The Soviet Union Under Stalin

In January 1924, tens of thousands of people lined up in Moscow’s historic Red Square. They had come to view the body of Lenin, who had died a few days earlier. Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, wanted to bury him simply next to his mother. Communist party officials—including Joseph Stalin—wanted to preserve Lenin’s body and put it on permanent display. In the end, Lenin’s body was displayed in Red Square for more than 65 years. By preserving Lenin’s body, Stalin wanted to show that he would carry on the ideals of the revolution.

A Totalitarian State

Karl Marx had predicted that under communism the state would eventually wither away. Under Stalin, the opposite occurred. He turned the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state controlled by a powerful and complex bureaucracy.

Stalin’s Five-Year Plans

Once in power, Stalin imposed government control over the Soviet Union’s economy. In the past, said Stalin, Russia had suffered because of its economic backwardness. In 1928, he proposed the first of several “five-year plans” aimed at building heavy industry, improving transportation, and increasing farm output. He brought all economic activity under government control. The government owned all businesses and distributed all resources. Stalin was заяден (in this propaganda image, children surround a gentle Stalin).

The Rise of Totalitarianism

In the years that followed, Stalin used ruthless measures to control the Soviet Union and its people. Stalin was displayed in Red Square for more than 65 years. By preserving Lenin’s body, Stalin wanted to show that he would carry on the goals of the revolution. However, in the past, said Stalin, the state had been weak and ineffective. He wanted to replace it with a powerful and effective government controlled by a small group of leaders.

Terms, People, and Places

- command economy
- collectivization
- Bukharin
- Comintern
- Stalin
- socialist realism
- gulag
- Stalinist
- atheism
- collectives
- command economy
- Five-Year Plans
- Comintern

Objectives

- Describe the effects of Stalin’s five-year plans.
- Explain how Stalin tried to control how people thought in the Soviet Union.
- List communist changes to Soviet society.
- Outline Soviet foreign policy under Stalin.

Focus Question

How did Stalin transform the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state?
resources. The Soviet Union developed a command economy, in which government officials made all basic economic decisions. By contrast, in a capitalist system, the free market determines most economic decisions. Privately owned businesses compete to win the consumer’s choice. This competition regulates the price and quality of goods.

**Mixed Results in Industry** Stalin also brought agriculture under government control, but at a horrendous cost. The government wanted farmers to produce more grain to feed workers in the cities. It also hoped to sell grain abroad to earn money.

As you have read, under Lenin’s New Economic Plan (NEP), peasants had held on to small plots of land. Many had prospered. Stalin saw that system as being inefficient and a threat to state power. Stalin wanted all peasants to farm either state-owned farms or collectives, large farms owned and operated by peasants as a group. On collectives, the government would provide tractors, fertilizers, and better seed, and peasants would learn modern farm methods. Peasants would be permitted to keep their houses and personal belongings, but all farm animals and implements were to be turned over to the collective. The state set all prices and controlled access to farm supplies.

Some peasants did not want to give up their land and sell their crops at the state’s low prices. They resisted collectivization by killing farm animals, destroying tools, and burning crops. Stalin was furious. He responded with brutal force. In 1929, Stalin declared the kulaks, or wealthy farmers, were behind the resistance. He responded with brutal force. In 1929, Stalin declared his intention to “liquidate the kulak class as a class.” To this end, the government confiscated kulaks’ land and sent them to labor camps. Thousands were killed or died from overwork.

Even after the “kholokholstina,” angry peasants resisted by growing just enough to feed themselves. In response, the government seized all of their grain to meet industrial goals, purposely leaving the peasants to starve. In 1932, this ruthless policy, combined with poor harvests, led to a terrible famine.

**The Great Famine**

“The industrialization is the path to socialism.” As this 1928 poster proclaims, Stalin’s five-year plans were not just a plan to modernize Russia’s economy. They were also a plan to destroy the will of the Ukrainian people. Their quest is in some ways similar to that of Armenian groups who hope to gain recognition of the genocide of Armenians that took place in the Ottoman empire during World War I.

A big step for Ukrainians occurred in 1984 when the U.S. Congress set up the Commission on the Ukraine Famine to compile the information available on the famine. The Committee concluded: “There is no doubt that large numbers of inhabitants of the Ukrainian SSR and the North Caucasus Territory starved to death in a man-made famine in 1932–1933, caused by the seizure of the 1932 crop by Soviet authorities.”

**Connect to Our World**

The output for each more than quadrupled.
Independent Practice

Have students write two statements, one that argues for collectivization and one that argues against it. Using the Think-Write-Pair-Share strategy (TE, p. T23), have students share and discuss their statements.

Monitor Progress

As students complete their charts, circulate to make sure they list collectivization as one of the main points of the five-year plans. For a completed version of the chart, see Note Taking Transparencies, 182.

Answers

Stalin’s government took control of all businesses, distributed all resources, and made all basic economic decisions.

Caption

Output of potatoes, wheat, and oats all fell between 1928 and 1932.

Food as a Weapon

In 1932, when peasants failed to meet unrealistic crop quotas, Stalin retaliated by seizing all of their grain to sell on the market, leaving them to starve. Below, a woman and her son search for food during the famine. Describe the effect of Stalin’s ruthless policies on the production of oats, wheat, and potatoes.

How did Stalin take control of the Soviet Union’s economic life?

Stalin’s Terror Tactics

In addition to tactics like the Terror Famine, Stalin’s Communist party used secret police, torture, and violent purges to ensure obedience. Stalin tightened his grasp on every aspect of Soviet life, even stamping out any signs of dissent within the Communist elites.

Terror as a Weapon

Stalin ruthlessly used terror as a weapon against his own people. He perpetrated crimes against humanity and systematically violated his people’s individual rights. Police spies did not hesitate to open private letters or plant listening devices. Nothing appeared in print without official approval. There was no free press, and no safe method of voicing protest. Grumblers or critics were rounded up and sent to the Gulag, a system of brutal labor camps, where many died.

The Great Purge

Even though Stalin’s power was absolute, he still feared that rival party leaders were plotting against him. In 1934, he launched the Great Purge. During this reign of terror, Stalin and his secret police cracked down especially on Old Bolsheviks, or party activists from the early days of the revolution. His net soon widened to target army heroes, industrial managers, writers, and ordinary citizens. They were charged with a wide range of crimes, from counterrevolutionary plots to failure to meet production quotas.

Between 1936 and 1938, Stalin staged a series of spectacular public “show trials” in Moscow. Former Communist leaders confessed to all kinds of crimes after officials tortured them or threatened their families or friends. Many of the purged party members were never tried but were sent straight to the Gulag. Secret police files reveal that at least four million people were purged during the Stalin years. Some historians estimate the toll to be much greater.

Results of the Purge

The purpose increased Stalin’s power. All Soviet citizens were now well aware of the consequences of disloyalty. However, Stalin’s government also paid a price. Among the purged were experts in industry, economics, and engineering, and many of the Soviet Union’s most talented scientists. Later called the Terror Famine, it caused between five and eight million people to die of starvation in the Ukraine alone.

Although collectivization increased Stalin’s control of the peasantry, it did not improve farm output. During the 1930s, grain production inclined upward, but meat, vegetables, and fruits remained in short supply. Feeding the population would remain a major problem in the Soviet Union.
Stalin used terror and Gulag labor camps to control life in the Soviet Union. Ask students to predict other methods that Stalin used.

Using modern technology, the party bombarded the public with relentless propaganda. Radios and newspapers replaced religion with communist ideology.

Communist Attempts to Control Thought

At the same time that he was purging any elements of resistance in Soviet society, Stalin also sought to control the hearts and minds of Soviet citizens. He tried to do this by tirelessly distributing propaganda, censoring opposing ideas, imposing Russian culture on minorities, and replacing religion with communist ideology.

Stalin's Terror Tactics

Instruct

1. Introduce Display Color Transparency 176 Gulag Prisoners, by Nikolai Getman to show a painting from the Gulag. Tell students that Stalin used the threat of these labor camps to control life in the Soviet Union. Ask students to predict other methods that Stalin used.

2. Demonstrate Color Transparencies, 176

3. Teach Ask: What was the Great Purge? (the arrest and execution of hundreds of thousands of people whom Stalin suspected of disloyalty.) How did the purges increase Stalin's power? (They made all Soviet citizens aware of the consequences of disapproval or disloyalty, and they replaced old revolutionaries with young party members loyal to Stalin.) How do you think this affected Soviets' feelings toward their government? (Sample: It probably made them feel either more loyal or become more secretive.)

4. Quick Activity Have students access Web Code nbp-2841 to take the Geography Interactive Audio Guided Tour and then answer the map skills questions in the text.

Independent Practice

Link to Literature To help students better understand Stalinist Russia, have them read the selection from Arthur Koestler's Darkness at Noon and complete the worksheet.

Monitor Progress

1. Check answers to map skills questions.

2. Refer students to the image of the Gulag on this page. To review this section, ask students to list Stalin's terror tactics.

Answers

Map Skills

1. Review locations with students.
2. Russia was the largest republic and the capital, Moscow, was located there.
3. That Stalin needed the threat of labor camps to guarantee his dominance.

4. The country lost many of its intellectual and military leaders.

Soviet Union, 1928–1941

1. Locate (a) Ukrainian S.S.R. (b) Russian S.S.R. boundaries

2. Regions How does the map help explain why Russia was the most influential republic in the Soviet Union?

3. Make Inferences What does the number of labor camps in the Soviet Union indicate about Stalin's rule?

Check the map to show a painting of a Gulag labor camp in 1934.
Communist Attempts to Control Thought

Instruct
- **Introduce: Vocabulary Builder** Have students read the Vocabulary Builder term and definition. Ask them if they have ever felt pressure to conform to a set of rules or customs from their parents or peers. Ask what it would be like if they felt this pressure from the state. Explain that these were the daily conditions in Stalinist Russia.

- **Teach** Ask: How did Stalin control cultural life in the Soviet Union? (by distributing propaganda, censoring ideas, promoting Russification, and destroying religions) How do you think people reacted to the policy of Russification? (Sample: They probably resented it, because previously, they had been encouraged to celebrate their autonomy.)

- **Quick Activity** Read the Primary Source selection aloud or play the accompanying audio. Ask: How long has Akhmatova's son been in prison (almost a year and a half)? What feelings does Akhmatova describe in this poem? (fear, desperation) Based on clues in this feature, how effective do you think censorship was in controlling writers? (Students may suggest that it was ineffective, as writers continued to work in secrecy, or they may suggest that it was effective, because writers could not publish or share their ideas with others within the Soviet Union.)

- **N 208 Witness History Audio CD: Anna Akhmatova

Independent Practice
To help students recognize propaganda, have them write two propaganda pieces for two different newspapers. One should be a statement in support of Stalin's policies in some way. An illegal anti-Stalinist newspaper might also be a statement in support of Stalin's policies. The other should be a statement that denounces a satirical verse that was critical of Stalin. Out of four for his wife's safety, Mandelstam finally submitted to threats and wrote an "Ode to Stalin." Boris Pasternak, who would later win fame for his novel Doktor Zhivago, was afraid to publish anything at all during the Stalinist period.

- **Link to Humanities** Despite restrictions, some Soviet writers produced magnificent works. Yevgeny Zamyatin's classic anti-Utopian novel We became well known outside of the Soviet Union, but was not published in his home country until 1989. The novel depicts a nightmare future in which people go by numbers, not names, and the "One State" controls people's thoughts And Quiet Places the Don, by Mikhail Sholokhov, passed the censors: The novel tells the story of a man who succeeds in fighting for World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the civil war. Sholokhov later won the Nobel Prize for literature.

- **Russification** Yet another way Stalin controlled the cultural life of the Soviet Union was by promoting a policy of Russification, or making a nationality's culture more Russian. By 1946, the U.S.S.R. was made up of 11 Soviet Socialist Republics. The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic consisted of the old Russian heartland and was the largest and dominant republic. The other

Monitor Progress
As students write their statements, circulate to make sure they understand how the two newspapers would have different views of Stalin's policies.

Soviet Art
In this Socialist Realist sculpture, a factory worker and a collective farmer raise the hammer and sickle together.

Anna Akhmatova (ahk MAH tuh vuh), one of Russia's greatest poets, could not publish her works because she had violated state guidelines. Still, she wrote secretly. In this passage from "Requiem," she describes the shock of trying to visit her 26-year-old son, imprisoned during the Stalinist terror:

**Primary Source**
"For seventeen long months my pain,
My son has called you home.
I've begged the hammer on my knees,
My son, my dead, my own.
My mind's mixed up for good, and I'm no longer even clear.
Who's man, who's beast, nor how much time
Before the end draws near."

Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem" (Dr. Rubin Kamen's)

Vocabulary Builder

**546 The Rise of Totalitarianism**
SSRs, such as Uzbek and the Ukraine, were the homelands of other nationalities and had their own languages, historical traditions, and cultures. At first, Stalin encouraged the autonomy, or independence, of these cultures. However, in the late 1920s, Stalin turned this policy on its head and systematically tried to make the cultures of the non-Russian SSRs more Russian. He appointed Russians to high-ranking positions in non-Russian SSRs and required the Russian language to be used in schools and businesses.

War on Religion The Communist party also tried to strengthen its hold on the minds of the people by destroying their religious faith. In accordance with the ideas of Marx, atheism, or the belief that there is no god, became an official state policy. Early on, the Communist targeted the Russian Orthodox Church, which had strongly supported the tsars. Many priests and other religious leaders were among those killed in the purges or sent to die in prison camps. Other religious persecutions were prosecuted as well. At one show trial, 15 Roman Catholic priests were charged with teaching religion to the young, a counterevolutionary activity. The state seized Jewish synagogues and banned the use of Hebrew. Islam was also officially discouraged.

The Communists tried to replace religion with communism more or less intact. People . . . want and need such a symbol.” —John E. W. Buel, The Orthodox Church

The terror and cultural coercion of Stalin’s rule made a mockery of the Soviet society. The Orthodox Church, the party seized church property and converted churches into offices and museums. Here, Red Army soldiers carry off religious relics from a Russian church.

The Party Versus the Church

To weaken the power of the Russian Orthodox Church, the party seized church property and converted churches into offices and museums. Here, Red Army soldiers carry off religious relics from a Russian church.

The Russian Orthodox Church The terror and cultural coercion of Stalin’s rule made a mockery of the original theories and promises of communism. The lives of most Russians did change. But, while the changes had some benefits, they were often outweighed by continuous shortages and restricted freedoms.

The New elite takes control The Communists destroyed the old social order of landowning nobles at the top and peasants at the bottom. But instead of creating a society of equals as they promised, they created a society where a few elite groups emerged as a new ruling class. At the head of society were members of the Communist Party. Only a small fraction of Soviet citizens could join the party. Many who did so were motivated by a desire to get ahead rather than a belief in communism. The Soviet elite also included industrial managers, military leaders, scientists, and some artists and writers. The elites enjoyed benefits denied to most people. They lived in the best apartments in the cities and rested at the best vacation homes in the country. They could shop at special stores in such a public way that no god, became an official state policy. Early on, the Communist targeted the Russian Orthodox Church, which had strongly supported the tsars. Many priests and other religious leaders were among those killed in the purges or sent to die in prison camps. Other religious persecutions were prosecuted as well. At one show trial, 15 Roman Catholic priests were charged with teaching religion to the young, a counterevolutionary activity. The state seized Jewish synagogues and banned the use of Hebrew. Islam was also officially discouraged.

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Answers

Capture For the religious, it would encourage secret worship and dislike of the Communist Party. Stalin used censorship and propaganda to glorify his work and stifle those who did not agree with him.
Soviet Foreign Policy

**Instruct**

- **Introduce: Key Terms** Have students find the key term *Comintern* (in blue) in the text and explain its meaning. Ask What was its purpose? (to encourage worldwide revolution) Ask students to speculate on how Western nations might view this goal.

- **Teach** Ask: What foreign policy goals did both Lenin and Stalin pursue? (to bring about a worldwide revolution and to win the support of other countries) Lead students in a discussion of how these goals were incompatible. Then ask: What progress did the Soviet Union make toward the goal of winning the support of other nations? (It slowly won recognition from Western powers, increased trade with them, and joined the League of Nations.)

**Independent Practice**

Have students make a Venn diagram comparing the goals and practices of Stalin and Lenin. Have them refer back to Chapter 14 for more information on Lenin.

**Monitor Progress**

- To review this section, ask students to summarize the Soviet Union’s foreign policy goals. (to bring about worldwide revolution, to gain support of other nations)

- **Check Reading and Note Taking Study Guide** entries for student understanding.

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**Answers**

**Caption** The people in the photograph seem to be living in cramped and crowded conditions, indicating the failure of planning to meet people’s needs.

**Schools taught communist values but also gave more students opportunities for higher education and extracurricular programs.**

**History Background**

**Educating the Youth** The Soviet government used schools and youth groups to indoctrinate young people with communist ideals. One Soviet reader for elementary students began with this assertion: “The first country of socialism in the world became the first country of children’s happiness in the world.”

The Communist Party also set up three youth groups: the Little Octobrists, for young children, the Young Pioneers, for children ages 9 to 14, and the Komsomol, for young Soviets ages 14 to 28. Komsomol members were often given better scholarships and jobs than non-members. They were also favored for Communist party membership, with all of its advantages.

**Benefits and Drawbacks** Although excluded from party membership, most people did enjoy several new benefits. The party required all children to attend free Communist-built schools. The state supported technical schools and universities as well. Schools served many important goals. Educated workers were needed to build a modern industrial state. The Communist party also set up programs for students outside school. These programs included sports, cultural activities, and political classes to train teenagers for party membership. However, in addition to important basic skills, schools also taught communist values, such as atheism, the glory of collective farming, and love of Stalin.

The state also provided free medical care, day care for children, inexpensive housing, and public recreation. While these benefits were real, many people still lacked vital necessities. Although the state built massive apartment complexes, housing was scarce. Entire families might be packed into a single room. Bread was plentiful, but meat, fresh fruit, and other foods remained in short supply.

**Women in the Soviet Union** Long before 1917, women such as Nadezhda Krupskaya and Alexandra Kollontai worked for the revolution, spreading radical ideas among peasants and workers. Under the Communists, women won equality under the law. They gained access to education and a wide range of jobs. By the 1930s, many Soviet women were working in medicine, engineering, or the sciences. By their labor, women contributed to Soviet economic growth. They worked in factories, in construction, and on collectives. Within the family, their wages were needed because men and women earned the same low salaries.
Soviet Foreign Policy

Between 1917 and 1939, the Soviet Union pursued very different goals in foreign policy. As Communists, both Lenin and Stalin wanted to bring about the worldwide revolution that Marx had predicted. But as Soviets, they wanted to guarantee their nation’s security by winning the support of other countries. The result of pursuing these two different goals was a contradictory and generally unsuccessful foreign policy.

In 1919, Lenin formed the Communist International, or Comintern. The purpose of the Comintern was to encourage world-wide revolution. To this end, it aided revolutionary groups around the world and urged colonial peoples to rise up against imperialist powers. The Comintern’s support of revolutionary groups outside the Soviet Union and its propaganda against capitalism made Western powers highly suspicious of the Soviet Union. In the United States, fear of Bolshevik plots led to the “Red Scare” in the early 1920s. Britain broke off relations with the Soviet Union when evidence revealed Soviet schemes to turn a 1926 strike into a revolution. Even so, the Soviet Union slowly won recognition from Western powers and increased trade with capitalist countries. It also joined the League of Nations. However, mistrust still poisoned relations, especially after the Great Purge.

Looking Ahead

By the time Stalin died in 1953, the Soviet Union had become a military superpower and a world leader in heavy industry. Yet Stalin’s efforts exacted a brutal toll. The Soviet people were dominated by a totalitarian system based on terror. The reality of communism fell far short of Lenin’s promises. Most people in the Soviet Union lived meager lives compared with people in the West.

1. What do many of the key terms listed at the beginning of the section have in common? Explain.

2. Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas. Use your completed chart to answer the section Key Question: How did Stalin transform the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state?

3. Identify Effects. What were the goals and results of Stalin’s five-year plans? How did the effects differ between industry and agriculture?

4. Contrast. How did the command economy under Stalin differ from a capitalist economy?

5. Synthesize Information. What methods did Stalin use to create a totalitarian state?

6. Synthesize Information. One historian has said that socialist realism was “communism with a smiling face.” What do you think he means?

7. Compare. Compare life under Stalin’s rule with life under the Russian tsars.

Progress Monitoring Online
For 549-551 with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nba-2841

Assess and Reteach

Assess Progress

● Have students complete the Section Assessment.

● Administer the Section Quiz.

Teaching Resources

Teaching Resources, Unit 4, p. 47

To further assess student understanding, use:

Progress Monitoring
Transparencies, 121

Reteach

If students need more instruction, have them read the section summary:

● Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 176

Adapted Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 176

Spanish Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 176

Extend

Tell students that in the 1990s, the breakup of the Soviet Union led to a revival of religion, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church. Ask students to form groups and discuss this question: Why do you think the Soviets were unsuccessful in their attempt to destroy religion?

Answer

By aiding revolutionary groups in other countries and urging colonial peoples to rise up against imperialist powers, the Soviet Union also undermined potential trade relationships.

Quick Write: Choose an Organization

Quick Write: Choose an Organization
Compare-and-contrast essays are often organized either point by point or by block. The first organization involves a discussion of one idea first, followed by the discussion of another, and emphasizes the two ideas. The second discusses all of the similarities, followed by all of the differences, and emphasizes the comparison or contrast itself. Write an outline for each type for an essay comparing and contrasting the results of the Five-Year Plans in industry and agriculture.

Writing About History

Quick Write: Choose an Organization

Write an outline for each type for an essay comparing and contrasting the results of the Five-Year Plans in industry and agriculture.

Writing About History

Students’ outlines should reflect understanding of the two types of organization.