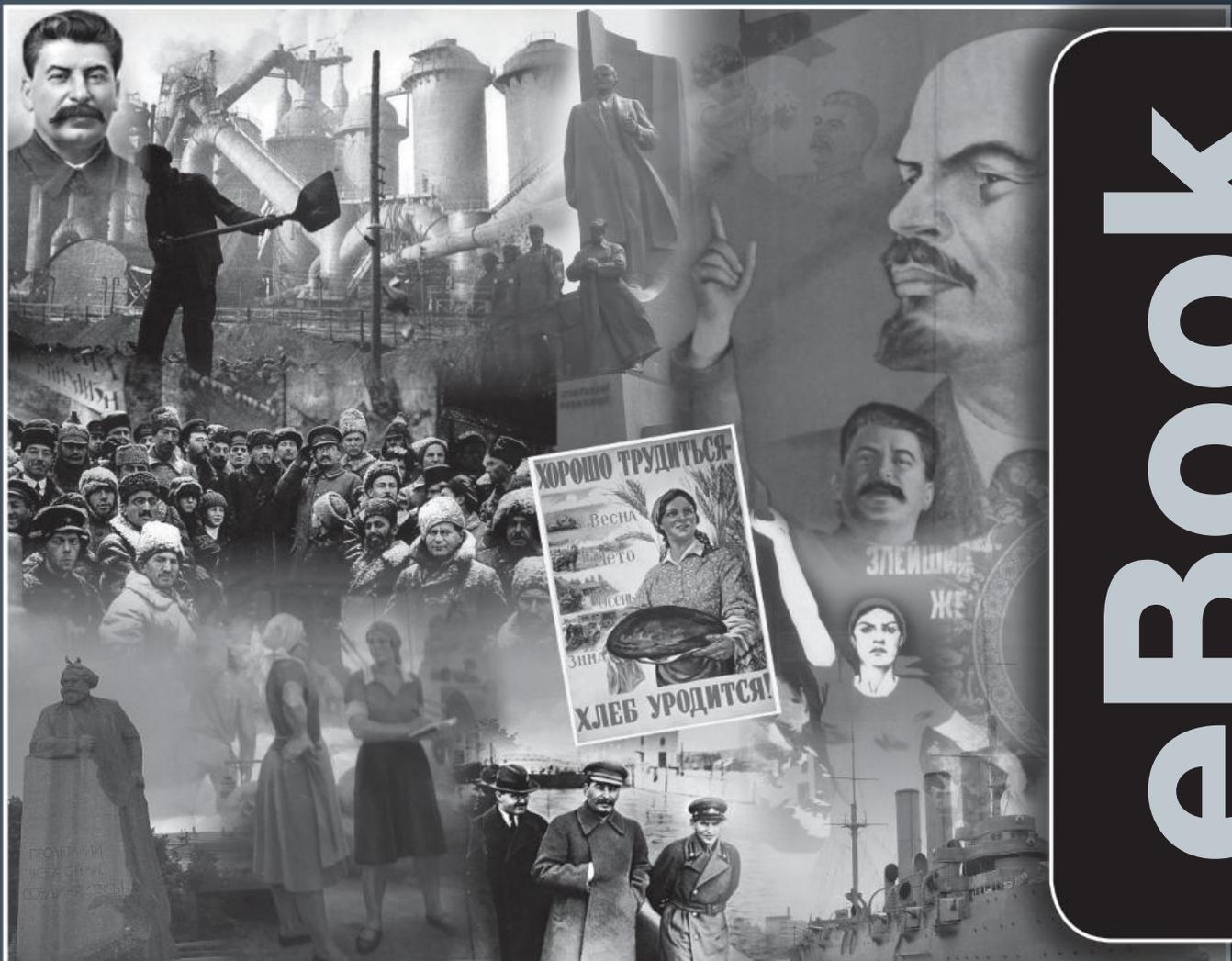


# RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

## 1917-1941

by Ken Webb

Here it is: the factual detail, the historiography, revision exercises and advice on how to write responses on Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941.



*"Everything you wanted to know about Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-41, but were afraid to ask."*

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by Ken Webb M.A. (Oxon), C.Ed

*“Everything you wanted to know about Russia and the  
Soviet Union 1917-41, but were afraid to ask.”*

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1st Edition

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## About the author

Ken Webb was educated in the United Kingdom and graduated from the University of Oxford. He taught in several state schools before moving to Pymble Ladies' College where he taught Modern, Ancient and Extension History. In March 2008, he moved to Ravenswood School for Girls where also taught the International Baccalaureate course in History. He is a member of the Independent Schools Examination Committee for Modern History. He frequently lectures and runs workshops for Year 12 and teacher groups in Sydney and Regional NSW. In addition to his own work, Ken Webb has contributed to colleagues' work, and to newspapers and periodicals. He has also been a consultant for various history video documentaries. In 2012, Ken Webb was a NSW winner of the "National Excellence in Teaching" award.

Over the years, Ken Webb has written a wide range of study guides and textbooks including *World War I: From Sarajevo to Versailles* (Nelson Cengage), *Discovering Australian History* (Cambridge University Press), *Extension History: The Historians* (HTA of NSW), *Power and Authority in the Modern World* (Nelson Cengage), *Excel School Certificate Australian History* (Pascal Press) and *International Relations Between the Wars* (McGraw-Hill)

"**Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941**" is one of fourteen titles in the "Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask" series *written specifically* for the new NSW Modern and Ancient History syllabuses commencing 2018-19. Other titles in this series include:

- |  |  |
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## Foreword

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This book has been written with the HSC specifically in mind: <sup>1</sup>

- it strictly follows the format of the Modern History syllabus;
- its content has been designed with the type of questions in mind which might be asked in the HSC;
- the advice given for responding to questions on “Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941” is the result of years of teaching and studying this period and marking the HSC.

This book endeavours to provide the following:

- detailed historical information about the key elements of Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941;
- frequent reference to historiographical information which can be used to reinforce the arguments presented by students in their HSC responses;
- frequent revision exercises to help students come to terms with the factual detail;
- specific advice on writing responses to HSC style questions.

It is hoped that this book will provide students with:

- solid historical information, but not too much that students will drown in an excess of the written word as can happen with some works;
- enough historiographical information to supplement student arguments – how many students have the time to go off and read Robert Service, Isaac Deutscher, Oleg Khlevniuk and Sheila Fitzpatrick etc for themselves? (Indeed, how much time do teachers have to do this?)
- a chance to frequently consolidate information;
- some of the techniques required for writing effective essays.

### Russian dating:

Before 1918, Russia operated under the Julian calendar which placed it thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in most of Western Europe. On 24th January 1918, the Bolshevik government decreed that Wednesday 31st January would be followed by Thursday 14th February, thus bringing it in line with Western Europe. For the purpose of this book, the Julian system will be referred to up to January 1918. After that the Gregorian system of dating will be used.

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<sup>1</sup> This book has been written for the **new** NSW syllabus in Modern History commencing in 2018 (Year 11) and Year 12 (2019).

# Chapter One

## An overview of Bolshevik ideology

---

### An idealistic introduction

Lenin and the Bolshevik Party wanted more than to just seize power, though this of course was of prime concern. Lenin and his colleagues had a vision of a future communist society in which people would be equal, in which there was no poverty, in which goods would be produced by machines rather than by manual labour, and where there would no repression, largely because there would be no state. Instead, there would merely be people managing day to day business that kept society functioning.

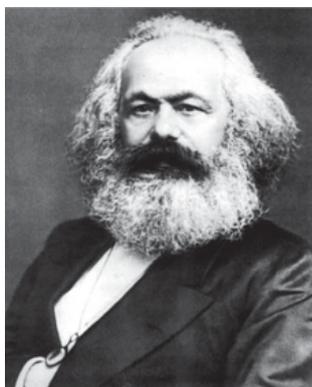
The kind of idealistic society that Lenin and people like him ultimately had in mind can be summed up in Karl Marx's statement:

*"...From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."* <sup>1</sup>

As a communist society would be capable of producing an abundance of goods, people would only take that which they needed, while at the same time contribute to society to the best of their ability, whether that be in a physical or other way. (It might be argued that the idealism envisioned by communists differs little from the actions of the early Christians in the Bible. This might be the basis of an interesting class debate). <sup>2</sup>

### The ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels:

The origins of the thinking of Lenin and the Bolsheviks are found in the works of the 19th century writers and thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.



- Karl Marx was born into a Christianised German-Jewish family in Trier in 1818.
- Following involvement in revolutionary activity in 1848, Marx and his family fled to London.
- He was the London correspondent for a New York paper for some years, but spent most of his time researching and writing in the confines of the British Museum.
- Volume 1 of *Das Kapital* was published in 1867.
- Karl Marx died in 1883.

---

<sup>1</sup> Marx, K, Critique of the Gotha Program, 1875

<sup>2</sup> See Acts the Apostles, Chapter 2, verses 44-45, and Chapter 4, verses 34-35.



- Friedrich Engels was born in Germany in 1820, the son of a textile manufacturer.
- By the 1840s, he was running his father's textile business in Manchester where he became deeply involved in the problems of England's new working class.
- He became a close friend of Karl Marx and assisted him both financially and in the literary field.
- He outlived Marx; he died in 1895. It was Engels who completed Marx's *Das Kapital*.

Marx and Engels worked together closely but the first great communist work, "The Communist Manifesto", which appeared in 1848, was solely Marx's work, though he generously named Engels as co-author. It was at the very end of the Manifesto that the great clarion call to all oppressed peoples around the world was first heard:

*"...Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians (working class) have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!"*<sup>3</sup>

Karl Marx presented the development of history in a scientific manner, something which appealed to the logical mind of a man like Lenin. Marx argued that human society was gradually moving towards the perfect state of communism through a series of stages. Each stage was reached by means of a violent clash between competing groups within society. Marx summed up his theory at the beginning of "The Communist Manifesto":

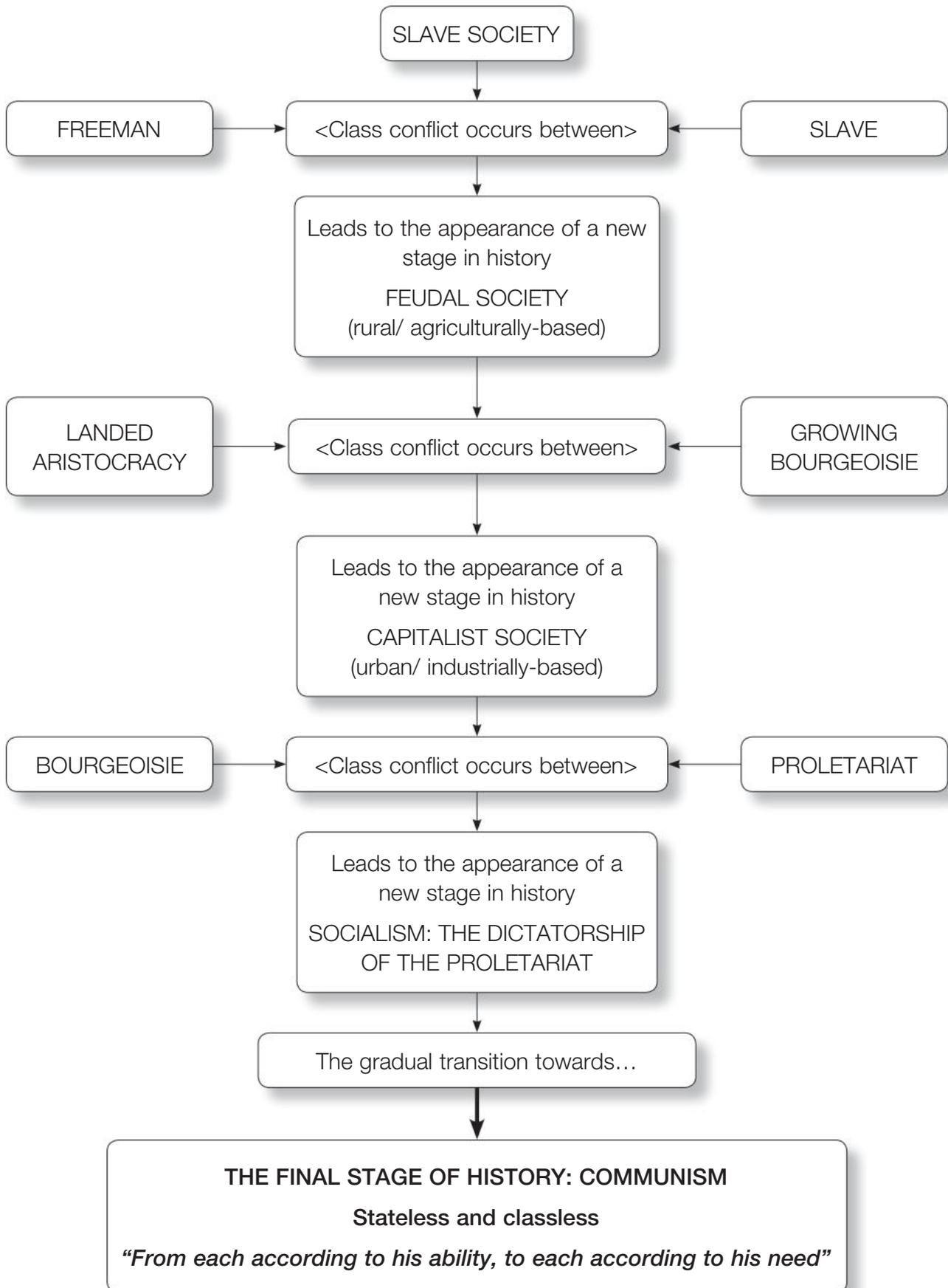
*"...The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes."*<sup>4</sup>

In essence, what Marx argued is that at each stage of society there will be conflict between an "oppressor class" and an "oppressed class". Another way of describing this is a conflict between "the haves in a society" and "the have-nots". Marx argued that the "oppressed" grow to resent the power and wealth of their "oppressors"; they develop a consciousness of this inequality and eventually rise up against their oppressors. The outcome of this conflict would be the creation of a new stage of society. However, this new society would produce a new conflict and the process would be repeated. Eventually the "dictatorship of the proletariat" stage (socialism) would be reached where workers controlled the state and counter-revolutionaries would be dealt with and non-socialist attitudes rooted out. Society would then gradually move towards the ideal of communism.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, K, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967 edition, pp 120-1

<sup>4</sup> Marx, p 79

Figure 1.1 Summary of Marx's view of class struggle <sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Webb, K, Extension History: the historians, HTA of NSW, 2006, p 71

To Marxists, the development of history as described above is both scientific and inevitable. This makes Marxist thinkers “determinists”, ie the course of history is determined by overriding forces. For Marx the key overriding force at play in history is that of economics. It is economic development which drives history. Marx was willing to concede that individuals could play a role in history but at best all they are able to do is to have an impact on the course of events. They are not able to alter the general pattern of history.

### Exercise 1.1

Using the terms in the box below, complete the following passage.

Marx believed that history was the story of \_\_\_\_\_ and that conflict between \_\_\_\_\_ was inevitable. Following this conflict, a new stage of history would be reached. In feudal society, he saw conflict as occurring between \_\_\_\_\_ and a growing \_\_\_\_\_. This would result in the creation of \_\_\_\_\_ society. There would then be conflict between the bourgeoisie and the \_\_\_\_\_. This conflict would lead to socialism and \_\_\_\_\_. Gradually all classes would \_\_\_\_\_ and there would be no need for a \_\_\_\_\_. Marx was a \_\_\_\_\_ who argued that though \_\_\_\_\_ could play a role in history, the general pattern of events was the result of mainly \_\_\_\_\_ factors.

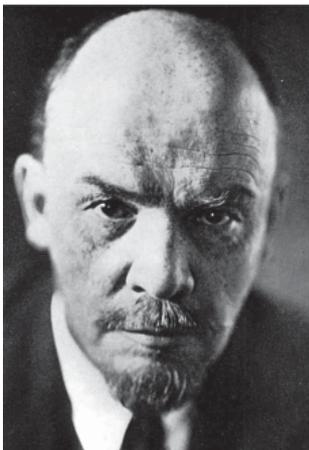
|                                     |             |                |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| THE LANDED ARISTOCRACY              | ECONOMIC    | CLASS STRUGGLE |
| BOURGEOISIE                         | PROLETARIAT | CLASSES        |
| DETERMINIST                         | STATE       | INDIVIDUALS    |
| DISAPPEAR                           | CAPITALIST  |                |
| THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT |             |                |

## Lenin, Marxism and the creation of the Bolshevik Party

For Lenin and other Russian Marxists, Marxist theory threw up some major problems:

1. Though Marx believed he had explained the development of history, he had not been able to explain the process. How were movements from one stage of history to another and on to classless communism to occur?
2. What was an economically and socially backward country like Russia supposed to do? After all, for socialism to be reached, the capitalist stage has to be achieved first. In a strictly Marxist sense, Russia's revolutionaries should be trying to push Russia towards capitalism, so that at some time in the future, it can then be overthrown in a revolution.
3. Where did this leave Russia's Marxists? Were they to dedicate their lives to achieving a goal which in their hearts they detested – capitalism - and which, had they been born in an economically advanced western country, they would be trying to destroy?

Lenin's major contribution to Marxist ideology was to provide solutions to these problems. (see below).



- Lenin was born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov in 1870 in Simbirsk (900 kms east of Moscow).
- His father was an inspector of schools while his mother was the daughter of a doctor and a landowner. His was a comfortable background and the family might be described today as “upwardly mobile”.
- However, Lenin's elder brother, Alexander, was involved in revolutionary activity. In 1887 he was hanged for attempting to assassinate the tsar.
- Though a gifted student, Lenin's entry into university was delayed because of his brother's activities. He eventually gained entry to Kazan University where he studied law. He was expelled due to involvement in a student revolt but was eventually allowed to sit his exams.
- For a brief time in the early 1890s, he practised as a lawyer.

## Lenin and the Bolshevik Party

- In 1893, Lenin moved to St Petersburg. By now he had been strongly drawn to the scientific ideas of Marxism and became involved in various Marxist discussion groups.<sup>6</sup>
- It was at this time that he met his future wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. In 1895, Lenin became involved in a major anti-government strike movement. Following his arrest and trial, he spent the next four years in prison and then Siberian exile. In Siberia he married Krupskaya.

<sup>6</sup> Bolshevik ideology, its roots in Marxism and Lenin's development of Marxist theory will be dealt with below.

- In 1900, Lenin and Krupskaya moved to London. He set up a newspaper called *Iskra* (the Spark) to promote the ideas of the (Marxist) Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.
- Between 1900 and 1917, Lenin spent only a few months inside Russia. During these years, he developed his ideas on Marxist theory which were to have such a profound effect on Russia (see below).

The key moment for the Social Democratic Party came at the party's Second Congress in 1903. **The party split** into two separate factions that were to become known as the **Bolsheviks** and the **Mensheviks**.

Lenin led the **Bolshevik** faction. He argued:

- The party should comprise a small number of dedicated, highly disciplined revolutionaries.
- The party should be centralised and hierarchical.
- The party's purpose was to educate the working class about socialist ideals and then lead it towards revolution.

The leading figure of the **Menshevik** faction was Martov. He and others argued:

- The party should be broad based and take in a wide membership.
- The party should have a democratic structure and allow party members to argue against the ideas of the leadership.
- It also sought to improve the conditions of the working class in the period before a revolution.
- The Mensheviks were actually "more Marxist" than the Bolsheviks, arguing that it would take a long time for the Russian working class to grow, and for it to develop a revolutionary consciousness.

In 1905, revolution broke out in Russia. Lenin returned in October but tsarist forces were soon in control; Lenin was forced to flee. He spent the next twelve years in useless exile. Bolshevik numbers declined, the party was infiltrated by the tsarist secret police (the *okhrana*), there were petty internal squabbles. Lenin wrote articles that few seemed to read.<sup>7</sup> However, he believed that the outbreak of war in 1914 offered an opportunity for the revolution. Once the early patriotic fervour had subsided, Lenin believed that Russia's armies could become fertile ground for Bolshevik propaganda. He strongly opposed those who believed the workers should take up arms against German workers. Instead he believed they should take up arms against Russian officers and capitalists.

---

<sup>7</sup> The 1970 movie *Nicholas and Alexandra* provides a Hollywood view of the collapse of the tsarist regime. It includes several scenes of Lenin's time in exile and back in Russia in 1917 which succinctly illustrate the fortunes of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin is played effectively by the actor Michael Bryant.

Lenin's critics who attacked the non-democratic nature of the eventual Bolshevik regime have suggested that he was never a sincere Marxist but merely used Marxism as a cover for his greed for power. The fact that Lenin modified Marxist principles might be a further reason to suggest that this was so. However, consider the following view:

*"...we must not underestimate the influence of Marx's ideas on Lenin... he firmly believed in Marx, and above all in the most fundamental of the Marxist principles that if a workers' movement is not revolutionary, it is nothing."*<sup>8</sup>

However, it is one thing to believe in Marxism; it is quite another to put it into practice and as was mentioned earlier,

- Marx gave no instructions on how this was to be done.
- It was Lenin's key contribution that he was to provide some practicality to the theory.
  - From Marxism came what can loosely be termed **Marxism-Leninism**.

Lenin was an inveterate writer. He was constantly putting his thinking into pamphlets, newspaper articles and books. It is beyond the scope of this book (or the need of HSC students) to delve into the detail of each of his works. Thus, what follows is a summary of some of the key works of Lenin and how these affected the main features of Communist (Bolshevik) ideology at the time of the revolution.

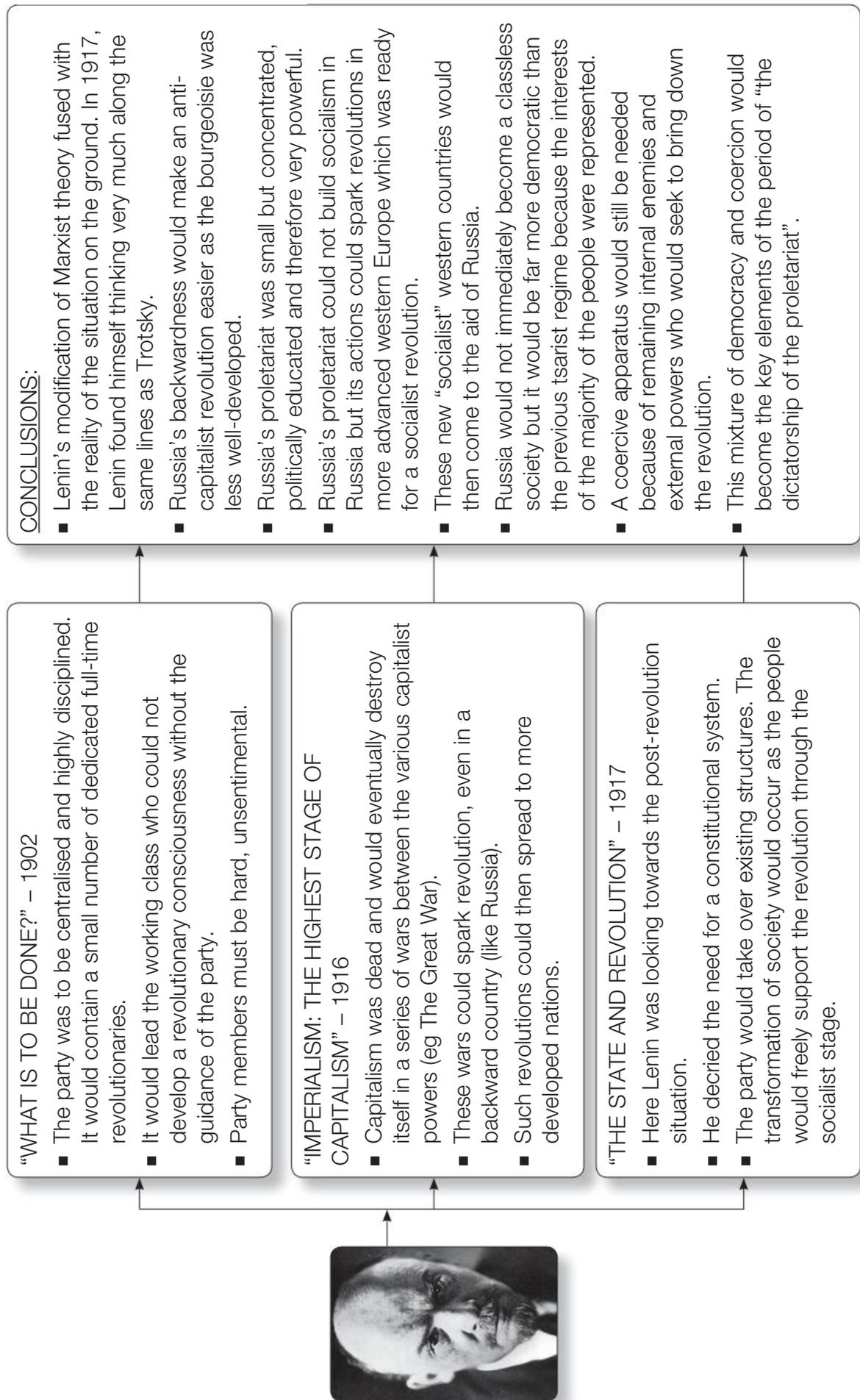
*The main works that will be considered are:*

- *What Is To Be Done?* (1902)
- *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)
- *The State and Revolution* (1917)

---

<sup>8</sup> Carew Hunt, R N, *The Theory and Practice of Communism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963 ed, p 171

Figure 1.2 The development of Lenin's thinking: a summary



**Exercise 1.2**

Correctly match each of the terms listed in the box on the right, with the description provided on the right.

|    |   |  |                                 |
|----|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 1  | The middle class in capitalist society  |  | DAS KAPITAL                     |
| 2  | Lenin's work where he argues for a small conspiratorial party                   |  | DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT |
| 3  | The process which explained the development of history                          |  | STATE AND REVOLUTION            |
| 4  | Period of transition on the way to classless communism                          |  | PROLETARIAT                     |
| 5  | The working class in a capitalist society                                       |  | WHAT IS TO BE DONE?             |
| 6  | Marx's multi-volume work which explained his theories                           |  | THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO         |
| 7  | Marx's intellectual partner who completed his work after the former's death     |  | FRIEDRICH ENGELS                |
| 8  | Lenin's revolutionary partner who thinking coincided with his in 1917           |  | LEON TROTSKY                    |
| 9  | Marx's brief groundbreaking treatise of 1848                                    |  | BOURGEOISIE                     |
| 10 | Here Lenin outlined his ideas for the state's organization after the revolution |  | THE CLASS STRUGGLE              |

## What do the historians have to say about the Main features of Communist (Bolshevik) ideology at the time of the revolution?

### 1. David Christian: *Power and Privilege*

Christian explains the situation facing Russia in 1917 and shows how the Provisional Government had failed to provide an effective solution to the problems facing the country. This reflected its impractical attempt to try to gain the support of all sections of the population. Christian then suggests that in 1917 Russia faced two key political alternatives: a right-wing solution, probably in the form of a military dictatorship, and Lenin's left-wing alternative. On his return to Russia, Lenin outlined his strategy in The April Theses. He had modified Marxist ideas to fit the situation facing Russia. Lenin's thinking meant that:

*"...rather than supporting bourgeois governments, proletarian parties should try to overthrow them... Above all, it meant that they should take seriously the task of organizing an anti-capitalist revolution, rather than postponing it to an indefinite future."*<sup>9</sup>

### 2. Lenin's April Theses, 1917<sup>10</sup>



*There must be no parliamentary republic... but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom. It isn't our immediate task to 'introduce Socialism', but only to bring social production and distribution of products under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.*

### 3. Elyse Topalian: *V I Lenin*

Topalian argues Lenin realized that the idea of mass revolt in Russia was not developing in the way that Marx had suggested. It was this which prompted him to produce "What is to be done?" in 1902. The title was borrowed from the 1860s novel of Chernyshevsky which Lenin's executed brother, Alexander, had given Lenin to read. Lenin added a subtitle: "The Burning Questions of our Movement." Lenin argued against the Marxist line that the workers would rise up spontaneously and instead that their beliefs would have to be moulded. Calling "What is to be done?" one of the "most important works of the twentieth century", Topalian says of Lenin's work:

*"...It was a purely practical approach. It was his style to deal only in immediate practical issues. Lenin left only one issue rather vague – how to govern in the aftermath of the revolution when the time came."*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Christian, D, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1986, p 146

<sup>10</sup> Lenin's Selected Works, vol 2, part 1, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1952, pp13-7

<sup>11</sup> Topalian, E, *V I Lenin*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1983, p 55

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# Chapter Two

## The October Coup 1917

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Had Lenin died in his Swiss exile during World War I, he would have been remembered as nothing more than an interesting footnote in history. Instead, he looms as one of the giants of Modern History. Lenin's leadership of the Bolshevik Party, his unquestioned authority, his development of Marxist theory, his ruthlessness and his decisive actions from 1917, not only brought socialism to Russia but changed the course of world history.

### From war to the revolutions of 1917

On 1 August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. Despite the problems that Russia had experienced in the previous decade which preceded the outbreak of World War I<sup>1</sup>, the nation responded to the outbreak of war with a wave of genuine patriotic fervour. From aristocrat to lowly peasant, the call to fight for mother Russia, church and tsar was heeded. Vast Russian forces were mobilised to take on the Germany army.

However, the only thing that the Russian army had going for it was numbers. Russia's army was poorly led, poorly trained and enormously under-supplied. Russia was in effect an 18th century nation attempting to fight a 20th century war. Against the superbly organised and trained German army, which had Europe's leading economy behind it supplying every modern weapon of war a general could desire, the forces of Tsar Nicholas II had little chance. Within weeks Russia suffered two massive defeats at the Battles of Tannenberg and Massurian Lakes. By late 1916, Russia was on the verge of collapse:

By late 1916/ early 1917, Russia was beset with war-weariness, disillusionment, an ever-widening strike movement, mass desertions and army mutinies.

### The February Revolution: 1917

The revolution of February 1917 was not carefully planned by conspiratorial revolutionaries. It was in fact a spontaneous act of public will. The regime of Nicholas II was not overthrown; it collapsed. In his book, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia*<sup>2</sup>, Richard Charques describes the revolution of March 1917 as follows:

*"...(the revolution was accomplished) without leadership and almost without conscious aim... the Russian Revolution... sprang not so much from the will of the people as from the mere decomposition and collapse of the tsar's government."*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1905, Russia had been humiliated by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War and the country was torn apart by revolution. In the years before the outbreak of war, Russia was suffering peasant revolts and a growing strike movement. In 1912, 200 strikers were massacred by government troops on the Lena goldfields. Russia was arguably on the brink of revolution in mid-1914.

<sup>2</sup> Charques, R, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia*, OUP, Oxford, 1958

<sup>3</sup> Charques, p 241

Charques emphasises the leaderless and formless nature of the events that occurred in March 1917:

*“...Driven by elemental passion... the mass moved of itself... This was mass revolution, elemental and unorganised, it is true, but revolution none the less.”*<sup>4</sup>

However, historian Richard Pipes<sup>5</sup> takes issue this view. He argues that the abdication of the tsar came not from the actions of peasants and workers but as a result of the actions of generals and politicians who wanted to prosecute the war more effectively.

The key events of February 1917 were as follows:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Thursday<br>23 February | This is International Women’s Day. There are mass demonstrations on the streets of Petrograd (Russia’s capital, formerly St Petersburg) against the fuel and food shortages.  |
| Friday<br>24 February   | The strike movement spreads across the city with hundreds of thousands of workers taking part. At this stage, the tsar’s forces still have control of the city.   |
| Saturday<br>25 February | Demonstrations increase in size. When huge crowds meet at the Nicholas Station, tsarist troops fire into the crowd. At this stage the tsar still retains the loyalty of his troops.   |
| Sunday<br>26 February   | As the unrest increases, the cabinet asks the tsar to form a new government from the Duma (parliament). Nicholas refuses. For the first time, some groups of soldiers refuse to fire on the crowd. The Volinskii regiment mutinies. |
| Monday<br>27 February   | By the end of the day, the government has lost control of Petrograd. Soldiers and city police are going over to the side of the demonstrators.  |
| Tuesday<br>28 February  | The Duma prepares to form a government to take power from the tsar. A Soviet of Workers and Soldiers is also formed.  |
| Wednesday<br>1 March    | The tsar is unable to reach Petrograd. All troops in the capital are now giving their support to either the Duma or the Soviet. A new Soviet is formed in Moscow.   |
| Thursday<br>2 March     | Faced with the collapse of all military support, Tsar Nicholas II abdicates, not only for himself but also his son. It is the end of the 300 year Romanov dynasty. From the Duma comes a new Provisional Government.                |

<sup>4</sup> Charques, pp 237-238

<sup>5</sup> Pipes, R, Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, Arnold and Knopf, New York, 1994

## Exercise 2.1

Indicate in the box on the right whether each of these statements is true or false.

|    |  |                             |
|----|--|-----------------------------|
| 1  | Russia was facing serious internal problems on the eve of World War I      | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 2  | The Russian people were reluctant to go and fight for the tsar in 1914     | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 3  | The Russian army performed well in battle against its German enemy         | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 4  | The February Revolution of 1917 was a carefully planned event              | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 5  | Lenin and the Bolsheviks had little to do with the events of February 1917 | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 6  | Lenin spent very little time in Russia between 1900 and 1917               | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 7  | Lenin promoted the idea of a widely-based party membership                 | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 8  | Lenin believed in an authoritarian and highly centralised party structure  | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 9  | Lenin seemed to enjoy his time in exile from Russia                        | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 10 | Lenin was excited by the prospect of war in 1914                           | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |

## Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in 1917

The major difference between the February and October Revolutions is that February was “leaderless and spontaneous” (according to Charques), while **October was a “carefully planned coup d’ état”**. In his later works on the events of 1917, the leading Bolshevik activist and writer, Leon Trotsky, would try to argue that the Bolshevik Party played a major role in the events of February. This was of course simply propaganda. In fact, the leading members of the party were not even in Petrograd when the revolution occurred:

- Lenin was in Switzerland
- Trotsky (who formerly joined the party later in 1917) was in New York
- Stalin and other leading figures were in exile in Siberia.

In fact, in early 1917, the Bolshevik Party was very much a minor feature of Russian political life. However, soon after Lenin’s return to Russia, the Bolshevik Party became a key player, and ultimately victor in the political battles of 1917.

**Figure 2.1 Russia in 1917: From March to the eve of the “October coup”**

The abdication of the tsar on 2 March left a political vacuum which was filled by two bodies: the Provisional Government and the Soviet. The PG was formed out of the Duma. The Soviet was a Workers and Soldiers Council. These two bodies co-exist uneasily.

The Soviet's first decision was Order Number One which placed Russia's armed forces under its control. The PG was first led by Prince Lvov. Its major error from the start was its decision to continue the war against Germany.

Lenin had been in Switzerland when the revolution broke out. The German government allowed him to travel in a sealed train to Russia. Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd in early April. He called for opposition to the PG, “all power to the Soviets” and an immediate end to the war with Germany.

All across Russia, peasants were seizing land and attacking landowners. The PG was powerless to prevent these events. As news of land seizures spread, desertion from the army greatly increased.

By July Alexander Kerensky had become leader of the PG; he was also a member of the Soviet. Kerensky was genuinely popular and a popular choice for prime minister. However, his major flaw was to continue the war with Germany.

July was a disaster for Kerensky. A key offensive against Germany was a major disaster. The sailors of the Kronstadt base revolted and there was an attempt to overthrow the PG. This was blamed on the Bolsheviks though Lenin disowned the attempt. Lenin was forced to flee to Finland while leading Bolsheviks were arrested.

Kerensky appointed General Kornilov as Commander in Chief. Kornilov saw himself as Russia's saviour and led a coup against the PG. His attempt failed when soldiers, sailors and workers mobilised to defend Petrograd. Much of the defence was organised by the Bolsheviks and their Red Guard Militias.

Riding a wave of popularity, the Bolsheviks gained control of the Petrograd Soviet. Trotsky became its President. The party also gained control of other Soviets. Lenin now believed the time was right to seize power.

## Lenin and the October coup 1917

Lenin played a pivotal role in the events of 1917 which culminated in the Bolshevik seizure of power in October.

- He ordered party members to **end all cooperation with the Provisional Government** on his return to Petrograd in April 1917.
  - Party leaders who made it back to Petrograd before Lenin, including Stalin, had backed the new regime.
  - Lenin outlined what was to become the basis of future Bolshevik policy in **The April Theses**.
- Lenin insisted on total opposition. His chief catch-cry of the time was **“all power to the Soviets”**. This proved to be a shrewd move on Lenin’s part:
  - It disassociated the Bolsheviks completely from the string of failures which beset the PG throughout 1917.
  - It allowed the party to establish its own clear identity.
- Lenin proved to be **an able propagandist**. At the time of the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks were a minor force in Russian politics. However, Lenin’s use of simple sloganeering and willingness to adopt populist positions, did much to win over popular support.
  - “All power to the Soviets” appealed to workers and soldiers who saw their interests more clearly represented there than in the PG.
  - “Land, peace and bread” tapped in to the main concerns of the Russian people at the time.
    - The only interest of the peasants was acquiring land. It did not matter that this might conflict with Marxist principles, support of this desire would gain the Bolsheviks support.
    - All Russians longed for peace. Lenin promised this peace, though the price of that peace was never spelled out.
    - He promised the workers bread though where it was coming from was another matter.
- Lenin realised that in the aftermath of the collapse of the Kornilov coup in September, the Bolsheviks had a **one and only opportunity** to take power. Lenin’s reasoning was:
  - They had gained control of the Petrograd (and other) Soviets following August elections. Trotsky had become President in September.
  - Bolsheviks efforts in quelling the Kornilov coup had presented the party as the true defenders of the revolution.
  - The Provisional Government was demoralised following the failure of the July Offensive against the Germans and Kornilov’s actions.
- Lenin had to **work hard convincing his colleagues** that the time was right to take action.
  - In late September he wrote to the party’s Central Committee arguing that if they did not seize power now *“History will never forgive us”*.

- On 10 October he returned secretly to Petrograd. Following an all-night session, he finally gained his colleagues' agreement, though Zinoviev and Kamenev remained opposed, fearing that civil war might break out.
- **Lenin accepted Trotsky's argument** that any seizure of power be delayed until the meeting of the Second Congress of All Russian Soviets on 25 October. His view was that the Bolsheviks action could then be presented as being taken in the name of the Soviets rather than merely as the Bolsheviks acting alone.

Though it was Lenin who took the lead and presented the arguments for a coup, it was Trotsky who actually planned the takeover. Trotsky's key role is summarised in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2 Trotsky's role in the October coup 1917**



On the evening of 25 October, members of the Congress of Soviets attacked the Bolshevik actions and many deputies walked out in protest. Trotsky ridiculed them, telling them that they could now go "into the dustbin of history ". Lenin arrived later and announced the formation of a Bolshevik government. He immediately called for peace with Germany and land for the peasants. The coup in Petrograd was almost bloodless but in other centres, such as Moscow, the Bolsheviks had a harder time taking control.

**Exercise 2.2**

Place the events listed in the box below in the correct chronological order.

- Following the failure of the July Days uprising, Lenin flees to Finland.
- Lenin opposes the patriotic calls for Russians to join the war effort against Germany.
- Lenin contacts his Bolshevik allies and says the time is right to take power.
- Trotsky organises the Bolshevik October coup.
- Kerensky’s Commander-in-Chief, General Kornilov attempts to seize power.
- Lenin returns to Petrograd to convince the Central Committee on the wisdom of taking power.
- Lenin announces “The April Theses” and calls for “all power to the Soviets”.
- Lenin announces the formation of a Bolshevik government.
- Bolshevik popularity increases following their role in the suppression of the Kornilov coup.
- Lenin returns to Russia thanks to a sealed train trip across German-occupied Europe.

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 1st event  |  |
| 2nd event  |  |
| 3rd event  |  |
| 4th event  |  |
| 5th event  |  |
| 6th event  |  |
| 7th event  |  |
| 8th event  |  |
| 9th event  |  |
| 10th event |  |

## What do the historians have to say about Lenin and the October coup 1917?

### 1. Adam Ulam: *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*

Ulam highlights Lenin's authority within the Bolshevik Party. This was apparent at the time of the April Theses. When Lenin enunciated his policies in early April, he was at first roundly attacked. The April Theses were considered anti-Marxist. Others complained that Lenin was out of touch with the reality of Russia of mid-1917 and argued that once he understood the true situation, he would modify his ideas. Yet, as Ulam points at, after early protests, Lenin was able to bend the party organisation to his will, a pattern that would be repeated in the future.

*"...This was the legacy of the years of isolation and defiance, 1907-17; he now dominated his Party morally and intellectually. Bolshevism without him was unimaginable."*<sup>6</sup>

### 2. Christopher Hill: *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*

Hill provides an explanation for Lenin's haste in seeking a takeover of power in late 1917. He argues that Lenin had two main fears: firstly, that the army command might give up Petrograd and the fleet to the Germans, as a lesser evil to surrendering it to Soviet control; and secondly, a fear of anarchy in the countryside as peasants continued to seize land, as this might play into the hands of a military dictator who could argue the need to "restore order".

*"...hence Lenin's own continual insistence on the necessity both for firm government and for good relations with the mass of the peasantry, and hence the eternally vigilant eye which he kept on generals with "Bonapartist" tendencies."*<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Robert V Daniels: *Lenin gambled wildly and won*

Daniels suggests that Lenin was gambling wildly in seeking power. He argues Lenin's opponents were right in arguing the Bolsheviks had little chance against the PG's military forces. In late October, argues Daniels, Lenin was failing to win over his colleagues, who preferred to wait for a multi-party 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 which galvanised them:

*"...and brought out their utmost effort to defend themselves. The Bolsheviks could not calculate... that the forces of the government would apathetically collapse. With... no intention before the fact, they had the city in the palms of their hands."*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ulam, A, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*, Collins, London, 1965, p 433

<sup>7</sup> Hill, C, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, English Universities Press, London, 1947, pp 124-5

<sup>8</sup> Daniels, RV, *Lenin gambled wildly and won*, from *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory*, ed Adams EA, DC Heath and Co, Lexington, 1972, p 185

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# Chapter Three

## The early Soviet government

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### The new government

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks claimed that they had seized power in the name of the Soviets. It had been Trotsky's idea to delay the coup until the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets met. The announcement of the overthrow of the Provisional Government was made in the Smolny Institute where the Congress was meeting. Few tears were shed for the demise of the Provisional Government. It had been fully discredited since the days of the Kornilov coup attempt in September. However, it was one thing to welcome the collapse of the Provisional Government; it was quite another to entertain the prospect of a fully Bolshevik government.

- Most Russian workers in the cities supported the idea of Soviet power, but not necessarily that of Bolshevik power.
- It was expected that after the fall of the Provisional Government, a coalition socialist government would be formed. Even some of the leading Bolsheviks believed this would be the case.

However, Lenin had no intention of sharing power. The future government of Russia was to be a Bolshevik government, sharing power with none!

When the All Russian Congress of Soviets met on the evening of 25 October, the Bolsheviks announced that power had been seized in its name. The other socialist parties protested at what had happened, arguing that the Bolsheviks did not represent the Russian people. Many non-Bolshevik deputies stormed out of the Congress in protest. Trotsky's reply to these parties was:

*"...you are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out; go where you ought to be – into the dustbin of history!"*

This meant that only the Bolsheviks and the left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries were left. The Bolsheviks thus had a majority in the congress.

*"...When Lenin... rose to address the Congress, he was greeted with an indescribable ovation... These were the halcyon days of the Revolution..."*<sup>1</sup>

For one who was received so ecstatically, Lenin's appearance and demeanour did not suggest the appearance of an all-conquering hero, if John Reed is to be believed.<sup>2</sup> This is how Reed describes Lenin's appearance at the Congress:

*"...a short stocky figure, with a big head set down in his shoulders, bald and bulging. Little eyes, a snubbish nose, wide generous mouth and heavy chin. Dressed in shabby clothes, his*

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<sup>1</sup> Kochan, L, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, p 253

<sup>2</sup> John Reed was a radical American journalist who was present in Russia in 1917, became close to the leading Bolsheviks and for a while even fought with Red Guard units. His book, *Ten Days That Shook The World*, became the basis for the Oscar-winning film *Reds*, starring Warren Beatty.

*trousers much too long for him. Unimpressive, to be the idol of a mob, loved and revered as perhaps few leaders in history have been...*"<sup>3</sup>

Lenin declared that a Bolshevik government had been formed. The new government was called "The Council of People's Commissars" or the SOVNARKOM.

The more important members of the SOVARKOM were:

- Lenin – Chairman
- Trotsky – Commissar of Foreign Affairs (till February 1918)  
– Commissar of War (from February 1918)
- Rykov – Commissar of Internal Affairs
- Kollantai – Commissar of Social Welfare
- Lunacharsky – Commissar of Popular Enlightenment
- Stalin – Commissar of Nationalities

### The weakness of the Bolsheviks in late 1917

It was one thing to seize power as the Bolsheviks succeeded in doing in October 1917; it was quite another to be able to hold on to that power, and a distant dream to be able to build socialism. Figure 3.1 illustrates the parlous state of the new Bolshevik regime at the end of 1917.

Writing just before the October coup 1917, Lenin had declared in "*State and Revolution*" that the new regime would be very popular, that the people would recognize it was ruling in their name and that there would be a genuine expansion of democracy. In the early months of the new regime, this is essentially what happened. Early Bolshevik measures (see below) emphasized local control, such as worker control of factories and the recognition of peasant land seizures.

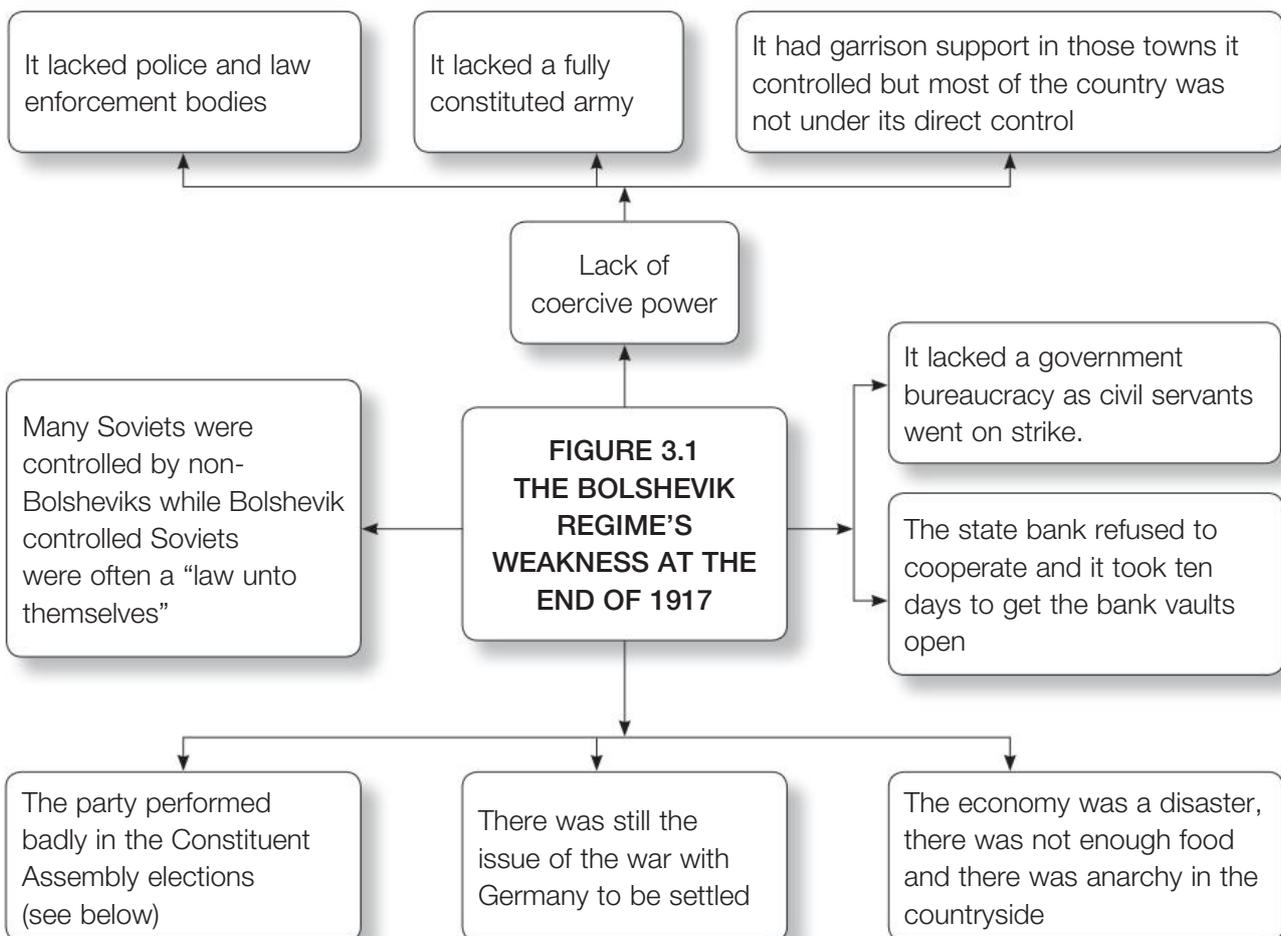
However, this view needs to be qualified by two key factors:

1. The initial weakness of the new regime gave Lenin no choice but to pass measures of a populist nature.
2. Accompanying the series of populist measures introduced by the SOVNARKOM was the creation of an authoritarian coercive apparatus (see opposite).

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<sup>3</sup> Reed, J, *Ten Days That Shook The World*, New York, 1960 ed, p 170

Figure 3.1 The Bolshevik Regime's Weakness at the end of 1917



### The early measures passed by the SOVNARKOM

The SOVNARKOM did not bother gaining the sanction of the Soviet for its early measures; it ruled by decree. The new regime wasted no time in introducing its program. What follows is a list of the main decrees passed between October 1917 and March 1918.

- Lenin's first measure was the **Peace Decree**.
  - Lenin had been well aware that the main reason for the failure of the Provisional Government had been its decision to continue the war with Germany. Lenin was prepared to pay any price in the short term to end hostilities with Germany.
  - Lenin's decree invited *"all the belligerent peoples and their governments to open immediate negotiations for an honest democratic peace"*.
  - The current Russian Commander-in Chief, General Dukhonin refused to obey the instruction to offer an immediate armistice. He was dismissed and replaced by a Bolshevik lawyer, Krylenko.
  - Still fearing opposition from the army command, Lenin broadcast on 26 October to Russia's soldiers and sailors: *"...The question of peace is in your hands. Do not let the counter-revolutionary generals wreck the great cause of peace."*

- The second measure was the **Land Decree**.
  - Peasants were given the right to seize the land of the gentry and there was to be no compensation. The land was to belong to the entire people.
  - This was not what the Bolsheviks wanted in the long term. Private land ownership was a decidedly capitalist notion and hardly the goal of a socialist revolution.
  - However, they had no choice but to accede to what was already taking place in the country and over which they had little control. To have opposed the peasants at this point would have almost certainly have brought down the new regime.
- There was a series of measures passed in **favour of the workers**. These included:
  - a maximum eight hour working day
  - unemployment pay, old age pensions and sickness benefits
  - workers' control of factories
  - from early 1918 workers' control of the railways
- There were measures to **break the power and wealth of the church**:
  - church lands were confiscated
  - civil marriage was introduced
  - in January 1918 church and state were formally separated
- There were moves to bring about **equality between men and women**:
  - the 1918 Marriage Code gave women legal equality with their husbands
  - divorce was made much easier
  - in 1920 abortion was legalised
  - in 1921 a Women's Department was set up called the Zhenontdel
- The organisation of the **armed forces** was also democratized:
  - army officers were now to be elected
  - officers would be under the control of army soviets and soldiers' committees
  - ranks were abolished
  - there was an end to uniforms and saluting.

**Exercise 3.1**

Answer the following questions. Place your answer in the space provided.

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1  | Why was the creation of SOVNARKOM not universally welcomed throughout Russia?             |  |
| 2  | Where did Trotsky suggest opponents of the revolution should go?                          |  |
| 3  | Who was John Reed?  |  |
| 4  | What reason might a cynic give for the populist nature of the SOVNARKOM's early measures? |  |
| 5  | Why was Lenin so insistent on the Peace Decree?   |  |
| 6  | What was the Land Decree?   |  |
| 7  | Why might Lenin have had mixed feelings about the Land Decree?                            |  |
| 8  | How was industrial life in Russia democratised?   |  |
| 9  | How was the power of the church weakened?   |  |
| 10 | Identify four ways in which the armed forces were democratised.                           |  |

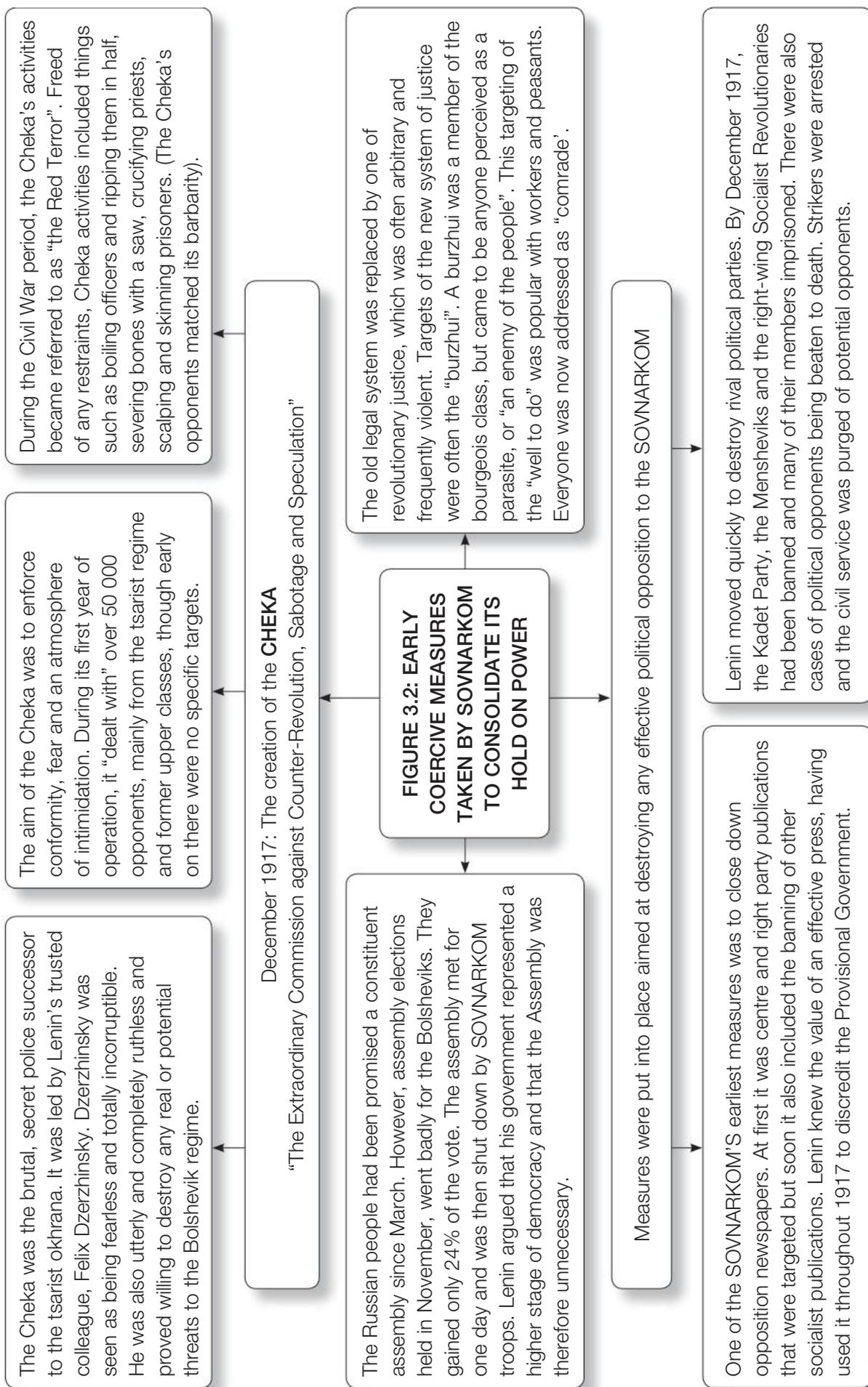
**The coercive nature of the new Bolshevik regime**

In *“State and Revolution”*:

- Lenin had expressed his expectation that the new regime would be popular and able to rule in the name of the people.
- However, in the same work he expressed his belief that a continuing and strong coercive apparatus would also be essential if the regime was to survive. He held no illusions that counter-revolutionary forces would do their very best to bring down his infant regime.

Figure 3.2 highlights some of the early measures taken by the SOVNARKOM to consolidate its power.

**Figure 3.2: Early coercive measures taken by SOVNARKOM to consolidate its hold on power**



**Exercise 3.2**

Match the descriptions on the left with the terms listed on the right.

|    |  |  |                      |
|----|--|--|----------------------|
| 1  | The head of the new Bolshevik secret police  |  | SOVNARKOM            |
| 2  | Women's department set up in 1921  |  | THE RED TERROR       |
| 3  | Term used to describe a member of "the bourgeois class"                                  |  | STALIN               |
| 4  | Bolshevik secret police established in December 1917                                     |  | CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY |
| 5  | One of the first political parties banned by the Bolsheviks in December 1917             |  | DZERZINSKY           |
| 6  | Term used as the standard form of greeting in revolutionary Russia                       |  | ZHENONTDEL           |
| 7  | The Council of People's Commissars   |  | COMRADE              |
| 8  | Body elected in November 1917  |  | BURZHUI              |
| 9  | The Commissar of Nationalities   |  | KADETS               |
| 10 | Term used to describe the activities of the Bolshevik secret police during the Civil War |  | THE CHEKA            |

## What do the historians have to say about the social and political reforms of the early Soviet government?

### 1. R H B Lockhart: *Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*

Lockhart was a British consular official in Russia at the time of the revolution. Today we might be more candid and call him a spy or a secret agent. It was part of Lockhart's brief to keep the British government informed about developments inside Russia after the revolution. Britain was most concerned that Russia might withdraw from the war with Germany. Lockhart highlights some of the ways the new regime coped with its early months in office, though bear in mind that he is clearly no friend of the Bolshevik regime.

*"...The Bolsheviks have established a rule of force and oppression unequalled in the history of any autocracy... The worst crimes of the Bolsheviks have been against their socialist opponents... (they) have abolished even the most primitive forms of justice... (they) have restored the barbarous methods of torture..."*<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union Since 1917*

McCauley argues that, though the Bolsheviks' main source of support was from the workers not the peasants, it was the peasants who made the greater gains early in the regime. Lenin and Trotsky both supported the idea of state capitalism early on, ie the idea of guiding the economy from the centre while leaving it in private hands. Even the Workers' Control decree did not change this. The situation remained thus until late June 1918 when War Communism was ushered in (see Chapter 5).

*"...Hence between November 1917 and June 1918 the peasants and the workers were treated quite differently. The land decree afforded the peasants all they wanted from the revolution but the aspirations of the workers, the backbone of Bolshevik support, were not satisfied until June 1918."*<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Adam Ulam: *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*

When describing the period immediately after the October coup, Ulam is at pains to highlight the desperate situation in the country. Food was even scarce in the Kremlin and anti-Bolshevik generals were preparing their counter-revolution. However, the general exhaustion in the country worked against any immediate attempt to snatch power from the Bolsheviks. Thus, in early 1918, Lenin's government was probably as popular as it would ever get.

*"...The industrial worker was in the main behind it. The peasant, if not converted to Bolshevism, was at least pacified by the land decree. The spectre of Civil War was still not imminent."*<sup>6</sup>

4 Lockhart, RHB, from A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia, Parliamentary Paper No 157 (Australia), vol 58, pp 7-8

5 McCauley, M, The Soviet Union Since 1917, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 19

6 Ulam, A, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Collins, London, 1965, pp 506-7

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# Chapter Four

## The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

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### Introduction

For Lenin, the immediate crucial issue facing his new government was the conclusion of peace with Germany. It is no accident that the first act of the new regime was the issuing of the Peace Decree. Lenin knew that the decision of the Provisional Government after it came to power to continue the war with Germany was the fundamental reason for its ultimate failure. For Lenin peace was indispensable:

- He knew that the country was in a desperate situation. The economy was in chaos and millions were starving.
- He knew that his hold on power in late 1917 was hanging by a thread.
- He was certain that counter-revolutionary elements would soon be organising to bring down his regime.

As a result, he insisted on peace with Germany at any price. He had to use all his persuasive powers and authority to enforce his view on the party. Bukharin believed that Russia should launch a revolutionary war against Germany which would then ignite revolutions across Europe and thus end Russia's isolation. The Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the SOVNARKOM was Trotsky. Trotsky believed that the Germans were in a weak state and would relish being rid of an Eastern Front. He proposed his "no war, no peace" strategy. The ineffectiveness of this was soon shown when, after being briefly stunned, the German High Command proceeded to move on Petrograd. It was then that Lenin stepped in and demanded peace negotiations be pursued in earnest.

### The Peace Process

- Appeals were sent to the major allied powers (Britain, France and the US) to open immediate peace talks with Germany. These appeals were quickly ignored, though the United States had shown interest.
- By mid-November the new Bolshevik army commander, Krylenko, had reached army GHQ, having removed several opposition generals along the way. The former Commander-in-Chief, Dukhonin was arrested. Krylenko was unable to control a crowd of soldiers and sailors which proceeded to beat Dukhonin to death.
- The first talks with the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) began on 3 December and an armistice was signed on 15 December.
- Formal peace talks began on 22 December at Brest Litovsk. The main participants were the German and Austrian Foreign Ministers, General Max Hoffmann of the German Supreme Command, while the main Bolshevik representative early on was A A Ioffe.
- Ioffe was soon replaced by Trotsky who tried to slow down the negotiations.
- Lenin realised that the Germans might resume hostilities with the aim of bringing down his

regime and so on 20 January argued strongly that the German terms must be accepted, no matter how “annexationist”.

- A Party Central Committee meeting of 22 January voted against the naïve revolutionary war strategy but they could not bring themselves to accept Lenin’s view and backed Trotsky’s “no war, no peace” line.
- On 10 February, the Russians stopped their talks with the Germans.
- On 18 February, the German army resumed its attack.

*“...As they had foreseen, the Bolsheviks were forced to sue for peace for fear that if they attempted resistance they would be overthrown by the anti-Bolshevik elements of the army. An onerous peace was eventually signed on 3 March.”*<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 4.1 The main terms of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk**

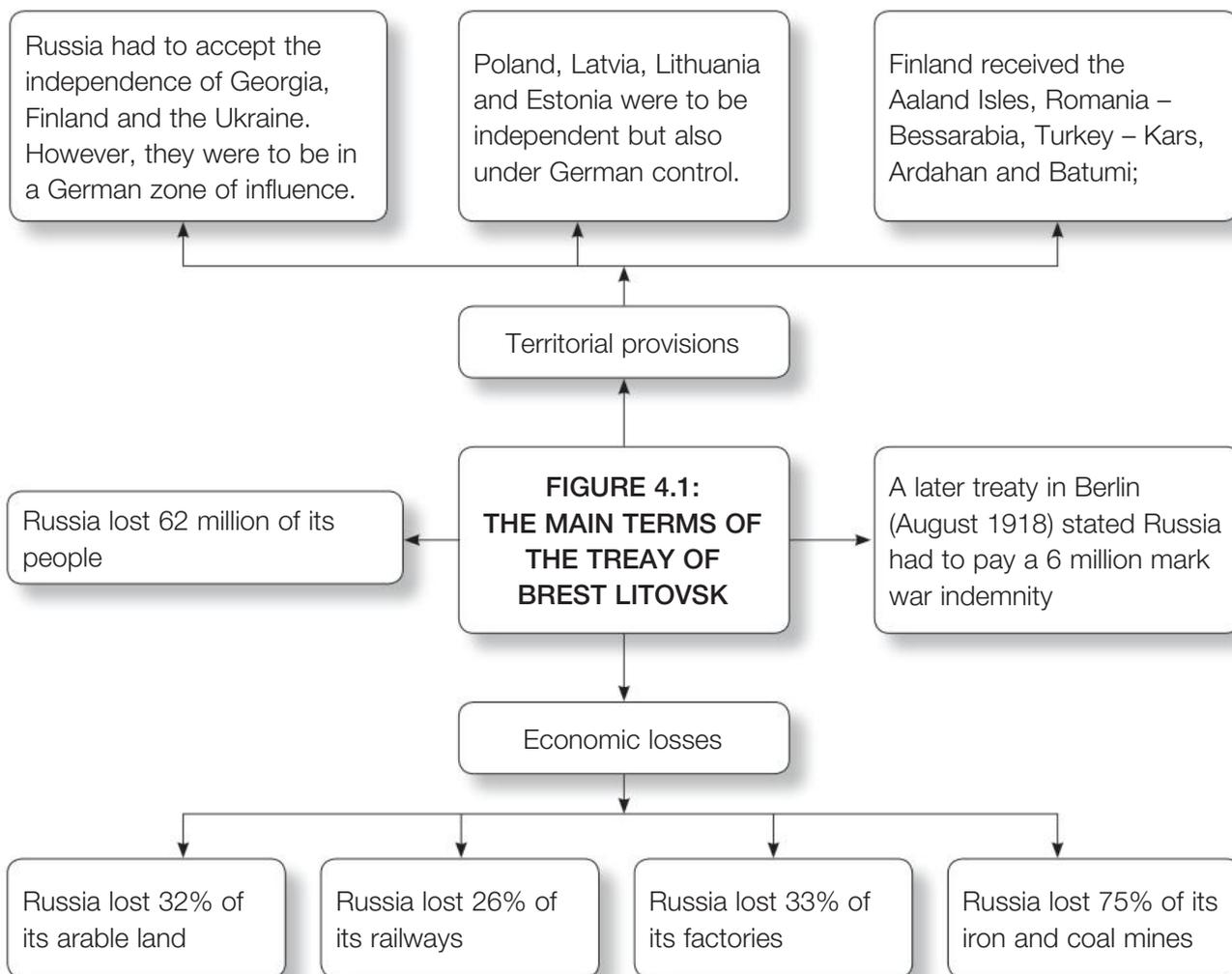
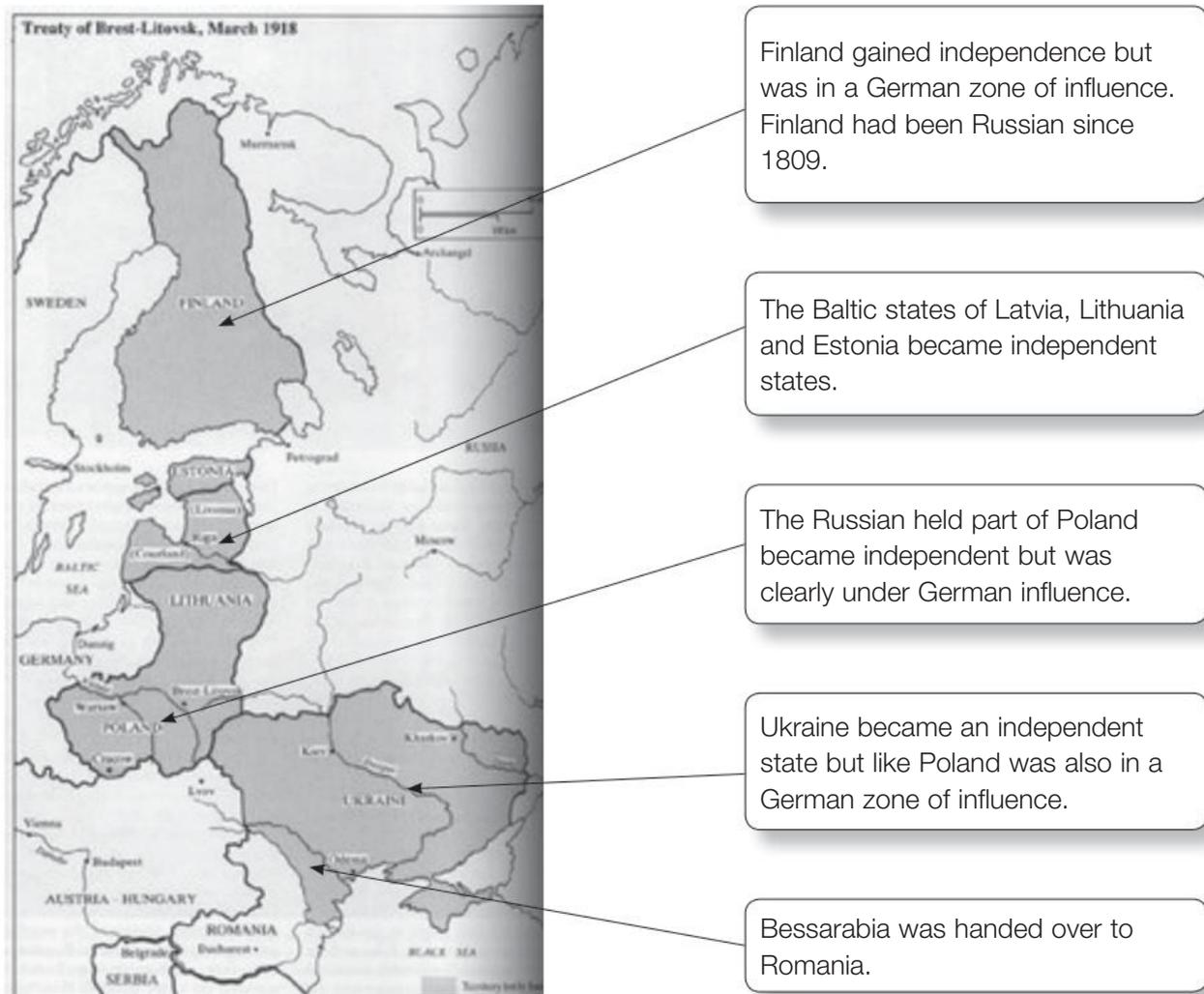


Figure 4.2 illustrates the main territorial losses suffered by Russia at Brest Litovsk.

<sup>1</sup> Schapiro, L, 1917, Temple Smith, Hounslow, 1984, pp 169-70

Figure 4.2 Russia's main territorial losses at Brest Litovsk



*"...The Bolsheviks, it is true, had exercised little control over the territory they had ceded. The Russian heartland, where they were strongest, was hardly touched. The communists could soothe their hurt pride with the hope that, come the socialist revolution in Germany, the treaty would be torn up."*<sup>2</sup>

### The significance of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk

In a sense, the Treaty of Brest Litovsk had no real long-term significance. The defeat of Germany at the hands of the allies in November 1918 meant that the provisions of the treaty became null and void.<sup>3</sup> However, the treaty was of major significance in the short to medium term.

**On an immediate political level,** it removed one major concern for the Bolshevik government – the German threat. However, it also caused major consternation inside Russia.

<sup>2</sup> McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, pp 25-6

<sup>3</sup> In the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to mutually declare Brest Litovsk nullified, and cancelled any claims each might have on the other because of the war.

- It was one thing to be the standard-bearer of anti-imperialism in the world, but it was quite something else to hand over vast territories and 62 million people to one's enemies.
  - There were major arguments inside the Bolshevik party over the treaty.
 

*"...In the crucial Central Committee meeting of 23 February, the voting went seven for acceptance, four against, and four abstainers."* <sup>4</sup>
  - However, following Lenin's entreaties, the party soon succumbed to reality and agreed to the treaty terms.
- However, Brest Litovsk destroyed the relations between the left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks:
  - The left SRs voted against ratification of the treaty and left the SOVNARKOM. They maintained romantic notions of a revolutionary war.
  - On 6 July, the German ambassador to the new Russian capital, Moscow, Count von Mirbach was murdered by the left SR, Bliumkin. A left SR revolt ensued which saw the arrest of Felix Dzerzinsky. A left SR commander on the River Volga even declared war on Germany but he was soon killed.
  - The revolt broke the link between the left SRs and the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks now changed their name to the All-Russian Communist Party.

The Treaty of Brest Litovsk was also a stimulus to the possibility of civil war, which with the benefit of hindsight was probably inevitable. There were many pockets of resistance to the Bolsheviks.

- Apart from the left SRs who attempted revolt, there were those parties who had been banned in 1917, such as the Kadets and the right SRs.
- There were still many who were angered at the treatment which had been meted out to the Constituent Assembly.
- Counter-revolutionary forces were gathering to remove the Bolsheviks. It might be argued that the treaty was also the final straw for them as, what was at stake now, was Russia's sovereignty. The Bolsheviks had to be removed for the sake of restoring Russia territorial integrity.

The whole point of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk had been to end the war with Germany. This might have been a wise strategy for an impoverished and broken Russia, but it spelled potential disaster to Russia's former western allies who were still fighting Germany on the Western Front. Brest Litovsk thus led to the **Allied Intervention** against the Bolshevik regime.

- The alleged purpose of the allied intervention in 1918 was to bring Russia back into the war against Germany. By year's end, there were British, French, American and Japanese troops on Russian territory. The Japanese would not fully evacuate the Far East of Russia until 1922.
- However, the true purpose of the allied intervention can be seen with the fact that allied forces remained in Russia assisting the Bolsheviks' "white" enemies in the Civil War, long after the war with Germany was over.

<sup>4</sup> Kochan, L, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, p 257

**Exercise 4.1**

Indicate whether or not each of the following statements is a fact or an opinion.

|    |   |               |
|----|---|---------------|
| 1  | The Russians found it difficult to present a totally united front during the peace negotiations.  | FACT/ OPINION |
| 2  | The Treaty of Brest Litovsk resulted in major economic and territorial losses for Russia.         | FACT/ OPINION |
| 3  | Trotsky negotiated in a skilful manner at Brest Litovsk.  | FACT/ OPINION |
| 4  | Bukharin's idea of launching a revolutionary war was naïve in the extreme.                        | FACT/ OPINION |
| 5  | Lenin was insistent on coming to a peace agreement with the Germans.                              | FACT/ OPINION |
| 6  | Many former Russian lands came under German influence after the Treaty of Brest Litovsk.          | FACT/ OPINION |
| 7  | The Treaty of Brest Litovsk was a key factor bringing an end to the Left SR/ Bolshevik coalition. | FACT/ OPINION |
| 8  | The Treaty of Brest Litovsk was finally buried with the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo.                   | FACT/ OPINION |
| 9  | The terms of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk were not as tough as historians have tried to make out.  | FACT/ OPINION |
| 10 | Lenin was afraid of a possible joint western-German campaign against his government.              | FACT/ OPINION |

## What do the historians have to say about the significance of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk?

### 1. Leonard Schapiro: 1917

Schapiro makes the point that the Treaty of Brest Litovsk now brought about the permanent break between the left SRs and the Bolsheviks. The left SRs were essentially a peasant-based party and they had already been unhappy with some heavy-handed Bolshevik food requisitioning in some areas. The treaty was the last straw. The subsequent murder of Count von Mirbach and the abortive left SR revolt in 1918 finally gave Lenin his excuse to end the “ill-matched” political partnership.

*“... (after the revolt) Physical reprisals were very moderate... The left SRs even retained the theoretical right to sit in the soviets provided they repudiated the July affair. But in practice... they were driven by arbitrary action from soviets to which they had been elected.”*<sup>5</sup>

### 2. John Bradley: Civil War in Russia 1917-1920

Bradley makes the point that the peace terms were terrible indeed for Russia, listing the losses and showing how the various national groups on Russia’s periphery were now very much German-dominated. However, he goes further and shows how the Germans now played a significant role in the unfolding internal struggle taking place inside Russia. The Don Cossacks asked for and quickly gained German aid, while the anti-Bolshevik movement split into pro-German and pro-allied factions. However, Germany continued to haunt both the pro- and anti-Bolsheviks forces.

*“...it was impossible to forget the terrible losses inflicted on Russia in the war and at Brest Litovsk. Moreover, Germany appeared such an unpredictable power, ready in its struggle against the Allies to abandon or destroy either or both Russian sides.”*<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Adam Ulam: Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Ulam argues that the Bolshevik leadership had another issue on their mind when negotiating at Brest Litovsk. What if the western powers came to a deal with the Germans to jointly destroy the Bolshevik regime and partition the Russian Empire? Ulam says that this fear led Lenin to even seek contacts with the west and to suggest that Russia might even re-enter the war, and that Russia might welcome an allied presence in the north of country. This was a dangerous game, of course, because it could provoke a German attack on the Bolsheviks.

*“...it would not have been inconceivable – on the contrary it would have been entirely logical – for the western capitalists to conclude a peace with the German capitalists and to join in the congenial task of destroying the Bolsheviks...”*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Schapiro, L, 1917, Temple Smith, Hounslow, 1984, p 170

<sup>6</sup> Bradley, J, Civil War in Russia 1917-1920, B T Batsford, London, 1975, p 46

<sup>7</sup> Ulam, A, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Collins, London, 1965, p 540

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# Chapter Five

## The Civil War

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### Introduction

An uneasy peace prevailed inside Russia for several months following the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917. Lenin's main early priorities were achieving peace with Germany, ensuring the support of the peasants and taking control of the Soviets. As explained in Chapter 3, during these early months the SOVNARKOM was busy passing a series of populist measures while at the same time developing its coercive apparatus. Opponents of the Bolsheviks took several months to organise a proper resistance to the new regime.

However, Lenin and Trotsky were realists and knew that the full array of counter-revolutionary forces would be hurled against the Bolshevik regime sooner rather than later. By mid-1918, Russia was in the midst of full-scale civil war, with each side denoted by its colour.

- The **“Reds”** comprised the Bolsheviks and their supporters.
  - A “Workers’ and Peasants” Red Army was completely reorganized by Trotsky in early 1918.
  - It was made up of sailors from the Kronstadt base, former Red Guard units, volunteering workers and peasants, and also some men and officers from the former tsarist army.
  - The “Reds” had one simple war aim: survival!
- The anti-Bolshevik **“whites”** comprised a wide range of forces who shared one aim: the destruction of Bolshevism. Beyond that, the various “white” groups agreed on very little else, a factor which was to greatly weaken their cause.
  - The “white” forces comprised a wide range of competing groups. They included members of the various political groups such as Socialist Revolutionaries and other moderate socialist groups.
  - There were those who would have liked a return of tsarism (few in number), often referred to as monarchists or rightists.
  - There were liberals, happy to have military rule in the short run if it meant the end of the Bolsheviks.
  - There were nationalist separatist groups.
  - The various “white” groups were each led by a particular general who doubtless saw himself as the saviour of Russia. The main white generals included Kolchak, Yudenich, Kornilov, Denikin and Wrangel.
  - The “whites” also had foreign backing including the Czech Legion (see below) and allied intervention forces.
- A third and significant participant in the civil war were the **“greens”**.
  - The “greens” were predominantly peasant armies who were primarily concerned with protecting their local areas from both Red and White forces.

- The “Greens” often comprised deserters from both sides and fought against both, depending on the local situation. By the end of the civil war, the “Greens” were fighting as an irregular Red force.
- “Green” groups ranged in size from small bandit gangs to well-coordinated guerilla armies.
- The most well-known of the Green leaders was Nestor Makhno. Once the “Reds” had won the civil war, “Green” forces were gradually destroyed. Makno escaped to Romania.

## The “narrative” of the Civil War

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1918 | <p>The main areas of fighting in 1918 are in the south east and the east.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ March: British forces land at Murmansk in northern Russia. <sup>1</sup></li> <li>■ May: Czech Legion captures part of the Trans-Siberian railway. <sup>2</sup></li> <li>■ May: By now Trotsky has tightened his organization of the Red Army, including the introduction of conscription.</li> <li>■ July: murder of former Tsar Nicholas II and his family.</li> <li>■ August: more British and US forces arrive in northern Russia. The allies attempt to set up anti-Bolshevik governments.</li> <li>■ August: The Reds abandon Kazan, 750 kms from Moscow. Trotsky rallies Red troops to prevent White forces crossing the River Volga.</li> <li>■ General Kolchak reaches Omsk, east of the Urals, 2000 kms from Moscow.</li> <li>■ December: French forces land at Odessa in the south.</li> <li>■ Allied intervention was largely ineffective and allied forces rarely fought against the Reds.</li> </ul> |
| 1919 | <p>1919 proves to be the most dangerous time in the civil war for the Bolsheviks as white forces converge on Red held territory from three directions and allied forces are still present in the country. The turning point in the war comes in the autumn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Denikin takes over as commander of White forces in the south and south east. Generals Alexseev and Kornilov both died in 1918. He has almost 150 000 men under his command.</li> <li>■ Kolchak’s White forces cross the Ural Mountains but are held in check by the Red Army.</li> <li>■ Denikin’s army captures Kharkov.</li> </ul>  |

<sup>1</sup> For the reasons for the Allied Intervention, see Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> The Czech Legion comprised Czech nationalists willing to fight for Russia against Austria in order to achieve Czech independence. It was later augmented by Czech prisoners of war. Following the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, it wanted to fight for the allies against Germany in the west. Disagreements with the Bolsheviks on how to reach the west led to clashes and it took part of the Trans-Siberian railway. White forces grew up around the Czech Legion. The Legion had ceased to be a factor in the war by late 1918.

|      |  |
|------|--|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In July and August there is a major conflict for control of Tsaritsyn. The heroic defence of the city, led by Stalin, becomes part of the Bolsheviks' heroic civil war mythology. Denikin's forces are prevented from linking up with Kolchak's.</li> <li>■ October: Denikin captures Orel, south of Moscow, but is soon pushed back.</li> <li>■ November: Yudenich and his 15 000 strong army is on the outskirts of Petrograd but he is pushed back.</li> </ul> <p>In late 1919, the Reds are in real trouble, being threatened from the south, east and north east. However, they successfully repulse White forces in all three areas. Allied intervention has petered out by the end of the year.</p>                    |
| 1920 | <p>The Reds are now able to take the initiative and the civil war is soon all but over.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ February: General Kolchak is captured by Red forces in the east. He is executed.</li> <li>■ Georgia is invaded by the Red Army.</li> <li>■ By March: Denikin has retreated to the Crimea where he is replaced by General Wrangel.</li> <li>■ May: Polish forces invade and capture Kiev. In July General Tukhachevsky leads Red forces against the Poles, cross the border but the Red Army is defeated outside Warsaw in what becomes known as "the miracle of the Vistula".</li> <li>■ November: The remaining White forces of Wrangel are defeated in the Crimea region.</li> </ul> <p>The Bolsheviks regime has survived.</p> |
| 1921 | <p>Remaining pockets of White resistance are "mopped up".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ March: A peace treaty is signed with the Poles at Riga. Poland receives more territory than it wanted. Lenin believes that the more non-Russians Poland has, the less stable it might be.</li> </ul>  |

The map in Figure 5.1 outlines the main areas of control of Red and White forces during the Civil War.

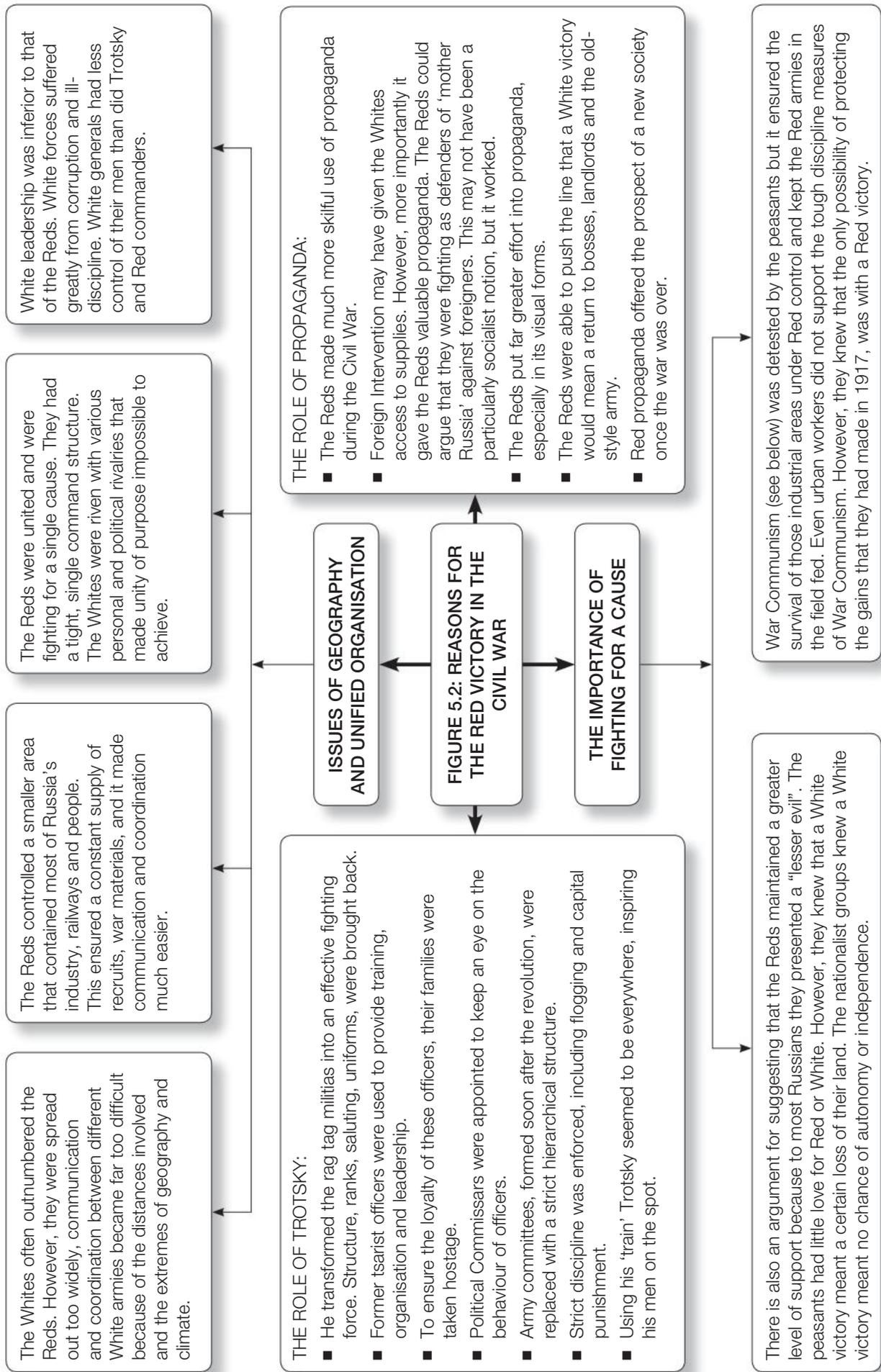
Figure 5.1 Extent of “Red” and “White” forces during the Civil War



### Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

In mid-1918, the odds were clearly stacked against the possibility of a Red victory in the Civil War. White forces outnumbered the Reds, they controlled most of Russia's territory, they appeared to have significantly greater military expertise and they had the prospect of western allied aid to fall back on. Yet by the end of 1919, the White cause had effectively collapsed. The Red victory was the result of a series of interconnected factors: leadership, unity of purpose, geography, superior organisation, propaganda, a willingness to do “whatever it takes” and idealism. The reasons for the Red victory are presented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Reasons for the red victory in the civil war



Trotsky was arguably the key factor in determining the outcome of the Russian Civil War. Appointed by Lenin as Commissar of War in February 1918, Trotsky was able to bring all his special talents, and those less pleasant aspects of his personality to the job of War Commissar.

*“...His oratory stirred the troops and his arrival at the front in his specially fitted out train could always be guaranteed to increase morale. His intelligence and his industry combined to totally refashion Red military forces into an efficient fighting force. His willingness to use brute force and the cruelest measures ensured the maintenance of Red Army discipline. He was even willing to turn on the Kronstadt sailors who had long been the Bolsheviks’ most loyal supporters.”*<sup>3</sup>

**Exercise 5.1**

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided:

1. Place the following events in the correct chronological order:

THE TREATY OF RIGA / THE DEATH OF KOLCHAK / THE DEFENCE OF TSARITSYN,  
THE TREATY OF BREST LITOVSK / THE REVOLT OF THE CZECH LEGION

|     |
|-----|
| 1st |
| 2nd |
| 3rd |
| 4th |
| 5th |

2. Match the personality on the right with the description on the left.

|   |   |  |          |
|---|---|--|----------|
| a | Led the White attack on Petrograd                 |  | KOLCHAK  |
| b | White commander in the South until March 1920     |  | WRANGEL  |
| c | Led the White forces moving west from Siberia     |  | MAKHNO   |
| d | Took over White forces in the South in March 1920 |  | YUDENICH |
| e | The most important Green commander                |  | DENIKIN  |

<sup>3</sup> Webb, K, Leon Trotsky 1879-1940, Get Smart Education, St Ives, 2010, p 51

3. Assume the role of a Russian peasant. Explain why you might support the Reds instead of the Whites.

## War Communism

The term “War Communism” refers to the series of extreme policies which Lenin introduced from mid-1918 to deal with the disastrous economic and military situation that the Bolsheviks were facing. War Communism involved the imposition of state control over economic production, distribution and grain output. It also involved the widespread use of state terror to achieve this control.

### *Why was War Communism introduced?*

- By mid-1918 the only issue for the Bolsheviks was survival.
  - Its White enemies controlled most of the country and were planning to move on the areas of Bolshevik control from the north west, the east and the south.
  - Allied intervention forces were arriving to assist the Whites.
  - Military defeat was a real possibility.
- The prime aim therefore had to be to maintain Red forces in the field. The Red Army had to be fed and it had to be supplied.
- The factories producing war equipment had to be kept going and their workers in turn had to be fed.
- The Bolsheviks’ industry policies which had been introduced after the October Revolution, though popular, had led to economic collapse.
  - Workers were proving incapable of running the factories.
- Land policies had pleased the peasants but had resulted in plummeting food production.
  - The peasants were unconcerned with feeding the cities, and the cities had little to exchange with the peasants for their grain.
  - Many peasant households had broken up into smaller units to increase their claims for land and this had led to smaller landholding units. Russian agriculture was returning to near subsistence levels.
- Lenin believed that the only solution to this disastrous situation was for the state to take control of the economy: reorganise the factories and force the peasants to give up their grain to the cities and the army.

The solution was War Communism.

### *War Communism comprised the following elements:*

1. All industry was nationalised and brought under state control. Following the seizure of power workers' factory committees had been set up to run things. They proved to be inept and often corrupt. The Bolsheviks ended the committees and put in place managers, often the previous bosses, who were now referred to as "specialists".
2. Workers could not leave their jobs without permission as an internal passport system was introduced. Strict rules regarding labour discipline were now introduced.
3. An end was put to the market economy. The state would now decide who would produce what, where, and how the produce would be distributed. A class-based rationing system was introduced: soldiers and workers got the most while former bourgeois groups, the burzhui, got the least. Rationing was chaotic and a burgeoning black market developed.
4. In 1919 the party tried to put an end to the use of money. This was achieved by flooding the market with useless bank notes. The result was hyper-inflation and the appearance of a system of barter.
5. The land was "socialised", peasants ordered to work for the state and their product was requisitioned by food detachments sent out into the country to prevent peasants hoarding their grain. This led to widespread violence between Red forces and the peasants. The Cheka was increasingly used to force grain requisitioning and they did not hold back from using the most extreme forms of violence they felt necessary.

### *What was the impact of War Communism on Russia?*

Any discussion of the impact of War Communism is determined by the issue of from which perspective the question is being addressed.

From the Bolshevik perspective it could be argued that the policy had been a success.

- The army and the towns had been kept fed and were thus able to function throughout the Civil War.
- The long-term result of this was of course victory in the war.
- Some Bolsheviks liked the ideological nature of War Communism and its policies of state control, state direction and the apparent end to the notion of private property.

However, from the economic, social and humanitarian standpoints, the policies of War Communism were disastrous for the country.

- Rather than give up their grain or their livestock, peasants chose to destroy it. They refused to sow future crops, gorged what food they had and killed their livestock.<sup>4</sup>
- Such behaviour led to even more extreme brutality from the Food Detachments and the Cheka. Terror was becoming the norm.
- Lenin insisted that any opposition be met with the most severe measures. He demanded the execution of hundreds of richer peasants known as "kulaks". People could be arrested for behaving as, or giving the appearance of behaving as a bourgeois. Hundreds of thousands of alleged opponents were arrested and placed in labour camps.<sup>5</sup>
- Worse still, starvation spread over wide areas and millions died.

<sup>4</sup> Similar behaviour would occur during Stalin's collectivisation but on a much larger scale.

<sup>5</sup> Brutal though Stalin's regime was to become, the origins of secret police power, the vast use of terror and the establishment of state concentration camps occurred under Lenin.



## What do the historians have to say about The Civil War, and the aims, nature and impact of War Communism?

### 1. David Christian: *Power and Privilege*

Christian highlights the plight of the Reds' food situation caused by Brest Litovsk, the loss of the Ukraine grain source and the Civil War. He goes on to describe the extremes that food detachments went to, taking not only food but also firewood, horses and carts. He quotes Lenin who admitted food detachments often took not only hoarded food but the peasants' own supplies. However, for all its brutality and crudeness, Christian says it:

*"...did the job of supplying towns and armies with just enough food and supplies to keep providing war material and to keep fighting. In this sense, it was a success."*<sup>6</sup>

### 2. Robert Service: *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*

Service pays tribute to the efforts of Trotsky in bringing about a Red victory. He refers to Trotsky's "élan and dash", his use of his specially-designed train and how all this inspired his men to fight. Trotsky soon earned the respect of the former tsarist officers he had persuaded to join the Red cause.

*"...His brilliance had been proved before 1918. What took everyone aback was his organizational capacity and ruthlessness as he transformed the Red Army into a fighting force."*<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Gordon Greenwood: *The Modern World*

Greenwood highlights the tragic results of the War Communism policy. Peasants were restricting their production to just what they needed. Bolshevik policies aimed at dividing the peasants, and encouraging some to produce, failed. State farms failed to produce enough food through lack of experience. Despite extensive aid given by such bodies such as Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration:

*"...The outcome was the disastrous famine of 1921, rendered worse by the general drought which immediately preceded it... in the area of the Lower Volga, there was an almost total failure of the crop... Some five million are estimated to have died from starvation.."*<sup>8</sup>

6 Christian, D, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1986, p 171

7 Service, R, *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1997, p 105

8 Greenwood, G, *The Modern World*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, p 441

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# Chapter Six

## The introduction New Economic Policy (NEP)

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### Introduction

The Bolsheviks had emerged victorious from the Civil War and allied intervention was a thing of the past. <sup>1</sup> Though there would remain pockets of peasant resistance for some years to come, the Bolsheviks <sup>2</sup> had a firm hold on power. However, the country that Lenin now ruled unchallenged was in a disastrous state. The economy was in ruins, infrastructure had been destroyed, millions had died and large areas of the country were suffering starvation.

While War Communism had played a key role in the eventual Communist victory, it had also alienated the peasants, wrecked the economy and created ongoing opposition to Communist rule. This was seen no more clearly than in the revolt at the Kronstadt Naval Base in 1921 which was brutally suppressed by Trotsky's Red Army.

In the face of such dire circumstances, Lenin decided to reverse policy. An end was brought to War Communism and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. The NEP allowed for a partial return to capitalism, the operation of the free market and a degree of private ownership. It quickly proved successful in reviving the Russian economy.

However, though there might have been some economic liberalisation, Lenin had no intention of easing up on political control and the authoritarian nature of the Communist regime was strengthened.

### The Kronstadt Rebellion

In 1917, the sailors of the Kronstadt Naval bases outside of Petrograd had been some of the Bolsheviks' most loyal supporters. Trotsky had referred to them as "the pride and glory of the Russian Revolution". However, it would be inaccurate to suggest the base had been entirely Bolshevik. Most of the sailors were originally peasants and many had been supporters of the more peasant-based Socialist Revolutionary party. They remained connected to their former rural areas and were well aware of the peasant suffering under War Communism.

In early 1921, the Communist regime faced two serious revolts: a peasant revolt in the Tambov region on the river Volga, and at Kronstadt. <sup>3</sup> The peasants of Tambov, led by Alexander Antonov, refused to hand over the grain demanded of them and prevented grain convoys from being sent to the Moscow region. The Communists did not have too many troops in the area and Lenin decided to deal with this revolt with kid gloves for fear of causing a general peasant revolt. The Tambov revolt lasted almost an entire year. However, the revolt at Kronstadt was something quite different.

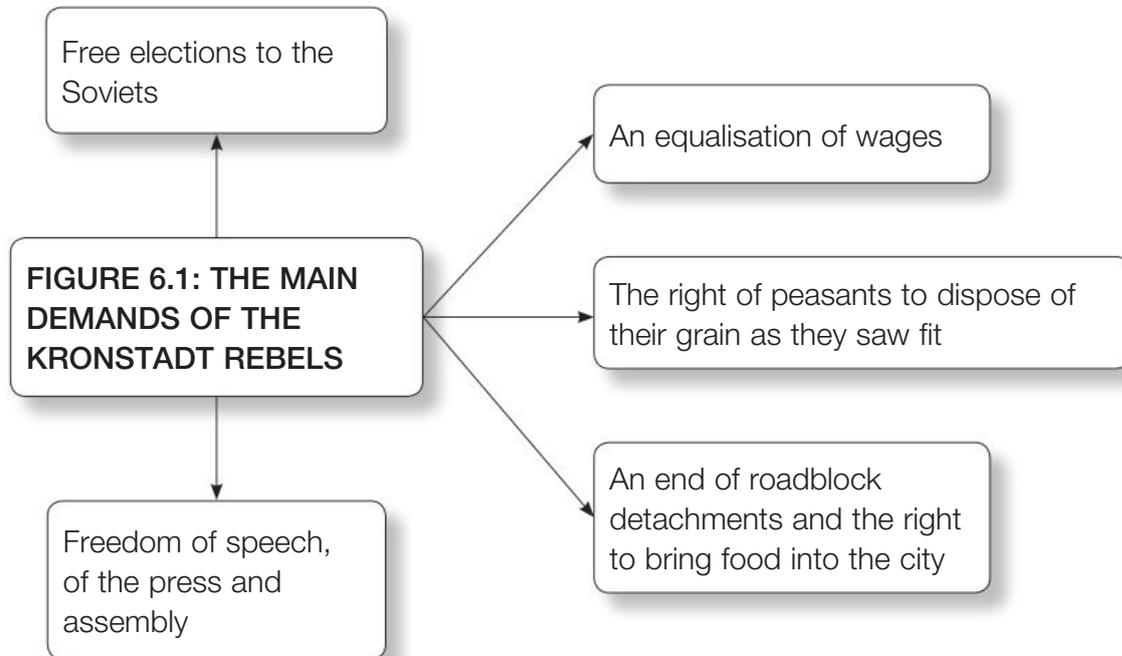
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<sup>1</sup> Japan would not completely evacuate the Far East of Russia until 1922.

<sup>2</sup> The Bolsheviks now referred to themselves as Communists.

<sup>3</sup> Cheka records showed that there had been 118 peasant revolts in 1921. Some areas of the country were too dangerous for party officials to enter.

At the end of February, the crews of the Battleships Sevastopol and Petropavlovsk called a meeting about reports they had heard of government repression of strikes in the city and elsewhere. A delegation went to investigate and reported back two days later. Angered by government actions, the sailors passed a resolution which contained 15 demands of the Communist government. These are summarised in Figure 6.1.



Trotsky saw the Kronstadt Revolt as a major threat to the party's hold on power. His response was brutal in the extreme. He sent Tukachevsky to deal with the rebels. Red Army troops made their way across the ice, followed by Cheka units to ensure there were none retreating. Up to 15 000 were killed in the suppression of the revolt. Leaders were rounded and shot without trial. Many others were sent to the labour camp that had been established in the north at Solovetsky.

Lenin had no illusions about the seriousness of Kronstadt:

*"...This was the flash which lit up reality more than anything else."*

### The background to the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP)

Kronstadt may have lit up reality for Lenin, but he would have been well aware of the signs of disaster facing his regime. Comments were being made at the time comparing 1921 with the situations preceding the revolutions of 1905 and of March 1917.

- Russia was experiencing one of the most severe famines of the century. An estimated five million people had died and emergency aid was even accepted from the United States. Parts of the country were suffering from historically bad droughts but the impact of government policy was clear.
- Between 1914 and 1920, the birth rate in Petrograd had fallen 50%; the death rate had increased four times. Diseases such as cholera and typhus were rife.

### Starvation in Russia at the end of the War Communism period



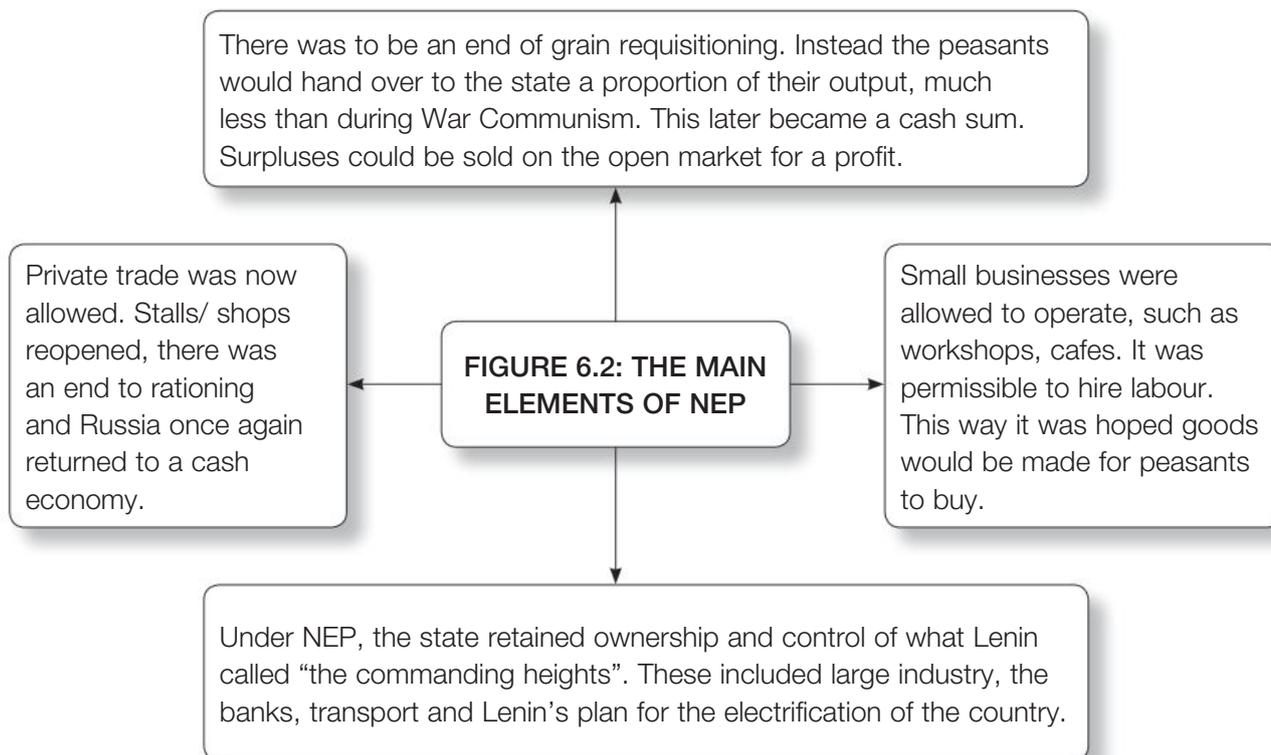
- The economic collapse of Russia was catastrophic:
  - In 1921, industrial output was about 16% of its 1912 level.
  - Mining output was 29%, oil 36% and grain 48%.
  - Transport had completely broken down.

Few party leaders had travelled around the country as much as Trotsky who had been able to witness the full impact of War Communism. He called for change as early as February 1920 but was overruled by Lenin. Trotsky then argued for increased coercion. However, following Kronstadt, Lenin realised that there had to be a dramatic change in policy.

### The introduction of the NEP

It was with some considerable reluctance that Lenin pushed for the introduction of the New Economic Policy at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. Reluctance because the step back towards capitalism which it entailed went against everything that Lenin and other party leaders believed in. The Congress made it clear that the introduction of the NEP was to be seen as temporary measure, “a tactical retreat” as Zinoviev called it. In a sense, the NEP might be seen as an economic Brest Litovsk – something unpalatable, necessary in the short term but certainly not to be seen as a long-term policy.

**Figure 6.2** The main elements of the NEP



**Exercise 6.1**

Indicate whether the following statements are true or false. Circle the correct answer.

|   |  |                             |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 1 | The sailors of the Kronstadt Naval Base had never been significant Bolshevik supporters. | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 2 | The revolts at Kronstadt and in the Tambov region were merely isolated incidents.        | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 3 | The Kronstadt rebels were seeking both significant political and economic freedoms.      | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 4 | Trotsky ordered that the revolt be put down with the utmost severity.                    | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 5 | Lenin had always been an eager supporter of the NEP.                                     | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 6 | For most Bolsheviks, the introduction of the NEP was ideologically unsound.              | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |

|    |   |                             |
|----|---|-----------------------------|
| 7  | Under the NEP, the state withdrew completely from involvement in economic matters.      | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 8  | Under the NEP, rationing remained a key feature of economic life.                       | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 9  | Under the NEP, peasants now had the freedom to sell their surpluses on the open market. | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |
| 10 | Under the NEP, permission was granted for small businesses to operate.                  | THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE |

## What was the impact of the NEP?

There was an essential series of paradoxes about the NEP. It was the saviour of the Russian economy, yet it provided Russia with no long-term solution to its future economic development. It was incredibly successful, yet it also contained the seeds of its own destruction. It proved to be the saviour of the young Communist state, yet it totally contradicted the ideological bases of communism.

The short-term results of the NEP were impressive:

- Within a year there was enough food, shops and restaurants had reopened and the country seemed to have returned to the semblance of normal social life.
- Within three years, cereal production was up almost 25%, while industrial output was up 200%.<sup>4</sup>
- Individuals were now allowed to operate in the retail area. A class of people known as “NEPmen” appeared who sought to buy up surplus goods and sell them in the markets. In a short time, NEPmen were controlling almost three quarters of urban retail trade.
- However, there was also a negative side to the NEP. The arrival of the NEPmen was accompanied with many of the evils of capitalism which the Communists had fought against.
  - Corruption was common, NEPmen were always “doing deals”, there was widespread speculation in property and manufactured goods.
  - Crime and prostitution increased.

NEP posed a major problem for the young Communist state. **It did not offer an answer to Russia’s long-term development.** In ideological terms, Russia was in the socialist stage of development which was to precede the ultimate stage of communism. Lenin knew that this stage would last a long time. Marx had a vision of a communist society based on abundance. However, Russia was very backward and so, to achieve the condition of abundance, it was necessary for Russia to modernise and industrialise. The problem with the NEP was that it was not creating the necessary capital that was essential for industrial development.

<sup>4</sup> It must be remembered that these figures were coming off a very low base.

In the early days of the revolution, the Bolsheviks had evaded the problem of a lack of capital with the belief that revolutions would ignite in Western Europe. Western socialist regimes would then assist Russia. However, apart from a few abortive attempts at revolution in Germany and Hungary, the hoped-for world-wide revolution had not happened. Russia was alone. As an isolated socialist state, Russia now also had the issue of defence to worry about. After the ravages of the Civil War, Russia was in no position to defend itself. Christian sums up the dilemma facing the Communists:

*“...Building socialism in Russia meant undertaking rapid economic growth without help from abroad, with the continual threat of foreign intervention, and in a hostile peasant environment. How could it be done?”*<sup>5</sup>

- Trotsky had flagged the dilemma Russia was facing at the 12th Party Congress in 1923. He referred to what was to become known as the “scissors crisis”.
  - The prices of urban produced industrial products were going up (due to poor production techniques, lack of economies of scale) while the prices of rural agricultural goods were falling (due to increased peasant productivity after the end of War Communism).
  - Faced with high-priced, often low-quality consumer goods coming out of the cities, the peasants were limiting or hoarding their output.

After two years of the NEP, Trotsky understood that industrial growth was still a long way behind the recovery in agriculture. He understood that the “scissors” that had opened up between urban and rural prices:

*“...threatened to cut the economic and political ties between city and countryside. The peasants would stop hoarding much of their surplus and sell it instead only if the ‘scissors’ were closed.”*<sup>6</sup>

However, as peasants still made up the vast majority of the population, it was clear that it was in the rural sector that sources of capital would have to be found for industrial development.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as peasants limited their output, so Russia’s main source of capital was drying up.

<sup>5</sup> Christian, D, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1986, p 187

<sup>6</sup> Segal, R, *The Tragedy of Leon Trotsky*, Hutchinson, London, 1979, p 269

<sup>7</sup> Pre-war Russia had been able to rely on foreign loans and recycled profits from capitalist enterprises. Neither of these sources of capital was available to the Communists in the 1920s.

**Exercise 6.2**

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | What was the short-term impact of the NEP?        |  |
| 2 | Who were the NEPmen?                              |  |
| 3 | Why did many NEPmen become unpopular in Russia?   |  |
| 4 | What was the “scissors” crisis?                   |  |
| 5 | What was the main long-term problem with the NEP? |  |

### What do the historians think about The New Economic Policy (NEP)?

#### 1. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union since 1917*

McCauley makes the basic point that if War Communism had been a leap into the world of socialism, then the NEP was a leap out of it. He points out that the party leadership accepted the NEP as a necessary evil while the lower levels of the party were unhappy with this ideological retreat. No matter how the leadership might try to paint the NEP, and praise the continuing control of the “commanding heights”, McCauley says the capitalist nature of the NEP could not be masked.

*“...At first the peasants paid a tax in kind but with the stabilisation of the currency in 1923, this could be paid in money – Soviet Russia was back to a money economy.”*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 48

## 2. Ronald Segal: *The Tragedy of Leon Trotsky*

Segal concedes that the NEP recorded rapid successes. Harvest yields were up and industrial production levels were gradually recovering. Private trade was flourishing in the streets. However, Segal also points out that there was also a much darker side to the NEP. Credits were given to enterprises on the basis of its profitable employment. Thus, enterprises tried to cut labour costs to get the credits. This swelled the rate of urban unemployment. Eager to exploit the system, some people acted corruptly as agents of state enterprises and made quick fortunes in the process. Segal paraphrases the Menshevik leader Dan, released from prison during the time of the NEP who found a Moscow:

*“... in which speculators seemed to be everywhere; shops stocked luxuries beyond the reach of any but the rich; and prostitutes were once more plying their trade.”*<sup>9</sup>

## 3. Boris Pasternak: *Doctor Zhivago* 10

Though parts of Pasternak's novel were written as early as the 1920s, it was not published until the mid-1950s. Pasternak won the Nobel Prize for literature for his efforts. Soviet authorities in the 1950s frowned on Pasternak's work as it brought out too many uncomfortable truths about the Soviet past, and it was not to be published inside Russia until the 1980s. The book was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and first published in Italy. Pasternak questions many of the values and beliefs that came out of the Russian Revolution. He uses his characters to highlight the contradictions of Bolshevik Russia and to show the state of Russia in the early 1920s. In the extract below, Zhivago has just read a party newspaper report:

*“...How lucky to be so blind!... To be able to talk of bread when it has long since vanished from the earth! Of propertied classes and speculators when they have long since been abolished by decree!... What kind of people must they be to go on raving with this never cooling, feverish ardour, year in, year out, of things which are non-existent, of themes which have long vanished, and to know nothing, to see nothing, of the reality which surrounds them?”*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Segal, R, *The Tragedy of Leon Trotsky*, Hutchinson, London, 1979, p 251

<sup>10</sup> Students probably will not have time to read *Dr Zhivago* which is a great loss. However, the oscar-winning film is well-worth seeing. It succeeds in highlighting many aspects of Russia history from just before 1914 into the 1920s in a spectacular and dramatic fashion. It also tells the story of one of cinema's great romances!

<sup>11</sup> Pasternak, B, *Doctor Zhivago*, Collins, London, 1958, p 374

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# ADVICE ON WRITING ESSAYS

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(These comments should be re-read when approaching the sections called ESSAYS 1, ESSAYS 2, ESSAYS 3 and ESSAYS 4.)

## Introduction to essay writing

People who have been marking the HSC for a few years can read an essay and with little hesitation can say “that’s a ‘B’ level answer, 16/ 25, or that’s a ‘mid-A’ range answer, 23/ 25, or this is ‘D’ answer, 8/ 25. HSC markers do occasionally disagree about answers but once they share their disagreements, the value of the essay becomes clear. It is one of the comforting things about how Modern History is marked at the HSC, that the legendary level of accuracy is almost scientific.

The reason for this is that essay writing is both a literary and a scientific skill. There is no mystery in writing a good essay. Certainly, some people are better writers than others: they might have a wider vocabulary, they might know more, they might have a better turn of phrase, they might be smarter and so understand the issues more clearly. However, everyone can come to terms with the basics and write a reasonable essay.

## *So, what makes for a successful essay?*

1. **Answer the question.** This sounds almost trite and an insult to the intelligence, but the majority of responses presented in the HSC which score poorly, do so because they do not answer the question. Failing to answer the question can be done in a variety of ways. In summary it can happen because:

a. A student fails to address the issues presented in the question, ie he or she decides to write about something else. For example, in the essay:

*How important was the NEP in the consolidation of Bolshevik power?*

A student decides to argue that:

- the NEP had nothing to do with the collapse of the consolidation of Bolshevik power;
- it was the result of the policy of War Communism and Trotsky’s skilful leadership during the Civil War.

A nice line of argument, but it is not answering the question. The student could argue the ‘War Communism/ Trotsky’ line, but above all he needs to deal with the issue of the NEP, even if it is to show that the NEP was not an important factor. He cannot simply ignore the focus of the question because he wants to write about something else.

- he could argue that yes, the NEP was important in bringing about the consolidation of Bolshevik power, and show why this is so, and then argue “but of course other factors were also of importance such as.....”
  - as a rule of thumb: if you are going to pursue this style of argument, make sure that about half of your essay deals with the subject of the question, in this case the NEP

b. A student writes about the issues presented in the question, but instead of providing an argument to answer the question, they simply 'narrate' or 'tell a story'. For example, in the essay:

*How important was the NEP in the consolidation of Bolshevik power?*

A student fails to present an argument, instead she simply narrates:

- she might describe the main aspects of the NEP;
- she might even go on to show some of the results of the NEP.

This is all relevant, factual detail but she is merely telling a story and not presenting an argument which is showing how important the NEP was in the consolidation of Bolshevik power.

c. A student does not really understand the question and has so little factual detail they are unable to sustain even a narrative response.

d. A student does understand the question and attempts an argument but has so little factual detail that the argument cannot be sustained.

'c' and 'd' can only be fixed up with solid work and revision on the part of the student; 'a' and 'b' can be learned.

2. **Provide an argument in your introduction** which will form the basis of the essay. The introduction is the most important paragraph of the essay; if it is written properly it should leave the marker in no doubt what is going to come up in the essay. So, what does a good introduction involve?

a. Avoid the dramatic 'setting the scene' method. For example, in the essay:

*How important was the NEP in the consolidation of Bolshevik power?*

A student should avoid opening like this:

- Before the NEP, the Russian people were living in a country where starvation and the stench of death stalked the land. Red and White armies roamed the countryside, terrorising the people. As mothers tried to keep their families alive, Cheka-backed food detachments grabbed the food from their children's mouths.....

b. Avoid providing lots of factual detail in the introduction. Introduce the broad areas you will discuss but leave the detail to the body of the essay. For example, in the essay:

*How important was the NEP in the consolidation of Bolshevik power?*

This is not a good introduction:

- The NEP, which stands for New Economic Policy and was introduced at the time of the 10th Party Congress of 1921, returned Russia to capitalism. It allowed peasants to sell surplus food on the open market and it also provided for the opening of shops and small businesses which gave an opening to NEP men to.....

c. Be careful with length. Three lines is not an introduction, no argument can be properly introduced in such a small space. However, a page and half is too long. With average sized writing, 6-8 lines should be enough to present the argument of the essay.

d. Present an argument in your introduction. There is no ‘right’ answer to a Modern History essay question; the right answer is the argument which you have presented, logically developed and backed up with detailed factual evidence. For example, for the essay:

*How important was the NEP in the consolidation of Bolshevik power?*

A student might try to argue:

- The NEP was of fundamental importance in the consolidation of Bolshevik power. Lenin’s resolution, Trotsky’s skill, and divisions amongst the Whites had helped the Bolsheviks emerge victorious from the Civil War. However, War Communism had left Russia shattered economically, left millions starving and presented the Bolsheviks with an alienated peasant population. It was NEP which restored the economy, made it possible for Russia to feed itself and which removed the final pockets of opposition to Bolshevik rule.

3. **Provide your essay with a structure.** Your introduction should show where the essay will lead, eg the above introduction might lead to the following structure:

- some points about Lenin’s role, his ruthlessness and his willingness to do whatever it took to ensure Bolshevik success, Trotsky’s military skills and the Bolshevik military success in the Civil War;
- the impact of War Communism, its role in bringing victory, the disastrous state in which it left Russia and the revolts it caused which made NEP necessary;
- some narrative detail about the elements of NEP;
- evidence to show the how NEP managed to revive the Russian economy;
- the political impact of NEP, the removal of all opposition and strengthening of party control;
- conclusion: The NEP was crucial in the Bolshevik consolidation of power. Despite their victory in the Civil War with the Whites, the Bolsheviks might well have found themselves unable to hold on to power in the desperate situation they faced in 1921 had it not been for the NEP. Thanks to the NEP the Russian people survived, the economy was revitalised and the Bolsheviks achieved unopposed political supremacy.

(NB: this is only one of a hundred ways of dealing with this question)

4. **Structure paragraphs carefully.** Some simple rules:

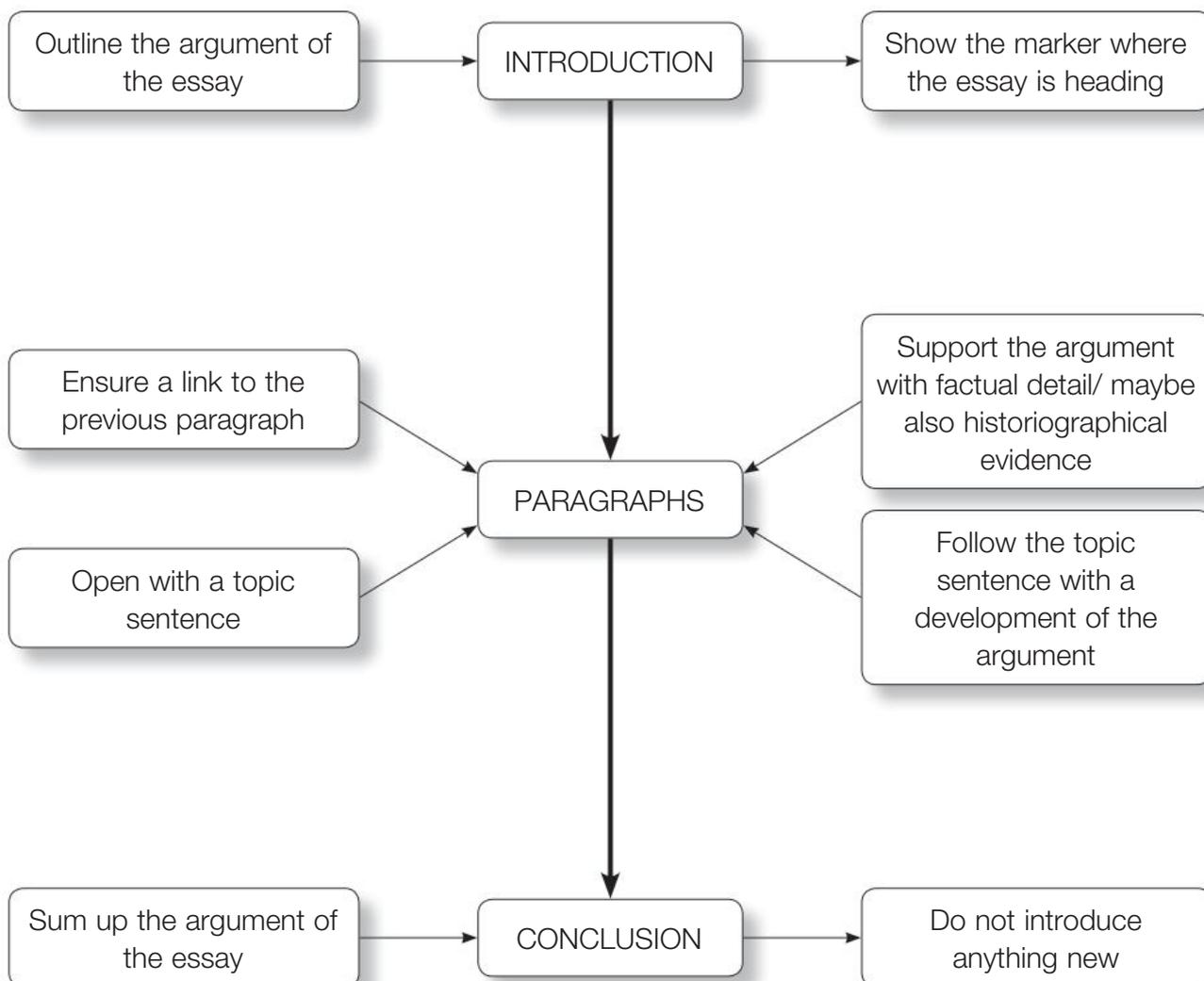
- open with a topic sentence which outlines what the paragraph is going to be about;
- develop the argument presented in the topic sentence;
- support the argument with specific factual detail;
- if appropriate, support the detail with historiographical evidence;
- link your paragraphs – this can be achieved easily with certain stock phrases, eg:
  - “not only was ‘x’ of significance but ‘y’ also had an impact....”
  - “in addition to “a and b”, “c and d” were also to benefit from.....”
  - “in contrast to “e”, “f” reacted quite differently....”

NB: Do not open paragraphs with historiography. The aim should be for the student to show the marker what he knows. Therefore, open with your ideas, back it up with factual detail and then, if appropriate, back up your idea with what a historian has said:

- argument>detail>(maybe) historians' ideas;
- do not name drop for the sake of it – markers are not fooled or impressed by having lots of historians' names dropped into an essay when their books have almost certainly never been looked at;
- Fewer historians mentioned is better than lots.

NB: Do not quote, paraphrase! This shows that you understand what the historian is saying; giving a three-line quotation merely shows you have remembered a three-line quotation, whereas paraphrasing the historian's view in your own words shows that you have understood what you are writing about. The occasional pithy quote of just a few words can be effective.

The diagram below sums up some of the main ideas that have been discussed in this section.



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# ESSAYS 1

## Bolshevik Consolidation of Power

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The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the survey section of the syllabus: Bolshevik Consolidation of Power. These outlines are not presented as the 'be all and end all' responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a 'first draft response' to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author's head as he thought about each question?

### Essay No 1

*“Assess the importance of ideology on the early policies of the Bolshevik regime.”*

“Assess” questions expect the student to provide a judgment about the issue presented in the question. Consequently, this question provides certain pitfalls about which students should be aware.

- It is not enough to simply describe the early policies of the Bolshevik regime. A student might be tempted to:
  - run through the early decrees
  - describe the early populist measures
  - move on to talk about War Communism
  - then describe the policies connected to NEP
  - make mention of the growing authoritarian developments

Such a response would be a purely descriptive/ narrative response and would be unlikely to score more than 15/ 25. Some inadvertent assessment might slip it into a 'low B' range answer.

There is also the issue of the term “early” to consider. Does this mean:

- the pre-Civil War period, November 1917-June 1918?
- the period to early 1921 which would include “War Communism”?
- the period of NEP as well?

There is no fast and hard rule here. Too narrow a period could make it hard for a student to provide a wide enough range of material, too wide a period (into the 1930s) would make it difficult to provide depth to the argument. For the purpose of the question, students would be advised to cover the period from the November Revolution to the death of Lenin (1924).

An argument is required from the start which provides an “assessment” of the role of ideology. Clearly, ideology was of major importance for the Bolsheviks – their whole reason for being is to create a new society based on a particular ideology. It was always uppermost in their thinking and policies. However, the Bolsheviks were always ready to compromise on ideology if practical politics made it necessary.

Students need to show that they have some understanding of the notion of ideology. A brief account of ideological goals would be useful without going into a full-blown account of Marxism-Leninism.

In the early days, ideology and populist policies combined to see the Bolsheviks pass a series of popular measures:

- refer to democratic measures for labour, the army
- promotion of class warfare, measures to break the power of the old elites such as the church and the army, measures to achieve female equality all suggest the primacy of ideological goals
- however, though the land decree was popular it could be argued it went against Bolshevik ideological goals as private ownership of land was clearly not a socialist aim

During the Civil War, the policy of War Communism was pursued:

- it could be argued that ideology ruled during this period
- state control and ownership of the means of production and distribution and the end of private ownership – provide details to back this up
- was this the period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat? – place War Communism in the context of Marxist historical development
- however, it could also be argued that in a pure sense War Communism went against ideological goals as far from the state “withering away” it was being reinforced.

The post-Civil War period saw the rejection of ideological goals for the purpose of practical politics.

- The country was on its knees and needed reviving – hence the return to some capitalism in the form of NEP.
- Provide details of NEP to show how it negated Bolshevik ideology.

Conclusion: the Bolsheviks’ prime aim was the maintenance of power. Though ideology was a key determinant of early policies, they were quick to compromise ideological goals if the situation made it necessary.

## Essay No 2

### *“Account for the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War”.*

This is a much more straightforward question but it does also contain certain traps.

- Students need to avoid slipping into a straight narrative of the main events of the Civil War.
- It is also not a good idea to simply give a list of twenty reasons, though such an approach is better than a descriptive/ narrative one.
- The time frame for the question poses no problem, the period referred to is clearly 1918 to late 1920/ early 1921.

Students will want to show their wide understanding of the factors that led to a Bolshevik victory but they are advised to do this by developing a solid line of argument. The following approaches might be considered for this question.

1. The Bolshevik victory in the Civil War was a primarily military one:
  - refer to Trotsky's organisation of the Red Army
  - his reversal of the early democratic army measures and his ruthlessness
  - the Bolsheviks' willingness to effectively militarise the economy
  - the military expertise of the Reds can then be contrasted with the ineptitude, disunity and disorganisation of the whites.
  - then students might bring in other factors which helped the Bolshevik victory, eg geography.
  
2. The Bolsheviks did not so much win the Civil War; the Whites lost it. The focus here is on the failures of the Whites
  - refer to their political divisions
  - military divisions and rivalry between the various commanders
  - the failure of allied intervention
  - students can then bring in other factors which also contributed to the Bolshevik victory such as superior Red Army organisation and tactics, geography etc.
  
3. The Bolshevik victory was primarily the result of the Whites' failure to offer a better future alternative for Russia to the Russian people than the Bolsheviks were able to do:
  - discuss the composition of White forces
  - consider their ideological aims, the idea that a White victory meant a step into the past
  - peasants and workers saw a White victory as a return to the days of landlords, bosses and a brutal army
  - despite the privations of War Communism, a Red victory in the Civil War was the best chance of avoiding a reversal of the gains of the revolution
  - refer to the Reds' effective use of propaganda here

### Essay No 3

#### *"To what extent did the Bolsheviks sacrifice ideology for power?"*

This question is similar to Essay No 1 but allows for a slightly different approach. As with most "to what extent" questions, three possible approaches are possible:

1. Agree completely with the question and argue yes, the Bolsheviks were only concerned with power. They were always willing to give up their ideological goals in order to hold on to power.
2. Disagree completely with the question and argue no, the Bolsheviks were ideologically motivated and they did their utmost to remain true to their ideological goals.
3. Take a middle path and argue that though the Bolsheviks had sincere ideological goals, they were willing to sacrifice them if the situation demanded it. This is the line that fits closely with Essay No 1.

Most responses to “to what extent” questions tend to follow the third approach. However, let us try and present an argument to back up the first approach.

From 1917 onwards, the Bolsheviks were concerned only with power – attaining it and holding on to it. Consequently, they were willing to sacrifice their ideological goals for power. This can be seen as Lenin corrupted Marxist thinking to justify a socialist revolution, in the Bolsheviks’ support for peasant land seizures to the return to capitalism with the NEP in 1921.

Open up with a brief discussion of Marxist thinking on the nature of history. Marx argued that following the class struggle during the capitalist stage, society would move into the period of socialism on the way to idealistic communism.

- It could be argued that Lenin corrupted this thinking.
  - Russia was not suited to a socialist revolution because of its backwardness but Lenin was obsessed with taking power and so changed Marxist views to justify his party taking power.
  - Refer to Lenin’s view on the role of the party leading Russia’s small proletariat in a revolution which would spark revolutions in more developed countries.
- During the Bolsheviks’ early days, Lenin was concerned only with maintaining his tenuous hold on power:
  - He supported peasant land seizures though private ownership of land hardly fits with socialist thinking. This was done merely to keep peasant support for the revolution.
  - Lenin argued against annexations and indemnities in international peace treaties but willingly accepted Brest Litovsk as he believed failure to achieve peace with Germany would mean defeat at home.
- The policies of War Communism arguably were in line with socialist thinking as the state took control of production and distribution within the economy.
  - Was this done due to ideological belief or was it forced upon the Bolsheviks by the demands of the Civil War?
  - Opposing this could be the view that War Communism actually represented the period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.
- Though victorious in the Civil War, the Bolsheviks inherited a Russia in a disastrous situation in 1921.
  - Revolts at Kronstadt and in Tambov were danger signs for the Bolsheviks – explain this idea.
  - As a result, Lenin was willing to almost totally discard ideology and revive capitalist policies in the NEP in order for the country to recover. Why? Because failure to do this would have led to massive internal unrest and the possibility of further anti-Bolsheviks revolts.
  - Far from the state withering away as Marxism envisaged, the Bolsheviks steadily concentrated more and more power in their hands and strengthened the powers of the state.

Conclusion: from the start ideology was manipulated, employed or totally ignored by the Bolsheviks if such actions were necessary for the achievement and ongoing maintenance of power.

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**Focus of Study (1)**  
**The Bolsheviks and the power struggle following the death of Lenin**

**Chapter Seven**  
**The impact of the Bolshevik consolidation of power**

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The impact of the Bolshevik consolidation of power was both immediate and long-term. In the long-term, of course, it would see the development of the Soviet system under the rule of Stalin. Communist control of the Soviet Union would continue until the collapse of the regime in 1991.

The immediate impact included:

- The destruction of all political opposition to the Bolsheviks within the country as a result of the Red Army's victory in the Civil War. Pockets of small-scale resistance would continue into the late 1920s but these would eventually be overcome and posed no risk to the regime.
- Victory had come at a high price, as was explained in Chapter Six. Starvation stalked the land. War Communism had played a major role in the Communist victory but at a great economic cost. It was this that persuaded Lenin to introduce the New Economic Policy at the 10th Party Congress in 1921.

The consolidation of Bolshevik power also had an impact on the politics and security of the regime.

### **The tightening up of political control**

Historians still debate the issue of the evolution of the Bolshevik regime into a brutal dictatorship. Was this development inherent in the nature of communist ideology or was it thrust upon the party by circumstance? This is not the place to digress into a complex historiographical debate. However, in a short time the party did change from an open forum of free-flowing discussion to one that demanded a rigid acceptance of the party line. The roots of Stalin's dictatorship are to be found in the early 1920s.

By the time of Lenin's death (1924), Russia had become a one-party dictatorship that allowed no opposition.

- The party dominated the government and all key decisions were made in the party Politburo.
- The party was no longer democratic.
- Instead it had become a highly centralized, bureaucratic and hierarchical organization.
  - However, it should be pointed out that the further one moved away from Moscow, the looser was party control and the more independently local Soviets and party organisations behaved.

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<sup>1</sup> This theme will be covered in much greater detail in Chapters 8 and 9.

*Several steps had been taken which led to this situation.*

- By 1921, the situation in the country had become so bad that major intra-party division was occurring. One of the major opposition groups was called The Workers Opposition.
  - It was led by Alexander Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai.
  - The Workers Opposition called for more workers' control, less militarisation of society and they opposed Trotsky's idea of making the trades unions organs of state.
  - They sought a return to the freer days of early 1918.
- Lenin was greatly angered by these divisions. At the 10th Party Congress in 1921, he called for a ban on such "factionalism".
  - It was decided that once the party had accepted a policy, all party members had to accept that policy and were not allowed to campaign against it.
  - The price of opposition would be expulsion from the party.
- At the same time as the ban on factions was being enforced, the "Nomenklatura system" was being put into place.
  - This was a system by which all key party/ government jobs were allocated by the party.
  - The key to gaining a post in the Nomenklatura system was loyalty, not talent.
  - In time the Nomenklatura system led to the development of a party elite.<sup>2</sup>

*There were other developments which pointed to the strengthening of dictatorship.*

- In the early 1920s, several intellectual critics were deported.
- All publications had to have the party seal of approval before publication by being examined by the Main Administration of Affairs of Literature and Publication.
- "Show Trials" became a key feature of Stalin's rule in the 1930s. However, the first of the party's "Show Trials" came in 1921 which led to the execution of eleven Socialist Revolutionaries.
- The party tightened its pressure on the church seen in the creation of Union of the Militant Godless in 1921 which permitted the pillaging and expropriation of church property.

### *From the Cheka to the GPU*

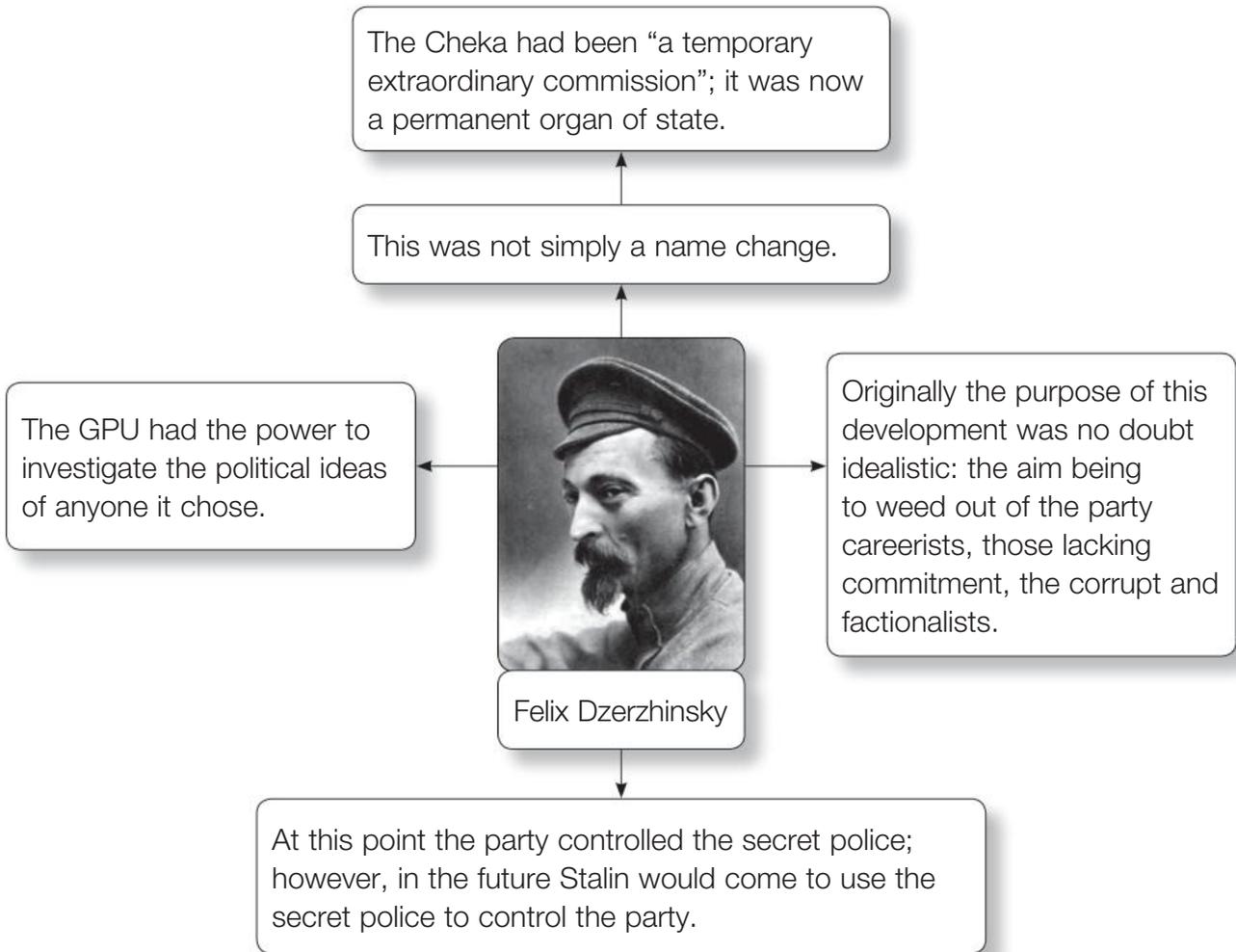
In 1922 a most significant development occurred. **The Cheka became the GPU** – the Political Administration of the State.

The significance of this change is summarised in Figure 7.1.

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<sup>2</sup> Stalin was to use this development to consolidate his power after he became General Secretary in 1922.

*Figure 7.1 From the Cheka to the GPU*



**Exercise 7.1**

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | What was the Workers Opposition?  |  |
| 2 | What decision was made at the 10th Party Congress regarding intra-party opposition? |  |
| 3 | How did the Nomenklatura system help to consolidate the party's control?            |  |
| 4 | What was happening to freedom of expression inside Russia in the early 1920s?       |  |
| 5 | What happened to the Cheka?   |  |

## The creation of the USSR

With the signing of the ‘Treaty on the Creation of the USSR’ in December 1922, “Russia” became the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republic”, or “the Soviet Union”. In 1922, the USSR was made up of your republics:

- The Russian SFSR (Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)
- The Transcaucasian SFSR (comprising Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan)
- The Ukrainian SSR
- The Byelorussian SSR

By late 1940, the USSR had grown from four to fifteen republics. It would continue in existence until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### Exercise 7.2

Place the events listed on the left in the correct chronological order.

|            |  |                                     |
|------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1st event  |  | The death of Lenin                  |
| 2nd event  |  | Introduction of War Communism       |
| 3rd event  |  | Collapse of the Soviet Union        |
| 4th event  |  | Creation of the GPU                 |
| 5th event  |  | Introduction of NEP                 |
| 6th event  |  | Creation of the USSR                |
| 7th event  |  | Time of open, free party discussion |
| 8th event  |  | The USSR becomes fifteen republics  |
| 9th event  |  | The Kronstadt Revolt                |
| 10th event |  | The 10th Party Congress opens       |

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# Chapter Eight

## Power struggle between Trotsky, Stalin and other leading Bolshevik figures in the 1920s

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### CHAPTERS 8 and 9: AN EXPLANATION

The material to be covered in Chapters 8 and 9 covers common ground. Consequently, some points will appear in both chapters. In order to maintain the syllabus focus, the following approach will be taken:

- Chapter 8 will take an essentially narrative/ chronological approach. Its purpose will be to merely “tell the story” as far as possible, with the minimum of analysis. There will be no specific “What do the historians have to say?” section in Chapter 7.
- Chapter 9 will assume knowledge of the narrative and will attempt to provide some analytical detail and the views of various historians.

### The Death of Lenin

On 30 August 1918, Lenin gave a speech to workers at the Michelson factory in Moscow. Earlier in the day, the head of the Petrograd Cheka, Uritsky, had been assassinated. Lenin refused appeals to stay home and continued his speaking engagements. When he had finished his speech, Lenin answered a few questions. He then turned to enter his car when three shots were fired; two bullets hit Lenin.<sup>1</sup> Distrusting the possible political affiliations of hospital doctors, Lenin’s chauffeur quickly drove him home. Lenin was lucky; the bullets missed his heart and any arteries. This is important because it took quite a while before doctors were at his side. Lenin survived the shooting and was quickly on the mend. The bullets remained in his body.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin’s final years were difficult. He suffered from severe headaches and insomnia; today we might recognise these as stress-related ailments. In the final two years of his life he suffered three strokes. By late 1923, he was having difficulty moving, and even speaking. Lenin suffered a final stroke on the morning of 24 January, 1924 and he died later that day.

*“...The autopsy was to reveal that he had suffered all along from an advanced cerebral arteriosclerosis. <sup>3</sup> To the last the organism struggled against the inevitable end.” <sup>4</sup>*

### The succession

Though Lenin had been ill for some time, no procedures had been put in place for deciding on his successor. Some in the party believed that there would be a form of collective leadership while others believed an individual would take over, most probably Trotsky. Lenin himself had not indicated who should follow him. In his last will and testament, he made comments about

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1 The would-be assassin was Fanny Kaplan. Cheka records of her interrogation indicate that she was probably insane and Soviet authorities could not link her to any political organisation. She was shot without a trial. However, her action sparked a wave of red terror against potential enemies.

2 One of the bullets was removed in 1922.

3 Cerebral arteriosclerosis is a blockage of the arteries in the brain that occurs as a result of thickening and hardening of the artery

4 Ulam, A, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Collins, London, 1965, p 762

several leading party figures, both positive and negative, but did not decisively indicate one person to assume the leadership. One clear opinion Lenin did make in his will was his growing distaste for Stalin. Had Lenin's will been openly published, Stalin's political future would have been gravely in doubt.<sup>5</sup>

There were several possible candidates for the leadership.



**Trotsky** seemed most likely to follow Lenin – charismatic, intelligent, admired by Lenin and largely responsible for the Red victory in the Civil War. He was disliked by many in the party for his arrogance.



**Zinoviev** had opposed Lenin's call for the seizure of power in 1917 and had not distinguished himself in the Civil War. However, as the boss of the Petrograd party, he had a strong party support base.



**Kamenev** had opposed Lenin's call for the seizure of power in 1917. He had the Moscow party machine behind him, had been with Lenin from the start and had been Lenin's deputy for a while.



**Bukharin** was one of the younger party leaders and was very popular with party members. Lenin had admired Bukharin as a Marxist theorist.



**Stalin** seemed the least likely to assume the leadership. Taciturn, and lacking charisma, Stalin was not liked by Lenin. However, he had built up a powerful power base in the party bureaucracy.

### Stalin slips in “under the radar”

Power had already moved from Lenin's grasp long before he died in January 1924. When viewing the Russian political landscape during those final months of Lenin's life, Isaac Deutscher makes the following comment:

*“...Two years after the end of the Civil War Russian society already lived under Stalin's virtual rule, without being aware of the ruler's name.”*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The will and how it was handled were crucial factors in the post-Lenin struggle for power. (This will be covered in Chapter 9).

<sup>6</sup> Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 232

By the time of Lenin’s death, Stalin had accumulated an enormous amount of power and influence within the party. By 1922, Stalin had become:

- Commissar of Nationalities
- Commissar of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate
- A member of the ruling Politburo
- “...the only permanent liaison officer between the Politburo and the Orgbureau (Organisation Bureau).”<sup>7</sup>
- General Secretary of the Communist Party

Stalin’s party roles were to be of crucial importance in the post-Lenin struggle for power (see Chapter 9). However, most party figures never saw Stalin as a potential party leader. He was a “grey blur”, a bureaucratic back-room party hack doing essential but unexciting work for the party. It was Trotsky, the charismatic Commissar of War, Red Army hero who was most expected to follow Lenin. This worked against Trotsky and in Stalin’s favour.

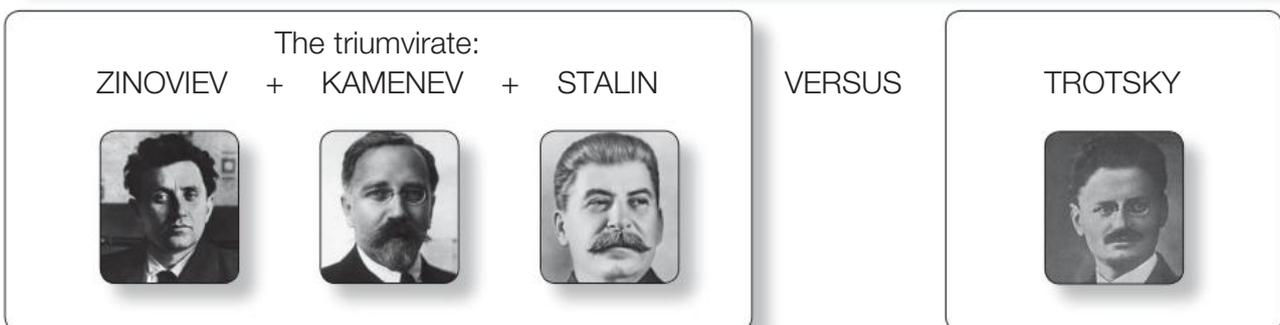
- Trotsky was admired, but also envied, distrusted and hated by many because of his arrogance and his contemptuous attitude to those whom he deemed to be his intellectual inferiors.
- Stalin was totally underestimated by his party colleagues. Few party members held Stalin in high regard but equally few feared him or suspected him of having aspirations for the top job.

Recent accounts of the struggle for power have taken issue with Deutscher’s view. The Russia historian, Oleg Khlevniuk, in his biography of Stalin suggests that Politburo members recognized Stalin’s strengths and shared Lenin’s concerns about him.

Robert Service argues a similar line, suggesting that Stalin’s taking the lead in the attack on Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress indicated the high regard in which he was held by other party figures.

**Figure 8.1: The Triumvirate**

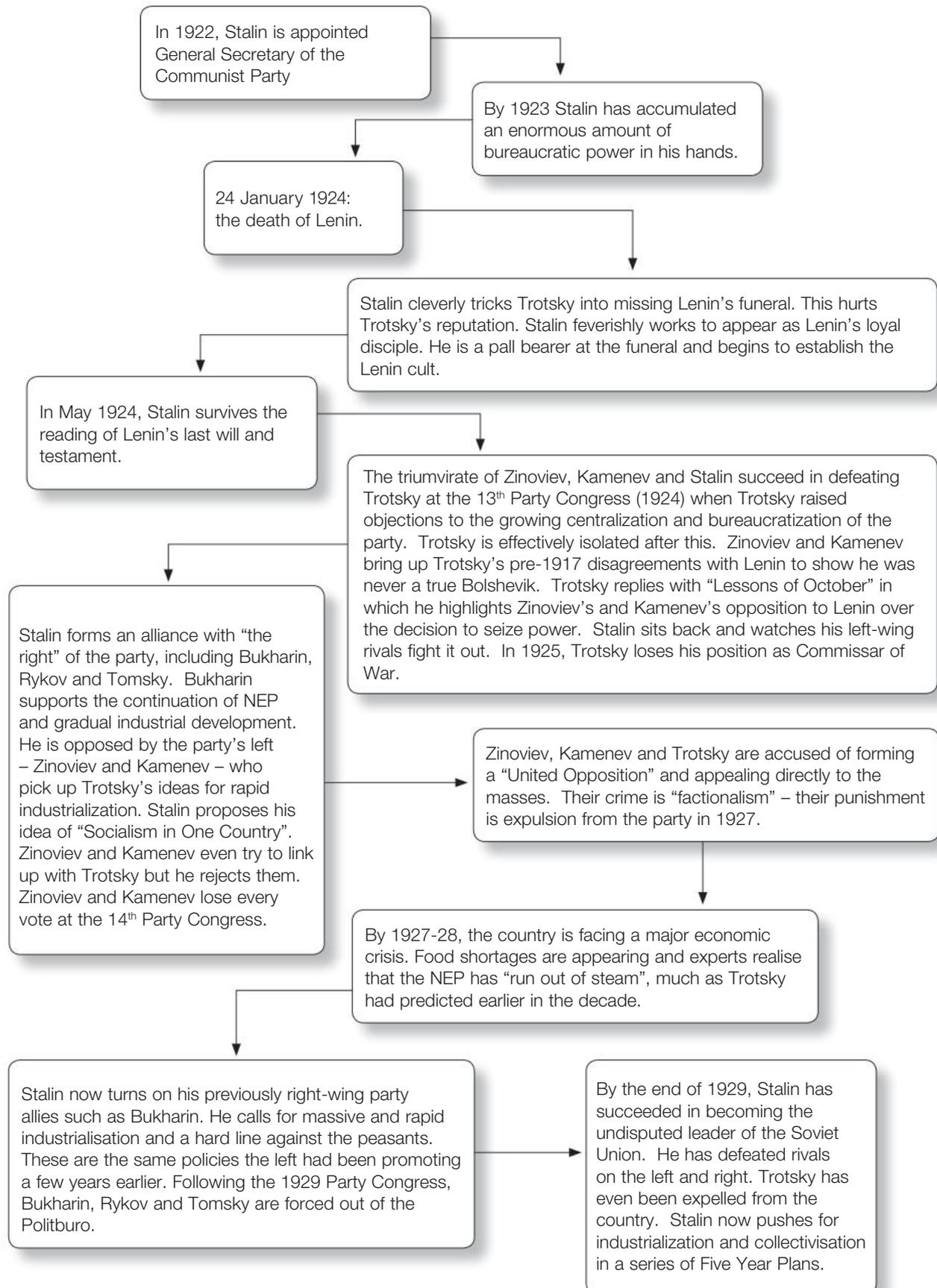
As early as 1923, suspicions about Trotsky’s dictatorial ambitions led to the creation of a “triumvirate” designed to keep Trotsky out of the top job



<sup>7</sup> Deutscher, p 235

**Figure 8.2: The struggle for power**

The significance of each of the following stages in the power struggle will be analysed more fully in Chapter 9. Figure 8.2 is aimed at providing a brief narrative overview.



## Immediate aftermath of the power struggle

By the end of the 1920s, Stalin was totally in control of the party.

- His main rival Trotsky had not only been expelled from the party but in 1929 was exiled from the Soviet Union. He eventually ended up in Mexico.<sup>8</sup>
- Other leading figures were removed from the Politburo and also expelled from the party.
- Expulsion from the party was not seen as a permanent punishment, and those expelled were often allowed back in.
- Stalin was now able to fill all key party positions with his own appointments, men and women who owed their careers to him.
- Stalin was also tightening his grip on the GPU (see Chapter 12).
- It was now full steam ahead in the pursuit of the modernisation and industrialisation of the Soviet Union, and the goal of catching up the west within ten years!

### Exercise 8.1

How well have you understood the narrative? Here is a detailed chronological exercise which includes information from this and earlier chapters. Rearrange the following events into the correct chronological order. Write each event in the space provided on the next page.

- Stalin turns on the left, and allies with Bukharin
- the October Revolution
- introduction of NEP
- Bolshevik victory in the Civil War
- Stalin survives reading of Lenin's will
- Lenin is shot
- Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky lose their party posts
- Stalin appointed General Secretary
- Stalin emerges triumphant in the party
- Treaty of Brest Litovsk
- the death of Lenin
- triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin defeats Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress
- Stalin turns on his right-wing allies
- the Kronstadt Revolt
- Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky expelled from the party
- Trotsky misses Lenin's funeral

<sup>8</sup> Trotsky was eventually murdered in Mexico in 1940 by one of Stalin's secret police agents.

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 1st event  |  |
| 2nd event  |  |
| 3rd event  |  |
| 4th event  |  |
| 5th event  |  |
| 6th event  |  |
| 7th event  |  |
| 8th event  |  |
| 9th event  |  |
| 10th event |  |
| 11th event |  |
| 12th event |  |
| 13th event |  |
| 14th event |  |
| 15th event |  |
| 16th event |  |

# Chapter Nine

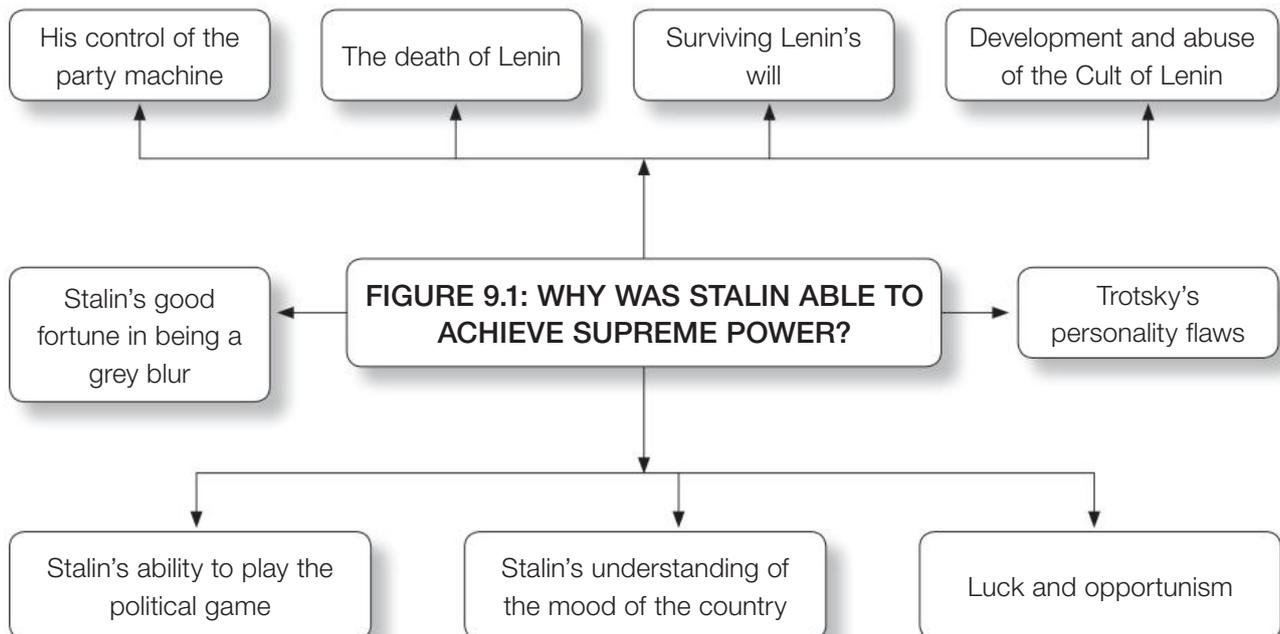
## Reasons for the triumph of Stalin as leader of the USSR

In the early 1920s, few in the Soviet Union would have believed that within less than a decade Stalin would have become the undisputed leader of the country. Nikolai Sukhanov described Stalin at the time as “a grey blur which flickered obscurely and left no trace.”<sup>1</sup> His colleagues were often contemptuous of him, even mocking his Georgian accented Russian. Yet it was Stalin who triumphed! It is unlikely that Stalin had a carefully worked out plan for his rise to power; History rarely works in such ways. However, it is certain that he was driven by a desire to protect his position and make himself a key player in the party. Stalin was an opportunist, driven more by a desire to thwart rivals than relentlessly pursue the leadership of the party. Here is one view of how it happened:

*“...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.”<sup>2</sup>*

The purpose of this chapter will be to analyse some of the issues which were raised in Chapter 8. The aim is to answer “the why” Stalin was able to achieve supreme power, not “the how”. Figure 9.1 summarises the key ideas which will be followed in this section.

**Figure 9.1: Why was Stalin able to achieve supreme power?**



<sup>1</sup> Sukhanov was a Socialist Revolutionary who had been a member of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917. After November 1917, he became a critic of the Bolshevik government. Stalin had him shot in August 1939.

<sup>2</sup> Westwood, J N, *Endurance and Endeavour*, OUP, Oxford, 1973, p 287

## 1. Stalin's control of the party machine.

Russia was quickly evolving into a one-party dictatorship. No other political parties were allowed to exist, no opposing views were permitted and the major decisions affecting the country were made in the party Politburo. The party controlled the nation. Thus, it logically follows that whoever controls the party, controls the nation. Stalin recognised that in order to control the party, one did not have to be its leading light to whom all looked up with admiration and for guidance. This was how many party figures behaved towards Lenin. Some party figures, such as Zinoviev, even went to the extent of try to ape Lenin's handwriting. This was not Stalin's style.

Stalin knew that whatever decision was made in the Politburo would have to be implemented by the party machine, the party bureaucracy. Thus, real power was to be had there. By the early 1920s, the party was becoming more centralized, bureaucratic, hierarchical and more disciplined. The ban on factions that was decided at the 1921 10th Party Congress is but one example of this development. This suited whoever could get control of the party machine. As early as 1923, if there was one leading figure that was fast in the process of gaining control of the party machine, it was Stalin.

In 1919, Stalin was appointed as Commissar of Nationalities. The Soviet Union was a vast multi-national empire containing not only Russians but Georgians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Tartars, Azerbaijanis and a host of other groups.

- As Nationalities Commissar, Stalin became the party's expert in this area.
  - Other leading party figures that had spent much of their lives in western Europe and the United States looked down on the minority groups and chose not to be involved with them.
  - Stalin was able to use his position to build up contacts in the border areas and in the far-flung party organisations.
  - He would be able to count on these people in any future party conflicts.
- Stalin understood the complexities and intrigues of the distant regions.

*"...His attitude was just that mixture of patience, patriarchal firmness, and slyness that was needed. The Politburo relied on this and refrained from interfering."*<sup>3</sup>

Also, in 1919, Stalin became the **Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate** on the suggestion of Zinoviev.

- This office had a noble purpose which was to remove inefficiency and corruption from the party. Idealism still counted at this stage.
- The inspectorate, or the Rabkrin as it was called, had the job of checking on every branch of government and of training a civil service elite to run the country. However, it soon developed its own bureaucracy, inefficiencies and corruption.
- Above it all was Stalin, who by virtue of this appointment came to supervise the personnel and workings of the entire government.

<sup>3</sup> Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 233

Stalin was also a member of the **Politburo**.<sup>4</sup> The Politburo had become the real government of the country. Each member had specific responsibilities, eg Trotsky was responsible for the management of the Civil War.

- Stalin's role was to take care of the day to day management of the party.
- Connected to the Politburo was the **Organisation Bureau** (Orgbureau). Its purpose was to direct party workers wherever they were needed following Politburo decisions.
- Stalin was the only permanent link between the Politburo and the Orgbureau.

*"...Like none of his colleagues, he was immersed in the party's daily drudgery and in all its kitchen cabals."*<sup>5</sup>

The most important job Stalin took on was the post of **General Secretary** to which he was appointed in 1922. The purpose of the General Secretary's job was to coordinate the overlapping branches of the party which had grown up since 1917. It was seen as a dull, unexciting job which the more exalted party leaders had spurned. It suited Stalin.

- He was responsible for promotions, demotions and various appointments.
- By the mid-1920s, there were thousands of party members at all levels of the party who owed their positions to one man – Stalin.

Stalin's dominance of the party machine would be of crucial importance during the power struggles which were to come.

## 2. The death of Lenin

Lenin's death in 1924 would not have brought many tears into the eyes of Stalin. Though Lenin had recognized Stalin's talents and assisted in his rise, by 1923 their personal relationship had broken down completely. Lenin accused Stalin of rudeness and formally stated that he would deal with Stalin only on an official basis. In his last will testament (see below), Lenin had promoted the idea of removing Stalin from the post of General Secretary. Lenin's position was untouchable; his words holy writ. If Lenin had pushed for Stalin's removal, that would have been the end of Stalin. Lenin's death was thus, timely.

Lenin's death was significant in another way. Stalin did not need Lenin as other leading party figures did. Stalin had not spent years in European exile mulling over theoretical debates at Lenin's table like other leaders. He did not share their intellectual need. While they were discussing the nature of the Marxist dialectic, Stalin was robbing banks or in a Siberian exile. Lenin's departure did not create that feeling of emptiness in Stalin that it did in some other party figures.

## 3. Surviving Lenin's will.

If there was one moment when Stalin's fate hung in the balance it was in May 1924 when Lenin's last will and testament was read out before the Central Committee. Lenin's will

<sup>4</sup> During the Civil War it consisted of Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin.

<sup>5</sup> Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 235

contained negative comments about several leading party figures. However, the man who came in for the worst treatment was Stalin. This is part of what Lenin had to say about Stalin:

*“...Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated an enormous power in his hands; and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution... Stalin is too coarse and this fault is insupportable in the office of the General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from the position and appoint to it another man who will in all respects differ from Stalin – more patient, more loyal, more polite, more attentive to comrades...”*

Stalin was in trouble. So soon after Lenin's death, it was inconceivable that his requests be denied. If the Central Committee agreed to have the will read to the entire Party Congress due to meet soon, Stalin's career would be over.

- He was saved by Zinoviev who addressed the Central Committee and argued that fortunately Lenin's fears had proven to be unfounded as party members were able to work harmoniously with Stalin.
- Apparently, there was an embarrassed silence as few in the room agreed with Zinoviev. However, Zinoviev won the day and it was agreed that the will would not be distributed.
- At this stage, Zinoviev was working with Kamenev and Stalin in an informal “triumvirate” directed against Trotsky. To Zinoviev, Trotsky was the threat, not the dull Stalin.

Deutscher's comment on this incident brilliantly sums up the importance of the moment.

*“...Stalin could now wipe the cold sweat from his brow. He was back in the saddle, firmly and for good.”*<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Development and abuse of the cult of Lenin

It was stated earlier that Stalin did not “need” Lenin in the way that other party figures did. However, this did not stop Stalin from manipulating the legend of the late leader for his own purposes. Lenin was a modest man. He spurned adulation, extravagance and made it clear that when he left this earth, he did not want pomp and ceremony. Stalin chose to ignore this request for his own political purposes.

Stalin set about developing a “cult of Lenin”, raising Lenin up to an almost divine status. Lenin's image now appeared everywhere and his words were constantly quoted. In order to justify a party policy or decision Stalin would always manage to find an appropriate quotation from Lenin's work. If Lenin had made a point about something, opposition to that position was now impossible. Lenin's words were coming to have the same authority as that of the Bible to a Christian who accepts a literal interpretation of the scriptures.

Stalin's skilful manipulation of the Leninist cult, his ability to present himself as totally loyal to Lenin and his memory, played well throughout the country.

- Stalin tricked Trotsky into missing Lenin's funeral. Trotsky was recovering from an illness in the south of the country. When he asked about the funeral, Stalin told him the wrong date and advised Trotsky to continue his recovery. Trotsky's absence from Lenin's funeral looked bad and had people commenting on Trotsky's ‘arrogance’.

<sup>6</sup> Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 275

- Stalin was one of the pall bearers at the funeral.
- Lenin’s body was embalmed and placed in a tomb in Red Square, Moscow.
- Stalin made a habit of using Lenin to support anything he said. By doing this he was playing the role of the loyal disciple. This contrasted with Trotsky’s approach. Trotsky always presented himself as Lenin’s equal.

**Exercise 9.1**

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 1  | Why was the post of Commissar of Nationalities of such use for Stalin? |  |
| 2  | What power did the post of General Secretary give Stalin?              |  |
| 3  | Comment on relations between Lenin and Stalin by 1923.                 |  |
| 4  | How would Stalin have felt about Lenin’s death?                        |  |
| 5  | Why was Lenin’s will and testament so dangerous for Stalin?            |  |
| 6  | Who saved Stalin at the time of the reading of Lenin’s will?           |  |
| 7  | Why did Trotsky not attend Lenin’s funeral?                            |  |
| 8  | Why was Stalin keen to develop the cult of Lenin?                      |  |
| 9  | What would Lenin have thought of the cult developed around him?        |  |
| 10 | How did Trotsky feel about the cult of Lenin?                          |  |

## 5. Stalin and Trotsky: a study in contrasts

Sukhanov's description of Stalin as a 'grey blur' was far from complimentary. However, for Stalin being a grey blur had major advantages.

- It meant that nobody suspected him of ambition and so nobody feared giving Stalin additional responsibilities and additional powers.
- Stalin was a dull, back-room bureaucrat, known to some of his colleagues as "Comrade Card-Index".
- The Bolsheviks were very conscious of history. They frequently looked back to previous revolutions to "learn the lessons of history".
  - In particular, they looked back to the example of The French Revolution.
  - What had come of the ideals of "égalité, fraternité et liberté"?
  - They had evolved into the military dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte. Could this happen to the Russian Revolution?
  - If it could, who might be that military dictator? There was only one possibility: Trotsky!
  - Who was the least likely candidate for military dictator? Stalin.
- The two men also differed greatly in their personality and the way that they dealt with their colleagues.
  - Stalin always seemed to have time to talk to people. He kept his views to himself but listened patiently and attentively, whether he was being spoken to by Bukharin or a poor peasant from the Georgia Soviet.
  - Trotsky, on the other hand, lacked patience and did not suffer fools gladly. He found it difficult to deal with his intellectual inferiors. His arrogance and disdain went to the extent of his sitting through Central Committee meetings immersed in a French novel.

## 6. Luck, opportunism and how to play the game

Historians enjoy seeking out deep currents of developments and complex interpretations to explain the course of events. However, much of what happens in History can often be put down to luck and chance. It has already been noted this is the case when it comes to Stalin's rise to power.

- Lenin's illness and premature death were of great benefit for Stalin. Had Lenin survived for another six months, what of Stalin's future then?
- Trotsky's absence from Moscow at the time of Lenin's death was fortunate for Stalin. It gave him a perfect opportunity to blacken Trotsky's reputation.
- Zinoviev's speech to the Central Committee in which he advised against the publication of Lenin's will saved Stalin.

Stalin certainly knew how to play the political game.

- He used his key positions within the party organisation to place "his" people in positions and to pack Congresses with people loyal to him.

- This meant that when crucial votes had to be taken, Stalin could be assured of success.
- Fundamentally this is why Trotsky's position deteriorated so rapidly.
- The ban on factions meant that Stalin's opponents were not allowed to campaign against his policies once a Congress dominated with his supporters had passed them. Such action would lead to expulsion from the party.<sup>7</sup>
- Stalin proved very skilful at forming and reforming political alliances:
  - firstly, he joined with Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky;
  - then he joined Bukharin and the right against Zinoviev and Trotsky;
  - then he turned on his right-wing allies.
- Stalin was unscrupulous and opportunistic when it came to pursuing policy:
  - he opposed the left, supported Bukharin and NEP;
  - then without any qualms rejected the right and adopted those left-wing ideas which he had argued against so strongly a few years earlier;
  - all made possible because of his control of the party machine.

## 7. Stalin's understanding of the mood of the country

Stalin's policy positions throughout the 1920s suggest he was a man devoid of principle and concerned only with power. This might be the case. However, Stalin proved to be more perceptive than his rivals. He was able to make use of two quite contradictory strands of thought to out-manoeuvre his rivals. Stalin understood that the people of Russia wanted a rest from the strains of war and revolution which had preoccupied the country from 1914 to 1921. However, he also realised that there was still a strong nationalist feeling within the country that he could tap into, despite the supposedly socialist nature of the new Russia.

- Stalin was happy to go along with the New Economic Policy, introduced in 1921, whatever his genuine feelings might have been and despite his totally opposite policies a decade later.
  - He knew that the Russian people had had enough crusading and campaigning. They wanted a period of quiet and peace. Since 1914, Russia had experienced war with Germany, two revolutions, Civil War and War Communism.
  - NEP offered a period of calm and consolidation.
  - What the Russian people did not want was more of the same. This is what Trotsky's plans for "permanent revolution" and the left's calls for rapid industrialisation offered.
  - By supporting Bukharin and NEP, Stalin was showing that he understood the mood of the country and so was able to outflank Trotsky.
- However, Stalin also realised that he could make use of the still strong patriotic sentiments that continued inside Russia.
  - When he introduced his theory of "Socialism in One Country", he struck a chord with the party and the country at large.

<sup>7</sup> This point refers to the ban on factions decided upon at the 10th Party Congress in 1921.

- For too long, Russians had been told that they could not build socialism on their own. Their country was too backward and it needed the help of the “advanced” west.
- Stalin was saying no to this idea: Russia can do it on its own.
- When he decided upon the great turn in 1928 and introduced plans for massive and rapid industrialisation, he found millions of Russians genuinely stirred by this great patriotic adventure. Russia would catch up the west in a decade!

**Exercise 9.2**

Read the statements listed below on the left. Indicate which person shown below would most likely have made each statement.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | I believe that what is best for the future of Russia is to continue with the policy of NEP.                         |  |
| 2 | I know we must never veer from Comrade Lenin’s position but thankfully he was wrong when it came to Comrade Stalin. |  |
| 3 | I am surrounded by fools who simply do not have my level of understanding of national issues.                       |  |
| 4 | I intend working with Zinoviev and Stalin against Trotsky for the future good of the party.                         |  |
| 5 | At times Stalin was almost invisible, it was as if he had disappeared into the background.                          |  |
| 6 | Stalin is rude and impatient and I have no desire to continue a personal relationship with him of any kind.         |  |
| 7 | We all honour the word of the late Comrade Lenin and I, for one, intend doing nothing unless guided by his words.   |  |
| 8 | I agreed with Bukharin that NEP should be continued. My position saw me losing my major party posts in 1929.        |  |

|         |         |          |          |
|---------|---------|----------|----------|
| TROTSKY | RYKOV   | ZINOVIEV | LENIN    |
| STALIN  | KAMENEV | SUKHANOV | BUKHARIN |

## What do the historians have to say about the reasons for the triumph of Stalin as leader of the USSR?

### 1. Isaac Deutscher: *Stalin*

Deutscher explains how the party became pre-occupied with the example of the French Revolution. Party leaders were educated, they knew their history and they knew full well that the idealism of the French Revolution had resulted in a military dictatorship. Stalin was seen as no threat. There might have been “*a streak of perversity in him*” but nobody suspected him of seeking to become Lenin’s sole successor. Indeed, the same was felt about all the leading party figures. All that is except Trotsky. Trotsky was brilliant, charismatic and had been the party’s great military hero. Deutscher believes that this worked strongly against Trotsky and for Stalin.

*“...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.”*<sup>8</sup>

### 2. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union since 1917*

McCauley suggests that a key reason for Stalin’s success in the post-Lenin power struggle was the fact that none of his rivals had had any experience in playing the political game. They had not had to climb the political ladder step by step but had, in effect, been handed power in 1917. Stalin was different; he had had to work his way up. The leading party figures all believed that they were superior to Stalin. This, says McCauley, was an error because their sense of intellectual independence had not prepared them “for caucus politics.”

*“...Stalin was moderate and methodical, not to say pedestrian, but he was the only one skilled at building tactical alliances and this put him head and shoulders above the rest.”*<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Hélène Carrère d’Encausse: *Stalin: Order Through Terror*

D’ Encausse highlights the role that the GPU played in the struggle for power. Before the mid-1920s, the role of the GPU (previously the Cheka) had been to deal with anti-party enemies of the state. When Felix Dzerzinsky was in charge, the GPU retained this role. However, Dzerzinsky died in 1926 to be replaced by Menzhinsky. Menzhinsky was in poor health, lacked Dzerzinsky’s revolutionary past and was much more accommodating to Stalin’s wishes. D’ Encausse shows how the police were now willing to use violence to rout Stalin’s enemies. The idea that the party was the source of all authority was over. D’ Encausse concludes:

*“...Menzhinsky clearly showed that the police recognized another type of authority, that of the Party apparatus, and thus of the General Secretary.”*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Deutscher, I, *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 275

<sup>9</sup> McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 70

<sup>10</sup> D’ Encausse, Hélène Carrère, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 10

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# Notes

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## ESSAYS 2

# The Bolsheviks and the Power Struggle Following the Death of Lenin

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The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the second section of the syllabus: The Bolsheviks and the power struggle following the death of Lenin. These outlines are not presented as the 'be all and end all' responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a 'first draft response' to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author's head as he thought about each question?

### Essay No 1

*"What was striking in the General Secretary was that there was nothing striking about him."*<sup>1</sup>

*Assess the importance of personality in Stalin's successful pursuit of power after the death of Lenin.*

This question expects students to "make a judgment" about the issue of personality in the struggle for power. It is not enough to simply describe what Stalin and the other contenders for power were like. The general issue of personality needs to encompass the entire question. There are flaws about which students need to be aware.

- Avoid simply narrating events from just before Lenin's death to Stalin's success by 1929. This could lead to a top "C" mark, 15/ 25.
- Students must not make the mistake of ignoring the issue in the question because they want to write about something else:
  - eg by arguing that personality had nothing to do with it, Stalin's success was all about ideological matters and his ability to make and remake alliances within the party;
  - this could be a clever argument but it is not addressing the issue of the question, ie personality.
- It is acceptable to argue against the importance of personality but that issue must be fully addressed before moving on to other things.
  - As a rule of thumb, try to make any discussion of the issue comprise about 50% of the answer.
- Students need to acknowledge the quotation in their answer. However, two or three times is enough, it is there merely to prompt students into an argument.

For the purpose of this question let us agree that the issue of personality was fundamental to Stalin's success. Deutscher correctly points out that Stalin appeared unremarkable and lacked charisma. He was not popular but neither was he feared, rather he was underrated. He was

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<sup>1</sup> Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 275

a backroom, party machine man who did the party's boring work. Other leading contenders for power were dynamic, charismatic intellectuals full of their own worth. They concerned themselves with attempting to thwart each other's ambitions while failing to realise it was Stalin who had the real ambition and the means to realise that ambition. Once they realised the true nature of Stalin's personality and drive, it was too late.

The student might open up with comments about Stalin's personality:

- Refer to Deutscher's quotation, make mention of Sukhanov's "grey blur" comment. Develop this.
- Refer to Stalin's patient and modest, but taciturn nature, its impact.
- Compare this to Trotsky – arrogant, aware of his intellectual superiority, refer to his unpopularity amongst many party members.

Comment on how leading party figures underrated Stalin.

- Trotsky was always the one who was feared – this can lead to a discussion of the reasons for/ effectiveness of the triumvirate.
- Make mention of Zinoviev's behaviour when Lenin's will was being considered. Why was he willing to let Stalin off the hook? Because he underrated him and thought he could use him against Trotsky.
- Trotsky was always disparaging of Stalin – he treated him with contempt rather than recognising the threat that he was - the French novel anecdote might work well here.
- Comment though that more recent historians than Deutscher argue that Stalin's talents were in fact recognised at the time.

In his work on Stalin, Deutscher refers to the party's fear of Bonapartism and how this worked in Stalin's favour.

- Explain the term and its connection to the French Revolution. Explain how leading party figures were very conscious of history.
- Show how Trotsky was clearly the ideal candidate for a Bonaparte.
- Show how Stalin was the least likely candidate – students might again make reference to the quote at this point.

Stalin had a grey personality and was underrated. His more illustrious colleagues were only too happy to give him the "boring", unexciting jobs within the party?

- Make reference to some of his posts, eg Commissar of Nationalities, General Secretary.
- However, Stalin was able to use his bureaucratic power to build up his power base. This would be crucial in the future conflicts within the party – give examples.
- Students might bring in here the way in which the party was evolving into a highly centralised, hierarchical and disciplined organisation and how this would benefit the man who controlled the party machine.

Stalin might be "grey" but he was also ruthless, unscrupulous and totally opportunistic. Lenin had already recognised this in his last will and testament. Show how these aspects of his

personality assisted his rise.

- Refer to his willingness to form and break alliances – give examples.
- Refer to his willingness to adopt and then reject various ideological positions – give examples.
- His gradual takeover of the GPU and use of Menshinsky.

Conclusion: Stalin's greyness and lack of charisma meant he was underrated by some of his rivals and was able to accumulate bureaucratic power. The ruthless and opportunistic side of his personality meant he would do anything to achieve his goal of power.

## Essay No 2

*To what extent does Stalin's domination of the party structure account for his ultimate success in the post-Lenin struggle for power?*

As with all "to what extent" questions, the key danger for students is the possibility that they might want to immediately jump in and disagree with the assumption underlying the question.

- For example, a student might want to argue that Stalin's domination of the party structure was not the reason why Stalin succeeded in the struggle for power.
  - Rather it was the result of Trotsky's personality flaws and his inability to handle party factions and the ideological debate.
- This is quite a valid argument. However, it is not answering the question.
  - Students must address what is in the question and so the focus must be on Stalin's domination of the party structure.
- It would be acceptable to argue against the importance of Stalin's control of the party structure and then to pursue the Trotsky line.
  - However, be sure that about 50% of the answer deals with the issue that is actually referred to in the question.

For the purposes of this question, let us accept the assumption underlying the question.

By the early 1920s, the Communist Party had become highly bureaucratic, centralised, hierarchical and disciplined. The main decisions in the country were being made by the party Politburo. Thus, any Politburo member who could gain mastery of the party machine would control the party, and in turn would control the country. In essence this is what Stalin achieved and in this lies the explanation for his success in the post-Lenin struggle for power.

Students might open up by discussing how the party had changed.

- Early on it was an open party with much discussion and airing of ideas.
  - In its early days its program contained many reforms of a democratic nature.
  - However, the stresses of the Civil War period changed the atmosphere within the party – refer to army reform, War Communism, the Cheka

- By 1921, though victorious, the party was weak and had changed in nature.
  - Refer to the ban on factions and its significance.
  - Make mention of the nomenklatura system.
- Make the point that control of the party machine would thus give an individual great power.

Stalin was able to accumulate enormous power within the party. Refer to the positions he held and what influence this gave him.

- Commissar of Nationalities
- Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate
- Member of the Politburo, its link to the Orgbureau
- General Secretary.

Stalin's enormous influence over the machine, promotions and demotions and party membership, combined with the growing authoritarianism of the party meant that he was able to manipulate intra-party debate. This, plus his manipulation of the ideological debate, is essentially how he managed to win the power struggle.

- Refer to the triumvirate and the isolation of Trotsky.
- Show how he then links up with the right against Zinoviev and Kamenev.
- He then uses the crisis of 1927-8 to turn on the right.

Stalin's taciturn nature and apparent invisibility, and the fact that he was underrated by other party figures assisted him in his accumulation of power within the party.

- Contrast Stalin with Trotsky and show how this worked in Stalin's favour.
- Mention can be made of the reading of Lenin's will here and how Stalin survived this crisis in his career.
- Trotsky would never want to be bogged down with the daily details of the Orgbureau – it was beneath him. Stalin was happy to do so and herein lay his future strength within the party.

Conclusion: The party had changed since 1917 and had become highly bureaucratic and centralised. Thus, whoever controlled the party machine controlled the party. By accumulating a range of bureaucratic powers, Stalin had effectively achieved this. It was this that later enabled him to dominate intra-party conflicts and hence, to win the post-Lenin struggle for power.

## **Chapter Ten**

# **The USSR under Stalin: dictatorship and totalitarianism**

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### **Introduction to the term “totalitarianism”**

The term “totalitarianism” is a fairly recent invention. It was first used by the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini in 1923 when he was describing his Fascist Movement. Mussolini obviously meant the term to provide a positive look for his party. Nowadays, the term automatically has a negative connotation. If a regime is described as being totalitarian in nature, an image of dictatorships, secret police and torture immediately comes to mind. No self-respecting political leader would want to be labeled as totalitarian.

The term became part of the political vocabulary after World War II. After 1945, relations between the western allies (Britain and the United States) and the Soviet Union deteriorated, despite the fact that they had fought together to defeat Hitler’s Nazi regime. A period of “Cold War” ensued between east and west on opposite sides of the iron curtain. As the propaganda war developed between east and west, it suited western leaders to depict the Soviet Union as being no different in practice to that of Nazi Germany. As the true horrors of Hitler’s regime became known, western leaders were happy to paint Hitler and Stalin as being one of the same. From this, models of “totalitarian government” were developed which, it was argued, could be applied to both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Though historians dispute the label being applied to Germany, a strong argument can be presented to see the Soviet Union in this light.

By 1948, relations between east and west had gone “into deep freeze”. War almost broke out between the west and the Soviet Union over Stalin’s blockade of Berlin.

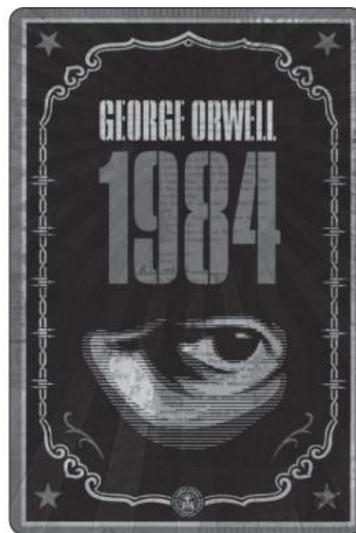
The same year saw the publication of George Orwell’s book “1984”. This is not the place to delve into a discussion of Orwell’s work but the image Orwell presents of a totalitarian society was eagerly taken up by western propagandists to denigrate the situation inside the Soviet Union. Was Orwell describing the Soviet Union in 1984?

*“...One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power...”*

*The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible, and glittering... a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans...”*

*“...Thoughtcrime is death. Thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thoughtcrime IS death. I have committed even before setting pen to paper the essential crime that contains all others unto itself.”*

In the atmosphere of the cold war, it was easy to cherry pick from 1984 and make the link with Stalin's regime. The record of the purges and the terror of the 1930s (see Chapter 12) seemed to provide the evidence for such a link. Stalin seemed to fit all too well 1984's "Big Brother".



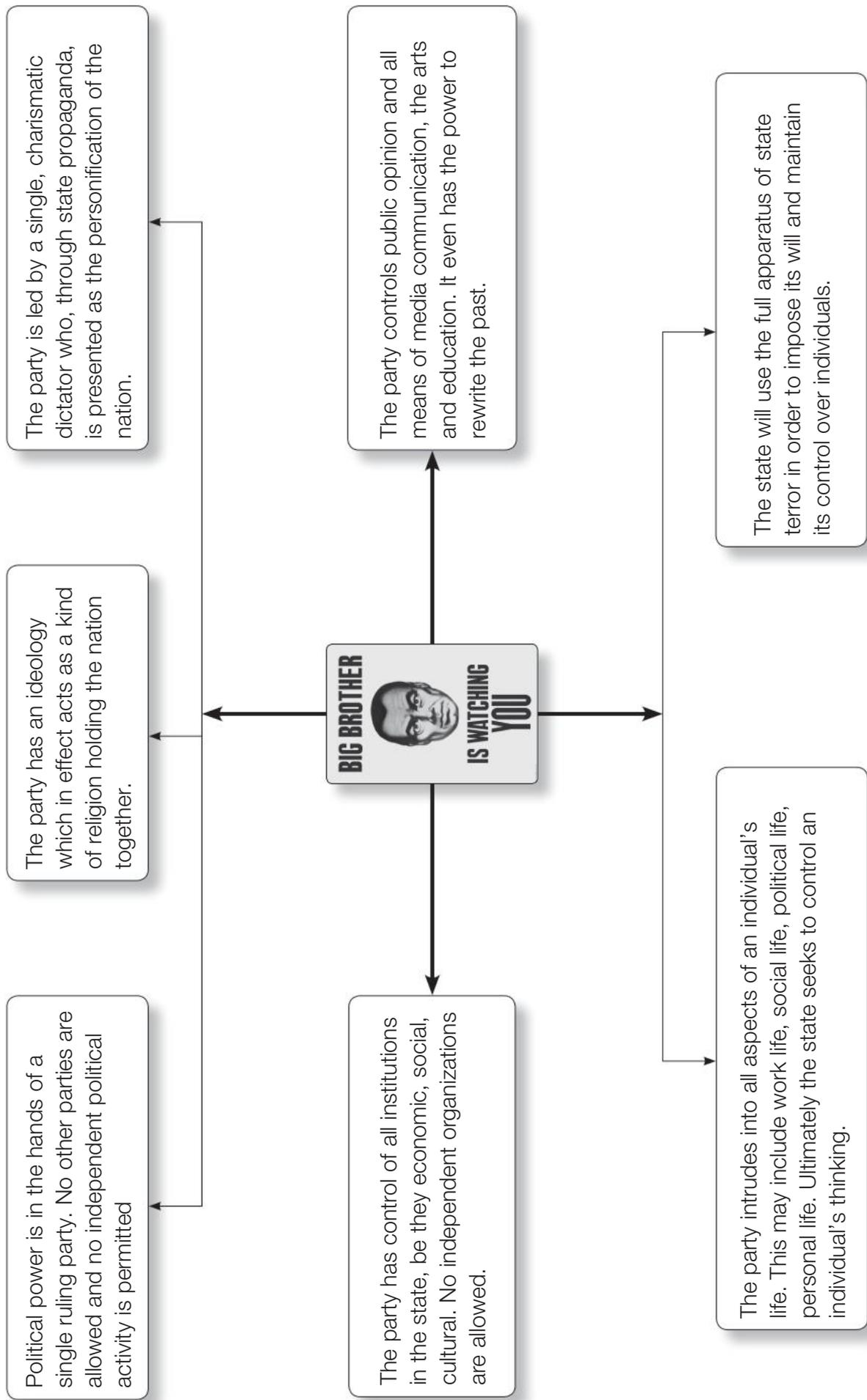
### What is totalitarianism?

More academic writers in the west sought to take the debate about the nature of the Stalinist regime to a different level and create models of totalitarianism. One of the first writers to do this was Hannah Arendt who wrote *"The Origins of Totalitarianism"* in 1951. In the mid-1950s, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski produced a work which listed five specific criteria that constituted a totalitarian state. These included:

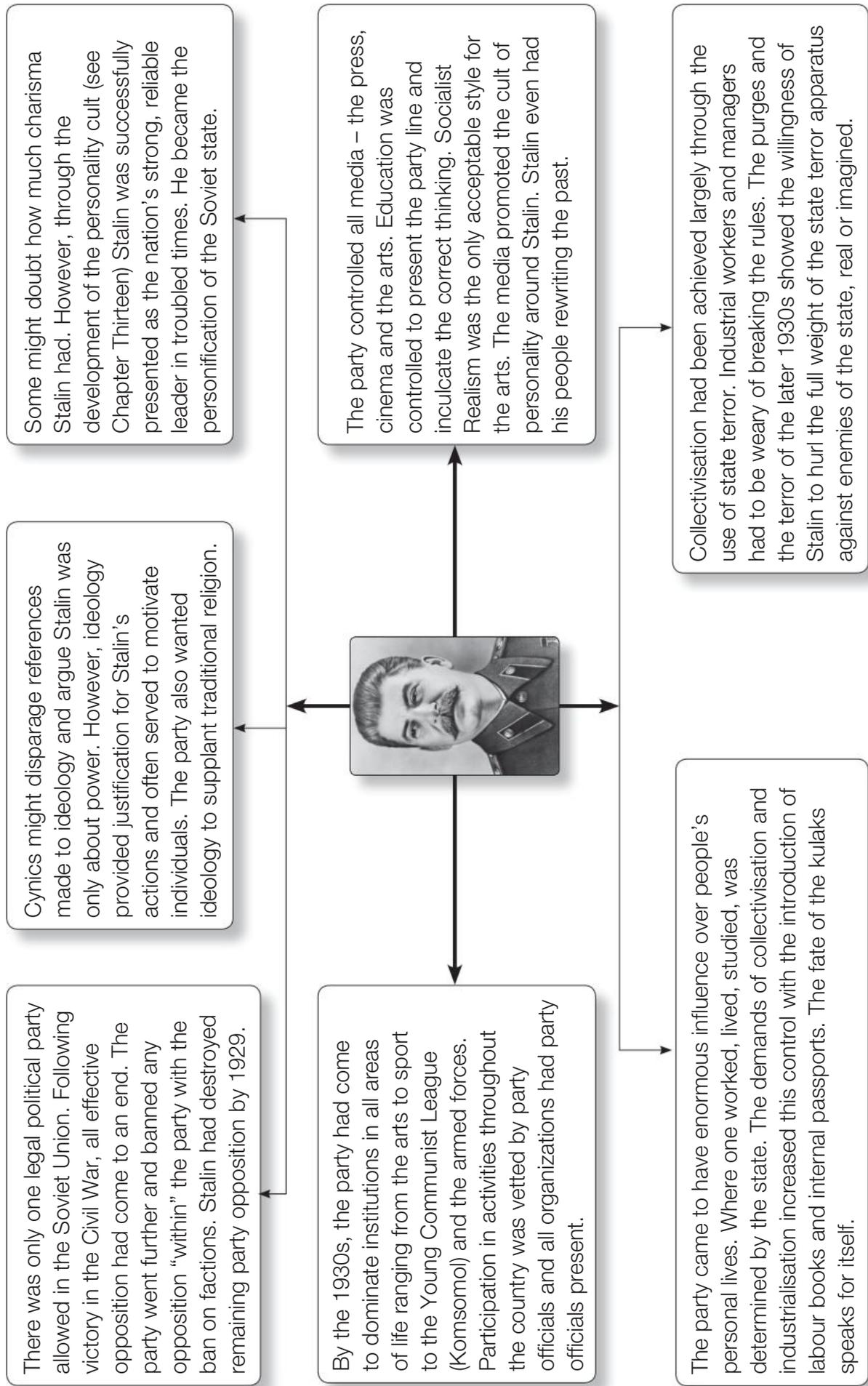
1. a single party led by a charismatic dictator
2. a party ideology
3. state control over the economy
4. state use of terror and repression
5. party control over the armed forces.

In essence, totalitarianism is a form of government in which the state controls all aspects of the lives of its people. Figure 11.1 presents a more detailed set of criteria that constitute a totalitarian state. Figure 11.2 attempts to show how the Soviet Union of the 1930s matches these criteria.

**Figure 10.1: The Bases of a Totalitarian State**



**Figure 10.2: The Totalitarian Basis of Stalinist Russia**



## The case against totalitarianism

Despite the points presented in Figure 10.2, an argument could be presented to weaken the view of Stalinist Russia as a totalitarian state.

- The Soviet Union was a vast unwieldy state that stretched from Eastern Europe to the Far East, the Arctic to the borders of India:
  - in the 1930s, transport links remained limited and unreliable.
  - in the pre-computer age, it was always difficult to ensure that decisions made in Moscow were carried out across the country in remote ethnic enclaves.
  - it was one thing for the party to make a decision in Moscow, quite another for it to be carried out in Tashkent.
- Stalin even suggested this himself. He blamed some of the excesses of the collectivisation program on the excessive zeal of some GPU committees, suggesting that he was not in control.
- Party organisations far from Moscow still had a tendency to act of their own volition.

Furthermore, **recent historians have challenged the totalitarian depiction of Stalin's Soviet Union.** They do not challenge Stalin's central role in the state nor do they question the terrorist nature of much of 1930s Soviet life.

- James Harris suggests that the greater power Stalin exercised the more difficult he found it to control the party's institutions. Harris also suggests that Stalin increasingly became the target of resentment.
- Jochen Hellbeck's research counters the idea that Soviet citizens were simply 'automatons' acting without free will. He argues that many Soviet people were enthused by Stalin's policies and enthusiastically threw themselves into the building of a new Russia.
- Sheila Fitzpatrick's approach to Soviet history is to examine from the 'bottom up' rather than focusing on the leaders. She supports Hellbeck in discovering that many Soviet people keenly backed the regime. Furthermore, she argues that though people conformed outwardly, they remained independent thinkers, skeptical of what the authorities said and indeed took risks in declaring their dissatisfaction with things.

Obviously, such comments cannot be taken too far when matched against the all-pervasive power of the Stalinist state and the price that would be paid for too independent a stand.

### Exercise 10.1

Indicate whether each of the statements on the left is true or false.

|    |   |             |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1  | Totalitarianism is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 2  | Various theories of totalitarian theory appeared in the 1950s.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 3  | George Orwell's work "1984" provides a historical account of a totalitarian state.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 4  | In a totalitarian state, the state's power is so great that it is confident enough to allow the existence of political parties. | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 5  | In a totalitarian state, state control of the media is restricted to those organs specifically run by the party.                | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 6  | Party ideology plays only a very minor role in a totalitarian state.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 7  | Many young people in Stalin's Russia were genuinely motivated by the party ideology.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 8  | Totalitarian control did not bother itself with small, local institutions.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 9  | Stalin's use of state terror is evidence enough of the existence of a totalitarian regime.                                      | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 10 | Decisions from the party made in Moscow were not always completely carried in distant regions of the country.                   | TRUE/ FALSE |

## What do the historians have to say about Stalinism as totalitarianism?

### 1. Theda Skocpol: *States and Social Revolutions*

Theda Skocpol provides evidence to support the totalitarian nature of the Stalinist state with her discussion of the enormity of the terror apparatus. So vast was the camp network, they constituted a *self-contained administrative-economic empire*. The general fear of arrest reinforced labour discipline. She makes the point that during the period of forced industrialisation:

*“...Soviet citizens at all levels of society were subjected to intense secret police surveillance and were constantly subject to possible arrest for real or imagined infractions, often followed by long, indeed indeterminate sentences to forced-labour camps.”*<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Isaac Deutscher: *Stalin*

In the middle of the economic dramas, Stalin introduced a new constitution to replace the electoral system introduced earlier by Lenin. Deutscher explains the array of freedoms sprinkled throughout this new document such as measures to prevent a President of the Republic becoming a dictator and allowing republics the right to secede! Such perverse doublespeak and playing with the language is Orwellian in nature.<sup>2</sup> However, Stalin reaffirmed single party control when he said there was no need for political parties because there were no antagonistic classes inside the Soviet Union.

*“...But what was real in these Arabian nights of democracy was the constitutional ban on any opposition.”*<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Lionel Kochan: *The Making of Modern Russia*

Kochan has a chapter in his book entitled “A Totalitarian Society”. He shows how such a society was stimulated by the Five-Year Plans, the growing adulation of the leader, the stifling of discussion and climaxed with the terror of the late 1930s. Kochan says this about the roots of Stalin’s totalitarian society:

*“...The fear of war, with its socio-industrial consequences, superimposed on the collective values inherent in Bolshevism, combined to create a society that was more and more totalitarian.”*<sup>4</sup>

1 Skocpol, T, *States and Social Revolutions*, CUP, Cambridge, 1979, p 230a

2 In 1984, the masses recited phrases such as “freedom is slavery”, “ignorance is strength”.

3 Deutscher, I, *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 378

4 Kochan, L, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968 ed, p 294

#### 4. *Sheila Fitzpatrick: Everyday Stalinism*

Fitzpatrick describes Soviet people behaving in a most “un-1984” manner. Far from even being too scared to think against the official line, she describes them as occasional risk-takers who played the potentially dangerous game of denouncing their bosses, telling anti-Soviet jokes and who, when drunk, would make obscene gestures at official sacred images in public places.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: Fitzpatrick, S, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, Oxford, 2000

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# Chapter Eleven

## Economic transformation under Stalin

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### Background to collectivisation

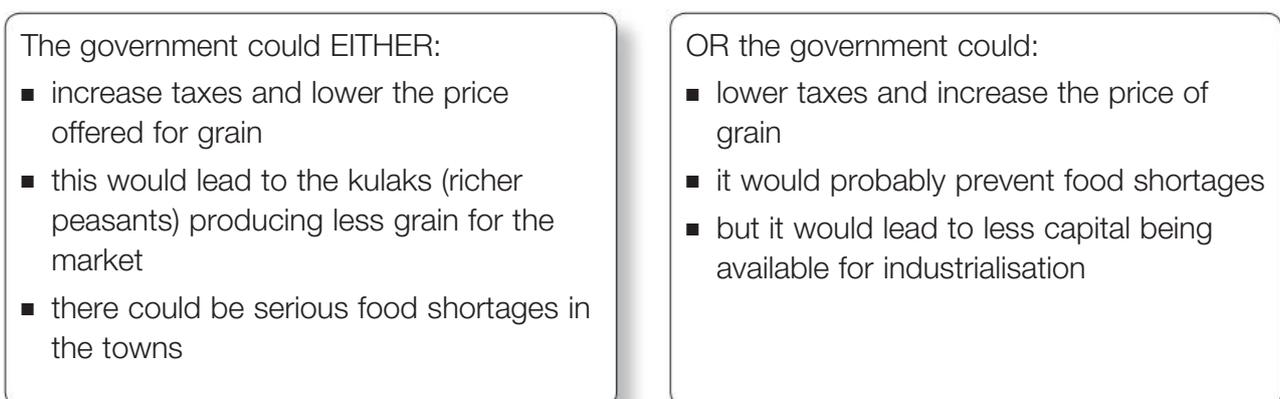
In some ways, the 1920s was a golden period in Soviet history. After years of war, revolution, civil war and famine, the country was finally at peace. The New Economic Policy, introduced at the 10th Party Congress in 1921, had brought the country some semblance of prosperity. The economy was recovering, NEPmen were making goods available in the markets and the peasants were being allowed to sell their surpluses on the open market. The party was securely in power. There were many in the party who encouraged the idea of gradual economic development, or “industrialisation at a snail’s pace” to use the phrase coined by Bukharin.

However, the apparent prosperity and stability of the country in the 1920s hid some fundamental problems:

- By 1927 the country was facing a potential economic crisis. Due to the inefficiency of industry and lack of development, prices of industrial goods were high and rising. However, the prices of agricultural goods, particularly grain, were falling. This is what Trotsky had referred to as the “scissors crisis”. If grain prices were falling, the peasants would put less grain on the market.
- Industrial growth was slowing which suggested that NEP was not producing the capital that was needed for industry to expand. One solution was to increase taxes and reduce the price paid for peasant grain. However, this would reduce further the amount of grain going on the market. Food shortages were already appearing by 1927.

The government was now in a most difficult position as it seemed to have two possible options, neither of which was satisfactory. Figure 11.1 shows this.

### Figure 11.1: The Government’s Dilemma



The lack of capital was the crux of the problem. Russia’s rulers wanted to build socialism. However, as good Marxists they knew that a future socialist society had to be based on abundance. This meant Russia had to become a modernised, industrialised society. Earlier

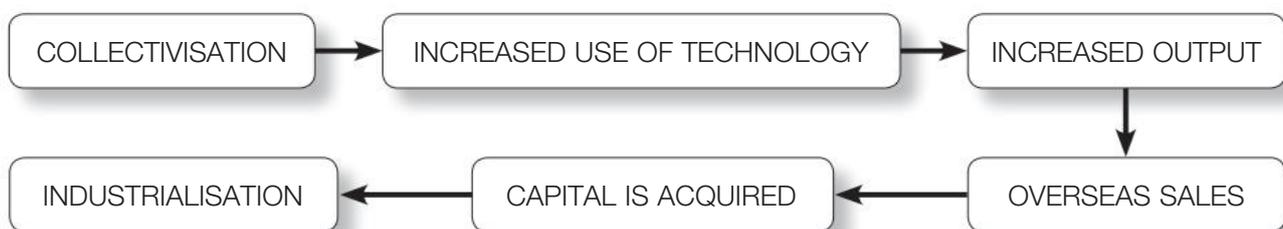
hopes that revolutions would break out in the west and that these socialist societies would help Russia had been proven baseless. Russia was going to have to go it alone.

Three key elements were required for industrialisation: labour, resources and capital. Russia had the labour and the resources; it lacked the capital. Where was it to come from?

- Foreign capital was an unlikely source. Western capitalist nations were unlikely to invest in a socialist economy, and earlier Bolshevik repudiation of pre-war loans had not been forgotten.
- Recycled profits from Russian capitalist enterprises were very limited.
- As a predominantly agricultural society, it was clear that capital for industrial development would have to come from the peasant sector. However, the peasants were reducing their grain output.

What was to be done? Lurking in the background was the knowledge that the Soviet Union was an isolated socialist country surrounded by potentially hostile capitalist powers. Thus, industrial development was also needed for reasons of defence. This need had been highlighted during the war scare of 1927.

Stalin's solution to the problem was the collectivisation of agriculture. Peasant farmers would be forced into large collective or state farms. This would make possible the use of modern technology which would greatly increase the output of grain which would then be sold internationally which in turn would provide the capital for industrialisation. In summary the process was to be:



Stalin was well aware that there were also some political gains to be made by collectivizing agriculture:

1. He would be able to remove his right-wing opponents in the party.
2. He would gain full political control of the countryside.
3. He could destroy the class of “kulaks”.

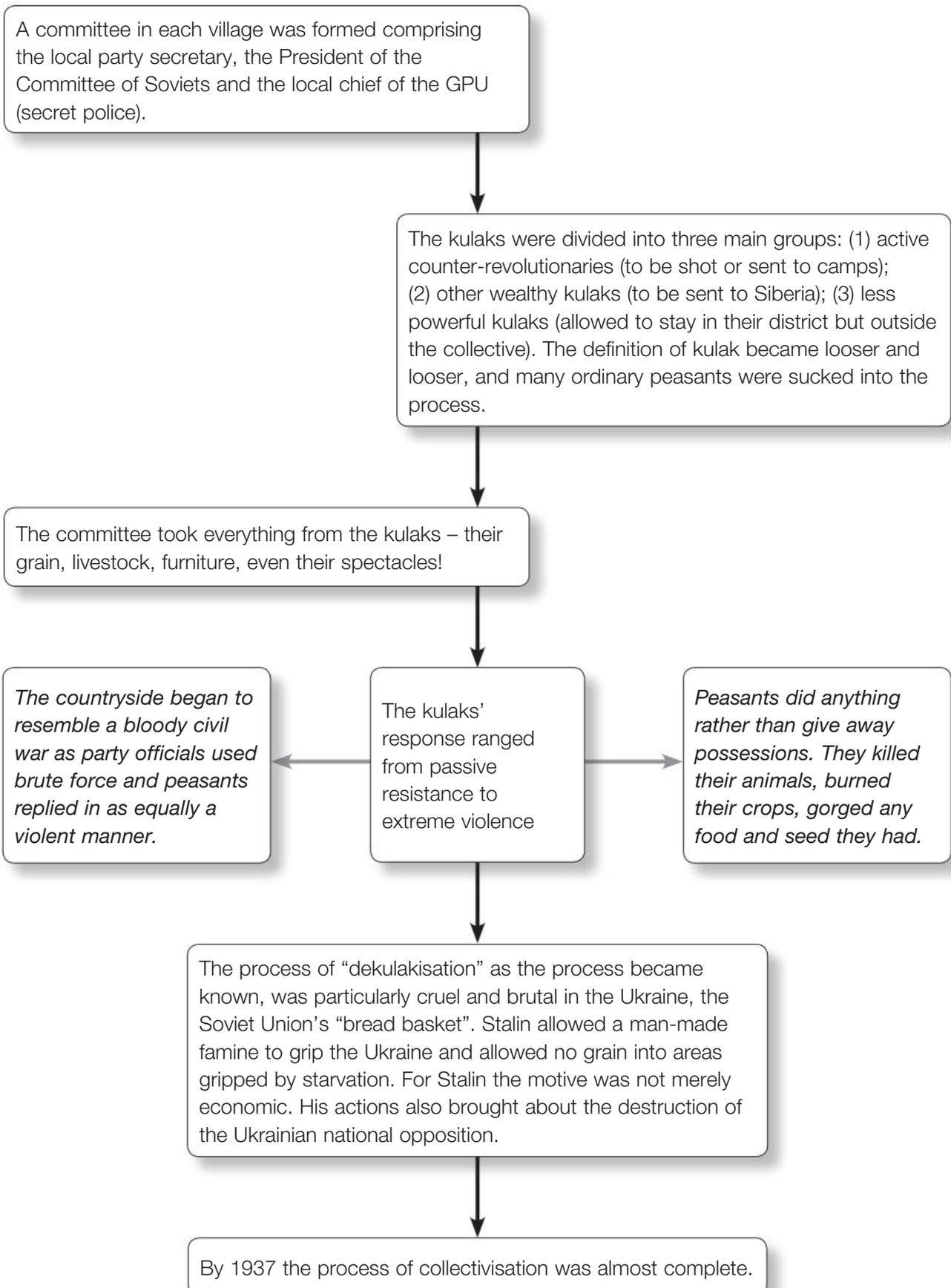
*“...We must break down the resistance of the kulaks... We must eliminate the kulaks as a class. We must smash the kulaks... so hard as to prevent them from rising to their feet again.. We must annihilate them as a social class..”*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for Stalin there were economic, ideological and political gains to be had from collectivisation.

<sup>1</sup> Stalin addressing the party in 1929 in a fairly unambiguous manner.

## The process of collectivisation

Figure 11.2 The stages in the process of collectivisation



## The results of collectivisation

It is impossible to generalise about collectivisation. It was simultaneously an absolute disaster, a massive human tragedy, a political masterstroke, socially transforming and a brilliant long-term economic success.

It is not hard to argue that collectivisation was a **disaster**:

- The Soviet Union's livestock population plummeted. Between 1929 and 1934, the number of horses in the country fell 55%, cattle 40%, sheep 66%, pigs 55%.
- The size of the grain harvest fell year by year between 1930 and 1934.

There can be no argument about the scale of the **human tragedy**.

- Historians have never been able to agree on the exact number of people who died because of collectivisation. The violence, the deportations and the famines associated with the process led to the deaths of anything between five and ten million people.
  - The man-made famine in the Ukraine is referred to as the "**Holodomor**".
- Millions ended up living a desperate existence in Arctic and Siberian labour camps.

**Politically**, Stalin would have been well-satisfied with the results.

- The Communist Party was now in complete control of the countryside. The destruction of private ownership destroyed any power that the peasants might have had to oppose the government. There was no chance of a rival political force being created.
- The peasants were now dependent on the state as its employees. The state had a monopoly of farm technology.
- Ukrainian nationalism was destroyed.

**Socially**, collectivisation had totally transformed the countryside forever.

- Rural society could never return to what it had been before. The deaths, the deportations and the end of private property changed everything.
- Dekulakisation had destroyed the previous rural social structure. It had weakened the influence of religion, a key target of Stalin's committees.
- The peasants had lost their brief period of independence. Many once again found themselves tied to the land under new state masters.

However, for all the costs, collectivisation had been a great **long-term economic success**.

- Grain procurements as a percentage of the harvest reached 32% in 1934, up from 15% in 1928.
- Grain exports in 1929 had been 0.029 million tons; in 1930 the figure was 4.76 million tons; in 1931 the figure was 5.05 million tons.<sup>2</sup>
- The exports needed to acquire the capital for industrialization had been acquired though at an enormous price. For Stalin it was a price well worth paying.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the figures given in this chapter come from Nove, A, *An Economic History of the USSR*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982 ed.

## What do the historians have to say about collectivisation?

### 1. David Christian: *Power and Privilege*

Christian acknowledges that for the peasantry and the economy as a whole collectivisation had been disaster, and that the human cost had been horrifying.

However, despite the devastation, in terms of Stalin's fundamental fiscal and political objectives, the process had been a success.

*"...Although in the short run the kolhozy (collectives) had failed as farms, they had succeeded as fiscal devices – as extractors of resources... Collectivisation (had secured for) the Soviet government the sort of power over the countryside that the tsarist government had at its height..."*<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Mikhail Sholokov: *Virgin Soil Upturned*

Mikhail Sholokov was a Nobel Prize winning author (1965). He came from the Don region of southern Russia and much of his work dealt with the experiences of people from that area. His work *"Virgin Soil Upturned"* was published in two parts, in 1932 and 1960. In it he describes in some detail the reaction of kulaks to the collectivisation policies. In this extract, he describes one way that the kulaks prevented the authorities from taking their property.

*"...They ate until they could eat no more. Young and old suffered from stomach ache. At dinner time everyone had a greasy mouth, everyone hic-coughed as if at a wake. Everyone blinked like an owl, as if drunk from eating."*<sup>4</sup>

3 Christian, D, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1986, pp 210-1

4 Sholokov, M, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, 1932/60 (quoted in T Downey, *The USSR*, OUP, 1989, p 34)

### Exercise 11.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete the following passage.

By the late 1920s, NEP had produced what Trotsky had called the \_\_\_\_\_ crisis – industrial prices were \_\_\_\_\_ and grain prices were \_\_\_\_\_. The economy was failing to produce the \_\_\_\_\_ needed for industrial change. Stalin’s solution was \_\_\_\_\_ whose prime purpose was to increase \_\_\_\_\_ production to create the \_\_\_\_\_ income to acquire the necessary capital. His main target was the \_\_\_\_\_. The process became a virtual \_\_\_\_\_ with great violence on both sides. The peasants often \_\_\_\_\_ what they had rather than hand it over to the \_\_\_\_\_. The \_\_\_\_\_ result was what Stalin wanted and he now also had \_\_\_\_\_ control of the countryside. However, \_\_\_\_\_ had died or had been sent to camps and \_\_\_\_\_ it had been a disaster.

|        |           |         |          |                  |           |           |     |
|--------|-----------|---------|----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| kulaks | political | capital | scissors | economically     | destroyed | fiscal    | GPU |
| rising | millions  | export  | grain    | collectivisation | falling   | civil war |     |

### The process of industrialisation

In the 1920s, the Soviet economy was still predominantly agricultural in nature. There were some major industrial centres in places like Moscow and the Donetsk Basin, and NEP had stimulated some small-scale industry. Small cottage industry was still a feature of the countryside. However, the Soviet Union was almost a century behind the major industrial western powers such as the United States, Britain and Germany. Within a decade Soviet Russia was transformed and on the eve of World War II had arguably become the second industrial power in the world after the United States. In 1940, the Soviet Union had the world’s largest air force.

This dramatic change was achieved by the implementation of a series of government Five Year Plans.

- The state took total control of the economy.
  - By means of central planning, the state decided what was to be produced, where and when it would be produced, who would work where, which sectors of the economy had priority.
  - The plans set long-term targets but there were also short-term targets. Production targets might be set for an industry, a region or an individual enterprise.
- The plans had the force of law.
  - Failure to reach targets became a criminal offence.
  - Enterprise managers and individuals might be accused of sabotage and treason for failing to reach targets.

- Those who exceeded targets were lauded in the press and received bonuses.
- The central planning of the economy was a “top down process”.
  - The party established overall targets.
  - It was then up to the various Commissariats of the various industries to work out the details. The key commissariat was that of Heavy Industry run by Sergei Ordzhonikidze, but there were almost two dozen others.
  - The Commissariats would then work through regional administrators.
  - Regional administrators would then establish specific plans and targets for the enterprises under their jurisdiction.
- On paper the system suggested careful thought and logic. However, in reality central planning, particularly for the First Five Year Plan, was **chaotic** in the extreme.
  - There was often a lack of coordination between the different sectors of the economy, eg a steel target might not be reached because of a failure to link up with iron ore production.
  - Party officials at all levels frequently interfered with production.
  - Managers and other officials were often appointed or dismissed for political rather than economic reasons.
  - Specialist managers were under enormous stress as targets had to be met and failure to do so could lead to being arrested!
- There was a tremendous emphasis on **heavy industry**, the things which Stalin and the Supreme Economic Council believed were the bases of western economic strength: coal, iron ore, steel, oil, transport.
  - Industrial centres were established from nothing, for example at Magnitogorsk in the Urals Mountains.
  - A major industrial area was established in western Siberia around Leninsk-Kuznetski.
  - More traditional industrial areas such as the Donetsk and the oil areas of Baku were further developed.
- Massive **prestige** projects were developed.

These included the building of the Dnieper Dam, the Moscow-Volga Canal and the Moscow underground railway system.

Life for ordinary Russians during the period of industrialisation was tough in the extreme. There were many opportunities for Russian workers including wider education, training courses, the chance to earn bonuses. Many workers were on the move, having three or four jobs in a year as they sought higher wages. Those workers with skills and those who stuck with the same job and obeyed the labour rules could do quite well.

However, there was another side to the workers' story.

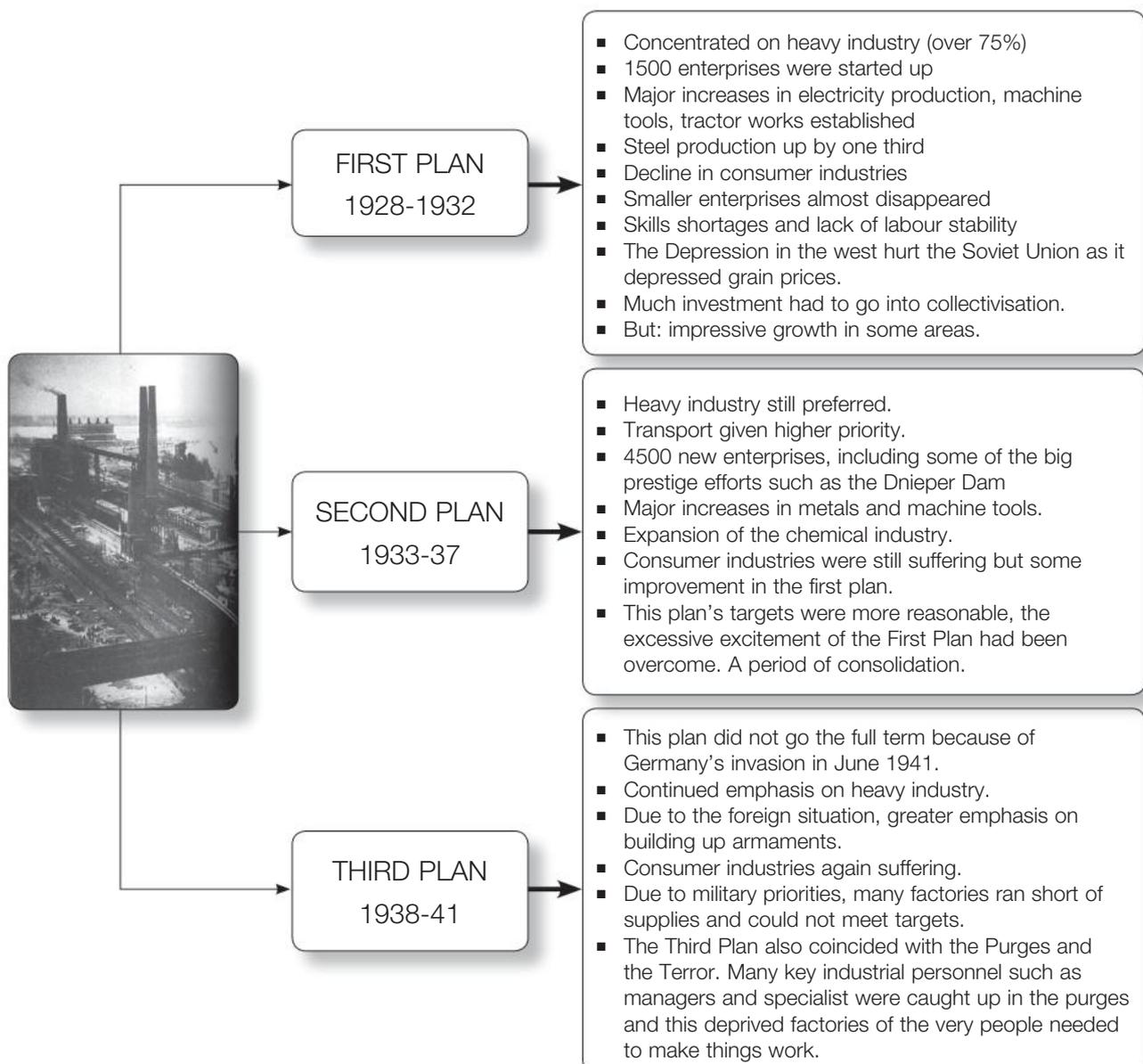
- Labour discipline was harsh with tough punishments for lateness, absenteeism, poor quality work, leaving a job without permission or damaging equipment.

- By the late 1930s, an internal passport system was in force to control workers' movements.
- Each worker had a labour book which contained a record of his work history, qualifications and a record of mistakes and poor discipline.
- Living standards plummeted. Consumer industries, housing and food production had a low priority.

The government also used forced labour. Hundreds of thousands of displaced kulaks, common prisoners and terror victims were sent to the most inhospitable locations to work. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners worked on the Baltic-White Sea Canal. This particular project was a failure as on its completion, it was found to be too shallow for the ships which were expected to use it.

For all the problems faced, hardships experienced, mistakes made, and freedoms lost, the achievement of industrialisation was impressive. The main results of the three Five Year Plans (1928-32, 1933-37, 1938-41) are summarized in Figure 11.3.

**Figure 11.3: Achievements of the Five-Year Plans**



It is impossible to verify all the statistics that emanated from the Soviet Union during the great economic transformation. Individual managers and specialists certainly exaggerated their achievements to avoid punishment. The party was also willing to exaggerate achievements for propaganda purposes. However, despite this, there is no denying that incredible leaps had been made in economic development.

The Soviet Union of the 1930s often conjures negative images. There was the brutality of collectivisation, the hardships of industrialisation, the brainwashing of the personality and the terror later in the decade. However, it should also be remembered that many Russians remember the period differently. They often approached the challenges set by Stalin with enthusiasm, idealism and a sense that they were taking part in a great national adventure.

- For the young there was the chance to play their part in history just as their parents had in the revolution and the civil war.
- There was a patriotic element – Russia was building socialism while the west was wallowing in the depths of depression.
- The propaganda language of the time seemed to inspire many people with its talk of “socialist offensive” and “mobilizing the nation”. Not everyone was carried along by this but we should avoid imposing our world-weary 21st century cynicism on the Soviet Union of the 1930s.
- The excitement engendered by industrialisation also affected foreigners. Thousands of idealistic westerners came to the Soviet Union to offer their skills – though for many it was also a means of escaping unemployment.

The government tried to encourage idealistic sacrifice by promoting the efforts of particular workers. Alexei Stakhanov was one. Whether or not Stakhanov achieved the superhuman things he was alleged to have done – cutting sixteen times the normal amount of coal in a shift – does not matter. The government turned him into a hero, others were encouraged to emulate him and managers were expected to get their workers to also become Stakhanovites. Stakhanovism swept across Russia.

### Exercise 11.2

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 1  | What was the main emphasis of the Five-Year Plans?                             |  |
| 2  | Name the massive industrial site in the Urals built from scratch in the 1930s. |  |
| 3  | Which branch of the economy suffered in each of the Five-Year Plans?           |  |
| 4  | Who was Sergei Ordzhonikidze?  |  |
| 5  | Name two of Stalin's prestige projects from the 1930s.                         |  |
| 6  | What was the main impact on living standards of the plans?                     |  |
| 7  | Why did the Third Plan not reach completion?                                   |  |
| 8  | What was the primary emphasis of the Third Five Year Plan?                     |  |
| 9  | Who was Alexei Stakhanov?  |  |
| 10 | Why was industrialisation viewed with so much idealism by many young Russians? |  |

### What do the historians have to say about industrialisation?

#### 1. Lionel Kochan: *The Making of Modern Russia*

Kochan highlights one of the important side benefits of the economic changes – the great expansion of education. For industrialisation to become possible, the nation needed skilled workers but there was often no skilled pool of labour upon which the government could call. Men had to be taught “on the job”. Many factories made provisions for workers to be taught how to read and write. A modern economy needs an educated and literate workforce. Higher level education institutions multiplied rapidly.

*“...Technical institutes, colleges and universities, factory schools, all were pressed into service to provide new cadres of skilled workers.”*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kochan, L, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968 ed, p 292

## 2. *Hélène Carrère d'Encausse: Stalin: Order Through Terror*

D'Encausse makes a point about the social impact of the economic changes of the 1930s. Nobody seems to have been untouched by what happened. Peasants had been thrown into collectives, labour camps or driven into towns. Rural life had been totally changed as the campaign against the kulaks developed. Workers were displaced, cities grew enormously. People suddenly found themselves in jobs and locations which they previously would have never thought possible.

*"...the whole society had been thrown into an inexorable whirlpool, so that at the end of the ordeal no one remained where he had been some years earlier. Every individual had been displaced, uprooted from his environment, projected into a new world."*<sup>6</sup>

## 3. *Alec Nove: An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991*

Nove comments on the impact of the purges and the terror on the economy. Thousands of specialist, foremen, managers and planners ended up in Stalinist camps. The lesson was learned: any mistake could lead to arrest and deportation and so people now avoided taking the initiative and decided to play it safe. In the long-term economies need people behaving in the opposite manner.

*"...the simplest thing to do was to avoid responsibility, to seek approval from one's superiors for any act, to obey mechanically any order received, regardless of local conditions..."*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> D'Encausse, Hélène Carrère, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 26

<sup>7</sup> Nove, A, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992, p 239



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# Chapter Twelve

## Political transformation under Stalin: purges, show-trials and terror

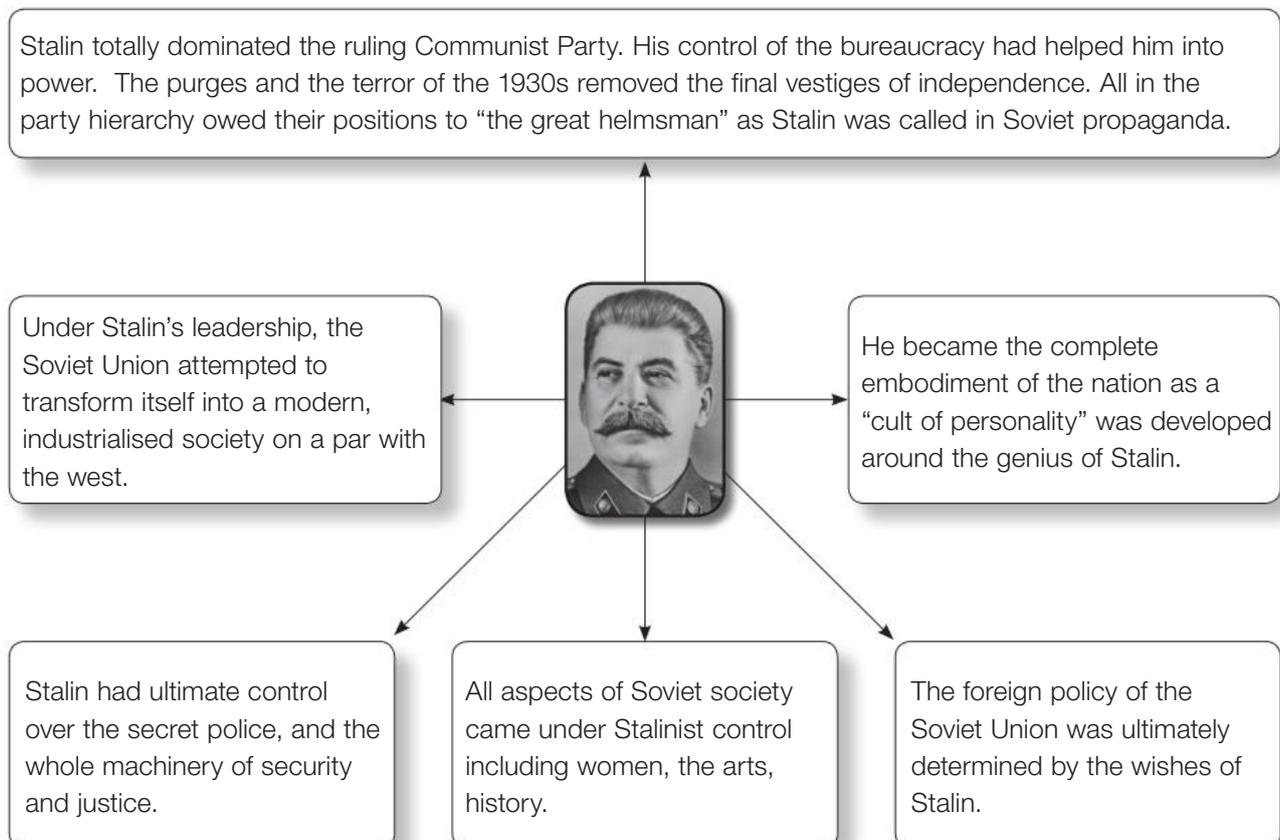
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### Introduction: Stalin's role in the Soviet state <sup>1</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, Stalin dominated every facet of Soviet life. His image and his words were everywhere. No policy was decided without Stalin, no achievement was possible without his inspiration, no action was taken unless it was happening because of the will of Stalin. He was the heir of Lenin but he had superseded Lenin; he was now the sole and infallible interpreter of the party's ideological line. Following the Soviet Union's victory in World War II, Soviet propaganda raised Stalin up to godlike status. Arguably, no leader had ever dominated a modern state in the way Stalin dominated the Soviet Union. The American novelist, John Steinbeck wrote in 1947:

*"...He is everywhere, he sees everything... we doubt whether Caesar Augustus enjoyed during his life the prestige, the worship and the godlike power over the people of which Stalin disposes."*<sup>2</sup>

Figure 9.1 summarises the extent of Stalin's role in the Soviet state in the 1930s.



<sup>1</sup> Chapter 10 considered the nature of Stalin's dictatorship and the issue of totalitarianism. Chapter 11 has examined Stalin's influence in economics. Chapter 13 will look at social and cultural change, while Chapters 14 and 15 will consider his impact on the development of Soviet foreign policy  
<sup>2</sup> Steinbeck visited the Soviet Union in 1947 and kept a detailed diary of his observations.

Stalin's role in the Soviet state was thus a multi-faceted one – he was the nation's economic planner, the inspired party leader, the font of all ideological wisdom, the protector of the party and of the nation from all its enemies, both internal and external. The French king, Louis XIV, was reputed to have once said:

*"L' état, c'est moi" - the state, it is I, or more simply, I am the state.*

If Stalin's French had been up to it, he would have been well justified in repeating this. His domination of the state far exceeded anything that even the most powerful of the tsars could have dreamed. By the late 1930s, a full personality cult had grown around the figure of Stalin.<sup>3</sup> However, even Stalin could not have achieved the power he did on his own. The system which developed in the 1930s which is loosely termed "Stalinism" comprised much more than Stalin.

*"...Without willing cohorts in all aspects of human endeavour Stalinism would not have flowered. It was his ability to inspire, respond to and ensnare a whole generation that makes Stalin a consummate political actor."*<sup>4</sup>

## The purges

The purges that occurred inside the Soviet Union in the 1930s remain extremely hard to comprehend even from our point in time and with the information that we now have. Thousands of party members, including some of the big names of Bolshevik history, stood accused of horrendous crimes, were clearly innocent, yet confessed and accepted their fate. The main focus of this chapter is to consider the impact of the purges, the show trials and the terror on the Communist Party and Soviet Society. However, it is impossible to avoid other issues such as:

- how could such travesties of justice be allowed to go on year after year?
- how were court officials able to get away with such obvious frame-ups?
- why was it done?
- surely the Russian people must have understood that the charges were fraudulent?
- why would those accuse openly confess when they knew that they were innocent?
- how could so many westerners at the time be duped into believing that the men accused were guilty and thus deserved their punishments?

The men in the dock were accused of everything from planning to assassinate Lenin and Stalin, to wrecking economic enterprises, to being in contact with Trotsky to bring down the regime, to spying for Germany and Japan. They were accused of flying to Norway to meet Trotsky when Norwegian aviation documents proved no such flights occurred. They were accused of meeting people who had long since died. And so it goes on.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 13.

<sup>4</sup> McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 102

Consider this exchange between the Court President and three accused men. The trial took place in January 1937.

*The President*

Accused Pyatakov

*Pyatakov*

Citizen judges... I was a Trotskyite for many years. I worked hand in hand with the Trotskyites... I am too keenly conscious of my crime and I do not venture to ask you for clemency. I will not even make bold to ask you for mercy... And I stand here before you in filth, crushed before my own crimes, bereft of everything through my own fault...

*The President*

Accused Sokolnikov

*Sokolnikov*

Yesterday the State Prosecutor concluded in his speech by saying that we all sitting in the dock deserve the death penalty... I cannot dispute this; that conclusion is, of course, justified to the maximum...

*The President*

Accused Shestov

*Shestov*

I was an agent of German fascism, I am not asking for mercy... And now I have only one desire, to stand with the same calmness, on the place of execution and with my blood to wash away the stain of a traitor to my country...

## Background to the purges

Stalin did not invent purging in the 1930s. The purging of the party had been a regular feature of party life since the Bolsheviks had taken power in November 1917. It was Lenin who had initiated the first purges. Their purpose was genuinely noble. The aim was to remove from the party those who were corrupt or inefficient. These early purges also sought to weed out what were called “careerists”, ie people who had joined the party not because they genuinely believed in the principles of socialism but because they saw an opportunity for personal advancement by “jumping on the Bolshevik bandwagon”.

Being a victim of one of the early purges was disappointing, inconvenient, but it was certainly not life-threatening.

- Being purged meant that one could be demoted or suspended from party meetings or worst of all expelled from the party.
- Expulsion was not always permanent.
- There were mechanisms by which those purged could appeal to the Central Control Commission in Moscow which later on sat in joint session with the party Central Committee.

Interestingly, the coordinating link between these two bodies was the General Secretary, and so in a sense it was Stalin who unofficially conducted the early purges.

Throughout the 1920s, there were several purges, often conducted after there had been a surge in party membership. Such purges occurred in 1919, 1924, 1925, 1928 and 1929. However, by the late 1920s, things had changed. Stalin was using purging to remove his opponents in the power struggle. Also, in 1928, the first of the big show trials occurred. Collectivisation and industrialisation were soon facing problems – the kulaks were resisting and targets were not being met. Scapegoats for these failures had to be found.

| Date          | The accused  | Alleged crimes   | The trial  | Results of the trial   |
|---------------|--|--|--|--|
| March 1928    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 53 engineers from the Shakty area of the Donbass</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Conspiring with former mine owners to sabotage the Soviet economy</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Part of the political struggle in the party as the engineers were followers of Bukharin</li> <li>■ Stalin looking for scapegoats as the Five-Year Plan was having problems</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ five of the engineers were shot</li> <li>■ 44 others were sent to prison or labour camps</li> </ul> |
| Nov/ Dec 1930 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Industrial Party</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wrecking the economy</li> <li>■ Assisting France in a military intervention against the Soviet Union</li> <li>■ Being members of a future planned government</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The charges were clearly false</li> <li>■ The accused were supposed to have met figures such as former tsarist minister Vyshnegradsky who had died years earlier</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Death sentences passed</li> <li>■ Commuted to long spells of imprisonment</li> </ul>                |
| 1933          | <p>A major party purge occurred at this time which resulted in 20% of party members being expelled. Zinoviev and Kamenev were again. The pressures of the economic transformation were telling as a category of those to be expelled now included:<br/><i>“those who label as a fantasy the objectives assigned by the party to the development of the USSR”</i></p> |  |  |  |

## The murder of Kirov

During 1934 there was a gradual easing of the pressure inside the Soviet Union. Targets for the Second Five Year Plan were eased and some concessions were granted to the peasants such as allowing them to work private plots and keep a few animals. The harvest of 1934 was good enough to see an end to rationing. The prisons were opened up and many old Bolsheviks were readmitted to the party. D' Encausse puts it this way:

*"...The noose seemed to slacken and the Soviet citizens could allow themselves to believe that with the end of the first Five Year Plan the most difficult stage of the development of the USSR had also come to an end."*<sup>5</sup>

The calm that had descended on the country and the easing of policy ended abruptly with the murder of Sergei Kirov on 1 December 1934.



- Kirov was born in 1886.
- He trained as a mechanic, joined the Social Democratic Party and ended up in prison after his role in the 1905 Revolution.
- He played an active role in both the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War.
- He joined the party's Central Committee in 1925
- He took over as Leningrad party boss after Zinoviev's demotion.
- He was popular in the party and a good speaker.

The alleged assassin was a young communist named Nikolayev. Apparently, this was a crime of passion and personal grievance. Kirov had been having an affair with Nikolayev's wife and had reneged on giving him a promised job. However, there was certainly more to it than that. In his Secret Speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev declared that Kirov had been murdered on the orders of Stalin with the connivance of the NKVD.

One can only speculate as to Stalin's motive but he would certainly have seen Kirov as a dangerous rival. Kirov had been cool on collectivisation and had not been happy at Bukharin's demotion but decided to go along with the Five-Year Plan. At the 17th Party Congress in 1934, it was clear that Kirov was becoming a party favourite and as the stresses connected with the Five-Year Plan worsened, Stalin's position was not totally secure. Kirov's departure from the scene would have done Stalin no harm, and in fact allowed him to unleash a new wave of purges against other possible rivals.

In March 1935, the "Kirov Decrees" were announced. They included:

- the minimum age of the death penalty was lowered to twelve;
- parasites and anyone who knew a parasite were to be executed: a parasite could be almost anyone.

<sup>5</sup> D' Encausse, Hélène Carrère, Stalin: Order Through Terror, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 31

Stalin demanded “collective responsibility” and called on people to be on the look out for “enemies of the people”. Thousands of people, the vast majority innocent of anything, were denounced to the NKVD. People were settling old scores or trying to prove their loyalty and avoid being arrested. An atmosphere of fear began to grip the nation. Over the next few years a wave of terror would be unleashed. Thousands of party members from those who had occupied the highest positions in the land to the lowliest regional functionary were caught up in the hysteria.

### The Great Show Trials of the 1930s

| Date         | The accused  | Alleged crimes   | The trial   | Results of the trial  |
|--------------|--|--|---|---|
| January 1935 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Zinoviev</li> <li>■ Kamenev</li> <li>■ Various party figures</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Establishing an opposition group in Moscow</li> <li>■ Having links to such a group in Leningrad</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Usual format of a show trial</li> <li>■ Outrageous allegations</li> <li>■ No evidence</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Zinoviev got 10 years</li> <li>■ Kamenev got 5 years</li> <li>■ Others lesser sentences</li> </ul> |
| August 1936  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Zinoviev</li> <li>■ Kamenev</li> <li>■ Bakayev</li> <li>■ Smirnov</li> <li>■ et alia</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Kirov’s murder</li> <li>■ Planning Stalin’s murder</li> <li>■ Creating a terrorist centre</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ They were referred to as a terrorist counter-revolutionary Trotskyist-Zinovievist bloc</li> <li>■ The evil Judas figure of Trotsky was always in the background</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All confessed</li> <li>■ All were shot</li> </ul>  |
| January 1937 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Trial of seventeen</li> <li>■ Pyatakov</li> <li>■ Sokolnikov</li> <li>■ Radek</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Similar to August 1936</li> <li>■ Plotting with Trotsky</li> <li>■ Economic sabotage</li> <li>■ Conspiring with Japan and Germany</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A clever move on Stalin’s part to bring in the foreign threat as the international situation was deteriorating</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All confessed</li> <li>■ 13 were shot</li> </ul>   |
| Mid-1937     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Red Army leaders</li> <li>■ Included Civil War heroes like Tukhachevsky</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Plotting with Germany for the overthrow of Stalin</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tried in camera</li> <li>■ No post-war evidence from German documents to back up the accusations</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All were shot</li> <li>■ Followed by a full-scale purge of the army</li> </ul>                     |
| March 1938   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Bukharin</li> <li>■ Rykov</li> <li>■ Yagoda (ex-NKVD chief)</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Economic sabotage</li> <li>■ Conspiring with foreign powers</li> <li>■ Planning to murder Stalin</li> <li>■ Planning the murder of Lenin</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Referred to collectively as the bloc of anti-Soviet rightists and Trotskyists</li> <li>■ Yagoda’s presence meant even the secret police were not safe</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All confessed</li> <li>■ All were shot</li> </ul>  |

## Exercise 12.1

Rearrange the events listed on the right into the correct chronological order.

|            |  |                                       |
|------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1st event  |  | THE MURDER OF SERGEI KIROV            |
| 2nd event  |  | THE TRIAL OF SEVENTEEN                |
| 3rd event  |  | THE TRIAL OF BUKHARIN AND YAGODA      |
| 4th event  |  | LENIN'S PURGE OF 1919                 |
| 5th event  |  | THE KIROV DECREES                     |
| 6th event  |  | THE EXECUTION OF ZINOVIEV AND KAMENEV |
| 7th event  |  | KIROV JOINS THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE     |
| 8th event  |  | THE TRIAL OF THE INDUSTRIAL PARTY     |
| 9th event  |  | THE TRIAL OF THE RED ARMY LEADERS     |
| 10th event |  | THE TRIAL OF THE SHAKTY ENGINEERS     |

### What was the impact of the “purges, show trials and the terror”

#### *The Yezhovshchina*

The terror unleashed on the party and the country in the late 1930s went far beyond a few grand show trials. In September 1936 Yagoda was replaced as head of the NKVD by Nikolai Yezhov. Yezhov was to spend three years as secret police chief before he himself was caught up in the terror and shot. Yezhov was very short and was known as the “bloodthirsty dwarf”. He was a man totally devoid of principle and inclined to sadistic pleasures. The terror unleashed on the country in 1937 and 1938 carries his name. It became known as the Yezhovshchina. Yezhov drew up vast arrest lists. Local NKVD offices were given quotas to fill; a fixed percentage of the quota arrested would then be executed, while a fixed percentage was given 10 years or more. Innocence or guilt was irrelevant. If it was not so tragic the whole process would be laughable.

**Under Yezhov, the terror spread to all branches of the party, the economy, the arts, the armed forces. Indeed, there was not a single area of Soviet life that was able to escape.**

- By far the key target of the NKVD was party members but thousands of ordinary people ranging from factory workers to shop assistants were sucked into the whirlpool of the purges.
  - Anyone who was arrested and interrogated inevitably was “able to provide the names of others to be arrested”.
  - Even close confidants of Stalin, like Commissar of Heavy Industry Ordzhonikidze, could become a victim. Ordzhonikidze had a major disagreement with Stalin in 1937. He was given a choice of suicide and a state funeral, or being shot with no funeral. He committed suicide.
  - Many foreign communists in Russia almost became targets.
  - The terror reached all the way to Mexico where Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist agent in 1940.
- Media campaigns were launched exhorting people to seek out potential spies and saboteurs.
- People were only too willing to come forward with names – some because they believed it, most because they were settling scores, or coveting people’s jobs or out of a desire to appear loyal and avoid arrest themselves.
- Particular targets were intellectuals and free thinkers. Hundreds of writers, scientists, artists, musicians and historians were rounded up.

The terror not only covered the nation in a blanket of fear but it also atomised society. You did not trust your workmates, friends or even family members, particularly if you were a party member. One kept one’s views very much to oneself.

The purges and the terror had other wide-ranging effects:

- **The terror combined with the impact of the economic changes led to a massive loss of life.**
  - No one will ever know the exact numbers. Various historians, including Robert Conquest and Roy Medvedev, have suggested figures in the millions.
  - The Second Five Year Plan expected the population to be 180 million in early 1937; it was 164 million.
- **The terror had totally transformed the Communist Party.**
  - The “old guard” of the Bolshevik party had been decimated. Most of the victims of the terror were old party members. In 1939, only 8% of party members had been members in 1920.
  - 75% of party members who had joined the party between 1921 and 1928 had been eliminated.
  - The party had been rejuvenated. It was now a young party, most of whose members could only recall a time when Stalin was leader and when society was organized on the basis of discipline and obedience.
  - Nearly the entire party and its leadership owed their careers to Stalin.

- **The nature of the secret police had changed.**
  - The Cheka had been formed back in December 1917 to protect the revolution from counter-revolutionaries. This it did with brutal efficiency during the civil war.
  - By 1922 it had been transformed into a permanent organisation (the GPU) but still under the control of the party.
  - However, by the late 1930s the situation had been reversed. The secret police was no longer controlled by the party; it controlled the party. Only Stalin stood above it.
- **Non-Russian groups throughout the Soviet Union suffered enormously.**
  - Stalin used the NKVD to systematically remove the leadership of the non-Russian groups in the country.
  - Russification policies were followed as rigorously as the tsars had ever done.
  - Even Stalin's home region of Georgia did not escape, where 260 out of 300 party secretaries were removed.
- **The armed forces were affected in a catastrophic manner.**
  - Such was the scale of the purging of the leadership in the armed forces, the terror had had the effect of decapitating them. These officers were killed:
    - All eight admirals;
    - Three out of five marshals;
    - 14 out of 16 Army Commanders Class I and II;
    - 60 out of 67 Corps Commanders;
    - 136 out of 199 Divisional Commanders;
    - 35 000 or half the Officer Corps;
  - 11 Deputy Commissars of Defence;
  - 75 out of 80 members of the Supreme Military Council. 6

Above it all was Stalin. Some modern studies have suggested that much of the terror went on beyond the reach of Stalin's control. Once the terror started, it developed a momentum of its own. However, the ultimate responsibility remains with him. Pathetically, many ordinary Russians were willing to believe that Stalin was ignorant of what was going on. "If only Comrade Stalin knew, he would put a stop to things."

### **Which begs the question "what was behind the terror"?**

1. The party later wanted to pin all the blame on Stalin. It was the result of his paranoia and a perverted personality. This was essentially the line presented by Khrushchev at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. This way the party and the system cannot be held responsible.
2. Western writers tended to blame the Communist system. In other words, the problem was Communism – it happened to be Stalin's terror but it could quite easily have been Lenin's or Trotsky's.

6 Figures from: McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 95

3. Deutscher argues that it was the result of Stalin's fear of an imminent attack from Nazi Germany. He had to remove any possible opposition in order to have a totally united nation behind him when the time came.

**Postscript:**

*In the late 1980s, the last General Secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, formally rehabilitated men like Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin. The party had finally acknowledged the falsity of the charges that had been laid against these men during the purges.*

**Exercise 12.2**

Match the name on the right with the description on the left.

|    |   |               |
|----|---|---------------|
| 1  | I was removed as NKVD chief in 1936 and faced trial myself in 1938.                     | BUKHARIN      |
| 2  | I was a hero of the Civil War but that did not save me in 1937.                         | ORDZHONIKIDZE |
| 3  | I was arguably the most popular man in the party by 1934.                               | TROTSKY       |
| 4  | I was tried in 1938 and was even accused of having planned the murder of Lenin          | YAGODA        |
| 5  | I was tried in 1937 and accused of conspiring with Germany.                             | TUKHACHEVSKY  |
| 6  | Stalin hates me and tries to argue that I am ultimately behind every conspiracy.        | YEZHOV        |
| 7  | My name was used to describe the terror of 1937 and 1938.                               | KIROV         |
| 8  | I was tried alongside Zinoviev twice, in 1935 and 1936.                                 | NIKOLAYEV     |
| 9  | I was given a choice between suicide and a state funeral, or being shot and no funeral. | SOKOLNIKOV    |
| 10 | I was accused of murdering Kirov in 1934.   | KAMENEV       |

## What do the historians think about the Political transformation under Stalin: purges, show-trials and terror?

### 1. Dmitri Shostakovich: Testimony 7

Dmitri Shostakovich was one of the Soviet Union's leading composers. As such, he was useful to the regime but his relationship with Stalin was never easy. If Stalin gave a negative opinion of one of the composer's works, it was never heard again until after Stalin's death. In his memoirs Shostakovich relates what happened to the roaming blind folk singers of the Ukraine, known as lirniki and banduristy. These innocent and defenceless constituted a living record of Ukrainian national culture. In the mid-1930s, Stalin called them to a congress to celebrate their work.

*"...There were several hundred of them at the Congress. It was a living museum, the country's living history; all its songs, all its music and poetry. And they were almost all shot, almost all those pathetic blind men killed."*<sup>8</sup>

### 2. Theda Skocpol: States and Social Revolutions

Skocpol suggests that there is a straightforward, most prosaic explanation for the purges of the 1930s. She describes the purges as arguably the most sweeping historical instance of terror applied by a society's elite against another part of that elite. The removal of the old guard opened the way for thousands of young, "upwardly mobile beneficiaries of the Stalinist system" and that in the long run this probably helped to stabilise the system. However, as to the reason for it:

*"...Stalin's drive to establish and maintain his own personal dictatorship... provides the most straightforward "explanation" for these arrests and murders of thousands of Party and non-Party leaders..."*<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse: Stalin: Order Through Terror

D'Encausse argues that the fundamental impact of the terror on Soviet society was to prove how helpless individuals in such a society are. Stalin's terror succeeded in atomising Soviet society, and Stalin found himself only ever confronted by individuals, not groups. Those individuals could not rely on each other or the state's institutions for protection.

*"...On the contrary, 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."*<sup>10</sup>

7 Shostakovich's memoirs of the Stalin era became a film in 1988, directed by Tony Palmer and starring Ben Kingsley as the composer. The film powerfully evokes the atmosphere of the time.

8 Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich, ed by Solomon Volkov, translated by Antonia Bouis, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979, p 165

9 Skocpol, T, States and Social Revolutions, CUP, Cambridge, 1979, p 231

10 D'Encausse, Hélène Carrère, Stalin: Order Through Terror, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 53



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# Chapter Thirteen

## Social and cultural changes in the USSR under Stalin

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The previous three chapters have illustrated the enormous impact that Stalinism had on the Soviet Union. In the period 1929 to 1941, Stalin had:

- by the use of terror and control of the secret police, established his political power and dominance over the party to the point that opposition to his rule was almost inconceivable;
- allowed the development of a cult of personality which ultimately established Stalin and the Soviet state as one and the same;
- modernised the Soviet economy and in so doing changed the socio-economic structure of the country forever;
- established what was arguably the world's first truly totalitarian state.

This chapter will focus more specifically on the areas of women, education, culture, the arts, the cult of personality and general social changes.

### Women under Stalinism

At the time of the November Revolution, there was a genuine desire within the Bolshevik Party to achieve equality for women. Lenin certainly believed this and he supported the efforts of his Commissar of Social Welfare, Alexandra Kollantai, to achieve this. However, it should be pointed out that Lenin was far more conservative than Kollantai and balked at her promotion of “free love” ideas. Even though Lenin and Kollantai had their political differences (she was a member of the Workers’ Opposition – see Chapter 7), they remained close. Lenin even intervened to prevent the execution of her lover, Pavel Dybenko.

In the early years of Bolshevik rule, women made significant gains.

- In January 1918, women were given civil, legal and electoral equality.
- Equality in marriage was introduced, as was divorce by consent.
- Abortion was legalised.
- Women were allowed to play a significant part in the Civil War, not only as nurses but also as combatants. About 74 000 took part in the Civil War, suffering 1800 casualties.
- In 1920, a Bolshevik Women’s Section was formed, called the Zhenotdel. It was headed by Inessa Armand who worked closely with Kollantai and Lenin’s wife, Krupskaya.

Women were given wider educational opportunities and encouraged to join the work force, particularly during the economic transformation of the 1930s. However, it is one thing to legislate and propagandise for female equality; it is quite another to achieve it. Russia did not lose its deep seated male chauvinism overnight. It was still women who did the housework and who queued for bread. Men took advantage of the growing sexual freedom and there were many “postcard divorces”. Millions of children grew up without parental homes. As one

Bolshevik member, Yaroslavsky put it:

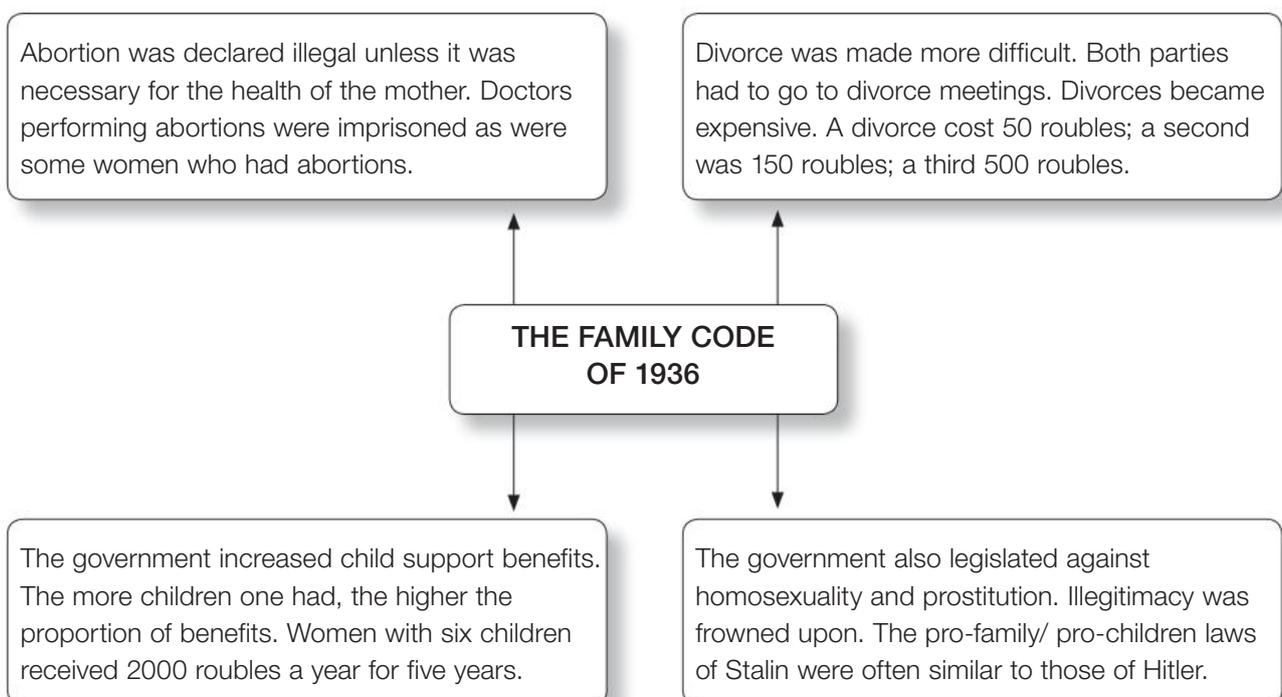
*“... It is one thing to write good laws and another to create the social conditions to bring them to life.”*

Kollantai was to die a disappointed woman as the revolution in the role of women that she had hoped for never eventuated. Under Stalin, there was a reversion to more conservative values and this inevitably affected women. The 1930s was a period of massive upheavals with millions of workers on the move. Apart from the political effects of this discussed earlier, there were also social ramifications. The Soviet Union faced growing social instability.

- the birth rate was steadily falling (not good for long-term growth);
- there were increasing levels of juvenile crime;
- Soviet cities were inundated with large numbers of homeless children, a not dissimilar situation to that described by Charles Dickens in his novels about 19th century industrial Britain.

As a result of these issues, and against the context of the Stalinist hard line of the time, it is perhaps not surprising to see some of the gains made by women after the revolution diluted. The change in the official approach to women became known as “the great retreat”. A more serious attitude to marriage was now demanded and children were to be taught respect and obedience. In 1936, the government introduced its new Family Code. Its main provisions are summarised in Figure 13.1.

**Figure 13.1 The Family Code of 1936**



The hard-line policies of the 1930s began to affect domestic issues. From 1935, the NKVD became involved in dealing with juvenile crime, and adolescents as young as twelve could receive the death penalty for violent crime. The NKVD attempted to clear the streets of homeless children and place them in orphanages. Parents were fined if their children were guilty of juvenile crime and on occasions could have their children taken away from them.

## Education

The late 1920s witnessed what became known as “the cultural revolution”. Young people were encouraged to criticise bourgeois values and to discover their revolutionary self and their proletarian values. It caused great upheaval as bourgeois intellectuals were attacked, and the values of schools and the authority of teachers were put in question. Many teachers were forced out of their jobs, branded as “bourgeois specialists”. The cultural revolution soon gained a momentum of its own. Many of the young people active in this process were also involved in the great changes taking place, anything from working in factories to teaching peasants how to read and write. These young people were active supporters of Stalin and his vision for the future. <sup>1</sup>

By the early 1930s, Stalin called for an end to the cultural revolution. Russia needed educated and disciplined citizens and all he could see were schools in chaos. There was an immediate shift to a more conservative and conventional approach to schools and education in general.

- Teaching was to be based on a tight curriculum, strict programming and structured timetables.
- There was an emphasis on the practical, “useful and non-political” subjects such as physics, chemistry and mathematics.
- Homework, rote-learning, examinations and school uniforms were back.
- Discipline was reinforced, as was respect for teachers.
- The increasingly conservative nature of education was extended to universities where academic success rather than proletarian origins became the criterion for entry.

During the “cultural revolution”, history and history teachers were targeted. History was seen as irrelevant in the brave new world of socialism and its past emphasis on previous tsars was seen as out of step with proletarian values. Some history professors were imprisoned. However, by the mid-1930s, things also changed in the area of history.

- Stalin decreed that history should be taught with reference to previous tsars such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.
- There was to be a greater emphasis on dates, chronology, great men.

Crucially, there was a rewriting of revolutionary history.

- John Reed’s book, *Ten Days That Shook the World* was no longer printed; it had no mention of Stalin.
- Trotsky’s historical works were obviously banned.

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<sup>1</sup> The activities of young Komsomol members at this time were similar to those of the Red Guard in China in the 1960s Cultural Revolution, though on a much-reduced level.

- In 1938, it became compulsory for all school students to be taught Soviet history from A V Shestakov's "A Short History of the USSR". This "correct" view of the past has Stalin as the central figure and Trotsky completely eliminated, except when he appears in a negative light. Here is an example of this new Stalinist view of history:

*"...Trotsky and his contemptible friends organised in the USSR gangs of murderers, wreckers and spies... (The aim of) these enemies of the people was to restore the yoke of the capitalists and the landlords to the USSR..."<sup>2</sup>*

## Culture and the arts

During the 1920s, Russia experienced a spectacular period of cultural activity. Led by Sergei Eisenstein, Soviet cinema rivaled the work of the German expressionists and Hollywood. The theatre world had Karl Meyerhold, literature had Boris Pasternak and the art world the likes of Alexander Rodchenko. However, once Stalin gained his supremacy Soviet artistic life was forced to change. Pasternak could not get work published and Rodchenko gave up his avant-garde art for the more acceptable world of sports photography.

Stalin demanded that artistic endeavour be mobilised to promote the efforts of the new Russia. Writers, artists, filmmakers and composers now had to work within the framework of "**Socialist Realism**".

- The days of artists expressing their inner feelings, their emotions and their individuality were gone.
- "Socialist Realism" demanded that all artistic efforts should be positive, optimistic and heroic. Art should assist in the socialist construction of the time and be in accord with the views of the party. Art was to be didactic, ie it was to teach the people the correct attitudes.
- Socialist Realism was instrumental in developing the Stalinist cult of personality (see below). Images of Stalin from this time are classics of socialist realism.
- Heroes were the order of the day, be they Stakhanovite miners, industrious peasants, arctic explorers or pioneering aviators.
- Gone were the days of self-doubt, questioning or introspection. Socialist Realism demanded of artists, writers and filmmakers the celebration of the glorious present and a golden future.
- Even music could not escape the demands of Socialist Realism. Stalin hated Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District* – it was too dark and realistic.

Figure 13.2 is a typical example of Socialist Realism. This rural scene offers us a view of well-fed, contented peasants. It is called "*Collective Farm Harvest Festival*" and was painted in 1937 by the artist Sergei Gerasimov. No brutalized kulaks here, merely happy collective farm workers.

<sup>2</sup> Shestakov, A V, A Short History of the USSR, Moscow, 1938

**Figure 13.2: Collective Farm Harvest**



The late 1930s also saw a revival of more nationalistic themes, a development which was promoted more fully during the Great Patriotic War (1941-45). Russia's glorious past was to be celebrated, seen in films on past Russians heroes such as Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky.<sup>3</sup>

**Exercise 13.1**

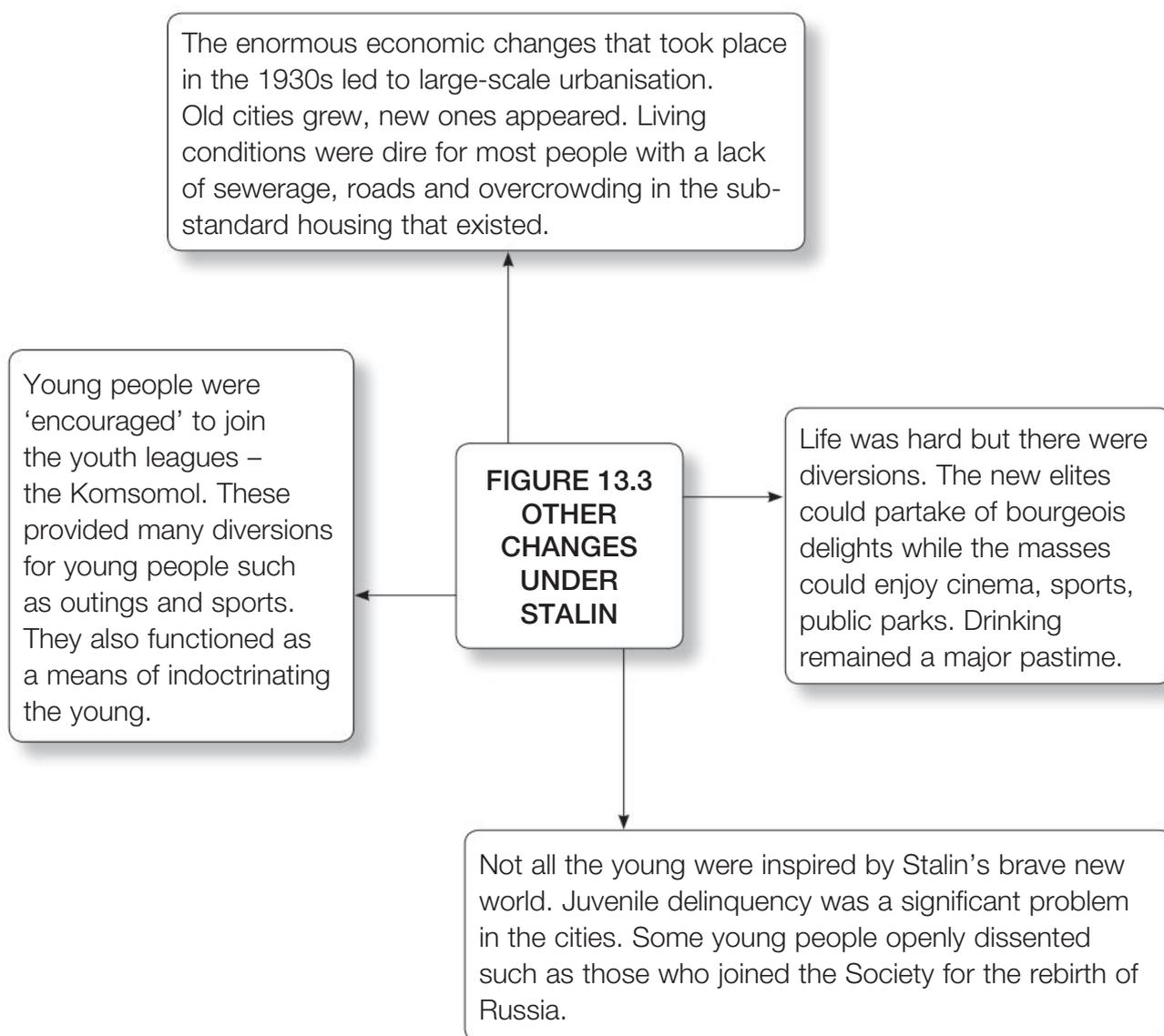
Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | What immediate effect did the revolution have on Russian women? |  |
| 2 | What was the Bolshevik women's section called?                  |  |
| 3 | How were women affected by Stalin's Family Code of 1936?        |  |
| 4 | What was the party's attitude towards the nation's teenagers?   |  |
| 5 | What happened to education during the cultural revolution?      |  |
| 6 | What happened to education from the early 1930s onwards?        |  |

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Nevsky was a 13th century Russian prince who won victories against invading German and Swedish armies.

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 7  | What style of art was demanded of artists by Stalin?                     |  |
| 8  | What were the key features of Soviet artistic endeavour in the 1930s?    |  |
| 9  | How did the new styles of art affect the presentation of Stalin's image? |  |
| 10 | How did the arts handle Russia's pre-revolutionary history in the 1930s? |  |

Figure 13.3 illustrates some other social changes of the 1930s.



## What was the “cult of personality”?

To fully understand the concept of the “cult of personality”, it is necessary to understand the nature of the Soviet state. Western commentators have often used the terms “Russia” and “the Soviet Union” interchangeably. However, this is not correct. Russia is but one part of the Soviet Union, as it was but one part of the Tsarist Empire before that. The Russian Empire/ Soviet Union comprised dozens of different national and ethnic groups who spoke over a hundred different languages and dialects and who believed in a host of different religious beliefs and followed hundreds of different customs and traditions.

In such a society, creating a sense of unity and consensus was a massive challenge.

- Before the revolution this sense of national unity had been achieved with the people’s veneration of the tsar. To peasants all over the Russian Empire, Nicholas II had been “the little father”.
- During the 1920s, the “Lenin cult” had been promoted. However, this was arguably done only as a means for Stalin to outmanoeuvre his opponents in the struggle for power.
- During the 1930s under Stalin, the “cult of personality” reached unbelievable levels. The revolution and the upheavals that followed made it even more necessary to provide a unifying figure for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union in the 1930s underwent a degree of social and economic upheaval unprecedented in history.

*“...The result was the “cult of personality,” the deliberate fixation of individual dedication and loyalty on the all-powerful leader, whose personality exemplified the challenge of creating socialist man and socialist woman.”<sup>4</sup>*

## The “cult of personality” in practice

The most obvious sign of the Stalinist cult of personality was his ever-present image. There were posters and paintings of Stalin in every home, every school, shop, factory, peasant’s hut, museum, government office, indeed any building capable of hanging a picture. There were busts of Stalin adorning parks, entrances to factories and hospitals. It was impossible to pick up a newspaper that did not have Stalin’s picture on the front page, and probably on most inside pages as well. No visit to the cinema was possible without seeing a newsreel praising Stalin’s firm and visionary leadership. Any public celebration, for example anniversaries of the October Revolution, would have people carrying massive portraits of Stalin.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.historyguide.org/Europe/cult.html>

The image presented of Stalin during the 1930s varied, depending upon the audience and the situation within in the country.

- Early images presented Stalin as a humane person who understood his people's needs. He was not presented as some remote, distant figure.
- He was often presented as a man who was intimately involved in the lives of his people. There were images of Stalin:
  - discussing machine technology with ordinary workers
  - standing in the fields talking with peasants
  - viewing major projects and in intense discussion with engineers and architects.
- There were many images depicting Stalin with children.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 13.4 below is an example of such imagery.

**Figure 13.4** The children are saying: *“Thank you dear Stalin for our happy childhood.”*



By the late 1930s, the image had changed.

- Stalin is often presented as a man of wisdom:
  - he is seen often discussing issues with Lenin (though we know that Lenin could not stand Stalin by the end of his life);
  - he is often depicted instructing party workers in meetings;
  - he is even seen as a very young man instructing his friends.

<sup>5</sup> In Moscow there was a famous statue of Stalin holding a small child based a photograph taken in 1936 when Stalin received flowers from a girl called Engelsina Cheshhova. Within twelve months the girl's parents had been arrested as "enemies of the people". The father disappeared, the mother died in exile.

- Stalin is presented in a more heroic, and sometimes detached and superior way, not so much of the people, as clearly leading and inspiring the people.
  - paintings and movies are produced depicting Stalin as a great Civil War hero;
- Stalin is presented as the lone leader, “the great helmsman” guiding the ship of state through troubled waters.

Figure 13.5 gives such an example.

**Figure 13.5 Stalin as the great helmsman**



Not only Stalin’s image, but his words were also everywhere. Newspaper editors vied with each other to see who could include the most quotations of and references to Stalin.

- If a journalist wanted to have a piece published, he was sure to back up his copy with several references to Stalin.
- Many writers tried to ape Stalin’s style of writing Russian.
- Authors, poets, artists and composers only ever dared to produce works which fitted in with the values and opinions of Stalin. <sup>6</sup>

**Not only the present but the past had to be managed to fit the “cult of personality”.**

- Stalin’s role in the past was steadily built up over time at the expense of other leading Bolsheviks, particularly Trotsky. Trotsky was effectively written out of Soviet history books, except when it could be found that he had had disagreements with Lenin.
- Not only were Stalin’s defeated rivals written out of history, they were “airbrushed” out of history. This was all part of the development of the cult of personality.
- Leading party figures who were no longer in favour or who had been inconveniently shot, were removed from photographs. The skill with which Stalinist propagandists achieved this is quite impressive when one considers that Photoshop was several generations into the future.

<sup>6</sup> This, plus the “socialist realism” movement, will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 13.

Figure 13.6 provides one of the more famous examples of this. The victim of the historical airbrushing is Yezhov, former head of the NKVD, shot in 1939.

**Figure 13.6 Yezhov: First you see him, then you don't!**



### The amusing side of the “cult of personality”

It might seem difficult to find much humour in Stalinist rule in the 1930s; indeed, it might almost be considered insulting to the memory of those who suffered. However, people both now and then have discovered a dark humour from those times.

- The faking of so many photographs itself is quite amusing until one considers that such fakes ended up distorting the collective memory of the Soviet people.
- A record of Stalin’s speeches was produced. The second side of the record consisted entirely of applause.

A Soviet joke from the late 1930s went something like this

*Stalin wanted to get a true picture of what people thought of him, so he went in disguise into a cinema. After the main film, a newsreel was shown which naturally highlighted Stalin in every scene. All the audience stood up amidst thunderous, unrelenting applause. Stalin remained modestly seated. After a few moments the man next to Stalin nudged him and said gently: “Most people feel the same way as you comrade. But it would be safer if you stood up.”<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller understanding of this joke, read the “What do the historians have to say” section at the end of this chapter.

**Figure 13.3** What were the stages in the development of the Stalin cult?

Before 1924, it would have been bizarre to contemplate “a Stalin cult”. Stalin was the back-room bureaucrat, the “grey blur” as Sukhanov had put it. Stalin was always outshone by his more intellectual peers.

Following Lenin’s death in 1924, “a Lenin cult” developed. Stalin promoted himself as Lenin’s loyal disciple, not his equal as Trotsky saw himself. All actions were justified by using the words of Lenin. However, in 1925, the city of Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad in honour of Stalin’s civil war exploits there.

By the early 1930s, Stalin’s own cult was well developed. At his 50th birthday in 1929, he was being called the “Lenin of today”. Applause for his speeches was becoming longer. His image was seen more and more, though often accompanying those of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

By the late 1930s, the cult is in full swing. Stalin’s image is used to give the Soviet people the assurance that despite all the turmoil going on around them, despite the signs of treachery within the party, and despite foreign threats, they can count on Stalin’s strong leadership. His image and his words are everywhere. “Socialist realism” further promotes this image (see Chapter 13).

After 1945, Stalin is now also lauded as the great generalissimo who led the nation to victory against Hitler’s Germany. His image is presented in almost divine terms, looking down from on high. The adulation of Stalin by this time knows no limits.

Exercise 13.2

Indicate whether each of the statements on the left is true or false.

|    |  |             |
|----|--|-------------|
| 1  | The cult of personality provided a unifying influence in the country at a time of great national stresses.         | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 2  | Stalin's cult of personality paled into significance when compared the Lenin cult.                                 | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 3  | The cult of personality required the control of the past as well as the control of the present.                    | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 4  | Newspapers were surprisingly little used in the development of the cult of personality.                            | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 5  | Stalin's cult of personality was really little different to that of previous tsarist rulers.                       | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 6  | As the cult of personality grew, Trotsky's role remained surprisingly high profile in Soviet books and films.      | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 7  | Rivals of Stalin or people who had been removed because of their alleged disloyalty were removed from photographs. | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 8  | Stalin hated images in which he was seen with small children.  | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 9  | Following World War II, there was a reduction in the presentation of the Stalinist cult of personality.            | TRUE/ FALSE |
| 10 | Stalin allowed himself to be seen as a Civil War hero even though his role was much less important.                | TRUE/ FALSE |

## What do the historians have to say about the impact of Stalinism on society, culture and the economy?

### 1. Grahame Gill: *Twentieth Century Russia*

Gill makes the point that the Soviet Union suffered a major cultural decline during the 1930s. This was partly the result of the party emphasis on Socialist Realism and of course the standards set by Stalin. However, Gill also suggests that the decline was a reflection of the new elite that had arisen in Stalinist Russia. This new elite had been educated primarily in the technical fields and they usually came:

*“...from a background with little appreciation of literature, art and music, (and so) it is not surprising that this group had little time for these aspects of Russian culture.”<sup>8</sup>*

### 2. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union since 1917*

McCauley provides a useful differentiation of the terms “social realism” and “socialist realism”. The social realist highlights the shortcomings of society and there was clearly no room for the social realist in Stalin’s Russia. Socialist Realism meant the depiction of life from the point of view of social relations and in accordance with the goals of the party. Such depictions had to display a compulsory optimism. Consequently:

*“...Excessive introspection, psychoanalysis, self-doubt and flights into the world of fantasy or the sub-conscious had no place in the new cultural milieu.”<sup>9</sup>*

### 3. Richard Galpin: *Medvedev blasts Stalin defenders*

Galpin’s piece appeared on the BBC website (October 2009). It is an instructive piece because it highlights the fact that, despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence, there are still many in Russia today who seek to defend Stalin’s record and laud his leadership. Galpin reported a videoblog placed on the Kremlin website by then Russian President Medvedev. President Medvedev criticised those in his country who seek to rewrite history and play down the brutal repression of the Stalinist regime. He says his people must never allow the truth of the brutal Stalin regime to be forgotten. President Medvedev’s comments are in contrast to recent positive commentary on Stalin inside Russia. Galpin comments:

*“...Under President Vladimir Putin, the order was given for school history books to be re-written highlighting Stalin’s achievements. In Moscow there is now even a Stalin-themed café and a metro station with one of Stalin’s famous slogans on its walls. In northern Russia a historian investigating crimes committed by the former dictator was recently arrested.”<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> Gill, G, *Twentieth Century Russia*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1987, p 84

<sup>9</sup> McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 89

<sup>10</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8334009.stm>

#### 4. Alexander Solzhenitsyn: *The Gulag Archipelago*

Solzhenitsyn was no friend of the communist regime in the Soviet Union. He had suffered at the hands of Stalin and spent long spells in labour camps. However, Solzhenitsyn's personal experiences and his literary skills, combine to highlight some of the absurdities of the cult of personality that developed in the Soviet Union under Stalin. He tells the story of a district party conference just outside Moscow. At the end of the conference, the new secretary of the District Party Committee called for a tribute to Comrade Stalin. Of course, everyone stood up and began applauding with great enthusiasm. The applause continued: five minutes, eight minutes, ten minutes, not just polite clapping but thunderous, painful applause. After eleven minutes of this, the director of a paper factory sat down and within seconds the applause had been silenced.

*"...That same night the factory director was arrested. They easily pasted ten years on him on the pretext of something quite different. But after he had signed... the final document of the interrogation, his interrogator reminded him: Don't ever be the first to stop applauding..."*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Solzhenitsyn, A, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Collins/ Fontana, London, 1974-78, translated by Thomas P Whitney, p 70

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## ESSAYS 3

# The Soviet State Under Stalin

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The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the third section of the syllabus: The Soviet State under Stalin. These outlines are not presented as the 'be all and end all' responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a 'first draft response' to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author's head as he thought about each question?

### Essay No 1

*Assess the impact of Stalinism on Soviet society in the period to 1941.*

This question expects students to "make a judgment" about the issue of the impact of Stalinism on Soviet society. Beware the pitfalls:

- This is a topic about which most students know a great deal. The danger is that students might be tempted to jump in and simply give a detailed description of everything from collectivisation to the purges to socialist realism. Students must be careful producing such an answer as it would constitute the classic 15/ 25 response.
- Students also need to be careful about the dates. There might be a temptation to go back into the 1920s and consider Stalin's rise to power. This question's starting point needs to be 1928. Foreign Policy issues are also irrelevant.

Several approaches are possible for this question:

- One approach is to consider the impact of Stalinism on society by themes, ie the economic impact, political, social, cultural. There is nothing wrong with this approach and it would certainly suggest a structure for the essay.
- An alternative and more difficult approach would be to try to consider an overarching theme and show how each aspect of the 1930s validates this theme. More sophisticated and an interesting approach for more confident writers.
- Students might even consider arguing that the main impact of Stalinism was to produce a totalitarian society. This is not suggested as most markers would probably consider this a pre-prepared answer, believing the student was expecting a different question.

Soviet society was totally transformed by Stalinism as every aspect of that society came to reflect the will, ideas and obsession with personal power of one man. Stalin's will demanded radical modernisation yet enforced conservative social values. His personality cult was developed to such an extent that the man and the state became one and the same. His obsession with personal power led to a reign of terror that changed society forever.

Open up with idea of Stalin's single-minded efforts to modernise the nation:

- Briefly refer to the crisis of 1927-28 and Stalin's introduction of the Five-Year Plan:
  - this can lead to a discussion of the impact of collectivisation – students should be careful here not to get bogged down in describing the process but instead should focus on the results;

- similarly, with industrialisation, focus on results rather than process.
- Though he demanded radical change in the economic field, Stalin demanded conservative behaviour in social policy;
  - consider the impact of Stalinism on women, the family, education.
- Stalinism involved the growth of a personality cult which created the idea that the state and the man were one and the same:
  - explain the concept of a personality cult;
  - show how it operated and how it affected Soviet society – this would offer a springboard in the impact of socialist realism: an approach to life and the arts emanating from Stalin.
- Politically, Stalinism meant the total domination of party and state by one man, the result of an obsession with maintaining personal power;
  - link this to Stalin's purging of the party;
  - go further and refer to the general terror;
  - be sure not to get bogged down in the narrative but talk about the impact on society, eg creation of a new elite, disdain for the arts, the atomisation of society.
- Conclusion: Stalinism touched all aspects of Soviet society as the will, ideas and power obsession of one man became the determinants of what went on in that society.

## Essay No 2

### *Analyse the purpose and impact of the introduction of collectivisation and industrialisation.*

Beware of the normal traps.

- Students will probably be very knowledgeable about collectivisation and industrialisation and have a few anecdotes to tell. Students must avoid becoming bogged down in the process because they will end up writing a descriptive/ narrative response.
- Students also need to be careful about drifting away from the economic into other areas. However, it would be quite reasonable to argue that the emphasis placed on socialist realism in art was a direct result of the struggles associated with the economic changes of the time.

A possible approach to this question might be to attack it from an ideological angle. Marxists sought a communist utopia with no classes and a state that had withered away. However, Marx had always insisted that such a society would be based on abundance. How was this to be achieved? - by having a modern industrial economy. Hence the purpose of collectivisation and industrialisation was ideological. However, the introduction of the policies modernised the Soviet state but failed to achieve their ideological goals.

Open up with a brief discussion of the Marxist ideal.

- Explain what Marxists believed in – don't get carried away – but make the point that a state of abundance was taken for granted in the achievement of such a new society.
  - Briefly consider the inappropriateness of Russia for a socialist revolution;

- move on to consider the misplaced hope of a world revolution;
- then consider the crisis of 1927-28, link this to the vision of constructing a socialist society alone – ie industrialisation was the necessary step in the building of socialism
- Link collectivisation and industrialisation:
  - explain the need for capital;
  - show how collectivisation was to provide the fiscal means for industrialisation;
  - however, digress here and show how there were also more prosaic political reasons for collectivisation, ie destroy the possibility of peasant opposition and gain party control of the countryside;
  - another digression could be to introduce the argument that there were also defence concerns in the drive towards industrialisation.
- Driven by ideological zeal and political imperatives, collectivisation and industrialisation were pursued fanatically:
  - provide some details of the process in the countryside;
  - bring in some details on the impact of collectivisation, eg output figures, the resultant social change;
  - provide some details of the process of industrialisation;
  - bring in details about its impact, eg output figures, new centres.
- Link the problems/ failures of both processes to the political response:
  - this could lead to a link to the beginning of the purges, eg the trial of the Shakty engineers and onwards
  - develop the terror line and the development of the secret police;
  - far from a state withering, Stalin's collectivisation and industrialisation policies had resulted in the creation of a totalitarian state.
- Conclusion: though ideological motives might have been important in promoting collectivisation/ industrialisation, they were subsumed in the drive to consolidate political power. The result of the policies was lower living standards and not abundance, the creation of a totalitarian state, not the withering away of the state.

### Essay No 3:

#### *To what extent was Stalin's control of the Soviet state the result of the use of terror?*

The ultimate sanction of Stalin's power was his control and use of the coercive power of the state. Terror removed opponents, intimidated waverers and atomised society. It gave him total domination of the party. However, Stalin's control did not rest on fear alone. He was loved as well as feared and millions of Russians gained from his policies.

Clearly, Stalin's use of state terror was fundamental in his control of the state.

- His use of the collectivisation process, the purges and the abuse of the judicial process made possible the removal of his opponents, real or potential:
  - NKVD terror in the countryside resulted in the destruction of his peasant opposition and party control there;

- provide some details of the purges - but do not get carried away with too much narrative;
- the Kirov Decrees and the Yezhovshchina created fear and made the terror self-perpetuating;
- party and non-party members desperately sought to prove their loyalty;
- the ultimate effect was to atomise society – explain this term, and show it provides a dictator with the ultimate control.
- Crucial in Stalin’s use of terror was his control of the secret police and the camps system.
  - explain the evolution of the secret police from control by the party to control of the party;
  - give some narrative details here;
  - explain the camp system: its development, economic uses, the public’s full knowledge of its operation and the impact this had on an atomised society.
- Accompanying the terror was the development of the personality cult.
  - explain the cult, its pervasive presence, the identification of Stalin with state;
  - a generation was growing up which accepted the worship of Stalin as the natural order of things;
  - the all-pervasive propaganda even cemented Stalin’s heroic place in Russia’s past for millions of young Russians.
- Despite the terror, millions of Russians loved Stalin or were willing to accept the advantages his rule brought.
  - many, especially the young, were moved by the idealism of constructing a new society;
  - the existence of losers always implied the existence of winners – those purged had to be replaced, and they owed their careers to Stalin;
  - as Russia changed a new, technical elite was being created which owed its success to Stalin.
- More recent historians warn against accepting the totalitarian idea too readily. They argue that many Russians managed to maintain some independence in personal life or were preoccupied by merely try to get by. Consider the ideas of Sheila Fitzpatrick.
- Conclusion: Clearly the use of state terror secured Stalin’s complete control of the Soviet state. Opponents were destroyed and the atomisation of society ensured the cowing of potential opponents. However, the new regime also had the gratitude and loyalty of millions for whom the Stalinist regime offered hope and opportunity.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

# **The nature of Soviet foreign policy 1917-1941**

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### **CHAPTERS 14 and 15: AN EXPLANATION**

The material to be covered in Chapters 14 and 15 covers common ground. Consequently, some points will appear in both chapters. In order to maintain the syllabus focus, the following approach will be taken:

Chapter 14 will examine Soviet Foreign Policy while making only the briefest of references to the role of ideology.

Chapter 15 will assume knowledge of the narrative and background causal factors, and will attempt to provide some more specific detail on the impact ideology had on Soviet Foreign Policy.

### **The ambiguity in Soviet Foreign Policy**

Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1941 might be considered to be schizophrenic in nature. It was a single creature, but it behaved in two quite different ways. From one day to another, indeed even on the same day, it might make pronouncements that were totally contradictory in nature.

On the one hand the Soviet Union was not a typical state.

- It was a revolutionary state. Its mission was to spread the word of Marxism-Leninism and its duty was to incite socialist revolutions in other countries. This was done in order to achieve the utopia of worldwide, classless and stateless communism.
- To this end, Lenin predicted a constant state of war between the Soviet Union and the capitalist countries.

*“...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.”<sup>1</sup>*

- In order to promote world revolution, the Bolsheviks established the “Communist International” or “Comintern” in 1919. The Comintern was based in Moscow. The purpose of the Comintern was to assist communist revolutionaries in various countries to overthrow their governments.

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<sup>1</sup> Lenin speaking at the 8th Party Congress, 18 March 1919.

- The Soviet Union did not attend the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and neither did it join the League of Nations. This is not surprising, after all the League was seen as being merely a coalition of capitalist states whose aim was to isolate, if not destroy the Soviet Union.

However, the Soviet Union was soon acting as a typical state.

- The hoped-for revolutions in the west did not eventuate. There were risings in Germany and Hungary, and there was a short-lived Soviet republic in Bavaria but these were soon overthrown.
- Thus, whether the Soviet Union liked it or not, it had become a state with no alternative but to co-exist with capitalist states.
- Consequently, while the Comintern was doing its best to destroy the governments of Britain, France and Germany, the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was doing its best to develop cordial relations.
- Once “Socialism in one country” had become the official thinking inside the Soviet Union, the capitalist west was needed for trade and capital.

It quickly became the case that ideology was to be sacrificed to national state interest (see Chapter 15).

### **The desperate years: 1917-21**

For all the talk about ideological fervour by Lenin at the 8th Party Congress, the Bolshevik regime had but one aim in the period 1917 to 1921: survival. Nothing else mattered and all foreign policy actions were aimed in this direction.

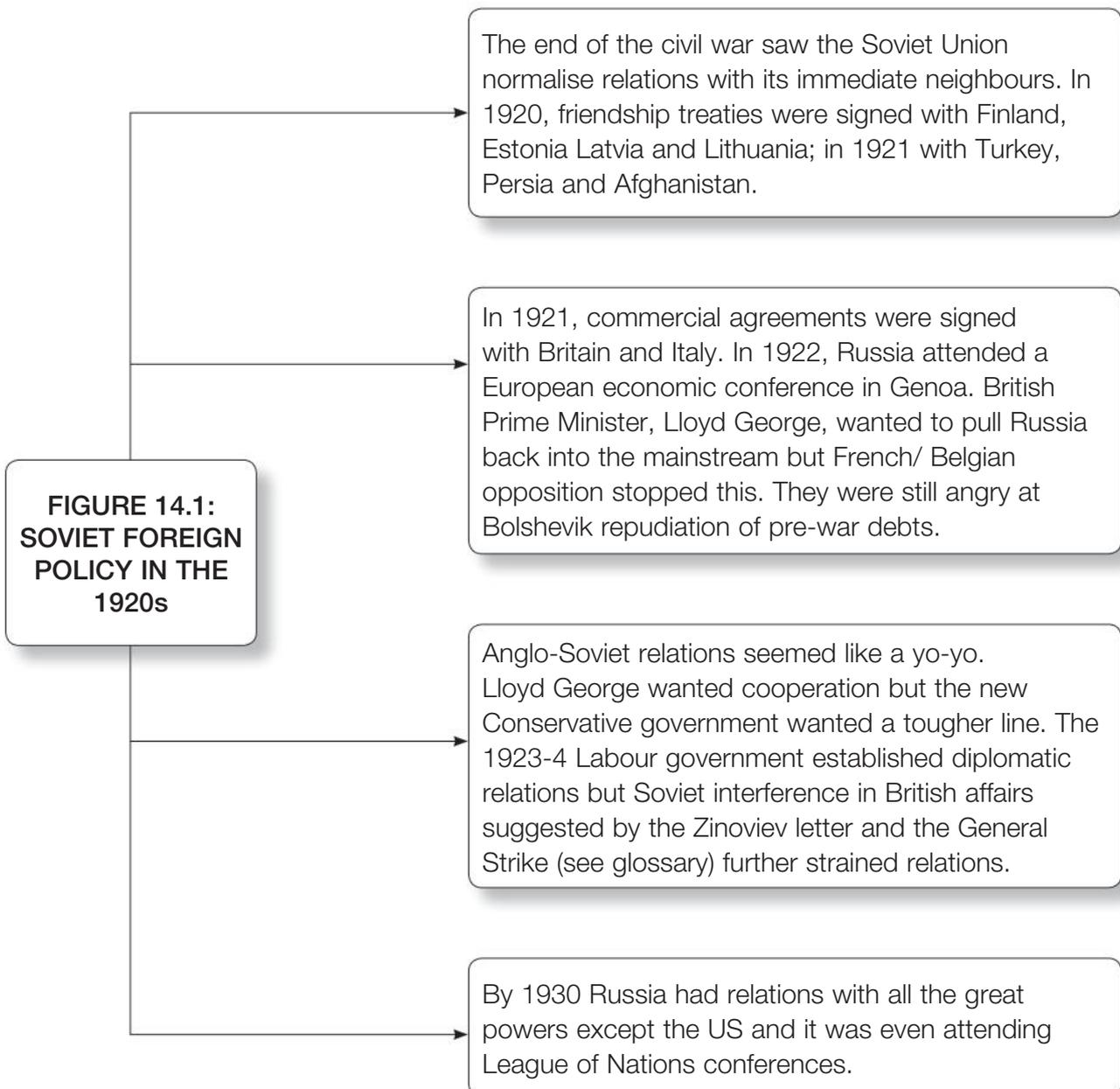
- Lenin’s first foreign policy actions concerned the war with Germany. He was adamant that the war with Germany had to come to an end and he was willing to pay any price to achieve this.
  - He faced opposition from the likes of Bukharin who had romantic views of leading a revolutionary war.
  - Lenin was more sanguine. The war had destroyed Kerensky’s government; it would destroy his if it was not ended.
  - The result was the Treaty of Brest Litovsk (Chapter 4 for the full details on the treaty and its impact).
- Lenin correctly saw survival was the only real issue for the Bolsheviks. As he faced civil war, allied intervention and war with Poland, (see Chapter 5), the Bolsheviks were holding on to power by a thread.
  - They were outnumbered by superior White forces.
  - They were surrounded by western capitalist forces eager to strangle the Bolshevik regime at birth. There were British forces in Murmansk, French forces in the Caucasus, American and Japanese forces in the Far East, and there were still German troops in the Ukraine. Though the allied intervention eventually came to naught, at the time it was a fearful prospect.

- Western governments were clear in their intentions. Winston Churchill (then Minister of War) was a strong advocate of bringing down the Bolsheviks. As late as January 1949, Churchill stated:

*“...the strangling of Bolshevism at its birth would have been an untold blessing to the human race.”<sup>2</sup>*

### The 1920s: Normalisation of relations

Victory in the civil war brought survival but the world revolution was now a distant dream. The 1920s were dominated by attempts to normalise foreign relations. Ideological changes at home ensured this (see Chapter 15) and the need to revive the Soviet economy. Figure 14.1 summarises 1920s developments.



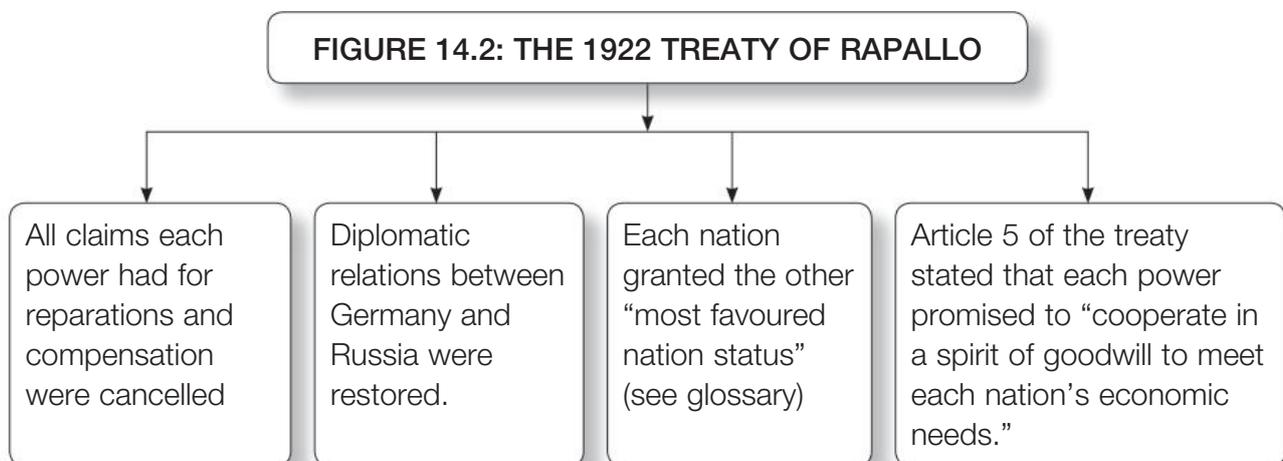
<sup>2</sup> Quoted in: Langworth, R M, Churchill by Himself, Ebury Press, St Ives, 2008, p 148

## Soviet-German relations in the 1920s

The Soviet Union's great diplomatic success in the 1920s was its relationship with Germany. Germany and Russia had much in common – they were both pariah states, both scorned the Treaty of Versailles and the League, and they both wanted to end mutual financial claims.

- Germany had helped Russia during its 1921 famine.
- The German army head, Hans von Seeckt had made contact with Trotsky for German-Soviet military cooperation.
- By early 1922, the German army was making military goods (banned by the Treaty of Versailles) and exercising its troops inside Russia, while also training Red Army forces.

The Soviets and the Germans formally came together in the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. Figure 14.2 summarises its main details.



The Treaty of Rapallo was clearly a “marriage of convenience”, as the two powers were poles apart ideologically, socially, politically and economically. For the Soviet Union it was a triumph as its diplomatic isolation had been broken.

*“...It (Rapallo) secured for the Soviet Union its first official recognition by a great power.”<sup>3</sup>*

Soviet-German relations were not totally smooth. They were hurt in 1923 following an abortive communist coup attempt in Germany. The Soviets were alarmed when German Foreign Minister, Stresemann, moved Germany closer to the west with the 1925 Locarno Treaty and Germany's 1926 entry into the League of Nations. However, these developments did not stop a further German-Soviet trade treaty being signed in 1925 and a neutrality treaty in 1926. Economic ties continued to strengthen and the Reichswehr (German army) continued its clandestine activities inside the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> Carr, EH, *International Relations Between the Wars*, Macmillan, London, 1947, p 25

### Exercise 14.1

In the space provided below, rewrite the following passage in a logical, chronological sequence.

Its relations with France and Belgium remained tense because of war debts. By the late 1920s, economic and military ties with Germany remained strong. The Bolsheviks' first major policy action was to sign the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. However, it achieved diplomatic success when it signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany. Having survived the civil war, the Soviets quickly normalised relations with its neighbours. By 1919, the prime concern of the Bolshevik regime was its survival though its ideological goal still remained world revolution.

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### Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1930s

**With the onset of the depression**, the ambiguity in Soviet Foreign Policy reappeared. The traumas being experienced by western nations, as unemployment rocketed and capitalism was facing collapse, briefly revived hopes of world revolution.

- Through the Comintern, Stalin ordered communist parties in western countries to break links with moderate socialist parties.
- This proved to be a disaster as it weakened the opposition to the rise of fascism.
- This was particularly the case in Germany.
  - Had the moderate socialist (SDP) and the communist (KPD) been able to work together, it might have proven possible to prevent the accession to power of Hitler and the Nazi Party.
  - One of the great “ifs” of history.
- However, this antagonistic policy was accompanied by the Soviet desire to sell its surplus grain to western powers in order to finance its massive drive towards industrialization.

**By the mid-1930s**, Soviet Foreign Policy changed direction. Stalin saw the dangers to the Soviet Union of the growth of Nazi expansionism in Europe and Japanese militarism in the Far East. When Hitler signed a Ten-Year Non-Aggression Pact with Poland in 1934, fears

of joint Polish-German military action in the Ukraine seemed real. The single most important foreign policy aim for Stalin at this point was the avoidance of war. The Soviet Union was going through the chaos of collectivisation and industrialisation. It was in no condition to fight a war with Germany in the west, and possibly one with Japan in the east.

Hitler had made no secret of his utter detestation for the Soviet regime. In his eyes, the Soviet Union was a country of inferior Slavs governed by Jewish Bolsheviks. His dreams of building a new German empire in the east, of achieving “lebensraum”, meant the inevitable destruction of Soviet power and the enslavement of the Russian people.

Consequently, Stalin ordered western communist parties to forget about dreams of world revolution and to cooperate with anti-fascist groups. The 7th Comintern Congress of July 1935 ordered them to join “Popular Front” governments where appropriate. Such a popular front government was formed in France in 1936. The Soviet Union now attempted to forge ties with non-communist nations to forge a united bloc against the threat of Nazism.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1932  | Treaty of Friendship signed with Italy.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This was short-lived as within four years, Italian leader Mussolini had signed an Anti-Comintern Pact with Hitler.</li> </ul>                                       |
| 1933  | The Soviet Union and the United States formally established diplomatic relations.   |
| 1934  | The Soviet Union joined the League of Nations.  |
| 2 May 1935  | The Soviet Union and France signed an alliance.   |
| <i>“...The result of the Nazi revolution had been to reconstitute the pre-war Franco-Russian alliance.”</i> <sup>4</sup>  |   |
| 16 May 1935   | Czechoslovakia joined the Franco-Soviet combination.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Soviet Union was only committed to helping Czechoslovakia if France did likewise.</li> </ul>   |
| May 1936  | Communists joined the Popular Front government in France  |
| 1936-39   | Stalin strongly backed the Republican anti-fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Was Stalin really trying to stop another fascist power being created or seeking to set up a communist state?</li> </ul> |
| <i>“...Russia’s main aim was to put up as strong a resistance as possible against Franco and his allies to support her foreign policy of defence against fascism.”</i> <sup>5</sup> |   |

<sup>4</sup> Carr, EH, *International Relations Between the Wars*, Macmillan, London, 1947, p 204

<sup>5</sup> Beloff, M, *Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 1929-41*, London, 1949

## The Nazi-Soviet Pact: August 1939

On 23 August 1939, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia signed one of the most amazing documents in diplomatic history: The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Hitler despised Stalin, hated the whole concept of communism and had made it clear for years that he intended to invade Russia and enslave its people. Stalin had no illusions about Hitler, hated and feared him, and for several years had desperately tried to form a united front against him. Yet, despite all this, the agreement was signed.

Stalin realised by late 1938 that his hopes of forming a united front with the west against the threat of German Nazism was going to fail.

- In western ruling circles, Nazism was seen as a lesser evil than Bolshevism. This was certainly the case in Britain.
- Fearful though the west might be of Hitler, there remained enormous distrust of the Soviet Union. British Prime Minister Chamberlain stated in May 1939:
 

*“...I must profess the most profound distrust of Russia.”*
- For Stalin the situation in Europe seemed to be going from bad to worse. The Soviet Union was isolated and vulnerable.
  - The convulsions which were going on inside the country (collectivisation/ industrialisation/ the purges) were not helping.
  - Stalin’s efforts to forge closer military ties with the west came to nothing.
  - His fears increased when Germany, Japan and Italy came together in the Anti-Comintern Pact of September 1937, thus forming what was to become known as the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis
  - Mussolini had been allowed to get away with his invasion of Abyssinia, Franco’s forces were getting close to victory in Spain and Hitler had been allowed to remilitarize the Rhineland and invade Austria with impunity.

The British government of Neville Chamberlain was pursuing a policy of appeasement. In essence, Chamberlain sought to avoid war at all costs by granting Hitler his ‘reasonable’ demands. The highpoint of the appeasement policy came in September 1938 at the Munich Conference. Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Daladier met to carve up Czechoslovakia and give Hitler the Sudetenland area which he had demanded on the threat of war. Neither Czechoslovakia nor the Soviet Union was invited to the conference. War was avoided and Chamberlain returned to Britain as a hero who saved the peace. However, Stalin saw things differently:

*“...The view from Moscow was that the western powers were driving Hitler eastwards and hoping for a struggle between fascism and communism in which each would destroy the other.”<sup>6</sup>*

Following Munich and Britain’s cool response to further Soviet overtures, Stalin began to think the impossible: coming to an agreement with Hitler. In March 1939, Germany invaded the rest

<sup>6</sup> Webb, K, *International Relations Between the Wars*, McGraw-Hill, Roseville, 1992, p 77

of Czechoslovakia. Britain finally dropped the policy of appeasement and warned Hitler that if he attacked Poland, Britain (and France) would declare war on Germany. Hitler was impatient; he wanted Poland. However, he did not want a repeat of 1914; he did not want Germany to be bogged down in a war on two fronts. If he invaded Poland, what would be the reaction of the Soviet Union? Hitler, too, now began to think the impossible.

Hitler and Stalin were both opportunists. Neither trusted the other, but it suited them both to reach an agreement. On 23 August the German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop flew to Moscow and with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Figure 14.3 summarises the main points.

**Figure 14.3 The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact**

| <b>WHY?</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><u>For Hitler:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ He believed he would defeat Poland quickly</li> <li>■ With Russia neutral, he could then deal with the west</li> <li>■ He could then take on Russia at a time in the future that suited him – he had no intention of honouring the agreement in the long term.</li> </ul>  | <p><u>For Stalin:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ He could take his share of Poland</li> <li>■ A buffer would be created between Germany and Russia</li> <li>■ Germany would exhaust itself fighting in the west and Russia would be able to consolidate its position at home and buy space and time.</li> </ul> |
| <b>THE AGREEMENT</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If either Russia or Germany finds itself at war, the other will not support the third power, ie Russia will do nothing if Germany attacks Poland.</li> <li>■ The agreement takes immediate effect, ie Hitler wanted to keep his deadline to attack Poland on 1 September.</li> <li>■ Secret Protocols were added (discovered after the war). Russia was allowed to take over Eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Bessarabia (on Romania's border).</li> </ul> |   |
| <b>THE EFFECT</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Germany invaded Poland which was defeated within a month.</li> <li>■ Russia occupied eastern Poland.</li> <li>■ Throughout 1940, Russia occupied those territories stipulated in the Secret Protocols.</li> </ul>  |   |

### **After the Nazi-Soviet Pact: September 1939-June 1941**

Hitler never had any intention of honouring the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Stalin must have known this, though right up until May 1941, he continued to keep his side of the bargain and was sending war materials to Germany only weeks before the German invasion in June 1941.

Following the defeat and dismemberment of Poland in October 1939, a period of “*phony war*” continued until April 1940 when there was no military action in Europe. In April and May 1940, Hitler attacked Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and France. By June all had been defeated and France surrendered in late June. Hitler then launched massive attacks against the British. He failed to defeat the British but believed he had nothing to fear from them. Throughout late 1940 and into 1941, he consolidated his position in eastern Europe. By mid-1941, he had gained Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania as allies, and had subjugated Yugoslavia and Greece. He was now ready to take on Russia.

In 1939, having taken its share of Poland, the Soviet Union attacked Finland following the latter’s refusal of Soviet territorial demands. The “Winter War” as it became known was humiliating for the Soviets. Under its general Mannerheim, the Finns inflicted several defeats on their Russian enemy. Finland was eventually defeated by sheer weight of numbers but the cost for Stalin had been high – 200 000 men dead, and the loss of 700 planes and 1600 tanks. By 1941, the Soviet Union had consolidated its position by annexing the Baltic states and Bessarabia and had engaged in a massive rearmament drive. This was the position when Germany invaded Russia on 22 June 1941 in Operation Barbarossa.

**Exercise 14.2**

Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

|            |  |   |
|------------|--|---|
| 1st event  |  | The Munich Conference                   |
| 2nd event  |  | Soviet Union joins League of Nations    |
| 3rd event  |  | The Winter War                          |
| 4th event  |  | Formation of the French Popular Front   |
| 5th event  |  | The invasion of Poland                  |
| 6th event  |  | The Franco-Soviet Alliance              |
| 7th event  |  | The Nazi-Soviet Pact                    |
| 8th event  |  | Operation Barbarossa                    |
| 9th event  |  | The Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis              |
| 10th event |  | Soviet Union and US establish relations |

## What do the historians have to say about Soviet Foreign Policy?

### 1. Richard Overy: *The Origins of the Second World War*

Overy tries to show that Stalin was an arch-opportunist. He had no desire to commit himself to either the western allies or to Hitler. His only desire was to keep out of the war and if that could be achieved by coming to an arrangement with Britain and France, that was fine. If it meant signing a pact with the devil (Hitler), that was equally acceptable. All that mattered was strengthening the Soviet position.

*“...Russia’s chief concern was to avoid involvement in any major war at all costs. Soviet foreign policy aimed to play one power off against another in the hope of escaping the impending conflict.”*<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Antony Beevor: *Stalingrad*

Most commentators assumed that Stalin’s signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact was a classic piece of cynical opportunism and that he was fully in control of the situation. In fact, Stalin keenly kept his side of the deal well into 1941. Beevor makes the point that Stalin could simply not accept that Hitler was going to renege on the deal. He refused to accept diplomatic warnings of a German attack; claimed Churchill’s warnings were merely a ruse to make Germany and Russia fight. He even ignored his border guards’ warnings about German preparations.

*“...Stalin, the totalitarian dictator, still could not come to terms with the idea that events might be outside his control.”*<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Gordon Greenwood: *The Modern World*

Greenwood makes the obvious point that the Soviets had reason to be suspicious of the west following their continual willingness to give in to German, Italian and Japanese aggression.

*“...The absence of the Soviet Union from Munich, the half-hearted western methods of negotiation for an alliance against Germany after the guarantee to Poland, only solidified these suspicions.”*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Overy, RJ, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Longman, New York, 1987, p 59

<sup>8</sup> Beevor, A, *Stalingrad*, Penguin, London, 1998, p 6

<sup>9</sup> Greenwood, G, *The Modern World*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, p 464

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# Chapter Fifteen

## The role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy 1917-1941

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### Introduction: Ideology or National State Interest?

When historians attempt to analyse a nation's foreign policy, it tends to be the practice to "personify" the country. To understand why a country behaves the way it does in foreign affairs, the historian tends to think of it as a person. People are generally motivated by a desire to look after one's own, personal self-interest, sometimes greed and avarice, and often by a desire to secure one's future. And then there are those people who are motivated by a belief, often driven by a religious principle. It is instructive to think of this when considering the foreign policy actions of the Soviet Union. Were Stalin and those before him motivated by national self-interest or by a principle, in this case an ideological rather than a religious one? Ideological concerns often appeared in Soviet pronouncements and during the early, heady days of revolution and civil war, they may well have been predominant. However, it will be the contention of this chapter that Soviet foreign policy was driven primarily by national state interest and the desire to protect the Soviet future, and that the changing currents of the ideological debate inside the country did little to alter this.

The wartime British Prime Minister understood this. On 1 October 1939, as German forces were smashing their way through Poland, Churchill broadcast to the British nation his views on what Russia might do in the war. He said:

*"...I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma..."*<sup>1</sup>

Churchill was making the point that it has always been difficult to understand Russian motivations and to predict their actions. (This is probably even the case today). Soviet Russia was always steeped in secrecy. Later in the war (April 1942), Churchill commented:

*"...Everybody has always underrated the Russians. They keep their own secrets alike from foe and friends..."*<sup>2</sup>

However, for all the apparent mystery behind Soviet foreign policy, it seems that Churchill had identified the constant theme in their actions in his 1939 broadcast. After he had made his point about the Russian "enigma", he said:

*"...but that is the key. That key is Russian national interest..."*<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter 14, it was explained there was an ambiguity in Soviet Foreign Policy. The Comintern, for a while led by Zinoviev (1919-26), was driven by a desire to destabilize foreign governments and promote socialist revolution. However, Foreign Minister Chicherin (1918-30) was trying to develop good state to state ties with foreign governments. From 1917 to 1941, the Soviet Union seemed to be pursuing two contradictory policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in: Langworth, R M, Churchill by Himself, Ebury Press, St Ives, 2008, p 145

<sup>2</sup> Langworth, p 145

<sup>3</sup> Langworth, p 145

However, as time went on, it was clear that national state interest mattered far more than ideology.

| Period                 | Importance of ideology  | Importance of national state interest  |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Nov 1917-<br>June 1918 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Officially there are calls for World Revolution and genuine hope for outbreaks of revolution in Germany and western nations</li> <li>■ Lenin and Trotsky have certainly argued that this will occur for some time</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Survival is all important</li> <li>■ The Bolsheviks are in a very weak position and it is crucial to establish peace with Germany</li> <li>■ Result: Treaty of Brest Litovsk</li> </ul>   |
| June<br>1918-1921      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Outbreaks of revolution in Germany and Hungary are well received</li> <li>■ The Comintern is established under Zinoviev with the purpose of promoting and assisting the outbreak of revolution</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Revolutionary slogans are in the air but the Bolsheviks' fundamental goal is survival</li> <li>■ As hopes for revolution in the west fade, the party focuses on winning the civil war, enforcing War Communism and dealing with revolts like Tambov and Kronstadt</li> <li>■ Having won the Civil War, there is no intention of launching a revolutionary war against the west – national interest is winning out</li> </ul>  |
| 1921-29                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ideology takes a back seat as national recovery takes precedence.</li> <li>■ The promotion of revolution does not sit well with NEP.</li> <li>■ The communist coup attempt in Germany in 1923 is welcomed but not acted upon.</li> <li>■ The Zinoviev Letter affair in Britain reflects more wishful thinking than a serious attempt at overthrowing the British system. Similarly, the Comintern's support for British miners in the General Strike of 1926.</li> <li>■ Inside Russia, Trotsky's support for "Permanent Revolution" fails to garner support as Stalin's notion of "Socialism in One Country" more accurately captures the national mood.</li> <li>■ Trotsky's defeat in the struggle for power and his eventual expulsion from the party and the USSR sees the end of a serious fanning of revolution in the west.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In 1921 the 10th Party Congress introduces NEP. This retreat from socialist principle is driven purely by the need for the country to recover.</li> <li>■ The defeat of the left in the struggle for power ensures that Soviet national economic development has priority over ideology.</li> <li>■ There is a need for stability and this is reflected in the promotion of normal state to state relations. By the end of the decade, the Soviet Union had diplomatic relations with all the major powers except the US.</li> <li>■ Economic agreements are important, seen in the Genoa Conference and the Treaty of Rapallo.</li> <li>■ Relations with Germany are promoted though politically and ideologically the two countries are poles apart.</li> </ul> |
| 1929-33                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The onset of the depression fans the flames of ideological fervour.</li> <li>■ The western capitalist system looks in serious trouble as unemployment levels explode, banks fail and economies totter.</li> <li>■ Stalin orders the Comintern to avoid cooperation with other political parties. Let the system collapse.</li> <li>■ Fascist regimes are welcomed because it is believed that this is the final stage before a workers' revolution.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Despite the tribulations in the west and a brief revival of ideological fervour, the Soviet Union is far more preoccupied by its internal economic development.</li> <li>■ Torn apart by collectivisation and driven by the goal of industrialisation, national interest is clearly predominant over ideological crusading.</li> <li>■ If ideology plays any role it is in national reconstruction not in the pursuit of world revolution.</li> </ul>   |

|         |  |  |
|---------|--|--|
| 1933-38 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The pursuit of ideological goals has disappeared.</li> <li>■ The purpose of the Comintern and the role of foreign communist parties are to promote the interests of the Soviet Union.</li> <li>■ Faced with the threat of Nazism and Japanese militarism, socialist goals disappear.</li> <li>■ Communist parties are encouraged to join Popular Front governments.</li> <li>■ The Soviet Union joins the League of Nations and attempts to form military alliances with hated capitalist powers.</li> <li>■ Ideological goals matter for little as the Soviet Union seeks to form a united front against Germany.</li> <li>■ The Soviet Union supports the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. It provides arms, finance and 'volunteers', though by 1938 Soviet involvement in Spain is in decline. The NKVD plays a major role in Spain and Trotskyites are pursued even more zealously than Franco's fascist forces.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The country is weak and vulnerable. With the countryside torn apart by collectivisation and industrial targets often not met, Stalin realises that he has to put his nation's interests first.</li> <li>■ This is even more so during the period of the purges.</li> <li>■ The ideological goal is the construction of socialism at home. This requires trade with the capitalist west and peace in Europe.</li> <li>■ The defence and security of the nation is paramount.</li> <li>■ Involvement in Spain is primarily motivated by national defence-strategic concerns. Stalin does not want the possibility of a fascist Spain lining up with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. However, he also uses Spain to eliminate pro-Trotsky elements fighting for the Republican cause. At the same time, foreign communists inside the Soviet Union also become victims of the purges.</li> </ul> |
| 1938-39 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Soviet Union is unrecognisable as a socialist country as it steadily steers towards a rapprochement with Nazi Germany.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ National defence and security dictate coming to terms with Germany.</li> <li>■ The Third Five Year Plan focuses on the military build-up.</li> <li>■ Ideology has ceased to have any relevance to Soviet foreign policy.</li> </ul>   |
| 1939-41 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ With war raging in Europe, only national self-interest matters.</li> <li>■ There is no propaganda/ ideological talk of war sparking socialist revolutions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stalin's goal is simply to keep Russia out of the war. He hopes that the Nazis will get bogged down in the west.</li> <li>■ He maintains ties with Germany, honours the Non-Aggression Pact, seeking not to antagonise Hitler.</li> </ul>   |

## What do the historians have to say about the impact of changing ideology on Soviet foreign policy 1917-1941?

### 1. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union Since 1917*

McCauley describes the debacle of Soviet foreign policy in Asia. Stalin and Bukharin were very keen on the Chinese Communist Party maintaining its united front with the leader of the Nationalists, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-Shek). The aims of the Nationalists were national unification and the removal of foreigners. Picking up on Lenin's ideas in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Stalin and Bukharin believed that national liberation success in China would weaken the European powers and increase the prospect of revolution. Such an approach seems quite strange when in Europe the focus was on cultivating ties with the west during the NEP period. This approach in Asia might

tend to suggest that at least in the Asian theatre, ideological concerns were of some importance. However, their policy was shown to be a disaster when Jiang Jieshi turned on his communist allies and massacred them in 1927.

*"...(Jiang Jieshi) caught Moscow completely off guard... the Comintern... had made Jiang an honorary member of its executive committee. Now its policy lay in ruins and opprobrium was heaped on the heads of Bukharin and Stalin."* <sup>4</sup>

## 2. Isaac Deutscher: Stalin

Deutscher shows how the importance of ideology during the early life of the Soviet regime caused havoc with Stalin's attempts to create a united east-west stand against Nazi Germany. Deutscher refers to an "old ideological antagonism" that Stalin tried hard to eliminate. As he entertained various western figures throughout the thirties, he tried to argue that the Soviet Union had never planned world revolution and this was a tragic misunderstanding. In a sense he was telling the truth. The Soviet Union had not attempted to export revolution but rather stimulate its growth in western countries. However, that was now all in the past:

*"...He tried to lay the ghosts of the past, the giant ghost of world revolution first of all... The bourgeoisie of the western countries now found it hard to believe that all this was merely a comic or tragic-comic misunderstanding."* <sup>5</sup>

## 3. Michael Jabara Carley: Pragmatism in Early Soviet Foreign Policy

Carley argues the case that the Bolsheviks were essentially pragmatic when it came to the exercise of foreign policy. He also shows that the western powers were too: each could ignore ideological concerns if it suited them. France might go on about the Bolshevik repudiation of pre-war debts and fan fears of a red menace, but a friendly Russia might well be useful in the event of a resurgent Germany bent on revenge. As for the Bolsheviks, Carley suggests that they were pragmatic, defensive and right from the start concerned with national self-interest. Surrounded by allied interventionist forces during the civil war, the Comintern was the only way to fight back against them. The Bolsheviks could not attack the west by force of arms but they could use revolutionary propaganda.

*"...The propaganda was dangerous, and the interventionists feared it. The Comintern, while attempting to spread revolution, was also an instrument of self-defence."* <sup>6</sup>

4 McCauley, M, The Soviet Union Since 1917, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p 63

5 Deutscher, I, Stalin, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed, p 414

6 <http://gozips.uakron.edu/~mcarley/uphill.html>

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## ESSAYS 4

# Soviet Foreign Policy

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The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the fourth section of the syllabus: Soviet Foreign Policy. These outlines are not presented as the ‘be all and end all’ responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a ‘first draft response’ to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author’s head as he thought about each question?

### Essay

*Assess the view that Soviet foreign policy in the period 1917-41 was determined by the changing ideological debate inside the Soviet Union.*

The essence of this question is the need to make a judgment about a point of view. Was Soviet foreign policy the result of ideology? As with all questions, there are certain dangers of which students need to be aware.

- The question covers the entire period. Thus, it is important to avoid slipping into a detailed narrative and simply throwing in “everything I know”.
- There is so much relevant material, students must be able to discriminate – what is really most useful. As a result of this, it is crucial to establish an argument early on. If this is done, the factual information can then be selected carefully to support the argument.
- Students must be careful not to simply dismiss the changing ideological debate and argue that something completely different determined foreign policy. The issue in the question needs to be addressed.
- The question assumes that there was a changing ideological debate. There would be little to gain from trying to be clever and denying this.

Between 1917 and 1941, there were often heated ideological debates inside the Soviet Union, though by the mid-1930s these had been largely resolved. They certainly had some bearing on the exercise of Soviet foreign policy. However, it would be incorrect to see the changing ideological debate as the key determinant of foreign policy. From the early days of the revolution to the era of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Soviet foreign policy was primarily determined by national state interest.

The Soviet Union was a state born of revolution whose leaders believed they had a mission to change the world. For much of its history, ideological debate was taken very seriously.

- From the earliest days, there were discussions about foreign policy:
  - refer to the debates about peace with Germany: Lenin’s view of peace at all costs to Bukharin’s notion of a revolutionary war;
  - the formation of the Comintern – a fomenter of revolution or a state defending itself?

- ultimately the issue was survival – regardless of idealised Marxism, faith in War Communism and hopes that Russia’s revolution would act as a spark to revolutions in the west – as civil war raged all that mattered was holding on to power and keeping Russia together.
- Refer to the switch in domestic ideology from 1921: War Communism to NEP:
  - explain the background, the betrayal of socialist principles and the point that it was the result of the primacy of national state interest, ie the recovery of the nation state;
  - as the Soviet Union struggled at home, there were at best only half-hearted attempts at pursuing ideological goals overseas – refer to Britain, Germany and China;
  - the necessity of domestic recovery demanded a cooperative attitude with the capitalist power – mention of relations with Germany and other powers can assist with this point;
  - Trotsky’s defeat in the power struggle saw the end of permanent revolution;
  - Stalin’s Socialism in One Country and the later Five Year Plans revealed the primacy of national concerns over the promotion of world revolution.
- The depression led to brief revival of ideological fervour:
  - refer to the state of the west, a brief belief in the likely collapse of capitalism and how this led to Comintern instructions to not cooperate with other parties;
  - comment on the contradiction here as the Soviet Union’s modernisation program depended on selling grain to the capitalist west to provide the capital to make the modernisation possible.
- The rise of Nazism and Japanese militarism finally pushed ideological concerns completely into the background:
  - the Soviet state was under threat – all that mattered was its protection and it behaved like any other national state;
  - it sought allies and a united front against Germany – provide examples of how this was done.
- The west’s failure to respond to Soviet overtures forced Stalin into his unholy alliance with Hitler:
  - comment on the background of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, particularly what Stalin perceived as western bad faith;
  - briefly mentions its key measures;
  - make the comment about this action being all about national self-interest and a complete denial of ideological zeal.
- Conclusion: The dominant theme in Soviet foreign policy 1917-41 was the promotion of national state interest. Socialist propaganda through the Comintern might hail the coming of world revolution but it was domestic concerns that determined policy. The domestic ideological debate only reinforced the national interest line. Coexistence with the west was the main goal of Soviet foreign policy, not world revolution, from the time that NEP was reviving a shattered old Russia to the time Five Year Plans were creating a new modern Russia.

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# Timeline

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- 1914 – August: Outbreak of World War I
- 1917 – March Revolution forces the tsar's abdication
  - November: The Bolsheviks seize power
  - December: Formation of the Cheka
- 1918 – January: Closing of the Constituent Assembly
  - March: The Treaty of Brest Litovsk
  - June: Start of the Civil War
  - Introduction of War Communism
  - August: Assassination attempt on Lenin
- 1919 – Stalin appointed Commissar of Nationalities
  - Allied intervention over by end of the year
  - Formation of the Comintern
- 1920-21 – War with Poland ended by Treaty of Riga
  - Bolshevik victory in the Civil War
- 1921 – The Kronstadt Revolt
  - 10th Party Congress: start of NEP
- 1922 – Stalin appointed General Secretary
  - Treaty of Rapallo
  - Formation of the GPU
- 1923 – Triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin
- 1924 – Death of Lenin
  - Stalin survives Lenin's will
- 1925 – Trotsky loses job as Commissar of War
- 1927 – Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky expelled from party
- 1928 – Bukharin defeated in the power struggle
  - The First Five Year Plan
- 1929 – Trotsky expelled from the Soviet Union
- 1930 – Trial of the Industrial Party
- 1933 – The Second Five Year Plan
  - US and USSR establish diplomatic relations

- 1934
  - Murder of Kirov
  - Yagoda becomes head of NKVD
  - Soviet Union joins the League of Nations
- 1935
  - Trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev
  - Kirov Decrees
- 1936
  - 2nd trial/ execution of Zinoviev and Kamenev
  - Yezhov succeeds Yagoda as head of NKVD
- 1937
  - Trial of Seventeen
  - Trial of Red Army leaders
- 1938
  - Trial of Bukharin, rightists, Yagoda
  - Munich Conference
- 1939
  - Nazi-Soviet Pact
  - Germany invades Poland: Start of World War II
  - October: Soviet Union occupies eastern Poland
- 1939-40
  - The Winter War with Finland
- 1940
  - Soviet Union occupies Baltic states, Bessarabia
  - Murder of Trotsky
- 1941
  - June: Germany invades Soviet Union

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# Glossary

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|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| abdicates                   | gives up the throne   |
| April Theses                | Lenin's ideas for Bolshevik strategy in 1917                                      |
| Bolsheviks                  | Lenin's faction of the Social Democratic Party, formed 1903                       |
| Bonapartism                 | fear of the revolution evolving into a military dictatorship                      |
| bourgeoisie                 | middle class  |
| burzhui                     | bourgeois types   |
| capitalists                 | owners of businesses, banks, factories etc  |
| cheka                       | Bolshevik secret police formed December 1917                                      |
| Comintern                   | Communist International, formed 1919  |
| coup d' état                | forceful takeover of power  |
| cult of Lenin               | acceptance of the almost divine status of Lenin after his death                   |
| dekulakisation              | destruction of the kulaks   |
| duma                        | parliament  |
| factionalism                | development of opposition groups with the Communist Party                         |
| General Strike              | nationwide strike in Britain in 1926  |
| GPU                         | secret police, Political Administration of the State                              |
| greens                      | peasant armies in the Civil War   |
| Iskra                       | Russian Marxist newspaper, means the Spark  |
| Kronstadt                   | naval base outside Petrograd  |
| kulaks                      | more prosperous peasants, targeted by Stalin during collectivisation              |
| Massurian Lakes             | site of major Russian defeat in August 1914                                       |
| Mensheviks                  | faction of Social Democratic Party formed in 1903 in opposition to the Bolsheviks |
| most favoured nation status | a nation automatically receives any concession that is made to another nation     |
| NEP                         | New Economic Policy, introduced 1921, involved a partial return to capitalism     |
| NEPmen                      | retail traders during the NEP period, often corrupt                               |
| NKVD                        | secret police, successor of the GPU   |
| nomenklatura                | people holding leading party and state jobs                                       |
| okhrana                     | tsarist secret police   |
| Operation Barbarossa        | German invasion of Russia, June 1941  |
| Politburo                   | ruling body of the party  |
| proletariat                 | working class   |
| propaganda                  | information aimed at making a person think a certain way                          |

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Rapallo, Treaty of             | German-Soviet treaty of 1922   |
| reds                           | pro-Bolsheviks in the Civil War  |
| reichswehr                     | German army, 1920s   |
| scissors crisis                | growing gap between industrial and rural prices in the 1920s               |
| Social Democratic Labour Party | Russian Marxist party  |
| soviet                         | council of workers and soldiers  |
| SOVNARKOM                      | Council of People's Commissars   |
| stakhanovite                   | term denoting model workers in the 1930s                                   |
| Tambov                         | site of peasant revolt 1920-1  |
| Tannenberg                     | Site of major Russian defeat in August 1914                                |
| triumvirate                    | term describing the anti-Trotsky coalition of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin |
| Versailles, Treaty of          | Post World War I treaty with Germany                                       |
| War Communism                  | extreme socialist economic measures imposed on Russia during the Civil War |
| whites                         | anti-Bolsheviks in the Civil War   |
| Workers Opposition             | group opposed to War Communism policies 1921                               |
| zhenontdel                     | women's department set up in 1921  |
| Zinoviev Letter                | alleged Comintern letter promoting communist action inside Britain 1924    |

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# Dramatis Personae

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|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Alexandra              | Tsarina, 1894-1917, wife of Nicholas II                         |
| Alexis                 | son of Nicholas II, heir to the throne                          |
| Antonov, Alexander     | leader of the Tambov revolt, 1920-1                             |
| Big Brother            | totalitarian figure from "1984"                                 |
| Bliumkin               | murderer of Count von Mirbach                                   |
| Bukharin, Nikolai      | key supporter of the NEP, executed by Stalin in 1938            |
| Chamberlain, Neville   | British Prime Minister 1937-40                                  |
| Chiang Kai-Shek        | See Jiang Jieshi  |
| Chicherin, Georgi      | Soviet Foreign minister 1918-30                                 |
| Churchill, Winston     | British Prime Minister 1940-45, 1951-55                         |
| Denikin                | white Civil War general   |
| Dukhonin, General      | Army commander at time of the November Revolution               |
| Dzerzinsky, Felix      | head of the Cheka   |
| Engels, Friedrich      | Communist writer and thinker, close colleague of Karl Marx      |
| Gorbachev, Mikhail     | Soviet leader 1985-91   |
| Hitler                 | leader of Germany, 1933-45                                      |
| Jiang Jieshi           | Nationalist leader of China                                     |
| Kamenev, Lev           | Moscow party boss, part of triumvirate with Stalin and Zinoviev |
| Kaplan, Fanny          | attempted to assassinate Lenin in August 1918                   |
| Khrushchev, Nikita     | delivered the Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress in 1956  |
| Kirov, Sergei          | Leningrad Party Boss, murdered December 1934                    |
| Kolchak                | white Civil War general   |
| Kollantai, Alexandra   | Commissar of Social Welfare, promoter of women's rights         |
| Kornilov               | coup leader September 1917, white Civil War general             |
| Krylenko               | Bolshevik army commander from mid-November 1917                 |
| Lenin                  | leader of the Bolshevik Party                                   |
| Makhno, Nestor         | green Civil War leader  |
| Martov                 | leading member of the Mensheviks                                |
| Marx, Karl             | Communist writer and thinker, author of The Communist Manifesto |
| Menzhinsky, Vyacheslav | head of the GPU 1926-34   |
| Mirbach, Count von     | German ambassador to Russia, 1918                               |
| Molotov                | Soviet Foreign Minister   |
| Nicholas II            | Tsar of Russia, 1894-1917                                       |
| Nikolayev              | man accused of murdering Kirov                                  |

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Ordzhonikidze, Sergei  | Commissar of Heavy Industry 1930-37   |
| Orwell, George         | author of 1984  |
| Pasternak, Boris       | author of Doctor Zhivago  |
| Pyatakov               | victim of the 1937 show trial   |
| Rasputin               | mysterious religious figure, gained enormous influence in the royal family    |
| Reed, John             | radical American journalist, author of Ten Days That Shook The World          |
| Rykov, Alexey          | supporter of Bukharin and the NEP, executed by Stalin in 1938                 |
| Shestov                | victim of the 1937 show trial   |
| Shlyapnikov, Alexander | leader of the Workers Opposition, 1921  |
| Shostakovich, Dmitri   | Russian composer  |
| Sokolnikov             | victim of the 1937 show trial   |
| Stakhanov, Alexei      | model Russian worker 1930s  |
| Stalin                 | Soviet dictator from 1929-1953  |
| Sukhanov, Nikolai      | Socialist Revolutionary, later opponent of Bolsheviks, shot by Stalin in 1939 |
| Tomsky, Mikhail        | supporter of Bukharin and the NEP, committed suicide 1936                     |
| Trotsky                | leading Bolshevik, Commissar of War 1918-21                                   |
| tsarevich              | title of the heir to the throne of Russia before 1917                         |
| Tukachevsky            | Civil War hero, executed by Stalin 1937                                       |
| Uritsky                | head of Petrograd Cheka, assassinated 1918                                    |
| Wrangel                | white Civil War general   |
| Yagoda, Genrikh        | head of the NKVD 1934-36  |
| Yezhov, Nikolai        | head of the NKVA, 1936-39   |
| Yudenich               | white Civil War general   |
| Yusupov, Count         | murderer of Rasputin, December 1917   |
| Zinoviev, Grigory      | Petrograd party boss, part of triumvirate with Kamenev and Stalin             |

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# Answers to revision exercises

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## Exercise 1.1

CLASS STRUGGLE – CLASSES – THE LANDED ARISTOCRACY – BOURGEOISIE – CAPITALIST – PROLETARIAT – THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT – DISAPPEAR – STATE – DETERMINIST – INDIVIDUALS – ECONOMIC

## Exercise 1.2

1 – BOURGEOISIE; 2 – WHAT IS TO BE DONE?; 3 – THE CLASS STRUGGLE; 4 – DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT; 5 – PROLETARIAT; 6 – DAS KAPITAL; 7 – FRIEDRICH ENGELS; 8 – LEON TROTSKY; 9 – COMMUNIST MANIFESTO; 10 – STATE AND REVOLUTION.

## Exercise 2.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – true.

## Exercise 2.2

1st – Lenin opposes the patriotic calls for Russians to join the war effort against Germany; 2nd – Lenin returns to Russia thanks to a sealed train trip across German-occupied Europe; 3rd – Lenin announces “The April Theses” and calls for “all power to the Soviets”; 4th – Following the failure of the July Days uprising, Lenin flees to Finland; 5th – Kerensky’s Commander-in-Chief, General Kornilov attempts to seize power; 6th – Bolshevik popularity increases following their role in the suppression of the Kornilov coup; 7th – Lenin contacts his Bolshevik allies and says the time is right to take power; 8th – Lenin returns to Petrograd to convince the Central Committee on the wisdom of taking power; 9th – Trotsky organises the Bolshevik November coup; 10th – Lenin announces the formation of a Bolshevik government.

## Exercise 3.1

1 – belief the Soviet should rule/ expectation of a socialist coalition government; 2 – into the dustbin of history; 3 – radical American journalist who was present in Russia in 1917 and who wrote “Ten Days That Shook The World”; 4 – the weakness of the new regime and its tenuous hold on power; 5 – belief that failure to end the war with Germany would spell the end of his government; 6 – peasants given the right to seize gentry land and pay no compensation; 7 – it went against his socialist beliefs but was necessary in order to maintain peasant support for the revolution; 8 – workers now in control of their factories and their railways; 9 – it lost land, wealth and control of things such as marriage; 10 – end of ranks, election of officers, soldiers’ committees, end of saluting.

**Exercise 3.2**

1 – DZERZINSKY; 2 – ZHENONTDEL; 3 – BURZHUI; 4 – THE CHEKA; 5 – KADETS; 6 – COMRADE; 7 – SOVNARKOM; 8 – CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY; 9 – STALIN; 10 – THE RED TERROR

**Exercise 4.1**

1 – fact; 2 – fact; 3 – opinion; 4 – opinion; 5 – fact; 6 – fact; 7 – fact; 8 – fact; 9 – opinion; 10 – opinion.

**Exercise 5.1**

1 – 1st: THE TREATY OF BREST LITOVSK; 2nd: THE REVOLT OF THE CZECH LEGION; 3rd: THE DEFENCE OF TSARITSYN; 4th: THE DEATH OF KOLCHAK; 5th: THE TREATY OF RIGA.

2 – a: YUDENICH; b: DENIKIN; c: KOLCHAK; d: WRANGEL; e:MAKHNO.

3 – I have no love of the Bolsheviks; the Reds can be as brutal as the Whites and I hate War Communism. Yet I know if the Whites win I will lose my land forever, the landlords will be back in control and the I am likely to suffer the cruelties and humiliations in the army that I suffered before the revolution.

**Exercise 5.2**

The Bolsheviks regime was in a dire situation by the middle of 1918 as it faced its White enemies and allied intervention. Lenin knew that the most important thing was to keep his soldiers and his factory workers fed and supplied. This led to his introducing the policy of War Communism. The main elements of the policy involved the nationalisation of industry, the end of the free market and grain requisitioning. The latter frequently led to major violence in the countryside between peasants and food detachments. The results of War Communism were devastating. Food production dropped dramatically and starvation stalked the land. However, in the long term it might be argued that War Communism had been a success as it had secured victory in the Civil War.

**Exercise 6.1**

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – true.

**Exercise 6.2**

1 – revival of Russian economy/ increases in industrial and food production; 2 – retail traders who bought up surpluses and sold them for profit; 3 – often corrupt, became involved in speculation and crime; 4 – the increasing gap between the price of industrial goods and rural goods; 5 – it did not provide a long-term solution to Russia's industrialisation and modernization;

**Exercise 7.1**

1 – a group within the party opposed to the policies of War Communism; 2 – a ban on factions, party decisions had to be accepted at the risk of expulsion from the party; 3 – jobs could only be gained by overt signs of loyalty to the party line; 4 – limited by the party with increased censorship; 5 – in 1922 it became the GPU, a permanent organ of state.

**Exercise 7.2**

1st – time of free, open, party discussion; 2nd – introduction of War Communism; 3rd – the 10th Party Congress opens; 4th – the Kronstadt Revolt; 5th – introduction of NEP; 6th – death of Lenin; 7th – creation of the GPU; 8th – creation of the USSR; 9th – the USSR becomes fifteen republics; 10th – collapse of the Soviet Union

**Exercise 8.1**

1st – the November Revolution; 2nd – Treaty of Brest Litovsk; 3rd – Lenin is shot; 4th – Bolshevik victory in the Civil War; 5th – the Kronstadt Revolt; 6th – introduction of NEP; 7th – Stalin appointed General Secretary; 8th – the death of Lenin; 9th – Trotsky misses Lenin's funeral; 10th – Stalin survives reading of Lenin's will; 11th – triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin defeat Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress; 12th – Stalin turns on the left, and allies with Bukharin; 13th – Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky expelled from the party; 14th – Stalin turns on his right wing allies; 15th – Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky lose their party posts; 16th – Stalin emerges triumphant in the party.

**Exercise 9.1**

1 – gave him great influence in the non-European regions of the Soviet Union;

2 – power over promotions, demotions, appointment; 3 – Lenin had broken off personal contacts with Stalin; 4 – probably relieved; 5 – in it Lenin had called for Stalin's removal; 6 – Zinoviev; 7 – Stalin had lied to him about the date; 8 – to show how close and loyal Stalin had been to Lenin, to justify his policy positions; 9 – he would have hated it; 10 – he disliked it; he saw himself as Lenin's equal.

**Exercise 9.2**

1 – Bukharin; 2 – Zinoviev; 3 – Trotsky; 4 – Kamenev; 5 – Sukhanov; 6 – Lenin; 7 – Stalin; 8 – Rykov.

**Exercise 10.1**

1 – true; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – false; 10 – true.

**Exercise 11.1**

scissors – rising – falling – capital – collectivisation – grain – export – kulaks – civil war – destroyed – GPU – fiscal – political – millions – economically

**Exercise 11.2**

1 – heavy industry; 2 – Magnitogorsk; 3 – consumer industries; 4 – Commissar of Heavy Industry; 5 – Moscow Underground, Dnieper Dam; 6 – they dropped; 7 – German invasion of Russia; 8 – armaments; 9 – model worker who exceeded his targets; 10 – patriotism, belief in building socialism.

**Exercise 12.1**

1st – Lenin's purge of 1919; 2nd – Kirov joins the Central Committee; 3rd – The trial of the Shakty engineers; 4th – The trial of the Industrial Party; 5th – The murder of Sergei Kirov; 6th – The Kirov Decrees; 7th – The execution of Zinoviev and Kamenev; 8th – The Trial of Seventeen; 9th – The trial of the Red Army leaders; 10th – The trial of Bukharin and Yagoda.

**Exercise 12.2**

1 – Yagoda; 2 – Tukhachevsky; 3 – Kirov; 4 – Bukharin; 5 – Sokolnikov; 6 – Trotsky; 7 – Yezhov; 8 – Kamenev; 9 – Ordzhonikidze; 10 – Nikolayev.

**Exercise 13.1**

1 – Greater equality/ easier divorce/ legalised abortion; 2 – Zhenotdel; 3 – Many of earlier gains were lost/ divorce harder/ abortion illegal; 4 – Tightened up on discipline and juvenile crime; 5 – It suffered/ lack of respect for teacher authority; 6 – Return to traditional values/ emphasis on practical subjects; 7 – Socialist Realism; 8 – Optimism/ positive outlook/ emphasis on heroes; 9 – Promoted the cult of personality; 10 – Glorification of past Russian heroes.

**Exercise 13.2**

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – false; 5 – false; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – false; 10 – true

**Exercise 14.1**

The Bolsheviks' first major policy action was to sign the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. By 1919, the prime concern of the Bolshevik regime was its survival though its ideological goal still remained world revolution. Having survived the civil war, the Soviets quickly normalised relations with its neighbours. Its relations with France and Belgium remained tense because of war debts. However, it achieved diplomatic success when it signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany. By the late 1920s, economic and military ties with Germany remained strong.

**Exercise 14.2**

1st – Soviet Union and US establish relations; 2nd – Soviet Union joins League of Nations; 3rd – The Franco-Soviet Alliance; 4th – Formation of the French Popular Front; 5th – The Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis; 6th – The Munich Conference; 7th – The Nazi-Soviet Pact; 8th – The invasion of Poland; 9th – The Winter War; 10th – Operation Barbarossa.

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## Some Resources

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There is a mass of material available dealing with the many aspects of “Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941”. What follows is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of resources. These are some of the books that the author has found useful working on this topic.

*Russia and the Soviet Union: A National Study*

Ken Webb, NELSON: A Cengage Company, Melbourne, 2018

*Everyday Stalinism*

Sheila Fitzpatrick, OUP, Oxford, 2000

*Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*

Oleg V Khlevniuk, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2015

*Stalin: Order Through Terror*

Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p. 53

*The Gulag Archipelago, Vol I*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Collins, Glasgow, 1974

*Russia’s International Relations in the Twentieth Century*

A Kocho-Williams Routledge, Abingdon, 2013

*Stalin*

Isaac Deutscher, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 ed

*The Soviet Union Since 1917*

Martin McCauley, Longman Harlow, 1981