

# Causes of the Russian Revolutions

## Tsars, Peasants and Revolutionaries

*Russia had two revolutions in 1917. Why did the tsarist regime collapse then, and why was the provisional government which succeeded it in turn overthrown later in the year by the Bolsheviks?*

The triggers of the Russian revolution of October 1917 were embedded in the political and economic crises of the First World War, but the deep causes are to be found in the middle of the nineteenth century. Four areas of potential turmoil may be identified: 1 the peasants; 2 the workers; 3 the intelligentsia; and 4 the tsar and his administration.

### Peasants

Since 1861, when they had been emancipated from serfdom, the peasants had undergone radically divergent experiences. A minority achieved success as independent farmers, while the majority were unable to withstand rising taxes, increasing debts and inadequate resources, and their living standards fell constantly. The inequitable terms of the emancipation – insufficient land grants and excessive mortgage payments – brought a festering sense of grievance to a crisis around 1900 and there were widespread riots.

### Workers

In Russia, industrialisation came late in the nineteenth century, was unevenly distributed geographically and employed only a comparatively tiny proportion of the population, which was otherwise mostly peasant and agrarian. The capital, St Petersburg, itself was the most densely industrial city, with shipbuilding and munition factories, while the later coal, iron and steel industries were concentrated in the south (present-day Ukraine). Factory workers derived mostly from migrant peasants and usually owed taxes and liability for military service through their villages. Their bond with the countryside was thus a vital one.

### The intelligentsia

By the beginning of this century, Russia's educated classes were aware that Russia lagged politically and socially behind the West and sensed the approach of a profound change. Many young Russians were committed to the cause of socialist revolution. Most of them accepted Marx's teaching that it would occur when the social fabric could no longer withstand the strain caused by the widening gap between rich and poor, capital and labour. Some were willing to wait for this 'organic' process to unfold, while others believed history needed 'a shove', and organised illegal groups to foster armed uprising.

### Political context

In Russia the discontent, which in freer societies found expression through political parties and the press, had no outlet. The emperor was deemed to have been appointed by God as the sole ruler, and any attempt to form a local political group, let alone a national party, was ruthlessly suppressed. The idea that society should elect its own representatives to help rule the country was treated as seditious.

When the liberally-inclined tsar, Alexander II, introduced reforms in the 1860s, he permitted local self-government – the *zemstvo* – but its members were prohibited from seeking to establish inter-provincial bodies that could lead to the creation of a national authority to rival that of the emperor. In fact, the men of the *zemstvo* and their lawyer friends were precisely inspired by the constitutional arrangements of Westminster; the more radical elements saw the kingless French Republic as a model.

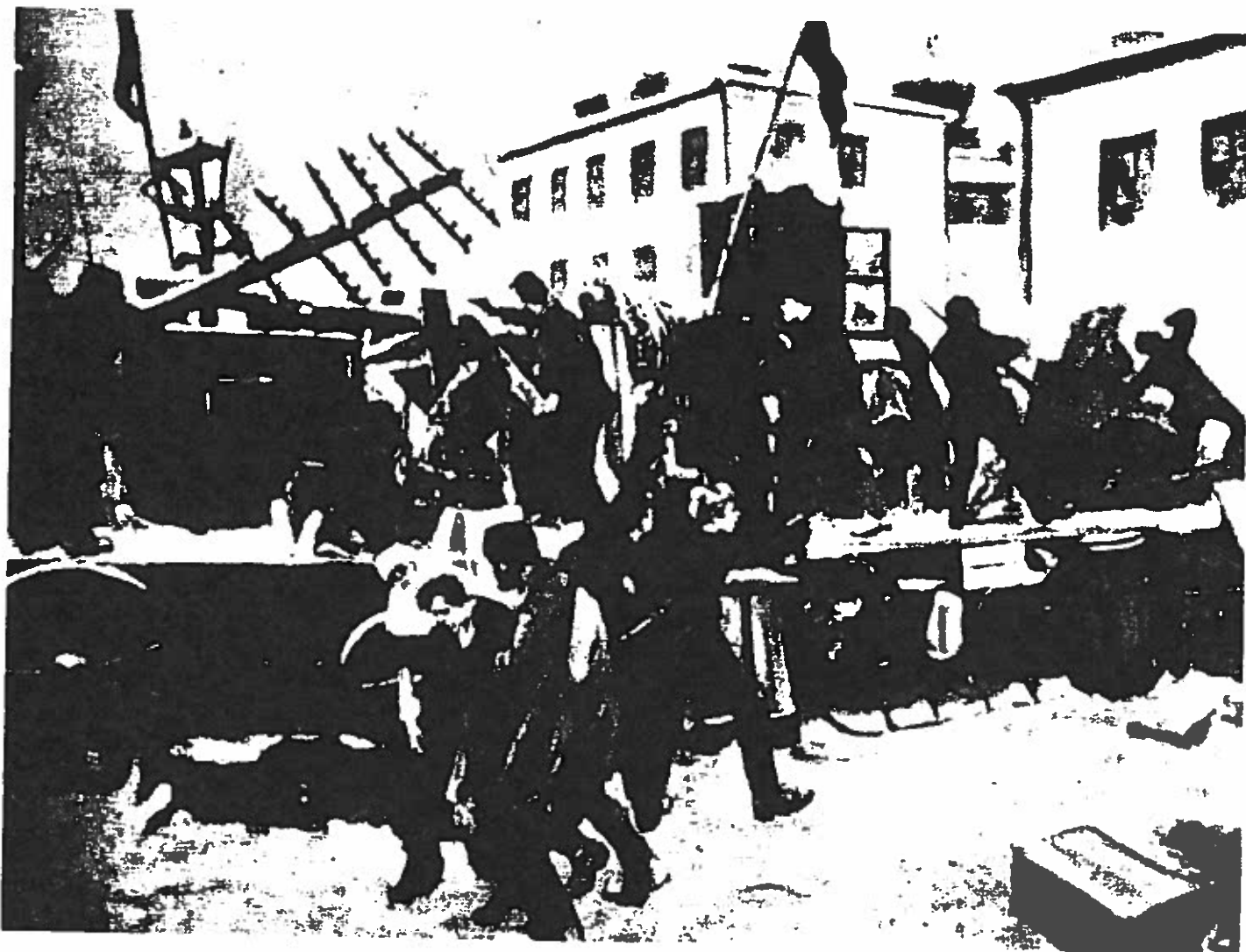
The relatively liberal reign of Alexander II came to an end when he was assassinated on 1 March 1881 and succeeded by his son, Alexander III who was naturally defensive. He responded to the regicide by enlarging the security police, clamping down on the *zemstvo* and restricting admission to high schools and universities, which he rightly perceived as hotbeds of disaffection.

These restrictions drove young people of all ethnic backgrounds either abroad to the West for an education, or ended their hopes of self-improvement, thus instantly politicising successive generations. It was from this pool of frustrated, intelligent young Russians, Jews and others, that the Russian revolutionary movement was formed.

The pressure for representation reached a crisis in 1905. The peasants were rioting, the workers were striking, and the state was at war with Japan over Manchuria. Practically the whole of society came onto the streets to demand political reform. Nicholas II, tsar since 1894, at last felt vulnerable, and in October 1905 he issued his October Manifesto, conceding civil rights and the formation of a national assembly, to be called the *Duma*.

### The Duma

Once the war with Japan was over, Nicholas felt able to dilute his promises. The franchise was weighted in favour of the propertied classes. Peasants, still regarded as loyal, were well represented. But the First Duma, which opened in 1906, was dominated by liberals – the Constitutional Democrats – and their peasant-supporters who saw them as champions of land reform. Socialists and conservatives were small elements on the left and right. Demands for universal suffrage, a general political amnesty and radical



*The Russian Revolution 1905: a barricade in a Moscow street.*

land reform prompted the tsar to dissolve the First Duma after only two months.

The liberals split. The right entered moderate conservative parties and the rest became more aggressive. On the far right, meanwhile, militant nationalist organisations – the Black Hundreds – were formed to disrupt the political process, while left-wing terrorists redoubled their efforts for the same end. The Second Duma assembled in March 1907 with a different line-up: the liberals were fragmented, the right, the clergy, the national minorities and the revolutionary left were greatly strengthened, while the government had some solid party support. The Second Duma was completely unworkable.

The government meanwhile was stamping out all traces of revolutionary violence, using summary execution and savage sentences to prison and exile: the liberals demanded an end to the terror, while the revolutionaries threatened another revolution if the government would not give in. Instead, the prime minister, Peter Stolypin, advised the tsar to dissolve the Second Duma after only six weeks, and in June 1907 introduced a new electoral law which bolstered the right-wing and pro-government parties at the expense of the left. Between 1907 and 1914 revolutionary activity totally declined, society became increasingly nationalistic and defensive,

and a rift between the tsar – and, of no less importance, his wife – and the Duma widened. Nicholas detested the Duma. It symbolised his panicky surrender of the autocratic principle.

### The Tsar

Shortly after the empress, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, produced an heir in 1904 – preceded by four daughters – it was discovered that the boy suffered from haemophilia, a blood disorder carried by Queen Victoria's female descendants. No cure was available, but in 1905 Rasputin, a 'holy man' with supposed healing powers, was introduced to the royal family and, indeed, was able to stop the boy's bleeding by semi-hypnotic relaxation techniques. He became indispensable.

The public was not told why Rasputin was a regular visitor to the court. Rasputin himself was a drunken lecher who exploited his connections to gain access to society, where he enjoyed the scandalous attention of aristocratic women, as well as supplying 'insider' information to stock market speculators. In April 1912, Alexander Guchkov, the Speaker of the Duma and leader of the conservative Octobrist Party, openly attacked the royal couple for harbouring Rasputin. Guchkov believed Russia's future lay in a consti-

titutional monarchy and he saw the backward-looking Nicholas as an obstacle. His campaign earned him the royal couple's enduring hatred.

This conflict was important for two reasons: first, it foreshadowed a more serious clash that would occur during the war, and secondly, it was reported in the press, and thus led to the erosion of the tsar's personal image. The press in Russia had exploded after 1905, when censorship rules were relaxed. Of enormous significance was its detailed reporting of speeches in the Duma attacking the government and the tsar. The Russians had never seen their monarch openly criticised. He began to seem less than divine and more fallible.

Weak-willed and easily influenced, a man of ordinary intelligence and little training for the job, Nicholas was unsuited to his role. His English-born wife of German extraction soon withdrew from St Petersburg society and court life, which she found stifling, and this suited Nicholas, who was happiest when ensconced with his loving family at one of their country estates, rather than dealing with ministers and having to face the growing ambitions of the Duma.

## War and politics

The particularly bloody suppression of a strike by gold miners on the Lena River in Western Siberia in 1912 revived the militancy of Russian workers and for two years Russia was wracked by discontent, now also fuelled by the press coverage of scandals and corruption in high places. But when Russia entered the war in August 1914, the mood changed abruptly to one of excited patriotism, as the mobilisation got under way with unusual efficiency. The capital's German-sounding name, St Petersburg, was changed to Petrograd, the German embassy was burnt, and a wave of chauvinistic enthusiasm swept the country.

By the middle of 1915, however, the mood had changed again. Crushing defeats of the Russian army in the opening campaigns, the disruption of transport and failure of supplies, rampant inflation, the suspension of the Duma and the tsar's exclusion of public figures from the war effort led to a new crisis of confidence. To remedy the situation, in September Nicholas decided to take command of his forces, leaving his wife to hold the balance between his ministers.

He also bowed to pressure by allowing leading industrialists and politicians to supervise putting Russian industry on a war footing. The chairman of the Central War Industries Committee was Alexander Guchkov. In the summer of 1916 the army gained an impressive victory under General Brusilov and by the end of 1916, with the supply position greatly improved, morale was reasonably high.

Politically, however, the rift between the tsar and the public was at its widest. A broad coalition of Duma members, including members of the Central War Industries Committee, met illegally to assess the situation. They were aware that the army was in better shape, and also that Britain, France and Russia were going to co-ordinate their spring offensives in 1917, for the first time in the war exploiting Germany's disadvantage of fighting in two opposed directions. The empress was openly referred to as 'the German woman' and, targeting Rasputin's presence in the royal bosom, where he was rumoured to be running state affairs and advising on military strategy, even moderate liberals questioned whether the government's conduct was due to 'treason or stupidity?' Alexander Kerensky, a member of the parliamentary wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (c.f. Sinn Fein and the IRA), even hinted at the possibility of assassinating Nicholas. Instead, in December 1916 right-wing politicians assassinated Rasputin as a liability to the monarchy.

## The February Revolution

The eruption occurred at the end of February. A worker's strike coincided with the celebration of International Women's Day. When it emerged that the capital had only three days' supply of flour, the meeting turned into an anti-government riot, augmented by mutinous troops. The

government lost control. Nicholas had no solutions to offer. When a two-man delegation from the Duma – one of them was Guchkov – went to him at GHQ and suggested he abdicate, not one of his senior officers came to his support: they believed military victory lay with the Duma and the industrialists, not with a fumbling tsar. Nicholas abdicated in favour of his brother, Michael, but when he heard that the revolutionary government could not guarantee his safety, the Grand Duke – who had democratic sympathies – declined the crown.

## Soviets and socialists

Simultaneously with the new provisional government a Soviet, or Council, of Workers' and Soldiers' (and later Peasants') Deputies was formed in Petrograd, with its headquarters in the same building as the Duma. Its aims were at first to protect their constituents' interests and to give the new government support in the war, providing it did not pursue offensive action. Most socialists had supported the war since 1914, the Russians much less enthusiastically than others. In 1915, a radical wing of European socialists, meeting in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald, called for immediate peace. A 'Left Zimmerwald' faction emerged that argued for turning the war into a civil war as the means to promote revolution. This group was led by Vladimir Lenin, who since the outbreak of the war had been urging that a Russian defeat was the best possible setting for socialist revolution.

The Duma's attacks on the tsar had been prompted by the failings of the army, and it was clear therefore that the new regime intended to do better. To the ordinary soldier, however, the departure of the tsar signalled the end of the war, and it was with the greatest difficulty thereafter that the provisional government was able to make them fight. Soldiers' deputies in the Soviet ensured that pressure was maintained on the government to relinquish any aggressive intentions. The Soviet, in other words, reflected the broad socialist position.

The German government, meanwhile, also expecting that revolution in Russia meant the country was out of the war, and finding instead a new regime committed to winning, facilitated Lenin's repatriation from Swiss exile, via Germany and Scandinavia, introducing him 'like a revolutionary bacillus' (in Churchill's words) into the political crucible. Lenin arrived in Petrograd on 16 April 1917 and at once attacked both the provisional government for not leaving the war, and the socialists for collaborating.

## The dual power

The liberal provisional government introduced civil and political equality for all the peoples of the multi-national ex-empire, but its eight-month rule was bedevilled by a dilemma: it was unwilling to abandon the Allies by making a separate peace with Germany, or to convene a Constituent

Assembly to determine Russia's constitutional form until the war was over.

Between February and October the provisional government re-formed three times, moving leftwards each time.

The Soviet, meanwhile, had problems of its own. As a coalition of broadly socialist forces, it acquired a left wing, represented by Lenin's Bolsheviks and their followers, and a right wing, represented by Mensheviks, or moderate Marxists, and those who felt the new democratic regime

## Chronology

*Note: All dates conform to the Western (New Style) Calendar, adopted by the Soviets in 1918. The revolution of 25 October, Old Style, thus took place on 7 November, New Style.*

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|----------------|--|
| March 1861     | Emancipation of the serfs and programme of reform begun.   |
| March 1881     | Assassination of Alexander II.   |
| October 1905   | General strike, Nicholas II promises civil liberties. Trotsky becomes chairman of first Petrograd Soviet.                              |
| August 1914    | Germany declares war on Russia.  |
| September 1915 | Nicholas II takes over supreme command of Russian forces.  |
| December 1916  | Rasputin murdered in Petrograd.  |
| March 1917     | Tsar abdicates. Liberal provisional government comes to power. Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies formed.             |
| April 1917     | Lenin returns to Petrograd from Switzerland.   |
| May 1917       | Trotsky returns to Petrograd from USA.   |
| July 1917      | Provisional government orders arrest of Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders as German agents. Alexander Kerensky becomes Prime Minister. |
| September 1917 | General Kornilov's attempt to crush the Soviet is defeated.  |
| October 1917   | Trotsky becomes Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. Lenin returns to Petrograd from hiding.  |
| November 1917  | Armed uprising by Bolshevik Red Guards. Trotsky declares seizure of power at Second Congress of Soviets.                               |

(even though it was unelected) must be given time to mature, before any precipitous move towards socialist revolution was undertaken.

Urged by the Soviet soldiers' committees formed at the front and in the garrisons to monitor the 'revolutionary correctness' of orders, undermining the line of command and, indeed, on many occasions resorting to mob rule and lynchings. Funded by secret German payments, the Bolsheviks were able to print a wide range of leaflets aimed at the front-line troops, calling on them to fraternise with the Germans and desert.

The government tried to defuse Bolshevik agitation by preparing to arrest Lenin as a German agent. Most of the evidence had been collected, when Lenin was tipped off and managed to escape, in disguise, to neighbouring Finland.

### The Kornilov movement

The officer corps had been demoralised by the tsar's abdication. Many, however, reflecting the general view of educated Russians, had welcomed the change as heralding a new beginning, and most expected the new regime to reinvigorate the war effort. As they watched their troops becoming daily more mutinous, deserting *en masse* and flocking to the Bolsheviks, they lost confidence.

Their discontent was expressed by no less than the Supreme Commander, General Lavr Kornilov, who regarded himself as loyal to the ideals of the February Revolution, but who wanted the government, now under Alexander Kerensky, to crush the Soviet and restore discipline in the army by reinstating the death penalty for desertion. In a garbled exchange by telegraph with Kerensky in late August, Kornilov agreed to send loyal troops to the capital to disperse the Soviet. But Kerensky, suspicious that Kornilov might also get rid of him, ordered Kornilov to call the operation off. Kornilov 'turned a blind eye' and pressed on. In a panic, Kerensky armed the Soviet and its supporters and called on them to 'defend the revolution'. In the event, the operation fizzled out as workers and revolutionary troops persuaded Kornilov's cavalymen to turn back. Kornilov was arrested and the officer corps was now utterly alienated.

### The Bolshevik coup

This was one of the most decisive moments in 1917: the army was virtually without leaders and was itself disintegrating rapidly, and the government had deprived itself of military support. Lenin, still in hiding in Finland, wrote frantic letters to the Bolsheviks in the capital that they must organise an armed uprising and seize power which, in Trotsky's words, was lying abandoned on the street. There were now as many as 40,000 armed men, or Red Guards, under Bolshevik command in Petrograd. Trotsky formed a Revolutionary Military Council and made his preparations. He was aware that if the Bolsheviks



Tsar Nicholas II

were to seize power in their own name, they could not be sure of the support of all the workers and soldiers in Petrograd, let alone in the country at large. He therefore advised Lenin to time the uprising to coincide with the next Congress of Soviets, so that it could be claimed that power had been transferred to the people's own representatives, the Soviet Deputies.

The Second Congress of Soviets took place on 25 October. Lenin was by now back in the city and the uprising took place according to plan. Meagre government resistance was easily overcome with virtually no bloodshed. Key positions in the city were occupied, the provisional government was arrested, and Kerensky escaped in disguise with the intention of raising a force to restore his regime. Trotsky addressed the assembled deputies and announced that power had been seized in the name of the Soviets. The Mensheviks, who were not deceived, walked out in protest. Trotsky, in an immortal phrase, declared as they left the hall: 'Go where you belong, in the dustbin of history!'

### The Soviet regime

The Bolshevik coup was not only presented as the coming to power of the Soviets, but all the new state and governmental institutions created by Lenin and his party were labelled to conform to this version. Lenin's cabinet was called the Soviet of People's Commissars – a title devised by Trotsky and Lenin in a moment of ironic deference to the French Revolution – and all national, regional and local government bodies became soviets. The country itself was renamed Soviet Russia and in 1922 the Soviet Union. Yet from its inception until its demise in 1991, the state was governed by the Bolshevik Party, later renamed the Communist Party, which through its supreme body, the Politburo, sanctioned all policy-making, and through a hierarchical structure controlled every aspect of political, economic, social and intellectual life of the country.

The purpose of the Russian revolution – both according to the Marxist scheme and Lenin's intentions – had been to transform the culture of society, to make it work-oriented, free of

economic exploitation and discrimination, a society in which all the national and ethnic minorities would have the right to self-determination. To achieve this, the Bolsheviks set about destroying the middle classes, which they identified as the bearers of capitalist and bourgeois culture, either by deportation or physical isolation and ultimately extermination.

They brought the workers under control by the introduction of a barracks-style industrial regime, and tamed the individualistic longings of the peasants by offering them a choice of joining collective farms or facing starvation and physical extinction. The artists and intellectuals, who had helped them to power or welcomed their arrival, were given the choice of leaving the country – most of them did by 1922 – or falling in line behind the Communist Party as purveyors of its propaganda, or ending up in prison and concentration camps. National minorities were permitted their own languages, but what they said and wrote in them was strictly monitored by the Communists.

By the time Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, it was clear the system had failed, and when he allowed freedom of speech, or *glasnost*, writers, journalists and scholars began to analyse the parlous state of the country. They found that the economy and the environment were almost ruined, the political system was corrupt from top to bottom, and the country's history was told as nothing but a tissue of lies. As they dug deeper, finding layer after layer of falsehood, they eventually came to 1917 itself. Apart from unreconstructed Communists, in Russia today there are very few people who regard the October Revolution as the dawn of a new age.

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## Kadets

(So called from the initials of the party's name, the Constitutional Democrats or KDs—pronounced Ka Dets in Russian)

**Policy:** They wanted to bring Russian government and laws up to date. They looked for their new ideas to England, France and Germany. In particular they wanted to make the Duma more like the English Parliament with power to make laws, agree to or refuse taxes, and help decide matters of war or peace with foreign countries. This meant that the Tsar would lose his right to do all these things as he pleased, and would have to work with the Duma according to the Duma's rules: in other words he would be a constitutional monarch obeying the rules of a constitution.

Some Kadets wanted to end the Tsar's rule altogether, and set up a republic with a president on the French model.

**Support:** The more progressive landlords and leaders of industry and commerce, many professional people—lawyers, doctors, university teachers, etc.

**Included among the party's leaders:**  
Professor Miliukov, Prince Lvov.

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## Socialist Revolutionaries

(SRs for short)

**Policy:** Originally believed that Russia could avoid the horrors of an industrial revolution and that after the overthrow of Tsarism, self-governing peasant communes would be set up throughout Russia. They believed therefore that the land should be given to the peasants, although many in the party thought the landowners should receive some compensation.

Once the revolution began, their original ideas about peasant communes were forgotten, and they supported the Provisional Government. Except for their ideas on land reform, their policies were always rather vague in comparison with other parties, and the SRs included a wide range of opinions. In Autumn 1917, the more radical SRs split off to form a separate group—the left Socialist Revolutionaries—which for a time supported the Bolsheviks.

**Support:** At first a huge majority of the peasants supported the SRs. Later they lost support to the Bolsheviks, who also adopted the policy of distributing land to the peasants. Nevertheless the SRs retained a majority of the peasant votes. They also had some support from moderate socialists in the towns, and from people who had not been 'politically minded' before the revolution.

**Included among the party's leaders:** Kerensky, Gotz, Chernov.

## Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

As Marxists they believed that the industrialization of Russia would lead to the destruction of the landowning classes. Their place as the most powerful class would be taken by industrialists and bankers. Tsarism, the system of government which represented the interests of the landowners would collapse with them. But the party was split over the kind of revolution which would actually overthrow the Tsar. The split happened in 1903 (it was not only over policy, but a clash about personalities and organization also) and two groups were formed: the Bolsheviks (meaning majority) and the Mensheviks (meaning minority). However, in the years from 1903 to 1917 the Mensheviks were more often the majority.

### Mensheviks

**Policy:** They believed that ultimately the working class (by which they meant factory workers, railwaymen, miners and so on) must win control over Russia, and establish socialism. But they thought that in 1917 the workers were too weak to have their own revolution; first they must co-operate with the factory owners, bankers, lawyers and professional people (the bourgeoisie) in overthrowing Tsarism. So the Mensheviks supported the Provisional Government once the revolution began.

**Support:** Some workers, progressive lawyers and professional people; in general, the more cautious socialists.

**Included among their leaders:** Martov, Dan, Abramovitch.

### Bolsheviks

**Policy:** Like the Mensheviks they believed that the working class must set up socialism in Russia. But they thought the bourgeoisie was too weak to destroy the powers of the Tsar and the landowners. They argued that the city workers in alliance with the peasant masses (and especially the poorer peasants) should overthrow the landowners, factory owners and bankers together, and begin working towards a socialist Russia immediately. They therefore refused to co-operate with the Provisional Government, and set about trying to destroy it.

**Support:** At first a minority of workers, but gradually in the big towns the party won over a majority. They also won the support of large numbers of soldiers, and some peasants, especially the poorer peasants.

**Included among their leaders:** Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Lunacharsky, Bukharin.

## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

A revolution in Russia in 1917 ended three centuries of rule by czars. It led to the establishment of the world's first communist government. Communism has since spread to other countries and has had a significant impact on international relations.

Causes, major events, and results of the Russian Revolution are given on the outline below. Read the descriptions carefully, then answer the questions on the following pages.

### I. Causes of the Revolution

- A. People were dissatisfied with the rule of Romanov czars.
  - 1. Most people in Russia were poor peasants called serfs who lived and worked on land owned by aristocrats.
  - 2. Aristocrats (wealthy citizens who supported the czar) were given political power over the peasants.
  - 3. Serfs had to pay taxes to the aristocrats.
  - 4. Serfs were poorly educated, were usually made to stay on the land where they were born, and were sometimes forced to serve in the army.
  - 5. Nicholas II, the last Russian czar, limited the role of peasants and workers in the government.
  - 6. Student protests, peasant revolts, and worker strikes became common in the late 1800's and early 1900's.
  - 7. Revolutionary groups were organized.
- B. The Industrial Revolution did not spread to Russia and thus did not provide the Russian people with benefits enjoyed by Western Europeans.
- C. The Russo-Japanese War ended in a humiliating defeat for Russia and clearly showed that rule by czars was weak and disorganized.
- D. World War I brought great suffering to the Russian people.
  - 1. The country was unprepared when attacked by Germany in 1914.
  - 2. In the middle of the war, Nicholas replaced experienced government officials with weak, unpopular men.
  - 3. Nicholas had fallen under the influence of Grigori Y. Rasputin, a holyman and adviser who he thought was saving the life of his sick son.
  - 4. The war brought shortages in food, fuel, and housing.
  - 5. Russian armies were soundly defeated, and nearly 2 million people lost their lives.

### II. The Revolution of 1917

- A. Shortages of bread and coal prompted riots and strikes.
- B. Soldiers sent to end the violent protests sided with the demonstrators instead.
- C. Aristocrats and all educated Russians joined the revolution against Czar Nicholas.
- D. Lacking political support, Nicholas resigned from power.
- E. The Bolsheviks (communists) took control of the government and signed a peace treaty with Germany ending Russian involvement in World War I.
  - 1. Nikolai Lenin became the first dictator of Communist Russia and began putting into practice ideas he had developed after studying the writings of Karl Marx.
  - 2. A civil war broke out in which the communists (called "Reds" after the color of their flag) defeated the anti-communists ("Whites").
  - 3. The communists organized the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) which was made up of four "union republics" or states. (The number of union republics increased during the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's.)
- F. Lenin died in 1924 and was succeeded to power by Joseph Stalin.

### III. Results of the Russian Revolution

- A. Under communism, the government gradually took over ownership of land, factories, mines, banks, and railroads.
- B. The Communist Party was the only political party allowed in Russia.
  - 1. Lenin -- the "Father of Communism" -- used force and terror against his opponents.
  - 2. In the mid-1930's Stalin used the "Great Purge" to arrest or put to death thousands of party officials, army officers, and factory managers that he thought were "enemies of the people"; millions of people were sent by the secret police to labor camps.
- C. Lenin's "New Economic Policy" (NEP) and Stalin's "Five Year Plans" greatly improved Russia's economy.
  - 1. When the communists first seized power, the country's economy was on the edge of total collapse as a result of World War I, the revolution, and civil war.
  - 2. Under communist control, Russia developed into one of the world's leading industrial nations.
- D. The Bolsheviks thought the Russian Revolution of 1917 would lead to revolutions in other countries.
  - 1. Russian communists established the "Comintern" (Communist International), an organization of communist parties around the world.
  - 2. Stalin eventually disbanded the Comintern when attempts to spark revolutions in other countries failed.
- E. Communist governments were set up in numerous countries in Europe and Asia following World War II.
  - 1. Russia refused to withdraw from nations in Eastern Europe occupied during the Red Army's campaign against Germany.
    - a. Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and East Germany became Russian "satellites" with communist governments loyal to the Soviet Union.
    - b. This was the first event in the "Cold War" -- a period that brought international tension and the threat of war between the Soviet Union and the United States.
  - 2. Local communists took over the governments of Yugoslavia, Albania, and North Vietnam.
  - 3. Communists defeated Nationalists in a civil war in China.
  - 4. Communist governments were established in North Korea, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Mongolia, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Cuba.
- F. An early goal of communism was the worldwide overthrow of "capitalism" -- the private ownership (instead of government ownership) of factories, farms, etc.
- G. Communist countries today tend to be more interested in their own future than in the spread of communism to other parts of the world.
- H. Communist and non-communist countries now lean toward "peaceful co-existence".

#### Multiple-Choice

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Most Russians of the late 1800's and early 1900's were: (a) serfs (b) aristocrats (c) small farmers
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ "Romanov" was the name of: (a) a revolutionary leader (b) a political party (c) the Russian royal family
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Before the Revolution of 1917, serfs: (a) owned their own land (b) had a voice in the government (c) were poor tax-paying peasants
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_ In the years leading up to the revolution: (a) the czar made many reforms (b) all citizens were given the right to vote (c) student protests, peasant revolts, and worker strikes occurred
- (5) \_\_\_\_\_ The last Russian czar was: (a) Ivan the Terrible (b) Grigori Rasputin (c) Nicholas II

- (6) \_\_\_\_\_ The Russo-Japanese War: (a) won for Russia new territories in the Far East (b) exposed the weak leadership of the czar (c) resulted in the immediate overthrow of Nicholas
- (7) \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following did not happen during World War I?: (a) the Russian army lost battles and the people suffered greatly (b) Nicholas replaced experienced government officials with weak, unpopular men (c) Rasputin became the dictator of Russia
- (8) \_\_\_\_\_ By the end of World War I: (a) Nicholas was overthrown in the Russian Revolution (b) aristocrats had fled the country (c) Joseph Stalin had seized power
- (9) \_\_\_\_\_ The Russian Revolution of 1917 ended with the government under the control of the: (a) Bolsheviks (b) czar (c) Germans
- (10) \_\_\_\_\_ Bolsheviks were: (a) communists (b) anti-communists (c) officers in the Red Army
- (11) \_\_\_\_\_ Communist Russia's first dictator was: (a) Karl Marx (b) Joseph Stalin (c) Nikolai Lenin
- (12) \_\_\_\_\_ After the Russian civil war of 1918-1920, the name of the new communist nation was changed to: (a) Soviet Russia (b) Communist Russia (c) Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- (13) \_\_\_\_\_ In a communist state, the government: (a) is a democracy (b) allows private ownership of farms, factories, and the means of production (c) owns land, factories, mines, banks, and railroads
- (14) \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following is not true about Lenin?: (a) he used the New Economic Policy to improve the Soviet Union's economy (b) he developed the principles of modern communism after studying the writings of Karl Marx (c) he opposed the Bolsheviks
- (15) \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph Stalin: (a) was the "Father of Communism" (b) used the "Great Purge" to eliminate political opposition (c) was the leader of the "Reds" in the Russian civil war
- (16) \_\_\_\_\_ The "Comintern" was: (a) the name given to the series of 5-year economic plans (b) an international organization of communist parties (c) the Russian secret police
- (17) \_\_\_\_\_ The number of political parties in the Soviet Union is: (a) 1 (b) 2 (c) 4
- (18) \_\_\_\_\_ Under communist control, the Soviet Union: (a) has become a leading industrial nation (b) has stood for freedom and individual rights (c) has spread capitalism to other nations
- (19) \_\_\_\_\_ The first event of the "Cold War" was: (a) a communist victory in the Chinese civil war (b) the setting up of communist governments in Mongolia, Cambodia, and Vietnam (c) the establishment of Russian "satellites" in Eastern Europe
- (20) \_\_\_\_\_ Communist and non-communist nations today: (a) are still very much involved in the Cold War (b) refuse to trade or communicate with each other (c) have generally learned to get along with each other despite having different political and economic systems

### Communism in the Soviet Union Today

Read the statements below, then answer the questions which follow.

- all power is in the hands of the Communist Party
- voters may only elect candidates of the Communist Party
- the government -- instead of private individuals -- owns factories, farms, natural resources, and transportation facilities
- only a small percentage of the population is given membership in the Communist Party
- radio, television, publishing, and motion-picture production is controlled by the government



- citizens are allowed to own homes, and may buy books, radios, and other consumer goods
- the amount and variety of consumer goods is limited by what the government decides to produce
- the government decides what prices should be charged for goods and services
- workers on "state farms" are paid by the government
- workers on "collective farms" get a share of the production and profits
- labor unions have no control over wages and are not allowed to strike
- education and medical services are free
- many families cannot afford a car
- a smaller gap exists between rich and poor in the Soviet Union than in the U.S.
- schools emphasize science, mathematics, and languages
- travel to other countries is restricted
- citizens may be punished for criticizing leaders of the Communist Party
- religious worship is discouraged
- women are given equality with men in job opportunities
- children are taught that communism is the best form of government

List in order of importance to you 3 disadvantages of living in the Soviet Union:

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_

List in order of importance to you 3 advantages of living in the Soviet Union:

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_





BY ANDREW CURRY

**Joseph Stalin** was a poor cobbler's son who turned a shattered, backward society into a superpower. He was a rustic Georgian from the Caucasus Mountains, yet he may have done more to modernize Russia than any other ruler since Peter the Great. He sent over 20 million people to government concentration camps but was hailed as an ally in the fight against Hitler. His five-decade political career combined leadership savvy and cold-blooded brutality. He crushed the spirit of his own people while conquering half of Europe.

Unlike his contemporary and rival Adolf Hitler, the Sta-

■ The Soviet Union Under Stalin: 1950



Chinese Communists with posters of Stalin in 1951. The Soviet dictator was known not as an inspirational leader or a fiery orator, but as a brutal, exacting administrator.

FROM LIFE, COURTESY OF LIFE PICTURES GROUP

viet dictator has remained an ambiguous figure for the past 50 years. He left no memoirs and gave few speeches. Although he ruled the Soviet Union for a quarter of a century, the documents that could help explain him have been frustratingly inaccessible. In recent years, however, the situation has begun to change. When the U.S.S.R. collapsed in 1991, independent scholars were allowed into the Central Party Archive in Moscow for the first time. And slowly, from millions of documents, a deeply complex figure is emerging. "Stalin was a killer," writes Oxford University historian Robert Service in his *Stalin: A Biography*. "He was also an intellectual, an administrator, and a party leader; he was a writer, editor, and statesman." A half century after his death, his legacy still hangs heavy over Russia and the world.

Stalin was the heir to a long tradition of conquest. For 230 years—between the reign of Peter the Great in 1683 and the beginning of World War I in 1914—the Russian empire expanded 55 miles a day. The mountain kingdom of Georgia came under Russian rule in the 19th century, and by the time Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili—the boy who would become Joseph Stalin—was born in 1878, Georgia was firmly under Russian control. Iosif was raised as an only child. His father was an ill-tempered alcoholic who was rarely at home. His mother lavished attention on him, especially after a bout of smallpox at age 6 almost killed him.

Dzhugashvili was molded by his early years. "He was mistreated by his father and spoiled but dominated by his mother, and he grew up resentful but ambitious to be the top dog in any pack," Service says. "He responded badly to being looked down upon." A star student in school, Iosif was sent to Tbilisi's Russian Orthodox seminary. Ironically, the experience may have driven him toward Marxism. Students were severely disciplined; those speaking Georgian were told it was the language of dogs. For a proud boy like Dzhugashvili, who never lost his Georgian accent, the scorn must have been especially noxious. Says Service: "The church turned seminarians into revolutionaries."

**VYING FOR ADVANTAGE.** Iosif graduated from seminary straight into turn-of-the-century revolutionary politics, abandoning thoughts of the priesthood in favor of a rapid climb through the radical Bolshevik party ranks. He was known for risk-taking: Early party fundraising exploits included armed robbery. In 1912, the Georgian adopted the macho pseudonym "Stalin," derived from the Russian for steel. Unlike revolutionaries such as Leon Trotsky and V. I. Lenin, he stayed in Russia instead of intriguing from exile. But he spent years in Siberian exile as a result. When the Russian Rev-

olution began in 1917, Stalin was in the thick of things.

Stalin's ruthless edge was honed in the chaos of revolution. The times called for toughness against the remnants of the Russian nobility, against political parties vying for advantage, and against the armies still fighting the last battles of the First World War. As the Bolsheviks fought to control Russia, they were also fighting among themselves. Political opponents or party rivals were killed at every opportunity. It was a brutality that would later mark Stalin's career. "Death solves all problems," Stalin said. "No man, no problem."

In the years after the Revolution, Stalin distinguished himself not as an inspirational leader or fiery intellectual but as a viciously competent administrator. He worked behind the scenes, letting Lenin and others make the speeches. He was Lenin's right-hand man, perfectly poised to seize power for himself when Lenin finally died in 1924. He moved quickly to eliminate his opponents. Once in control, he turned to a much grander project: reshaping the Soviet Union itself.

Russian Communists had always been hampered by circumstance. When Karl Marx formulated the idea of communist revolution, he meant for it to happen in a heavily industrialized society like Germany. After the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks found themselves with the opposite culture: a sprawling land of small peasant farms and few factories. To bring the U.S.S.R. into the 20th century, Stalin set about creating an industrialized society the way he knew best: by force. In effect, he would conquer his own country.

The first step was pushing the country's peasants into collective farms. Soldiers were sent into the countryside to seize grain by force. The country's most successful farmers were arrested or killed. Between 1930 and 1933, over 2 million peasants were sent to camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere. Collectivization and the massive famines that followed represented "a vast upheaval," writes Anne Applebaum in her 2003 book *Gulag: A History*. "Collectivization also destroyed forever rural Russia's sense of continuity with the past." In a holocaust largely ignored at the time, between 6 million and 7 million people died of starvation.

Up until 1930, Stalin's impulse to slaughter had been directed at specific opponents, or abroad. The famine was the first time the Soviet people themselves became a target, but it wouldn't be the last. Stalin's key tool was the NKVD, later called the KGB. The secret police ran the U.S.S.R.'s infamous prison labor-camp network, the Gulag, which flourished as hundreds of thousands more were deported. In many cases, the arrests were ordered personally: In one chilling note from 1933, Stalin ordered the deportation of 418,000 people. The



## JOSEPH STALIN

**Born.** Dec. 6, 1878, in Gori, Georgia

**Died.** March 5, 1953

**Claim to fame.** Autocratic ruler of the Soviet Union for nearly 50 years. Directed the brutal industrialization and deadly collectivization of Russia, helped defeat Nazi Germany in WWII, and expanded the U.S.S.R.'s borders.

**Red terror.** Most estimate that between 10 million and 50 million people died as a result of famines, prison, labor camps, and state terrorism during Stalin's reign.

**Cult figure.** Until de-Stalinization in the 1960s, over a dozen towns and cities bore Stalin's name, and his embalmed body was displayed in Red Square.

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order was written on a sheet of paper covered in doodles. The specifics were left to low-level party officials, who saw arrests as one of the few quotas it was easy to exceed.

The camps were more about Stalin's vicious policies than about any rational economic motives. An avid student of Russian history, Stalin knew that czars since Peter the Great had used slave labor to accomplish huge projects. "Imperial Russia had an exile system and used forced labor," says Applebaum. "Forced labor was part of Russian culture." Gulag inmates cut timber in the Siberian snows and mined gold in deadly conditions on starvation diets. Eventually, the Gulags grew into sprawling, inefficient cities built on the Russian tundra. In 1930, official statistics recorded 179,000 inmates in the camps; seven years later, there were 1.2 million. By Stalin's death in 1953, that number had doubled to almost 2.5 million people. Constant turnover, Applebaum says, meant close to 20 million people passed through the camps. Many never left.

Stalin's vision of the Gulag as a tool to shape the Soviet economy was deeply flawed. Of course, no one dared point that out to him. "It became clear they weren't successful because they weren't calculating hidden costs like paying the guards, or making people dig coal who were nuclear physicists," says Applebaum. "But the camps appealed to him. They served a political function—to terrorize people."

With the Gulag system steadily growing, Stalin turned to even more violent measures, this time directed against largely imagined enemies within the Communist Party itself. Again, quotas were set.

With chilling precision, 1937's Politburo Order No. 00447 specified 268,950 arrests and 75,950 executions. "Better too far than not far enough," NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov told his men, who exceeded their orders several times over.

At the same time, national groups Stalin suspected might be troublesome were individually targeted. Some 1.5 million ethnic Poles, Germans, Koreans, Estonians, and others were arrested and 700,000 were shot. "He picked on ethnic groups he thought were a danger to state security," says Service. "If you had a problem, the best way to deal was physically eliminating it—kill them or deport them."

Often, those closest to Stalin had the most to fear. Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* reconstructs in detail the lives of those closest to Stalin—and their deaths. When Semyon Budyonny, a close friend and frequent weekend guest, begged Stalin to spare his wife, Olga, the dictator's response was chilling. "Be brave," he told the man. "Do you think I don't feel sorry when my closest circle turn out to be enemies of the people?" Olga was sentenced to 11 years in

solitary confinement and went mad. Another friend's wife was shot in front of her husband. Even Stalin's brother-in-law was shot and his sister-in-law imprisoned.

In his Moscow office, Stalin pored over lists of the doomed: party officials and Army officers, professors and poets. He wrote personal notes next to some names: "Beat, beat!" "Stalin talked about the lives of men as if they were old clothes—some we keep, some we throw away," writes Sebag Montefiore. Thousands of high-level targets met their end in the NKVD's Lubyanka prison. After severe beatings and forced confessions, the accused were taken to a low building with sloping concrete floors that could be hosed clean and a log wall to stop bullets. There they were shot in the head and trucked to crematoria. The NKVD's Yezhov was known to arrive at Politburo meetings in a blood-spattered shirt.

**MASS GRAVES.** Yet the majority of the terror's victims were shot in nameless forests, falling into mass graves by the tens of thousands. A Russian human-rights organization has excavated mass graves containing thousands of bodies; one, near the city of Chelyabinsk in the Urals, held 80,000 skeletons. Most of the bodies still haven't been found.

In his book *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, historian Robert Conquest describes the terror as "the central and essential event of Stalinism." "The terror of 1936–38 was an almost uniquely devastating blow inflicted by a government on its own population," Conquest writes. "Millions lived year after year in an insane world of denunciation and hysteria.

... People's whole psychology was distorted in unnatural and inhuman ways—to the degree that even now the recovery has not yet been complete."

Stalin's biographers have long debated his motivations. For years, he was portrayed as a psychotic killer, his horrific crimes explained by insanity. But the Soviet archives reveal a more complex picture. Service argues that Stalin was a talented leader with a deeply troubled mind. He rose to power after decades as a bureaucrat; he had the genuine support of his peers in the Soviet hierarchy long before he became the country's dictator. "We underestimate him if we think only in terms of insanity," Service says.

Of course, Service writes, Stalin "had the opportunity to act out his own psychological damage by persecuting millions of his people." Stalin was a sincere Marxist but over time developed his own belief system that saw violence as the answer to every problem. He certainly wasn't motivated by wealth; he spent much of his time in worn army boots and slept on a couch in his Kremlin office. But he was a true megalomaniac, drawing no distinction between per-



Stalin, about age 20. He had wanted to be a priest but rose quickly in the Bolshevik party.



Stalin was a devout Marxist, but he came to see violence as the solution to every problem, setting quotas for arrests and executions. "Better too far," said one of his aides, "than not enough."

sonal motives and ideological convictions. "He assumed that if he weren't around, the whole Soviet regime would be at threat," Service says. "The ultimate thing he wanted to preserve was his own power."

The terror left the Soviet leadership gutted and unstable; it virtually decapitated the Red Army's officer corps. Most important, it left survivors afraid of opposing anything Stalin did. By 1938, Stalin's self-imposed isolation was nearly complete. No one was left who could steer him away from the disasters to come.

**HEADY TIME.** In 1939, Stalin approved a treaty with Nazi Germany that divided Europe between the two powers. Hitler and Stalin moved to secure their gains: Hitler's Wehrmacht invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939; two weeks later, the Red Army moved into Estonia and Latvia. In the newly occupied lands, the Soviet terror machine began executing and exiling opponents. It was a heady time. In less than 30 years, Stalin had effectively re-created the Russian empire.

But the treaty with Germany gave him a false sense of security. As Hitler massed troops and tanks on the U.S.S.R.'s frontier, Stalin entered a state of denial. He trust-

ed no one but himself, and since there were few people left to challenge his lack of military knowledge, he refused to act, despite repeated warnings about German plans.

When Hitler launched a surprise attack in June 1941, the Soviets were caught totally unprepared. The catastrophe was almost complete. German tanks pushed deep into Soviet territory. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers

were taken prisoner; within weeks, the country's population was halved, along with its industrial and agricultural capacities. By late July, German planes were bombing Moscow.

Stalin applied the same methods in war as he did in peace. Returning Russian POWs were shot as traitors and deserters. (When Stalin's own son was captured by the Nazis, Stalin refused to exchange him.) Entire factories were relocated in the Ural Mountains. The whole Soviet economy was turned to war production. By the end of 1942, Soviet factories were producing twice as many planes and tanks as Germany. Millions of young men were drafted. Civilians suffered tremendously—agriculture was all but abandoned—but the German advance was halted.

The legacy of the terror left no doubt about the price of

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failure. "The military knew it was going to get clobbered if it didn't win battles, and eliminated if battles were lost," Service points out. Stalin made his feelings explicit: "Bear in mind that if you leave the Germans even 1 ton of oil, we will shoot you," he told one production official. "But if you destroy the installations prematurely and the Germans don't grab them and we're left without fuel, we'll also shoot you." With pistols to their heads, Soviet forces rallied to reverse the course of the war. Losses were incredible. The Soviets lost between 8 million and 9 million soldiers. And civilian deaths during the war approached 20 million.

Stalin made plans for the aftermath. Negotiating with Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during the war, Stalin knew he had the opportunity to reshape the world. "Whoever occupies a territory," he told the Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas, "also imposes on it his own social system." At the Yalta conference in 1945, Stalin pressed hard to make his gains on the ground concrete, pushing FDR and Churchill to accept the reality of Soviet control in Eastern Europe.

The tide finally turned; the Red Army bore west across a ravaged Poland and into Germany. After years of violence and suffering, Soviet soldiers were in no mood for magnanimity. Historians estimate 2 million German women were raped by the advancing troops. Stalin was sympathetic. "Imagine a man who has fought from Stalingrad to Belgrade—over thousands of kilometers of his own broken land, across the dead bodies of his comrades and dearest ones," Stalin urged Djilas. "What is so awful about his having fun with a woman after such horrors?"

When Germany surrendered, Stalin found himself in control of an empire that stretched halfway around the world. "Before WWII, the U.S.S.R. was a shrunken version of the Russian empire. Stalin was interested in reconquering those territories," says Stanford University historian Norman Naimark. "Stalin as czar re-established the borders of the Russian empire." Yet Stalin often didn't go as far as he might have. At the end of the war, Stalin's practical side emerged. He set up governments loyal to the U.S.S.R. but left them some autonomy. "This isn't the traditional form of conquest," Naimark says. "The imposi-

tion of socialism has priority over sheer conquest."

Yet Stalin's lack of military or diplomatic experience led him into major blunders again and again. He almost forced open war with his former allies in the West over control of postwar Germany; in 1950, he wildly underestimated America's willingness to go to war in Korea, locking the two superpowers into a tense dance for influence that dragged on for decades. Still, Stalin pressed his advantage where he

could. Yugoslavia's postwar leader, Marshal Tito, was one of the few people to stand up to Stalin's demands for absolute loyalty. Stalin took it personally—for once, to no avail. "Stop sending people to kill me," Tito wrote. "If you don't stop sending killers, I'll send one to Moscow, and I won't have to send a second."

**MAN OF STEEL.** Because Stalin's legacy in today's Russia remains the subject of deep unease, it's worth knowing more about him, not just to learn what makes dictators tick but also to understand a country that remains one of America's few military and diplomatic rivals. Russia's leadership is dominated by former KGB officers, including Russian President Vladimir Putin. "It's not flattering to have their agency shown to be homicidal," says Applebaum.

"So [Putin] is trying not to focus on the bad things of the past."

The result, scholars say, has been a chilly reception toward researchers studying the Stalin era. Declassification of archival documents has slowed dramatically. And observers have noticed an increasing nostalgia for the days when Russia was a major power—a nostalgia that often overlooks the grim toll those years took. Russian politicians are pushing for statues of Stalin to be brought back. In his hometown of Gori, visitors can still see his death mask and grammar school report card in a massive, Soviet-era Stalin Museum.

As America pushes an agenda of democratization farther east, Russians seek inspiration from their Man of Steel, again claiming nations like Estonia and Latvia as part of Russia's rightful sphere of influence. In Latvia recently, President Bush apologized for U.S. complicity with Stalin at Yalta. "It's part of American history, too," says Applebaum. "We fought the Cold War for good reasons." In recognizing the enormity of Stalin's impact, we may better understand our world. ●

## SAID STALIN: "DEATH SOLVES ALL PROBLEMS. NO MAN, NO PROBLEM."



Stalin at the Potsdam conference. After the war, his military and diplomatic inexperience caused him to make major blunders.

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