

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, **Lenin's** government controlled most industries and seized grain from peasants to ensure supplies for the army. Once Lenin pulled Russia out of World War I and the civil war began, peasants began to sabotage the Communist program by hoarding food. The situation became even worse when drought caused a terrible famine between 1920 and 1922. As many as 5 million lives were lost. With agricultural disaster came industrial collapse. By 1921, industrial output was only 20 percent of its 1913 level.

Russia was exhausted. A peasant banner proclaimed, "Down with Lenin and horseflesh. Bring back the czar and pork." As Leon Trotsky said, "The country, and the government with it, were at the very edge of the abyss."

In March 1921, Lenin pulled Russia back from the abyss. He abandoned wartime communism in favor of his **New Economic Policy (NEP)**. The NEP was a modified version of the old capitalist system. Peasants were allowed to sell their produce openly. Retail stores, as well as small industries that employed fewer than 20 workers, could be privately owned and operated. Heavy industry, banking, and mines, however, remained in the hands of the government.

In 1922 Lenin and the Communists formally created a new state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The state is also known as the **USSR** (by its initials) or as the Soviet Union (by its shortened form). By that time, a revived market and a good harvest had brought an end to famine. Soviet agricultural production climbed to 75 percent of its prewar level. Overall, the NEP saved the Soviet Union from complete economic disaster. Lenin and other leading Communists, however, intended the NEP to be only a temporary retreat from the goals of communism.

Lenin died in 1924. A struggle for power began at once among the seven members of the **Politburo** (PAH•luht•byur•oh)—the Communist Party's main policy making body. The Politburo was severely divided over the future direction of the Soviet Union. One group, led by **Leon Trotsky**, wanted to end the NEP and launch Russia on a path of rapid industrialization, chiefly at the expense of the peasants. This group also wanted to spread communism abroad. It believed that the revolution in Russia would not survive without other communist states. Another group in the Politburo rejected the idea of worldwide communist revolution. Instead, it wanted to focus on building a socialist state in Russia and to continue Lenin's NEP. This group believed that rapid industrialization would harm the living standards of the Soviet peasants.

These divisions were further strained by an intense personal rivalry between Leon Trotsky and another Politburo member, **Joseph Stalin**. In 1924 Trotsky held the post of commissar of war. Stalin held the bureaucratic job of party general secretary. The general secretary appointed regional, district, city, and town party officials. Thus, this bureaucratic job actually became the most important position in the party.

Stalin used his post as general secretary to gain complete control of the Communist Party. The thousands of officials Stalin appointed provided him with support in his bid for power. By 1929, Stalin had removed the Bolsheviks of the revolutionary era from the Politburo and had established a powerful dictatorship. Trotsky, pushed out of the party in 1927, eventually made his way to Mexico. There he was murdered in 1940, probably on Stalin's orders.

The Stalin Era marked the beginning of an economic, social, and political revolution that was more sweeping in its results than were the revolutions of 1917. Stalin made a significant shift in economic policy in 1928 when he ended the NEP. That year he launched his First **Five-Year Plan**. The Five-Year Plans set economic goals for five-year periods. Their purpose was to transform Russia virtually overnight from an agricultural into an industrial country.

The First Five-Year Plan emphasized maximum production of military equipment and capital goods (goods devoted to the production of other goods, such as heavy machines). The plan quadrupled the production of heavy machinery and doubled oil production. Between 1928 and 1937, during the first two Five-Year Plans, steel production in Russia increased from 4 million to 18 million tons (3.6 to 16.3 million t) per year.

The social and political costs of industrialization were enormous. Little thought was given to caring for the expanded labor force in the cities. The number of workers increased by millions between 1932 and 1940. However, total investment in housing actually declined after 1929. The result was that millions of workers and their families lived in miserable conditions. Real wages in industry also declined by 43 percent between 1928

and 1940. Strict laws even limited where workers could move. To keep workers content, government **propaganda** stressed the need for sacrifice to create the new socialist state.

With rapid industrialization came an equally rapid collectivization of agriculture. **Collectivization** was a system in which private farms were eliminated. Instead, the government owned all of the land, and the peasants worked it. The peasants resisted by hoarding crops and killing livestock. In response, Stalin stepped up the program. By 1930, 10 million peasant households had been collectivized. By 1934, 26 million family farms had been collectivized into 250,000 units.

Collectivization was done at tremendous cost. The hoarding of food and the slaughter of livestock led to widespread famine. Stalin himself is supposed to have said that 10 million peasants died in the famines of 1932 and 1933. Stalin gave the peasants only one concession. Each collective farm worker could have one tiny, privately owned garden plot. Stalin's programs had other costs as well. To achieve his goals, Stalin strengthened his control over the party. Those who resisted were sent into forced labor camps in Siberia.

Stalin's desire to make all decisions led to **purges**, or removal, of the Old Bolsheviks. These people had been involved in the early days of the movement. Between 1936 and 1938, the most prominent Old Bolsheviks were put on trial and condemned to death.

During this time, Stalin purged army officers, diplomats, union officials, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens. An estimated 8 million Russians were arrested. Millions were sent to labor camps in Siberia; they never returned. Others were executed. The Stalin era also overturned permissive social legislation enacted in the early 1920s. To promote equal rights for women, the Communists had made the divorce process easier. They had also encouraged women to work outside the home. After Stalin came to power, the family was praised as a small collective. Parents were responsible for teaching the values of hard work, duty, and discipline to their children.

Read the article and underline the answers (and write the number of the question next to your underlined answers) to the following questions.

1. What happened to Russian industrial output by 1921?
2. What were peasants and retail stores allowed to do under the NEP? Heavy industry, banking, mines?
3. What does USSR the abbreviation of?
4. What happened to agricultural production in the USSR under Lenin?
5. What is the Politburo?
6. Who wanted communism to spread and to end the NEP?
7. IN 1924, who was the party general secretary in the Politburo?
8. What happened to Leon Trotsky in 1940?
9. What was the purpose of the Five-Year Plans?
10. What was the change in steel production over the first two Five-Year Plans?
11. What was collectivization in agriculture in the USSR?
12. How many people died in the USSR due to famines in 1932 and 1933?
13. How many Russians were believed to have been arrested in the purges of the 1930s?