

Soviet political system - the practice

The main difference with this system in practice was that actual power lay in the control of the final leadership level, the Politburo. Instead of leaders being *elected* from below, they were *selected* from above. This had a dramatic impact on Party politics. To be promoted, instead of being popular amongst your peers, prospective leaders had to gain the favour of a current leader above them who could ensure that they were appointed. While power was officially shared between the government and the Politburo, it became increasingly apparent that it was the Politburo that held the real authority.

Implications of this political system

Stalin's political structure and system had three significant implications. The first implication of this system in reality was that a complicated network of favours and voting loyalty developed. This heavily bureaucratic system was manipulated successfully by Stalin to gain sole control of the nation after Lenin's death. The second implication was that the Soviet Government was therefore controlled by the Communist Party. While the Communist Party was NOT the official government, it made all the important decisions which were legitimated and implemented by the government system. The third implication was perhaps the most damaging. Whereas Lenin had taken power in 1917 to form the dictatorship of the proletariat, he left Russia with a complex system of privilege and elitism within the Communist Party. Western historians like Orlando Figes argue that the elite Communists fought to preserve their privileges in the same way as had the gentry in the Tsar's regime. For example, once leader, Stalin had an unlimited bank account and historian Medvedev argues that his personal expenditure was equal to that of Tsar Nicholas II. He had a fleet of foreign cars including Rolls Royces and Cadillacs.

