

Stalin and the Soviet Union

Thinking on Your Own

Italy under Mussolini and the Soviet Union under Stalin were totalitarian states, or nations. As you read this lesson, make a list of the characteristics of a totalitarian communist society.

Joseph Stalin came to power in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. He survived a struggle with other Communist Party leaders after Lenin's death. Part of the struggle had been over how quickly to industrialize the nation. Lenin's New Economic Policy had improved the economy after the war. However, Stalin and his supporters wanted more improvements—and quickly. They wanted the Soviet Union to become a major industrial nation.

Stalin's Five-Year Plans

Once Stalin had defeated his rivals, he pushed through a series of **Five-Year Plans**. The Plans began in 1928. They were aimed at increasing industrial and agricultural production.

Industry was to focus on making steel, machines, weapons, and farm and transportation equipment. The transportation system was improved and expanded. New power plants were built. More money was put into mining and oil drilling.

To increase farm production, Stalin ended private ownership of farms. Farms were turned into **collectives**.

focus your reading

Discuss how the Five-Year Plans affected the Soviet economy.

At whom were Stalin's purges aimed?

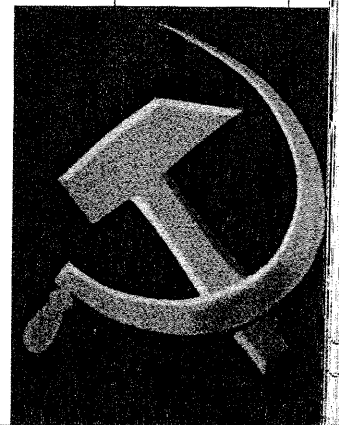
Describe what life was like in the Soviet Union under communism.

vocabulary

Five-Year Plans	kulaks
collectives	purges
quotas	

Between the Wars, 1919-1939

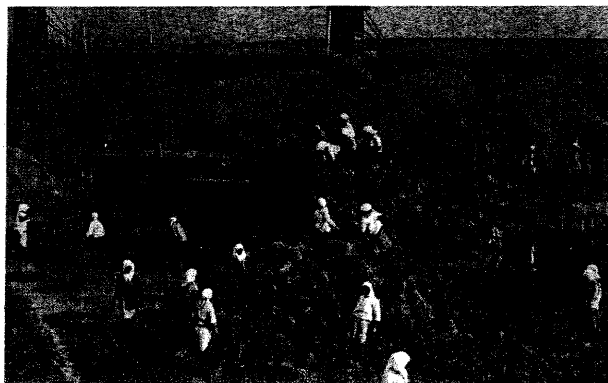
The Soviet symbol of the hammer and sickle. The hammer represented industrial workers, and the sickle, farm workers.





These huge farms were made by combining the small farms of many peasant families. The collectives were to be run by groups of peasants.

The peasants could keep their homes and a small plot of land on which to grow their own food. However, all farm animals, tools, and supplies belonged to the collective. The peasants were to manage and work the farms together. They would not be paid wages, but they would share in any profits. However, the government set prices and **quotas** for production. A quota is a set amount. Quotas regulated the amount of crops that each collective could produce.



Workers on a collective farm in the early 1930s

The peasants, especially those who had owned their own farms, rebelled. They burned their fields or hid their crops after the harvest. They killed their farm animals and broke the new tractors and other tools the government had given them.

Stalin used force to end the resistance. He sent the **kulaks** to labor camps in Siberia, the coldest, farthest part of the Soviet Union. Kulaks were the farm owners who resisted collectivization. Stalin's policies and the resistance of peasants had a cost. Terrible famines occurred across the Soviet Union in 1932 and 1933. As many as 10 million peasants may have died.

stop and think

Make a Venn diagram. Label the circles "Italian Fascism" and "Soviet Communism." Fill in the diagram with information about how the two governments were similar and different.

Stalin's Purges

The persecution of the kulaks was just one of Stalin's **purges**. A purge is an attempt to get rid of political opponents. The period from 1934 to 1936 is called the Great Purge.

Stalin used his secret police to spy on and arrest those who disagreed with him. The accused were tried and sentenced to death or to a labor camp in Siberia. Perhaps 8 million people died because of the Great Purge.

Like Mussolini, Stalin used terror to make Soviets obey the government. He also used the Great Purge to



Russian workers meet to approve the first Purge.

remove anyone from the Communist Party who might challenge his power.

Those jobs were filled by young Communists who were grateful to Stalin and, therefore, loyal to him.

Between the Wars, 1919-1939

Life in Soviet Society

Stalin put few resources into producing consumer goods such as refrigerators, furniture, and cars. As a result, there were few luxuries for workers to buy. Additionally, they had little money to spend on anything except food and housing. Wages were low. Like that of earlier European and U.S. factory workers, housing was crowded. Living conditions were bad. Families often shared two- or three-room apartments. Food in the cities was in short supply. Women stood in long lines daily to buy food.

Stalin had achieved his goal of increasing food production. However, much of the food was exported. Stalin needed to sell huge amounts of food to other nations in order to buy goods needed for industry and the military. Like Mussolini and Hitler, Stalin was building a strong military.

Also like Mussolini and Hitler, Stalin used propaganda to promote his goals. Everywhere, Soviets saw and heard messages glorifying the Soviet Union. They were encouraged to work harder and to produce more. Stalin also encouraged nationalism and suspicion of Western nations. Religion was banned because it distracted people from loyalty to the government.

Putting It All Together

Why is the Soviet Union called a totalitarian nation? Review the list that you made as you read this lesson. Use it to write an essay of three or four paragraphs to answer the question. Ask a partner to review your essay. Ask for suggestions on how to make it clearer and more interesting.

Time Box

- 1922
Stalin elected leader of Communist Party
- 1928
Five-Year Plans
- 1934
Great Purge began

The shortage of food that began during the 1930s remained an issue for Soviet citizens into the 1980s.

