Upon becoming General secretary in 1922, Stalin controlled the more important appointments to the party apparatus. The apparatchiki in turn controlled the nomenklatura, a category of people who held key administrative positions in areas such as government, industry, agriculture and education, and whose positions were granted only with the approval of the communist party in the region. This meant Stalin could command vast patronage over all the important positions throughout soviet society, giving him an elaborate bureaucracy of loyal servants. Upon Lenin’s death in 1924 the power base Lenin had set up in party machinery would help him overthrow the other contenders to soviet leadership.

In ‘revolution betrayed’ 1936, Trotsky wrote that Stalin’s power in the 1930s rested on a ‘vast administrative pyramid’ of five or six million party officials.

I ideological factors also played a role in Stalin’s ascendancy. From 1921 the Bolsheviks had been split over economic policy, and how best to reach the economic structures presented by Marx. Lenin’s ‘New Economic Policy’ had been controversial in that it conflicted with strict Marxist teaching. Whether Lenin had only implemented it as a precursor to full socialism, when the switch to full socialism should be made and whether to attempt full socialism immediately was at the heart of debates in the 20s. The left, represented by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev advocated the removal of the NEP immediately. The right, represented by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky supported its continuance. Stalin supported the left in 1925, but switched over to the right between 1925 and 28, after which he returned to the left. This would present Stalin as an opportunist, though this is countered by the environment of high food prices and bread shortages in 1928 and 1929 rather than him lacking in ideological principles.

Another ideological issue was whether to pursue revolutions abroad. Despite the early expectations that the revolution in Russia would trigger others, the Soviet Union remained the only communist state in the 1920s. Nevertheless, Trotsky still held to the line that there should be ‘continuous revolution’ until a truly socialist society was created. Stalin on the other hand had by 1924 adopted the more pragmatic view that there could be ‘socialism in one country’ and that efforts should be concentrated on creating a ‘workers’ paradise’ in the Soviet Union as an example to the rest of the world. This appealed to those who favoured stability and feared the continuous revolutionary turmoil that Trotsky appeared to be advocating.

A further ideological issue was one concerning leadership. Many believed that whilst strong central leadership had been required to win the civil war, it should not be continued afterwards. Marx had not envisaged a single leader as necessary in a socialist state and instead some supported collective control, through a committee of equals. This view was mainly advanced by those who feared the dominance of Trotsky and, in this way, the argument worked to Stalin’s advantage as his own ambition was gravely underestimated throughout most of the 20s.

Stalin also benefitted hugely from some of the changes made under Lenin. The change from elections to appointments within the party hierarchy, the ban on factions and the growth
Increase heavy industry production by 300%  
Develop heavy industry. (Coal, Iron, Steel, Oil and Machinery)  
Boost electricity production by 600%  
Double the output from light industry such as chemicals production.

Such was its success that Stalin proclaimed the objectives were met in 4 years rather than 5. In reality, none of the major objectives were actually met; although major investment did bring impressive growth. **Electricity output trebled, Coal and Iron output doubled, and Steel production rose by a third.** New railways, engineering plants, hydro-electric power schemes were constructed and huge industrial complexes like Magnitogorsk sprung up.

The effect on light industry, however, was weak. The targets for the chemical industry were not met and house-building, food processing and other consumer industries were woefully neglected. **There were too few skilled workers and too little effective coordination for efficient development.** Since targets were being set centrally, they had little knowledge of the capabilities for the regions and industries being taken into account; targets were therefore the result of uninformed decisions.

Stalin said to those who objected to the rapid pace of five year plans; **“This is dictated by our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR... To slacken the pace would be to lag behind and those who lag behind are beaten.”**

It is equally important to note that the success of the first five-year plan came at a time when the rest of the industrialised world was suffering the effects of a deep economic recession.

**The Second Five Year Plan, 1933-37**

Planners had more realistic expectations when they set the quotas for the second plan. With lower production figures demanded the plan was able to proceed more smoothly and build on the achievements of the first.

The aims of the second five-year plan were to;
- Continue the development of heavy industry
- Put new emphasis on the light industries, chemicals, electrical and consumer goods
- Develop communications to provide links between cities and areas of industry
- Boost engineering and tool making

The plan had some success, particularly in the ‘three good years’ of 1934-36. The Moscow Metro was opened in 1935, The Volga Canal in 1937 and the Dnieprostroy Dam was extended to make it the largest dam in Europe.

Electricity production and the chemical industries grew rapidly and new metals such as copper, zinc and tin were mined for the first time. **Steel output trebled, Coal production doubled and by 1927 the Soviet Union was virtually self-sufficient in metal goods and machine tools.** Nevertheless, oil production failed to meet its targets and there was still no appreciable increase in consumer goods. **Furthermore, the emphasis on quantity rather than quality, which had also marred the first 5-year plan continued.**