenin's death decided that the *Testament* should remain secret.

Trotsky made difficulties for himself. In October 1923 he had criticized the Central Committee for their conduct of economic policy and complained of 'the incorrect and unhealthy regime in the party'. He complained that appointment had replaced election within the party, 'a secretarial apparatus from above'. The Party Congress, almost to a man, rejected Trotsky's view. He was also accused of factionalism, since he had persuaded 45 other members of the party to sign his criticisms. It began a concerted attack by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev on Trotsky's record.

At this crucial time Trotsky was continually ill. He failed to attend Lenin's funeral. He said afterwards that Stalin had told him the wrong day! Perhaps this failure illustrates Trotsky's lack of political sensitivity.

The death of Lenin was followed by the 'Literary War'. Stalin in *On the Foundations of Leninism* attacked Trotsky's criticisms of, and disloyalty to, Lenin. The arguments grew very bitter. Trotsky replied in *Lessons of October* with a detailed attack on Zinoviev and Kamenev for their actions in opposing Lenin in 1917. Kamenev, Stalin and Bukharin continued the attacks. Stalin published *Comrade Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution*. Denunciations of Trotsky at many party meetings became routine.

The result of these attacks was that Trotsky was replaced as Commissar for War by his deputy, Frunze, in January 1925. Trotsky made no moves to use his command of the Red Army to protect his position. Perhaps he accepted the fact that Stalin would become dominant in the party. Trotsky is reported to have said to Smirnov in 1924:

Source 20

[Stalin] 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.

Stage Two. The defeat of the Left

Once Trotsky's influence had been eclipsed, Zinoviev and Kamenev grew uneasy about the influence that Stalin increasingly had over the party. They were also unhappy about the conduct of policy to the peasants.

After allowing many concessions to the peasants, the result had been greater difficulty for the government in the purchase of grain, despite a good harvest. Zinoviev called in December 1925 for a change of policy to the peasants and in foreign policy. Kamenev criticized the idea that there should be 'one leader' and again attacked Stalin's authority in the party.

Think about

- ▶ Why do you think the Party Congress rejected Trotsky's criticisms?
- ▶ What does this episode suggest about Trotsky as a politician?

Think about

What does this quote tell us about:

- ▶ the situation in the USSR?
- ▶ Trotsky?

Facts and figures

The Politburo in Dec 1924

Bukharin, Kamenev, Rykov, Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev

The Politburo in Dec 1926

Bukharin, Kuibyshev, Molotov, Rudzutak, Rykov, Stalin, Tomsy, Voroshilov

In 1926, party meetings in Leningrad and Moscow were addressed by critics of Zinoviev and Kamenev. Elections to the city committees put new 'loyal' members in control of these two key cities – and Zinoviev and Kamenev were removed as Secretaries of the local parties.

The size of the Politburo was increased by adding close political allies of Stalin, Voroshilov, Rudzutak, Molotov and Kuibyshev. In 1926 Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev finally joined together in the 'United Opposition'. They attacked the NEP and the lack of free debate in the party. It was too late. The party removed Zinoviev and Kamenev from the Politburo in 1926 and then, with Trotsky, from the party in 1927.

In October 1927 the United Opposition, together with Krupskaya (Lenin's widow) held a demonstration in Moscow's Red Square. There were more police present than followers. It was the last organized effort by the Left.

Stalin and Bukharin now appeared the twin giants of the party. In 1928 Trotsky was exiled to Kazakhstan, and then in January 1929 expelled from the USSR.

Stage Three. The defeat of the Right

Bukharin, Tomsy and Rykov argued that the NEP must continue for many years. The *smychka* must be preserved.

In 1927 there was a crisis of grain supplies – once again after a good harvest. The party, with Stalin's support, passed a number of new measures, including:

- Soldiers were to be sent into the countryside to requisition grain
- All hoarded grain was to be confiscated
- Hoarding grain was made a crime (Article 107).

In 1928 Stalin took a special interest in the Shakhty affair, a trial of so-called saboteurs in Russian mines allegedly acting in league with foreign spies.

Bukharin wrote a withering attack on the new policy to the peasants in *Notes of an Economist* in September 1928. Now it was those on the Right who were denounced as factionalists. They were slowly removed from their positions. In 1929 Bukharin lost his presidency of Comintern, editorship of *Pravda* and his seat on the Politburo. Tomsy was sacked as head of trade unions. In 1930 he and Rykov were removed from the Politburo. Stalin was now the dominant figure in the party and the Soviet Union.

■ Historical debate

This summary of events gives an outline of how many of the prominent figures in the 1920s lost their political positions. Historians do not agree on why this happened. Some see Stalin as a devious, cold and calculating man, without any political convictions, who manoeuvred in the party debates so that he could oust possible rivals. Others see Stalin as the moderate figure in the party, holding it together while others broke away and attacked the party line. For some the real divisions in the Soviet Union were about personalities; for others they were about principle.

To find out more, turn to Chapter 12 'Historians and Stalin.'

Quotation

We have internal enemies. We have external enemies. This, comrades, must not be forgotten for a single moment.

Stalin, 1928