Stalins Rise To Power Essay, Research Paper

Rise to Power

Stalin first became interested in politics when as a theology student; he began reading illegal the works of political philosopher Karl Marx. He eventually gave up his religious education to devote his time to the revolutionary movement against the Russian monarchy. After becoming involved in the movement, Stalin joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party.

When the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party split into the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions, Stalin was drawn to the more militant Bolsheviks, who were led by Vladimir Lenin. Upon the Bolsheviks upheaval of the monarchy, Stalin became an active member of the new government and held many different influential positions. He was eventually elected a member of the Communist Party s highest decision making body, the Politurbo, and the Central Committee s Orgburo (Organizational Bureau). The Orgburo supervised the work of local party committees. It was the next body in the Communist Party hierarchy after the Politurbo. In 1922, after Lenin suffered a stroke, Stalin was elected general secretary of the Communist Party, a position that gave him control over appointments and established a base for his political power.

Opposition and Rivals

Stalin s aggressive behavior brought him into conflict with Lenin, who shortly before his death wrote a testament in which he voiced misgivings about Stalin. Basically the testament expressed Lenin s doubt that Stalin would use his authority with sufficient caution. In the testament , he called for Stalin s removal from the post of general secretary.

Through political maneuvering, Stalin was able to discount and suppress Lenin s testament, as well as join with Kamenev and Zinoviev to gain control of the party. Stalin s main reason for the collaborating with Kamenev and Zinoviev was to form a strong opposition against Trotsky, who was Stalin s long time rival and a candidate to succeed Lenin as head of the Bolshevik party. Trotsky was a strong supporter of Marxism and the theory of world revolution. Trotsky also objected strongly to Stalin’s theory of “socialism in one country,” which claimed that the success of Russia’s revolution did not depend on the revolution spreading to the rest of the world. It was this difference of opinion, along with Stalin s shrewdness and thirst for authoritarian power that ended Trotsky s ascension in Communist Party. In 1925, Stalin again used his shrewd political maneuvering ability to join with Bukharin and Rykov in a new coalition against his former partners Zinoviev and Kamenev. They in turn joined with Trotsky. Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev formed what was known as the Left Opposition in order to block Stalin s control of the party. Zinoviev, probably the only man who was willing to fight Stalin using his own methods of undermining the bureaucracy, unfortunately aligned with Trotsky too late. This was Zinoviev s biggest mistake. If they would have combined forces much sooner, they would have had a better chance in taking away Stalin s power, however, personal issues got in the way. Zinoviev disliked Trotsky for replacing him as Lenin s right hand man. Once Stalin had succeeded in defeating these opponents, he then turned against his former allies Bukharin and Rykov.

Policy Initiatives

In the late 1920s Stalin decided the New Economic Policy (NEP), which Lenin had introduced to stimulate postwar economic recovery by encouraging limited private enterprise, no longer worked. The rate of economic growth was declining and peasants were not producing enough grain to satisfy demand. Instead of giving the peasants economic incentives to raise production, Stalin chose to implement a policy called Collectivization that forced them into state-owned collective farms. At the same time, he pressed forward with a program of rapid industrialization, which began with the first Five-Year Plan in 1928. Stalin believed the Soviet Union had to industrialize rapidly in order to strengthen the Communist regime and enable the country to defend itself against foreign enemies. The plan, which was financed by exploiting resources in the countryside, resulted in the near collapse of Soviet agriculture and the deaths of millions of peasants from famine. In the end, industrialization was achieved, but at great cost.