Stalin Essay, Research Paper

Stalin’s rise to power was a combination of his ability to manipulate situations and the failure of others to prevent him from taking power, especially Leon Trotsky. Trotsky did not take advantage of several opportunities which would have helped him to crush Stalin politically. When he failed to take advantage of these opportunities, Stalin maneuvered himself into a stronger position within the party by allying with Zinoviev and Kamnev. He manipulated them into crushing Trotsky, thus eliminating the strongest opponent in his path to power. Stalin deftly avoided potential political ruin when Lenin formulated his Testament in December 1922. Lenin’s Testament described what he thought of the future of the Party and Party leaders, especially Trotsky and Stalin. Lenin warned of a potential split in which Stalin and Trotsky would be the chief factors. When describing Stalin, Lenin felt that he had concentrated ” unlimited authority in his hands and whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution.” (Clark 472). The content of Lenin’s Testament eventually became more detrimental to Trotsky than Stalin. Coupled with the Lenin incidentally undermining Trotsky, Stalin manipulated the content of the Testament to enhance his stature. By mentioning Stalin as one of the prominent members of the Party, Lenin raised Stalin’s stature to that of Trotsky. The equivalent stature of Stalin and Trotsky made Trotsky seem to be less important in relation to Lenin and thus to the Party apparatus. Further damaging Trotsky, Lenin described him as possessing ” excessive self-confidence and overly attracted by the purely administrative aspects of affairs ” (Clark 472) The latter characterization of Trotsky was one that Stalin employed against him throughout their struggle for power. Lenin then added a postscript to the Testament on January 4, 1923, characterizing Stalin as a poor choice for Secretary General by stating, ” Stalin is too rude and this defect becomes intolerable in a Secretary General.” (Clark 474). Lenin continued on to state that ” the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man ” (Clark 474). Lenin felt that if the removal of Stalin was not acted upon, the conflict between Trotsky and Stalin would escalate, which would in turn endanger the party as a whole. Combined with the Testament, the Postscript could have served as a tool for Trotsky to obtain power, instead Stalin squashed it in the Central Committee. Another possible advantage left unused by Trotsky was Lenin’s disagreement with Stalin on how to handle the Georgian Affair. During the war with Poland, the Soviet republic signed a treaty with the Menshevik government of Georgia, ” which solemnly undertook to respect Georgian independence.” (Segal 240). Lenin wanted to maintain that Georgia remained a ” sovereign and independent unit which would have joined the Russian federative state.” (Clark 477). As Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin ordered the suppression of the Menshevik party in Georgia. In order to achieve his goal, Stalin was preparing a constitution which was ” to be much more centralistic and would curtail and abrogate the rights of the non-Russian nationalities ” Also in this new constitution, Stalin was going to change ” Soviet Federation of republics into the Soviet Union.” (Pro 51) Through a series of notes, after the postscript, Lenin, with a guilty conscience, admitted that he had not sufficiently stopped the new oppression of the weak by the strong and viewed the centralistic nature of Stalin’s scheme as being “borrowed from Tsardom and only just covered with a Soviet veneer ” (Pro 71). He proceeded to dictate notes on the Georgian Affair, which were scathing criticisms of Stalin’s conduct. He described Stalin as a “truly Russian man, the Great Russian chauvinist, who is essentially an oppressor ” (Pro 71). Lenin communicated to Trotsky that he desired him ” take upon yourself the defense of the Georgian affair at the Central Committee ” (Clark 479) and attached a copy of his notes on the subject. Warning Trotsky not to show weakness or uncertainty and not to accept any compromises that Stalin might offer. He stressed the need to avoid warning Stalin and his associates of the offensive. Stalin’s antagonism towards Trotsky was apparent. He criticized Stalin’s performance as Commissar of Rabkrin by stating that ” it was useless to look to Rabkrin for guidance if the need arises for any change of policy or for any serious reform in organization ” (Pro 47). Zinoviev, the most popular member of the Politbureau, acted as Lenin’s ” loud and stormy mouthpiece whos knowledge about the world was unrefined and unpolished consequently leaving him devoured by ambition to rise higher in the party ” (Pro 79). Kamenev, though less popular, was more respected by inner party leaders. Armed with a more cultivated intellect and a steadier character Kamenev was attracted by moderate ideas and policies which set him up as Zinoviev’s idealistic balance. Their traits complemented each other and thus they compromised and worked together well. The combination of these three leaders produced a majority against Trotsky in the Politbureau. Instead of executing Lenin’s intentions, he proceeded to accept an undesirable compromise. Lenin intended on expelling Stalin from the party for at least two years. Trotsky stated that he ” was against removing Stalin but he agreed with Lenin in substance ” (Pro90). He wanted Stalin to apologize to Krupskaya, behave more loyally to his colleagues, and most importantly stop pushing the Georgians around. Stalin accepted these terms with great enthusiasm. Eager to rectify his behavior, Stalin prepared a written statement to the general congress that denounced the Great Russian Chauvinism that was being exacted upon the Georgians. The most serious of Lenin’s strokes occurred after this. The final stroke was debilitated him, by paralyzing him, rendering him speechless, and causing him to suffer from sporadic spells of unconsciousness. The generous terms of Trotsky’s compromise and Lenin’s last stroke had multiple effects upon his ability to obtain party leadership and affected how Stalin pursued his leadership goals. Stalin’s triumvirate successfully kept Lenin’s Testament and Postscript inside of the Central Committee. Kamenev objected by stating that it should not be published “because it was not a speech given at the Politbureau.” (Vol 243) Zinoviev thought that the document should only be distributed to the Central Committee. Stalin suggested that there was no reason to publish the document because Lenin did not leave any instructions to. Tomsky, Solts and Slavatinskaya, all agreed with Zinoviev. The opposition to publication was apparent and the triumvirate succeeded in suppressing Lenin’s documents. Further action against Trotsky was being undertaken by the triumvirate. By using his position as the General Secretary of the Party, Stalin began to install supporters of the ring in place of Trotsky supporters. Party organizers were employed on the criteria that they were against Trotsky. Political biographies were being reviewed and references to Trotsky were being reduced thus slowly eliminating him from important moments in history. The death of Lenin in January of 1924 allowed the triumvirate to begin to openly attack Trotsky. They labeled Trotsky a factionalist. He wrote two letter that gave Stalin and his allies enough ammunition to render Trotsky politically powerless. In the first letter Trotsky blamed the Scissors Crisis on ” serious errors of economic and political management by the leadership… which was an effect of the extreme worsening of internal Party conditions was due to the process of bureaucratization that had overwhelmed the Party ” The next letter, named the Trotskyist Manifesto,’ stated that, ” the Party hierarchy, increasingly selects the memberships of conferences and congress changing them into mere extensions of the hierarchy and the factionalism must be stopped by those who instituted it and a more comradely unit must be installed in order to achieve internal Party democracy.” (Vol 248). This letter opened up the opportunity to accuse Trotsky of reverting back to Menshevism. The Thirteenth Party Congress proceeded to condemn Trotsky and his supporters’ opinions as ” a Menshevik revision of Bolshevism.” (Vol249) Labeling Trotsky as a factionalist enabled Stalin to finally start to point out how Trotsky was in disagreement with Lenin and thus was an enemy to the Party. Stalin took this power and developed himself into the interpreter of Leninism. Stalin worked on eroding Trotsky’s reputation that was built upon the October revolution and the civil war. He characterized Trotsky’s roles in the affairs to be over inflated. Eventually, after constant political attack, Trotsky was informed that under article 58 of the criminal code, ” i.e. the charge of counter-revolutionary activity “(Pro 391) he would be deported to Alma Ata in Turkestan. Expulsion was the last step in Trotsky’s failure to achieve power. He was taken to Constantinople from where he eventually emigrated to Mexico. Stalin’s ability to take advantage of Trotsky’s errors allowed him to move on to crush the less significant former allies Kamenev and Zinoviev. After eliminating his political opponents Stalin would not be opposed by anyone until his death.