

Russia and the Soviet Union: 1917-1941 A National Study

Ken Webb





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Russia and the Soviet Union: 1917-1941 A National Study

Ken Webb



Russia and the Soviet Union: 1917–1941

A National Study

1st Edition

Ken Webb

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Russia and the Soviet Union 1917–1941

Russia and the Soviet Union 1917–1941 has been developed especially for senior secondary students of Modern History in New South Wales. The book is based on the understanding that History is an interpretative study of the past by which you also come to better appreciate the making of the modern world.

Developing understandings of the past and present in senior History extends on the skills you learnt in earlier years. As senior students you will use historical skills, including research, evaluation, synthesis, analysis and communication, and historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability, to understand and interpret societies from the past.



INTRODUCTION

At the start of the century Russia was an autocratic regime, ruled by medieval political and religious thinking. Russia was changing from a backward agrarian economy to an industrial one, though it was decades behind the West. Political absolutism, urban poverty and rural destitution produced a revolutionary outlook. The revolution of 1917 was led by the First World War. It brought an end to the Romanov dynasty and the establishment of the Soviet Union. The Provisional Government could not deal with the economic and political crisis. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, took power in October 1917, which allowed the Bolsheviks to establish the first socialist state in the world.

The Bolsheviks had an aim to create a new society. Within a few years, they were transformed by Lenin, who took control of the party. The Bolsheviks led a revolution in 1917, which was the first socialist revolution in the world.

Lenin's death in 1924 led to a power struggle for power. Within a few years, Trotsky was outmanoeuvred by Stalin, who took control of the party. The Bolsheviks led a revolution in 1917, which was the first socialist revolution in the world.

BOOK INTRODUCTION provides context for the issues that are addressed.

KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS

<p>LAURENTY BERIA (1899–1953)</p> <p>Like Stalin, Beria was Georgian. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, moved to the Cheka and by 1922 was head of the Cheka. He became party boss in the Transcaucasus republic in 1921. Following the fall of the NKVD (secret police) in 1953, Beria was removed for his cruelty and brutality. Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, Beria was himself arrested and shot.</p>	<p>LEV KAMENEV (1882–1919)</p> <p>Kamenev joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, becoming a Politburo member in 1918. With Stalin and Zinoviev, he made up a group of moderates from 1923, but split with Stalin over coalition in 1924. Kamenev was implicated in various conspiracies, but was not executed in 1936.</p>	<p>SERGEI KIROV (1882–1934)</p> <p>Kirov was a Bolshevik who rose through the ranks to become the head of the Leningrad branch of the Communist Party. Some argued that Kirov was a possible alternative to Stalin. He was assassinated in December 1934. Stalin used Kirov's murder as a pretext for launching widespread terror across the country.</p>
<p>NIKOLAI BUKHARIN (1882–1938)</p> <p>Bukharin was a key Bolshevik strategist and popular party member. Closely associated with the party's 'left wing', he was head of the Politburo from 1924 and head of the Comintern from 1926. Excluded from the Politburo in 1929, Bukharin aligned with Stalin on the power struggle. He was executed in 1938.</p>	<p>ALEXANDER KORENSKIY (1879–1936)</p> <p>Korenskiy was a leader and member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Following the February 1917 Revolution to become a key figure in the Provisional Government, he became a minister in July 1917. He was executed in 1936.</p>	<p>ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI (1870–1932)</p> <p>Alexandra Kollontai was the first woman to hold a high position in the Bolshevik government. She was a member of the Politburo and the Central Committee. She was executed in 1932.</p>

KEY FIGURES, KEY TERMS AND KEY DOCUMENTS feature brief biographies, profiles, definitions and summaries of key documents as a ready reference for learning and revision.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Biogenesis
From a Marxist theory to describe those who own the means of production in a capitalist society. These people might be factory and mine owners, traders, bankers or property owners. They do not maintain their property and make a profit.

Collectivisation
A policy introduced by the Bolshevik government in 1929 that was a rapid removal of the Russian economy. The Kolkhoz was a state-run collective farm. Collectivisation brought the countryside under the control of the party.

Collective security
Collective security was embedded in Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Its purpose was to ensure that all nations would defend themselves against aggression.

Meriton
The political and economic ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism argued that history is the story of class struggle whereby a capitalist society eventually develops into a socialist, classless society.

New Economic Policy (NEP)
A policy introduced by the Bolshevik government in 1921 that was a rapid removal of the Russian economy. The NEP was a return to a small-scale capitalism, allowing for some private trade in small-scale private and enterprise.

Operation Barbarossa
Operation Barbarossa was the coded term used by the German military for the Soviet era. All aspects of anti-aircraft and air force were the state.

Soviet
The term broadly means 'socialist'.

Sovietisation (ENKI)
The government of Russia following the October 1917 Revolution. The SNK was the Council of People's Commissars, comprising Bolshevik and some Left Socialist Revolutionary Party members.

Trotskyism
A system of political doctrine with the features of a right-wing party which the party seeks to control aspects of public and private life through the use and application of state interventionism.

Woj Communism
The policy implemented during the civil war.

KEY DOCUMENTS feature summaries of key documents as a ready reference for learning and revision.

SYLLABUS OUTCOMES are listed at the start of the chapter. These provide a focus for you as you read each chapter.

01 The Bolshevik consolidation of power

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will explore how the Bolsheviks secured their power from the October Revolution to the introduction of the New Economic Policy.

Aspects to be covered include:

- the nature of Bolshevik ideology
- October Revolution
- early Bolshevik measures
- the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
- civil war and the Comintern
- the New Economic Policy (NEP)



Who?
Khrushchev's
secret speech to
the 20th Party
Congress in
February 1956

Stalin died in March 1953. For the next few years, a collective leadership took control of the Soviet Union. One of the main arguments had been made for a successor. The most likely candidate was Georgi Malenkov. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev. In the 20th Party Congress in January 1956, Khrushchev took a gamble and delivered his famous 'secret speech' to the delegates. He attacked Stalin's leadership and called for a return to the Soviet Socialist system. Khrushchev's gamble paid off as the party was ready to move into a new post-Stalin era and in 1956 he was able to consolidate his position as the paramount leader of the USSR.

It is worth to mention, Khrushchev was also able to consolidate his position as the paramount leader of the USSR in December 1956.

After the removal of Stalin, Khrushchev was not only a leader of a revolution but also a leader of a revolution. On the evening of December 20, 1956, Khrushchev delivered his famous 'secret speech' to the 20th Party Congress. This speech was a turning point in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the first time that the Soviet leadership had been held accountable for the actions of the late Stalin. Khrushchev's speech was a landmark moment in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the first time that the Soviet leadership had been held accountable for the actions of the late Stalin. Khrushchev's speech was a landmark moment in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the first time that the Soviet leadership had been held accountable for the actions of the late Stalin.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why could it be argued that Khrushchev was taking a big gamble by delivering a speech denouncing Stalin?
- 2 What was the main reason for Khrushchev's speech, according to Khrushchev?
- 3 What is Khrushchev arguing about Nikita?
- 4 Why were the NKVD officers slain in 1952, according to Khrushchev?

SOURCE STUDIES of visual and text primary sources and secondary literature appear frequently throughout the text and are combined with questions and activities to aid your evaluation and interpretation of evidence from the past.

SERGEI KIROV (1886–1934)

Sergei Kirov came to close attention in the Soviet Union to being considered a realistic alternative to Stalin as party leader in 1934 as the result of education and industrialisation were being done. Kirov's popularity and his doubts about the country's economic position, but many in the party to seriously consider Kirov as a realistic challenger to Stalin.

Kirov was born in Irkutsk, a small town west of Moscow. His parents died when he was young, and from the age of seven he was raised in an orphanage. After attending a technical school in the regional center of Krasnoyarsk, he graduated towards politics. He took part in the 1905 revolution, was arrested and sentenced to prison.

During the 1920s Kirov supported Stalin in the struggle for power within the party and, in 1930, was awarded with Lenin's Order of the Patriotic War. In March 1937 following a general amnesty for political prisoners, Kirov found himself in Leningrad. In 1935 he was appointed to the post of First Deputy Mayor of Leningrad. At the 17th Party Congress in 1934 Kirov received a big ovation in Stalin. He called for a new course for the party.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think Lenin was so eager to introduce the New Economic Policy?
- 2 Why was Lenin willing to support peasant Bolshevik ideology?
- 3 What was the purpose of the Cheka?
- 4 Why was Lenin so determined to achieve his goals?

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS are biographical profiles and assessments of key historical figures and frequently include questions and activities.

Purging: 1928–35

In 1928 the pressure on the party to speed up the pace of industrialisation was increased. The targets for the second Five-Year Plan were more realistic, the harvest for that year improved and there were even some minor 'NEP-right' concessions given to some of the peasants in certain regions. Some of those who had been imprisoned were released, and many party members who had recently been expelled were allowed to rejoin the party.

However, this temporary reprieve ended dramatically in December 1934 with the murder of the popular Leningrad party head Sergei Kirov. Stalin used the murder of Kirov as an excuse to launch a massive wave of terror on the country. The Soviet criminal code was expanded to include a whole new range of offences. The death penalty could now be carried out on people as young as 12. It became a crime to be 'parasitic', to be associated with a 'parasite' or to even know a 'parasite'. A parasite could be almost anyone: the secret police decided who a parasite was. In 1935, a wave of terror spread across the country as thousands of people, party members and ordinary citizens were denounced by the secret police as saboteurs, traitors or parasites. The vast majority of the people caught up in the denunciation and terror frenzy were totally innocent of any crime; in many cases old scores were being settled. Though the terror was to affect thousands, it was the purging of the leading party figures that caught the imagination of the nation, and

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think Lenin was so eager to introduce the New Economic Policy?
- 2 Why was Lenin willing to support peasant Bolshevik ideology?
- 3 What was the purpose of the Cheka?
- 4 Why was Lenin so determined to achieve his goals?

INFORMATION BOXES contain extended discussions of key events, concepts and historical developments. Many also include questions and activities.

Robert Service

Robert Service is one of the leading experts today on the history of the Soviet Union. Born in 1947, Service graduated from the University of Cambridge, and since 1998 has been Professor of History at the University of Oxford. Service has written a three-volume biography of Lenin, a biography of Stalin, and a controversial work on Trotsky, which was attacked for being more critical and less sympathetic to Trotsky's propaganda. Though consistently condemning Mensheviks, Service deals with Stalin fairly even-handedly. He never hides the fact that Stalin was cunning and ruthless, but he also sees him as more complex than the two-dimensional villain who is often portrayed.

In the following extract, Service discusses the quality and necessity of Stalin's drive to industrialisation.

The picture of over-filled economic plans painted by the newspapers involved much distortion. And where there was indeed over-fulfillment, as in steel production, its quality was often too poor for use in manufacturing. Wastage occurred on a huge scale and the problem of uncompleted production was ubiquitous. The statistics themselves were fiddled not only by a central party machine willing to fool the world but also by local functionaries wanting to tick the central party machine. Deceit was deeply embedded in the mode of industrial and agricultural management.

It has been asserted that shortly, unrealistic goals were so high a proportion of output

HISTORIAN BOXES introduce key historians and schools of interpretation as a way of making historiography clearer.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES are included throughout the text to consolidate content knowledge and hone examination skills.

- 1 Why do you think Lenin was so eager to introduce the New Economic Policy?
- 2 Why was Lenin willing to support peasant Bolshevik ideology?
- 3 What was the purpose of the Cheka?
- 4 Why was Lenin so determined to achieve his goals?



DIAGRAMS are used to visually summarise complex ideas and events and some chapters include **LOCATION MAPS**.

Chapter summary

- Though Lenin made the decision to seize power, Trotsky was the key organiser of the coup, which was carried out almost bloodlessly.
- By late November the Bolsheviks controlled many Soviets across the country but their hold on power was tenuous at best.
- The new government formed by Lenin was called the Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom.
- The first two acts of the new government were the Peace Decree and the Land Decree. Lenin wanted to end the war with Germany at any price, knowing how the decision to continue the war had destroyed Kerensky. He also needed to ensure peasant support in the anarchic countryside.
- In December 1917, Lenin created the Cheka to deal with counter-revolutionary opposition. It was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky.
- The Cheka (and its White opponents) would be responsible for acts of the most brutal kind of terror.
- Elections were held for the Constituent Assembly shortly after the Bolshevik takeover. Results did not go to the Bolsheviks' way and in January 1918, after only one sitting day, the Assembly was dissolved.
- Lenin forced his colleagues to accept peace with Germany at any price.
- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk demanded Russia of vast areas, resources and peoples. It was very unpopular across the country and stimulated growing opposition to the Bolsheviks.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES conclude each chapter. They include a brief precis of the topic, suggestions for further reading, and a range of learning activities that consolidate knowledge and understanding of the chapter's content. These tasks incorporate a range of historical understandings and skills.

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

- THE BOLSHIEVKS SEIZE POWER**
 - Assess the significance of Lenin and Trotsky in the Bolshevik takeover of power in October 1917.
- THE NEW GOVERNMENT: SOVNARKOM**
 - What was the Sovnarkom?
 - Explain Lenin's first two key decrees.
 - Outline the measures passed by Sovnarkom during its first six months in office.
- THE CHEKA**
 - What was the purpose of the Cheka?
 - Do you think the creation of the Cheka was a betrayal of the ideals of the revolution or an inevitable consequence of the Bolshevik seizure of power? Give reasons for your answer.
- THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY**
 - What were the results of the Constituent Assembly elections?
 - What was the fate of the Constituent Assembly?
- THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK**
 - What were the main measures of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?
 - Why was Lenin's insistence on acceptance of the treaty?
- THE BOLSHIEVKS ENEMIES GATHER**
 - Imagine you are a neutral observer in Russia in mid-1918. You believe that the absence of the Bolsheviks holding on to power was inevitable. Produce a moral report to support this interpretation of the situation.
 - There were many reasons why the Reds won the civil war. Identify what you see as the four most important factors. Justify your choices.
- WAR COMMUNISM**
 - Identify the key elements of War Communism.
 - Why did Lenin believe War Communism was necessary?
 - What impact did War Communism have on the membership of the Bolshevik Party?
 - Was War Communism a success? Give reasons for your answer.
- THE KRONSTADT REVOLT**
 - Why did the Kronstadt sailors revolt?
 - What were the results of the revolt?

TEACHER RESOURCES Please note that complimentary access to NelsonNet is only available to teachers who use *Russia and the Soviet Union 1917–1941* as a core educational resource in their classroom. Contact your Cengage Education Consultant for information about teacher access codes and conditions.

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Ken Webb

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Getty Images/ATP

INTRODUCTION

Russian Communist supporters holding portraits of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin participate in a rally marking the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Moscow on 7 November 2017.

At the turn of the century Russia was an autocratic regime, steeped in medieval political and religious thinking. Russia was changing from a backward agricultural economy into an industrial one, though it was decades behind the West. Political stubbornness, urban poverty and rural destitution produced a revolutionary cocktail. The humiliation of defeat by Japan sparked the revolution in 1905.

The regime survived 1905 but not the First World War. Incompetent and corrupt military and political leadership, and economic collapse forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate after the February 1917 Revolution. After the Provisional Government made the disastrous decision to remain in the war, it could not prevent the coup of October 1917, which allowed the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, to seize power.

The Bolshevik hold on power was tenuous and soon their opponents combined to try to bring down Lenin's government. By early 1921 the Bolsheviks had emerged victorious from three years of civil war, but the country was in chaos and starving. The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) rescued the economy briefly during the 1920s.

Lenin's death in 1924 led to another struggle for power. Within a few years Trotsky was outmanoeuvred by Stalin, who took control of the party bureaucracy, his deft political footwork leading to his domination of the party by the late 1920s.

In 1928 Stalin launched the first Five-Year Plan. Industrialisation proceeded at breakneck speed; farming was brutally collectivised; and millions died of famine in the Ukraine. The achievements were impressive, but the cost in human suffering was enormous. On the eve of the Second World War, the Soviet Union had arrived as the world's number-two industrial power. In order to achieve the nation's goals and to ensure Stalin's absolute power, a totalitarian system developed inside the Soviet Union leading to the spread of terror, public show trials, millions of deaths and tens of millions of people being sent to Gulags. However, recent historians have questioned the extent to which Stalin's Russia was totalitarian.

Soviet foreign policy after 1917 experienced many twists and turns. By the 1930s foreign policy was determined by the needs of internal modernisation and national defence in the face of the Nazi threat.

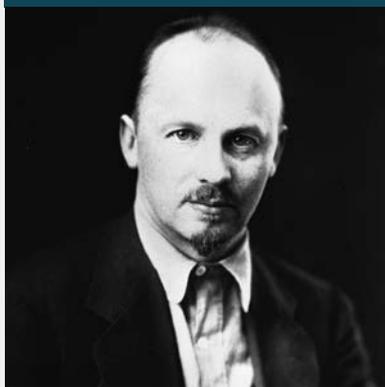
Though considered irreconcilable enemies, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia agreed to a non-aggression pact in August 1939 for their own short-term reasons. Having neutralised the threat of possible Soviet action against him, Adolf Hitler now felt confident enough to attack Poland in September 1939. The two countries remained at peace until the Nazis' invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS

LAVRENTIY BERIA (1899–1953)

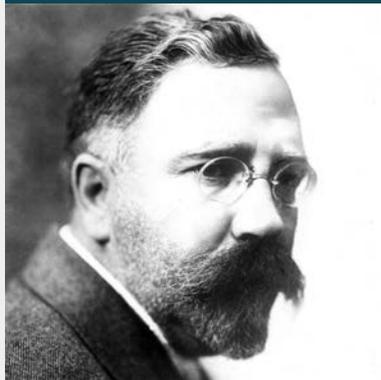
Like Stalin, Beria was Georgian. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, moved into the Cheka and by 1923 was head of the Georgian Cheka. He became party boss of the Transcaucasian republics in 1932. Following the fall of Yezhov, he became head of the NKVD (secret police) in 1938. Beria was renowned for his cruelty and brutality. Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, Beria was himself arrested and shot.

NIKOLAI BUKHARIN (1888–1938)



Bukharin was a key Bolshevik ideologue and popular party member, closely associated with the party's left wing. A member of the Politburo from 1924 and head of the Comintern from 1926, Bukharin aligned with Stalin in the power struggles of the 1920s. Expelled from the Politburo in 1929, Bukharin was executed in 1938 for counter-revolutionary activities.

LEV KAMENEV (1883–1936)

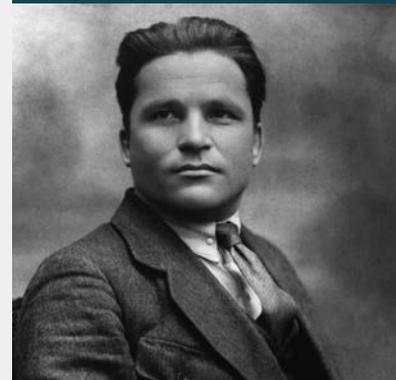


Kamenev joined the Bolshevik Party in 1903 and was active in the attempted revolution of 1905. He returned from exile in Switzerland after the abdication of the tsar in 1917, becoming a Politburo member in 1918. With Stalin and Zinoviev, he ruled as part of a triumvirate from 1923, but split with Stalin over 'socialism in one country'. Kamenev was implicated, without foundation, in Kirov's murder in 1934, and was subsequently found guilty of plotting against Stalin. He was executed in 1936.

ALEXANDER KERENSKY (1881–1970)

Kerensky was a lawyer and member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Following the February 1917 Revolution he became a key figure in the Provisional Government, becoming prime minister in July. Kerensky's government was eventually overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

SERGEI KIROV (1886–1934)



Kirov was a Bolshevik who rose through the ranks to become the head of the Leningrad branch of the Communist Party. Some viewed Kirov as a possible alternative to Stalin. He was assassinated in December 1934. Stalin used Kirov's murder as a pretext for launching widespread terror across the country.

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI (1872–1952)



Alexandra Kollontai was the Commissar for Social Welfare in the Bolshevik government following the October Revolution. She was a firm advocate for women's equality, and established the Zhenotdel, or Women's Department. Her opposition to later party policies led to her being edged out of government and into diplomatic posts.

Clockwise from top centre: Alamy Stock Photo/Granger Historical Picture Archive; Alamy/Pictorial Press Ltd; Alamy/DIZ Muenchen GmbH, Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo; Alamy/RIA Novosti

**GENERAL LAVR KORNILOV
(1870–1918)**

Kornilov was appointed commander-in-chief of Russian forces in August 1917 by Alexander Kerensky. Dissatisfied with Kerensky's conduct of the war, Kornilov attempted a military coup in August/September 1917. He was killed fighting Red forces during the civil war in April 1918.

**LENIN
(1870–1924)**

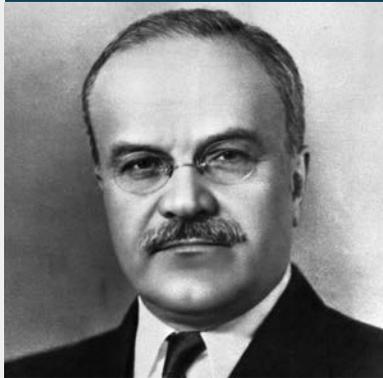


Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, was the leader of the Bolshevik Party formed in 1903. Lenin's goal was revolution and the subsequent creation of a Marxist society and the spread of Marxism worldwide. The Bolsheviks seized power in a coup in October 1917. Lenin ruled Russia until his death in 1924.

**MAXIM LITVINOV
(1876–1951)**

Litvinov was the Soviet Foreign Minister from July 1930 to May 1939. He was a keen supporter of collective security and secured diplomatic relations with the United States in 1933 and the Soviet Union's membership of the League of Nations in 1934. He was replaced as Foreign Minister in May 1939 by Molotov, as Stalin was considering the possibility of a deal with Hitler. Litvinov later served as ambassador in Washington.

**VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV
(1890–1986)**



Molotov was the Soviet Foreign Minister from 1939 to 1949, and again from 1953 to 1956. He worked closely with Stalin and was renowned for his diplomatic skills. Molotov signed the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 1939.

**TSAR NICHOLAS II
(1868–1918)**



Nicholas II ruled Russia from 1894 until his abdication in February 1917. Believing God had placed him on the throne, he sought to maintain autocracy. Though intelligent and eager to fulfil his duty, he proved to be a weak and indecisive leader, easily influenced by his wife, Alexandra, and her advisor, Rasputin.

STALIN
(1878–1953)



Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, better known as Josef Stalin, was the leader of the Soviet Union from the late 1920s until his death in 1953. As General Secretary from 1922, he outmanoeuvred Trotsky in the struggle for power after Lenin's death. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union became the world's number-two superpower. He led his country to victory against Germany during the Second World War.

LEON TROTSKY
(1879–1940)



Lev Davidovich Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky, joined the Bolsheviks in mid-1917 and was the mastermind behind the October Revolution. He led the Red Army to victory in the civil war. However, he was outmanoeuvred by Stalin in the struggle for power after Lenin's death. Forced into exile in 1929, Trotsky was assassinated on Stalin's orders in Mexico in 1940.

KLIMENT VOROSHILOV
(1881–1969)

Voroshilov joined the Bolsheviks in 1903. He commanded Red Army troops during the civil war and rose through the ranks of the military during the 1920s. In 1934 he was appointed Commissar of Defence. Voroshilov's military skills were sometimes questioned but never his courage in battle. He remained totally loyal to Stalin and personally signed many death warrants during the purge of the Red Army.

GENRIKH YAGODA
(1891–1938)

Yagoda joined the Bolsheviks in 1907. After the revolution he joined the Cheka and steadily rose through the ranks of the Secret Police Organisation. He was a close associate of Stalin, a key player in the purges of the 1930s and was probably responsible for Kirov's death. However, he fell out of favour with Stalin, and in 1937 he was dismissed and arrested. In March 1938 he was tried for treachery and executed.

GRIGORY ZINOVIEV
(1883–1936)



Zinoviev joined the Bolshevik Party in 1903 and was elected to the central committee in 1907. In 1917, he returned to Russia and was a key opponent of the Provisional Government. After Lenin's death, Zinoviev formed a triumvirate with Stalin and Kamenev. Alongside Kamenev, he was falsely implicated in the murder of Kirov in 1934, tried for treason and executed in 1936.

THE BOLSHEVIKS

Formed following the split of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903, the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin, believed in a tight-knit, disciplined party dedicated to violent revolution. Following the October Revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks became the dominant force in Russian politics. In 1918 they changed their name to the All-Russian Communist Party.

THE CHEKA

The Cheka was the Bolshevik secret police, formed in December 1917 to protect the revolution from its enemies. Headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka was originally seen as a temporary body. However, it became a permanent institution, eventually evolving into the NKVD in 1934.

Clockwise from top left: Alamy/AF archive; Alamy Stock Photo/Granger Historical Picture Archive; Alamy/David Cole

THE COMINTERN

In 1919 the Bolsheviks created the Comintern (Communist International). The purpose of the Comintern was to promote international communism and assist in the development of revolution in capitalist countries. Gradually the Comintern came to be simply an arm of Soviet foreign policy and communist parties around the world were expected to obey instructions that emanated from Moscow.

THE KULAKS

The kulaks were the more prosperous peasants who had made gains following the reforms of Stolypin before 1914. Stalin targeted the kulaks during the brutal process of collectivisation, claiming they were class enemies and opposed to the revolution. Under Stalin, many poor peasants also came to be targeted as kulaks.

NEPmen

The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) at the 10th Party Congress did much to revive the Russian economy with its toleration of small-scale private enterprise and markets. A new class of Russian appeared at this time – NEPmen. They were wheelers and dealers who managed to manipulate the system to build up wealth for themselves.

THE NKVD

In 1934 the OGPU was reorganised as the NKVD – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. Headed by Genrikh Yagoda, it was answerable directly to Stalin. It would be the NKVD that would carry out much of the purging of party members in the late 1930s. Yagoda himself would later fall victim to the NKVD.

THE OGPU

The Cheka was transformed into the GPU, a department of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the Russian Republic. In November 1923 the GPU became the OGPU under the control of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union. This secret police agency was under the control of Felix Dzerzhinsky until his death in 1926, and then Vyacheslav Menzhinsky.

THE PETROGRAD SOVIET

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was established in Petrograd in February 1917 as the peak body of the various workers' and soldiers' committees (Soviets). Initially the Petrograd Soviet's role was the representation and protection of workers' rights, but the emergence of Dual Power structures greatly enhanced its significance during 1917. Although composed of a range of political groups through 1917, the Petrograd Soviet was eventually dominated by the Bolsheviks.

THE POLITBURO

A truncation of the term 'political bureau', the Politburo was the five-member executive committee of the Communist Party. It was established in 1919, and early members included Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev and Nikolai Krestinsky; later members included Zinoviev.

PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The Provisional Government was the interim government established at the time of the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917. It was considered provisional because it was envisaged as a temporary governing structure following the dissolution of the tsarist state. Initial leadership came from the Kadets but passed to Kerensky, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Members of the Menshevik and Bolshevik parties also participated in the Provisional Government. The division of power between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet greatly weakened its power and authority.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Bourgeoisie

Term used in Marxist theory to describe those who own the means of production in a capitalist society. These people might be factory and mine owners, traders, bankers or property owners. They aim to maintain their property and make a profit.

Collectivisation

As part of the drive towards modernisation, Stalin implemented a policy of collectivisation of agriculture. Private land ownership was brought to an end as peasants were driven into large collective or state farms, to encourage more modern farming and higher yields. Collectivisation brought the countryside under the control of the party.

Collective security

Collective security was embedded in Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Its purpose was to deter potential aggressors with the promise that League members would rally behind any victim of aggression.

Dekulakisation

The kulaks were the richer peasants, sometimes referred to as middle-class peasants. Dekulakisation referred to the systematic destruction of the kulaks by Stalin during the process of collectivisation in the early 1930s.

Gulag

The network of labour camps dotted around the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era. The term refers to the government agency that administered the camps.

Industrialisation

Stalin pursued a policy of industrialisation to modernise the Soviet economy. Industrialisation involved the rapid development of heavy industry such as iron and steel, chemicals, transport, mining and electricity production.

He wanted to catch up to Western economies within a decade.

Marxism

The political and economic ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism argues that history is the story of class struggle whereby a capitalist society eventually develops into a socialist, classless society.

New Economic Policy (NEP)

A policy introduced by the Bolshevik government in 1921 that saw a quick revival of the Russian economy. The NEP saw a return to small-scale capitalism, allowing for some private trade and small-scale private land ownership.

Operation Barbarossa

Operation Barbarossa was the coded term used by the German military for the massive German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Proletariat

Term used in Marxist theory to describe those who are wage earners in a capitalist society. The proletariat normally refers to industrial, urban workers who do not own the means of production, or general labourers who are at the mercy of employers.

The purges

Purging had been a feature of Soviet rule from soon after the October Revolution. However, the term 'the purges' usually refers to the systematic removal from the party of suspected 'Trotskyites, oppositionists and foreign agents' that happened between December 1934, when Kirov was murdered, and 1938.

Socialist Realism

The cultural and artistic movement that was promoted strongly during

the Stalinist era. All aspects of artistic endeavour aim to serve the state.

Soviet

The term literally means 'council'.

Sovnarkom (SNK)

The government of Russia following the October 1917 Revolution. The SNK was the Council of People's Commissars, comprising Bolshevik and some Left Socialist Revolutionary Party members.

Totalitarianism

A system of political dictatorship with the features of a single ruling party led by a charismatic leader, in which the party seeks to control all aspects of public and private life through the use and application of state-sanctioned terror.

War Communism

The policy implemented during the civil war that gave the state total control over the economy, including industry, transport, trade and agriculture. It brought the country to the brink of total economic collapse, but arguably facilitated the Bolsheviks' victory in the civil war.

Whites

The main anti-Bolshevik forces in the Russian Civil War.

Yezhovshchina

Term for the period 1936–38 and derived from the name of Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD. While Yezhov controlled the secret police, the party and larger society were subjected to widespread terror and repression. Yezhov himself became a victim – he was arrested in 1939 and executed in 1940.

Order No. 1

In February 1917 more than 600 soldiers and workers formed the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviet's 'Order No. 1' stated that no military orders given by the Provisional Government were to be accepted unless the Soviet approved them. In addition, Order No. 1 instructed military units to send representatives to attend the Soviet, and stated that officers should no longer be addressed as 'Your Excellency' or 'Your Honour', and that officers were to be prevented from receiving certain types of weapons.

The April Theses

When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917 he released his April Theses. These became the policies pursued by the Bolsheviks throughout 1917. The April Theses demanded an end of support for the Provisional Government, 'all power to the Soviets', confiscation of landed estates and the land to be put under the control of the local Soviets, and an immediate end to Russia's involvement in the war with Germany.

On Party Unity

At the time of the 10th Party Congress, the Bolshevik leadership was facing major opposition from groups within Russian society and within the party. Lenin forced through a resolution called 'On Party Unity', which banned factions and demanded that party members accept decisions made by the party or face expulsion. This ban on factions would be used later by Stalin as he gradually eliminated sources of opposition during his rise to power.

Lenin's last will and testament

Before he died, Lenin dictated his last will and testament. His wife, Krupskaya, released this shortly after his death and it was to cause the party some embarrassment. Lenin commented on each of the leading Bolsheviks, but his most damning criticism was of Stalin. Lenin called for Stalin's removal. Stalin's ability to survive Lenin's will was a significant factor in his eventual rise to undisputed party leader.

The Kirov Decrees

Following the murder of Leningrad Party leader Sergei Kirov in December 1934, Stalin issued a series of decrees in March 1935. The decrees, which became known as the Kirov Decrees, included measures such as reducing the minimum age for the death penalty to 12. Stalin called for collective responsibility and warned people to be on the lookout for enemies of the people. The Kirov Decrees laid the basis for the terror that enveloped the country and the party during the next few years.

The Constitution of 1936

The Soviet Union adopted its first constitution in December 1936. On paper it was an idealistic, democratic document that guaranteed basic human rights such as freedom of religion, voting rights and the right to work. However, Article 126 stated that the Communist Party was to play the leading role in developing the socialist system. The article was to be used to justify the banning of all other political parties.

The Nazi–Soviet Pact

In August 1939 Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. This agreement, between two sworn enemies, has been described as one of the most remarkable diplomatic agreements in history. The pact contained a public section and secret protocols, which became known after the war. In essence it gave Hitler the green light to attack Poland without fear of Soviet action, and it gave Stalin control of eastern Poland and the Baltic states. It also guaranteed that the Soviet Union would not be attacked by Nazi Germany, at least in the short term.

01

The Bolshevik consolidation of power

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine how the Bolsheviks secured their power from the October Revolution to the introduction of the New Economic Policy.

Aspects to be covered include:

- the nature of Bolshevik ideology
- October Revolution
- early Bolshevik measures
- the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
- civil war and War Communism
- the New Economic Policy (NEP)



Modern History
Syllabus

Soviet poster, 'Have you volunteered for the Red Army?', 1920



Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century Russia was considered one of the major powers of Europe. The Russian Empire was vast, covering one-sixth of the world's land surface, and contained a wide range of different national groups, many with their own specific language, culture and religion. Russia was rich in resources and had a population of about 150 million. However, its apparent strength was a facade. Economically it was decades behind the West. Though its own industrial revolution was in progress, Russia's economic power was dwarfed by Germany, and in many parts of the country, Russian agriculture was still using medieval methods of production. Between 1900 and 1905 Tsar Nicholas II's regime experienced defeat in war and near revolutionary overthrow. The regime survived and attempted to modernise in the decade before 1914. However by the time war broke out, Russia was once again facing massive unrest and was arguably on the brink of revolution, only to be rescued by the patriotic upsurge that followed Russia's entry into the war.

Within weeks of the outbreak of war in 1914, Russia's military and economic inferiority to Germany became all too apparent. Russia proved no match for the brutally efficient German war machine. By early 1917 there were widespread desertions and mutinies, and the home front was in a state of collapse. Tsar Nicholas II had lost all political support, and following spontaneous, leaderless protests in February 1917 he was forced to abdicate. From February to October 1917 Russia experienced a system of Dual Power, with authority shared uneasily between the Provisional Government and the Soviet.

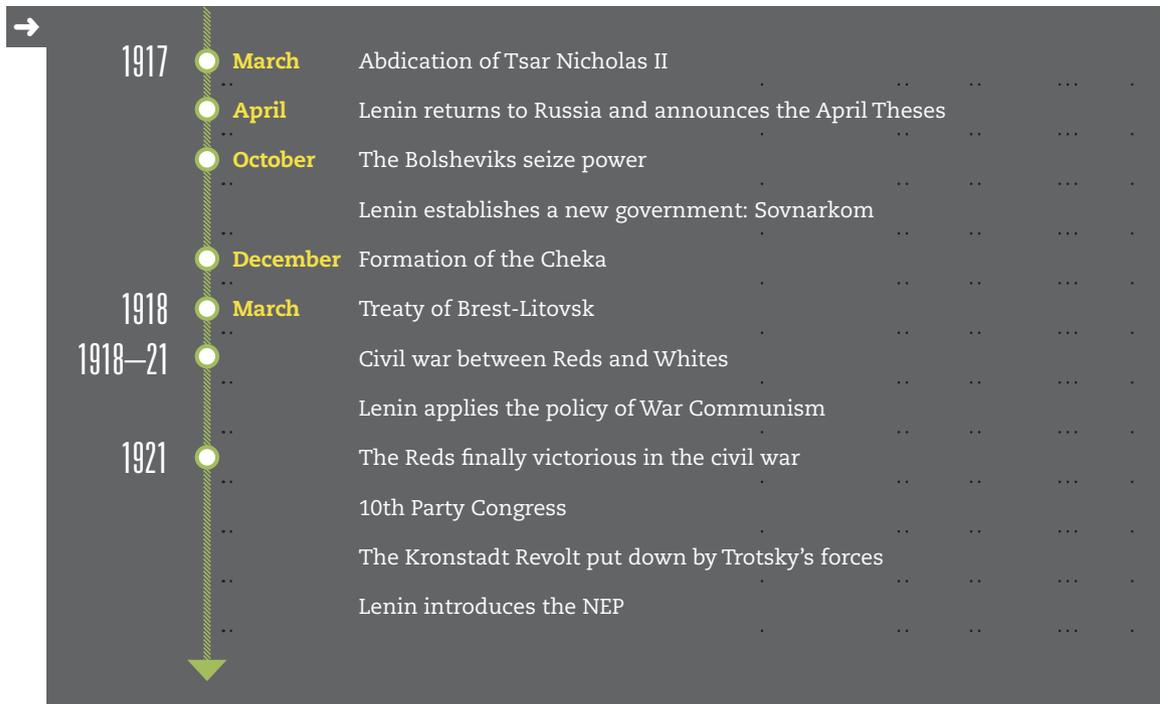
Lenin's return to Russia in April raised the political temperature as the Bolsheviks demanded peace with Germany and land for the peasants. Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party to seize power and remove the Provisional Government. The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was a capital affair, well organised and almost bloodless. Lenin's government, the Sovnarkom, ended Russia's involvement in the First World War with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and introduced a series of populist measures. However, its hold on power was tenuous at best, and soon the Bolsheviks' enemies were lining up, ready to strike them down.

By the summer of 1918, Russia was ablaze with civil war which dragged on into early 1921. The Bolsheviks emerged victorious against all the odds in a conflict that eventually claimed more than 600 000 lives and left as many as half a million people displaced or deported, leaving Russia in a state of utter devastation.

The Bolsheviks' policy of War Communism was resented deeply by the peasants, but it did keep Red forces supplied. In March 1921 the extremes of that policy even led to the traditionally loyal Kronstadt sailors rising in revolt against the regime, a revolt brutally suppressed by Red Army troops led by Trotsky. By the time of the 10th Party Congress in 1921, Lenin and his party had achieved victory but their hold on power was now threatened by the weakness of Russia. To counter this, Lenin ended War Communism and introduced the NEP. The NEP allowed a return to small-scale capitalism. This policy was resented by many in the party, but it had the effect of reviving the economy. Lenin also tightened party discipline, banning factionalism within the party.

Timeline

- 1898 Formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP)
- 1902 Lenin writes 'What is to be done?'
- 1903 RSDLP splits into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks
- 1914 Germany declares war on Russia
- 1916 Lenin writes 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism'



The Julian or the Gregorian calendar

In 1917 Russia was still using the 'Julian calendar' which had been in existence since the time of Julius Caesar. However, by the 16th century there had developed a ten-day gap between the solar calendar and the Julian calendar. To correct this, a new calendar was introduced known as the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII. The old calendar was moved forward 13 days and adjustments were made regarding leap years. Western Europe adopted this calendar but Russia stayed with the Julian calendar. This meant that in 1917, Russia was 13 days 'behind' the West. Thus, the October Revolution in Russia was the November Revolution in the West. Russia fell in with the West in early 1918.

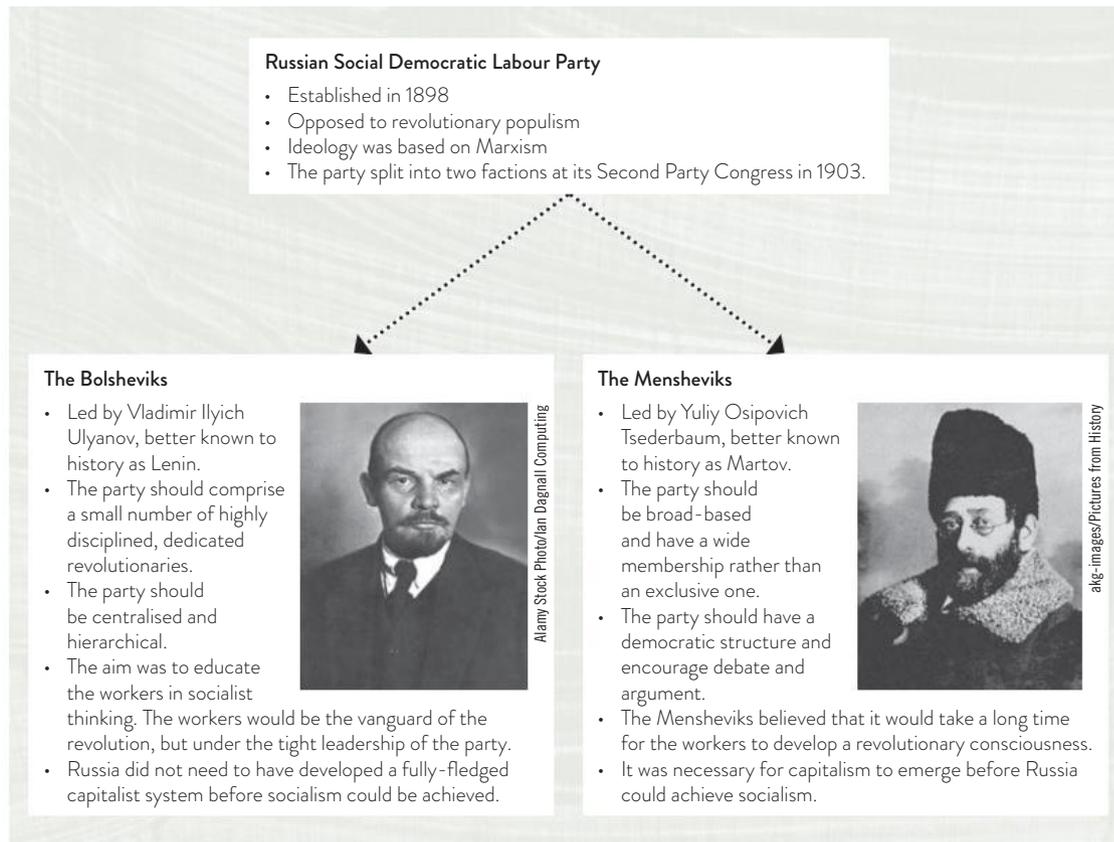
An overview of Bolshevik ideology

Marxism and the creation of the Bolsheviks

By the 1890s Marxist ideas were spreading throughout intellectual circles within Russia. The essence of Marxist thinking was as follows:

- History is the story of class struggle; the exploited in a struggle with the exploiters. For example, in the Feudal Stage, the struggle was between the nobility and the rising bourgeoisie. Having won their struggle, the exploited – the bourgeoisie – became the new exploiters in a struggle with the proletariat, and the next stage of the struggle developed.
- The class struggle would end when society had reached the socialist stage. There would be no more classes, there would be no need for a state, and society would be based on the principle of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'.

Marx had in mind modern capitalist societies such as Britain and Germany, not Russia. However, this did not stop Russian Marxists establishing themselves. In 1898 George Plekhanov established the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. At its 2nd Party Congress in London in 1903, the party split into two factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The diagram in Source 1.1 summarises the key differences between the two groups.



SOURCE 1.1 Bolshevik and Menshevik parties

Lenin wrote voluminously on issues of ideology. In ‘What is to be done’ (1902), he argued the case for a disciplined party which would lead the working class towards revolution. In ‘Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism’ (1916), it was Lenin’s view that capitalism would destroy itself in a series of wars that would spark revolution even in backward countries like Russia, which would spread to developed countries. In ‘The State and Revolution’ (1917), Lenin looked to the post-revolution period and envisaged the party taking over existing structures as a first stage to the transformation of society.

- 1 What is Marxism?
- 2 What do the words ‘Bolshevik’ and ‘Menshevik’ mean in Russian? Why were these terms used to describe the two factions?
- 3 Why might Lenin and Martov have differed in their beliefs about the path to socialism in Russia?

The return of Lenin and the April Theses

The Bolsheviks had played virtually no role in the February Revolution, though Trotsky would try to argue later that the radicalism of Petrograd workers had been the result of steady Bolshevik education and propaganda. Lenin was in Switzerland but managed to persuade German authorities to give him safe passage across Europe, via neutral Sweden, in a sealed train so that he could reach Russia. Lenin argued that his only concern was gaining power in Russia, and that once he had taken it, his first decision would be to withdraw Russia from the war. The Germans were dismissive, indeed suspicious, but the possibility of ending a two-front war had major strategic advantages. The German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, instructed his Foreign Minister, Richard von Kuhlmann, to arrange transport for 32 Russian revolutionaries across Europe.

Lenin arrived at Petrograd's Finland Station on 3 April. He immediately changed the whole revolutionary dynamic in Russia. Since the tsar's abdication the Bolsheviks inside Russia, including Stalin, had been supporting the Provisional Government. It was taken for granted by party members that Russia was not ready for socialism. Lenin had different ideas. As soon as he arrived, he demanded that Bolshevik support for the Provisional Government cease immediately. 'All power to the Soviets' became the catchcry of Lenin and the party. Many in the party thought Lenin was mad to pursue such a strategy, but Lenin believed that he could use the Soviet as a power base from which the Bolsheviks could eventually seize power.

Lenin's other catchcry was 'Peace, land and bread'. In this short phrase, he encapsulated the hopes and dreams of the Russian people. The majority of the population wanted an end to the futile war with Germany, the workers in the towns wanted food, and the peasants in the countryside wanted land reform. In fact, throughout most of 1917, the peasants were seizing land for themselves. Soon after his return, Lenin published his 'April Theses', which explained what Bolshevik policy was to be.



Lenin's return



The April Theses



The April Theses

The October coup of 1917

Since July 1917 the Provisional Government had been led by Alexander Kerensky. By October 1917 Kerensky's government was in clear decline. Parts of the countryside were facing near anarchy as peasant land seizures continued; in the cities, law and order were breaking down in the face of ever-worsening social and economic distress. And Russia still faced the threat of German attacks.

The Bolsheviks were not the only revolutionary socialist party, but it was Lenin who had been calling for 'All power to the Soviets' since April. Lenin's impatience to act seems quite logical with the benefit of hindsight, but at the time it took all his skills of persuasion to bring the party with him and attempt a coup.

The Bolshevik attempt to take power in October 1917 was not without great risk. Lenin's decision was the ultimate gamble. The Bolsheviks were in a far weaker position than the Provisional Government, and some in the party wanted to wait for a multiparty revolution by the Congress of Soviets. It was Kerensky's error on 23 October of moving against the Bolsheviks and sparking fears of a right-wing coup that galvanised the Bolsheviks into action.

Lenin's will ensured that the October Revolution would take place, but Trotsky's skills of organisation ensured it would be a success. It was Trotsky who had persuaded Lenin to delay the takeover until the 2nd Party Congress of All-Russian Soviets, so that the new government could be presented to the congress and the claim could be made that the takeover had been done in the name of the Soviet. It was Trotsky who was the brains behind the Military Revolutionary Committee, which controlled Petrograd's arms and manpower. It was Trotsky who, from the Smolny Institute, coordinated Red Guard units to seize the key installations in Petrograd such as bridges and the

railway station. It was Trotsky who sent Red Guard units into the Winter Palace to arrest members of the Provisional Government. The storming of the Winter Palace was not quite the heroic episode of later Soviet propaganda, seen most notably in Sergei Eisenstein's 1928 film, *October*.



Alamy Stock Photo/Science History Images

SOURCE 1.2 Lenin (left) and Trotsky (saluting). Though Lenin was the undisputed leader of the Bolsheviks and made the decision to seize power, it was Trotsky who was responsible for carrying out the coup.



age-fotostock/Fine Art Images

SOURCE 1.3 Nikolai Kochergin's painting, *Storming the Winter Palace*, vividly and heroically reconstructs the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917.



The early Soviet government: Sovnarkom

Following Lenin's announcement that power had been seized in the name of the Soviets, many non-Bolshevik deputies walked out in protest. Trotsky famously yelled after them: 'Go where you belong from now on – into the dustbin of history!' With only Bolsheviks and their left Socialist Revolutionary allies present in the Congress, Lenin had his majority and when he spoke to those present he was received rapturously.

The new government was called 'The Council of People's Commissars', or Sovnarkom, and had 16 members. It was one thing to seize power; it was quite another to hold on to it and to actually do anything with it. Lenin's new government was in a precarious position at the end of 1917, and it faced a multitude of problems.

The first six months of Bolshevik rule

Lenin had no illusions about the weakness of his position at the end of 1917. The party may have carried the day in late October, but holding on to that power was another matter. Building socialism was something else completely. As a result Lenin introduced a series of popular measures during the early months of Bolshevik rule. These early measures reflected both his understanding of the need to win over the Russian people and the ideas that had been promoted in Bolshevik propaganda throughout 1917. Sovnarkom did not waste any time and within a few months it had introduced many decrees. Source 1.4 summarises the early Bolshevik program.



SOURCE 1.4 Summary of early Sovnarkom measures

Punch on the Bolshevik Revolution



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THE LIBERATORS.

FIRST BOLSHEVIK. "LET ME SEE; WE'VE MADE AN END OF LAW, CREDIT, TREATIES, THE ARMY AND THE NAVY. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE TO ABOLISH?"
SECOND BOLSHEVIK. "WHAT ABOUT WAR?"
FIRST BOLSHEVIK. "GOOD! AND PEACE, TOO. AWAY WITH BOTH OF 'EM!"

SOURCE 1.5 A cartoon from the British satirical magazine *Punch* reflects on the early period of Bolshevik rule in Russia.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Is this a negative or positive assessment of the 'liberators'?
- 2 Why might such a cartoon have featured in a British magazine in early 1918?

The Cheka

Lenin knew that though the early measures of his regime would be well received by many, there were groups throughout Russia who sought the immediate destruction of the Bolshevik government, ranging from supporters of the tsar to army officers to members of the various political parties. Lenin had understood this when, in his 1917 work *State and Revolution* (written before the October Revolution), he had stated that the new revolutionary government would need a strong coercive apparatus if it were to survive.

As well as pushing a popular reform program, Sovnarkom also introduced a series of coercive measures. The Constituent Assembly was to be dissolved after only one day. Opposition newspapers were closed down, including those of other socialist parties. By the end of 1917, various political

parties were banned, including the Kadets, the Mensheviks and right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries. Those in the civil service who did not support the new regime were purged. The traditional legal system was replaced by one advocating revolutionary justice. Untrained judges meted out quick, stern, arbitrary revolutionary justice. Anyone who was perceived as an 'enemy of the people' or a 'parasite' was referred to as a *burzhui*. The only acceptable form of address became 'comrade'.

However, the most significant aspect of the Bolsheviks' coercive power came in the form of the Cheka. In December 1917 Lenin established the Extraordinary Commission Against Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation, which became known by its Russian acronym as the Cheka. The Cheka was originally intended to be a temporary organisation, created to deal with the immediate issue of opposition to the regime. However it soon grew. By the end of the civil war in early 1921, it had over grown to a force of more than 100 000. What had been intended as a short-term organisation, evolved into a massive state secret police force. The brutality of the Cheka far exceeded that of the tsarist Okhrana. It sought to enforce conformity and acceptance of the regime. Its key weapons were fear and intimidation, and during the civil war the Cheka committed unbelievable atrocities, inflicting 'a red terror' on those perceived as enemies of the revolution.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Russia's preoccupation with internal developments throughout 1917 and early 1918 – the Bolshevik coup, Sovnarkom, creation of the Cheka, dissolution of the Constituent Assembly – could not hide the fact that German troops were still on Russian territory and were threatening to move on Petrograd. Such action on the part of the German army would almost certainly have spelled the end of Lenin's regime. Lenin knew this, and he also knew that continuation of the war had been the key reason for Kerensky's fall. As a result he demanded peace with Germany 'whatever the cost'.



SOURCE 1.6 The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was attended by Trotsky and Kamenev. German delegates are on the left; Russians on the right.

The conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk not only ended Russian involvement in the war but had a major impact on internal developments. The Russian people may have wanted to end the war, but handing over vast territories and 62 million people was something else.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a further stimulus for the outbreak of civil war. One of the reasons the Bolsheviks' enemies now began to get organised was for the sake of the nation, for the sake of Russia's territorial integrity. The treaty may have ended German actions against the Bolshevik regime, but it created a new, potentially greater, threat to the government. The Western Allies were stretched to the limit during the first half of 1918 as Germany launched a massive offensive along the Western Front, made possible by its disengagement on the Eastern Front. By late 1918 several Allied nations had landed troops in Russia to force it back into the war. These included forces from Britain, France, the US and Japan. However, the fact that many of these troops remained after the conclusion of the First World War suggests their main purpose was to help bring down the Bolshevik regime. Japanese troops did not leave Russian territory until 1922.



SOURCE 1.7 Main terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

In a real sense, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had no long-term significance. The defeat of Germany in November 1918 meant that Lenin was able to ignore it, though by then Russia had become embroiled in civil war. By the time the Bolsheviks had emerged victorious, the map of Europe had been redrawn, and several new countries had been carved out of the former Russian empire, including Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In 1922 Germany and Russia signed the Treaty of Rapallo, which cancelled any claims each nation might have raised against the other because of the war.

- 1 Why do you think Lenin was so eager to risk a Bolshevik coup in October 1917?
- 2 Why was Lenin willing to support peasants taking land when private land ownership was contrary to Bolshevik ideology?
- 3 What was the purpose of the Cheka?
- 4 Why was Lenin so determined to achieve peace with Germany 'at any price'?

The Russian Civil War

The Russian Civil War lasted from about the middle of 1918 to early 1921, though isolated pockets of opposition to Bolshevik rule persisted for several years to come. It was a savage affair with both sides guilty of terrible atrocities, and it eventually cost Russia nearly a million lives – including around 300 000 war dead, and roughly the same number of executions. There were also approximately half a million civilians displaced. The war was fought from the Arctic to the Black Sea, from European Russia to Siberia. On occasions it involved full-scale battles with thousands of men on each side. Often it involved small-scale, **guerrilla warfare** actions. Commanders on both sides were not always in control of the men who were allegedly fighting for their cause. Red and White **partisans** organised themselves and fought for themselves, usually on horseback. There were also 'Green' partisan groups, aligned to neither Reds nor Whites, who fought to secure their own local interests.

The Russian Civil War is usually characterised as a conflict between 'Reds' and 'Whites', which is largely correct, though it does conceal the fact that there were many smaller forces across the country who did not owe allegiance to either. The Reds supported the Bolshevik regime.

Why did the Reds win the Russian Civil War?

With the benefit of hindsight, events in history often seem inevitable. Such is the case of the Reds' victory in the Russian Civil War. However, observers of events in Russia in the middle of 1918 would not have been predicting a Red victory. The Reds seemed to be outnumbered as they controlled only a small area of the country, and they had control of virtually none of Russia's coastline. Russia's experienced generals led the White armies. The Reds were facing possible significant intervention by the Western Allied powers on the side of the Whites, and there was always the possibility that Germany might make increasing demands on the Bolshevik regime, as it did in August with its demand for reparations. Despite all the handicaps the Reds faced, they emerged triumphant. How did this happen? Source 1.8 summarises the key reasons for the Red victory in the civil war.



Propaganda and the Russian Civil War

guerrilla warfare

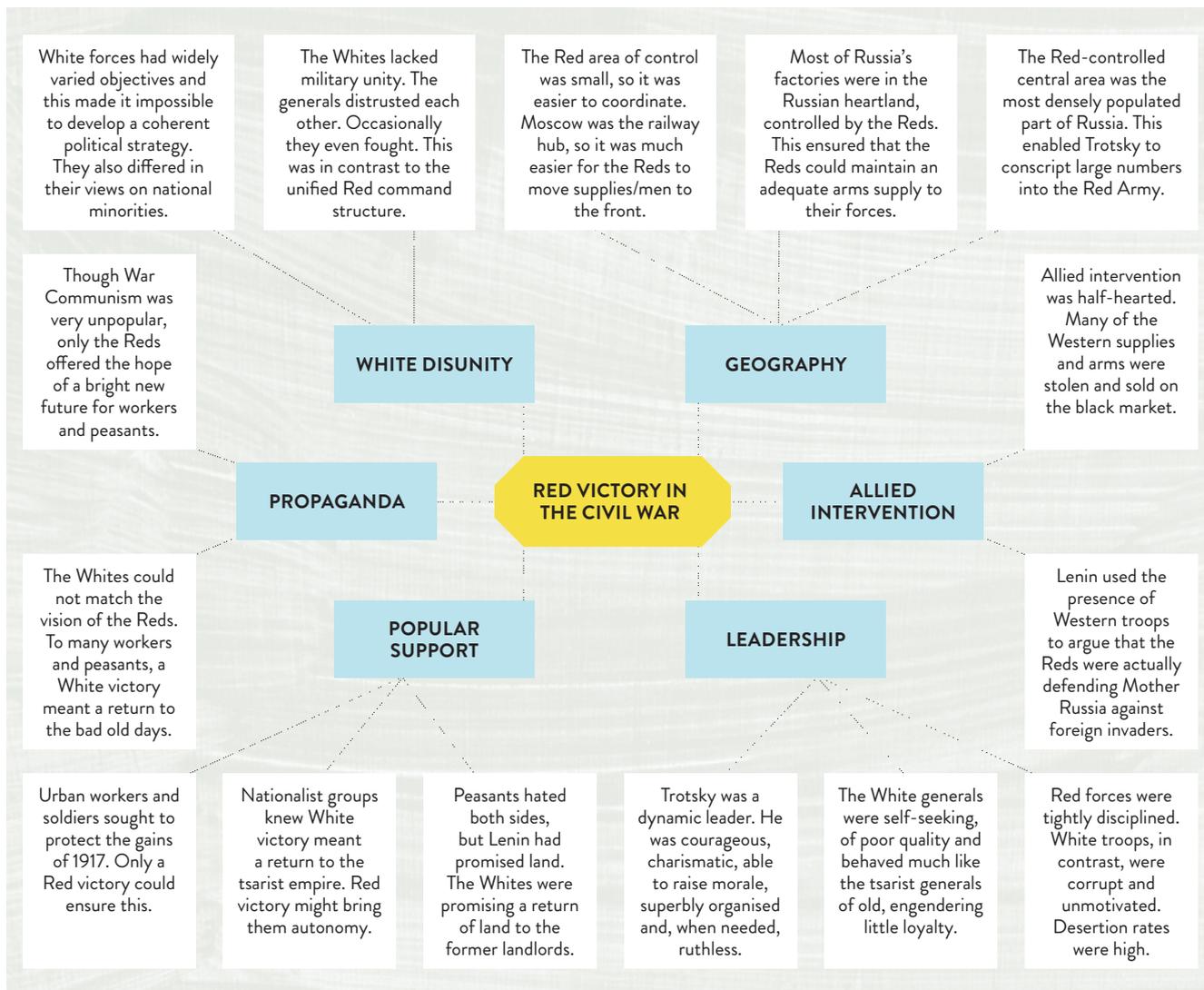
A style of warfare involving small groups, using surprise ambush and hit-and-run tactics that often occur at night. Guerrilla fighters avoid large-scale battles with conventional armies

partisans

Irregular soldiers, often civilians, who fight in smallish groups, often in areas already occupied by the enemy



Russian Civil War



SOURCE 1.8 How did the Reds win the civil war?

The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP)

War Communism

Lenin realised that the revolution would survive only as a result of military victory. To achieve this, the army and the urban workers supplying the army had to be fed. As a result, the extreme economic policies of War Communism were introduced.

War Communism was a complex system, but it came down to five essential elements.

- 1 All industrial enterprises were nationalised and placed under the control of the Supreme Council of National Economy (*Vesenkha*). The workers' committees were ended and the running of factories was returned to the former bourgeois managers.
- 2 Accompanying nationalisation was the imposition of strict labour discipline.
- 3 A strict system of rationing was brought in. It was 'class-based'. Workers and soldiers received the most rations, along with other essential workers, such as doctors.

- 4 An end was brought to the market economy.
- 5 The key element of War Communism was grain requisitioning. The land was 'socialised' and peasants became, in effect, state employees. They were forced to hand over grain to squads that roamed the country, seeking out secret stores of grain hidden by peasants reluctant to hand over their produce. The Cheka became increasingly involved in grain requisitioning, and as the civil war intensified, Lenin demanded that no mercy should be shown to recalcitrant peasants. Violence intensified in country areas as Cheka-led squads enforced the movement of grain to the towns. The system of requisitioning was called *prodrazverstka*. Grain requisitioning squads were rewarded with a share of what they collected.

The impact of War Communism

In a real sense, War Communism was a clear success. The system of *prodrazverstka* had succeeded in keeping the workers fed and had made it possible for the Red Army to operate effectively. As a result, victory in the civil war was possible. There were some in the party who positively enthused about War Communism, as to them it looked like the birth of socialism itself.

Though War Communism might have had its military and ideological merits, there was no denying that it had also produced a social, economic and humanitarian catastrophe. The peasants resisted in any way they could. They burned or hoarded crops, killed their livestock, gorged on any food they had and refused to sow new crops. Actions such as these merely intensified the violent reprisals of the Cheka-led grain-requisition detachments. The violence in the countryside became part of a wider class war. It became acceptable to attack anyone who was a declared class enemy. A class enemy was a person who behaved like a bourgeois or perhaps looked like a bourgeois. The first Soviet labour camps appeared during the civil war.

By 1921 agricultural output had plummeted and there was large-scale starvation in many areas. No totally accurate figures can ever be ascertained but estimates suggested that between five and eight million people died because of famine. The famine was the result of the dislocation caused by seven years of war, government indifference and mismanagement, and a serious drought.

The Kronstadt Revolt

The Kronstadt Naval Base was located on Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland about 25 kilometres west of Petrograd. In March 1921, the Kronstadt sailors rose up in revolt against Lenin's government. The rebels had a series of demands. Some of the demands were of an economic nature and revealed

the anger many felt about the impact of War Communism. They called for an immediate end to grain detachments, the reinstatement of the right of peasants to dispose of their grain as they saw fit, and an end to roadblock detachments. They also demanded the peasants' right to bring food into the city. However, there were also political demands. The sailors claimed that the Bolshevik regime had moved away from the ideals of the revolution.

Lenin could not allow the revolt to succeed and he ordered its suppression with whatever brutality was required. It took ten days to crush the revolt; the death toll numbered in the thousands. Kronstadt showed that the party would take any action to cling on to power. More importantly, it marked a



SOURCE 1.9 Red Army attack on the Kronstadt Naval Base, March 1921. More than 15 000 troops died in the assault on Kronstadt.

turning point in the party's relationship with the people as the early idealism and genuine links to the proletariat were destroyed. In the short term, Lenin realised that there had to be a change in policy direction. In effect, it could be said that Kronstadt gave birth to the NEP.



Introduction of the NEP

The 10th Party Congress was held from 8 to 16 March 1921. The principal policy decision at the 10th Party Congress was the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). If the wave of peasant revolts and the Kronstadt Revolt did not convince Lenin of the country's plight, cold statistics could. In 1921 Russia's industrial output was 16 per cent of the 1912 level, mining output was 29 per cent, oil was 36 per cent and grain was 48 per cent. In Petrograd the birth rate had fallen 50 per cent while the death rate had increased fourfold. It was against this background that the NEP was introduced.

Lenin agonised about this partial return to capitalism. He compared the NEP to Brest-Litovsk – something that was unpalatable, necessary in the short term, but would not last forever. Zinoviev said at the Congress: 'The New Economic Policy is only a temporary deviation, a tactical retreat ...' In many ways, the NEP was very similar to the state capitalism that had existed during the first six months of 1918.

THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY (NEP)

- The brutal system of grain requisitioning was ended. Peasants would now pay a tax 'in kind'; they would hand over a proportion of their produce to the state. It would be considerably less than had been demanded during War Communism.
- Famine-ravaged areas would be let off payment for 12 months.
- Once the tax in kind had been paid, peasants were allowed to sell any surplus produce on the open market.
- The aim was to alleviate the desperate food situation by encouraging peasant grain output, while at the same time encouraging peasants to make a profit, which they could use to buy goods from the cities, thus stimulating the urban economy. It was classic capitalist multiplier economics.

- The ban on private trade was ended.
- Privately owned shops were reopened and there was an end to rationing.
- A 'money economy' reappeared. There was a new currency backed by gold; wages were paid in cash.
- Inflation was gradually brought under control.

- Small businesses were reopened, private ownership allowed and the profit motive was back.
- Workshops and small factories were allowed. Lenin realised that the peasants would not sell their grain if they had nothing to buy with their new income.

- The state maintained control of what Lenin called 'the commanding heights'. This included the major heavy industries such as coal, steel, oil and transport. Banks were owned and run by the government.
- Factories were run by trusts that were responsible for buying materials and paying workers. The state would not bail out poorly run enterprises.
- The strict military measures that had governed the workforce during the period of War Communism were removed.

SOURCE 1.10 The main elements of the New Economic Policy

The impact of the NEP

The short-term economic and social effects of the NEP were dramatic. Within a very short time, food began to flow into the cities, and shops and restaurants reopened. The spectre of starvation and famine began to recede from the land, though not until after Lenin had been forced to accept relief aid from the United States. Now that the system of *prodrazverstka* had been abolished, peasant opposition to the regime ended. Peasants wanted only two things – to own their land and to be left alone to work that land. For a brief period in the 1920s under the NEP, they had their wish.



SOURCE 1.11 The poster ‘From the NEP Russia will come the Socialist Russia!’, by the artist Gustav Klutsis (1895–1938), was created in 1930. While it was created long after the death of Lenin and the end of the NEP, the image celebrates Lenin’s role as the leader of this economic initiative.



New Economic Policy



SOURCE 1.12 Emergence of a free market economy under the NEP, including signage of shops and increased numbers of people in shops.

However, there was a dark side to the success of the NEP. Though there was clearly an economic revival, this improvement was accompanied by rampant corruption, speculation and conspicuous consumption – not exactly the goals of a socialist society. Much of the private trade fell into the hands of ‘NEPmen’, traders who roamed from village to village, workshop to workshop, buying surplus produce – anything from eggs, meat and vegetables to nails, garments and tools – and selling it in the marketplace. These men quickly started making big profits. Property speculation reappeared and government officials could be bribed if the price was right. There was a major increase in crime, and prostitution once again became a significant business. The Moscow local government authority received most of its revenue from taxes levied on gambling clubs.

Conclusion

By mid-1918 Russia was in the midst of civil war and the odds were heavily stacked against a Bolshevik victory. White armies, aided by Western interventionist powers, surrounded the small area controlled by Red forces. However, political division and geographical separation worked against the various White forces, and most Allied powers soon lost interest in the conflict. The Bolsheviks’ control of the Russian heartland brought them economic and strategic advantages. This factor, combined with Trotsky’s dynamic leadership and reorganisation of the Red Army, turned the conflict in the Reds’ favour. The policy of War Communism, though extremely unpopular, succeeded in keeping Red troops fed and supplied. Victory for the Reds had been achieved by 1921 but as the Kronstadt Revolt indicated, the country desperately needed a change in economic direction. This came when Lenin introduced the NEP at the 10th Party Congress. The economy soon revived, but this revival was also accompanied by capitalist evils the party had vowed to remove. The 10th Party Congress also outlawed factionalism, and party affairs became much more rigid and disciplined. Externally, the Soviet Union began establishing normal state-to-state relations as the dream of world revolution ebbed away. Relations with Germany became particularly close.



Lenin to power

Chapter summary

- Though Lenin made the decision to seize power, Trotsky was the key organiser of the coup, which was carried out almost bloodlessly.
- By late November the Bolsheviks controlled many Soviets across the country but their hold on power was tenuous at best.
- The new government formed by Lenin was called the Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom.
- The first two acts of the new government were the Peace Decree and the Land Decree. Lenin wanted to end the war with Germany at any price, knowing how the decision to continue the war had destroyed Kerensky. He also needed to ensure peasant support in the anarchic countryside.
- In December 1917, Lenin created the Cheka to deal with counter-revolutionary opposition. It was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky.
- The Cheka (and its White opponents) would be responsible for acts of the most brutal kind of terror.
- Elections were held for the Constituent Assembly shortly after the Bolshevik takeover. Results did not go the Bolsheviks' way and in January 1918, after only one sitting day, the Assembly was dissolved.
- Lenin forced his colleagues to accept peace with Germany at any price.
- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk denuded Russia of vast areas, resources and peoples. It was very unpopular across the country and stimulated growing opposition to the Bolsheviks.
- By mid-1918, anti-Bolshevik forces were organising to destroy the regime. Civil war would blight Russia for the next three years, with White forces supported by Allied interventionist powers who were seeking to drag Russia back into the war.
- Western Allied powers, such as Britain, France, the US and Japan, intervened to try and force Russia back into the war. Their real aim was to destroy the Reds.
- The Reds won the civil war thanks to geography, White disunity, effective propaganda, popular support, and the superior leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.
- Lenin introduced War Communism in 1918. Though extremely unpopular and often accompanied by terror and violence, it did keep Red forces fed and supplied throughout the civil war.
- The civil war and War Communism left the country in a disastrous state by 1921. There were rebellions against the Bolsheviks from the Ukraine to the Kronstadt Naval Base, and millions died of famine.
- Lenin took a backward ideological step by reintroducing elements of capitalism in the New Economic Policy. Grain requisitioning ended, markets and a cash economy returned, and the economy quickly revived.
- However, there were drawbacks to the NEP. Graft and corruption accompanied its implementation.

Further reading

- Fitzpatrick, S, *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008
- Pipes, R, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, Harvill, London, 1994
- Reed, J, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, World Library, New York, 1960
- Schapiro, L, *1917*, Temple Smith, Hounslow, 1984
- Mawdsley, E, *The Russian Civil War*, Pegasus, New York, 2007

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

THE BOLSHEVIKS SEIZE POWER

- 1 Assess the significance of Lenin and Trotsky in the Bolshevik takeover of power in October 1917.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT: SOVNARKOM

- 2 What was the Sovnarkom?
- 3 Explain Lenin's first two key decrees.
- 4 Outline the measures passed by Sovnarkom during its first six months in office.

THE CHEKA

- 5 What was the purpose of the Cheka?
- 6 Do you think the creation of the Cheka was a betrayal of the ideals of the revolution or an inevitable consequence of the Bolshevik seizure of power? Give reasons for your answer.

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

- 7 What were the results of the Constituent Assembly elections?
- 8 What was the fate of the Constituent Assembly?

THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK

- 9 What were the main measures of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?
- 10 Why was Lenin so insistent on acceptance of the treaty?

THE BOLSHEVIKS' ENEMIES GATHER

- 11 Imagine you are a neutral observer in Russia in mid-1918. You believe that the chances of the Bolsheviks holding on to power are slight. Produce a mind map to support this interpretation of the situation.
- 12 There were many reasons why the Reds won the civil war. Identify what you see as the four most important factors. Justify your choices.

WAR COMMUNISM

- 13 Identify the key elements of War Communism.
- 14 Why did Lenin believe War Communism was necessary?
- 15 What impact did War Communism have on the workings of the Bolshevik Party?
- 16 Was War Communism a success? Give reasons for your answer.

THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

- 17 Why did the Kronstadt sailors revolt?
- 18 What were the results of the revolt?

THE NEP

- 19 Outline the key reasons for the introduction of the NEP.
- 20 Identify the key elements of the NEP.
- 21 Why would Lenin have had mixed feelings about the introduction of the NEP?
- 22 Was the NEP an economic success? Present arguments both for and against the idea of it being a success.
- 23 Create an annotated timeline of the 10 most significant economic developments between 1918 and 1924.

ESSAY/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 24 The Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917 was followed by a series of initiatives aimed at consolidating their position. Discuss.
- 25 'Trotsky's leadership of the Red Army was the key factor in the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War.' Critically evaluate this statement.
- 26 What were the consequences of Bolshevik rule for Russia in the early 1920s?

02

The struggle for power following the death of Lenin

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine the struggle for power within the Bolshevik Party after the death of Lenin.

Aspects to be covered include:

- Bolshevik rule after the civil war
.....
- the creation of the Soviet Union
.....
- the impact of Lenin's death
.....
- Stalin's growing influence
.....
- the struggle for power between Stalin and his party rivals
.....
- Stalin's supremacy by 1929
.....



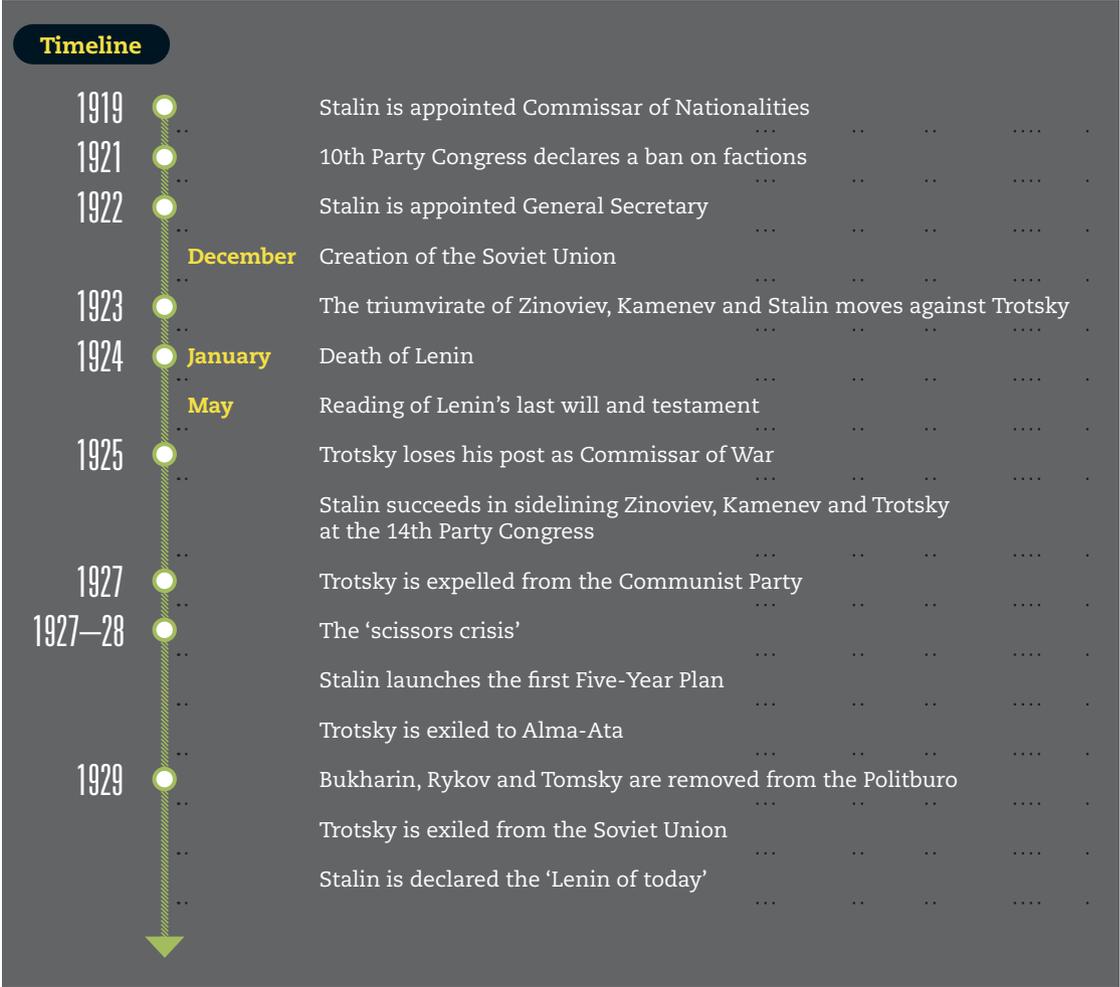
Modern History
Syllabus

Lenin's body lying in state for pilgrims to visit in 1924



Introduction

Lenin's party had changed enormously by the early 1920s. The boisterous debating and vigorous exchange of ideas that had been a feature of the party for so long was replaced by rigidity and discipline. As the party grew, it also became more centralised and bureaucratic. The party not only decided national policy but was also the dispenser of offices and favours across the land. The man who controlled the bureaucracy wielded enormous power. By the early 1920s, the most influential figure in the bureaucracy was Josef Stalin. However, Lenin disliked and distrusted Stalin and the relationship between the two men had deteriorated to such an extent that in his last will and testament Lenin called for Stalin's removal from the office of general secretary. With Zinoviev's help Stalin survived the reading of Lenin's will. He did not grieve over Lenin's death as others did, and with Lenin gone, Stalin was able to manipulate the party debate over ideology and the future direction of the country, outmanoeuvring his rivals to become Lenin's successor. Of all the leading Bolsheviks, Stalin seemed the least likely to assume leadership of the party and the country. Most people assumed that the position would fall to Trotsky. However by 1929 Stalin was being hailed as the 'Lenin of today', Trotsky was in foreign exile never to see his country again, and the party looked to Stalin to take it into an uncertain future.



The nature of Soviet rule

The Bolshevik Party was much smaller during its early years than it was by the early 1920s. Though Lenin's position was unchallenged, he had to use his intellectual skills to get his way and not merely rely on the loyalty of party members. Party debates were often rowdy, robust affairs with insults thrown about, occasional walkouts and keen discussion. This was the essence of democratic centralism.

The end of democratic centralism

By the early 1920s two key developments brought about the end of democratic centralism. The first of these was the ban on factionalism. The wishes of those party members who sought greater debate at party congresses, and wanted more grassroots decision making, were thwarted. The civil war had introduced an inevitable centralisation of power. With victory won, groups such as the Workers' Opposition wanted a return to the old ways. Lenin crushed this group at the 10th Party Congress, reinforced the power of party leaders and reduced the influence of ordinary members.

The second development related to the enormous growth in party membership, and the fact that the party now controlled an empire. This necessitated a revamped party apparatus and the creation of three new party bodies:

- 1 the Politburo – this group made the key decisions
- 2 the Orgburo – the Organisation Bureau overseeing party efficiency
- 3 the Secretariat – responsible for record-keeping, allocating jobs and membership.

The Secretariat was to become the most important body. It appointed local party officials who in turn held authority over local rank-and-file members. Thus the Secretariat was able to dispense enormous patronage. The Central Committee of the Party and local provincial committees drew up lists of key positions in government administration that had to be filled called *nomenklatura*. These committees soon had the right to determine who was appointed to these positions. David Christian summarises the position this way:

“ Thus, the Secretariat's control of the apparatus (the party machine) of professional Party workers effectively gave it control of all key positions in Soviet society. ”

David Christian, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1991, p. 196.

At the time, Trotsky railed against this development. In October 1923 he wrote to the Central Committee:

“ The bureaucratisation of the Party apparatus has developed to unheard-of proportions by means of the method of secretarial selection. There has been created a very broad stratum of Party workers, entering into the apparatus of the government of the Party, who completely renounce their own Party opinion, at least the open expression of it, as though assuming that the secretarial hierarchy is the apparatus which creates Party opinion and Party decisions. Beneath this stratum, abstaining from their own opinions, there lies the broad mass of the Party, before whom every decision stands in the form of a summons or a command. ”

Trotsky, first letter to the Central Committee, 8 October 1923. Cited in *Challenge of the Left Opposition: 1923–1925*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1975, pp. 55–6.

Between 1921 and 1923 purges of the party membership, carried out by the bureaucracy, resulted in the expulsion of about 25 per cent of the members. By 1923 only one in seven of the administrative posts allocated by the party machine was held by manual workers.

'Democratic centralism' had been replaced by 'bureaucratic centralism'. The main beneficiary of this development was to be Stalin.

The creation of the Soviet Union

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), generally known as the Soviet Union, came into existence with the 'Treaty on the Creation of the USSR' in December 1922. At the time, the USSR comprised four republics – the Russian SFSR (Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), the Transcaucasian SFSR, the Ukrainian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR. The treaty included the means to admit new republics, and by 1940, the Soviet Union comprised 15 republics. It continued in existence until its final demise in December 1991. With the end of the civil war, the introduction of the NEP and clear evidence that 'world revolution' was not likely in the near future, Stalin argued that the Bolshevik state should be reorganised into one nation. This would mean the end of some 'splinter' Soviet governments and it would centralise control in Moscow. Lenin wanted a looser arrangement that would allow republics to secede if they chose but he believed that they would not want to. His illness allowed Stalin's view to prevail.

Some elements of the party did not agree with this idea, and some of the national groups, such as the Ukrainians were also opposed. The 1922 treaty can thus be seen as a compromise that aimed to satisfy various competing interests and allow for future expansion.

Stalin's secret rise to power by 1923

At the time of Lenin's death, the five main Bolshevik leaders were Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Stalin. The background of these men, and the struggle for power after Lenin's death, will be covered in detail later. However, at this stage it is worth noting that of these five men, most people in the party assumed that Trotsky would assume the leadership. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin were notable figures who arguably also had a claim. However, if members agreed that Trotsky was the 'man most likely', Stalin was clearly the 'man least likely'. In his classic biography of Stalin, the historian Isaac Deutscher refers to Stalin at this time as 'a grey blur'.

However, more recent historians have questioned Deutscher's description of Stalin at this time. Oleg Khlevniuk suggests that Stalin's colleagues were all too aware of his talents:

“ ... Many members of the bureaucracy began to perceive Stalin as an experienced and confident bureaucrat who held secure positions within the hierarchy. He was coolheaded, but he could be stern and unbending in standing up to his interests and opinions ... The members of the Politburo fully appreciated Lenin's concerns about Stalin and the power he held as general secretary, and they tried to limit this power ... ”

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, pp. 67, 75.

Robert Service comes to a similar conclusion.

“ ... He had the potential of a true leader. He was decisive, competent, confident and ambitious. The choice of him rather than Zinoviev or Kamenev to head the charge against Trotsky at the Thirteenth Party Conference showed that this was beginning to be understood by other Central Committee members. He was coming out of the shadows ... ”

Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, Croydon, 2004, p. 228

- 1 How do Khlevniuk's and Service's view of Stalin differ to Deutscher's?
- 2 Why do you think they have such different views? (Consider the fact that Khlevniuk's and Service's biographies are very recent.)



Alamy Stock Photo/World History Archive

SOURCE 2.1 Stalin's 'mugshot' from tsarist Okhrana records. Stalin was arrested many times and served several periods in Siberian exile, the last up until the February 1917 Revolution.

Stalin's background: 1878–1919

1878

18 December

Stalin was born Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili in the Georgian town of Gori. For unknown reasons, official accounts of Stalin's life give his birth date as 21 December 1879.

1878–88

Stalin's parents, Vissarion and Ekaterina, were of peasant background but had moved to the Georgian capital, Tiflis, where Vissarion worked as a cobbler. It would have been a tough and poor childhood. Vissarion was a violent alcoholic who beat his son, while Ekaterina did her best to protect the young Josef. Stalin had smallpox as a child and his scarred face forever bore the evidence of the disease. A childhood accident also left him with a slightly withered left arm.

1888–94

Stalin attended school in Gori where he was forced to speak Russian. Stalin's Russian would always have a Georgian accent, a fact mocked by his better-educated Bolshevik colleagues later on.

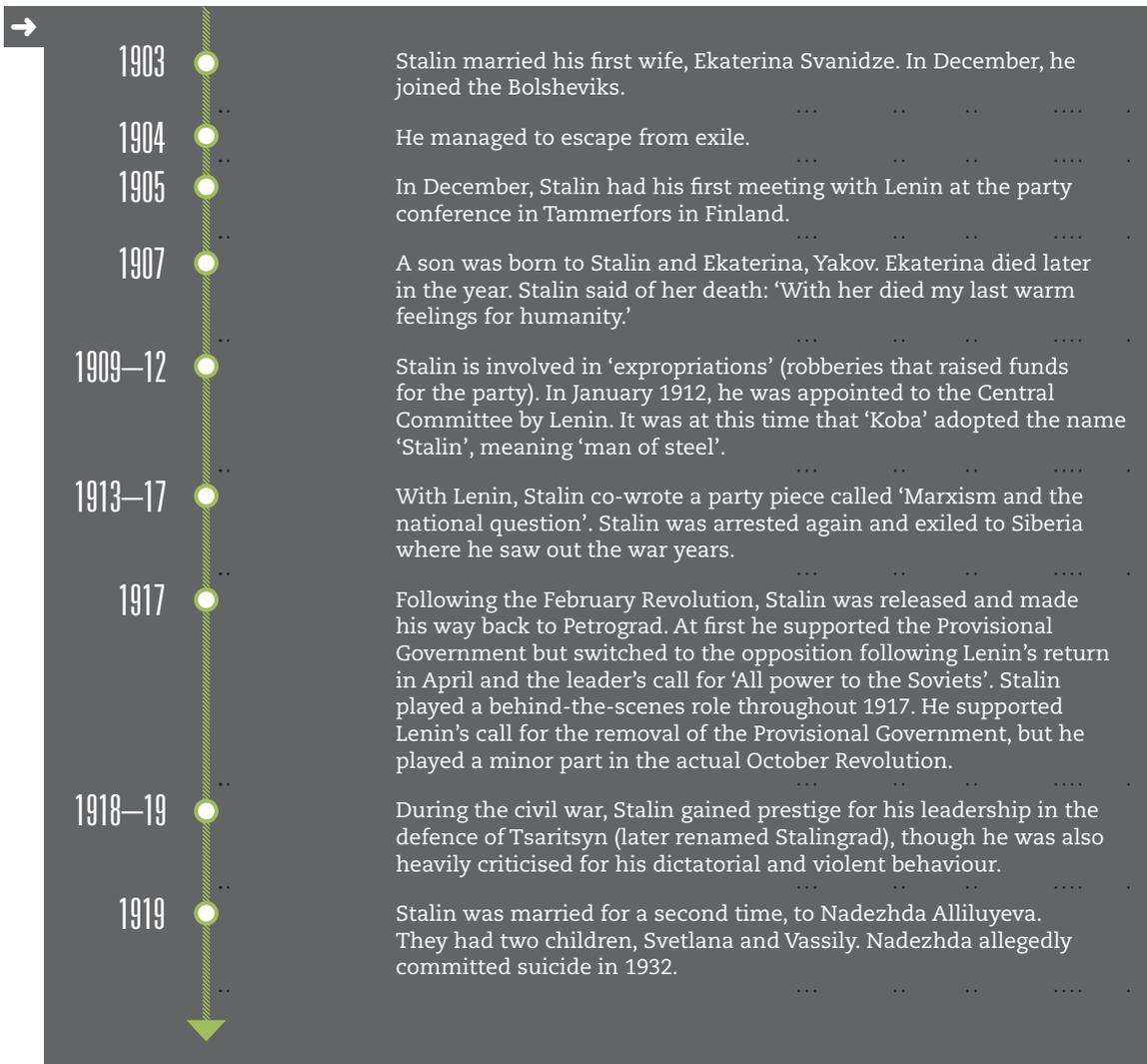
1894–99

Stalin attended the Tiflis Seminary and seemed to be heading towards a religious life. He was expelled from the seminary in 1899 because of his involvement with the Georgian Social Democratic Group, the Mesame Dasi. For the next couple of years, Stalin worked with various left-wing Georgian groups, adopting the party alias 'Koba' – a fictional hero of Russian literature.

1902

Following his organisation of a strike at Batumi, Stalin was arrested and exiled to Siberia.

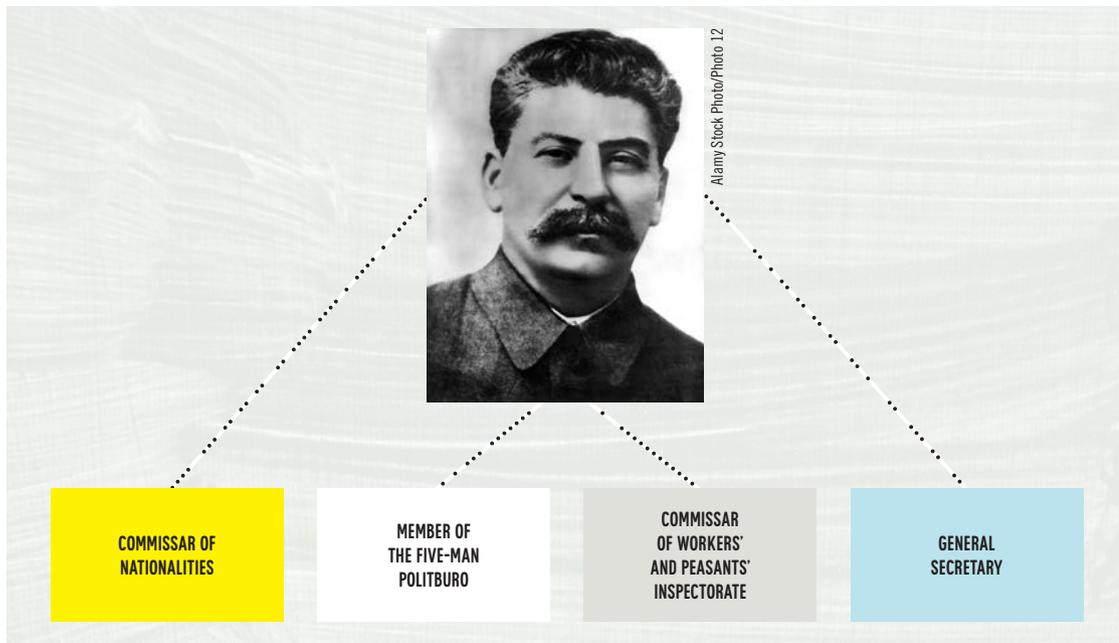




Though Stalin was a member of the Bolshevik leadership, he was not seen as one of its leading lights. Lenin's position was unassailable, Trotsky was the charismatic and dynamic leader of the Red Army, Zinoviev ran the Comintern, and Kamenev was head of the government. Stalin was more concerned with the party bureaucracy. However, it was this factor that would be so crucial to Stalin's success in the post-Lenin struggle for power. By 1923, Stalin already wielded enormous power within the party. Source 2.2 summarises the nature of this power.

As was explained previously by the early 1920s the Communist Party had become more centralised, more hierarchical, more bureaucratic and more disciplined. This suited Stalin because he alone of the major party leaders understood the significance of these developments, and had gradually manoeuvred himself into powerful bureaucratic positions. Lenin was a sick man by 1923 and Stalin knew that once Lenin was dead, political power in the party and the nation would be determined by 'who had the numbers'. This was why control of the bureaucracy was so important.

In 1919 Lenin appointed Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities. Russia was a multinational empire that contained dozens of different ethnic groups around its periphery, including Georgians, Ukrainians, Armenians and many from central Asia. Most of the party's leading figures were Western-educated and felt much more at home in Paris or Zurich than in Azerbaijan. Only Stalin was willing to take on what seemed the thankless task of Commissar of Nationalities, which involved spending time in the regions and talking to the minorities. However by doing this Stalin was able to build up



SOURCE 2.2 Summary of Stalin's positions and power by 1923. Though not seen as a leading, dynamic figure like Trotsky, Stalin was already holding enormous power even before Lenin died.

contacts and support, and place 'his' people in positions in the far-flung regional party organisations. Stalin was left alone when it came to issues regarding the nationalities.

In its early days, the party maintained its idealism and Lenin established the Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate to weed out corruption and increase efficiency. The Inspectorate came to oversee all branches of government and the civil service across the country. In 1919 Stalin was appointed to head the Inspectorate and so found himself supervising the workings of the entire government.

The chief body in the country from the time of the civil war was the Politburo, which decided high policy. At this time it contained five members – Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. Each Politburo member had specific functions. Trotsky's was the running of the civil war. Stalin's job was the unexciting one of running day-to-day party business. Stalin provided the only permanent link between the Politburo and the Orgburo, which was in charge of party personnel.

However, by far the most significant of Stalin's bureaucratic positions was the post of general secretary, to which he was appointed in 1922. The purpose of the general secretary was to coordinate the overlapping bodies of the party. It was responsible for promotions and demotions, and myriad party appointments. As Trotsky's biographer, Isaac Deutscher, put it: 'Like none of his colleagues, he (Stalin) was immersed in the party's daily drudgery and in all its kitchen cabals'. Again, it was not exciting work, but Stalin's willingness to take on such a job would serve him well. Soon there were many thousands of party officials across the Soviet Union who owed their job and their future to one man – Stalin.

The historians Besier and Stoklosa, in *European Dictatorships: A Comparative History of the Twentieth Century*, share Deutscher's view of the significance of Stalin's bureaucratic power but they approach it from a slightly different angle. By the mid-1920s, they argue that the party now had a second-generation leadership which consisted not of revolutionaries but rather administrators of the revolution. The early revolutionaries had been willing to give up their bourgeois lifestyles and make great sacrifices for 'the revolution'. However, reasons for joining the party now had more to do with career, prestige and income, rather than ideological zeal. Stalin represented this type of party member like no other.

Besier and Stoklosa further argue that the party's regular leadership bodies had evolved into nothing more than 'simple representative councils', and that Soviet democracy had become a facade. Intra-party democracy had been destroyed at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. They conclude:

“ ... Another characteristic was the concentration of all power in the Bolshevik Party. Other parties or public organisations with their own goals, remained forbidden, just like inner-party pluralism, which was considered factionalism. It was no longer the party itself, but rather their highest executives and administrative councils that made the decisions ...

Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa, *European Dictatorships: A Comparative History of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2013, p. 42

- 1 Create a mind map diagram which outlines how Stalin had become so powerful in the period just before Lenin's death.

The death of Lenin

Lenin had been in poor health for some time. He had long been a workaholic and thought nothing of putting in a 15- or 16-hour day. He had a long record of suffering from migraines and insomnia. While in exile from Russia, he had been diagnosed with erysipelas, a potentially fatal bacterial infection of the skin and tissue. The failed assassination attempt by Fanya Kaplan in August 1918 left him with a punctured lung, and two bullets permanently lodged in his neck and collarbone. In November 1921 he noticeably faltered during a major speech, unable to remember his words. Over the next few months he suffered bouts of aphasia, the inability to speak, and agraphia, the inability to write, both common symptoms of strokes.

In May 1922 he suffered a stroke but managed to recover. A second stroke resulted in him withdrawing almost completely from public life, and a third stroke in May 1923 left him paralysed down his right side. Lenin was suffering from advanced cerebral arteriosclerosis. With the help of his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, he slowly started to re-learn how to speak and was even able to walk with a cane. Lenin suffered his final stroke on the morning of 21 January 1924, and died that evening.



SOURCE 2.3 This image of Lenin, with his sister and his doctor, was one of the last before his death. As the photograph clearly shows, Lenin's health was greatly weakened by the strokes he had suffered.

The impact of Lenin's death

Though Lenin's death was not unexpected, it still came as a shock to the party and the nation. Russia had suffered much in recent years, yet Lenin was mourned by the Russian people as few leaders in history have been mourned. For many, he still epitomised the hope of an equal and free society. Lenin's funeral was an enormous and elaborate ceremony. His body was eventually embalmed and laid to rest in a mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow, which millions would visit to silently and reverentially

file past. The Soviet Union was an atheist state, but even an atheist state needed its religion. Soon, Lenin's status would be raised to a near-divine level. His words would become sacred text, his image the new icon and his successors his priests. Stalin inaugurated what would become the Leninist cult with his 'oath to Lenin' read at the Second Congress of the Soviets. The oath was a strange mixture of a revolutionary call to arms and a religious catechism.

“ In leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordained us to hold high and keep pure the great title of member of the party. We vow to thee, Comrade Lenin, that we shall honourably fulfil thy commandment too ... In leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordained us to guard the unity of our party like the apple of our eye. We vow to thee, Comrade Lenin, that we shall honourably fulfil this, thy commandment.

Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 235.



Getty Images/Topical Press Agency

SOURCE 2.4 After his death, Lenin's body was transferred to Moscow. His body lay in state for three days and as many as a million 'pilgrims' are believed to have viewed his body prior to the funeral.

Up until the autumn of 1922, relations between Stalin and Lenin had been close, not only professionally but also personally. There had been a few instances of discord between the two men, but years of collaboration had created a bond between Lenin and Stalin. Recent Russian archive research has revealed several examples of clear warmth and humour between the two. This has led Khlevniuk to suggest that:

“ ... This playful manner went beyond the boundaries of the boss-subordinate relationship. For Lenin, Stalin was a comrade-in-arms with whom relations were warm enough to allow teasing. It is difficult to imagine that he would take such liberties with Trotsky, with whom he maintained a stiff, official manner, using the polite pronoun *vy* for 'you' rather than the familiar *ty* ...

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, pp. 67

However, the earlier warmth did not last, and it is difficult not to see the depth of Stalin's hypocrisy in his oath speech, quoted on page 34. By 1923, relations had soured to the point that Lenin indicated that personal relations between him and Stalin were at an end. Reasons for the breakdown are not clear, but alleged rudeness on Stalin's part towards Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, was clearly a major factor. On 5 March 1923, Lenin dictated a stern letter to Stalin:

“ ... You had the uncouthness to summon my wife to the telephone and swear at her. Although she has even given you her agreement to forget what was said... I do not intend to forget so easily... and it goes without saying that I consider something done against my wife to be something done against me. I therefore ask you to consider whether you agree to retract what you said and apologise or you prefer to break relations between us ... ”

Losing Lenin's favour would not be a good career move and clearly, Stalin would have received news of his leader's death with mixed feelings.

The loss of Lenin did not hurt Stalin in another way. Stalin was no fool but he was not an intellectual. While his colleagues were discussing Marxist dialectics with Lenin in Swiss coffee houses, Stalin was robbing banks or enduring Siberian exile. Lenin's colleagues sought to emulate the leader. Zinoviev even tried to copy Lenin's handwriting style. Stalin did not share their intellectual need for Lenin.

A more immediate impact of Lenin's death was the harm it did to Trotsky's reputation. When Lenin died, Stalin and the other party leaders quickly made their way to Lenin's home in Gorki to pay their respects and 'to be seen to pay their respects'. That is, all of them except Trotsky, who was in the Caucasus recovering from an illness. At Lenin's funeral the leading party figures enthusiastically carried Lenin's coffin; all except Trotsky. Stalin had misinformed Trotsky (possibly deliberately) of the date of the funeral, and advised him to continue his convalescence so that Trotsky would be embarrassed by his absence. Only Trotsky, his critics could then argue, would arrogantly not bother attending Lenin's funeral. Trotsky's apparent snub of the late leader was never forgotten. However, Lenin's death had the potential to have an even greater impact on the party and the nation as it brought to notice his last will and testament.



SOURCE 2.5 *At the Coffin of the Leader*, 1924, a painting by the Socialist Realist artist Isaak Brodsky (1884–1939), highlights the formality of Lenin's funeral. Stalin and other key Bolshevik figures, but not Trotsky, are shown closest to the coffin.



SOURCE 2.6 Nadezhda Krupskaya with Lenin. Krupskaya was Lenin's widow and angrily disagreed with the decision not to publish Lenin's last will and testament.

Lenin's last will and testament

Stalin's position within the party had clearly been strengthened by the death of Lenin. From the middle of 1923, he had been working closely with two other Politburo members: Zinoviev and Kamenev. With Lenin incapacitated, leading party figures were already looking to the future. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev played leading roles in the party and each saw himself as a future party leader. Neither of them considered Stalin a serious contender. However, all three men had a deep distrust, and probably deep dislike, of Trotsky. To many, Trotsky seemed the natural successor. However, Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev were working together as a 'triumvirate' to sabotage Trotsky's position within the party.

In May 1924 only four months after Lenin's death, Stalin had to face arguably his greatest crisis. Unknown to Stalin and the party at large, Lenin had composed a last will and testament. This was now to be read to a plenary session of the Central Committee, with a view to making the document public at the soon-to-be-held party congress.

In this document Lenin presented his views on each of the leading party figures. He was not particularly complimentary to any of them, though there was praise for Trotsky's talents. However, the man who received Lenin's greatest condemnation was Stalin. In essence, Lenin stated that Stalin could not be trusted with the power he had been given, and that he should be removed from power. That said, Lenin did value Stalin as a 'yes man', and detailed discussion of both Stalin and Trotsky in the will and testament suggests that Lenin saw both as having important roles in the future. In the atmosphere of the Leninist cult that was quickly developing since the leader's death, it would be deemed sacrilegious not to honour Lenin's wishes.

Stalin was in deep trouble; his whole future was at stake at this moment. How could the party not follow the word of their deceased leader? It was Zinoviev who came to Stalin's rescue. Zinoviev told the meeting that they had all sworn to obey Comrade Lenin's instructions. However on this occasion Comrade Lenin's fears had proven baseless in regards to General Secretary Stalin. Zinoviev then went on to argue that relations between Stalin and other branches of the party had been very harmonious and that he should be left in office. Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, angrily disagreed but she was overruled. Trotsky just sat there. Isaac Deutscher interpreted Trotsky's response as disgust at the piece of theatre that was taking place. Other commentators, however, have challenged this assessment, arguing that Trotsky unduly dismissed Stalin as a lightweight. Stalin's biographer, Khlevniuk, suggests that it was not Trotsky's silence that helped Stalin. 'Trotsky's very presence was enough.' (p. 79)

The meeting voted 44 votes to 10 against publishing the last will and testament, and to give it only to selected delegates. This meant that it was almost certain Stalin would be re-elected as General Secretary.

This was a moment of crucial importance for Stalin, for the Soviet Union, indeed for the future of the world. Stalin's future could have ended there; instead he would go on to become one of the giant figures of the 20th century. Isaac Deutscher described the impact of Zinoviev's speech and the plenary vote this way: 'Stalin could now wipe the cold sweat from his brow. He was back in the saddle, firmly and for good.'



Lenin's last will and testament



Lenin's last will and testament

- 1 Explain why Stalin might have had mixed feelings about the death of Lenin.
- 2 Why might Stalin not have been as affected by Lenin's death as other members of the party?
- 3 'Lenin's death, funeral and last testament combined to work against the fortunes of Trotsky.' Justify this statement.

LEON TROTSKY (1879–1940)

Next to Lenin, Trotsky was the most influential of the Bolshevik leaders. It was Trotsky who masterminded the October 1917 seizure of power, who transformed the ragtag red militias into the five-million-strong Red Army, and who organised the attack on the Kronstadt rebels. However, during the 1920s, he was to be outmanoeuvred by Stalin in the post-Lenin struggle for power. By 1929, Trotsky had been driven out of the Soviet Union. Once Stalin had established his supremacy, Trotsky

was effectively written out of Soviet history, only to be mentioned as a counter-revolutionary/antiparty/rightist/deviationist/pro-German traitor, or whatever other insult could be hurled at him. Trotsky was eventually murdered in 1940 in Mexico, on the orders of Stalin.

Trotsky's later career will be examined in this chapter.



Alamy/Quintone

SOURCE 2.7 Leon Trotsky

Key events in the life of Trotsky

- 1879** Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein to Jewish parents as one of eight children. The family was not particularly devout.
- 1888–97** He was educated in a Jewish school in Gromokley and then St Paul's High School in Odessa. He finished his schooling in Nikolayev.
- 1897** He organised the South Russian Workers' Union. For his efforts he was arrested, spent a few months in solitary confinement and then 18 months in an Odessa prison.
- 1902** After prison, he ended up in a Siberian camp, but in 1902 managed to escape and later that year arrived in London. The young Bronstein chose the name of one of his gaolers for his passport: Trotsky. Once in London, Trotsky met Lenin and started working for the (Marxist) Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.
- 1903** When the party split, Trotsky opposed Lenin but he never became an outright Menshevik.
- 1905** Towards the end of the 1905 Revolution, Trotsky became chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet. He was arrested after a week.
- 1906–17** Trotsky was tried and sentenced to exile in Siberia for life. He managed to escape even before he got there. During the next decade, Trotsky travelled widely, developed his ideas and tried to reunite the party. He often worked as a journalist.
- 1917** At the time of the March Revolution, Trotsky was in New York. It took him two months to return to Russia, and along the way he was briefly imprisoned in Canada. Back in Petrograd, he soon found common cause with Lenin. Following the July Days, Trotsky was briefly imprisoned but was freed following the Bolsheviks' efforts during the Kornilov coup. In September he became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. Trotsky persuaded Lenin to delay the Bolshevik takeover so that the party's actions could be presented as being carried out in the name of the Soviets. Trotsky organised the takeover of Petrograd, which heralded the Bolshevik Revolution.
- 1918–20** As Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Trotsky led negotiations for peace with Germany. However, his 'no war, no peace' strategy was rejected by Lenin. By the time of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky had become Commissar of War. Trotsky was to prove an able and charismatic leader, simultaneously inspiring and utterly ruthless. His five-million-strong Red Army emerged victorious in the civil war.
- 1921** Faced with the Kronstadt Revolt, Trotsky agreed with Lenin that the rebellion had to be crushed in order to consolidate the revolution. More than 15 000 men died during the crushing of the Kronstadt Revolt.



Trotsky

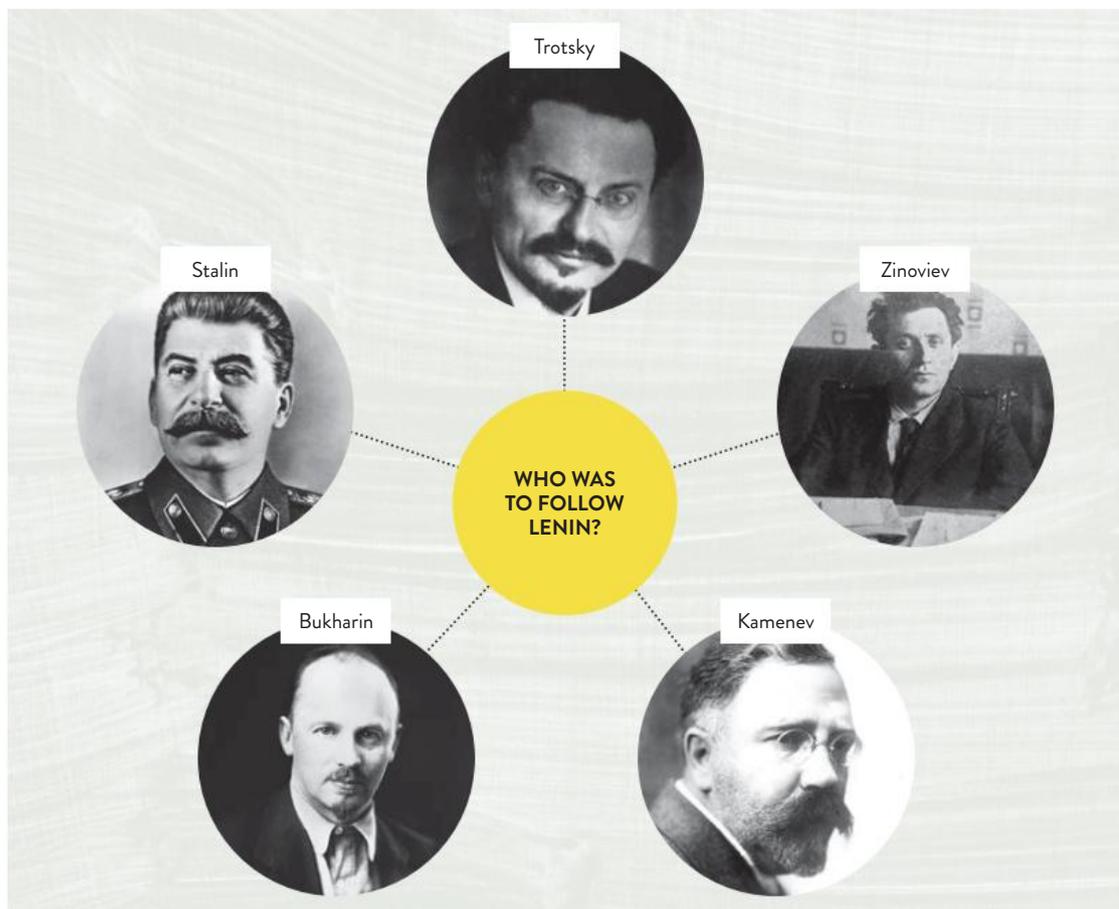


QUESTIONS

- 1 Compare Trotsky's experiences before 1917 with those of other key individuals. Was he typical of other Bolsheviks?
- 2 Using the Internet and other sources, prepare a collection of 10 Trotsky quotes from before 1923 that reflect on the nature of revolution. Explain why his ideas might have changed during this period.

The post-Lenin struggle for power

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see how Stalin emerged victorious in the post-Lenin struggle for power. From the start he had gained a firm grip on the party bureaucracy. He proved to be a shrewd political player, forming alliances with leading party figures and then turning on those allies. Stalin correctly assessed the mood of the country and used ideological arguments to his advantage, only to completely change his stance once his position was secure. His opponents totally underestimated his guile and political skill, while the general suspicion and dislike of Trotsky worked in his favour.



Clockwise from top: Alamy/David Cole; Alamy Stock Photo/Granger Historical Picture Archive; Alamy/RIA Novosti; Alamy/AF archive

SOURCE 2.8 The rivals for power. Of the leading figures in the party who might succeed Lenin, Stalin was considered the least likely to take control.

In 1924 Stalin seemed the most unlikely of the leading Bolsheviks to succeed Lenin. He was recognised as intelligent, efficient and a good administrator, but he was also perceived as being dour, grey, lacking charisma and not of the same calibre as his rivals. This was the general view of Stalin even before Lenin's testament became known. Trotsky was the most likely successor. He had the charisma and intellect; he had the Red Army behind him; and his record in the civil war was second to none. Apart from Trotsky and Stalin, the other potential claimants for power after Lenin's death were Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Bukharin. Zinoviev was the leading party figure in Leningrad (Petrograd having been renamed in Lenin's honour) and was head of the Comintern. Kamenev was the leading party figure in Moscow and head of the government. Bukharin was younger than the others but, as Lenin had conceded in his testament, the most popular figure in the party. Yet of all these, Stalin was triumphant. His control of the party bureaucracy was crucial to his victory. The other three factors that accounted for Stalin's success were:

- the nature of the ideological debate
- Stalin's skill at political manoeuvring
- the party's suspicion and dislike of Trotsky.

GRIGORY ZINOVIEV (1883–1936)

Zinoviev was born to Jewish peasant farmers in the Ukraine in 1883. He joined the party in 1901, sided with Lenin in 1903 and became a Bolshevik. He spent much time in exile and became one of Lenin's closest associates. During the war he was in Switzerland with Lenin. He returned to Russia in April 1917 with Lenin in his sealed train. Zinoviev and Lenin fell out over Zinoviev's opposition to the decision to seize power in October 1917, an issue Lenin mentions in his testament. However, Zinoviev played a key role in the next few years. He was responsible for defending Petrograd in the civil war, became a non-voting member of the Politburo in 1919, gained full voting rights in 1921, and was President of the Comintern from 1919. In 1923 he joined the anti-Trotsky 'triumvirate' with Stalin and Kamenev, and Zinoviev persuaded the party to suppress publication of Lenin's last will and testament. At the time of Lenin's death, Zinoviev's power was at its peak, but his influence was limited to Leningrad, while Stalin's control of the bureaucracy gave him much wider influence.



SOURCE 2.9 Grigory Zinoviev



Grigory Zinoviev

LEV KAMENEV (1883–1936)

Lev Kamenev was born in Moscow in 1883. His parents were comfortably well-off and he received a good education. In 1902, he met Lenin in London and sided with the Bolsheviks in the party split the following year. He was in St Petersburg during the 1905 Revolution but played a minor role; by now, he had married Trotsky's sister, Olga. Over the next few years he was involved in party work, both in Russia and abroad, becoming a close associate of Lenin. Returning to St Petersburg at the outbreak of war, Kamenev was arrested and exiled to Siberia where he would spend the war years. He was released in March 1917 and returned to Petrograd. Like Zinoviev, he opposed Lenin's decision to seize power in October, a fact Lenin mentions in his testament. During the civil war, Kamenev was head of the Moscow Soviet and became a full Politburo member in 1919. During Lenin's illness, it was Kamenev who chaired the Politburo and acted as head of the government. In 1923, he joined Stalin and Zinoviev in the 'triumvirate' against Trotsky.

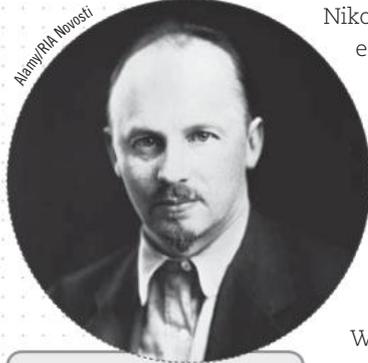


SOURCE 2.10 Lev Kamenev



Lev Kamenev

NIKOLAI BUKHARIN (1888–1938)



SOURCE 2.11 Nikolai Bukharin



Nikolai Bukharin

Nikolai Bukharin was born in Moscow in 1888. His parents were teachers so he received a good education and entered Moscow University in 1905. He became caught up in the fervour of that year and played a minor role in the 1905 revolution. In 1906 he joined the Bolsheviks. In 1907 he helped organise a nationwide youth conference, an early version of what was to become the Komsomol (the Communist Youth League). Over the next few years he was arrested on several occasions and in 1911 was exiled to the Arctic. He soon managed to escape and during the next few years lived overseas, meeting Lenin and Zinoviev in Switzerland, and Trotsky and Kollontai in New York. Following the February Revolution, he returned to Russia via the Far East, and was briefly detained by Japanese authorities. He reached Moscow in mid-1917 and joined the Moscow Soviet. During the Russian Civil War he believed in the idea of a Soviet-led revolutionary war, and proposed the romantic notion of a Socialist United States of Europe, but he was opposed strongly on this by Lenin. He and Lenin had various ideological differences at this time, but when Lenin introduced the NEP in at the 10th Party Congress in 1921, Bukharin became a firm adherent. He became a full Politburo member in 1924.

The role of ideology and the future

Politics is always essentially about gaining power, wielding it and holding on to it. The Bolsheviks were no different from any other political group in this regard. The first aim of political parties in democratic countries is to gain power; the second aim is holding on to it. However for the Bolsheviks having power was never enough. Years of arrest, police torture, imprisonment, exile and bloody civil war had not been endured merely to gain and hold on to power. The Bolsheviks had a noble, idealistic aim. Their goal was to create a communist paradise. Lenin had warned them that this goal would not be easy to reach, would involve many sacrifices, and would probably not be achieved in their lifetimes, but that cherished long-term aim was never in doubt. All that was in doubt was how that goal was to be reached.

Consequently ideological considerations were to become a major aspect of the post-Lenin struggle for power. Party manoeuvring and personal attacks, even Stalin's domination of the party machine, would never really be enough. The players in the intra-party struggle had to base their claim for leadership on a sound, ideological basis.

The crux of the ideological debate concerned the vexing question: How was the Soviet Union going to modernise and industrialise? Marx had always argued that communism would be based on abundance; it would not be a society of equality based on poverty. He had envisaged the road to communism starting out from fully developed capitalism, as existed in Britain and Germany. He had not considered that a backward society like Russia would be attempting such a journey, at least not until it had gone through its capitalist stage. For the party, this issue had added urgency. Revolutions had not occurred across Europe and so the Soviet Union was an isolated socialist country surrounded by capitalist enemies. Thus, the country had to develop quickly in order to defend itself from a possible future attack. Ideologues within the party debated strongly on which strategy to follow, but it narrowed down the options to two alternatives, which for the sake of ease of understanding will be referred to as 'the left model' and 'the right model'.

The 'left' and the 'right' agreed on certain things. Traditional sources of capital for development were not open to the Soviet Union. Profits from colonies could not be used as the country had none; profits from capitalist enterprises were not available as the government controlled the 'commanding heights'; the socialist state could hardly expect funds to flow in from the capitalist West (especially after the earlier Bolshevik repudiation of tsarist debts). For industrialisation, a means had to be worked out to squeeze the maximum revenue possible from a population that was still predominantly made up of peasants.

The main differences between the two models are summarised in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 The left and right models

THE 'LEFT' MODEL	THE 'RIGHT' MODEL
Trotsky was the main promoter of the 'left' model.	Bukharin was the main promoter of the 'right' model.
This model argued that industrialisation had to be rapid and massive. This meant an end of the NEP, or 'socialism at a snail's pace', as Bukharin had put it.	This model was based on the continuation of the NEP, which seemed intuitively correct as the NEP had brought rapid economic growth by the mid-1920s.
The peasants had to be squeezed, taxed hard, and a return to War Communism-style policies was necessary.	The peasants should be allowed to prosper, be taxed mildly and allowed to sell their surpluses. This would increase their productivity.
Small private farms had to go and be replaced by large collective farms. This would increase output for export, which would earn foreign exchange and provide capital for industrial investment.	Increased grain production would mean more grain exports, and so more foreign exchange to purchase those goods was needed for industrialisation.
Heavy industry and armaments should be promoted to build up defence capability. This could end Russia's aggressive foreign policy of isolation and could encourage revolution in the West.	Prosperous peasants would buy more industrially produced goods and so a 'multiplier effect' would feed into economic growth.
This model could certainly not be condemned as being capitalist.	This method would guarantee peace at home and good external relations. It might even lead to a return of foreign loans.
But: (i) it would inevitably bring massive peasant opposition; (ii) it could well lead to lower output as peasants refused to cooperate; (iii) it could lead to conflict with the West.	But: (i) this was capitalism; (ii) it favoured the peasantry over the proletariat; (iii) it would be very slow; (iv) the 'scissors crisis' would show it to be unworkable (see Chapter 4).

Trotsky's 'left' model gained the label 'permanent revolution'. Stalin came up with a variation on the 'right' model called 'socialism in one country', arguing that the Soviet Union did not need the West's help to modernise, and could go it alone. His playing of the 'patriotic card' was well received in the party and the country at large. The last thing people wanted was a return to the upheavals of the civil war and War Communism times. Little did the people know that Stalin's eventual strategy would turn the country upside down.

- Imagine you are writing a letter to the party newspaper, *Pravda*, in the mid-1920s. In your letter, argue as strongly as you can either the 'left' or 'right' case about the future direction of the country.

Party manoeuvring

Stalin was close to establishing his mastery of the party bureaucracy. He had established his position in the ideological debate. Most importantly, he had survived the reading of Lenin's last will and testament. It was now time to gradually squeeze out his party rivals. It is unlikely that Stalin had a carefully worked out plan of action for his rise to power or that he was aiming for total, personal power. His original intention was probably to protect his position and ensure that he remained a key player in the party. However, Stalin was an opportunist, and often his rivals would do his work for him by attacking each other.

“ Although Stalin seemed to win every trick, it is unlikely that he followed a long-term plan. He did not need to; he could stand back and watch his rivals dig their own graves, occasionally offering his spade to one or other of them ...

JN Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, OUP, Oxford, 1973, p. 287

He would achieve success by various methods:

- using the numbers he had been able to muster as general secretary and his other positions
- forming and breaking brief party alliances
- playing on the party's suspicion and dislike of Trotsky
- taking advantage of the fact that other leading party figures underestimated his political skills, even his intelligence; a thick Georgian accent perhaps had its advantages
- manipulating the course of the ideological debate.

Stalin had become distant from Lenin. Indeed in his testament Lenin had called for Stalin's removal on the grounds that he could not be trusted to use the power that he had accrued. However, it was to be Stalin who most strongly promoted what became 'the cult of Lenin'. Lenin may have been driven and ruthless, but he always remained a modest man who never demanded the luxuries of power and who would have hated the near-divine status that was thrust upon him after his death. But Stalin realised that the party's and the nation's feelings for Lenin could be used to his advantage. He promoted the Lenin cult. From the mid-1920s Lenin's image was everywhere in schools, railway stations and homes, whether it be in the form of a photograph, a painting or a sculpture. The word of Lenin became holy writ. Stalin's own speeches and writings were peppered with quotations from Lenin. Everything Stalin did, it was agued, was done in the name of Lenin.

Opponents were often attacked for their lack of loyalty and respect to the memory of Lenin. Trotsky's earlier disagreements with Lenin before 1917 were frequently aired. The decision of Zinoviev and Kamenev to oppose Lenin's decision to seize power in November was dragged up. Stalin's own apparent modesty worked in his favour with regards to Lenin's memory. He always presented himself as a disciple of Lenin; Trotsky regarded himself as Lenin's equal. This provided another weapon to use against Trotsky: his arrogance.

The Bolsheviks frequently looked back to history for guidance on their revolution. The only real example they had to look to was the French Revolution of 1789. The French Revolution had begun with idealistic notions of liberty, equality and fraternity, and hopes of creating a new society. It ended up in the military dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte. The Bolsheviks feared that this might be the fate of their revolution, but who would be the Russian Bonaparte? It could only be one man: Trotsky. There was only one man it could never be: Stalin. The manoeuvrings of Stalin in the intra-party struggle are summarised in Source 2.12.

THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

Luck, circumstance and a propensity for hard work placed Stalin in a strong position by the early 1920s. Lenin's death was a godsend as, had Lenin survived, he would almost certainly have removed Stalin. Trotsky's absence from Lenin's funeral, the result of Stalin's misinformation, hurt Trotsky's reputation. Stalin had gradually built up his power within the bureaucracy. Zinoviev's underestimation of Stalin certainly played a role in his decision to persuade the party not to publish Lenin's Testament.

Robert Service argues that Zinoviev and Kamenev needed Stalin as a counterweight to Trotsky. They therefore stopped criticising Stalin and sat back while Stalin attacked Trotsky. Service explains their motivation:

'They knew that Stalin could look Trotsky in the eye and smack him politically in the face – and perhaps they calculated that Stalin would do himself no favours by appearing divisive while they seemed above the demands of factional struggle ...'

STAGE 1: STALIN/ ZINOVIEV/ KAMENEV VERSUS TROTSKY

The triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev isolated and defeated Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress in 1924 following Trotsky's criticism of party centralisation and bureaucratisation. Trotsky wrote *Lessons of October* attacking Zinoviev and Kamenev for opposing Lenin in October 1917. They brought up Trotsky's disagreements with Lenin before 1917. Stalin merely had to sit back and watch his enemies tear each other apart. At this stage, Stalin was promoting the 'right' ideological model while Trotsky was pressing the 'left' model. In 1925, Trotsky was sacked as Commissar of War.

STAGE 2: STALIN/ BUKHARIN VERSUS ZINOVIEV/ KAMENEV

Stalin now turned on his former allies. He joined Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky who were promoting the 'right' model and a continuation of the NEP. Stalin introduced his idea of 'socialism in one country'. Zinoviev and Kamenev adopted the 'left' model, which promoted the idea of rapid industrialisation. They even tried to ally with Trotsky against the 'right' but he refused to work with them. Stalin 'had the numbers' and at the 14th Party Congress in 1925, Zinoviev and Kamenev were consistently outvoted. Stalin's alliance with Bukharin came to fruition at the 15th Party Congress in December 1927 when Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the party.

STAGE 3: STALIN VERSUS BUKHARIN AND THE 'RIGHT'

As Trotsky had earlier predicted, the economy was in trouble as the 'scissors crisis' developed (see Chapter 4). As food shortages appeared and economic growth stagnated, Stalin realised that the NEP was not working and that major changes were required. Stalin turned on his 'right' allies and now promoted the 'left' model of rapid industrialisation. At the 1929 Party Congress, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky were removed from the Politburo. They were replaced with Stalin's allies: Kaganovich, Molotov and Voroshilov. By now, Trotsky had been expelled from the Soviet Union. Stalin had control of the party.

THE END

In 1929 Stalin's 50th birthday was celebrated across the nation. He was being glorified as the 'Lenin of Today'. Lenin's cult did not disappear, but it was to be gradually smothered by the all-pervasive 'cult of Stalin'.

SOURCE 2.12 The struggle for power. Stalin cleverly, and opportunistically, formed party alliances and broke party alliances until, by 1929, the leading party figures were all 'Stalin men'.

The eclipse of Trotsky

Trotsky's fall from power was dramatic in terms of both the distance and speed at which he fell. In 1921 Trotsky was the number-two man in the country and Lenin's trusted confidant. He was Commissar of War, he had led the Bolsheviks to victory against the Whites, and had commanded the loyalty of the five-million-plus Red Army. By 1929 he had not only lost office but had been expelled from the country, never to return. Stalin's success in destroying Trotsky has already been described. The following timeline shows the key moments in Trotsky's fall from grace. →



Trotsky's fall

- 1921 ● At the 10th Party Congress, a ban on factionalism was enforced. Stalin successfully used this against Trotsky over the next few years.
- 1924 ● Missed Lenin's funeral. Lenin's testament, which castigated Stalin, failed to gain widespread exposure.
Trotsky's opposition to the centralisation and bureaucratisation of the party failed at the 13th Party Congress.
- 1925 ● Lost his job as Commissar of War.
- 1926 ● Removed from the Politburo.
- 1927 ● Expelled from the Communist Party.
- 1928 ● Exiled to Alma-Ata in Turkistan.
- 1929 ● Expelled from the Soviet Union, and began foreign exile in Turkey.



Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin

Historians and the struggle for power

ISAAC DEUTSCHER

Isaac Deutscher was one of the leading historians of the history of the Soviet Union. He was born in 1907 near Kraków in modern-day Poland. Until 1939 he worked as a journalist in Poland (recreated as an independent state at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference). He joined the Polish Communist Party in 1926 but was expelled in 1932 for attacking the policies of Stalin. In 1939 he arrived in London. For the next 28 years, Deutscher worked on leading British publications, such as *The Economist* and *The Observer*, while increasingly focusing on his historical writings. Towards the end of his life, he was the GM Trevelyan Lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

Isaac Deutscher became a leading authority on the history of the Soviet Union. His trilogy on Trotsky – *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet Outcast* – remains one of the leading works on the Bolshevik leader. His biography of Stalin first appeared in 1949, was updated after Stalin's death in 1953, and has been in print ever since.

Deutscher was an ardent Trotskyist and never denied his admiration for the man. However, this did not prevent him writing a classic work on Stalin, and he did credit Stalin with transforming the Soviet Union. In the extract that follows, Deutscher explains the party's fear and suspicion of Trotsky.

Both [Zinoviev and Kamenev] looked upon Stalin as their auxiliary; and though they were sometimes uneasy about a streak of perversity in him, neither suspected him of the ambition to become Lenin's sole successor. Nor, for that matter, did any such suspicion enter the mind of the party as a whole. It was not, on the other hand, very difficult to arouse in the party distrust of Trotsky. The agents of the triumvirate whispered that Trotsky was the potential Danton or, alternatively, the Bonaparte of the Russian Revolution. The whispering campaign was effective, because the party had, from its beginnings, been accustomed to consult the great French precedent. It had always been admitted that history might repeat itself; and that a Directory or a single usurper might once again climb to power on the back of the revolution. It was taken for granted that the Russian usurper would, like his French prototype, be a personality possessed of brilliance and legendary fame won in battles. The mask of Bonaparte seemed to fit Trotsky only too well. Indeed, it might have fitted any personality with the exception of Stalin. In this lay part of his strength.



- The very thing which under different circumstances would have been a liability in a man aspiring to power, his obscurity, was his important asset. The party had been brought up to distrust 'bourgeois individualism' and to strive for collectivism. None of its leaders looked as immune from the former and as expressive of the latter as Stalin. What was striking about the General Secretary was that there was nothing striking about him.

Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 275

QUESTIONS

- 1 How did Zinoviev, Kamenev and others in the party view Stalin?
- 2 Why do you think party figures kept looking back to the French Revolution?
- 3 Why did the 'mask of Bonaparte' best fit Trotsky?
- 4 Why did that mask least fit Stalin?
- 5 From this extract, what is Deutscher's key argument about the reasons why Stalin succeeded in the post-Lenin struggle for power?

ROBERT SERVICE

Robert Service is one of the world's leading authorities on the history of the Soviet Union. Service is a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford and a Fellow of the British Academy. He produced his biography of Stalin several decades after Deutscher. Service agrees with earlier interpretations of Stalin that say he was a 'bureaucrat and a killer'. However, with the benefit of more recent post-Cold War archival research, Service argues that Stalin should be seen as a more complex figure – a leader, writer, theorist, follower of the arts, a family man and even a charmer. In the following extract, Service focuses on the manner in which Stalin was able to manipulate party affairs during the post-Lenin period.

He was highly conspiratorial. According to Politburo secretary Boris Bahzanov, Stalin's desk had your telephones but inside the desk was a further apparatus giving him the facility to eavesdrop on the conversations of dozens of the most influential communist leaders. He could do this without going through the Kremlin switchboard, and the information he gathered must have alerted him to any manoeuvres being undertaken against him. Personal assistants such as Lev Mekhlis and Grigori Kanner carried out whatever shady enterprise he thought up. He was ruthless against his enemies. When Kamenev asked him about the question of gaining a majority in the party, Stalin scoffed: 'Do you know what I think about this? I believe that who votes how in the party is unimportant. What is extremely important is who counts the votes and how they are recorded.' He was implying that he expected the central party apparatus to fiddle the voting figures if ever they went against him ...

Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, Croydon, 2004, pp. 227-8

QUESTIONS

- 1 What impression is Service giving of Stalin at this time?
- 2 Do you think Stalin was wise to behave in this manner? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 Why was Stalin not concerned about party democratic processes?
- 4 Why do you think Stalin had no concerns about how the votes would be counted if they went against him?

Stalin: The Lenin of today

From the time of Lenin's death, Stalin had deliberately and skilfully used the cult of Lenin for his own purposes. He quoted Lenin in his own writing and his speeches. He attacked opponents using the words of Lenin. However, the emphasis gradually began to change and what was to become a 'cult of Stalin' emerged. This will be dealt with more fully in Chapters 3 and 5, but there were already signs of its presence as early as 1929. Stalin's image was frequently reproduced alongside Lenin's (and the founders of socialism, Marx and Engels). It was also beginning to appear alone. Oaths of loyalty were being sworn to Stalin; rarely did a newspaper not have Stalin on its front page. It was becoming the habit of party figures to quote Stalin as well as Lenin. This promotion of Stalin would reach extraordinary heights by the mid-1930s.

When Stalin's 50th birthday was celebrated in 1929 (it was actually his 51st birthday), he was declared within the party and throughout the nation as the 'Lenin of today'. This was merely a taste of the propaganda barrage to come.

1929: Stalin the 'Lenin of today'

Stalinist propaganda began promoting Stalin's near divine status in the late 1920s. Below are two examples of the kind of images that were being popularised. Examine them closely and respond to the questions that follow.



Alamy/Mary Evans Picture Library

SOURCE 2.13 Stalin and Lenin talking together, c. 1922



Bridgeman Images/Klutchais (fl.1932)/Private Collection/Archives Charmet

SOURCE 2.14 Soviet propaganda poster from 1931. The slogan reads, 'The USSR is the shock brigade of the world's proletariat'. The front row shows Joseph Stalin (centre), Mikhail Kalinin, Vyacheslav Molotov and Kliment Vorochilov.



SOURCE 2.15 These two photographs highlight the manner in which the propaganda cult of Stalin sought to rewrite key events in the history of the Russian Revolution. The photograph is of Lenin delivering a speech to members of the Red Army on 5 May 1920 in Sverdlov Square, Moscow. The original photograph is on the top and includes Trotsky and Kamenev. The photograph on the bottom was altered to remove both Trotsky and Kamenev.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think Stalin was so keen to have pictures of him with Lenin published, even long after the death of Lenin?
- 2 Why might such a publication be seen as slightly ironic?
- 3 What do you see as the purpose of the propaganda poster?
- 4 Why might images of Stalin's competitors have been removed from the historical record?
- 5 Conduct further research to find additional examples of the removal of competitors from the historical record. Bring the results of your research to class and explain them.

Conclusion

Lenin's death in 1924 at the age of 54 created an enormous vacuum. The obvious candidate to succeed Lenin seemed to be Trotsky, the civil war hero who had undoubted talents but who was not popular within the party. Lenin's illness had effectively sidelined him as early as mid-1923. At this time a triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin had formed whose primary aim was to isolate Trotsky. When Lenin died, his wife, Krupskaya, presented the Central Committee with his last will and testament. In it, Lenin commented on the party's leading figures, saving his harshest words for Stalin. Stalin managed to survive Lenin's testament. Having been able to consolidate his control of the party bureaucracy in the previous two years, Stalin was able to use his backroom power to defeat his rivals in the post-Lenin struggle for power. Adopting the ideas of the 'right', Stalin worked with Zinoviev and Kamenev to defeat Trotsky. He then linked up with Bukharin and others on the 'right' to attack Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were now promoting Trotsky's 'left' agenda. Once he had defeated them, he turned on Bukharin and other members of the 'right', adopted the ideas of the 'left', and removed his right-wing rivals. By 1929 Stalin's opponents had been subdued and Trotsky was in exile. Stalin had control of the party and he was being hailed as the 'Lenin of today'.



Round-table discussion



The chronology of the struggle for power



Personalities

Chapter summary

- In its earlier days, the Bolshevik Party was notable for its robust debates. However, this 'democratic centralism' had disappeared by the early 1920s.
- As the party grew and its affairs became more complex, greater centralisation and discipline became the key aspects of party life. In part, the demands of the civil war made such developments necessary.
- At the 10th Party Congress in 1921, the ban on factionalism did much to stifle intra-party debate.
- The main beneficiary of the increasing bureaucratisation of the party was Stalin. As Commissar of Nationalities, Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, Politburo member and General Secretary, Stalin gradually became the controlling influence over the party bureaucratic machine.
- Trotsky railed against this development with no success.
- After Lenin's death, there was no clear successor, though most assumed it would be Trotsky; few thought of Stalin, who, though respected for his administrative efficiency, was perceived as a grey, background figure.
- In his last will and testament, Lenin praised Trotsky's talents, but stated that Stalin was not fit for the job of general secretary, and that he should be removed.
- Stalin survived Lenin's testament thanks to Zinoviev's intervention.
- Stalin's success in the post-Lenin struggle for power was the result of his control of the party bureaucracy, his use of the ideological debate and his skill at party manoeuvring.
- Those on the 'left' in the party sought rapid and radical change that would turn the Soviet Union into a modern industrial state. The main proponent of this line of thinking was Trotsky, who promoted his idea of 'permanent revolution'.
- Those on the 'right' argued that the country's development should be more gradual, that the NEP should be continued, and that the peasants should not be squeezed as they were during the period of War Communism.
- At first, Stalin sided with the 'right', and developed his idea of 'socialism in one country'.

- Stalin joined Zinoviev and Kamenev in a triumvirate to defeat Trotsky. He then joined Bukharin and others on the right to defeat Zinoviev and Kamenev, who took up the ideas of the 'left' and who tried, unsuccessfully, to link up with Trotsky.
- Following the 'scissors crisis' (see Chapter 4), Stalin turned on the 'right' and adopted the ideas of the 'left'.
- By 1929, Stalin had defeated all his main rivals, and on his 50th birthday he was being declared the 'Lenin of today'. Stalin had cleverly used the growing 'cult of Lenin' to his advantage. However, there were already signs by this time that a 'cult of Stalin' was developing.
- Trotsky had been completely outmanoeuvred by Stalin. He lost his party posts, was exiled to central Asia and finally forced to permanently leave the Soviet Union.

Further reading

- Service, R, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, Croydon, 2004, Section 2
- Khlevniuk, OV, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, Chapter 2
- Deutscher, I, *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, Chapter 8, pp. 298–318
- Howe, I, *Trotsky*, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1978, pp. 92–115
- McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, Chapter 2, pp. 48–71
- Service, R, *Trotsky: A Biography*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009
- Thatcher, ID, *Trotsky*, Routledge, London, 2003

THE NATURE OF SOVIET RULE

- 1 Explain the difference between 'democratic centralism' and 'bureaucratic centralism'.
- 2 How do you account for the development of bureaucratic centralism?
- 3 In what ways had Stalin's party career before 1917 been different from most other members of the party leadership?
- 4 Explain why Stalin was able to gain such a stranglehold over the party machine by the early 1920s.
- 5 Stalin must have had mixed feelings about Lenin's death. Provide responses to the following:
 - a You are Stalin; write an entry about Lenin's death in your personal diary that you are convinced no one will ever see.
 - b You are Stalin; outline the key points you will make about Lenin's death at the next Central Committee meeting.
- 6 How did Stalin survive Lenin's last will and testament?
- 7 Why did Trotsky not attend Lenin's funeral? How was his absence viewed by many party members?

THE POST-LENIN STRUGGLE FOR POWER

- 8 Why were ideological positions so important for the Bolshevik Party?
- 9 Outline briefly where Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Stalin stood in the 'left' versus 'right' debates of the 1920s.
- 10 Form pairs. Together, produce a script between a member of the 'left' and a member of the 'right' in which each side tries to argue its case and break down the arguments of the other.
- 11 Produce a mind map to explain why Trotsky failed in the post-Lenin leadership struggle. In your diagram, refer to such things as the bureaucracy, character, popularity, ideology, Bonapartism, etc.
- 12 What was the 'cult of Lenin'? How did Stalin make use of it? What would Lenin have most likely thought of his 'cult'?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 13 What happened to Trotsky following his expulsion from the Soviet Union? Is 'Trotskyist' thinking relevant today?
- 14 Who was Alexandra Kollontai? What influence did she have on early Soviet Russia? How was she affected by decisions made at the 10th Party Congress in 1921?

EXTENDED RESPONSES

- 15 'Skilled and grossly underrated'. To what extent does this description of Stalin explain his success in the post-Lenin struggle for power?
- 16 Assess the view that Trotsky himself was responsible for his failure to succeed in the political manoeuvring of the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

03

Dictatorship and totalitarianism



STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine the nature of Stalin’s dictatorship and the debate over totalitarianism.

Aspects to be covered include:

- what is totalitarianism?
.....
- the case that Stalinist rule was totalitarian
.....
- the Constitution of 1936
.....
- the growth of the secret police
.....
- the case that Stalinist rule was not totalitarian
.....



Modern History
Syllabus

Portrait of Joseph Stalin by Isaak Israilevich Brodsky, 1933

Introduction

The political system headed by Stalin in the 1930s has for decades been presented as the classic example of what a totalitarian state is. It is argued that by end of the 1930s, the Soviet system had evolved into a fully-fledged totalitarian regime as the state sought to intervene in every aspect of the lives of its people. The Constitution of 1936 had all the appearances of democratic procedure, but in practice the power of the party was unlimited and unchallenged. The terror that operated in the 1930s reached down to all levels of the party and beyond. Leading figures were caught up in the great show trials of the purges, while millions of ordinary party members and other Soviet citizens found themselves subject to deportation or sentenced to time in a Gulag. The secret police had appeared as a temporary measure in December 1917, but by the late 1930s they had evolved into a massive organisation that enveloped every aspect of Soviet life. Above all this stood Stalin who, particularly after the murder of Kirov in 1934, was untouchable; indeed, Soviet propaganda raised Stalin to near-divine status. The party left no part of Soviet society untouched. The lives of workers, peasants, women and youth could not escape party interference. Education, the media, the arts, the military and the economy all bore the imprint of the presence of the party. And at the top was the figure of Stalin, 'the great helmsman'. However, though most historians continue to adhere to the central role of Stalin in the Soviet system, recent research has attempted to place some doubt on the pervasiveness of the totalitarian model as applied to Stalin's Russia. Questions have been raised about the efficacy of any totalitarian model, and more specifically doubts have been raised about its appropriateness for 1930s Soviet Union.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will examine in more detail the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of Stalinist rule. This chapter will attempt to focus on the 'totalitarian debate'. References will be made to the later chapters.

fascism

A political movement based on extreme nationalism, anti-Communism and opposition to democracy and conservatism. Fascist ideology tends to emphasise the cult of the leader, prefers a militarised style of organisation, uses terror as a political tactic and frequently advocates racist policies

Cold War

The term used to describe the tense state of relations between the United States (the West) and the Soviet Union (the East) between 1945 and 1990. It was both an ideological and a great power conflict. The term 'cold war' is applicable as each side on occasions took the conflict to the brink of war but managed to step back from outright war

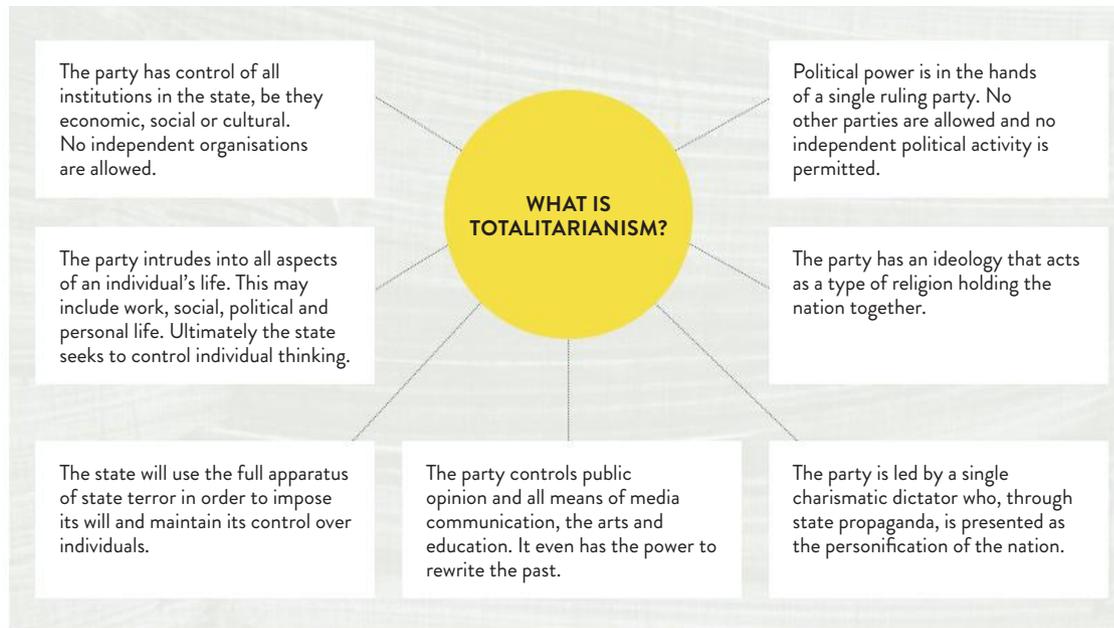
Totalitarianism

The term 'totalitarian' was first used by Italian **Fascists** in the 1920s to describe the aims of their system of rule, in which the ruling party sought to dominate all aspects of life in Italy. After 1945 as the **Cold War** was intensifying, the term came to be used to identify and discuss similarities between Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany and Stalin's Soviet regime. There was a Western propaganda element in this. As the world became more aware of the horrific reality of the consequences of Nazi rule and the Holocaust, highlighting similarities between Stalin and Hitler could only serve to blacken the nature of Soviet Russia in the eyes of the world. In fact, the differences between the two regimes were sharp. However, thinking about totalitarianism has led historians to identify the similarities between the systems of rule established in particular forms of dictatorship. To consider the Stalinist regime of the 1930s in this light, a definition of totalitarianism is required.

Definition of totalitarianism

The novel *1984*, by the English writer George Orwell, was published in 1948. In it Orwell described a government system dominated by the all-powerful figure, 'Big Brother'. In Orwell's *1984* world, every aspect of people's lives, including thought, was dominated and controlled by the state. Many at the time saw *1984* as a parody of life inside the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, several academic writers attempted to develop theories of totalitarianism. One of the most influential works on the topic was the 1956 book *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski. In this work, Friedrich and Brzezinski created a model for totalitarian regimes that had five criteria: a charismatic leader heading a single party, a party ideology, state economic control, state use of

terror and party control of the armed forces. This comparative approach waned during the 1970s and 1980s but has been revisited since the end of the Cold War. Source 3.1 presents a more detailed diagrammatic representation of the main elements of totalitarianism.



SOURCE 3.1 The main elements of a totalitarian regime



- 1 Identify what you think are the three most important elements that combine to indicate a totalitarian regime.
- 2 Explain why you have chosen those three elements.

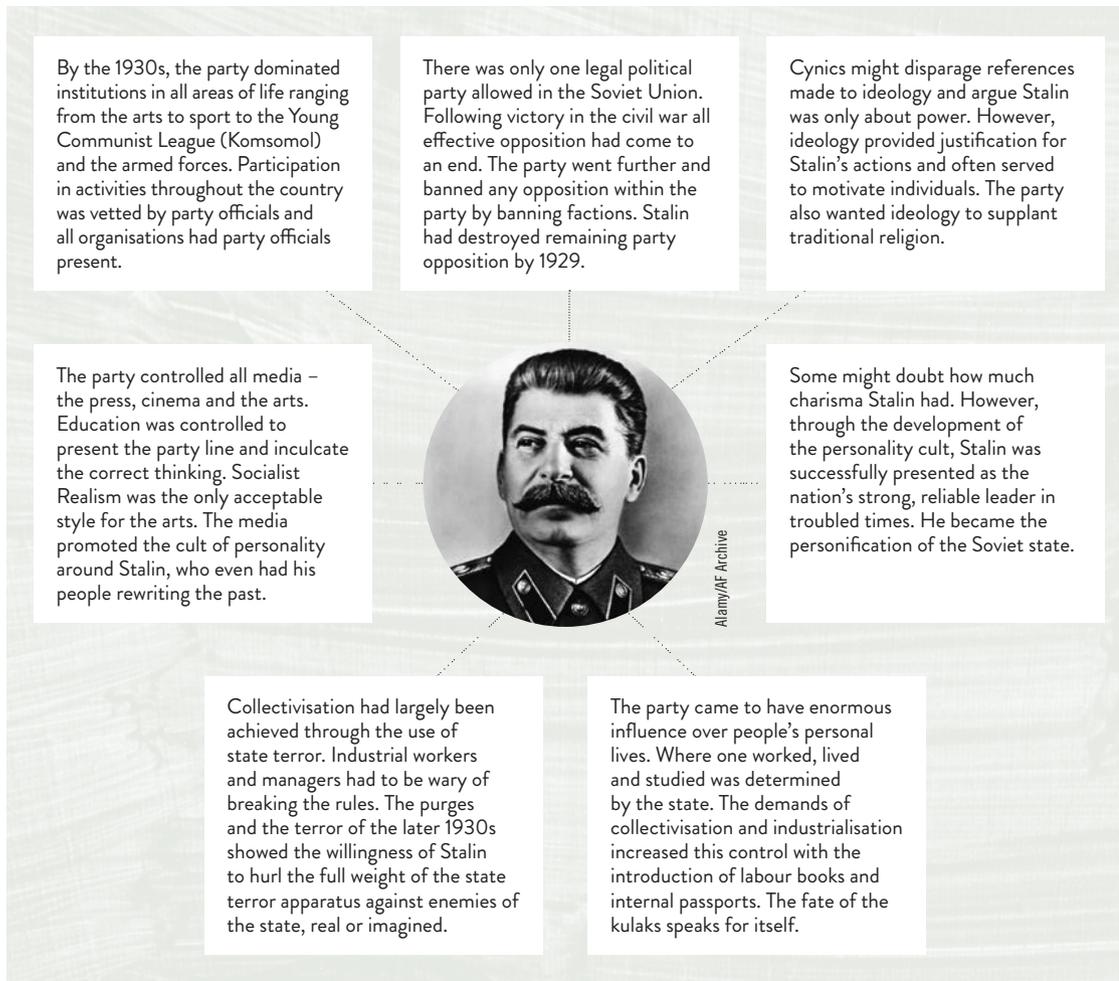
Stalinism as totalitarianism

Notwithstanding the propaganda motive of much political analysis in the 1950s, which clearly sought to paint the Stalinist system in the worst possible light, very strong arguments can be presented to show Stalinism as totalitarianism. These arguments are summarised in Source 3.2.

Stephen Lee, in *European Dictatorships 1914–1945*, identifies four key points that mark out a totalitarian regime: firstly, it has a radical program for change and deliberately mobilises the masses to achieve this; secondly, the regime is controlled by a single party led by a leader who is promoted with a cult of personality; thirdly, the individual is totally subordinated to the state by means of coercion and indoctrination; and fourthly, a totalitarian state has complete control of the economy. This leads him to conclude:

“ ... In some respects the most ‘totalitarian’ of all the regimes may appear to have been Stalin’s Russia, since it fulfilled all the categories mentioned. Marxism-Leninism was an all-embracing ideology which was used extensively as a social-engineering force ... ”

Apologists for Stalin, such as EH Carr, Joseph E Davies (the former US ambassador to Moscow), and the *New York Times* journalist, Walter Duranty, doubted the scale of brutality in the Soviet Union of the 1930s. Isaac Deutscher, writing before access to the Soviet archives became available after the end of the Cold War, suggested that any brutality in the 1930s could have been the result of the



SOURCE 3.2 Stalinism as totalitarianism

non-totalitarian nature of Stalinist rule. The argument runs that Stalin was in fact a weak dictator, that the party-state apparatus was so vast, and covered such an enormous geographical area, that it was relatively free of interference from the top leadership. Thus, Stalin's dictatorship was unstable and that the worst excesses of the time, such as the mass repression, were the result not of Stalin's totalitarian control but arose spontaneously 'from below'.

Recent research from the former Soviet archives suggests that this was definitely not the case. The regime had worked out effective methods of pressuring society and the party-state structures. Stalin had a strong grip on power and the implementation of the important decisions.

“ ... The documentary evidence offers no support for the idea of a 'weak dictator'. We do not know of a single decision of major consequence taken by anyone other than Stalin ... Stalin himself did not need to exercise tight control over all party and government bodies to retain dictatorial power. It was sufficient to hold the main levers of power, the most important being control of the secret police ... Although Stalin relied heavily on state security, he never became beholden to it ... ”

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, pp. 37, 39, 41

In his book *Sacred Causes*, the British historian Michael Burleigh explains how Bolshevism evolved into a political religion, which he sees as a key element of a totalitarian regime. At first it was Lenin, but by the mid-1930s it was Stalin who had become the Soviet Union's saviour. The following extract from Burleigh's book gives a flavour of the religious nature of Stalinist totalitarianism.

“ He (Stalin) slipped easily into the tsars’ role of genial father-figure, to whose justice desperate people turned when they sought to outflank unresponsive officialdom ... This belief in Stalin’s good-natured blindness sat oddly with the repeated claim to omniscience – the essence of the ‘fantasy state’ based on the interaction of the inner workings of a dictatorial mind and the wider society (including its institutions) as a whole. The following Stalin-era poem reflected the Orwellian spirit:

And so – everywhere, In the workshops, in the mines
In the Red Army, the kindergarten
He is watching ...
You look at his portrait and it’s as if he knows
Your work – and weighs it
You’ve worked badly – his brow lowers
But when you’ve worked well, he smiles in his moustache

Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European dictators to Al Qaeda*, Harper Collins, London, 2006, pp. 74–5

Earlier accounts of Stalin’s Russia argued that it should also be remembered that the Soviet Union in the 1930s still remained a very inefficient system. The problems of land size, and poor transport and communications, which had plagued the tsarist regime in earlier years, had not yet been fully overcome. The party in Moscow might hand down directives; it was another thing to ensure that those directives were obeyed to the letter in distant places such as Vladivostok. Indeed, some local party functionaries sought to be more independent. Stalin hinted at this when he blamed the excesses of collectivisation and the terror on overzealous local officials. (As Khlevniuk has shown, this view has been countered by recent research.)

- 1 Carefully re-read what Lee, Khlevniuk and Burleigh have to say about the totalitarian nature of Stalinist rule. Isolate the key point each historian is making. Attempt to limit your answer to no more than two sentences per historian.

The Constitution of 1936

It seems bizarre that such a system should even bother having a constitution, but in December 1936 the Constitution of the USSR, known as the Fundamental Law, was proclaimed with great fanfare. On paper it was a truly democratic document, guaranteeing the basic freedoms of speech, religion, press and assembly, and provided for free elections based on universal suffrage with no discrimination against any religious, ethnic or national group.

Soviet citizens could vote in elections at various levels ranging from village to town to province to republic. The constitution made the ‘Supreme Soviet’ the highest organ of state power in the USSR. It had two houses: the Soviet of the Union (one representative for every 300 000 citizens) and the Soviet of the Nationalities (which aimed to provide separate representation for each national group). The Supreme Soviet appointed the Council of Ministers, which was the official government of the USSR. The Supreme Soviet also chose the ‘presidium’, whose chairman was the official head of state.

Despite the democratic guarantees and the complicated nature of the governmental set-up, the Soviet Constitution was of course a facade. The Communist Party, according to its self-definition, theoretically represented the interests of the Soviet people; other parties were not needed and were hence illegal. Elections took place but there was only one candidate to vote for: the party’s nominee. The constitution provided window-dressing legitimacy for the power of the party, which of course meant the power of Stalin.

“ ... The constitution that remained valid until 1977 was, in terms of reflecting the true ideals of democracy, not worth the paper it was printed on. In contrast to the ideals espoused in the constitution, the actual consensus-building and decision-making process moved, in the population, in the party, and in the state, from top to bottom ... The new occurrence in the 1930s was not the hegemony of the party but rather personal dictatorship of one man over the party as well as his use of terror as an instrument of rule ... ”

G Besier and K Stoklosa, *European Dictatorships: A Comparative History of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2013, p. 49



The Soviet Constitution

The evolution of the secret police

One of the most fundamental elements of a totalitarian state is the pervasiveness of the secret police and this was to be a key aspect of the Stalinist totalitarian state. When the Cheka was formed in December 1917 under the leadership of Felix Dzerzhinsky, it was seen as a temporary means to deal with the likely threat to the young Bolshevik regime of counter-revolutionaries. It grew in strength during the civil war and became renowned for its willingness to implement the most barbaric atrocities. Dzerzhinsky was seen as incorruptible and totally loyal to Lenin.

After the victory in the civil war, the Cheka was placed under the control of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. In 1922 the Cheka became the GPU (the Political Administration of the State); the secret police had become a permanent organ of state. In 1923 the GPU became the OGPU – the Unified Political Administration of the State. Though Dzerzhinsky worked with Stalin at this time, he remained very much his ‘own man’ and as incorruptible as ever.

Dzerzhinsky died in 1926 and was succeeded by Menzhinsky, who was not as strong as his predecessor. Stalin was able to direct him to do things Dzerzhinsky would not have done. The OGPU now spied on party members and began to use violence against them. Menzhinsky’s ill health meant that the organisation came increasingly under the control of his deputy, Yagoda. Menzhinsky had tried to maintain party control of the police but this changed under Yagoda, though he did succeed in preventing death sentences being carried out against ‘old Bolsheviks’.

In 1934 the OGPU and the Commissariat of Internal Affairs were merged and became the NKVD. Stalin brought in more new people and he became exasperated at Yagoda’s unwillingness to do his bidding. In 1936 Yagoda was replaced



Getty Images/Laski Collection

SOURCE 3.3 Felix Dzerzhinsky (at left) as leader of the GPU with members of his staff during the 1920s



Alamy Stock Photo/Heritage Image Partnership Ltd

SOURCE 3.4 Stalin (centre) being escorted by members of the GPU →

by Yezhov. Yezhov was different from his predecessors. He owed his whole career to Stalin and was quite prepared to do his master's bidding. It was under Yezhov that the terror of the 1930s was to reach its height. The NKVD used the full array of methods usually associated with such organisations: arrest without being charged, solitary confinement, torture, threats against the families of those charged and the use of prison camps in the freezing Arctic north (known as the Gulag). These practices were known collectively as the 'Yezhovshchina'.

The influence of the NKVD was everywhere, from factories to schools, libraries, parks and the army. Millions of files were kept on people. By now the secret police was not controlled by the party; it controlled the party, under Stalin's direction, of course. Stalin enforced a massive system of surveillance in true 'big brother' fashion. Nobody was free of this surveillance, not even the police themselves.

Being part of the secret police was no guarantee of safety. The secret police themselves were under constant surveillance. Stalin had managed to create a system in which everyone felt they were being watched by someone, even members of the secret police. This applied to even the top levels of the NKVD. Yagoda was arrested in 1937 and shot the following year. Yagoda's successor, Yezhov, was arrested and executed in early 1940. Yezhov's deputy, Beria, took control of the NKVD in December 1938 (he, too, would be executed, in December 1953). Khlevniuk, the biographer of Stalin, sums up the situation thus: '... The new executioners destroyed the old, only to later wind up in the torture chamber themselves ...'



Getty Images/Laski Diffusion

SOURCE 3.5 Construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal. The canal was constructed between 1931 and 1933 by forced labour of Gulag inmates.

QUESTION

Copy out the following table and fill it in based on the content of this information box.

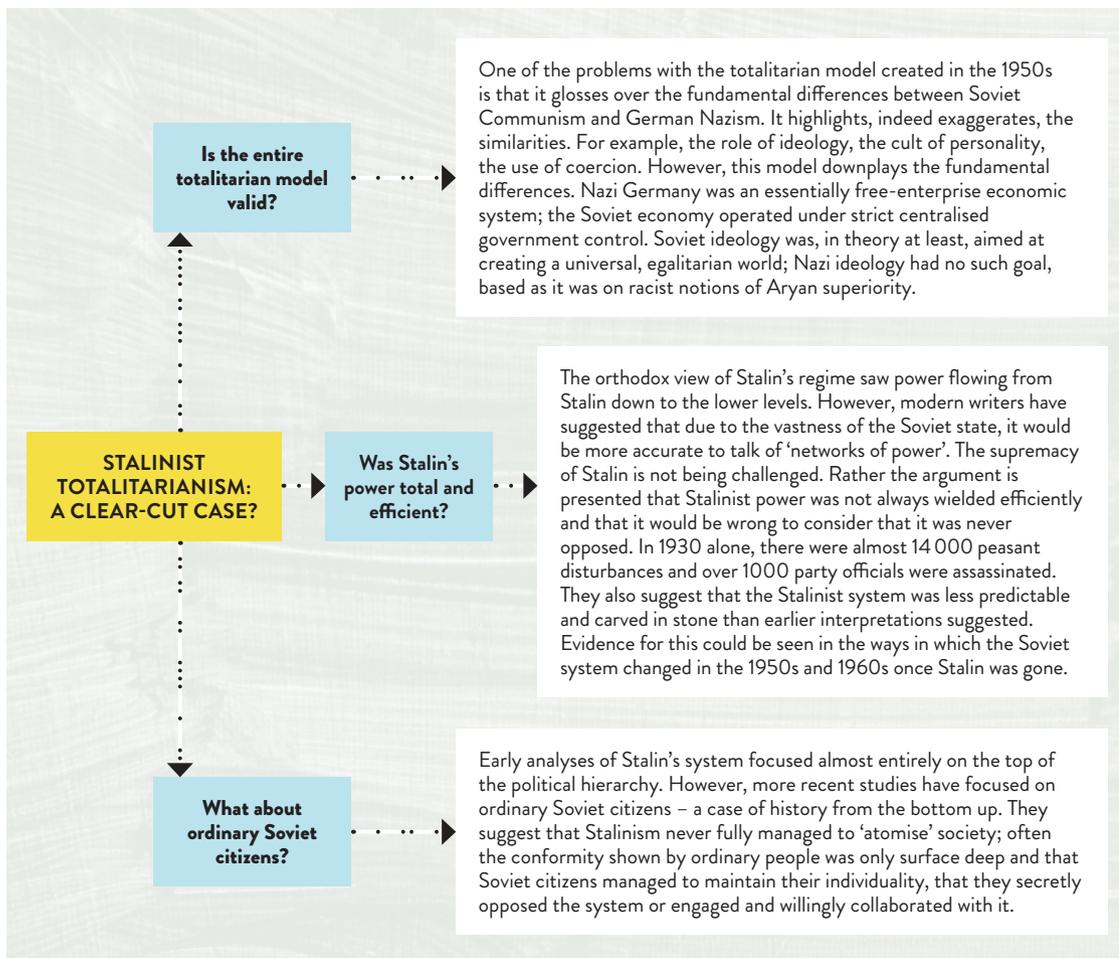
ORGANISATION	PERIOD OF EXISTENCE	LEADER	FATE OF THE LEADER
The Cheka			
The GPU			
The OGPU			
The NKVD			



Soviet Secret Police

The case against Stalinism as totalitarianism

In recent decades the traditional, orthodox view of Stalinism as totalitarianism has been challenged by a range of historians. This does not mean that historians are denying the central role of Stalin, the extent of his power or the brutality of the system. Source 3.6 summarises some of the fundamental issues that have been raised.



SOURCE 3.6 Questioning of the totalitarian argument

Various writers in recent years have raised doubts about the totalitarian nature of Stalin's rule. Their doubts do not destroy the argument of Stalinist totalitarianism. However, they do prove that the issue is far more complex and involved. The English historian, James Harris, suggests a paradox between the enormity of the power that Stalin had and his ability to exercise that power. He suggests that the more Stalin became the centre of everything, the more difficult it was for him to administer the party's institutions. Harris further says that the more Stalin tried to accelerate change, the more he engendered resistance from ordinary people, and that in fact he became the focus of public resentment. This is a challenge to the traditional view that suggested ordinary Soviet citizens saw Stalin as above the day-to-day problems, indeed as someone to whom they might appeal for assistance, in the same way that the Tsar was seen.

The traditional totalitarian model of Stalinism suggested that ordinary people were totally repressed, that they conformed without question and functioned within the state almost as robots. The fundamental reason for this sort of behaviour, of course, would have been fear. In his wide-ranging study of Soviet diaries, written by ordinary citizens, Jochen Hellbeck has suggested that ordinary people were not simple automatons. He argues that individuals did not simply accept the ideology and propaganda of the time but that they engaged with it. In fact many Soviet people actively and enthusiastically took up the party line and wanted to apply it to their own lives. Others expressed their doubts and confusions in their diaries. Thus, Hellbeck suggests that ordinary Soviet citizens' diaries reveal people who quietly rebelled, or became keenly involved in what was happening

in Stalin's Russia. In other words they were not just unthinking cogs in a machine, conforming out of fear. It would appear that Stalinism was not simply a system imposed on a fearful population as argued in the totalitarian model, but something that nurtured cooperation and collaboration from the people.

Assessing totalitarianism

SHEILA FITZPATRICK AND EVERYDAY STALINISM

Sheila Fitzpatrick is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and gained her PhD from St Antony's College, Oxford. She is Professor of History at the University of Sydney and has worked at the University of Chicago. Fitzpatrick is one of the leading authorities on the history of the Soviet Union. Her major focus has been on the lives of ordinary Soviet citizens during the Stalinist era of the 1930s. Her social history of Stalinist Russia is very much a work of 'history from below', in contrast to earlier historians' work that has focused on the elites of the Soviet system. Fitzpatrick's research on Stalinist Russia cast some doubts on the traditional totalitarian view of the 1930s. She argues that though citizens conformed outwardly, their personal lives were far more important to them. Fear played its part, but life was really just a grind and an attempt to survive. Indeed she argues that for all its repression and conformity, Stalin's regime also offered many ordinary people great opportunities and many Russians, particularly younger ones, became keen supporters of the regime.

In the following extract Fitzpatrick describes the independent thinking of ordinary Soviet people with regards to the news. There is no unquestioning acceptance, *1984*-style, here.

... Skepticism about the reliability of what was written in the papers – as expressed in the joke that there was no truth in *Pravda* (which means truth) and no news in *Izvestiia* (which means news) – was widespread. The reaction that 'It's all lies' was not uncommon: for example, 'There are no real Stakhanovites; all that is just written in the paper, but doesn't exist in life, they make it all up.' But most newspaper readers, while distrusting the press, assumed that some of what appeared in the papers had a relationship to reality. One Harvard Project respondent, a skilled worker with a high school education, said that he did not believe the boasting about economic achievements in the Soviet press, but he did believe the articles that described 'disorder, nonfulfillment and spoilage of production.' If the press published a denial by TASS, the Soviet international news agency, of a foreign report, he believed it, for 'if they deny something (there) must be (something) to it.'

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, pp 187–88

In a totalitarian regime one might expect people to be extremely cautious, keep a low profile. However, Fitzpatrick makes the point that this was not the case. She says that industrial managers who succeeded often took risks in their work even though they faced the possibility of arrest and prison. Writers and theatre producers were admired amongst their peers for pushing ideas to the brink of regime acceptance, even when punishment might beckon. One could not imagine characters from *1984* behaving this way.

... Stalinist citizens, although generally passive, were also intermittent risk-takers – people who bought lottery tickets and played the potentially dangerous game of denouncing their bosses; people who were liable to tell anti-Soviet jokes, and who sometimes, when drunk, made obscene gestures at sacred images in public places. They were by no means as cautious as one might expect of persons living under a highly repressive regime, perhaps because they had no confidence that caution would ensure survival ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 221





ROBERT SERVICE AND TERROR

A totalitarian regime is one which has achieved conformity and acceptance, and where no opposition exists (or is possible). It could be argued that the Stalinist terror of the 1930s (see Chapter 5) had achieved this; the terror displayed the strength of the regime. However, it could equally be argued that Stalin's frequent use of terror suggests weakness not strength; that in fact, the latent hostility of so many towards the regime made the use of terror necessary. In his biography of Stalin Robert Service hints at this with his description of the opposition and resentment with which Stalin had to deal.

... Years of state violence and popular hardship had deepened the reservoir of anger with the regime. Kulaks and their supporters had been killed and deported. Industrial managers and other experts had been persecuted. 'Bourgeois nationalists', including Russian ones, had been imprisoned. Remaining religious leaders had been persecuted. Show trials had been organised in Moscow and the provinces. The labour camp system held a million convicts. Whole zones in northern Russia, Siberia and Kazakhstan were inhabited by involuntary colonists who lived and worked in conditions scarcely better than prison. Hostility to the regime was not confined to those who had suffered arrest or deportation. Peasants on collective farms, especially in the famine areas, hated the agricultural system imposed on the villages ... The display of obedience did not tell the whole truth. A multitude of individuals suffered from the punitive, arbitrary workings of the Soviet order and might be counted on to support almost any movement against Stalin and his policies ...

Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, London, 2010, p. 287.



Totalitarianism



Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech'



1984

Conclusion

Most historians argue that under Stalin, the Soviet Union in the 1930s had been transformed into the closest thing to totalitarianism the world has ever seen (apart from present-day North Korea, perhaps). The party, ably assisted by the growing power of the secret police, permeated every element of Soviet life. It even became dangerous to even think anything that went against the wishes of the party. Stalinist rule was typified by the extensive use of terror which was imposed across society, against kulaks, various national groups and social classes within the country. Party members were especially subjected to the terror as Stalin removed thousands of party members from the highest to the lowest levels. Public show trials against former leading Bolsheviks were the most obvious sign of the terror. The secret police grew in size and power, and came to dominate the party, but always remained under the control of Stalin. Those inflicting terror and fear were nearly always to eventually suffer the fate of their victims. However, recent writings on Stalinist Russia of the 1930s have attempted to dent the traditional, orthodox view of totalitarian rule under Stalin. The whole concept of totalitarianism has been brought into question and the unwieldy structure of the Soviet Union suggests that totalitarian rule would have been extremely difficult to enforce. Historians who have focused on the ordinary Soviet citizen have shown that people living under Stalin's rule were not the meek, passive automatons that might be expected in a totalitarian regime.

Chapter summary

- A totalitarian regime is one that intrudes on every aspect of a citizen's life. Theories of totalitarianism were developed in the 1950s as attempts were made to equate the Stalinist regime with that of Nazi Germany.
- Stalinist Russia matched most of the criteria that analysts had developed to explain the nature of a totalitarian regime.
- Recent research has suggested that Stalin was not a 'weak' dictator but responsible for all major decisions.
- Against this totalitarian background, Stalin introduced a constitution in 1936 that suggested that the Soviet system was based on democratic principles.
- However, the all-pervasiveness of the Communist Party and Stalin's domination made a joke of the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution.
- The key element of Stalin's totalitarian regime was the secret police which came to dominate the party but always under the control of Stalin.
- The entire notion of a totalitarian model, developed from the 1950s, has been called into question as the two regimes it was based on – Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia – were so different.
- Recent studies of the Stalinist period have tended to focus on the view from 'below'. These works have dented the totalitarian notion of Stalin's rule, as ordinary Soviet citizens were not taken in by the regime and indeed were willing to throw caution to the wind and show defiance.
- The policies of the Stalinist period succeeded in creating a wide body of opposition to the regime.

Further reading

- Fitzpatrick, S, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000
- Conquest, R, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007
- Duranty, W, *The Kremlin and the People*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1942 (a controversial book that argues the case for Stalin and the 'justice' of the purges)
- Montefiore, SS, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, Phoenix, London, 2004
- Service, R, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, London, 2004, Part Three
- Hellbeck, J, *Revolution on My Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2006

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

- 1 List the characteristics that would indicate a system of government was totalitarian in nature.
- 2 Why were historians researching the nature of totalitarianism in the 1950s?
- 3 Imagine you are a Soviet citizen from the 1930s speaking confidentially to a visitor. List the ways in which the Soviet system was intruding directly into your life.
- 4 How democratic was the Soviet Constitution of 1936? Give reasons for your answer.
- 5 Place these organisations in the correct chronological order: NKVD, Cheka, OGPU, GPU.
- 6 Place these secret police chiefs in the correct chronological order: Beria, Dzerzhinsky, Yagoda, Yezhov, Menzhinsky.
- 7 What was the essential difference between the Cheka and the NKVD?
- 8 Name three historians who have challenged the totalitarian idea of Stalin's Russia.
- 9 What does 'history from below' mean?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 10 Does the national and international context of historians affect the ways in which they view the past?
- 11 How did the Cold War environment of the early 1950s affect Western interpretations of Stalin's Russia?
- 12 Might the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights issues of 1960s America have had an influence on historians' writings?
- 13 Why has the opening of the former Soviet archives been so important for understanding Stalin's rule?

EXTENDED RESPONSE QUESTION

- 14 To what extent can it be argued that the Stalinist regime of the 1930s was a totalitarian state?

Economic transformation under Stalin



STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine the nature of economic change under Stalin between 1928 and 1941.

Aspects to be covered include:

- the 'scissors crisis'
- industrialisation and the Five-Year Plans
- Stakhanovism
- the collectivisation of agriculture
- the impact of economic change on the USSR
- Holodomor



Modern History
Syllabus

Poster by artist Gustav Klutsis,
'1st of May: Join the battle for the
five year plan', 1931

Introduction

As Trotsky and others on the left had predicted, the Soviet economy was in trouble by about 1927–28; the limits of the New Economic Policy (NEP) had been reached. This economic crisis was referred to as the ‘scissors crisis’. For Stalin, the scissors crisis provided him with a dual opportunity: he was able to destroy his rivals on the right, and it gave him both the opportunity and the excuse to launch the Soviet Union into a massive program of economic modernisation. With the implementation of a series of Five-Year Plans Stalin exhorted, and his system terrorised, the Soviet people to achieve his goal of economic equality with the West within a decade. The process of industrialisation experienced many successes and failures but there was no denying that, though the cost had been high, by 1941 the Soviet Union’s economy had been transformed. A key feature of the transformation was the forced collectivisation of agriculture and the ‘war on the kulaks’. Capital was needed for modernisation; grain exports would be the source. The country’s peasants would be forced to participate; the result was virtual civil war in the countryside. The worst affected region during the collectivisation process was the Ukraine, where a man-made famine killed up to five million people.



Industrialisation

The NEP had restored much health to the Soviet economy. In many areas pre-war production had been matched and in some areas even exceeded. However, the ‘scissors crisis’ of 1927–28 indicated that economic growth had not only slowed, but that in-built restraints within the NEP-based economy meant that further growth was impossible. Stalin realised that drastic measures were needed if the Soviet Union were to achieve its goal of modernisation; he was also concerned about the defence connotations of the country’s lack of industrial power. The first Five-Year Plan was launched in 1928.

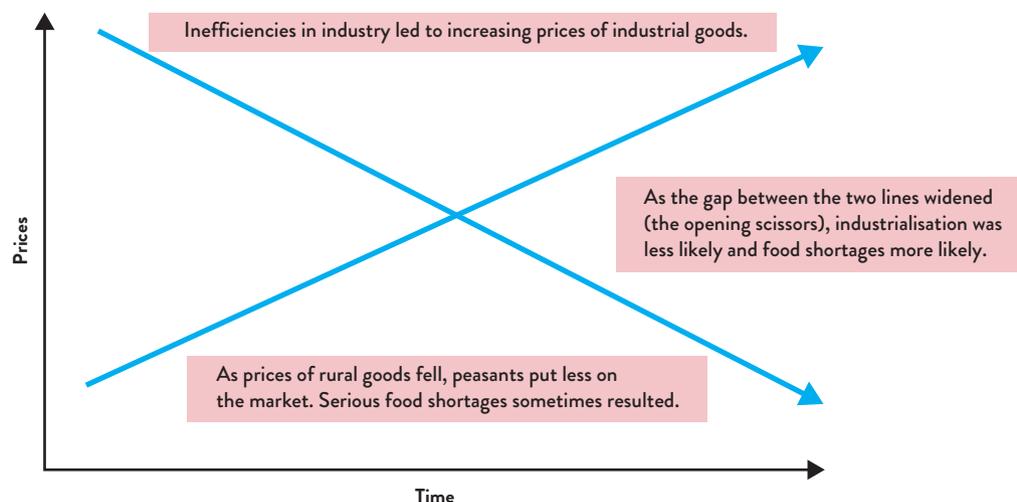
The focus of the plan was to rapidly expand areas of heavy industry such as coal, oil, iron and steel, and chemical production. Little attention was paid to the development of consumer industries. The second Five-Year Plan (1933–37) had similar concerns, but there was some allowance for the development of light industry. The third Five-Year Plan (1938–41, cut short due to the Second World War) had a major focus on the defence area. By 1941 the Soviet Union had become one of the leading industrial powers in the world and could boast major economic achievements, such as the building of the Dnieper Dam. It also had one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the world. However, the cost had been incredibly high in terms of lives lost, waste and inefficiencies, a plummeting standard of living and the denial of freedom as a police state took form.

The ‘scissors crisis’ and the end of the NEP

As early as 1921 those on the left of the party, such as Trotsky and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, urged the promotion of a policy of rapid industrialisation. This could only be achieved, argued Preobrazhensky, a Bolshevik economist and member of the Central Committee, if resources were transferred from the agricultural sector. He called this ‘primitive socialist accumulation’. Such ideas went against the prevailing thinking of the party in the 1920s, which favoured a continuation of the NEP.

The state’s monopoly of trade had to be reinstated, and prices needed to be artificially fixed so that resources could be drained from agriculture and concentrated in industry. Preobrazhensky and Trotsky predicted that the NEP would result in increasing prices of goods from the industrial/manufacturing sector, and falling prices of goods from the agricultural sector. This was largely the result of inefficiencies in the manufacturing sector, where industry could not take advantage of **economies of scale** or developments such as mass-production and assembly-line techniques, which were occurring in countries such as the USA. Agricultural prices were falling because domestic demand had been satisfied by 1926, and there was little for peasants to buy even if they could sell their surpluses. Falling prices meant peasants were cutting production and putting less produce on the market, with all the dangers of food shortages this implied.

The Soviet economy presented a dilemma. With the majority of the population working in agriculture, the main source of capital for industrialisation had to come from the rural sector. However, failures in the manufacturing sector meant that peasants had ceased trying to increase output by 1926. Their output was not going to increase without improvements in the manufacturing sector. Those improvements could not be achieved without capital from the agricultural sector. It was a classic **‘catch 22’ situation**.



SOURCE 4.1 Diagrammatical representation of the ‘scissors crisis’

economies of scale

The ability of industry to produce greater output at a lower price as the industry increases in size

‘catch 22’ situation

From the 1961 US satirical novel *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller. The term refers to two outcomes, neither of which can be achieved, as each requires the other to be achieved first

Trotsky and Preobrazhensky predicted that a point would be reached when urban prices began to exceed rural prices, and once this occurred, rural production would steadily fall. This increasing gap between urban and rural prices was likened to a pair of scissors opening: hence the term ‘scissors crisis’. It had made a brief appearance in 1923 as Trotsky had predicted, but the economy was able to overcome it. However, by 1927–28 the scissors crisis had taken a firm hold over the Soviet economy. The situation is illustrated in Source 4.1. If the NEP continued, argued Preobrazhensky, it would be impossible for the Soviet Union to industrialise. This had not only economic but also defence implications.

The industrialisation drive

The process of industrialisation required three basic economic essentials: **capital**, **labour** and **resources**. Clearly, the Soviet Union was likely to have problems with all three elements. The fundamental method of **capital accumulation** was to squeeze the countryside. This will be dealt with in more detail later, but essentially it involved forcing peasants onto collective farms, maximising grain output and exporting as much as was humanly (and often inhumanely) possible. Grain exports earned foreign exchange, which could be used to purchase Western technology and even Western technicians.

As the historian, Robert Service, explains in the following extract, Stalin was utterly uncompromising on the need to ‘squeeze’ the peasants.

“ ... The economic premise of policy was not publicly revealed, but Stalin made it plain in an instruction to Molotov: ‘Force up the export of grain to the maximum. This is the core of everything. If we export grain, credits will be forthcoming.’ A few days later, in August 1930, he repeated the message in case its content had not been fully accepted. Mikoyen had reported complacently about the level of wheat procurement across the USSR. This to Stalin was insufferable. The point was to go on raising that level and to ‘force up’ the grain export trade ‘wildly’. Nothing less than a hysterical campaign to collect and sell wheat abroad would satisfy him ... ”

Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, Pan Books, London, 2010, p. 272

The squeeze in the countryside allowed for the movement of peasant labour into the factories. Thousands of people sent to the **Gulags** provided another source of labour – the secret police having ‘trilled’ the use of political prisoners in the Solvetskii camps from the mid-1920s. By the mid-1930s, superhuman efforts had succeeded in creating a canal and railway network across the country, which made possible the movement of Russia’s vast resources to where they were required.

The Five-Year Plans

The planning of the economy was a ‘top down’ process. Through the state planning body, Gosplan, the party established overall targets but left the commissariats of the various industries to work out the details. The commissariats worked through their regional administrators who then established specific plans and targets for individual enterprises.

The first Five-Year Plan covered the period from October 1928 to the end of 1932. The whole nation was effectively thrown into an enormous struggle to transform the Soviet Union from a backward agricultural economy into a modern, industrial one. Stalin did not hold back on the importance of industrialisation. In 1931, he stated: ‘We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.’ Hitler coming to power in Germany only served to increase the urgency of the need for change (see Chapter 7).

The second Five-Year Plan was to run from 1933 to the end of 1937. This plan placed a greater emphasis on class B industries, though there was still great emphasis placed on electrification and transport development. The third Five-Year Plan was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Its main emphasis was on the build-up of the Soviet Union’s military power.

capital

Money or other assets

labour

A workforce; in this case, urban workers to work in factories

resources

Raw materials such as coal and iron ore

capital accumulation

The acquisition of money and other assets to invest further in the economy

Gulag

Acronym for the ‘Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps’. It was an institution inside the secret police, responsible for the forced labour/prison camps that were established from the 1930s. The word ‘gulag’ came to simply mean a forced labour/prison camp.

The emphasis in the plans was primarily on heavy industry. In the first plan, ambitious targets were set, with some sectors of the economy expected to increase their output by several hundredfold.

- Class A industries such as coal, iron and steel, oil and machine building were expected to triple their output.
- Class B industries such as those producing consumer goods were to double their output.
- By 1933 Soviet **Gross National Product (GNP)** was planned to be 236 per cent above the 1927–28 level. Electrical power was expected to rise 600 per cent.
- Few sectors of the economy reached their ambitious targets despite the announcements coming from Soviet propaganda. Historians still debate the successes of the Five-Year Plans.

However, enormous achievements could not be denied. The massive iron and steel centre of Magnitogorsk, beyond the Ural Mountains, arose from almost nothing. Under the guidance of American Hugh Cooper, the giant Dnieper Dam and its hydroelectric works were built. Coal fields near Moscow and in the Donets Basin, at Karaganda in Kazakhstan, and in Siberia were developed. The Soviet Union's transport network was transformed. Canals were constructed, often with forced labour, which linked the major waterways of the country from the Black Sea to the White Sea in the far north of the country. It has been estimated that the tractor plant that was built in the town of Chelyabinsk covered an area that was larger than the original town. Accompanying industrial development was significant urban growth, not only of old established cities such as Moscow and Leningrad, but of smaller centres that grew with industrialisation, such as Minsk and Sverdlovsk.

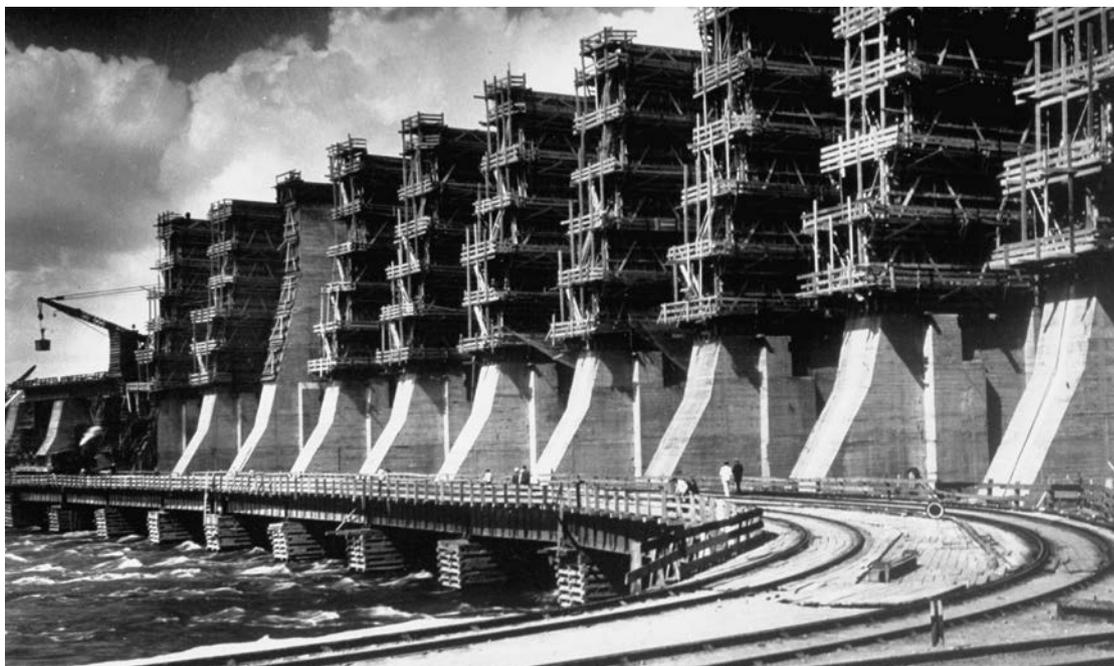
Gross National Product (GNP)

The total monetary value of all the goods and services produced inside a country over a particular period of time



Alamy/RIA Novosti

SOURCE 4.2 A blast furnace under construction at the Magnitogorsk Iron Steel Works, November 1933



Getty Images/Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection

SOURCE 4.3 The world's largest dam, the Dnieper River Dam, begins construction, c. 1930

The Five-Year Plans had achieved much, but Stalin's ridiculously ambitious targets were often simply out of reach. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 give an indication of how well targets were reached. The massive increases in expenditure that were directed towards defence, especially in the third Five-Year Plan, were a reflection of the deteriorating European situation and the threats to Soviet security (see Chapter 7).

TABLE 4.1 Targets and achievements of the Five-Year Plans

Production in millions of tonnes	1927–28 level	FIRST FIVE-YEAR PLAN		SECOND FIVE-YEAR PLAN	
		Target for 1933	Actual result for 1933	Target for 1937	Actual result for 1937
Coal	35.4	75.0	64.0	152.5	128.0
Oil	11.7	21.7	21.4	46.8	28.5
Pig iron	3.2	10.0	6.2	16.0	14.5

TABLE 4.2 Armaments expenditure of the Soviet Union

EXPENDITURE ON ARMAMENTS	1933	1937	1940
Total spending in millions of roubles	42080	106238	174350
Defence spending	1421	17481	56800
% of total spending going to defence	3.4%	16.5%	32.6%

Tables adapted from M Morcombe and M Fielding, *The Spirit of Change: Russia in Revolution*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1998, p. 205.

- 1 Who had predicted the 'scissors crisis' several years before it occurred?
- 2 What was the essence of the scissors crisis?
- 3 Why was it necessary to 'squeeze' the countryside to achieve industrialisation?
- 4 What were the main aims of each of the Five-Year Plans?

The costs of industrialisation

There is no doubt that Stalin successfully mobilised popular support for the great change he introduced after 1928. The Soviet propaganda machine promoted feelings of nationalism and patriotic sacrifice within the Soviet Union. Indeed for many people there was a feeling that they were engaged in the great adventure of building socialism. Many people, young citizens in particular, willingly volunteered to work in some of the country's most inhospitable regions. There were thousands of foreign workers who also felt that they were playing a part in creating socialism. When propaganda failed to motivate the Soviet people, incentives were introduced such as higher wages for skilled workers and additional social benefits.

However, though national pride might be felt by many, the costs of Stalin's great change were enormous. Source 4.4 summarises the negative side of the industrialisation process.



SOURCE 4.4 The costs of industrialisation

Historians on Stalin's industrialisation

Historians have differed significantly in their assessments of Stalin's path to industrialisation. Read the following extracts and answer the questions.

LIONEL KOCHAN

At a time when industrial production in the principal capitalist powers had actually declined below the level of 1913, that of Soviet Russia showed an almost fourfold increase over the level of 1913.

Lionel Kochan, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 292

ROBERT CONQUEST

The results in industry were not as negative as in agriculture. But vastly excessive claims were made, both at home and in Soviet propaganda abroad. Indeed, it is astonishing how deep the myth penetrated in Western circles. Most of the figures then touted were falsified. Current Soviet estimates for the 1930s are that instead of the alleged fivefold increase in production between 1929 and 1941, the true figure is about one and a half.

Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, Penguin, London, 1992, p. 190





ORLANDO FIGES

The first major Gulag project was the White Sea Canal, 227 kilometres of waterway between the Baltic and the White Sea, which employed 100 000 prisoners by 1932 ... Prisoners were given primitive hand tools – crudely fashioned axes, saws and hammers – instead of dynamite and machinery. Worked to exhaustion in the freezing cold, an estimated 25 000 prisoners died during the first winter of 1931–32 alone. Their frozen corpses were thrown into the ditch ... Built on top of bones, the canal was a fitting symbol of the Stalinist regime, whose greatest propaganda successes were achieved with total disregard for the millions of lives they cost.

Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991*, Penguin, London, 2014, pp. 222–3

SHEILA FITZPATRICK

... Most memoirs about (the 1930s) ... recall the idealism and optimism of the young, their belief that they were participants in a historic process of transformation, their enthusiasm for what they called ‘the building of socialism,’ the sense of adventure they brought to it, and their willingness (at least rhetorical) to go off as pioneers to distant construction sites like Magnitogorsk and Komsomolsk on the Amur. Terror was not part of this picture ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, pp. 68–9

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is Kochan’s view of Soviet industrialisation? How does he try to highlight the scale of the achievement?
- 2 What is Conquest’s view of the economic change? What reason does he suggest for the overly optimistic views presented by people such as Kochan?
- 3 How does Figes try to convince his readers of the point he is making?
- 4 In what ways does Fitzpatrick’s view of industrialisation differ to that of Figes? Show how her use of language illustrates this.

Stakhanovism

In September 1935 a coal miner by the name of Aleksei Grigorievich Stakhanov, working in the Donets Basin, allegedly managed to dig out 102 tonnes of coal in his shift – 14 times his quota. Stakhanov’s name quickly became used to ‘inspire’ or perhaps ‘shame’ other workers into similar selfless feats. Technicians, who raised practical objections to what became known as ‘Stakhanovism’, were labelled as defeatists or, even worse, saboteurs. In November 1935 the First All-Union Stakhanovite Conference was held. A month later, the party’s Central Committee passed resolutions calling for Stakhanovite thinking to be incorporated into industrial training and special courses for ‘foremen of socialist labour’. There were Stakhanovite competitions, and Stakhanovite brigades were created. Authorities claimed that as a result of Stakhanovism, labour productivity almost doubled during the second Five-Year Plan.

However, the whole Stakhanov episode was concocted and promoted merely to serve Soviet propaganda at the time. Even in the 1930s, there were stories that Stakhanov’s output figures had been boosted by including the efforts of fellow workers. The lie was fully revealed by President Gorbachev in the late 1980s.





Stakhanov was a tragic figure. Used by the regime, no doubt hated by many of his fellow workers who were now forced to work even harder, he ended up in Moscow and became an alcoholic. In 1957, when Soviet leader Khrushchev was asked by visiting foreign press about Stakhanov, he replied that he was still working in the Donets. On learning that he was in Moscow, Khrushchev had Stakhanov sent back to the Donets with only 24 hours' notice. He died a lonely and depressed man in 1977.



Alamy/World History Archive

SOURCE 4.5 Alexsei Stakhanov (right), whose allegedly superhuman coal-mining exploits turned him briefly into a national hero

Robert Service

Robert Service is one of the leading experts today on the history of the Soviet Union. Born in 1947, Service graduated from the University of Cambridge, and since 1998 has been Professor of History at the University of Oxford. Service's work includes a three-volume biography of Lenin, a biography of Stalin, and a controversial work on Trotsky, which was attacked for being error-ridden and Service criticised as willing to swallow Stalinist anti-Trotsky propaganda. Though consistently condemning Marxism, Service deals with Stalin fairly even-handedly. He never hides the fact that Stalin was cunning and ruthless, but he also sees him as more complex than the two-dimensional villain who is often portrayed.

In the following extract, Service discusses the quality and necessity of Stalin's drive to industrialisation.

The picture of over-filled economic plans painted by the newspapers involved much distortion. And where there was indeed over-fulfilment, as in steel production, its quality was often too poor for use in manufacturing. Wastage occurred on a huge scale and the problem of uncoordinated production was ubiquitous. The statistics themselves were fiddled not only by a central party machine wishing to fool the world but also by local functionaries wanting to trick the central party machine. Deceit was deeply embedded in the mode of industrial and agricultural management.

It has been asserted that shoddy, unusable goods were so high a proportion of output that official claims for increases in output were typically double the reality. If the increase in output has been exaggerated, then perhaps Stalin's forced-rate industrialisation and forcible mass collectivisation were not indispensable to the transformation of Russia into a military power capable of defeating Hitler in the Second World War. An extrapolation of the NEP's economic growth rate into the 1930s even suggests that a Bukharinist leadership would have attained an equal industrial capacity. This is not the end of the debate; for





as the first Five Year Plan continued, Stalin diverted investment increasingly towards the defence sub-sector. Nearly six per cent of such capital was dedicated to the Red Army's requirements: this was higher than the combined total for agricultural machines, tractors, cars, buses and lorries. It was easier for Stalin to bring this about than it would have been for Bukharin who wanted peasant aspirations to be taken into account.

Robert Service, *Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-first Century*, Penguin, London, 2009, p. 186

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is Service's main comment regarding the quality of Soviet industrial output?
- 2 How does Service back up his statement that 'deceit was deeply embedded in the mode of industrial and agricultural management'?
- 3 How does Service justify his view that the Soviet Union could have performed just as well under Bukharin as under Stalin?
- 4 Why was Stalin able to focus on the needs of the Red Army more effectively than Bukharin would have?

Collectivisation

The fundamental aims of collectivisation for Stalin were economic, ideological and political. The economic purpose related to the Soviet Union's lack of capital. Stalin needed to squeeze the countryside and increase grain production for export, which in turn would earn foreign exchange that could be used to buy Western mechanical goods and employ technicians. Ideologically, collectivisation was seen as a means of ending the capitalist interlude of the NEP. Peasant private-land ownership, after



akc-images/magno



Collectivisation

SOURCE 4.6 Russian peasant women demonstrate in support of the removal of distinctions between workers and peasants, and the strengthening of the collective farm system, 1930s

all, was not exactly socialist. Politically, Stalin's 'liquidation of the kulaks' would ensure his long-term control of the country as well as the towns. Collectivisation began at breakneck speed, and resistance from the peasants was strong. Stalin had declared war on the kulaks but increasingly, more and more peasants were being given that label. There was virtually civil war in the countryside.

A local village committee would be formed, which included the head of the local GPU. The committee would take everything away from the kulaks, not just their land and livestock, but even their glasses. In response, those peasants targeted as kulaks did anything to avoid having to surrender their property. They killed livestock, burned crops, gorged food and burned houses. In the Ukraine, the collectivisation reached tragic proportions with Stalin's man-made famine. Historians still disagree about the success or failure of collectivisation. Essentially, the verdict on collectivisation depends very much on one's perspective. This is illustrated in Source 4.9.

The liquidation of the kulaks

The process of collectivisation was seen by many in the party as the necessary adjunct to the policy of industrialisation, for the simple reason that grain exports seemed to be the only way to raise capital for industrial change.

The only way to increase grain exports was to squeeze the peasantry by increasing grain procurements. However, as the extract from historian Robert Service (pp. 71–2) shows, such a view is debatable.

However, as explained before, Stalin also had political motives for collectivisation. Though Stalin talked about the need for farm amalgamations and the increased use of technology, his speeches of the time revealed an almost obsessive class-warfare zeal. His target was the kulaks. These middle-class peasants had larger farms, had been successful during the years of the NEP and often hired others to work for them. This was the classic Bolshevik definition of a class enemy. Stalin told the party in 1929:

“ We must break down the resistance of the kulaks and deprive this class of its existence. We must eliminate the kulaks as a class. We must smash the kulaks ... we must strike at the kulaks so hard as to prevent them rising to their feet again. We must annihilate them as a social class. ”

Cited in Tony Downey, *The USSR*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 33



SOURCE 4.7 Children collecting frozen potatoes in a field of a collective farm, 1933



SOURCE 4.8 Women on a collective farm using machinery to clean grain, 1930



SOURCE 4.9 Collectivisation: success or failure?

This type of language showed that Stalin's interest in collectivisation went well beyond simple economics. At first there were three categories of kulak (though soon it became apparent that anyone could be classified as a kulak):

- counter-revolutionaries – people in this group were either shot or sent to prison camps immediately, without compunction
- wealthy kulaks – this group was banished to work in labour camps in Siberia and the Arctic
- other kulaks – this group was allowed to stay in the district but often settled outside of the collective.

Stalin urged terror and repression, and the conflict between the party and the kulaks became akin to civil war in the countryside. Millions were exiled, often in the middle of winter, and transported in open cattle trucks. Party officials took everything they could. However, the results of this campaign began to have serious consequences in the countryside as the extract from *Virgin Soil Uplifted* (in the source study on page 76.) suggests. This led Stalin to slow down the process, claiming that party members had become too carried away, and had become 'dizzy with success'.

The official party view, expressed in newspapers, cinemas and on the radio, was that collectivisation was extremely popular throughout the nation. When celebrities such as the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw visited the Soviet Union, they were taken to 'model' collective farms where food was plentiful, bellies full, housing of a high standard and technology in full evidence. On their return to the West, these privileged visitors spoke enthusiastically about the achievements of Soviet agriculture, especially at a time when the West was in the middle of the Great Depression. Soviet propaganda propagated this view with examples of Socialist Realist art (see the source study on page 77). The extract from Mikhail Sholokov below suggests a version of events closer to the truth.

The results of Stalin's dekulakisation policies were the deaths of millions and the destruction of traditional rural society. Historians will never know the true extent of the human tragedy. Robert Conquest has suggested up to 10 million people lost their lives, and most estimates suggest around one million of these deaths were by execution. The slaughter of livestock associated with collectivisation also had catastrophic consequences that are frequently overlooked. In Kazakhstan, farmers were completely reliant upon their herds. The Kazakhs arguably suffered more than any other nationality during this period; approximately 1.5 million people, about 38 per cent of the population, died. The Russian novelist and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, himself later an inmate of a Stalinist Gulag, estimated that more than five million people were forced into Siberian and Arctic labour camps in the 1930s.

**Sheila
Fitzpatrick and
the issue of 'who
was a kulak?'**

In her book, *Everyday Stalinism*, Sheila Fitzpatrick attempt to examine Stalinism in the 1930s from 'the bottom up'. Instead of focusing on the major players and the big events, she focuses on the lives of ordinary Soviet citizens and the impact that Stalinist rule had on their lives.

Fitzpatrick shows how even the definition of the term 'kulak' proved to be surrounded by confusion and misunderstanding. A kulak was essentially a prosperous peasant who exploited other peasants. However, many 'kulaks' took evasive action to avoid being recognised as one. Many poor peasants did not see kulaks as class enemies. Rather they were often seen as patrons, willing to give help in hard times. Many former kulak families had lost their prosperity due to the revolution while poor peasants had become prosperous due to their connections with the regime. It was the former group that was targeted.

Many rural activists thought that in the post-revolutionary context 'kulak' should be considered as much a psychological category, applying to embittered and anti-Soviet former exploiters in the village, as an economic one.

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 122

During the actual process of dekulakisation, what mattered was who local officials and OGPU officials *thought* was a kulak. Unpopular members of a village could suddenly 'become' a kulak. If there were ethnic definitions, non-Russians were invariably labelled kulaks. A new term began to appear which was 'kulak's hireling'. This was a person who deserved to be called a kulak but who did not merit the label in economic terms.

After dekulakisation, a new category of Soviet citizen appeared, 'former kulak'. This was obviously a person who had been dekulakised, but it also referred to the many thousands of kulaks who had escaped the authorities and tried to start new lives for themselves and their families by masking their origin. The authorities put a great deal of effort into tracking down these people.

Deportation for a kulak was an 'administrative' punishment, not a judicial one. As a result of this, the duration and terms of the deportation were never fixed. However, one thing was certain, these 'former kulaks' were now part of a special legal category which experienced a loss of rights and various restrictions.





At first, they were called 'special settlers,' then 'labour settlers.' In a few years, their ranks were joined by other 'socially dangerous' people – 'kulaks, former traders, former landlords, and so on' who had served out prison or Gulag sentences, but whom the OGPU, for obvious reasons, did not wish to allow to return to their homes.

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 123

QUESTIONS

- 1 To what extent did Stalin's aims in relation to collectivisation go beyond economics?
- 2 What was the role of the OGPU in collectivisation?
- 3 How did the peasants react to collectivisation?
- 4 What problems does Fitzpatrick highlight in the dekulakisation process?
- 5 In what ways did dekulakisation create a bureaucratic nightmare?

Collectivisation

MIKHAIL SHOLOKOV – *VIRGIN SOIL UPTURNED*

Mikhail Sholokov was one of the Soviet Union's leading novelists; he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965. Born in 1905, he joined the Bolsheviks and fought for them during the Russian Civil War from the age of 13. His first work was *Tales from the Don* in 1926. He started writing *And Quiet Flows The Don* the same year but it was not published until 1940. His book *Virgin Soil Upturned* earned him the Lenin Prize. It took him 28 years to write. It comprises two parts: *Seeds of Tomorrow* (1932) and *Harvest on The Don* (1960). Mikhail Sholokov died in 1984.

The following extract is from *Virgin Soil Upturned* and it provides a more realistic account of what went on during collectivisation than the Socialist Realist art that the regime promoted at the time.

Stock was slaughtered every night in Gremyachy Log. Hardly had dusk fallen when the muffled short bleats of sheep, the death squeals of pigs, or the lowing of calves, could be heard. Both those who had joined the kolkhoz (collective farm) and individual farmers killed their stock. Bulls, sheep, pigs, even cows were slaughtered, as well as cattle for breeding. The horned stock of Gremyachy was halved in two nights. The dogs began to drag entrails about the village. Cellars and barns were filled with meat. The cooperative sold about two hundred poods (about 36 pounds) of salt in two days, that had been lying in stock for eighteen months. 'Kill, it's not ours anymore ... Kill, they'll take it for meat anyway ... Kill, you won't get any meat in the kolkhoz.' And they killed. They ate until they could eat no more. Young and old suffered from stomach ache. At dinner time tables groaned under boiled and roasted meat. At dinner time everyone had a greasy mouth, everyone hiccupped as if at a wake. Everyone blinked like an owl, as if drunk from eating.

Mikhail Sholokhov, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, 1932

QUESTIONS

- 1 The behaviour of the peasants seems extremely odd. How do you account for it?
- 2 Why was there such a demand for salt?
- 3 What do you think the reaction of the authorities to this behaviour would have been?

**The Socialist
Realist
depiction of
collectivisation**

During the 1930s, Stalin demanded that all artistic endeavour – be it music, art, literature, cinema – should be used to support and promote the enormous efforts that the nation was making to modernise. Creators of the various art forms had been used to expressing their own feelings and emotions, such as in love poetry. The hero of Boris Pasternak’s novel, *Dr Zhivago*, is criticised because his poetry is ‘personal and self-indulgent’, and out of step with the epoch-making events of the time. Under Stalin, personal art was replaced by Socialist Realism. Art now had to be in line with party views, be optimistic and didactic; it had to teach the people correct attitudes.

This was seen no more clearly than in Soviet artistic depictions of the collectivisation program in the 1930s. Examine the two paintings below and consider the questions that follow.



Alamy/World History Archive

SOURCE 4.10 *The Collective Farm Harvest* by the Soviet artist Sergei Vasilyevich Gerasimov was painted in 1937.



Fine Art Images/Ilya Maximovich Shulga

SOURCE 4.11 *The First Tractor* by the Soviet artist Ilya Maximovich Shulga. This is just one of many paintings depicting tractors on the collective farms.





QUESTIONS

- 1 Examine *The Collective Farm Harvest* and *The First Tractor*. Identify the ways in which the artists have presented a happy, optimistic view of life on the collective farm.
- 2 How do these images compare with what you have read in this chapter?
- 3 Why do you think so many paintings were commissioned to illustrate the use of tractors?
- 4 What is your view: should art be personal or should it be used to promote social goals? Give reasons for your answer.



Man-made famine?

The events in the Ukraine during the process of collectivisation deserve special attention. Stalin's motives were clear: maximise grain procurement. However, historians differ markedly in the wider assessment of the events, with interpretations ranging from a deliberate policy of genocide to attributing the famine to natural disaster. Historians, most notably Robert Conquest in *Harvest of Sorrow* (1987), have argued that Stalin's policies in the Ukraine amounted to a deliberate policy of mass murder, or even genocide. Conquest argues that Stalin deliberately engineered the Ukrainian famine, not only for economic gain, but also to destroy the remnants of Ukrainian nationalism. He argues that around seven million Ukrainians died as a result of these policies. Conquest is not alone in this assessment. Norman Naimark, in *Stalin's Genocides* (2011), makes similar arguments. However, historians, as they so often do, debate the issue of genocide in the Ukrainian context. For example, Mark B Tauger, from the University of West Virginia, suggests that there was not a deliberate genocidal policy, but that the famine was caused by poor harvests.

Australian historian Stephen Wheatcroft, using archival material released after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, suggests the answer lies between the two extremes. The famines were the result of multiple factors, including failed crops caused by fluctuating levels of rainfall and wheat rust, and the inept policies of grain procurement. Wheatcroft suggests that the number of deaths as a result of the famine in the Ukraine is around 4.5 million.

QUESTION

- 1 Why might these historians differ in their interpretations of the impact of famine in Ukraine?

Holodomor

The term 'Holodomor', meaning 'extermination by hunger' in Ukrainian, has come to be used to describe the famine in the Ukraine in 1932–33. The Holodomor is seen as the result of a deliberate genocidal program initiated by the Soviet Union. In 2006, the Ukrainian government recognised the famine as a form of genocide. Since then Australia, the United States, Canada and a number of other nations have acknowledged that the Holodomor was genocide.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is genocide and why does it differ from other forms of mass killing?
- 2 Why might the Holodomor be considered genocide?



SOURCE 4.12 Ukrainian peasants forced from their home during the famine of 1932–33.



SOURCE 4.13 An emaciated horse pulls a cart during the famine of 1932–33.

Against all the evidence, Stalin continued to deny the situation in the region. Staged visits for foreign figures tried to present a calm, prosperous scene. Red Cross trains loaded with grain were turned back at the border on the grounds that there was no famine in the country. However, the truth did begin to emerge. British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge managed to have firsthand accounts smuggled out, and he wrote strongly on the issue. The author and journalist Arthur Koestler did the same. The Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich wrote about the Ukraine in his memoir, *Testimony*. He tells the story of the roaming blind folk singers of the Ukraine known as *lirniki* or *banduristy*. These men were a living embodiment of Ukrainian culture and passed on their cultural knowledge in the time-honoured oral tradition. Stalin had hundreds of them brought to Moscow to ‘honour’ their work. They were all shot.

Dmitri Simes gives this summary of the events in the Ukraine.

“ Starvation was particularly brutal in the Ukraine where, in addition to the campaign against kulaks, a war was declared against all vestiges of local nationalism. Ukrainian peasants were viewed as a major constituency for ‘petty-bourgeois’ nationalist sentiment. To them the sword of the revolution knew no mercy. The authorities had gone so far as to prevent starving Ukrainian peasants from escaping to the better supplied Russian provinces and bringing food back to their dying villages. Conquest calculates that of a Ukrainian farm population of between twenty and twenty-five million, about five million died – a quarter to a fifth. Travellers to the Ukraine reported unattended corpses of peasants who failed to escape filling railroad stations.

Dmitri Simes, ‘Stalin’s genocide of the Soviet peasantry’, *The Guardian*, 9 November, 1986, p. 18



SOURCE 4.14 This photograph is included in the exhibition ‘Declassified Memory’ in Kiev and is titled *Death of Starvation in Kharkov, 1933*.

Conclusion

By 1927–28, the Soviet economy was in trouble as economic growth had stalled and food shortages were appearing. This was the so-called ‘scissors crisis’. Stalin seized the opportunity of the crisis both to remove his opponents on the right and to hurl the country into a frenzy of economic transformation. Agriculture was forcibly collectivised, often with great brutality as Stalin sought to destroy the kulaks and the remnants of Ukrainian nationalism. What the countryside experienced was like a civil war. The cost in human lives and destruction of property was enormous. However, Stalin had succeeded in increasing grain procurements for export, which earned foreign exchange that could be used to finance industrialisation. Based on a series of Five-Year Plans, the Soviet economy was transformed in a few years. There was an emphasis on heavy industry, and armaments later in the decade. Conditions for workers were torrid, discipline strict and as the 1930s moved along, millions of forced labourers were used to promote industrial change. However, despite the enormous hardships, there was also some support for the industrialisation program, particularly among young people, who were motivated by the idea that they were building a new Russia. Propaganda was mobilised to gain popular support for the changes, as seen in Socialist Realist art and the Stakhanovite movement. Great strides were made in the 1930s, but never as great as Soviet propaganda tried to make out. The human cost in terms of death, famine, deportations and imprisonment counted in the millions.



Essay questions



Empathy exercise

Chapter summary

- By about 1927–28, it had become clear that the NEP had run out of steam. Urban products were increasing in price, rural goods were falling and so peasant grain output began to drop. This was the ‘scissors crisis’.
- Stalin’s solution was to begin a massive industrialisation drive.
- Five-Year Plans became the basis of the industrialisation program. Targets were established centrally, while regional authorities had to organise their local situations to reach them.
- The emphasis at the beginning was on heavy industry. In the second Five-Year Plan some allowance was made for lighter industry, but by the end of the decade, as the foreign situation became more dangerous, armaments production was given priority.
- The Soviet economy made enormous strides and could boast many prestige projects, such as the Dnieper Dam and the Moscow Underground Railway system. However, the increases claimed by the authorities were never as great as the propaganda suggested, and there was much inefficiency, bribery and corruption that accompanied the drive for change.
- Though there was genuine enthusiasm among many sections of the population, it proved necessary to use forced labour in many areas to get the work done. Working conditions were poor and labour discipline became ever stricter.
- The Stakhanovite movement, named after the Donets miner of the same name, was promoted to encourage greater effort from workers. Socialist Realist art sought to do the same thing by promoting a positive and optimistic view of developments.
- Agriculture was collectivised. Private land ownership became a thing of the past as peasants were forced onto collectives or into the towns. There was widespread opposition to the process and this led to violence in the country, destruction of crops and livestock, and, in places, virtual civil war.
- However, despite the enormous cost in lives and property, Stalin managed to achieve major increases in grain exports, which earned the foreign exchange that was needed to provide the capital for industrial change.

- The party's control in the countryside was complete after collectivisation; the kulaks had been destroyed.
 - The Ukraine came in for especially brutal treatment as Stalin sought not only to maximise the output of this grain-rich region, but also to stamp out the remaining elements of Ukrainian nationalism. A man-made famine was imposed on the Ukraine, which historians estimate led to the deaths of more than five million people.
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Further reading

- Fitzpatrick, S, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000
- Conquest, R, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror Famine*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986
- Nove, A, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992
- Kotkin, S, *Magnetic Mountain*, University of California Press, 1997

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

THE 'SCISSORS CRISIS'

- 1 Define the terms 'NEP' and 'scissors crisis'.
- 2 Explain how Trotsky and Preobrazhensky had been proven right on the issue of economic development.
- 3 The Soviet economy faced a 'catch 22' situation. Explain what this means.
- 4 What were the defence implications of the 'scissors crisis'?
- 5 Why might the end of the NEP be regarded as the end of Lenin's revolutionary reforms to the economy?

THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

- 6 How were the Five-Year Plans devised?
- 7 Identify the main elements of the three Five-Year Plans.
- 8 List some of the major achievements of the industrialisation program.
- 9 Why is there so much disagreement about the achievements and success of Stalin's industrialisation drive?
- 10 Summarise Robert Service's argument about the quality of Soviet industrial output. Does his argument reduce the scale of the Soviet achievement?
- 11 What are the key points made by Kochan, Figes, Conquest and Fitzpatrick regarding the industrialisation process?

COLLECTIVISATION

- 12 What were the three main motives behind Stalin's collectivisation policy?
- 13 Who were the kulaks?
- 14 Why was it difficult deciding who was a kulak?
- 15 In what ways did the Soviet police and judicial system contribute to the programs of industrialisation and collectivisation?
- 16 'It was a human catastrophe and an economic success. It was also politically astute.' Support this statement in terms of the results of collectivisation.
- 17 Why was Stalin so keen to target the kulaks?

ESSAY QUESTION

- 18 Evaluate the successes and failings of industrialisation and collectivisation.

Political transformation under Stalin

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine the nature of political life and change under Stalin.

Aspects to be covered include:

- the Stalinist political system
.....
- the *nomenklatura*
.....
- the purges
.....
- the 1930s show trials
.....
- the wider terror
.....
- the Gulags
.....



Modern History
Syllabus

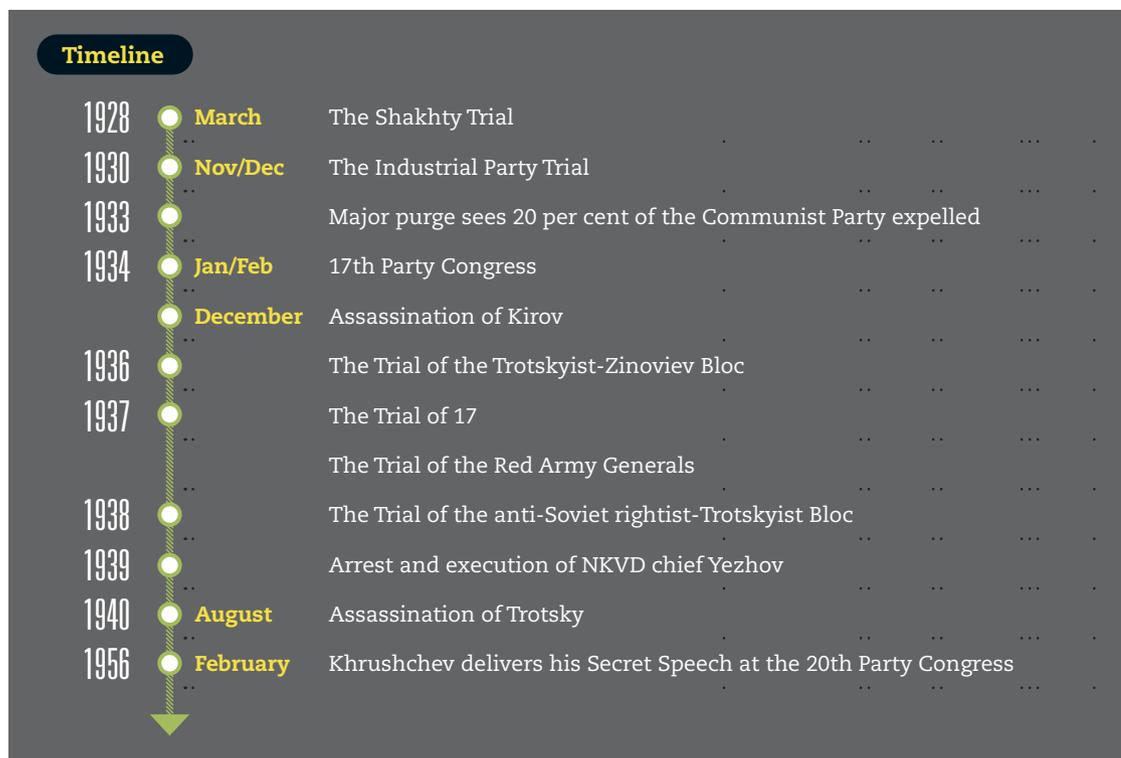
The Trial of the Twenty-One, Moscow, USSR, 1938. This was the last of a series of show trials of prominent Bolsheviks during Stalin's Great Purge. The most prominent defendant was Nikolai Bukharin, former head of the Communist International.

Introduction

In Chapter 3 the issue of totalitarianism was discussed. The traditional orthodox Western view saw Stalin's regime as the epitome of totalitarian rule, while more recent accounts, benefiting from access to previously off-limit Soviet archives, have dented that interpretation. However, the central rule of Stalin and the brutality of the regime are accepted by all. This chapter is not concerned with totalitarianism per se, but rather how the Stalinist system actually operated. There was a contradiction between the clear control and dominance of Stalin at the apex of the party and the democratic elements of the 1936 constitution. Centralised control from Moscow, even totalitarian control, did not imply efficiency, and any examination of the running of the Soviet Union in the 1930s reveals evidence of chaos and confusion, although as will be shown below, this should not be taken too far.

Though inefficiencies and possible lack of central control might exist at the lower levels of the party and far distant regions, this cannot be said at the top levels of the party. Purging had long been a part of Soviet political life and it became a key feature of the early years of Stalinist rule; it was a process that went into overdrive following the assassination of Sergei Kirov in 1934. The purges and the wider terror of the 1930s went far beyond the party into wider society and the armed forces. The 1930s also saw the widespread development of the Gulag system.

Accompanying the terror was relentless propaganda and the promotion of Stalin's cult of personality. No opposing ideas were to be allowed. (This aspect of Stalin's rule will be examined in Chapter 6.)



The Stalinist political system

Three key political developments can be identified from a study of the Stalinist political system of the 1930s:

- 1 the transformation of the Communist Party into a disciplined, obedient, hierarchical structure with Stalin at its apex
- 2 the introduction of arguably one of the world's most democratic constitutions
- 3 chaos and confusion at the lower levels and in the more distant regions.

Source 5.1 summarises these developments.

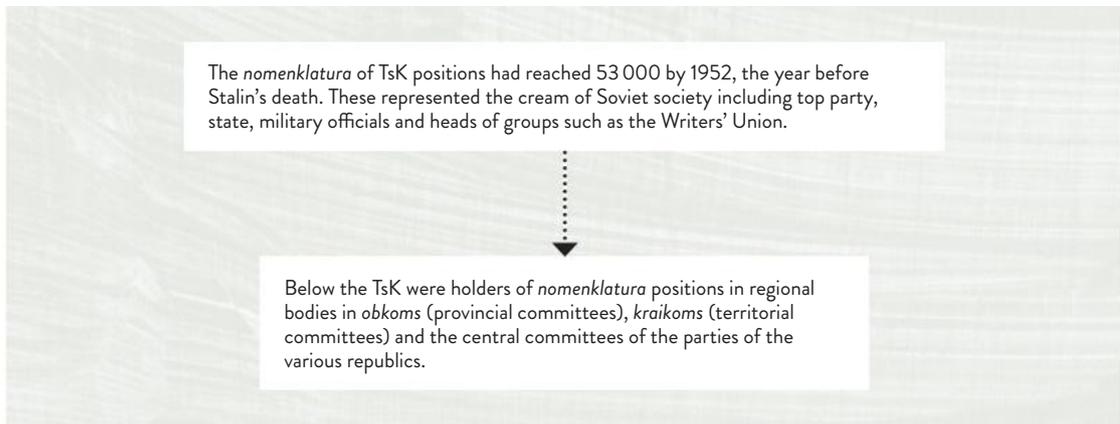
At the 17th Party Congress in early 1934, the party was excited at the economic progress that had been made, and membership reached its highest level yet. However, by 1939 Stalin had systematically reduced the number of party members, and through a series of purges and show trials, the party leadership was decimated. None of the key Bolsheviks who were part of the October 1917 revolution remained. The party had become a pyramid, with Stalin at its apex, and ascent up the pyramid granted as a reward for unquestioning loyalty to Stalin.

The Constitution of 1936 (see Chapter 3) provided a democratic face to Stalin's system. Universal suffrage was granted to all over 18 years of age and voting was secret and direct. No preference was granted to urban workers. However, the constitution was a facade and in practice nothing stopped Stalin imposing his will on the Supreme Soviet as he did on the party.

For Stalin's system to work, it was necessary for his commands to seep effortlessly through the pyramid from the apex. However, commands from the top were often imprecise and lower-level officials in all areas of the party, state and economy would often interpret orders to suit their local needs. The 'centre' then tried to reinforce control which often led rank-and-file members to attack lower-level officials, who then accused these members of being troublemakers. In his book *European Dictatorships 1918-45*, Lee says, 'The whole decision-making structure was therefore riddled with conflict and dissent. In the ensuing chaos the centre sought to restore a semblance of order, by adjusting, intensifying or ending particular campaigns.' Recent accounts of the system, based on archival research, have suggested that Stalin's control was far greater than these revised ideas might suggest (see Khlevniuk, Chapter 3).

SOURCE 5.1 Developments in the Stalinist system of the 1930s

In his biography of Stalin, Khlevniuk describes the all-pervasive power of the party, whose organisation was often modified to suit the needs of Stalin's power (the purges bear witness to this). The party had the right to hire, fire and promote officials across the country, and over time lists of positions were recorded (the *nomenklatura*). Each position was checked by a party committee of one kind or another, ranging from a *raikom* (a district committee) to the TsK (the Central Committee of the party). One's career, and indeed ultimate fate, could be decided by these committees. The top positions had to be approved by the TsK apparat in Moscow. Source 5.2 summarises Khlevniuk's analysis of the *nomenklatura* system.



SOURCE 5.2 Khlevniuk on the *nomenklatura* system

“ This list was also constantly growing. As of 1 July 1952 it totaled 350 000 positions. These hundreds of thousands of functionaries were the backbone of the apparat and the pillar of the dictatorship. ”

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, p. 37

Stalin obviously had contact with only a minute percentage of these officials and abuses of power at the lower levels were common. However, Khlevniuk's research leads him to conclude that the idea of Stalin as a weak dictator because of the massive extent of his system is incorrect and that Stalin 'had a firm grip on power and the implementation of key decisions'.

- 1 Which geometrical shape is often used to refer to the Stalinist system? Why?
- 2 Why does the 1936 Constitution seem so democratic?
- 3 What does Khlevniuk recognise as the party's fundamental lever of power?
- 4 Stalin: a weak or strong dictator? Give reasons.

The purges and the terror

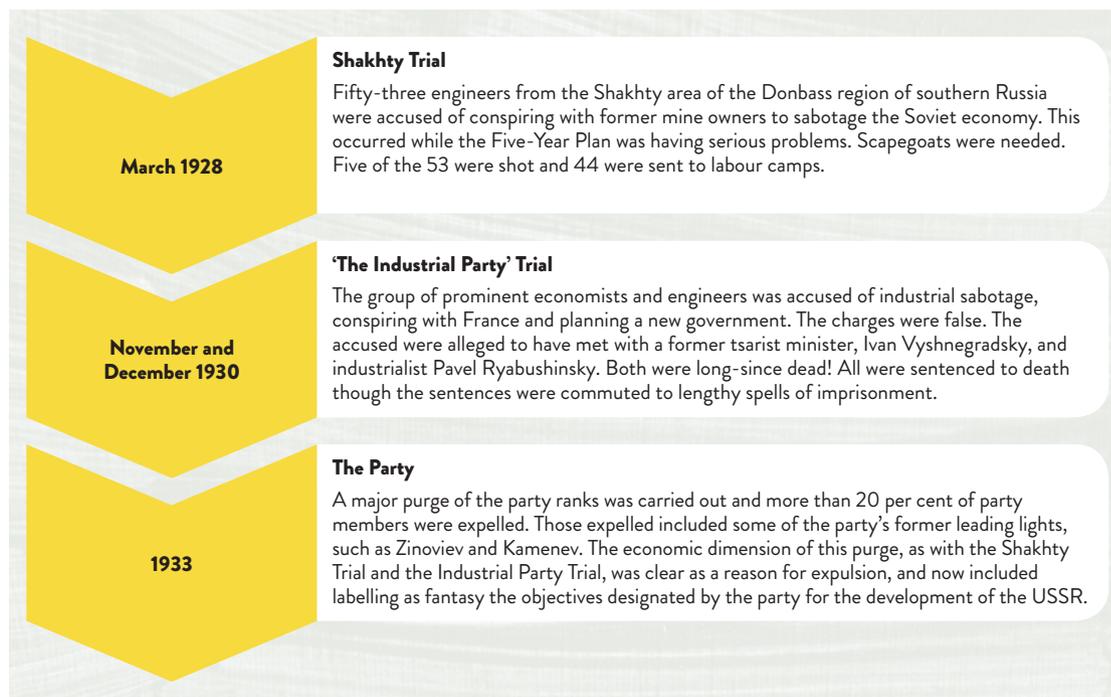
In his biography of Stalin, Isaac Deutscher has a chapter entitled, 'The gods are athirst'. It is a most apt label for what happened in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. The costs of collectivisation, enforced famine in the Ukraine and industrialisation have already been discussed. Yet there were even more deaths, imprisonments and deportations that were the result of direct government policy. From the beginning of the industrialisation period, scapegoats were found if targets were not achieved. Following the murder of Sergei Kirov in 1934 (see page 88–9), the Soviet security and judicial system began full-scale purging of the party, from the highest to the lowest levels. Many of the inmates in the Gulags had been former, loyal, dedicated party members. The secret police grew into a massive, powerful organisation (see Chapter 3). These developments raise many questions: Why did all this happen? Was it a natural evolution of the Soviet system? Was it Stalin's paranoia? Was much of the purging and terror due to the fact that the party had lost control of affairs? Was the threat of Nazi Germany a factor? These issues will be discussed in sections to come.

The early purges

The purges of the 1930s are epitomised by the great show trials in the later years of the decade, when thousands of party members were sentenced to death, imprisoned or deported. However, purging was nothing new in the party. As early as the civil war years, Lenin had ordered purging of the party ranks. His argument then was that there was growing corruption and inefficiency within the party and it needed to be a tighter organisation. Many people had joined the party once it was clear that the Bolsheviks were going to win. Lenin called these people ‘careerists’; they were people who did not really believe in socialism. Such people were contemptuously referred to as ‘radishes’: red on the outside, white on the inside. They too were purged. Those purged from the party could appeal to the Central Control Commission in Moscow, which eventually sat in joint session with the Central Committee. The link between these two bodies was the office of the general secretary, held by Stalin. Thus, it could be argued that Stalin was actually carrying out the first party purges.

Official purges were carried out in 1919, 1924, 1925, 1928 and 1929 as party membership expanded. Party membership never rose above 5 per cent of the population, and membership was prized because it was the main pathway to a career and a good job. During this time, as party discipline became stricter, and as Stalin was gradually tightening his hold on power, expulsion from the party was a common punishment. At this stage, expulsion from the party was not seen as permanent but rather an inconvenient interruption to one’s career, and many members who were expelled did rejoin the party. Neither was expulsion seen as a threat to a person’s life.

However, once problems and setbacks began to appear in the modernisation drive, the process of purging was stepped up and scapegoats had to be found. Those purged were now being accused of much more serious crimes, and the punishments being handed down were far more severe. Source 5.3 summarises some of the purging activity that occurred between 1928 and 1933.



SOURCE 5.3 The purges of 1928–33

Purging: 1928–35

In 1934 the pressure on the party eased. The targets for the second Five-Year Plan were more realistic, the harvest for that year improved and there were even some minor 'NEP-style' concessions given to some of the peasants in certain regions. Some of those who had been imprisoned were released, and many party members who had recently been expelled were allowed to rejoin the party.

However, this temporary reprieve ended dramatically in December 1934 with the murder of the popular Leningrad party head Sergei Kirov. Stalin used the murder of Kirov as an excuse to launch a massive wave of terror on the country. The Soviet criminal code was expanded to include a whole new range of offences. The death penalty could now be carried out on people as young as 12. It became a crime to be a 'parasite', to be associated with a 'parasite' or to even know a 'parasite'. A parasite could be almost anyone the secret police decided was a parasite. In 1935, a wave of terror spread across the country as thousands of people, party members and ordinary citizens were denounced to the secret police as saboteurs, traitors or parasites. The vast majority of the people caught up in this denunciation and terror frenzy were totally innocent of any crime; in many cases old scores were being settled. Though the terror was to affect thousands, it was the purging of the leading party figures that caught the imagination of the nation, and indeed the world.



Getty Images/Bettmann

SOURCE 5.4 Leonid Ramzin, left, giving evidence during the 1930 trial of the Industrial Party, an organisation he was accused of leading. This was the first of the Stalinist 'show trials', designed to blame Soviet shortcomings of the Soviet state on 'outside agitators' and to keep the people in a state of fear.

SERGEI KIROV (1886–1934)



Alamy/Pictorial Press Ltd

SOURCE 5.5 Sergei Kirov

Sergei Kirov came as close as anyone in the Soviet Union to being considered as a realistic alternative to Stalin as party leader. In 1934, as the strains of collectivisation and industrialisation were being felt, Kirov's popularity, and his doubts about the country's economic policies, led many in the party to seriously consider Kirov as a realistic challenger to Stalin.

Kirov was born in Urzhum, a small town west of Moscow. His parents died when he was young, and from the age of seven he was raised in an orphanage. After attending a technical school in the regional centre of Kazan, he gravitated towards politics. He took part in the 1905 revolution, was arrested and

served three months in prison, and then joined the Bolsheviks. In 1906, on returning to Moscow, he became involved in party activities and was again arrested.

In March 1917 following a general amnesty for political prisoners, Kirov found himself in Petrograd. Following the October Revolution, he fought in the Red Army during the civil war against the White forces of General Denikin. In 1921 Kirov became the party boss in the southern republic of Azerbaijan.

During the 1920s Kirov supported Stalin in the struggle for power within the party and, in 1926, was rewarded with Zinoviev's previous job as party head in Leningrad. In 1930 he was appointed to the Politburo.

At the 17th Party Congress in 1934 Kirov received as big an ovation as Stalin. He called for



→ reconciliation with those party members who had been purged. Stalin could not have been ignorant of the fact that his position was threatened by Kirov's growing popularity. On 1 December 1934 Kirov was murdered.

The alleged assassin was a young communist named Nikolayev, who was apparently motivated by personal issues. Kirov was supposed to have been having an affair with Nikolayev's wife, and had reneged on the offer of a job for Nikolayev.

Stalin used the murder of Kirov to launch more purges and set the terror in motion. At the 20th Party Congress in 1956 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev stated that Kirov had been murdered on the orders of Stalin with the connivance of the NKVD (the Soviet secret police service). The last possible rival of Stalin was gone. An extract of Khrushchev's speech is included in the source study below.

Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th Party Congress in February 1956

Stalin died in March 1953. For the next few years, a collective leadership took control of the Soviet Union since no arrangements had been made for a successor. The main leadership contenders were Georgy Malenkov, Nikolay Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev. At the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev took a gamble and delivered his famous 'secret speech' in which he denounced Stalin and placed the blame for the terror of the 1930s on the late Soviet leader. Khrushchev's gamble paid off as the party was ready to move into a new, post-Stalinist way of governing. Khrushchev was soon able to consolidate his position and he remained Soviet leader until 1964.

In his speech to the congress, Khrushchev made specific reference to the circumstances surrounding the death of Sergei Kirov on 1 December 1934.

After the criminal murder of S M Kirov, mass repressions and brutal acts of violation of socialist legality began. On the evening of December 1, 1934, on Stalin's initiative (without the approval of the Political Bureau – which was passed two days later, casually) the secretary of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, Enukidze, signed the directive ... [that] became the basis for mass acts of abuse against socialist legality ...

It must be asserted that to this day the circumstances surrounding Kirov's murder hide many things which are inexplicable and mysterious and demand most careful examination. There are reasons for the suspicion that the killer of Kirov, Nikolayev, was assisted by someone from among the people whose duty it was to protect the person of Kirov. A month and a half before the killing, Nikolayev was arrested on the grounds of suspicious behaviour, but he was released and not even searched. It is an unusually suspicious circumstance that when the Chekist assigned to protect Kirov was being brought for an interrogation, on December 2, 1934, he was killed in a car 'accident' in which no other occupants of the car were harmed. After the murder of Kirov, top functionaries of the Leningrad NKVD were given very light sentences, but in 1937 they were shot. We can assume that they were shot in order to cover the traces of the organisers of Kirov's killing.

Nikita Khrushchev, 'Report delivered to the 20th Congress of the CPSU', 25 February 1956

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why could it be argued that Khrushchev was taking a big gamble by delivering a speech denouncing Stalin?
- 2 What use did Stalin make of Kirov's murder, according to Khrushchev?
- 3 What is Khrushchev suggesting about Nikolayev?
- 4 Why were the NKVD officers shot in 1937, according to Khrushchev?
- 5 How do you think the assembled delegates at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 would have reacted to Khrushchev's speech? Give reasons for your answer.

The show trials

The drama of the great show trials of 1930s is almost beyond belief. The charges, the conduct of the trials, the confessions, the accused being the leading figures of the party and the army, and the fact that in many quarters the trials were accepted at face value as justice, today seem beyond comprehension. Several questions need to be considered.

- Who were the accused, what were they accused of and what was their fate?
- Why did so many obviously innocent men confess to the fabricated charges?
- How and why did it happen, and who or what was responsible?



SOURCE 5.6 Zinoviev's mug shot, taken shortly after his arrest by the NKVD in 1936



SOURCE 5.7 Attendees at a show trial in Moscow in the late 1930s

All the leading 'old' Bolsheviks were dragged into the show trials. Table 5.1 summarises the key details of the trials.

TABLE 5.1 The show trials

DATE AND TRIAL	CHARGES AND CONDUCT OF THE TRIAL	RESULTS
January 1935 The (first) trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and other leading party figures.	They were charged with setting up an opposition group in Moscow and of having links to a terrorist centre in Leningrad.	Zinoviev was sentenced to 10 years; Kamenev to five years; and various other sentences were handed down for the other accused.
August 1936 The trial of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist bloc. The accused included Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bakayev, Smirnov and Mrachkovsky.	They were charged with Kirov's murder, planning the murder of Stalin and creating a terrorist centre. Trotsky was always accused of masterminding these events from afar.	All those accused confessed and all were shot.
January 1937 Known as the Trial of 17, the accused included Radek, Piatakov and Sokolnikov.	The charges were similar to those of August 1936 but also included economic sabotage and conspiring with Germany and Japan.	All confessed and 13 of them were shot.





DATE AND TRIAL	CHARGES AND CONDUCT OF THE TRIAL	RESULTS
Mid-1937 The trial of the Red Army leaders. The accused included the civil war hero Marshal Tukhachevsky, Yakir and Uborevic.	The charges included plotting with Nazi Germany to remove Stalin from power. The generals were tried 'in camera' (in private). The Czech leader, Benes, had warned Stalin of an impending military coup. Historians remain divided on whether a coup really was being planned.	The leading figures were shot. There followed a full purge of the leading ranks of the army and navy.
March 1938 The accused in this final great show trial of the bloc of 'anti-Soviet rightists' and Trotskyists included Bukharin and Rykov. The former NKVD chief, Yagoda, was also on trial.	The accused were charged with economic sabotage, plotting with Germany, Japan, Britain and Poland, working with Trotsky and planning to assassinate Stalin. In addition, they were accused of planning to assassinate Lenin.	All the accused confessed and all were shot.

This was all fantasy. People were accused of meeting co-conspirators who had died years before, in buildings that had been demolished, having taken flights to various locations (events that never occurred). So why did these men confess? Many of them were hardened revolutionaries who had experienced tsarist jails and had fought in the civil war. Some had obviously given in to physical torture. Others gave in to psychological pressure such as threats being made against loved ones. For some it may have been the futility of opposition. Isaac Deutscher suggests that many confessed out of loyalty to the Soviet system and the revolution. For good or ill, the revolution had become Stalin. To oppose Stalin meant opposing the revolution to which these men had dedicated their lives. To oppose Stalin also meant weakening the Soviet Union while threats from the aggressive countries of Germany and Japan loomed.



Who or what was responsible for the terror?

Details of the widespread nature of the terror will be given in the next section, but this is a good place to pose the question: How was all this possible? Who was to blame?

- Following the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union went through what was called a 'de-Stalinisation' period, as the most repressive elements of the Stalinist regime were dismantled. In 1956 at the 20th Party Congress, the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, gave a 'secret speech' that openly condemned Stalin for the murder of Kirov, and the subsequent terror and purges. This explanation suited the Soviet Communist Party. There was nothing wrong with communism; any wrongdoing was the fault of one man, Stalin, driven by his inner demons and paranoia.



Alamy/RIA Novosti

SOURCE 5.8 Stalin signing a death warrant at the time of the show trials

- Western historians saw things differently. The terror was not the result of the actions of one man; Stalin was merely a symptom of an evil system. The terror was the natural outgrowth of Bolshevism, and the signs of totalitarian excess could be seen from the early years of Bolshevik rule. The system was the cause of the terror.
- Deutscher suggests that Stalin, faced with the real looming threats of Germany and Japan, needed a totally united front. In the war that Stalin believed was coming, the party needed to be totally united and so could not allow even the possibility of internal dissent. Hence, the purges.
- Was Stalin really in control? The Soviet Union is a vast country, difficult to control, and once the process had started, perhaps Stalin lost control of the situation as zealous party members sought to outdo each other in the purging process to prove their loyalty and dedication.

However, more recent research, made possible since the opening of the Soviet archives following the end of the Cold War, has strongly suggested that the terror *was* centrally planned and directed by Stalin.



The purges

The wider terror

Though the purge of the leading party figures gained the headlines, men such as Zinoviev and Bukharin represent only a small minority of the number of victims caught up in the terror. The principal orchestrator of the terror was the NKVD chief of the time, Nikolai Yezhov. This short, sadistic man, known as the ‘bloodthirsty dwarf’, gave his name to the terror that spread across the country: the Yezhovshchina. Yezhov drew up lists of victims. Local NKVD offices were given arrest quotas to fill, and fixed percentages of these quotas were to be executed or imprisoned. Innocence or guilt was utterly irrelevant.

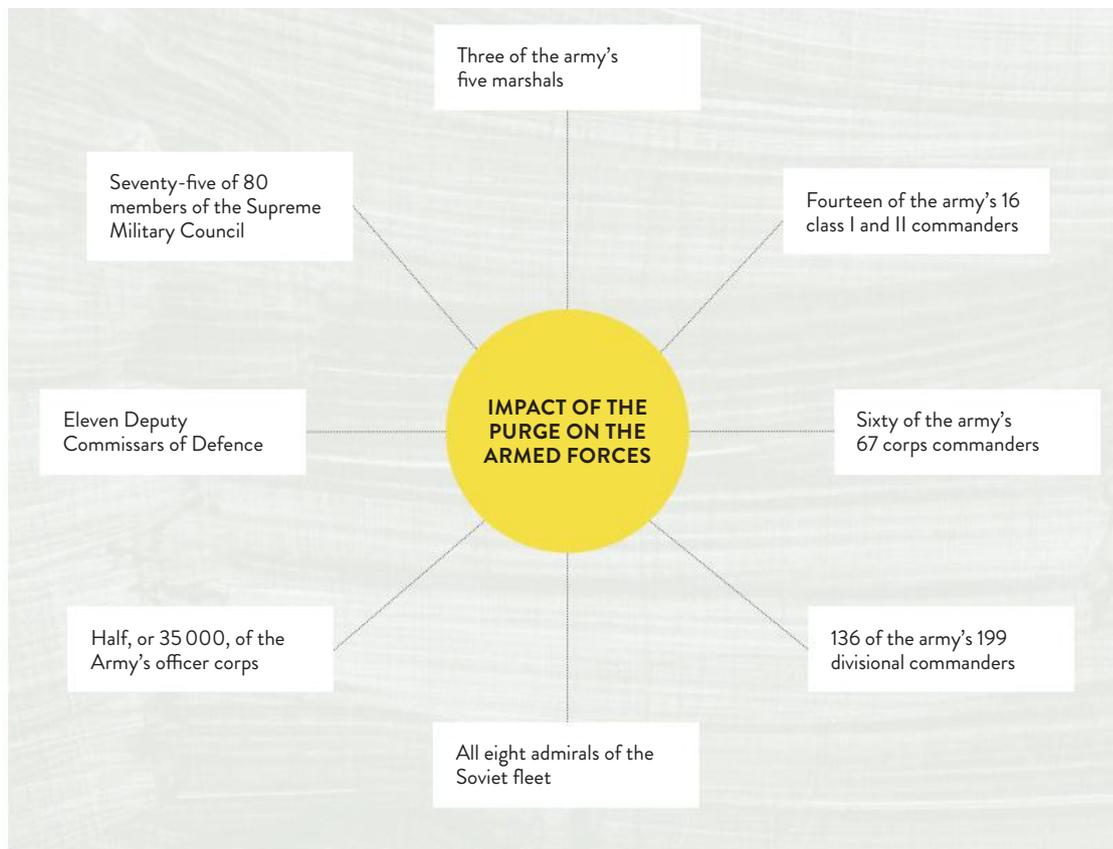
The early key targets of the terror were party members. However, the terror affected all groups of society. Intellectuals and artists were particular targets; free thinking was not encouraged in Stalinist Russia. Foreign communists living in the Soviet Union were also targets. Even Trotsky did not escape the terror; he was murdered in Mexico in 1940 by an NKVD agent. Those arrested were always able to give the NKVD the names of others who should be arrested. People volunteered names for a variety of reasons: to remove suspicion from themselves, to settle old scores or to hopefully gain the jobs of those arrested.

The terror created a sense of helplessness for ordinary Soviet citizens. It fragmented Soviet society, because no one could rely on anyone else and certainly not on the institutions of the state. H  l  ne Carr  re d’Encausse, a historian of Stalin’s terror, sums up this situation:

“... the mutual distrust, the fear of being compromised had isolated every individual. This social atomisation was a decisive help to Stalin’s power which was able from then on to grow unhindered.”

H  l  ne Carr  re d’Encausse, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p. 53

The exact figure for the loss of life in the Soviet Union during the 1930s as a result of economic changes, forced famine and the terror will never be known. However, the census held in January 1937 as part of the second Five-Year Plan expected the Soviet population to be about 180 million; it was 164 million. Non-Russian groups were especially targeted. Stalin may have been a Georgian, but his Russification policies exceeded anything the tsars had tried to do. In his home region of Georgia, 260 out of 300 party secretaries were purged. Following the 1937 trial of Marshal Tukhachevsky, the armed forces were also purged.



SOURCE 5.9 The purging of the armed forces was extensive and weakened Russia considerably.

- 1 From what you have read, what do you see as the main reason for the degree of terror that permeated the Soviet Union in the 1930s? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 Why might we be shocked at the purging of the armed forces in the late 1930s?
- 3 What does the 'atomisation' of society refer to? Why might it assist in Stalin's control of the system he headed?

Oleg V Khlevniuk

Robert Conquest in the book *The Great Terror* (1968), one of the first detailed academic studies of Stalinist terror, argued that during 1937–38 there were around seven million arrests, about one million executions and approximately two million deaths in camps. While Conquest has revised this book several times, he has remained convinced that his estimates may in fact be understated.

When Conquest was first writing, he lacked access to the Soviet archives. This is a problem that historians today do not have, and the scale of violence from Stalin's time can now be calculated fairly precisely. (However, it should be emphasised that the Russian government has not given Western historians 100 per cent access to the Stalinist era files).

Oleg Khlevniuk is a research fellow at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences. He is also a senior research fellow at the State Archive of the Russian Federation. His research has led him to the following conclusions about the scale of the terror during Stalin's time.





... Official records show that approximately eight hundred thousand people were shot between 1930 and 1952. The number who perished as a result of the regime's actions, however, was much higher, insofar as Stalin's security apparatus made frequent use of fatal torture techniques and the conditions prevailing in labour camps at times made them indistinguishable from death camps. Between 1930 and 1952, some twenty million people were sentenced to incarceration in labour camps, penal colonies or prisons. During that same period no fewer than six million, primarily 'kulaks' and members of the 'repressed peoples', were subjected to 'administrative exile': forced resettlement to a remote area of the USSR. On average, over the more than twenty-year span of Stalin's rule, one million people were shot, incarcerated, or deported to barely habitable areas of the Soviet Union every year ...

Khlevniuk says that many of those so treated were criminals but that because of the severity of Stalinist laws and the all-embracing nature of arrests, many totally innocent people were swept up in the various campaigns and classified as criminals.

... Furthermore, in addition to the 26 million who were shot, imprisoned, or subjected to internal exile, tens of millions were forced to labour on difficult and dangerous projects, arrested, subjected to lengthy imprisonment without charges, or fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes for being relatives of 'enemies of the people'. Overall the Stalinist dictatorship subjected at least 60 million people to some sort of 'hard' or 'soft' repression and discrimination. To this figure we must add the victims of periodic famines or starvation, which during 1932–33 alone took the lives of between 5 and 7 million people. The Stalinist famine was largely the result of political decisions...

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, p. 38

His detailed research leads Khlevniuk to the astounding conclusion that a majority of the Soviet population was brutally suppressed by a privileged minority, though Khlevniuk adds that there were many in that minority who were also swept up in Stalin's terror.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What advantage did Khlevniuk have over Conquest in his work on the terror?
- 2 What similarities and differences do you see in the conclusions that Khlevniuk and Conquest arrive at?

Alexander Solzhenitsyn and *The Gulag Archipelago*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was one of the Soviet Union's leading writers; he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970. However, he was not popular with the Soviet authorities because his writings highlighted the terror and suffering of the country under Stalin. In 1974 he was expelled from the country. He returned to Russia in 1994 following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

One of Solzhenitsyn's most significant works was *The Gulag Archipelago*. The term 'Gulag' refers to the 'Main Administration of Corrective Labour and Labour Settlements' which ran the labour camps spread across the Soviet Union. The 'Archipelago' refers to those camps dotted throughout the islands of the Soviet Arctic. Solzhenitsyn's accounts of the camps are based on his own first-hand knowledge; he spent many years as a camp inmate. The following extract gives a flavour of the conditions to which victims of Stalin's terror were subjected. Solzhenitsyn illustrates how camp authorities became experts in both psychological and physical torture.





... On the eve of May 1st 1933, in the Khabarovsk GPU, for twelve hours – all night – interrogation. ‘Hey, you – hands behind your back!’ They led him out of the cell, up the stairs quickly, into the interrogator’s office. The guard left. But the interrogator, without asking one single question, and sometimes without even allowing Chebotaryev to sit down, would pick up the telephone: ‘Take away the prisoner from 107!’ And so they came to get him and took him back to his cell. No sooner had he lain down on his board bunk than the lock rattled: ‘Chebotaryev! To interrogation. Hands behind your back! And when he got there: ‘Take away the prisoner from 107!’ ...

... prisoners would have their skulls squeezed within iron rings; a human being would be lowered into an acid bath; they would be trussed up naked to be bitten by ants and bedbugs; ... a man’s genitals would be slowly crushed beneath the toe of a jackboot ...

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol I, Collins, Glasgow, 1974, pp. 108-9, 93

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why might a historian consider Solzhenitsyn as a reliable source about conditions in the labour camps?
- 2 Despite his first-hand experience, is there any reason why a historian might question Solzhenitsyn’s reliability?



One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich



The Gulags

Conclusion

The party, ably assisted by the growing power of the secret police, permeated every element of Soviet life. No career path in any field was possible without the approval of party officials. Stalinist rule was typified by the extensive use of terror. Terror was imposed across society, not only against kulaks, but against the various national groups and social classes within the country. Party members were especially subjected to the terror as Stalin removed thousands of party members from the highest to the lowest levels. By the end of the 1930s, the party had been transformed. Public show trials against former leading Bolsheviks were the most obvious sign of the terror. None of the leading ‘old Bolsheviks’ were left with any influence within the party. Regular purging which had involved no more than temporary exclusion from the party eventually became a matter of life and death. Bizarre accusations were laid against people who for a variety of reasons confessed to crimes of which they were totally innocent. The secret police grew in size and power, and came to dominate the party, but always remained under the control of Stalin. The scale of Stalinist terror was so extensive that historians suggest that a majority of the Soviet population were victims of it in one way or another. As for responsibility for the terror, historians remain divided.

Chapter summary

- Positions within all areas of Soviet life – the *nomenklatura* – and career advancement all lay within the power of the party to grant or deny.
- The extent of Stalin’s power and influence within the system has been debated by historians over time but recent research tends to lean towards Stalin as a ‘strong’ dictator.
- Purging had been a feature of the Soviet system since the early days of Bolshevik rule, but in the 1930s it reached massive proportions and had the effect of transforming the party.

- There had been some show trials in Lenin's era. However, after the Shakhty engineers' trial in 1928, they became a key feature of the Soviet system in the 1930s. The great public show trials of 1936–38 saw nearly all the leading 'old' Bolsheviks condemned and sentenced to death.
- In 1937, even the leading figures of the Soviet military were purged.
- The terror affected all areas of the Soviet Union, both geographically and socially, and gained momentum after the assassination of Sergei Kirov in 1934.
- Most historians now believe that Kirov was murdered on the orders of Stalin. This is certainly the view Khrushchev argued before the 20th Party Congress in 1956.
- Various theories have been presented to explain the exercise of the terror, ranging from Stalin's personal responsibility to systemic faults within the regime to the idea that the process was beyond Stalin's control.
- The principal instrument of the terror was the secret police, which evolved into a mammoth, all-powerful organisation under Stalin's control. However, leadership of the NKVD did not guarantee safety from the terror, as Yagoda and Yezhov discovered.
- As Alexander Solzhenitsyn has shown, conditions in the Gulag under Stalin could often be horrendous and the mortality rate in such places was very high.

Further reading

- Khlevniuk, OV, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2015
- Carrère d'Encausse, H, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981
- Conquest, R, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007
- Duranty, W, *The Kremlin and the People*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1942 (a controversial book that argues the case for Stalin and the 'justice' of the purges)
- Montefiore, SS, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, Phoenix, London, 2004

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

THE PURGES

- 1 Was purging an act that appeared only in the 1930s under Stalin?
- 2 What were the causes and consequences of the early purges?
- 3 What was behind the Shakhty trial and the Industrial Party trial?
- 4 Why was Stalin so concerned about Sergei Kirov?
- 5 What happened to Kirov? What theories have been presented to explain the assassination of Kirov?
- 6 Why did the murder become so significant?

THE SHOW TRIALS

- 7 Who were the main victims of the show trials?
- 8 Of what crime were the main subjects of the show trials accused? What was the likelihood the accusations against them were true?
- 9 Imagine you are one of the accused who has been tried, condemned and sentenced to execution. You know that you are innocent. Explain to an outsider why you and many of your innocent co-accused willingly confessed to what you had not done.
- 10 To what extent do you think Stalin was personally responsible for the terror?
- 11 'The terror lacked rationality and logic.' Provide arguments to support this statement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 12 What were the circumstances of Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' to the 20th Party Congress in 1956?
- 13 Apart from the issues surrounding Kirov's murder, what other accusations did Khrushchev make about Stalin's rule in the 1930s?
- 14 What is meant by the term 'de-Stalinisation'? How did it manifest itself in the 1950s and early 1960s?

EXTENDED RESPONSE

- 15 To what extent can it be argued that the terror of the 1930s was the fault of the Soviet system rather than just the consequence of one man's will?

06

Social and cultural change in the USSR under Stalin

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine the nature of cultural and social changes during Stalin's rule.

Aspects to be covered include:

- urbanisation
- popular culture
- education
- youth
- women
- class and the new elites
- culture and the arts
- Socialist Realism
- the cult of personality
- censorship



Modern History
Syllabus

Members of the Young Pioneer Organisation of the Soviet Union, a mass youth organisation for children in the USSR from 1922–91

Soviet society under Stalin

It is very easy to compile a negative set of conclusions when examining the impact on Soviet citizens of the Stalinist regime of the 1930s. Collectivisation led to virtual civil war in the countryside with Stalin's 'war on the kulaks'. Forced deportations and man-made famine hurt millions. As Oleg Khlevniuk has shown (see Chapter 5), the majority of the Soviet population was affected in some way or another by the terror of the 1930s. The party had been transformed with most old Bolsheviks sent to their deaths or long terms of imprisonment. With the upheavals, the terror and the suffering experienced by the Soviet people, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate that in many areas of the Soviet Union, 'normal life' did continue. Change was very real and it is also difficult to deny that there were positive achievements of the Stalinist period. In a short time, the Soviet Union had become a far more urbanised society; this fact alone had a huge impact on how the Russian people lived their lives. Life was a struggle, and crucial elements of survival became improvisation and 'knowing the right people'. While Moscow's metro system gleamed, Stalingrad in 1938 still lacked a sewerage system. In the field of education, mass literacy came to Russia, all classes had educational opportunities and thanks to the educational achievements of the 1930s, the Soviet Union was to excel in many areas. There was often genuine enthusiasm for the regime from many of the country's young. New thinking took hold of many Soviet citizens and this was not always the result of state pressure. It is true that policies towards women veered in a conservative direction under Stalin. However, in many ways, the lives of women were transformed and opportunities beckoned for many. Culture and the arts blossomed in some areas though artistic endeavour certainly needed to conform to the party's values. Censorship was ever present and frequently difficult to follow. By 'removing' so many people, the terror and the purges opened up many new opportunities for people, particularly those from modest backgrounds. A new elite emerged, including a new technical intelligentsia. Social and cultural change was inevitably substantial during the Stalinist regime of the 1930s, and much of it of a positive kind.

Urbanisation

Arguably the most significant impact of Stalin's modernisation drive was the growth of urbanisation in the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1920s fewer than 20 per cent of the population was urban; in less than a decade this figure had risen to 33 per cent. The country's wage- and salary-earning workforce tripled in this time. Such rapid and enormous growth brought with it massive hardship and suffering. State finances were limited when it came to the development or creation of urban facilities. Old cities that experienced rapid population growth found their public transport, roads, power and water supply in a total mess. The situation was even worse in the new cities being created, which were started from nothing. Streets were typically filthy, stinking and dilapidated.



SOURCE 6.1 Opened in 1935, the Moscow Metro system was the first underground railway system in Russia. The station itself was built in a streamlined modern style, a striking contrast to the more traditional architecture of the Russian State Library in the background.

Bridgeman Images/Private Collection/Tobie Matthew Collection/Kudryarov, Boris (1898–1973)



SOURCE 6.2 *Ploshchad Revolyutsii (Revolution Square) Station in Moscow opened in 1938 and like many other stations in central Moscow was grand and palatial. The corridors of the station are lined with 72 life-sized statues of workers, peasants, artists, soldiers and children.*

of Dnepropetrovsk, with a population of over 400 000, had no sewerage system in 1933. Workers' settlements had no electric lights or running water. In 1933, there were 26 000 reported cases of malaria. The new towns fared even worse. Magnitogorsk had one paved road, little street lighting and relied on the use of outside cesspits. Even posher suburbs, such as Kirov, had no sewerage system for years. The city had a streetcar network by 1935 but as late as 1939 it had only eight buses. The city of Pskov, with a population of 60 000, had no streetcars or paved roads as late as 1939.

The primitive condition of many Soviet urban centres had other results as Fitzpatrick describes below.



Urbanisation

“ ... It was dangerous to walk the streets in many Soviet cities in the 1930s. The new industrial towns and workers' settlements in old ones were the most perilous. Here drink, the congregation of restless single men, inadequate policing, bad living conditions, and unpaved and unlighted streets all contributed to a lawless, frontier atmosphere. Robberies, murders, drunken fights and random attacks on passersby were common. Ethnic conflicts often occurred at worksites and barracks with an ethnically mixed labour force ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford 2000, p. 52



SOURCE 6.3 *Russian women and children line up outside a food store, c. 1931*

The most significant aspect of urban living was the disappearance of even the most basic things. Shortages, queueing and hunting for the basics became a fundamental element of urban life. The immediate switch from a partially market economy of the NEP period to one that was fully centralised, and the famines of the times account for this. Housing was in permanent short supply. The result was massive overcrowding and entire families forced to live in one room and share whatever bath and toilet facilities might be available. Communal living was stressful; there was no privacy with people under constant surveillance by their neighbours. In some towns, communal barrack living became the norm, less out of ideological zeal than necessity.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sputnik

SOURCE 6.4 Magnitogorsk residential architecture

Ever-present shortages in Soviet towns and cities led to the existence of a thriving ‘second economy’ and a black market. Knowing somebody, having connections in a society where the society provided everything became crucial for survival. Soviet people referred to this phenomenon as *blat*. It meant ‘having pull’, or ‘being in the know’. It was a fact of life that if one did not have it, one got nowhere.

- 1 Identify ways in which urban life in the 1930s Soviet Union was difficult.
- 2 Why would people want to live in Moscow?
- 3 Why was *blat* so important? What were the consequences of not having it?

Soviet jokes

How did the Soviet people cope with the extremities of life in the 1930s? Like many people faced with hardship and struggle, one way of dealing with life’s tribulations was through humour. Telling anti-Soviet jokes could bring one to the attention of the NKVD and result in a spell in the Gulag. However, this did not prevent the telling of jokes, invariably dark in nature.

As you read each of the following jokes, identify the aspect of Soviet life that it is commenting on.

A flock of sheep approaches the Finnish border in a panic, pleading to be allowed across. ‘Yezhov [NKVD chief] has ordered the arrest of all elephants.’ The Finnish border guard replies, ‘But you’re not elephants’, to which the sheep reply, ‘You try telling that to Yezhov.’

A man walks into a Kharkov shop, looks around and asks, ‘Don’t you have any meat?’ The shop assistant replies, ‘Oh no, here we don’t have any fish. The shop that doesn’t have any meat is across the road.’





A cleaner in the Kremlin [centre of the Soviet government] exclaims, 'What are we going to do about all the mice in here?' His colleague replies, 'Put up a sign saying "Collective Farm".' The cleaner asks, 'What good will that do?' His colleague says, 'Well, half of them will starve and the other half will run away.'

Three men are sitting in a prison cell in NKVD headquarters in Dzerzhinsky Square. The first man asks the second, 'Why are you here?' The second man replies, 'I spoke up in favour of Comrade Glazanov at a party meeting.' The first man then replies, 'But I am here because I criticised Comrade Glazanov.' The third man has been sitting quietly, and eventually they ask him why he is in prison. He replies, 'I am Comrade Glazanov.'

'Have you heard that Comrade Dmitrov has been shot?' His friend replies, 'Shhh, isn't that Comrade Dmitrov walking across the park over there?' To which the first man replies, 'Yes. He hasn't heard yet.'

AGE fotostock/Fine Art Images



SOURCE 6.5 A promotional poster for the 1938 film, *Volga-Volga*

Bridgeman Images/Sputnik



SOURCE 6.6 On the set of the film *Alexander Nevsky* in 1938, a historical drama of Nevsky's defence of Novograd against the invading Teutonic Knights set in the 13th century. Directed by Sergei Eisenstein, ideological themes were prominent as in his other works, such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927).

Popular culture

It is impossible to deny that life was difficult and that hardship was the norm for most Soviet citizens during the 1930s. However, even in the Soviet Union's bleak cities people were able to partake of popular entertainments and indulge in the popular culture that was developing. From the mid-1930s, economic austerity was easing and ideological purity was on the wane. For those who had the means, which really meant the new elites of Soviet society, typically Western-style bourgeois activities were becoming available. Women were wearing silk stockings, elite couples were dancing the foxtrot and taking tennis lessons. At Moscow's Metropole Hotel, those who had the means could now dine while listening to jazz from Antonin Ziegler's Czech Group or Aleksandr Tsfasman. The top elites were becoming able to indulge in the delights of a country *dacha* or Black Sea vacation resorts.

As in the West, the most popular mass medium of the time was cinema. Musical comedies were much in vogue such as *Jolly Fellows* (1934) and *Volga-Volga* (1938). Some films sought to teach a lesson. The 1931 film *Road to Life*, told the story of an OGPU colony for juvenile delinquents outside Moscow where young people were rescued from a life of crime by an inspiring OGPU officer. A generation later, western films such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *To Sir with Love* told a similar story, though with an inspiring

teacher rather than a secret police officer. Stalin's Russia was also not without its own popular music, though the 'pop songs' of the time such as 'March of the Happy-Go-Lucky Guys' referred to the modernisation process taking place.

Sporting events were well-patronised including football, and long-distance car and motorcycle races. The regime promoted air shows and mass gymnastic displays, which of course also had propaganda value as well as being popular. Great prominence was given to the heroes of the age such as pioneering aviators like Mikhail Babushkin and Valerii Chkalov, and polar explorers like Otto Schmidt whose polar expedition was rescued by Soviet aviators in dramatic fashion. Here was propaganda that the regime did not have to make up.

Women were also encouraged to participate in sporting events. In future years, Communist regimes would go to extraordinary lengths to win medals at events such as the Olympic Games, including massive state-run drug programs. In the 1930s, women's sport was rather more benign. The two images in Source 6.8 illustrate the regime's efforts to promote healthy female participation in sport.

Public parks of culture and rest were being developed such as Gorky Park in Moscow which was designed by the American, Betty Glan. Such parks often featured Ferris wheels, cinemas, pavilions and kiosks. The beginning of the winter season in Gorky Park in 1935 was accompanied by the unfurling of gigantic banners declaring 'Life has become better, life has become more cheerful'. We do not have any public opinion evidence to consider the reaction of the Soviet people to such statements. There was also the return of the New Year Holiday which saw the reappearance of 'Grandfather Frost'.



SOURCE 6.7 Russian aviator Valerii Chkalov embodied the spirit of the New Soviet Man and was honoured as a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1936.



(left) Bridgeman Images/Retnakov Gallery, Moscow (right) Alamy Stock Photo/SPUTNIK

SOURCE 6.8 Women were actively encouraged to participate in sport, as shown in these artworks by Aleksandr Nikolaevic Samokhvalov (1894–1971): *The Sportswoman*, 1933 and *Girl in a football jersey*, 1932.

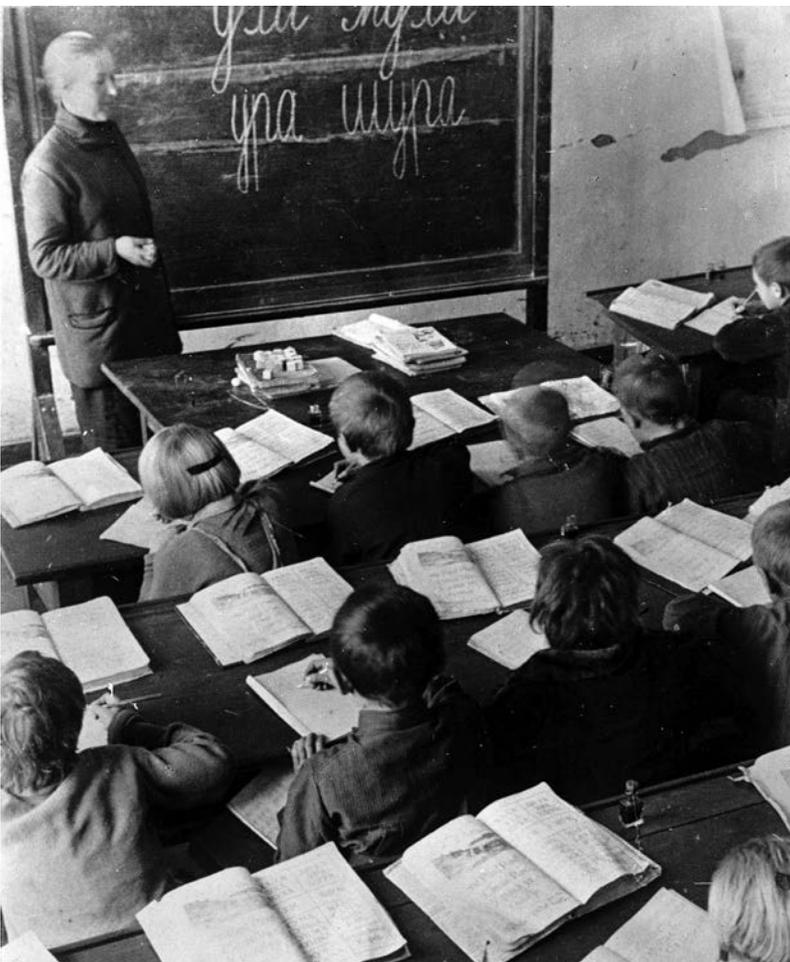


SOURCE 6.9 Ice skating in Gorky Park, 1938

- 1 Why do you think the regime of Stalin was so keen to play up sporting achievements and the exploits of its 'heroes'?



SOURCE 6.10 Nikolai Petrovich Bogdanov-Belsky's *The Schoolroom*, 1938, a painting in the state-sanctioned Socialist Realist style, portrays an idealised view of the classroom of peasant children.



SOURCE 6.11 Russian school students with their teacher in the classroom, 1930s

Education

During the 1920s Soviet education fell into disarray (similar to the experience in China during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s). The party wanted young people to question bourgeois values and exercise their revolutionary fervour. As the revolution and the civil war had already been won, a new target had to be found. Teachers became that target. Many teachers lost their jobs and thousands of students did not attend school. The teachers preferred to participate in the great transformation by working in factories or heading to the countryside to teach peasants to read and write.

However, as in many areas of Soviet life, the values that the party began to promote became increasingly conservative. Students with a proletarian consciousness were of little use if they lacked basic skills of literacy and numeracy. More importantly, as the economic transformation took hold, there was a need for engineers, scientists and specialists. As a result, education reverted to a stricter, more conservative model. The curriculum was tightened, teachers were given greater authority, discipline was restored and non-political subjects, such as physics, chemistry and mathematics were given emphasis.

History became part of the party propaganda. Students were now taught about Russia's past strong rulers, such as Peter the Great. An official view of Soviet history was enforced, which played up Stalin's role and his 'close' relationship with Lenin, while removing Trotsky from the story. John Reed's 1919 book, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, fell out of favour because it did not mention Stalin. In 1938 the compulsory text for all students became the *Short History of the USSR* by AV Shestakov.

While not at school learning 'useful' things and the 'correct' view of the past, students were forced into the Komsomol, the Communist Youth Leagues, where they were taught about Marxist thinking, maintained healthy bodies and learnt to love Stalin.

Education was not only for school children and there was an extraordinary expansion of part-time schools and courses of all kinds for adult members of Soviet society. Such courses aimed to raise literacy levels, and teach basic trade skills and establish a technical minimum which could allow a person to enter a technical college.

Education also helped in the attempts by the regime to promote ‘Russification’, a practice well known to the tsars. Figure 6.12 shows women from the central Asian republic of Uzbekistan in class learning Russian.



Tate Images © Boris Kudoyarov. Part of the David King Collection. Purchased from David King by Tate Archive 2016.

SOURCE 6.12 Photograph by artist Boris Kudoyarov (1898–1973) of Uzbek women attending a literacy class during their work break at the Stalin Textile Kombinat in Tashkent, 1935

There developed within Soviet society a passion for studying. Sheila Fitzpatrick refers to a survey taken at the Stalin Auto Plant in 1937 which asked workers what their primary short-term aim was. More than 50 per cent answered ‘continuing their education’.

“... ‘In Moscow I had a burning desire to study,’ calls a woman of peasant origins uprooted by collectivisation. ‘Where or what wasn’t important; I wanted to study.’ From the story she tells, this was not because she had any clearly formulated ambition or intellectual interests, but because she perceived that education was the ticket to a decent life: ‘We had a saying at work: ‘Without that piece of paper (the diploma) you are an insect; with it, a human being.’ My lack of higher education prevented me from getting decent wages.’ ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 87

The yearning for knowledge at the time went beyond the desire for a ‘diploma’. Visitors to the Soviet Union in the 1930s frequently commented on the people’s passion for reading and desire to learn.



- 1 What had happened to Soviet education in the 1920s? Why?
- 2 In what ways was the study of history affected in the 1930s? How do you account for this?
- 3 Identify the positive elements of education in Stalin’s Russia.



SOURCE 6.13 Meeting of members of the Komsomol, the Communist Youth Leagues, in Moscow, 1930



SOURCE 6.14 Children attending a Young Pioneers camp in the 1930s



Young pioneers

bureaucracy. A film of the 1930s called *A Girl with Character*, told the story of a Komsomol girl, Katia Ivanova. Katia had discovered corruption on her Far East collective farm and journeyed to Moscow to have this dealt with. She is well received and the film endeavoured to show that the leadership applauded such behaviour.

Komsomol activists were not always viewed in a positive light by ordinary Soviet citizens and their activities were often resented. Religious believers referred to the tie of the pioneers as ‘the devil’s noose’ and physical attacks on young activists occurred. They were seen by ordinary citizens as the regime’s favoured and privileged few. Of course, such attitudes only served to reinforce the young activists’ belief that they were the ones putting their lives on the line in the heroic endeavour to construct socialism. As happened with members of the Hitler Youth in Germany, it was not unheard of for young Komsomol members to report their parents for anti-party behaviour. One pioneer, Paulik Morozov, reported his father for hoarding grain. His relatives took their revenge on young Paulik and murdered him. He was later declared a hero of the Soviet Union.

Soviet youth in the 1930s

Youth movements

The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, better known as the Komsomol, was the Soviet Union’s youth organisation. It was the Soviet equivalent of the Hitler Youth, although they were not identical. The Komsomol was originally independent of the Communist Party but by Stalin’s time it had come under party control. Membership was voluntary but failure to join could be used against a person as evidence of a lack of support for communist ideals. More practically, lack of membership could make it difficult to obtain those essential ‘hard to get’ things. Membership could be seen as a form of *blat*.

Membership of the Komsomol made one almost by definition an ‘activist’. Komsomol members would volunteer to assist the party or state organisation – evidence of this can be seen in their involvement in grain procurement during the collectivisation process and the anti-religion campaigns of the 1930s. They had their own ‘uniform’ comprising knickers, *brtinki* (boots), stockings and a semi-military tunic complete with a Sam Browne belt, worn diagonally across the chest.

Activism had an appeal for many Komsomol members who, like their contemporaries in Nazi Germany, displayed great enthusiasm for the idealistic goals of the regime. An element of activism was to expose any abuses they discovered in the

The other side of Soviet youth

Many Komsomol activists involved themselves in 'unmasking'. A stigma was attached to a person who was from a previously bourgeois, or even worse, upper-class background and many Soviet citizens made efforts to 'create' a proletarian or peasant background; concealment of one's class background became a crime. It became the duty of Komsomol members to unmask such people and expose their true social origin. This was serious as 'unmasking' could result in the loss of work, food, housing, promotion and other essentials of life. Unmasking could also result in expulsion from the Komsomol itself.

Not all young people enthusiastically embraced the regime. Between December 1933 and May 1934 police came across several counter-revolutionary groups such as the 'Society for the rebirth of Russia'. In the town of Voronezh, police came across groups supporting Trotskyism and fascism in high schools. One school had swastikas painted on its walls.

There was also another side to youth issues in Stalin's Russia. Sheila Fitzpatrick describes the impact of youth homelessness of the time.

“ ... The Leningrad police was also concerned about the demoralising influence gangs of homeless children were having on schoolchildren in the city. Criminal and hooligan behaviour was still surrounded by a 'romantic oriole' in the eyes of Leningrad's young people, the police reported. Knife-fights and gangs were common, and young people 'at the great majority of enterprises and schools' were carrying knives, knuckle-dusters, and other weapons'. The homeless children corrupted the other young people by organising drinking parties with them, 'as a result of which children started to leave their parents to go and live with the homeless children' ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 171

Youth idealists

Western historians have written at length about the dark side of life in the Soviet Union during its first quarter-century. The evidence is there – the Cheka, the brutality of the civil war, Kronstadt, the war on the kulaks, the Gulag, the purges. However, for some young people, Soviet rule inspired genuine idealism which went far beyond the exhortations of the regime. They sought to do more than obey party dictates or strive to build the latest tractor factory. They wanted to create a new way of life, a new way of living based on true socialist principles.

“ ... A self-conscious youth vanguardism came to manifest itself in a number of interesting ways: most notably in the way some young revolutionary enthusiasts chose to live ...

Andy Willimott, *People of the Future*, *History Today*, October 2017, Vol 67 Issue 10, p. 27

Small groups of young people began to experiment with ideology in a practical way and live on socialist principles. They would share a living space, earnings and money were placed in a common pot, and their possessions would be shared, even including underwear. Domestic tasks would be rostered, each person given an equal share of work, regardless of gender. By doing this 'each inhabitant vowed to live in a comradesly and collective fashion. This was socialism in one apartment.' (Willimott, p. 28) By the late 1920s, the Komsomol estimated that over 50 000 people were living in this manner, and as young people became involved in the Five-Year Plan this number expanded.

This idealism was not to survive the era of the purges and the war. However, as Willimott explains:

“ ... the October Revolution and the broader Bolshevik project managed both to frame and fire the imagination. Across its opening decade, this new state relied on volunteerism, youth mobilisation and utopian visions of the future, as well as the suppression of opposition. In this sense, the revolution was participatory as well as coercive. The emotional energy of the revolution remained an important cornerstone of the Soviet state ... Those that formed the domestic communes ... were actively identifying themselves as 'the people of the future' ...

Andy Willimott, *People of the Future*, *History Today*, October 2017, Vol 67 Issue 10, p. 35

Komsomol memoir

The popular perception of Stalin's Russia is of a society ruled by terror, living in fear and suffering constant hardship. Much of this is of course true. However, it should not be forgotten that for many, especially the young, it was also a time of idealistic endeavour. The following extracts are from the memories of activist Komsomol members of the 1930s.

... In spite of material difficulties, such as the constant food shortage which was particularly acute at the time, neither I nor the young people around me had any anti-Soviet feelings. We simply found in the heroic tension involved in the building of a new world an excuse for all the difficulties ... The atmosphere of undaunted struggle in a common cause – the completion of the factory – engaged our imagination, roused our enthusiasm and drew us into a sort of front-line world where difficulties were overlooked or forgotten ...

... Of course it was only we, the younger generation, who accepted reality in this way. Our parents were full of muted but deep discontent. The arguments of our elders, however, had little effect on us, being, as they were, wholly concerned with material things, while we found in the official justification of all these difficulties a superficial idealism which had considerable appeal to the young ...

... It ... was not a desire for honours or rewards that caused me to do without sleep and to devote all my energy to the Party and the Komsomol ... I saw that the older generation, worn out after the years of war and the postwar chaos, were no longer in a position to withstand the difficulties involved in the construction of socialism. I thus came to the conclusion that success in transforming the country depended entirely on the physical exertions and the will of people like myself ...

Quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 37

QUESTIONS

- 1 Outline the attitude of these young people to Stalin's policies in the 1930s.
- 2 What evidence is there of a 'generation gap'?
- 3 How do you account for the attitude of these young people?
- 4 Could you imagine yourself holding similar views?

Women

The fate of women in the Soviet Union echoed that of education. During the early days of the revolution, there was a great emphasis on women's rights, equality and feminist thinking. This was in no small part due to the efforts of Alexandra Kollontai and her work with Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, in the Women's Department, the Zhenotdel. Women achieved legal equality, divorce was made easier and abortion was legalised. There was even a brief period where 'free love' was promoted by some women. Kollontai wrote novels at the time that encouraged such thinking. Women even fought in combat units during the civil war. This kind of thinking regarding women was not surprising in a revolutionary time, as the new regime sought to transform the old society. Under Stalin, women were given greater educational opportunities and women working in factories during the economic transformation became a common sight.



Women

The writings of Alexandra Kollontai

As well as her political activities, Alexandra Kollontai was a prolific writer of both sociological work and fiction. Her output included *The New Morality and the Working Class*, a short-story collection called *Love of Worker Bees* and a 1932 book called *Free Love*. In 1927 Kollontai wrote a novel called *Red Love* in which she argued about the unfairness of the treatment and judgement of women compared to men. She argued that if a man was involved in public matters, his private life remained his own business. However, if a woman was involved in public life, she was judged purely on the basis of her morality.

In a foreward to her book she wrote:

... I do hope that this book will aid in combating the old, bourgeois hypocrisy in moral values and show once more that we are beginning to respect women, not for her 'good morals', but her efficiency, for her ingenuity with respect to her duties towards her class, her country and humanity as a whole ...

For all her radicalism in 'sexual politics', Kollontai had little long-term impact on the thinking of Russian men, where traditional male chauvinism remained (and remains) strong. Kollontai herself was gradually squeezed out of Soviet political life, and she was to make her main contribution to the Soviet Union in the diplomatic field, both as an ambassador and later an advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Getty Images/ulstein bild DTI.

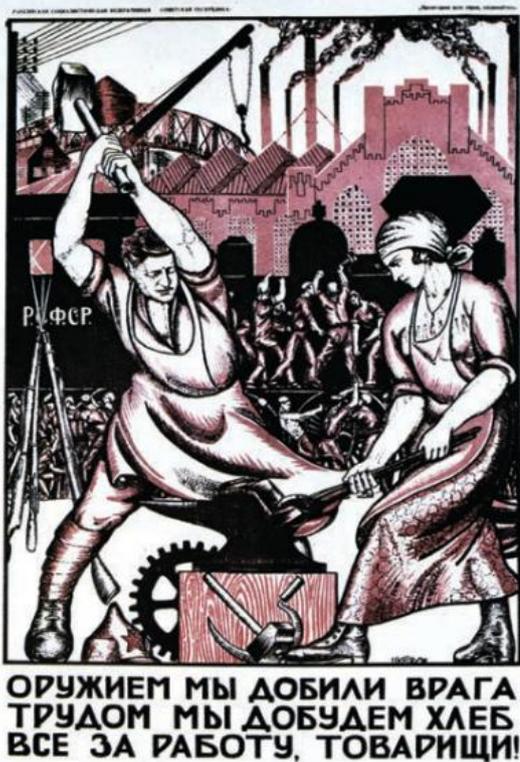
SOURCE 6.15 Alexandra Kollontai (right) in the 1920s

However, modern revolutionary Soviet society could not shake off the traditional Russian view of women. Russia's deep male chauvinism and sexist thinking remained strong. In addition, in the 1930s, the Soviet Union was beset with a variety of social ills. Easier divorce had created broken homes, Soviet cities were inundated with homeless children (similar to scenes described by Charles Dickens about the British Industrial Revolution) and juvenile crime was rampant. The Soviet birth rate was declining, which was not good for future economic growth. As a result, Stalin enforced a range of conservative measures regarding the lives of women.

A new approach to women's affairs was now implemented, which became known as 'the great retreat'. Most of the liberal reforms of the early Soviet period were reversed as the regime took a 'more serious' attitude towards marriage, family and child rearing. In 1936 a new Family Code was introduced:

- Abortion was outlawed unless it was essential for the mother's health. A doctor who performed an abortion (and some women who received them) could be imprisoned.
- Laws were passed against prostitution and homosexuality, and illegitimacy was frowned upon.
- Child-support benefits were increased. The more children a woman had, the higher the rate of benefits. If a woman had six children, she would receive 2000 roubles a year for five years.
- Divorce became more difficult to obtain and was made much more expensive.
- The NKVD became involved in dealing with juvenile crime. Homeless children were forced into orphanages, and parents could be fined if their children had been consistently unruly.

The conservative nature of these regulations echoed those that were being introduced in Nazi Germany.



SOURCE 6.16 Propaganda poster from 1920s extolling the new woman working in a factory with men. Female labour was always valued, but women were subjected to more conservative social thinking in the 1930s. The words read, 'By force of arms we have smashed the enemy, with our labour we will get bread. Down to work, Comrades!'

Class differences never disappeared in Stalin's Russia despite propaganda claims to the contrary. This was never more evident than in the 'Wives' Movement'. The Wives' Movement, which appeared in the mid-1930s, highlighted the gulf between its elite members – wives of high ranking managers, party officials – and ordinary working women. This difference, suggests Sheila Fitzpatrick, was not only social but also ideological. For the elite wives, their lives were guided by the principles of being dutiful wives and mothers, and homemakers. However, for lower-class women, such lofty goals always came into conflict with their mistreatment by unenlightened husbands and fathers.

“ ... As far as lower-class women were concerned, however, it was the duty to family, not the duty to husbands, that was usually emphasised. Lower-class husbands were too often delinquent in their own performance of family duties to be a suitable object for too much wifely duty – with the interesting exception of Stakhanovite workers who evidently deserved the same level of support as elite husbands ...

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 162

Of course, for the vast majority of Soviet women in the 1930s, issues of ideology and concern about the place of women in society were more or less irrelevant. For ordinary Soviet women, what mattered was getting through the daily grind of feeding and clothing a family, coping in cramped living spaces and achieving some sort of tolerance of and collaboration with neighbours in communal apartments. The activities of an organisation such as the Wives' Movement was a million miles away. This even applied to that small percentage of educated women with a profession or a job who did not define themselves as 'wives'. Such women had been quite influential during the 1920s, often working through the Zhenotdel. However, their voice had become muffled in the 1930s, partly due to the closure of the Zhenotdel in 1930 and partly due to the regime's lessening of support for women's issues. However, perhaps of greater importance were practical issues; even professional women could not escape the grind of domestic duties imposed upon them, and these were made more acute following the birth of a child.

The Wives' Movement, though welcomed by Stalin himself in Kremlin ceremonies, also came into conflict with the regime's desire to increase the size of the labour force by employing more women. Of course all women were expected to support the regime's goal of increasing the birth rate, whether they were working or not.



Women's dialogues

- 1 How could it be argued that the revolution had had a liberating impact on women's lives during the post-revolution decade?
- 2 How did women's rights diminish during the 1930s?
- 3 How could it be argued that the lives of Soviet women changed little despite the revolution and the later policies of Stalin?

Culture and the arts

One of Russia's great 20th-century writers was the poet and novelist Boris Pasternak. In 1958, Boris Pasternak won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his novel *Doctor Zhivago*. In 1965 the novel was made into a major Hollywood movie starring Omar Sharif and Julie Christie, going on to win five Academy Awards. However, Pasternak's book was banned inside the Soviet Union because it did not paint a flattering picture of early Soviet history. It had to be smuggled out to the West to be published.

The novel tells the story of the romance between a young doctor, Zhivago, and a woman he falls in love with, Lara. All this is set against the drama of Russia during the First World War, the 1917 Revolutions, the Russian Civil War and afterwards. In the film there is an interesting exchange between Zhivago and a Red Partisan leader, Strelnikov. Zhivago also writes love poetry. Strelnikov mocks Zhivago's 'bourgeois indulgences', arguing that such 'personal' things are out of place in the new post-revolution world. There is only one thing that is important, and that is the revolution!

Strelnikov's views are reflected in the Soviet attitude to the arts during the 1930s. Stalin demanded that the arts should be mobilised to support the efforts of the nation as it tried to build socialism. This was not the time for personal emotions and individuality. Instead, art, literature, cinema and music should be directed to the goals of the party. This framework of artistic endeavour became known as Socialist Realism. Artistic work was to be optimistic, positive and heroic. It was to be didactic; that is, it should teach people the correct way to think and go about their lives, not simply reflect the artist's individual feelings. Art was not meant to create doubt, but to present socialist heroes, be they Stakhanovite workers, industrious peasants or brave soldiers. Above all was the figure of Stalin. By the end of the 1930s Socialist Realism was presenting Stalin as a genius, the world's greatest statesman, the people's guide, a man imbued with limitless wisdom who sacrificed all for the nation. The 'personality cult' that developed around the figure of Stalin exceeded anything that had grown up around Lenin in the 1920s.

The 1st Congress of Soviet Writers met in 1934, and Socialist Realism was formally announced as the Soviet Union's 'official' cultural style. Writers were not allowed to stray from this model; they would be condemned for writing in a 'stream of consciousness' style like James Joyce. Artists were attacked if their work reflected Impressionism or Cubism or other modern styles. In 1935, the Leningrad Union of Artists presented an exhibition that set the tone of Soviet art with its positive and optimistic depictions of Soviet life. Dmitri Shostakovich, one of Russia's greatest 20th-century composers, often earned Stalin's ire with his work. Shostakovich's opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, was banned because Stalin believed it was too dark and realistic. Shostakovich was again in trouble in 1945 when his *Symphony No. 9* failed to reflect the heroics of the Soviet people and the glory of the nation's defeat of Nazi Germany.



Socialist Realism and the Stalin personality cult

During the 1920s Stalin sought to identify himself closely with Lenin, and promoted the 'cult of Lenin'. The aim was to present Stalin as a true disciple of Lenin and his natural heir. During the 1930s, the link to Lenin was expanded, but gradually the 'success' of the nation was being attributed to Stalin's great leadership alone. He was presented as the nation's 'father', not dissimilar to the tsarist idea. Links to the common people were emphasised; Stalin knew how they felt and understood their problems. He was omnipotent and omniscient – all-powerful and all-knowing. His picture was everywhere. No home failed to have his picture hanging; countless places were named after him, as were prizes and awards. Statues of Stalin were everywhere, often presenting him as tall and strong like Alexander III, though he was much shorter. In this way, Stalin propagandists were emulating the Roman Emperor Augustus, whose statues always depicted him as strong and youthful.

Examine the Socialist Realism posters on page 110 and answer the questions that follow.





Alamy/Heritage Image Partnership Ltd



SOURCE 6.17 The slogan reads: 'Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood'.



Alamy Stock Photo/World History Archive

SOURCE 6.18 Stalin presented as 'the great helmsman'. The slogan reads, 'The captain of the Soviet nation pilots us from victory to victory!'

Alamy Stock Photo/Heritage Image Partnership Ltd



SOURCE 6.19 *Lenin and Stalin* by Pyotr Vasilyev, c. 1949–1950

QUESTIONS

- 1 How are the children presented in Source 6.17? How is Stalin presented?
- 2 Consider the idea that Stalin is both 'close and distant'.
- 3 How is Stalin depicted in Source 6.18?
- 4 Explain the analogy of Stalin as the helmsman and the Soviet Union as a ship.
- 5 What is depicted in Source 6.19? Why do you think Stalin approved of such scenes? Who is noticeably absent from the scene? Why do you think this is?



Socialist Realism

Censorship confusion

Socialist Realism was one side of the propaganda coin; the other side was censorship. However, censorship in Stalin's Russia was not always as heavy-handed as one might expect. Certainly the party ensured that a positive image of the regime was prominent and details of any shortcomings in the industrialisation drive or the brutality of collectivisation did not appear in the media, which was of course state-controlled. Great publicity was given to the purges of the later 1930s but most NKVD activity took place under the radar. Needless to say, the party leadership, and in particular Stalin, was beyond comment in the media, unless that comment was favourable, as it always was.

However, interest in the arts did sometimes become a matter of Politburo interest. A production of the play *Molière*, written by Mikhail Bulgakov, was discussed, as was Eisenstein's film *Bezhin Meadow* which the Politburo ordered not to be shown. Even the prestigious Bolshoi Theatre was attacked because of its recruitment of alleged 'anti-Soviet' elements including people who had religious faith or foreign ties. In 1935 a permanent commission was established under Klim Voroshilov whose function was to keep a close eye on the output of state theatres. In May 1936, art galleries were ordered to remove paintings that were deemed to be 'formalist' or 'crudely naturalist in character'. They had to be replaced with the work of realist artists. Similar actions were occurring in Nazi Germany at the same time.

Censorship under Stalin was not always as clear cut which made life difficult for party officials, never quite knowing what they were supposed to do. During the first decade of Bolshevik rule, the official line towards religion was limited tolerance; churches were not to be closed down or destroyed. This was done to mollify international opinion. However, from 1929 a new militancy appeared as churches were closed and priests arrested. This was done without official announcement or published instructions but in secret. When the inevitable backlash from rural communities and international opinion arose, the militant campaign eased and the regime could claim it was not involved in such things in the first place. This caused problems for officials as they could not be informed of policy changes as all instructions were secret.

This confusion over censorship and party secrecy can be illustrated with the example of Bulgakov's play, *Days of the Turbins*. Sheila Fitzpatrick explains:

“... The combination of ambiguous policy signals and the cult of secrecy could produce absurd results, as when certain categories of officials could not be informed of relevant instructions because the instructions were secret. In one blatant example, the theatre censorship and the Ministry of Enlightenment, headed by AV Lunacharsky, spent weeks arguing at cross purposes about Mikhail Bulgakov's controversial play *Days of the Turbins*, despite the fact that the Politburo had instructed the Ministry that the play could be staged, because this decree was secret, known only to key officials in the administration of art, and Lunacharsky was not at liberty to divulge it ...”

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 27

The new elites

Another key aspect of Soviet society in the 1930s was the social revolution. This revolution did not have barricades in the street, and though bloodless, it was largely the result of the terror.

With the economic transformation that was taking place, there was a desperate need for educated, trained people who could organise the economy. The trials of the Shakhty engineers and the Industrial Party led many in the Communist Party to question the reliability of bourgeois specialists trained under the old regime. Technical education expanded, and party members and young workers soon took advantage of the opportunities being opened up. As the economy grew, there came into being a new class of managers, many of whom had come from peasant and worker ranks.

An even more significant change occurred within the party. Many experienced party members were lost during the 1930s as a result of purging, membership screening and the terror. Their places had to be filled so that the jobs of party functionaries could be carried out. This provided a clear opportunity for young men with initiative and ability to step forward and rise through the ranks. Future leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev and Andrei Gromyko began their careers in this way. The vast majority of this 'new elite' came from peasant or proletarian backgrounds and had been educated in technical fields. An appreciation of bourgeois tastes in literature, art and music was a low priority. As this group became more influential, it is perhaps not surprising that Soviet society and culture became more and more conformist, less willing to experiment and more closely tied to socialist construction.

One of the paradoxes of the rise of the new elites, though probably not a surprising one, is that out of a revolution that sought equality came the entrenchment of privilege and inequality. One element of this development is examined in the following historian section on Sheila Fitzpatrick.

Sheila Fitzpatrick

Sheila Fitzpatrick's excellent ground-breaking work on the lives of ordinary people in Stalinist Russia (*Everyday Stalinism*) has been referred to several times throughout this book. She makes some extremely pertinent comments about the enthusiasm with which the new elites and new privileged of Stalin's Soviet Union eagerly sought to restore the appearances of rank and privilege which were so much part of the pre-revolutionary tsarist regime. In some ways, it was almost as if the revolution had not happened.

Fitzpatrick makes her point with reference to 'uniforms'. After the revolution, ranks, insignia and uniforms were abolished in all areas of life. They were seen as being ridiculous and a key feature of the class-ridden tsarist regime. Even within the Red Army, ranks had been banished until the late 1930s. Uniforms in schools and universities, and ranks in the civil service and government ministries were ended, and even the cap bearing craft insignia worn by skilled tradesmen disappeared.

However, in the mid-1930s there was a dramatic change in attitude towards uniforms and ranks. Uniforms with the various insignia indicating rank and superiority reappeared in a vast range of activities. These changes did not apply only to the military as might be expected; in 1935 the ranks of major, colonel and marshal reappeared. The NKVD was also quick to develop uniforms and ranks from sergeant to Commissar General of State Security. During the war years, state prosecutors had military-style ranks and diplomats went into uniform. Ranks and uniforms were also introduced into a range of activities including waterways and fishing authorities, aviation, lumber export, and polar exploration.

The regime also indulged in a plethora of titles and prizes, most with at least a revolutionary flavour. Such titles included Distinguished Artist, People's Artist of the Russian Republic, or Order of the Labour Red Banner, the Order of Lenin and of course eventually the Stalin Prize.

Fitzpatrick attempts to explain why this change in post-revolutionary Russia came about during the 1930s.

... The dramatic reversal of the mid-1930s has been attributed to a general process of 'embourgeoisement' of the Stalinist regime and repudiation of revolutionary values. This is probably true, but she should remember that contemporaries often saw it differently. Communists who had moved up from the lower classes were particularly inclined to see their assumption of distinction modelled on those of the old regime as simply a proof that the Revolution had finally triumphed: they now had what the old bosses used to have ...





... It should be pointed out, moreover, that the appeal of uniforms was not only connected with status. The return of school uniforms in the second half of the decade, a very popular move, was not only a matter of social status, since all pupils went to the same state schools, and the only differentiation fostered by the uniforms was between boys and girls. Yet, *Izvestiia* reported that 'almost every family' was discussing the question of uniforms ...

... Some people liked the idea of uniforms because they *diminished* social distinctions within the school. Uniforms were associated with order and propriety and the inculcation of responsibility and pride in the collective

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000, p. 107

QUESTION

Construct a mind-map style diagram to explain the reasons for the reintroduction of old-style ranks, insignia and uniforms during Stalin's regime of the 1930s.



Conclusion

The transformation of the Soviet Union was not only economic and political but also social and cultural. Urbanisation was the clearest sign of change as the Soviet Union's urban population almost doubled in the 1930s. Education became widespread, available to almost all and illiteracy began to disappear. There was an emphasis on technical subjects such as mathematics and the various sciences to match the needs of the emerging modern, industrial society that the Soviet Union was becoming. History was used as a means of building up Stalin and encouraging the correct line of thought amongst young people. Questioning, critical thinking was not encouraged. Young people were greatly attracted to the goals of the revolution and there was genuine enthusiasm amongst members of the Komsomol to build socialism. Some young people even tried to bring the practice of socialism into their private and personal lives. The liberation and freedoms experienced by women in the 1920s gradually faded as a more conservative set of values were imposed, emphasising the importance of the role of wife and mother. However, there was still much encouragement given to women to get them into the workforce. The arts became trapped in the confines of Socialist Realism as the 'personal' had to be sacrificed on the altar of the common good. A cult of personality was developed around the person of Stalin, far greater than had ever been the case with Lenin. An important by-product of the terror was the enormous opportunities which came to people willing to accept the dictates of the regime. A new class of elites appeared by the late 1930s. There was even a reversion to tsarist-era ranks and uniforms, often undertaken enthusiastically by the Soviet people.

Chapter summary

- The most obvious social change of Stalin's time was the massive urbanisation that occurred during the great economic upheavals of the time. However, life in the Soviet Union's urban centres was never easy.
- Urban facilities were limited, social ills such as crime and juvenile delinquency abounded, and all Soviet citizens realised that without *blat*, life would be very hard.
- Education during the 1920s had suffered as students were encouraged to discover their revolutionary consciousness. However, during the 1930s economic need and social issues combined to restore more conservative values in the education system.
- Practical and scientific subjects were promoted in schools and universities at the expense of the humanities. History became a vehicle for party propaganda.
- Many young people joined the Komsomol and enthusiastically engaged in activism though their apparent privileged status was also a cause of resentment amongst other youth.
- The wide-ranging rights and freedoms that women had gained in the 1920s were gradually whittled away as a conservative agenda was imposed on them.
- The arts and culture were placed in a party straitjacket. Individual feelings and emotions, and experimentation in all artistic fields were frowned upon. The purpose of the arts was to promote the goals of the party.
- Socialist Realism became the official style of the arts, which the Soviet Union's artists, writers and composers were expected to emulate. Socialist Realism was intended to be optimistic and positive, and to extol the virtues of the regime.
- A new elite arose in the Soviet Union by the end of the 1930s. This group benefited from the economic transformation that created a need for technical expertise and assisted in the expansion of education, which provided the means for that expertise to be developed.
- The massive purging of the 1930s created opportunities for younger party members with ability and unquestioning loyalty to Stalin.

Further reading

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- Willimott, A, *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes and Soviet Socialism*, OUP, Oxford, 2017
- Kocho-Williams, A, *The Twentieth Century Russia Reader*, Routledge, London, 2012
- Montefiore, SS, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, Phoenix, London, 2004

CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

SOVIET SOCIETY UNDER STALIN

- 1 Outline the difficulties of urban living for most Soviet citizens in the 1930s.
- 2 In what ways did education in the Soviet Union change from the 1920s to the 1930s?
- 3 Why were the humanities frowned upon in the Soviet system?
- 4 What became the purpose of the study of history under Stalin?
- 5 How was literacy affected by Stalin's period of rule?
- 6 What seemed to be the popular reaction to the opportunities available for additional study?
- 7 How had women made gains in the decade following the revolution?
- 8 What was Alexandra Kollontai's contribution to women's issues after the revolution?
- 9 In what ways did upper- and lower-class women experience similar things in Stalinist Russia? In what ways were they different?
- 10 Explain the term Socialist Realism.
- 11 Describe the ways that Stalin affected cultural life in the Soviet Union.
- 12 Why was Boris Pasternak's work banned for so long in the Soviet Union?

RESEARCH QUESTION

- 13 In his biography of Stalin, Oleg Khlevniuk explains in some detail Stalin's interest and involvement in the culture of the Soviet Union. Normally such interest in the arts by a nation's supreme leader would be a boon for artists of various genres. However, this could also work in a negative way if the tastes of the supreme leader were in opposition to the styles of the various artists. Research the relationship between Stalin and the following to gain an understanding:
 - Dmitry Shostakovich
 - Sergei Prokofiev
 - the blind travelling singers of the Ukraine
 - avant-garde artists.

EXTENDED RESPONSES

- 14 How was art in the Soviet Union affected by Stalinist rule in the 1930s?
- 15 To what extent was society in the Soviet Union transformed under Stalin's rule?

07

Soviet foreign policy 1917–41

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter students will examine Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1941 and the importance of ideology in formulating foreign policy.

Aspects to be covered include:

- foreign policy during the period of consolidation to 1922
.....
- the Comintern
.....
- the role of ideology
.....
- Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s
.....
- the search for collective security in the 1930s
.....
- the Spanish Civil War
.....
- Far East foreign policy
.....
- the Nazi–Soviet Pact
.....
- Operation Barbarossa
.....



Modern History
Syllabus

An anonymous cartoon pokes fun at the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin, 1939

Introduction

There was to be a major ambiguity that lay at the heart of the nature and practice of Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1941. The Soviet Union was supposed to be a revolutionary regime whose long-term goal was the creation of communism in the Soviet Union on the basis of Marxism–Leninism. The party believed that revolution would not stop at the frontier of the Soviet Union and saw Bolshevik-inspired risings in Germany and Hungary as evidence of the spread of revolution. It was convinced that the flames of socialist revolution, once fanned, would spread across all of Europe, and eventually to the United States. It was the duty of the Soviet Union to help bring about revolutions in other countries. In this sense, ideology is at the heart of Soviet foreign policy.

However, by the early 1920s it was apparent that world revolution was not going to happen. The Soviet Union was alone. Faced with this situation, the party had to compromise its principles and develop normal state-to-state relationships. This became even more imperative once the NEP was introduced and the economy needed to be able to trade. A decade later, the dilemma would still be there. Stalin needed Western markets to sell his grain, and Western suppliers from whom to buy machine tools and factory equipment for the Five-Year Plan. Yet it was also assumed that the onset of the Great Depression was merely the first stage in the collapse of Western capitalism.

During the 1930s Soviet concerns not only revolved around issues of internal economic development and modernisation, but the very real threat of foreign attack. The Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, made no secret of his desire to establish a new German empire in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Steady German rearmament and gradual territorial expansion left Stalin in no doubt about the German dictator's intentions. The Soviet Union also faced a threat of war in the east as Japanese leaders eagerly eyed expansion into the resource-rich regions of Soviet Siberia. Thus, defence became the number one Soviet priority in the 1930s; ideological concerns had faded. For most of the decade, Soviet foreign policy attempted to strengthen collective security with Western powers. However, when it became clear that this strategy was doomed to failure, due both to the inherent weaknesses in collective security, and Western mistrust and reluctance to work with the Soviets, a new strategy was needed. This resulted in an agreement with Hitler and the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact in 1939. For the first two years of the Second World War there was cooperation between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia but this was to end dramatically with Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 (the German invasion of Russia).



Soviet foreign policy





Foreign policy during the period of revolution and civil war

The fundamental goal of the Bolsheviks on taking power in October 1917 was survival. The first decision Lenin made on seizing power in October 1917 was to issue the Peace Decree. German troops were still on Russian territory and were threatening to move on Petrograd. Such action on the part of the German army would almost certainly have spelled the end of Lenin's regime. Lenin knew this, and he also realised that the fundamental mistake of the previous Provisional Government, in power since the February Revolution, had been to continue the war with Germany when the Russian people were clamouring for peace. As a result, he demanded peace with Germany 'whatever the cost'. He overruled Bukharin's romantic notion of launching a revolutionary war. During the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky, as Commissar of Foreign Affairs, attempted his tactic of 'no war, no peace'. He argued that a Russian disengagement on the Eastern Front would be welcomed by the Germans due to their desperate position on the Western Front. Initially the Germans did not quite know how to react to Trotsky's tactic, but within a day or two they were once again heading to Petrograd. It was then that

Lenin stepped in and demanded that Russia sign the peace treaty.

In his book *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*, Adam Ulam suggests that Lenin had another reason for being so keen on achieving a quick peace. Ulam argues that Lenin feared that the Western powers might do a deal with Germany to destroy the Bolshevik regime and partition Russia. Lenin's regime even went as far as making contact with the West, suggesting that the Soviet Union might re-enter the war and even welcome Allied troops in northern Russia. Events in the war moved quickly to prevent such a fanciful development, and on 3 March 1918, Germany and Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which brought an end to Russia's involvement in the First World War.



Alamy Stock Photo/World History Archive

SOURCE 7.1 Delegates at the negotiations for the treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk not only ended Russian involvement in the war but had a major impact on internal developments. The Russian people may have wanted to end the war, but handing over vast territories and 62 million people was something else. Lenin had to fight hard to win over his party, and the coalition with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries broke down because of the treaty.



SOURCE 7.2 Main terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The treaty may have ended German actions against the Bolshevik regime, but it created a new, potentially greater threat to the government. The Western Allies were stretched to the limit during the first half of 1918 as Germany launched a massive offensive along the Western Front, made possible by its disengagement on the Eastern Front. By late 1918, several Allied nations had landed troops in Russia to force it back into the war. These included forces from Britain, France, the US and Japan. However, the fact that many of these troops remained after the conclusion of the First World War suggests their main purpose was to help bring down the Bolshevik regime. Japanese troops did not leave Russian territory until 1922.

In a real sense, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had no long-term significance. The defeat of Germany in November 1918 meant that Lenin was able to ignore it, though by then Russia had become embroiled in civil war (see Chapter 1). By the time the Bolsheviks had emerged victorious, the map of Europe had been redrawn, and several new countries had been carved out of the former Russian empire, including Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In 1922 Germany and Russia signed the Treaty of Rapallo, which cancelled any claims each nation might have raised against the other because of the war (see page 125).

- 1 Explain Lenin's motivation for wanting the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
- 2 'The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was of both crucial importance and no importance.' Explain this statement.

Western intervention and the ideology issue

Western intervention was limited and ultimately proved not to be effective. In fact, it had the ironic effect of presenting the Bolsheviks as 'Russian nationalists' defending the nation from foreign interference. However, of even greater importance was its impact on long-term Soviet foreign relations. The fact that the West had tried to strangle the Bolshevik regime at birth was never forgotten. Lenin stated at the 8th Party Congress in March 1919:

“ ... We are living not merely in a state but in a system of states and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before this end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable ... ”

Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 33

The historian Richard Overy argues that this view of Lenin's became the one constant in Soviet foreign policy thinking:

“ ... for Soviet leaders one thing remained constant: the fear that at some point the capitalist powers would unite to destroy the world's first and only communist state ... ”

Richard Overy, *The Road to War*, Macmillan, London, 1989, p. 183.

In March 1919 the Soviet regime established the **Comintern** to promote revolution.

The desire to export socialist revolution had both idealistic and practical dimensions. The Bolsheviks never believed that the revolution would stop at Russia's frontiers. Their revolution was to be a trigger to spark revolution across Europe as the beginning of world revolution. However, Lenin also assumed that Russia could not survive alone surrounded by capitalist enemies and that assistance from future socialist regimes like Germany would be forthcoming.

Comintern

The Comintern (also Communist International) was created in 1919, and sought to bring together all communist parties and assist each in bringing about revolution in their countries. Though nominally independent, it soon became an element of Soviet foreign policy

**Extract from
'The Programme
of the Communist
International.
Comintern Sixth
Congress 1929'**

The ultimate aim of the Communist International is to replace world capitalist economy by a world system of Communism. Communist society, the basis for which has been prepared by the whole course of historical development, is mankind's only way out, for it alone can abolish the contradictions of the capitalist system which threaten to degrade and destroy the human race.

Communist society will abolish the class division of society, i.e. simultaneously with the abolition of anarchy in production, it will abolish all forms of exploitation and oppression of man by man. Society will no longer consist of antagonistic classes in conflict with each other, but will present a united commonwealth of labour ...

... After abolishing private ownership of the means of production and converting these means into social property, the world system of Communism will replace the elemental forces of the world market, competitive and blind processes of social production, by consciously organised and planned production for the purpose of satisfying rapidly growing social needs.

The Programme of the Communist International Together with the Statutes of the Communist International, London, 1929

QUESTIONS

- 1 What evidence is there in the extract of the Comintern's confidence about future events?
- 2 To what extent is the extract an idealistic document?

The Russo–Polish War 1920–21

A Polish state, supported by the victorious powers of the First World War, reappeared in 1919 for the first time since the 1790s. The eastern frontier of Poland was settled as the rough boundary between the Catholic Polish communities and the Orthodox communities to the east. This frontier became known as the Curzon Line (after the British Foreign Secretary). Poland's new leaders were eager to expand, and in April 1920 they invaded Ukraine, capturing the capital, Kiev, on 6 May. However, the Red Army fought back and ejected the Poles on 11 June.

Some in the Soviet government now began talking about 'revolutionary war', believing that an advance against Poland might spark revolution in Germany. Red Army General Tukhachevsky stated at the time: 'Our way towards worldwide conflagration passes over the corpse of Poland'. Lenin expected Polish workers to welcome the Red Army. Instead the Poles showed that they were imbued more with nationalism than international proletarian solidarity.

With the help of French General Weygand, the Poles managed to save their capital, Warsaw, in a life and death struggle that became known as the Miracle of the **Vistula**. On 16 August, led by Josef Pilsudski, the Poles counterattacked and pushed the Red Army well to the east of the Curzon Line. An armistice was signed in October, and in March 1921 Poland and the Soviet state ended their brief war with the signing of the Treaty of Riga. There were now six million Ukrainians and White Russians under Polish domination. Lenin was unperturbed. He believed that when the world revolution came, the treaty would be ripped up, and he believed that Poland would soon encounter problems with having to deal with such a large national minority.

However, despite Lenin's optimism, the Soviet Union's defeat by Poland put an end to the imminent hope of revolution spreading across Europe. Lenin's government now started pursuing normal diplomatic relations with its neighbours and adopted the NEP at home.

Vistula

The river that runs through Warsaw

The Treaty of Riga

The Treaty of Riga, which ended the Russo-Polish War, was signed in the Latvian capital of Riga on 18 March 1921. It was eventually acknowledged by the Western powers in 1923. The treaty was concerned with three main issues: borders, national minorities and economics.

The border between Poland and Russia was established 250 kilometres east of the Curzon Line. The Curzon Line was the border agreed on at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Poland's border with Lithuania was settled the following year.

Poland was now much larger than had been planned at the Paris Conference in 1919. As a result, it now contained significant numbers of non-Poles: up to four million Ukrainians and one million Belorussians. These groups never became assimilated, and agitated for greater autonomy in the 1930s. People living in the border areas between Poland and Russia were allowed to choose their nationality, and each state promised to respect the rights of national minorities within their borders.

Russia was to pay Poland in gold for a year, and had to provide materials for railway construction. Poland was excused from any obligation to pay debts incurred by the Polish region of the Russian empire when it was under tsarist control. Poland was also given 'most-favoured nation status'. Thus, any trading concessions Russia granted to another nation automatically flowed on to Poland.



SOURCE 7.3 Poland after the First World War

- 1 What was the 'Curzon Line'?
- 2 Why could it be argued that the end of the Russo-Polish War marked a turning point in Soviet foreign policy?
- 3 Why was Lenin unconcerned at the losses sustained in the Treaty of Riga?

Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1920s

“ ... A two-pronged approach to foreign policy developed in the early Soviet state, on the one hand a traditional diplomacy pursued by capable individuals that aimed at securing a 'normal' relationship with the outside world, and on the other hand a drive to foment socialist revolution outside of Russia ... ”

A Kocho-Williams, *Russia's International Relations in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, p. 3

Those capable individuals included the Soviet Union's first foreign minister, Georgii Chicherin. He was a tsarist aristocrat and later a Menshevik. None of this mattered to Lenin who saw in Chicherin a skilled diplomat, fluent in several languages.

Anglo-Russian relations in the 1920s

Having defeated its enemies in the civil war, the young Soviet state's main concern continued to be survival. World revolution was downplayed in favour of nation building, though some party enthusiasts believed that this would not be a permanent situation. The NEP was introduced in 1921 (see Chapter 1) and its successful operation required stability, peace and economic links with foreign states. To this end, the Soviet Union signed a trade agreement with Britain in February 1921. Britain was motivated by a desire to limit Soviet propaganda and agitation in the empire, especially India, and to revive its own international trade after the war.

This agreement was an important moment in Soviet foreign policy:

- it indicated that the outside world now accepted that the Bolsheviks were masters of Russia
- it also showed that the Soviet Union was ready and eager to rejoin the international system. A series of similar agreements followed (see Table 7.1).

Kocho-Williams suggests that the significance of the Anglo–Russia Trade Agreement for the Soviet regime was that it marked ‘the benchmark of acceptability’.

Relations with Britain became something of a ‘political football’ during the 1920s. In May 1923 British Foreign Minister Curzon issued what became called ‘the Curzon Ultimatum’. A series of demands were made against the Soviet regime including such things as stopping the persecution of priests and an end to Soviet interference in India. Curzon was keen to break off relations with the Soviet Union but was prevented from doing so with the accession to power of the opposition Labour Party, under Ramsay Macdonald. In February 1924 Macdonald’s government formally recognised the Soviet regime; France quickly followed, as did most powers, though noticeably the United States did not.

However, there were still irritants to the Anglo-Russian relationship. Publication of the **Zinoviev Letter** during the 1924 General Election suggested Soviet interference in British political affairs. The letter was later proven to be a forgery but it managed to raise suspicions about Soviet intentions. Soviet support for coalminers during the 1926 **General Strike** in Britain, communist-led unrest in India and a British security raid on ARCOS – the All-Russia Cooperative Society – further strained relations. In May 1927 Britain’s Conservative government broke diplomatic ties with Moscow. Relations were restored in 1929 when the Labour Party was returned to power.

Zinoviev Letter

A letter allegedly written by Comintern chief Zinoviev in 1924, which encouraged revolution in Britain. It did much to discredit the left-wing British Labour Party and was arguably a factor in their 1924 electoral defeat.

The Treaty of Rapallo: 1922

Following the trade agreement, British prime minister Lloyd George ensured that an invitation was offered to the Soviet Union to attend the Genoa Economic Conference of 1922. This was another important moment for Soviet foreign affairs as it displayed the regime’s willingness to ‘play by the rules’. Of even greater importance was the stimulus it gave to a rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Though Germany and Russia had been enemies during the First World War, after the war they had soon found common ground. They were both ‘pariah’ nations. Germany was rejected by the other powers because of its responsibility for beginning the war. Clause 231 of the Treaty of Versailles put the blame squarely on Germany. Germany was also forced to hand over territories and pay huge reparations to the victorious powers. It was allowed no part in the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Russia had become a pariah for ideological reasons. It too had lost territories, and the Western powers were demanding the repayment of loans that had been made to the former tsarist regime, which the Bolsheviks had repudiated. Russia was also not invited to the peace talks in Paris in 1919.

Thus, both nations had common interests despite the obvious ideological divide. They sought cancellation of international debts and needed trade. The Treaty of Versailles had greatly restricted

General Strike

In 1926 a British miners’ strike became a national general strike, which briefly brought the country to a standstill. Britain accused Soviet authorities of assisting the strikers.

Reichswehr

The German armed forces during the Weimar Republic period of 1919–33

Germany's military power. So even before the two nations had signed a formal treaty, the German army chief, Hans von Seeckt, and Trotsky, by this stage head of the Soviet Red Army, had set up factories inside the Soviet Union making arms for the German army, while the **Reichswehr** was training Soviet forces.

Germany and the Soviet Union used the occasion of the Genoa Economic Conference in Genoa to reach a key agreement: the Treaty of Rapallo. According to the treaty:

- All claims for reparations and compensation were cancelled.
- Each granted the other 'most-favoured nation status'; any trade concession either power gave to another power, automatically flowed to each partner.
- Each promised to cooperate in a spirit of goodwill to meet each nation's economic needs.

The Soviet regime had secured its first formal official recognition by a great power. Several more trade and friendship treaties were signed between Germany and the Soviet Union during the decade. Kocho-Williams also suggests that the Rapallo Treaty was significant as it prevented the formation of a possible anti-Soviet bloc between the Western powers and Germany, a constant fear in Soviet governing circles since Western intervention during the civil war.



Alamy Stock Photo/Interfoto

SOURCE 7.4 German and Russian delegates together at Genoa in 1922 before the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo

- 1 Construct a mind map in which you illustrate the following about the Treaty of Rapallo:
 - the context of its signing
 - Germany's motivation
 - the Soviet Union's motivations
 - its significance.

Ideology and ‘war scares’

The ambiguity of Soviet foreign policy came to the fore again in the 1920s. Despite the improvement of relations with Germany, hopes of revolution there remained. In 1923 Germany faced a total economic catastrophe. Its failure to maintain its reparation payments, demanded under the Treaty of Versailles, led to French forces invading the Ruhr industrial area. German industrial production collapsed as the government urged its workers to strike and pursue a policy of non-cooperation with the French, while still paying their wages. The result of these events was the destruction of the German currency as **hyper-inflation** took off.

It seemed to some in Soviet circles that revolution might at last become a reality inside Germany, and there was talk of a looming ‘German October’. However, this was not to be. The chances of Comintern-assisted European revolution were further eroded with the ideological shift within the Soviet Union. Stalin’s policy of ‘Socialism in One Country’ and Trotsky’s removal from power (see Chapter 2) placed the emphasis in Soviet foreign policy squarely on the need for normal state-to-state relations. Stable foreign relations were a necessity for economic development, and so it was important that other powers did not view the Soviet Union as seeking to undermine them.

Events in Asia also highlighted the Soviet Union’s ambiguous foreign policy. Comintern agents had encouraged the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to work with the Chinese Nationalists – the Guomindang (GMD) – in China. However, in 1927–28 the GMD leader, Jiang Jieshi, turned against his erstwhile communist allies. Thousands of Chinese communists were massacred by GMD forces and the CCP was almost destroyed. Jiang’s betrayal led to the Comintern declaring the ‘doctrine of social fascism’. In essence, this called on communist parties around the world to cease cooperation with social democrat and nationalist parties, who were now referred to as ‘social fascists’ and accused of facilitating the rise of radical right-wing regimes. This ultra-left thinking was announced as official Comintern policy by Bukharin at the 6th Comintern Congress in 1928.

Events in China coincided with the worsening of Anglo-Russian relations. When Britain broke diplomatic ties with Moscow in May 1927, fear of war grew in Soviet circles and the spectre of possible ‘capitalist encirclement’ again raised its head. This Soviet suspicion of the West and the belief that Western powers would never be satisfied until they saw the destruction of Soviet communism was to remain a constant in Soviet foreign policy thinking through the entire history of the Soviet Union. War scares became common as Stalin became convinced that war was ever on the horizon.

Despite Bukharin’s Comintern announcement in 1928, once Stalin began the economic transformation of the Soviet Union (see Chapter 4), peace and stability remained the priorities of Soviet foreign policy. Stalin’s Five-Year Plans needed Western capital, Western expertise, Western technology and stability abroad. Comintern delegates might delight in the troubles besetting the Western powers during the worst of the Great Depression, but Stalin had no intention of jeopardising his plans for modernising the Soviet Union.

Kocho-Williams sums up Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s in the following way:

“... the commitment to bringing about world revolution did not entirely go away but became subordinated to the needs of the Soviet State... the Soviet Union had other concerns which it addressed by seeking stable relations with foreign powers that were not upset by the activities of the Comintern, and by developing the Soviet economy towards greater efficiency and the development of industry ...”

A Kocho-Williams, *Russia’s International Relations in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, p. 53

hyper-inflation

A level of inflation that reaches unmeasurably high levels and results in a nation’s currency becoming worthless

The following table summarises the main steps taken in the practice of Soviet foreign policy from 1917 to the late-1920s.

TABLE 7.1 Soviet foreign policy, 1917 to the late 1920s

DATE	ACTION	SIGNIFICANCE
December 1917	Sovnarkom issues the Peace Decree	The Bolsheviks' main concerns are peace and survival.
March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk	War with Germany ends. Russia pays a high price for peace but Lenin does not expect the treaty to last. The Bolsheviks repudiate all debts owed to Western powers.
1918–20	Allied intervention in the civil war	The Western Allies claimed to be seeking Russia's return to the First World War, but it is soon clear they seek the destruction of the regime.
1919	Creation of the Comintern	Its purpose is to foment revolution across Europe.
June 1919	Germany is forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles. League of Nations is established.	Russia does not attend the Paris Peace Conference. Russia is not invited to join the League of Nations, which it sees as a capitalist club. Attempted revolutions in Hungary and Germany fail, leaving Russia as an isolated socialist state.
1920	Friendship treaties are signed with Russia's neighbours Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.	The Bolsheviks had already given up claims to former tsarist lands. However, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia are soon reincorporated into the Soviet Union.
1920–21	War with Poland Treaty of Riga in March 1921	Some Bolshevik enthusiasts briefly believe in using the Russo–Polish War to launch revolutions across Europe. Russia's defeat puts an end to such ideas.
1921	Friendship treaties are signed with Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey.	Soviets establish diplomatic relations with neighbours.
1921	Commercial treaties are signed with Italy and Britain.	These arrangements coincide with the introduction of the NEP.
1922	Germany and Russia sign the Treaty of Rapallo.	The Treaty of Rapallo resolves territorial and economic disputes between the Germans and the Soviets and lays the foundation for later secret military cooperation.
1924	Diplomatic relations are established with Britain.	Anglo–Soviet relations become something of a 'political football'. Relations are established, broken, and established again, depending on events in the British political scene, such as the General Strike, and the activities of the Comintern, such as the Zinoviev Letter of 1924.
1920s	Early cooperation between the CCP and the GMD in China ended when the Guomindang turned on the CCP, nearly destroying it.	At the 6th Comintern Congress, Bukharin announces the end of cooperation between communist parties and so-called 'social fascists', such as social democrat and nationalist parties.
late 1920s	Diplomatic relations are established with all the great powers except the United States.	Despite occasional rhetoric coming from the Comintern and party members, the Soviet Union dedicates itself to building socialism at home and has effectively given up the dream of world revolution. By now, the country is embroiled in its internal economic transformation.



Anglo–Soviet relations

- 1 Why did Germany and the Soviet Union develop such close ties despite their clear differences?
- 2 To what extent were Anglo–Soviet relations at the mercy of British politics?
- 3 Explain the impact that Stalin’s domestic dominance had on Soviet foreign policy.
- 4 In the eyes of the Comintern, who were ‘social fascists’ and how were they to be treated?

Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s

The fundamental aim of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s was to avoid being drawn into a war, whether that threat came from the west or the east. Stalin and his foreign minister, Litvinov, were well aware of the dangers presented by the growth of German Nazism in the west and Japanese militarism in the east. Hitler had made no secret of his intention to create a new German empire in Russia, and Japan’s army leaders were eyeing eastern Siberia, having already taken control of Manchuria in 1931.

The course of Soviet foreign affairs at this time was not a consistent one. There were real attempts to work with the Western powers and a commitment to collective security while attempts were also made to reach an accommodation with Nazi Germany. Internal developments and personal rivalries also played a part in the development of foreign policy.

The Soviet search for collective security

In July 1930 Maxim Litvinov became Soviet Foreign Minister. He had effectively been in this position since 1928 due to the illness of Georgii Chicherin. Litvinov was an Anglophile, unlike Chicherin who nursed a deep dislike and distrust of Britain. Litvinov was married to a British woman and believed that the Soviet Union should support the principle of **collective security**.

The perceived threat from Nazi Germany was well understood in Moscow. Hitler had written and spoken about his goal of creating a new German empire in the east at the expense of the ‘inferior’ Slavs who lived there. At the 1933 World Economic Conference, the German economics minister, Alfred Hugenburg, issued a statement that Germany sought expansion in the east and had its sights set on Soviet territory. Hitler’s non-aggression pact with Poland in 1934 led Stalin to fear the possibility of joint German-Polish action. The young Bolshevik regime had already fought a war with Poland in 1920–21.



SOURCE 7.5 Maxim Litvinov and his wife, Ivy Low Litvinov, during the 1930s

collective security

The essence of collective security was the notion that if one country became the target of aggression, other countries would rally behind that country in opposition to the aggressor. It was enshrined in Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Alamy Stock Photo/Sputnik

The League of Nations

The League of Nations was an international body established after World War I whose aim was to prevent conflict between nations. It was the brainchild of US President Wilson who introduced the concept in his Fourteen Points speech in January 1918. Article 10 of the League Covenant stated that member nations would rally behind a fellow member that was subject to military aggression. This was the essence of 'collective security' and it was hoped that the threat of international action would deter nations pursuing aggressive actions. If nations had disagreements that could lead to war, Article 12 enabled those nations to present their cases to the league for internal arbitration.

As Germany increased in economic and military strength, the Soviet Union placed its idealistic goal of world revolution well and truly on the back burner and sought meaningful cooperation with the West. To this end, it joined the League of Nations in September 1934.

In April 1935 the Soviet Union went further and signed a 'Mutual Assistance Treaty' with France. The treaty stated that each power would provide assistance to the other in the event of an unprovoked attack by a European state. However the treaty had severe limitations:

- France was obliged to act only if the League of Nations acknowledged any act of aggression against the Soviet Union.
- There was no mention of Japan.
- It took the chaotic French government over a year to ratify the treaty.

In May 1935 the Soviet Union signed a similar agreement with Czechoslovakia. However, the Soviets were obliged to act only if France also honoured its commitments to the Czechs. The lack of a common Soviet-Czech border also made this agreement problematic. At the same time, there was a major change in Comintern policy. Comintern president Georgii Dimitrov called for communist parties across Europe to now cooperate with other political parties against the threat of fascism and be willing to join coalition governments.

In late 1933 the USA became the last Western power to establish formal diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Suspicion and distrust remained deep-seated between the US and the Soviet administrations but trade ties had been growing and there was a significant American presence in the Soviet Union during Stalin's modernisation of the country. The USA and the Soviet Union also shared a distrust of Japanese intentions in the Far East.

- 1 What were the Soviet Union's prime international concerns in the 1930s?
- 2 What was collective security?
- 3 What evidence is there that the Soviet Union was beginning to take the notion of collective security seriously?

Soviet doubts about collective security

By 1936 the Soviet Union was beginning to have doubts about the effectiveness of collective security. In March 1936 Hitler ordered troops into the demilitarised area of the Rhineland. This was totally contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles but Britain, and more importantly France, did no more than protest. The Soviet Union looked on with great concern. Stalin began to doubt the value of collective security. If Britain and France did not want to act in the west and allowed Hitler to act

at will, what was the likelihood of the Western nations taking action if Hitler moved eastwards, as he had stated was his intention on several occasions?

Soviet concerns were increased when Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, again in total contravention of the Versailles Treaty, and action that again met with no Western response. To the Soviets, it seemed that the Western powers were pushing Hitler eastwards.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

SOURCE 7.6 German soldiers marching into Cologne, 1936



Alamy Stock Photo/Everett Collection

SOURCE 7.7 German soldiers entering Austria at the time of the Anschluss, 1938

The Spanish Civil War

The Soviets then had to face the situation of the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in mid-1936. The major powers formed a Non-Intervention Committee, fearing that the civil war between the Democratic Republic of Spain and its fascist opponents could escalate and spread beyond Spain's borders. Spain's civil war lasted almost three years and the scale of its destruction and brutality brought home to people what a Europe-wide conflict would be like.

The Soviet Union faced a major dilemma in Spain:

- Spain was clearly a fight against fascism which the Soviets had pledged to oppose through both its normal foreign policy and new Comintern policy. It was feared that a fascist victory in Spain could lead to further fascist success in Europe and encourage Hitler to move east sooner rather than later. Hitler and the Italian dictator, Mussolini, were openly supplying the fascists in Spain with supplies, aircraft and men.
- However, Stalin had agreed to refrain from intervening and there was a danger that overt Soviet involvement in Spain could damage hopes of collective security.
- A decisive 'communist' victory in Spain could push Britain and France into an anti-Soviet alliance with Germany.

Faced with this quandary, the Soviets decided on 'Operation X' in September 1936. This would involve secret intervention on the side of the Republic. Soviet aid was directed by the NKVD but channelled through the Comintern.

By mid-1938 the Soviet Union had all but abandoned Spain. The Soviets were still hoping for collective security to work. At home the purges were in full swing and to make things worse, the Soviets were now involved in a significant military conflict in the Far East against Japan.



Spanish Civil War

Stalin and the Spanish Civil War

Oleg Khlevniuk's recent work on Stalin has been referred to several times in this book. Here he is able to offer some significant insight into the exercise of Soviet foreign policy by examining Stalin's direct involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Khlevniuk makes the point that Stalin's actions occurred while the Republican forces in Spain were suffering serious defeats alongside setbacks in Europe and the Far East, and the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Against all of these developments, the purges were gaining pace inside the Soviet Union. The italics in the extract below highlight Stalin's points.

... Newly available archives confirm that Stalin was heavily involved in Spanish affairs. The evidence clearly shows that he believed Republican defeats were caused by saboteurs in the ranks. He demanded that the internal enemy be dealt with decisively. On 9 February 1937 Soviet representatives in Valencia and Madrid were sent a telegram asserting that a series of failures at the front had been directly caused by treachery at headquarters: *'Make use of these facts, discuss them, observing caution with the best of the Republican commanders ... so that they may demand ... an immediate investigation of the surrender of Malaga, a purge of Franco agents and saboteurs from army headquarters ... If these commands by front-line commanders do not produce immediately the necessary results, put it ... that our advisors may find it impossible to continue working under such conditions.'* A few days later he repeated these demands: *'We tell you what our firmly established opinion is: that the General Staff and other headquarters must be purged thoroughly of their complement of old specialists who are unable to understand the conditions of civil war and, in addition, are politically unreliable ...'* ... The theme of the special danger posed by wreckers and spies in wartime ran through the speeches delivered at the (February-March Central Committee) plenum, including Stalin's: *'Winning a battle in wartime takes several corps of Red Army soldiers. But reversing*





that victory at the front requires just a few spies somewhere in army headquarters ...' ... In the months that followed, Stalin's suspicions were translated into massive police operations ...

Oleg V Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015, pp. 154, 155

QUESTIONS

- 1 Is there any similarity between Stalin's reaction to failures in Spain and his reaction to economic failures at home (see Chapter 5)?
- 2 Do you think Stalin's actions were motivated by a desire to promote an ideological cause or to secure national Soviet interests?
- 3 What impact do you think Stalin's behaviour regarding the conflict in Spain would have had on Anglo-French perceptions of the Soviet Union, occurring as they did at the same time as the purges back in Moscow?



The Soviets abandon collective security

The purges had a major impact on Western perceptions of the Soviet Union. Distrust and suspicion were ever-present, but now there were serious doubts about how effective the Soviets could be as a collective security partner. The purging of the Soviet diplomatic corps had removed half of the senior level officials and ambassadors. The new appointees lacked experience, and so it now became almost impossible to conduct normal relations with the Soviet Union. The purging of the Soviet armed forces in 1937 suggested to many in British circles that the Soviet military could not be relied upon.

In September 1938 Hitler demanded to be allowed to annex the largely German-speaking Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. He was willing to go to war to achieve this. The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, in pursuit of his policy of **appeasement**, flew to Munich to meet Hitler and work out an agreement that would prevent war. Chamberlain succeeded in his aim but Czechoslovakia was forced to hand over the Sudetenland to Germany, as well as smaller pieces of territory to Poland and Hungary.

The Soviet Union had not been invited to the Munich Conference (nor had Czechoslovakia) and Hitler's advance eastwards was allowed to continue. Despite the results of Munich, Soviet Foreign Minister, Litvinov, sought a 'Tripartite Pact' with Britain and France to stand up to Nazi aggression. This came to naught, and in March 1939 Hitler ripped up the Munich agreement and marched into the rest of Czechoslovakia. The Czech state ceased to exist.

appeasement
Appeasement was the policy pursued by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain. Its purpose was to avoid war by making concessions to Germany in the belief that German demands were reasonable following its harsh treatment in the Treaty of Versailles.

Stalin's 'warmongers' speech

In March 1939 Stalin spoke to the 18th Party Congress on foreign policy matters. His speech is sometimes referred to as the 'warmongers/chestnuts speech'. Read this extract from Stalin's speech and answer the questions that follow.

... Everybody is arming, small states and big states, including primarily those which practise the policy of non-intervention. Nobody believes any longer in the unctuous speeches which claim that the Munich concessions to the aggressors and the Munich agreement opened a new era of 'appeasement.' They are disbelieved even by the signatories to the Munich agreement, Britain and France, who are increasing their armaments no less than other countries ... while our country is unswervingly pursuing a policy of preserving peace, it is at the same time doing a great deal to increase the preparedness of our Red Army and our Red Navy.





At the same time, in order to strengthen its international position, the Soviet Union decided to take certain other steps. At the end of 1934 our country joined the League of Nations, considering that despite its weakness the League might nevertheless serve as a place where aggressors can be exposed, and as a certain instrument of peace, however feeble, that might hinder the outbreak of war. The Soviet Union considers that in alarming times like these even so weak an international organization as the League of Nations should not be ignored. In May 1935 a treaty of mutual assistance against possible attack by aggressors was signed between France and the Soviet Union. A similar treaty was simultaneously concluded with Czechoslovakia. In March 1936 the Soviet Union concluded a treaty of mutual assistance with the Mongolian People's Republic. In August 1937 the Soviet Union concluded a pact of non-aggression with the Chinese Republic.

It was in such difficult international conditions that the Soviet Union pursued its foreign policy of upholding the cause of peace ...

The tasks of the Party in the sphere of foreign policy are:

- 1 To continue the policy of peace and of strengthening business relations with all countries;
- 2 To be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them;
- 3 To strengthen the might of our Red Army and Red Navy to the utmost;
- 4 To strengthen the international bonds of friendship with the working people of all countries, who are interested in peace and friendship among nations ...

Josef V Stalin, *Report on the Work of the Central Committee to the Eighteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B.)*, 10 March 1939

QUESTIONS

- 1 What did Stalin see as the significance of the massive rearmament of Britain and France?
- 2 What was Stalin's opinion of the League of Nations?
- 3 How had the Soviet Union attempted to strengthen collective security despite Stalin's doubts about it?
- 4 What does Stalin's 'chestnuts' metaphor tell us about the fundamental aim of Soviet foreign policy at this time?

In May 1939 Litvinov was replaced as Foreign Minister by Molotov. Molotov was willing to reach a rapprochement with Germany but there was no immediate change in Soviet policy and Molotov made it clear the Soviets still wanted to work with Britain. However, Prime Minister Chamberlain was reluctant to become too involved with the Soviets. In response to Molotov's request for talks, he sent a junior foreign office official, William Strong. Military officials did not arrive until 10 August, having experienced delays on their 'sea journey'.

It was in this environment that on 11 August the Deputy Soviet ambassador in Berlin, Georgii Astrakhov, was told by German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop that Germany saw no reason why it could not come to an agreement with the Soviet Union. On 15 August von Ribbentrop told the Soviets he was ready to fly to Moscow. On 23 August, von Ribbentrop was in Moscow to sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Lebensraum

German, living space: the term used by the Nazis to describe the areas in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union where the new German Empire was to be created

The Nazi-Soviet Pact

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 is one of the most amazing acts of diplomacy in modern European history. From the time he wrote his political memoir *Mein Kampf* while in prison during 1924, Hitler made it clear that he intended to achieve **Lebensraum** in the east at the expense of the Soviet Union. He despised Bolshevism, arguing that it was a product of an international

Jewish conspiracy. In addition, Hitler looked down on the Slavic peoples of the Soviet Union, as *untermenschen* – subhumans. Their fate in the new German empire was to be the slave labour force of Hitler's master race. Stalin despised all that Nazism stood for; it was the ideological antithesis of socialism. More importantly, with the Soviet Union weakened by economic upheaval and the purges, he feared the German military machine to the west. The cartoon shown in the source study on page 136 illustrates the feelings of Hitler and Stalin about each other.

So if the antipathy between the Soviet Union and Germany was so deep-rooted, why did they agree to sign a 10-year non-aggression pact on 23 August 1939?

For Hitler, there was one overriding aim: he wanted to ensure that he would not have to face a two-front war, which had been so disastrous for Germany in the First World War. In March, Britain had given a guarantee that it would defend Poland in the event of a German attack. Thus, Hitler had to consider the possibility of Polish resistance, combined with war with the West, and the possibility of Soviet action if he moved east. By signing the pact, Hitler achieved several things. There would be no two-front war; indeed the Soviet Union would soon join Germany in its dismemberment of Poland. Poland could be overcome in just a few weeks using *blitzkrieg* tactics. Once this had been achieved, Hitler could deal with the West. He had not changed his aim of attacking the Soviet Union; it just suited him to postpone such an attack until later.

Stalin's motives for the pact were equally opportunistic. Stalin believed he could not trust the West. A deal with Hitler over Poland, he believed, would ensure that Germany moved west and that a long conflict would ensue, which would weaken both Germany and the Western powers. A deal with Hitler would give him control of eastern Poland (and other territories) and more importantly, the agreement gave the Soviet Union time to consolidate and strengthen its military for the struggle with Germany that would surely come. The pact's secret articles also included an agreement between the parties to an increased Soviet role in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe.

Hitler's Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, flew into Moscow on 23 August and, with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, signed the non-aggression pact. The world was stunned!

untermenschen
German term for subhumans, used by the Nazis to describe what they saw as inferior races, such as Slavs



Nazi-Soviet Pact



SOURCE 7.8 The Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, signs the non-aggression pact, 23 August 1939. German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (third from left) and Soviet leader Josef Stalin (second from right) look on while standing under a portrait of Lenin.

Alamy/Heritage Image Partnership Ltd

The Nazi–Soviet Pact



SOURCE 7.9 David Low's cartoon in the *London Evening Standard*, 20 September 1939

David Low/Solo Syndication/British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent. www.cartoons.ac.uk

QUESTIONS

- 1 How does the cartoonist present Hitler and Stalin? What indicates that they have become friendly? What indicates that this friendship is not deep-seated?
- 2 What does the body between them represent? Explain why the cartoonist has added this to the cartoon.
- 3 There are storm clouds in the background. What might they indicate?
- 4 This is a British cartoon. What is this British perspective trying to say about the Nazi–Soviet Pact?

THE NAZI–SOVIET PACT, 23 AUGUST 1939

The Nazi–Soviet Pact was a brief document comprising two sections: a public section and a 'secret protocol'.

THE PUBLIC DOCUMENT

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April, 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following Agreement:

Article I. Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

Article II. Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.





Article III. The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

Article IV. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties, neither of the two High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

Article V. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

Article VI. The present Treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not advance it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

Article VII. The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The Agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

Secret Additional Protocol

Article I. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognised by each party.

Article II. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish States and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

Article III. With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas.

Article IV. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Moscow, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich v. Ribbentrop
Plenipotentiary of the Government of the U.S.S.R. V. Molotov

Cited at www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/pact.htm

QUESTIONS

- 1 In Article II, what is each power offering the other in the event either power becomes involved in a war?
- 2 What is the significance of Article VII? What does it suggest about Hitler's intentions towards Poland?
- 3 In Article I of the Secret Protocol, what is Stalin being offered by Hitler with regards to the Baltic States?
- 4 What does Article II of the Secret Protocol suggest is going to happen to Poland?
- 5 What does Article III indicate is likely to happen to Bessarabia?
- 6 Why do you think Hitler and Stalin wanted the Secret Protocol kept secret?

Historians and the Nazi–Soviet Pact

The significance of the Nazi–Soviet Pact was evident from the start; it gave Hitler the green light to launch his attack on Poland. Norman Davies describes the post-pact celebration in Moscow at which Stalin toasted the health of Hitler and assured German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that the Soviet Union would not betray its ‘partner’.

NORMAN DAVIES

... On the surface the Nazi–Soviet Pact appeared to be no more than an agreement for closer ties of friendship, trade and political cooperation. Thanks to the secret protocol, however, it amounted to much more. It foresaw the division of North Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence; and it gave free rein to both signatories to devour their inconvenient neighbours (in the interests of self-defence) ... Hitler and Stalin were in business. Poland’s fate was sealed.

Norman Davies, *Europe at War*, Pan, London, 2006, pp. 149, 150

IAN KERSHAW

Ian Kershaw sees the Pact as a classic piece of *realpolitik*. Hitler was desperate to attack Poland as soon as possible; late August was what he had in mind in order to avoid the autumn rains. On 19 August Stalin indicated he was willing to talk seriously to Berlin and so Hitler sent von Ribbentrop to Moscow without delay.

... A secret protocol delineated spheres of interest in the Baltic, Romania and Poland with a view to ‘a territorial and political transformation’ in these regions. It was the most cynical deal imaginable. It made eminent sense, however, to both parties. Germany had sealed its Eastern Front. The Soviet Union had bought precious time to consolidate its defences.

Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914–1949*, Penguin, St Ives, 2016, p. 341

RICHARD OVERY

Richard Overy considers the Nazi–Soviet Pact in a broader context. He argues that after the Munich Conference, Hitler had only contempt for the Western leaders and believed that they were ‘too militarily enfeebled and politically decadent’ to mount any opposition to his plans for Eastern Europe. After the occupation of Prague and Memel, he ordered his generals to prepare for a short, punitive war against Poland in August, believing that Britain and France would not oppose him.

... To avoid Soviet involvement in the area where there were strong Soviet interests, Hitler concluded a non-aggression pact with Stalin on 23 August, with a secret protocol dividing Poland between them, and granting the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in the Baltic States. The pact was a marriage of convenience between ideological enemies. Hitler felt that Britain and France, faced with the combined weight of Germany and the Soviet Union, would have to accept the reality of the new European balance of power, while Stalin gained from the pact the opportunity to revise the post-war settlements by seizing back the lands of the old Tsarist Empire without German or Western resistance.

Richard Overy, *The Inter-War Crisis*, Routledge, Oxford, 2017, p. 97

QUESTION

- 1 Identify the motives and consequences of the Nazi–Soviet Pact as highlighted by the three historians.

1939–41: From the Nazi–Soviet Pact to Operation Barbarossa

By the summer of 1941 Hitler was ready to attack the Soviet Union. Since the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 1939 relations between Germany and the Soviet Union had proceeded well, considering the fundamental distrust and suspicion that existed. Stalin continued to send war supplies westwards to Germany, while Hitler acceded to Stalin's takeover of the Baltic States and Bessarabia, provision for which was made in the non-aggression pact.

Germany defeated Poland in about five weeks; Soviet troops had invaded the country on 17 September and taken possession of the eastern half. Between April and June 1940 Germany took over Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg; France surrendered in June. Britain survived the Battle of Britain, but Hitler believed he had little to fear in the west, so turned his attention to the Soviet Union. By March 1941 Hungary and Bulgaria had joined the **Axis**, and Romania was also pressured to join. By late May, Germany had taken over Yugoslavia and Greece, and driven Allied troops out of Crete. Nazi actions in the Balkans arguably delayed the invasion of Russia, which would have great significance later in the year.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union – Operation Barbarossa – began on 22 June 1941. It was the biggest invasion in history involving more than three million men, 600 000 trucks, 3350 tanks, 2000 aircraft and, perhaps surprisingly, hundreds of thousands of horses. Three German army groups invaded, heading for Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. Soviet forces were totally unprepared for the attack. Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, had warned Stalin what was coming, but Stalin had believed the Western powers were merely trying to trick him into fighting. When the German troops attacked, many Soviet troops were on leave, playing in sporting events. As the German army marched into some towns, trams were still running and people waved at the troops believing them to be Red Army contingents. The first two months of the campaign led to Soviet losses on an incredible scale:

- on the first day, the Soviets lost 1200 aircraft
- by late July German forces had captured an area twice the size of Germany
- by September Soviet forces had lost three million men, most of its aircraft and thousands of tanks
- by November German forces had captured Minsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa and Rostov. Leningrad was besieged and Moscow was within striking distance. For a brief time in October, Moscow was a city in a state of panic; even Stalin left briefly.

However, the German advance stalled and in December, Soviet forces were able to launch a massive counterattack that pushed the Axis forces back, up to 300 kilometres in some places. For now, the Soviet Union had survived. However, the Soviet Union was to experience another three and a half years of bloody conflict which would lead to the deaths of over 20 million Soviet people. Nine out of every ten German soldiers killed in the Second World War would be killed on the Eastern Front fighting the Soviet Union.



SOURCE 7.10 German forces invading Poland in September 1939. Hitler's prime motivation in signing the non-aggression pact was to facilitate the rapid defeat of Poland.

Axis

The alliance of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan and their other allies



Alamy/INTERFOTO

SOURCE 7.11 Captured Soviet soldiers on the Eastern Front, 1941



Alamy/INTERFOTO

SOURCE 7.12 German troops move into the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa, 1941

During the catastrophic war years, ideology virtually disappeared from Soviet rhetoric. The Soviet people were laying their lives down for ‘mother Russia’. Soviet propaganda extolled the virtues of Russian nationalism, former Russian heroes were celebrated and even the Orthodox Church was free to function. Having God on one’s side took precedence over world revolution.

Soviet foreign policy in the Far East

Threats from the west were not Stalin’s only concern in the 1930s; there was also the potential of conflict with Japan in the east. Japan had humiliated Russia in the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War.

Japanese troops had intervened against the Bolsheviks during the civil war and remained on Soviet territory as late as 1922. In 1931 Japan attacked Manchuria, nominally under Chinese control, and in the years that followed, violated Soviet rights on the Chinese Eastern Railway. The Soviet Union was in no position to act against Japan in Manchuria and even offered Japan a non-aggression pact which the Japanese refused on the grounds that it still had unresolved issues with the Soviets.

Far East policy became complicated for the Soviet Union:

- The USSR sought to restrain Japan and wanted to prevent a possible Sino-Japanese agreement. To this end it reopened relations with the National Chinese GMD (Guomindang) government of Jiang Jieshi.
- At the same time it was supporting the CCP based in the Chinese province of Kiangsi.
- Japan was showing interest in northern China; it had attacked Shanghai in 1933. However, Jiang preferred to put his efforts against the Chinese communists rather than the Japanese and in 1934 launched a major attack on the CCP in Kiangsi. This led the Chinese Communist leader, Mao Zedong, to lead his forces west to the remote province of Yanan.
- The Soviet Union tried to appease Japan by selling it its interests in the Chinese Eastern Railway while at the same time trying to encourage a joint GMD-CCP front against the Japanese.

Open conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan

In 1936 Japan moved troops into Mongolia. The Soviet Union concluded a mutual assistance treaty with Outer Mongolia and soon small-scale skirmishes between Japanese and Soviet troops occurred. In November 1936 Japan and Nazi Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact and the possibility of an anti-Soviet alliance of Germany and Japan was raised. In July 1937 Japan invaded China. The Soviet Union responded by signing a Treaty of Friendship with the GMD and put pressure on the CCP to work with the GMD against Japan.



Getty Images/The Asahi Shimbun

SOURCE 7.13 Like the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of April 1941 was an example of pragmatism over ideology in Soviet foreign policy. The pact secured each powers' non-aggression.

By 1938 there was full-scale conflict between Japan and the Soviet Union. In July 1938 Japan attempted an invasion of the Soviet Union but was defeated at the Battle of Lake Khasan. In 1939 Japan was again defeated by joint Soviet-Mongolian forces at Khalkin Gol. The Soviet–Japanese conflict had led to thousands of casualties on each side. However, its final outcome was inconclusive and in April 1941, Japan and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. Japan by this time had decided to turn its attention southwards, a decision which would result in the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s faced major challenges. These included how to deal with the clear menace emanating out of Germany, the weakness of collective security, the impact of internal developments such as the purges and the threat of Japan in the east. The switch from Litvinov to Molotov as foreign minister would eventually see the abandonment of collective security in favour of a rapprochement with Germany. Kocho-Williams comments:

“... It is therefore difficult to account for Soviet foreign policy in particularly simple terms, as it lacked consistency of approach, even if there was a single goal – the security of the Soviet Union in the coming war ...”

A Kocho-Williams, Russia's International Relations in the Twentieth Century, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, p. 70

TABLE 7.2 Major developments in Soviet foreign policy, 1932–41

DATE	ACTION	SIGNIFICANCE
1932	Non-aggression pacts were signed with Poland, Finland and Estonia. A Friendship Treaty was signed with Italy.	Stalin was indicating he had no aggressive intentions towards his neighbours.
1933	Diplomatic relations were established with the United States of America.	The US was the last major Western power to recognise the Soviet Union. Distrust still existed between the two but economic ties had grown and they shared a concern about Japanese intentions in the Far East.
1934	The Soviet Union joined the League of Nations.	Stalin was making clear his desire to be part of the League's collective security machinery.
May 1935	The Soviet Union signed a Mutual Assistance Treaty with France. Czechoslovakia joined the Franco-Soviet arrangement.	The diplomatic make-up of Europe from before the First World War seemed to be re-emerging.
July 1935	The 7th Comintern Congress announced that communists were to cooperate with all anti-fascist groups in Popular Front governments. One such government was formed in France in 1936.	Traditional Russian foreign policy had won out against revolutionary policy. It was the security of Russia that now mattered, not the spread of socialism.
1936	Spanish Civil War	Stalin sent 'volunteers', arms and money to help the anti-fascist Republican forces.
1936–38	The fascist powers made several significant gains. Hitler marched into the Rhineland (1936), annexed Austria (1938) and was given the Czech Sudetenland region at the Munich Conference by Britain and France. Mussolini had been allowed to invade and take over Abyssinia (1935). Britain and France pursued non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War.	To Stalin, Britain and France's appeasement of Hitler seemed to be a policy of pushing Germany eastwards to confront the Soviet Union. The failure of collective security also made Stalin feel very nervous about his country's security.

DATE	ACTION	SIGNIFICANCE
1939	In March, Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. Britain gave Poland a guarantee to defend it if it was attacked by Germany. Throughout the year, Stalin sought to establish defence links with the West to no avail. Therefore, the non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany was signed.	Britain's reluctance to enter firm arrangements with the Soviet Union convinced Stalin that the West was still bent on pushing the Nazis to confront the communists. Stalin responded to the West's reluctance by entering into a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany to reduce the likelihood of conflict with Germany in the short term.
1932–41	The Soviet Union established links with the Nationalist regime in China. Following Japan's attack on China in 1937, Soviet advisors were sent to help the Nationalist Chinese forces that were now fighting alongside Chinese communist forces. Soviet–Japanese clashes along their common border between 1937 and 1939 resulted in major Japanese setbacks. As a result, Japanese expansion was now directed southwards. The Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact was signed in April 1941.	Stalin was willing to help the Chinese Nationalists even though they had massacred Chinese communists in 1927. Russian security again prevailed over international communism. The Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact ended clashes with Japan.



Chronology



Personality and role

- 1 Why did the Soviet Union become involved in Spain? Why did the Spanish Civil War present difficulties for Stalin?
- 2 The Western powers viewed the Nazi–Soviet Pact as an act of treachery on the part of Stalin. Why do you think they viewed it in this way? To what extent do you agree with their assessment of the agreement?
- 3 Why was the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact of April 1941 of such importance?

Conclusion

Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1941 was not always consistent or predictable, the result of its ambiguous nature, simultaneously seeking the overthrow of neighbouring capitalist governments while at the same time needing to work with them. Early on, the prime goal of foreign policy was simply survival. Once victory had been achieved in the civil war and it was clear that world revolution was not about to happen, Soviet foreign policy during the 1920s was directed to establishing normal state-to-state relations, as internal economic development became the prime goal. During the 1930s, the prime concern of Soviet foreign policy was national security. Facing the real possibility of a future threat from Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union sought to work with Western nations in the exercise of collective security. Distrust and suspicion on the part of the West prevented any firm links being established between the West and the Soviet Union. Faced with the failure of collective security, the Soviet Union decided to reach an accommodation with Germany which resulted in the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 1939. This would be the basis of Nazi–Soviet relations until Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Soviets also faced a threat from the east in the form of Japan. Japanese ambitions were at first settled on the resource-rich areas of Siberia. There were major clashes between the two nations in 1938. However, as Japanese attention turned southwards, a non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Japan was signed in April 1941.

Chapter summary

- Soviet foreign policy had veered from trying to promote revolution in capitalist countries to establishing normal state-to-state relations. However, in the face of the Nazi threat in the 1930s, Stalin tried hard to create a common anti-fascist front with the Western nations.
- Between 1917 and 1921 the Soviet aim was regime survival. An exit from the First World War was achieved when peace was established with Germany at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918.
- During the civil war Western nations intervened to assist the anti-Bolshevik White forces but the intervention proved ineffectual.
- In 1920–21 the Soviet Union fought a brief war with Poland which resulted in the Treaty of Riga in March 1921.
- A trade agreement was signed with Britain in 1921 and diplomatic relations achieved in 1924, though Anglo-Russian relations would be turbulent during the 1920s.
- The Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany in 1922 and a series of other agreements followed between the two states during the decade.
- During the 1930s the Soviet Union's foreign policy was dominated by its fear of a possible future German invasion. Thus, it pursued collective security, joining the League of Nations in 1934 and signing agreements with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935.
- In 1936 the Soviets supported the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War.
- The failure of collective security and the failure of Britain and France to stand up to Nazi expansion led the Soviets to consider reaching an accommodation with Germany.
- The West's unwillingness to work with the Soviet Union led Stalin to take the opportunistic step of signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler in August 1939.
- For almost two years the Soviet Union was able to avoid involvement in the European war, and during this time it took possession of the Baltic States, Eastern Poland and Bessarabia.
- In June 1941 Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa. The Red Army experienced defeat after defeat and the collapse of the Soviet Union seemed a real possibility.
- Strategic errors on Hitler's part, the onset of winter, the transfer of troops from Siberia to the West and Zhukov's organisational skill combined to prevent the Germans from capturing Moscow. Three-and-a-half years of bloody war were to follow before the Soviet Union finally achieved victory in May 1945.
- The Soviet Union was also concerned about Japanese ambitions in the Far East. Major clashes between the two countries occurred in 1938 and 1939. In April 1941 Japan and the Soviet Union signed a Non-Aggression Pact as Japan's ambitions turned southward.

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CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920S

- 1 What was the function of the Comintern?
- 2 Why was Lenin so insistent on signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?
- 3 Why did the Allied powers intervene in the Russian Civil War during 1918–19?
- 4 Explain the ambiguity of Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s.
- 5 What was the Zinoviev Letter? How did it affect Anglo–Soviet relations?
- 6 Why were both Germany and the Soviet Union happy with the Treaty of Rapallo?

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1930S

- 7 What was collective security?
- 8 Why did the Soviet Union pursue collective security so keenly in the 1930s?
- 9 How did Soviet foreign policy change from the mid-1930s? How do you account for this change?
- 10 Imagine you are a leading member of the Soviet government. From your perspective, explain the motives of the Western powers in their dealings with Hitler.

THE NAZI–SOVIET PACT

- 11 You are an official of the British government in August 1939. Explain your reaction to the news of the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact.
- 12 Hitler and Stalin did not trust each other. Why did they agree to sign the non-aggression pact?
- 13 What was the key significance of the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact?
- 14 What strategic gains did Stalin make from the Secret Protocols of the Pact?

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FAR EAST

- 15 Why was the Soviet Union so concerned about Japan in the 1930s?
- 16 Describe the Soviet Union’s dealings with China.
- 17 What occurred between Japan and the Soviet Union in 1938? What was the result?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 18 Who were David Kandalaki and Max Schacht?
- 19 What discussions did they have between 1935 and 1937?
- 20 Why did these talks not lead to a definite Nazi–Soviet agreement?
- 21 What did they suggest about the potential for Nazi–Soviet cooperation?

EXTENDED RESPONSE QUESTIONS

- 22 To what extent was Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1941 driven by ideology?
- 23 How do you account for the change in Soviet foreign policy during the 1930s?

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