JOSEF STALIN AND THE USSR

One of the most important leaders of the USSR during the 20th century, Josef Stalin established the political and economic structure that remained in place until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This chapter will cover Stalin's rise to power and how he was able to consolidate his control of the USSR both before and after World War II.

Timeline – 1879–1953

1879  Stalin is born on 21 December in the town of Gori in Georgia, Russia.
1894  Stalin enters Tiflis Theological Seminary.
1898  The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) is established.
1899  Stalin is expelled from Tiflis Seminary.
1902  Stalin is involved in illegal political activity; he is arrested and exiled to Siberia.
1903  The RSDLP splits into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.
1905  Revolution breaks out in Russia; Stalin meets Lenin for the first time.
1914  World War I breaks out.
1917  The March Revolution takes place in Russia; Tsar Nicholas II abdicates; Lenin returns to Petrograd in April; Stalin arrives in Petrograd and becomes one of the editors of Pravda. The Bolshevik Revolution takes place in October; Stalin is appointed Commissar for Nationalities.
1918  The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is signed with Germany; civil war breaks out in Russia; Stalin is placed in charge of Red Army forces in Tsaritsyn.
1921  The New Economic Policy is introduced.
1922  The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is founded; Stalin is appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party.
1924  Lenin dies in January; the 'troika' oppose Trotsky; Stalin proposes his theory of 'Socialism in One Country'.
1925  Stalin opposes the Left Opposition.
1926  Stalin opposes the United Opposition.
1927  Stalin proposes the Five Year Plan and collectivization.
1929  Stalin opposes the Right Deviationists; forced collectivization takes place.
1930  Stalin makes his 'Dizzy with Success' speech.
1932-33 Famine in the Soviet Union.
1934  Kirov is murdered.
1936  The show trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev—both are executed; Tomsky commits suicide.
1937  Stalin purges the military; the beginning of the 'Great Terror'.
1938  The show trial of Bukharin and Rykov—both are executed.
1939  The Great Terror draws to a close; the Nazi-Soviet Pact is signed; World War II breaks out in Europe.
1940  Trotsky is assassinated in August.
1941  Operation Barbarossa begins on 22 June.
1943  Turning point of the war, as Germans are defeated at Stalingrad.
1945  Stalin meets with Churchill and Roosevelt in February at Yalta; war ends in Europe in May; post-war meeting at Potsdam with Attlee and Truman; the Red Army occupies much of Central and Eastern Europe; the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August; the war in the Pacific ends in September.
1948  The Berlin Blockade.
1949  The People's Republic of China is established.
1950  The Korean War breaks out in June.
1953  Stalin dies on 5 March.

The USSR

Known in 1918 as the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics (the Soviet Union), the name was changed to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1922. Lenin achieved his aim of allowing each republic to be equal and also to have the right to secede if they chose to do so. In fact, of course, power lay in Moscow and secession was not allowed, certainly not after Stalin took over. In 1936, the number of republics was increased to 11: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.
Section 1: Origins and nature of authoritarian and single-party states – the USSR

Josef Stalin was not primarily responsible for the establishment of a single-party state in Russia. He was a Bolshevik and a member of the political party that carried out the October Revolution, but it was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) who set up the structure of what became known as the USSR. Stalin is, however, associated with the consolidation of the USSR and it was his policies that became the model for all future communist states.

What was Stalin’s background and what was his role in the establishment of a single-party state in Russia?

Stalin before the Bolshevik Revolution

One of the most notorious single-party leaders of the 20th century, Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili (Stalin) was born in 1879 in Gori, Georgia. Although part of the Russian Empire, Georgians had their own language and culture, and for Stalin Russian was a second language that he always spoke with a heavy accent. Rebellious at school, he later attended a theological seminary; this was not an unusual path for intelligent but impoverished young men who wanted an education. Stalin became influenced, however, by Messame Dassy, a revolutionary group that wanted to secure Georgia’s independence from Russia. Through this organization, he met socialists whose ideology was based on Marxism. Stalin was expelled from the seminary in 1899 and in 1901 he joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and became a professional revolutionary.

Messame Dassy

A secret organization that wanted Georgia to gain independence from the Russian Empire. It was also socialist in its politics.

Marxism

Based upon the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism formed the basis of the political ideology of the Communist Party. Central to this ideology is the belief that history shows that whoever owns the means of production of wealth controls all aspects of society. In feudal times, for example, whoever owned the land controlled wealth and power and structured society to benefit themselves. When wealth shifted to those who owned the means of industrial production (the bourgeoisie or middle classes), social and political power also shifted to the middle classes. Marx predicted that the workers (the proletariat), whose labour was exploited by the bourgeoisie, would rise up to seize power and to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. This would lead to the final stage of communism, a time when there would be no private property and resources would be shared.

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP)

This political party was set up in Minsk in 1898 and focused on the role of the workers (proletariat) in the overthrow of the autocratic system in Russia. Almost immediately, the leaders were arrested and sent into exile. Lenin, among others, went abroad.

Unlike leaders such as Lenin, Stalin did not go abroad into exile, but stayed behind in Russia and became involved in organizing strikes among factory workers. Arrested for this in 1902, Stalin was sent into exile in Siberia, although he was able to escape in 1904. He first met Lenin in Finland in 1905 and sided firmly with the Bolsheviks. Stalin was arrested several times by the Tsar’s secret police, before finally, in 1913, being sentenced to exile for
life, Stalin remained in Siberia until 1917, when the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty led to the establishment of the Provisional Government and the subsequent release of all political prisoners.

What role did Stalin play in the 1917 revolution?

Stalin returned to Petrograd (St Petersburg) in 1917 when he became part of the editorial board of Pravda, a post he had previously held in 1913. He was also elected to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.

The Bolsheviks were a minority party in the early months of 1917, but Lenin's leadership and events over the summer gave it a lot of publicity and a reputation for being the only party to oppose consistently Russia's involvement in World War I. Lenin, as the leader of the Bolsheviks, also strongly opposed any collaboration between the Petrograd soviet and the Provisional Government.

'Land, Peace and Bread' and 'All Power to the Soviets' became the catchphrases of the Bolsheviks, but these also signified a departure from the policies adopted before Lenin returned to Petrograd. As one of the editors of Pravda, Stalin was caught up in a struggle within the Bolshevik Party. Lenin criticized editorials that had supported the war and even accused Stalin of being a 'betrayal of socialism'. Stalin was quickly persuaded to change his approach, to abandon support for the Provisional Government and the war and to work towards the revolution. Despite his rather senior position within the party, Stalin did not take a leading role in the October Revolution, as the planning of this was mostly the work of Trotsky and Lenin.

**SOURCE A**

In the days of the upheaval, Stalin was not among its main actors. Even more than usual, he remained in the shadow, a fact that was to cause embarrassment to his official biographers and perhaps justify Trotsky in saying that 'the greater the sweep of events the smaller was Stalin's place in it'... But in spite of their best intentions and indelible zeal, the official Soviet historians have not been able to write Stalin's name or anyone else's into the blanks left by the deletion of Trotsky's.

From Isaac Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, 1966

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The Bolshevik Revolution

The October Revolution of 1917 marked the seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party. The traditional Soviet view of the events of October 1917 was that it was a popular uprising expertly led by Lenin and his supporters. Other interpretations suggest it was a **coup d'état** by a small group of determined revolutionaries with limited popular support. More recently, assisted by access to the Soviet archives, historians have leaned more towards interpreting the revolution as popular unrest combined with dynamic leadership from the Bolsheviks. This party of revolutionaries was able to harness enough support to get itself
into power and to stay there long enough to build the structure of a single-party state, after which popular support was no longer so important. Soon after the October Revolution, the Decree for Land and the Decree for Peace were issued in response to popular demand. Also issued was the Decree on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, while Congress established Sovnarkom to run the country.

**Decree for Land**

Although, according to Marxist doctrine, land would be held communally (or rather, no one would own it but all would share it), peasants had already taken over privately owned land and divided it up. Lenin saw this as a fait accompli and rather than try to rule against it, he made the land seizures legal by decreeing that, in theory, there would be no private ownership of land and that it would be 'held in common' by the people who farmed it. In practice, this meant that land owned by landlords (people who rented out their land to small farmers) and the Church would be taken away without compensation being paid for it. The land would then be divided among the peasants.

**Decree for Peace**

Russia would pull out of the war and begin negotiations for peace with Germany. It was also stated that there would be no more secret diplomacy conducted.

**Decree on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia**

This decree set up the structure for a federal state (in which different regions or republics would have their own independent rights over domestic policy) and it was followed by another decree in January 1918 that said any state wanting to leave (to secede from) the Soviet Union could do so.

While in Finland, where he had been hiding before the October Revolution, Lenin had written an important book, *The State and Revolution*. In this, he outlined his plans for a post-revolutionary Russia and indicated that he did not intend to share power with other parties. For Lenin, only one party knew how to proceed towards communism and it was up to the Bolsheviks to lead the way, to be the 'vanguard of the revolution'.

Lenin knew that elections for the Constituent Assembly had been promised by the Provisional Government and that the people expected these to take place, although he considered the Soviets to be more democratic than a parliament. Elections were held in November 1917, but the Bolsheviks did not gain enough seats to form a majority, and although Lenin allowed the Constituent Assembly to meet once in January 1918, he then closed it down. The Soviet Union did not turn into a single-party state overnight, but liberal parties were banned first and then, gradually, the more leftist parties were excluded from government until by 1921 all opposition was officially banned.

**SOURCE B**

...the closure of the Constituent Assembly, the suppression of other political parties, the elimination of press freedom and the establishment of party control over the soviets all occurred in the early years of Bolshevik rule. These moves effectively limited popular access to the political sphere ... and by 1920 had rendered any notion of unfettered competitive politics impossible.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed with Germany in March 1918 gave the people the peace for which they craved, but the price paid was very high and added to the discontent that was brewing among opponents of the Communist Party. Three years of brutal civil war followed and this led to radical policies being imposed in areas controlled by the Red Army. What now mattered most was that the revolution was secured and the White and Green armies were defeated. Meanwhile, the Tsar and his family were executed at Yekaterinburg in July 1918.

Stalin after the Bolshevik Revolution

In 1917, Stalin, now a well-established member of the Communist Party leadership, was appointed Commissar for Nationalities. Unlike Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, two other leading members of the party, Stalin had supported the decision to take power in October and, unlike Trotsky, had been a long-standing member of the Bolshevik Party.

It was as Commissar for Nationalities, however, that Stalin had his first quarrel with Lenin. Lenin believed that the republics of the former Russian Empire would support a communist revolution and could be trusted to bind themselves willingly to the Soviet Union. Stalin took a more pragmatic view, however, and wanted to ensure that all the republics were tightly bound to the centre and to the Bolshevik Party. In The Soviet Century, Moshe Lewin explains that Lenin wanted a federation of fairly autonomous states but Stalin, influenced by his own experience as a Georgian and also by his experiences during the civil war, was convinced that the republics had to be ruled from a strong centre and with strict discipline.

SOURCE C

In four years of Civil War, we were obliged to display liberalism towards the republics. As a result, we helped to form hard-line 'social-independists' among them, who regard the Central Committee's decisions as simply being Moscow's. If we do not transform them into 'autonomies' immediately, the unity of the soviet republics is lost. We are now busy bothering about how not to offend these nationalities. But if we carry on like this, in a year's time we'll be verging on the break-up of the party.

Stalin quoted in Moshe Lewin, The Soviet Century, 2005
In 1922, the 'Georgian Question' brought this conflict to the surface. Georgia wanted to join the USSR as an independent republic and the Georgian Central Committee of the Communist Party complained they were limited in their autonomy and always overruled by the Transcaucasian Committee. According to Martin McAuley, Lenin had two irreconcilable aims because he wanted the republics to be independent but party organizations within them to be absolutely loyal to Moscow. Lenin suspected that Stalin wanted to restore centralized control that resembled Tsarist imperial ideology, and when the Treaty of the Union finally came into being in January 1924, Georgia did indeed enter as a member of the Transcaucasian Federation.

The Resolution on Party Unity, also known as 'the ban on factions', passed at the 10th Party Congress in 1921, tightened control over the party at all levels from the state down to the local branches. Stalin was to use this increasing control to good effect, as we shall see. In 1922, he was appointed General Secretary of the Party. He was now a member of the Politburo, the Orgburo and the Secretariat, the only leading member of the party to be in all three. This gave him a unique overview of the everyday running of the most powerful institutions in the Soviet Union.

The death of Lenin and Stalin's rise to power

The cast of characters:

- Grigory Zinoviev
- Lev Kamenev
- Leon Trotsky
- Nikolai Bukharin
- Alexei Rykov
- Mikhail Tomsky

Grigory Zinoviev – a Bolshevik since 1903 and a close comrade of Lenin. He was a member of the Politburo, the leader of the Leningrad (Petrograd) city and regional government and appointed the first Chairman of Comintern in 1919. Tried and executed in 1936.
Lev Kamenev — a Bolshevik since 1903 and a close confidant of Lenin. He was a member of the Politburo and chairman of the Moscow Party. Tried and executed in 1936.

Leon Trotsky — Bolshevik only since 1917, but a brilliant orator and strategist. Planned the revolution in October 1917 and led the Red Army to victory in the civil war. Commissar for Foreign Affairs and then appointed Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. On Stalin's orders, Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico in 1940.

Nikolai Bukharin — a Bolshevik since 1906, he was the editor of Pravda. He was in the Politburo and also on the committee of Comintern. Tried and executed in 1938.

Alexei Rykov — a Bolshevik since 1903, Deputy Chairman of Sovnarkom, Chairman of Gosplan. He was a moderate who favoured Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP; see below). Tried and executed in 1938.

Mikhail Tomsky — a trade union leader who joined the Bolsheviks in 1906. A moderate who favoured the NEP, he was elected to the Politburo in 1927. In 1936, he openly criticized Stalin and then committed suicide.

These six staunch communists were to play a very important role in Stalin's rise to power.

What methods did Stalin use to come to power?

Lenin's health had not been good since he suffered an assassination attempt by Fanya Kaplan in August 1918. He never fully recovered and, in his early 50s, he suffered debilitating strokes in 1922 and 1923. Moshe Lewin considers Lenin's ill-health to have been crucial to Stalin's readiness to challenge him and suggests that without it Stalin would not have dared scheme against him too openly. As General Secretary of the Party, 'Stalin was charged by the Central Committee with supervising Lenin's medical treatment' and so was kept closely informed about Lenin's health (see Lewin, The Soviet Century, 2005).

Lenin reversed his most controversial economic policy, War Communism, in 1921 and replaced it with the NEP. War Communism provoked a lot of opposition from the peasants, but also from the soldiers and sailors of the Kronstadt naval base (an important source of support for the Bolsheviks in 1917). The so-called Kronstadt Uprising in March 1921 was harshly suppressed, but it made Lenin realize that he needed to turn back to a more moderate economic policy, the NEP.

The NEP was what Lenin referred to as 'one step back', meaning that War Communism had not only failed to introduce a communist economy into the Soviet Union but had plunged the country into economic chaos. A less radical and more moderate solution had to be found and so a 'step back' into capitalism was taken. The NEP retained state control of what were called the 'commanding heights', meaning heavy industry, transportation and so on, but small businesses could be privately owned. Peasant farmers who had suffered greatly under the grain requisitioning policies of the civil war were now allowed to keep any surplus produce after they had paid taxes in kind (in goods). Later, they were allowed to pay tax in cash and so to keep or sell their goods as they wished.

This proved controversial, but Lenin succeeded in putting the new Soviet state on a more stable economic footing. Yet the switch to the NEP was so controversial that the Resolution on Party Unity was meant to halt further discussion and opposition. Within the Politburo, Trotsky had been vocally opposed to the NEP, believing that it led away from and not towards the development of a socialist state.

By 1923, it was apparent that the NEP suited the peasants, as agricultural production (severely hampered by the war and War Communism) had recovered. Industrial growth
was much slower to recover, however, and there was a disparity between the cost of agricultural goods (cheap) and industrial goods (expensive). As a result, farmers produced less food. Trotsky viewed this as farmers (kulaks) holding the state to ransom, although Bukharin thought it was an economic trend that would resolve itself once industrial production speeded up and more goods led to cheaper prices. This event was referred to as the ‘Scissors Crisis’ because, on a graph, the decline in the cost of food and the increase in the cost of industrial goods intersected to look like an open pair of scissors. It deepened Trotsky’s suspicion that the peasants were turning back to the old ways of producing food for profit.

Lenin’s control of the Politburo weakened as his health deteriorated and he was less able to keep the Soviet Union on the course he had planned for it. In 1923, the leading Bolsheviks were divided over whether or not to support the NEP. Meanwhile, Lenin had lost the power of speech and could not maintain a united Politburo. When Lenin died in January 1924, it was the first time that the new Soviet state had to deal with the death of a leader and there was no ceremonial pattern to follow. There would be a state funeral, but it was also decided that Lenin would not be buried. His body was embalmed and displayed in a mausoleum, to become a place of pilgrimage for the Soviet people. Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, complained that he would not have wanted this, but her objections were brushed aside by Stalin, who set about turning Lenin into a god-like figure and himself into the closest and dearest disciple.

Examiner’s hint
When you read about Stalin’s rise to power, it is tempting to see it all as inevitable. Stalin, the plotter, manages the downfall of Trotsky, his arrogant rival; astutely supports popular policies (NEP), moves almost seamlessly from the Left (against Bukharin) to the Right; accuses enemies of factionalism; fills the Politburo with supporters; and by 1929, is in sole charge of the Soviet Union. Could it all have been so easy? Beware of what is called 20/20 hindsight! Sometimes we look back at events and everything seems to lead to one conclusion: Did Stalin plan it all so successfully? Luck probably played a part, but so did events over which he had no control, such as the War Scare of 1927 and popular unrest over the results of the NEP. To what extent did Stalin rise to power not only because of what he did, but also because of what happened in the Soviet Union? As you read through the following points, consider how Stalin both creates and takes advantage of opportunities to accumulate power.

Method 1: Stalin and Lenin
Stalin had fallen out of favour by 1923, for his boorish behaviour towards Krupskaya had convinced Lenin that the General Secretary of the Party was ‘too rude’. Ill-health, however, meant that Lenin was unable to do more than to express his reservations about Stalin (and others) in his Testament. This was a series of memorandums written by Lenin between 1922 and 1923. They reflected on the personalities in the leadership of the Communist Party and on likely successors. Lenin had realized that Stalin was too powerful and recommended that he be removed from his post as General Secretary. The Testament was to be read at the 12th Party Congress in 1924, but it was decided to spare Stalin’s feelings and to keep it quiet. Also, there was a feeling that the leadership had to appear united after Lenin’s death. (The Testament was mentioned by Nikita Khrushchev in his secret speech in 1956, but remained ‘buried in the archives’ until 1989.)

Lenin already had concerns about Stalin’s Russian chauvinism in his role as Commissar for Nationalities, and was intending to act on these when he suffered a major stroke in March 1923. After this, Lenin was more or less incapable of directing the Politburo and Stalin became alert for opportunities to assert his influence. Much has been written about this period from 1923 to 1924, and it seems that Stalin was aware of how much was at stake and was able to take advantage of the power vacuum far more effectively than any of his rivals. Stalin gave the oration at Lenin’s funeral, but also gave Trotsky the wrong date for the ceremony so that he missed the funeral altogether. Trotsky therefore committed the cardinal
sin of missing Lenin's funeral: he had been sunning himself in Sukhumi instead.

To expand the membership of the Party, Stalin began the 'Lenin Enrolment', which encouraged people to join as a mark of respect for the great leader. This policy also changed the nature of a party that had started as a deliberately small clique of leaders who would guide the masses. Now, the masses were being encouraged to join and to swell its ranks. From these masses would be chosen future members of the Central Committee and from his position as General Secretary, Stalin would oversee it all. Unlike the founding members who had argued with Lenin over interpretations of Marxism, the new membership could find a ready-made explanation of party policy in The Foundations of Leninism written by Stalin and published in 1924.

Method 2: Stalin and the removal of his rivals

**Trotsky**

Stalin and Trotsky had been considered likely successors to Lenin, although as we have seen by 1923 Stalin had fallen out of favour. Trotsky, with his legacy as the strategist of the October Revolution, his brilliant leadership of the Red Army during the civil war, and his considerable oratorical skills was well-placed to succeed Lenin in 1924. He lacked the will for a political fight, however, and was also unsure that, as a Jew, he would have the support necessary to lead the Soviet Union. Also, Trotsky failed to forge strong ties with his fellow members of the Politburo and made enemies by attacking the NEP and by advocating military-style leadership for the economy.

Neither Zinoviev nor Kamenev would support Trotsky in 1924 and both saw him as arrogant and overbearing. Along with Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev formed a *troika* (group of three) that planned to take over the leadership of the party once Trotsky had been removed. Trotsky lost support over his opposition to the NEP and his advocacy of 'permanent revolution', and he resigned as Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs in 1925. He remained in the Politburo, but was no longer considered a potential leader for the party.

**Zinoviev and Kamenev - the Left Opposition or the Left Deviationists**

With Trotsky out of the way, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin came to the fore. In 1925 there was considerable debate over whether or not to continue with the NEP. Did it favour the peasants over the workers? Kamenev and Zinoviev (known as the 'Left Opposition') argued that it did and so should be discontinued. Perhaps it is not surprising that the two leaders whose support lay in the two major cities of Moscow and Leningrad should have sympathized with the workers rather than the peasants. They faced the opposition of Bukharin who, on the contrary, argued that the NEP worked effectively to develop the economy of the USSR and so should be continued. It was at the 14th Party Congress in 1925 that Kamenev attacked not only the NEP, but also Stalin's policy of 'Socialism in One Country'. The Central Committee was being filled with supporters of Stalin, however, and a vote was taken to remove Kamenev from the Politburo. This occurred when the membership of the Politburo increased to nine and Molotov, Kalinin and Voroshilov (all supporters of Stalin) were voted on. The *troika* was disbanded.

The Left Opposition became the United Opposition in 1926 when Kamenev and Zinoviev were joined by Trotsky. They were branded by Stalin as 'factionalists' (see the 10th Party Congress resolution in 1921) and expelled from the Central Committee and the Party. Trotsky was exiled to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan. Kamenev and Zinoviev, knowing when they were beaten, repented and were allowed back into the Party.

**Permanent revolution**

Trotsky (and Lenin) had believed that the Russian Revolution would soon be followed by revolutions elsewhere. This would be good for Russia, as support would then be given by the more industrialized countries (e.g. Germany) to help modernize the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, within the Soviet Union harsh methods would have to be used to push it towards communism. Military discipline would be required to organize workers, and peasants would be forced to accept collectivization.

**Socialism in One Country**

By 1924, Stalin pointed out that the communist revolution had not succeeded elsewhere (by the end of the 1920s, Mongolia was the only other communist country) and it was unlikely to succeed in Germany or France, for instance, in the near future. The Soviet Union, therefore, had to depend upon its own resources and to focus on building socialism at home, an idea known as 'Socialism in One Country'. The methods Stalin would use to achieve this, however, were rather similar to the methods Trotsky proposed to achieve 'permanent revolution'.
The War Scare
This was the name given to a period of tension following alleged interference by the USSR in the British General Strike of 1926 and the general election of 1927. The War Scare reflected a fear that the Soviet Union was surrounded by enemies. There were many apparent threats. Britain broke off diplomatic relations in 1927 after a police raid on the Soviet trade delegation in London. Jiang Jieshi (the leader of the Guomindang in China) had turned against his communist allies and was killing them in what was known as the White Terror. Volodya, the Soviet envoy to Warsaw, was assassinated. It was highly unlikely that war would have been launched against the Soviet Union, but this was less important for Stalin than the fear created by the prospect of war.

Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky – the Right Opposition or the Right Deviationists
Stalin demonstrated a change of heart in 1927 when he began to criticize the NEP and to advocate a harsher policy towards the peasants. The War Scare had led to another spell of hoarding by the peasants and a subsequent rise in food prices. Stalin was not prepared to tolerate this and spoke of the need to industrialize and to bring agriculture under the control of the state. This belief was directly contrary to Bukharin’s idea that the NEP worked effectively by giving peasants the incentive to produce more. By 1928, Stalin had started a policy of grain requisitioning. The days of the NEP were numbered. Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky were voted off the Politburo in 1929.

By 1929, Stalin had established his position as the most powerful member of the Politburo. He had undermined the authority of the Bolsheviks who had risen to power alongside him after the October Revolution. New members of the Politburo and close comrades of Stalin included Voroshilov, Mikoyan and Molotov. These three personalities were to remain alive (quite an achievement) and close to Stalin for the rest of his life.

SOURCE D
Stalin was the most violent of leading Bolsheviks. His terror campaigns in the civil war were gruesome. He adopted a military style tunic and knee-length black boots, and his soup-strainer moustache indicated a pugnacious man. At tactics and conspiracy he was masterful. He had reached dominance in the party before Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin knew what had happened. There was no keeping a bad man down in the politics of the USSR.

From Robert Service, Comrades, 2007
EXAMINER'S HINT
When you consider how single-party leaders rise to power, there are several factors to bear in mind, including:
What conditions exist that allow leaders to centralize power? (In other words, are there opportunities that can be taken to enable leaders to seize power?)
What kind of methods do they use to get their hands on power?

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

ACTIVITY
Look at the list below and write a few lines on each of these headings to make sure you understand what each of them means. Sort the list into two columns, one under the heading 'Conditions' and the other under the heading 'Methods'.
- Lenin's early death
- Lenin's Testament is kept secret
- Disagreements over the NEP
- The Lenin Enrolment
- The Foundations of Leninism
- Lenin doesn't seem to have a clear successor
- Trotsky seems easily outwitted by Stalin
- Permanent Revolution vs Socialism in One State
- Changing membership of the Politburo
- The War Scare of 1927
- The Scissors Crisis

You may find it rather difficult to decide where to place some of these bullet points. How, for instance, do you choose where to put the War Scare of 1927? Was this a 'method' thought up and used by Stalin or a 'condition' that he used to his advantage?

QUESTION
For what reasons and by what methods was Stalin able to rise to power as the leader of the Soviet Union by 1929?

ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS
As we saw in previous chapters, the introduction to your essay is important. You need to show that you understand what the question is asking and to indicate how you will answer it. It is a good idea to refer to the question in your introduction.

Here are some samples of introductions for the essay question above.

Student Answer A – Patrick
Joseph Dzhugashvili (named Stalin), was born in Georgia in 1879, he was the son of a shoemaker and the grandson of aeron. He soon became Marxian and in 1904 he joined the Bolshevik Party. He climbed up the ladder of the party and in 1917 he was the editor of Pravda. He became Commissar for Nationalities and was one of the main artisans of the creation of the USSR. He was also General Secretary of the Party's Central Committee since 1922 (a position considered as boring bureaucratic work by the other Revolutionaries) and a member of the Politburo. Before 1924, he was not a public figure but his internal influence was important.

Examiner's comments
This introduction is rather short and has too much narrative content. It does mention Stalin and gives some context to his emergence as leader, but it makes no mention of the essay question. It is a good idea to refer to the question in your opening paragraph. In this way, you will show the examiner that you are focused and that you will be answering the question. It also reminds you not to be too narrative in your approach.
**Student Answer B – Clara**

Lenin was for sure the strong commander of Russia till 1922, when he suffered his first stroke. After that, his leadership began to weaken, until his death on the 21st of January 1924. Before he died, though, it was clear to him that there would almost certainly be a struggle for power after he was gone. For this reason he wrote his Testament, in which he gave short portraits of his most probable successors, and their faults. He recognized five possible candidates: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Josef Stalin. Of these, it was Stalin who climbed to the top and became the main leader by 1929. Lenin had warned that although Stalin had great practical abilities, these were offset by his roughness and lack of consideration for his colleagues. Stalin, Lenin said, was “too rude” and should be removed from his post as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Not only did Stalin manage to keep this quiet, he also managed to outmanoeuvre the other likely candidates for leader. How far, however, was his rise to the top a result of external reasons that Stalin was able to exploit, or of Stalin’s own political skills? This essay will examine both the reasons for and the methods by which Stalin came to power.

**Examiner’s comments**

Clara’s Introduction is quite a lot better than Patrick’s. She begins with a reference to Lenin and gives some relevant background before moving on to mention the essay question. This introduction makes a good impression by indicating that Clara will select relevant material and focus on Stalin’s rise to power. Furthermore, she will address both ‘reasons for’ and ‘methods’ and so answer both parts of the question.

**How you end your essay is also important! A good conclusion should sum up your arguments and, again, focus on answering the question.**

**Student Answer C – Joanna**

Stalin’s rise to power is mainly due to his political skills, his pragmatism, his populism, and his patience. Those skills were based on a strong propaganda, especially on the ‘Cult of Lenin’. Propaganda was the new educated base of the party to Stalin’s cause, marginalizing his opponents. Stalin also benefited from the many errors of his opponent, particularly about Lenin’s Testament. Stalin’s rise to power left him in a position of entire control. He would soon become a strong totalitarian leader.

**Examiner’s comments**

This is a rather short conclusion, but it does summarize the main points. It also refers to the question. It would be a good idea to say a little more about Lenin’s Testament, however, as it needs to be made clear here why it was so important (was it more important than the use of factions, for instance?). Also, mentioning ‘totalitarian’ in the last sentence introduces an entirely new concept, perhaps not such a good idea.

**Student Answer D – Chris**

There is great deal of controversy regarding how Stalin rose to power as many factors have influenced events. On the one hand, as has already been mentioned, in many ways, Stalin was lucky, benefiting from factors such as the premature death of Lenin and his rivals’ weaknesses. In addition to this, Stalin benefited from circumstances such as the economic situation in the Soviet Union as well as the failure of revolution abroad. However, Stalin’s triumph was not due just to good fortune and accidental circumstances. Indeed, it is not to be forgotten that Stalin’s emergence as the single leader of the Soviet Union would not have been possible without his own ruthless political ability and his skill to take advantage of all the previously mentioned circumstances. As Bukharin once said, Stalin was a man of unprincipled intriguer who changed his theories at will in order to get rid of whomever he wished.
Examiner's comments

This is a much better conclusion. It mentions both methods and conditions and adds another factor, which is Stalin's political skill. It also ends nicely with an appropriate quotation.

Other aspects of Stalin's rise to power

Were his methods legal or illegal?

In some cases, single-party leaders use a combination of legal and illegal methods to come to power. For Stalin, what he did was entirely legal. He was an elected member of the Politburo, he was appointed to be General Secretary of the Communist Party and to the Orgburo. He had considerable power available to him because he held high office. When he accused his rivals of 'factionalism' he was applying a resolution that Lenin had proposed and that had been accepted by the 10th Congress of the Supreme Soviet in 1921. When his rivals were expelled from the Politburo, they were removed because the majority of the members voted for this. So, you could argue that Stalin's actions were quite legal.

Did he also respond to popular opinion?

Historians consider Stalin's ability to gauge public opinion and 'to give the people what they want' to be one of the important methods he used to establish himself in power. (Of course, clever use of propaganda can also be used to tell people what they want, and Stalin was able to use this very effectively.)

Since 1917, workers had looked for greater participation in the running of factories and an improved standard of living. The civil war had brought more hardship to many, and the NEP was a betrayal of the revolution when it reintroduced the right to own small businesses and to hire labour. The prevalence of 'Nepmen' further angered workers, who saw these entrepreneurs or 'middle men' as exploiters of the working class. Stalin ceased to support the NEP once he had got rid of the Left Deviationists and, in doing so, he would also echo the grievances of the workers. The arguments raged inside the Central Committee (Zinoviev and Trotsky had both been expelled from the Politburo by now) and ended with Trotsky's expulsion to Alma-Ata and Zinoviev and Kamenev asking forgiveness.

Section II:
Stalin in power: Domestic policies and their impact

Stalin's domestic policies

The Five Year Plans: 'The turn to the left'

In 1927, after several years of supporting the NEP, Stalin worked on an alternative economic system. This was the Five Year Plan, a model of economic planning that would eventually be adopted in almost every communist country during the 20th century. (See below p.114 for detailed outlines of each plan.)

A measure of central planning had been put in place by Lenin, and Gosplan was set up in 1921 to control the 'commanding heights' of industry that were to be nationalized under