

4 (a) Write an account of Stalin's rise to power.

Stalin rose to power in the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin in 1924. His rise was not immediate, but through a mixture of political skill, manipulation, and ruthless tactics, Stalin outmanoeuvred his rivals and became the unchallenged leader of the USSR by the late 1920's. His rise was marked by clever alliances, control over key positions, and the elimination of opponents.

Stalin's position in the party was instrumental to his rise to power. By 1922, Stalin held the powerful role of General Secretary of the Communist Party. This position allowed him to control party membership, promote loyal supporters, and build a strong network of allies. While the role seemed unimportant at first, it gave Stalin huge behind-the-scenes influence.

Lenin died in January 1924. Before his death, he wrote a Testament in which he warned that Stalin was too rude and should be removed from his post. However, the Testament was not widely shared, as other party leaders (like Kamenev and Zinoviev) feared it would damage the party's unity, and their own chances of power. The fact that Lenin's wishes were not made known to the Party Congress meant that Stalin was able to stay in place and continue growing his influence.

Another aspect of Stalin's rise to power was him defeating the Left Opposition. Stalin first allied with Zinoviev and Kamenev to oppose Leon Trotsky, who was seen as Lenin's likely successor. Trotsky was a brilliant speaker and had led the Red Army during the Civil War, but he was arrogant and unpopular among some party members. So, Stalin used propaganda to paint Trotsky as disloyal and too focused on worldwide revolution. This led to Trotsky losing support in the party. By 1925, Trotsky had been removed from key positions and later expelled from the party entirely.

After dealing with Trotsky, Stalin turned on his former allies, Zinoviev and Kamenev, forming a new alliance with Bukharin and the Right Wing of the party. He did so by accusing Zinoviev and Kamenev of being too radical and too closely tied to Trotsky. By 1927, both were expelled from the party.

Once his Left opponents were gone, Stalin targeted the Right Wing, including Bukharin, who supported the NEP (New Economic Policy). Stalin changed his policies and began supporting rapid industrialisation and collectivisation, taking the ideas of the Left to weaken the Right. He accused Bukharin of not being revolutionary enough. By 1929, Bukharin and his supporters had been removed, and Stalin stood as the unchallenged leader of the Soviet Union.

During his rise to power, Stalin promoted a cult of personality, presenting himself as Lenin's true heir and a great leader. He used propaganda, controlled the press, and created a loyal base within the Communist Party by rewarding supporters with key positions.

Stalin's rise to power was not based on popularity or a single moment of success. It was a gradual and calculated process. He used his position as General Secretary to build a loyal network, made and broke alliances to defeat rivals, and changed policies when it suited him. By 1929, Stalin had eliminated all opposition and became the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union.