



Why was
there a
Communist
revolution in
Russia in
1917?

Russian failures in the
First World War

The weakness
of Tsar Nicholas II

The
failure
of the
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Opposition of
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scandal

The
discontent of
the workers

The
discontent of
the peasants

Factors that led to
the
Communist
revolution
in 1917.

Weakness of Tsar Nicholas II

The ruler of Russia was Tsar Nicholas II. He was an absolute monarch, meaning that he had total power in Russia.

Nicholas was a weak man. He used his secret police, the Okrana, to persecute opponents. Books and newspapers were censored. The Church supported the Tsar – the ‘Little Father of the Russian people’.

Nicholas II ruled a vast country that was almost medieval in comparison to other countries. The Tsar’s undemocratic government was a major cause of the revolution.



The Russian Empire in 1913

as it was during the reign of Nicholas II



Failure of the Duma

In 1905 Russia lost a war with Japan. This defeat caused strikes in the Russian cities, the Tsar nearly lost control. Nicholas II offered to call a Duma, or parliament, with free elections. This was accepted by the demonstrators.

When the Duma met, it began to criticise the Tsar and demanded changes. Nicholas II did not like this at all. The Duma was dismissed and new elections, controlled by the Tsar, were called.

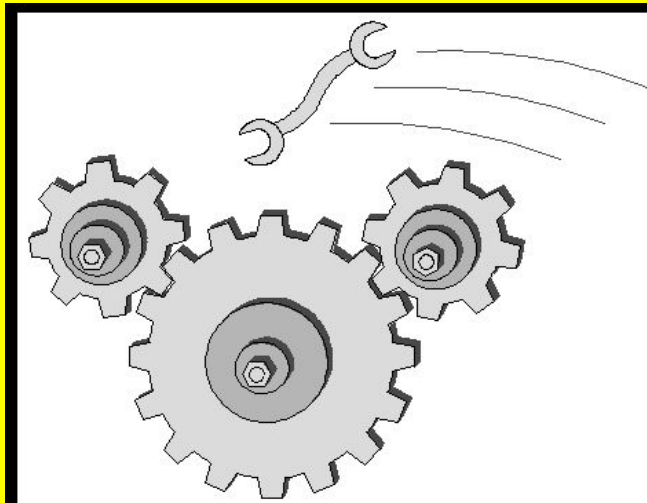
It became clear that the Duma would be shut down if it criticised the Tsar. As long as the Tsar had control of the army, his power could not be broken.



The discontent of the Workers

Industrialisation began much later in Russia than in Western Europe. Huge iron foundries, textile factories and engineering firms were set up. Most were owned by the government or foreigners, and were located in the big cities such as St Petersburg or Moscow. By 1900 20% of Russians were workers living in cities.

Working conditions in the new industrial towns were hard. Pay was very low. Although strikes and demonstrations were illegal, they often took place. Strikers were frequently shot by the Tsar's soldiers or secret police.



‘The whole day we
pour out our blood and
sweat. Every minute
we are exposed to
danger.’

Union leaflet 1898



The discontent of the Peasants

Russia was a rural society with over 90% of the people being poor peasants. Until 1861 the peasants had belonged to their masters, who could buy and sell them like animals. When the peasants were freed in 1861 they were given small amounts of land for which they had to pay back the government. As a result most farmers were in absolute poverty. Agriculture was in desperate need of modernisation.

In contrast, a small number of upper-class people held most of the wealth and power. This aristocracy had large town houses and country estates.

Very often the peasants do not have enough allotment land. They cannot feed themselves, clothe themselves, heat their homes, keep their tools and livestock, secure seed for sowing and lastly pay their taxes.

Police report into country conditions 1905

Russian failures in the First World War

In the first few months of the First World War, Russia fought better than had been expected. Russian forces attacked Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1914 and were only pushed back after fierce fighting at the battle of Tannenberg.

In 1915, Tsar Nicholas II assumed personal command of the Russian armed forces. This was a risky policy; any defeats would be blamed on him. As it turned out the Tsar was a poor commander. The Russian army lost confidence in the Tsar after a string of serious defeats. The Russian soldiers, poorly trained and equipped, lacking in basic items such as rifles and ammunition, suffered from lowering morale. Thousands of men deserted.

Without the support of the army, the Tsar's position became increasingly precarious.



Rasputin and Scandal

While Tsar Nicholas II was absent commanding Russian forces during the First World War, he left the day to day running of Russia in the control of his wife Tsarina Alexandra.

Alexandra came increasingly under the influence of Grigori Rasputin, a 'holy man' who appeared to be able to heal the haemophilia of Prince Alexis, the heir to the throne.

Rasputin used his power to win effective control of the Russian government. But this aroused envy and he was murdered in 1916. Rasputin's influence undermined the prestige of the royal family, but his murder came too late to save them.



The opposition of the Communists

Many middle-class Liberals and Social Revolutionaries (who supported the peasants) opposed the rule of the Tsar, but the most revolutionary were the Social Democrats or Communists.

The Communists believed in the ideas of Karl Marx. Marx claimed that history is all about the struggles between the classes. He claimed that the capitalist system was unfair because the factory owners (bourgeois) made profits from the toils of the workers (proletariat). Marx predicted that the proletariat would violently overthrow the bosses and take control of the country on behalf of the people.

The Russian Communists were divided into the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and the Mensheviks led by Trotsky. Lenin believed that the small party of Bolsheviks should seize power and control Russia on behalf of the people. Before 1917 Lenin and many of the other Communist leaders were in exile abroad, plotting to bring about a revolution in Russia

The February Revolution 1917

Russia fared so badly in the First World War there was a spontaneous uprising against the Tsar in February 1917. This was sparked off by food riots, poor working conditions and the failure to win the war. The Russian army refused to shoot at the demonstrators and joined forces with them. Lenin, in exile in Switzerland, raced to Petrograd so that he could attempt to seize control of the revolution.

In March 1917, without the support of the army, the Tsar was forced to abdicate and a Provisional Government was set up under Prince Lvov and Kerensky. Lenin believed that this new government was weak and would not impose communism on the Russian people.

In October 1917, Lenin led an armed uprising against the Provisional Government. His aim was to take control of Russia and turn it in to a communist country.





How did Lenin
impose
Communist
control in
Russia between
1917-1924?

The Treaty of
Brest-Litovsk
1918

The abandonment of
the Constituent
Assembly

The
Cheka

Success of
the New
Economic
Policy

The Civil
War
1918-1921

Factors that helped
Lenin impose
Communist control
in
Russia 1917-1924.

The execution
of Tsar
Nicholas II
1918

War
Communism

The Kronstadt
Revolt 1921

The abandonment of the Constituent Assembly 1917

Straight after the October Revolution of 1917, Lenin promised to hold elections for a Parliament to be known as the Constituent Assembly.

Lenin renamed the Bolshevik Party as the Communist Party in order to win wider support. However, the Communists only won 175 seats out of 700, not enough for a majority.

Therefore Lenin shut down the Constituent Assembly after only one day!

Lenin was not prepared to share power with anyone. This was the first step in setting up a Communist dictatorship.



The Cheka (or secret police)

In December 1917 Lenin set up a secret police force known as the Cheka. Cheka agents spied on the Russian people in factories and villages.

Anyone suspected of being anti-Communist could be arrested, tortured and executed without a trial.

When opponents tried to assassinate Lenin in 1918, he launched the **Red Terror** campaign against his enemies. It is said that 50,000 people were arrested and executed in this period.



The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918

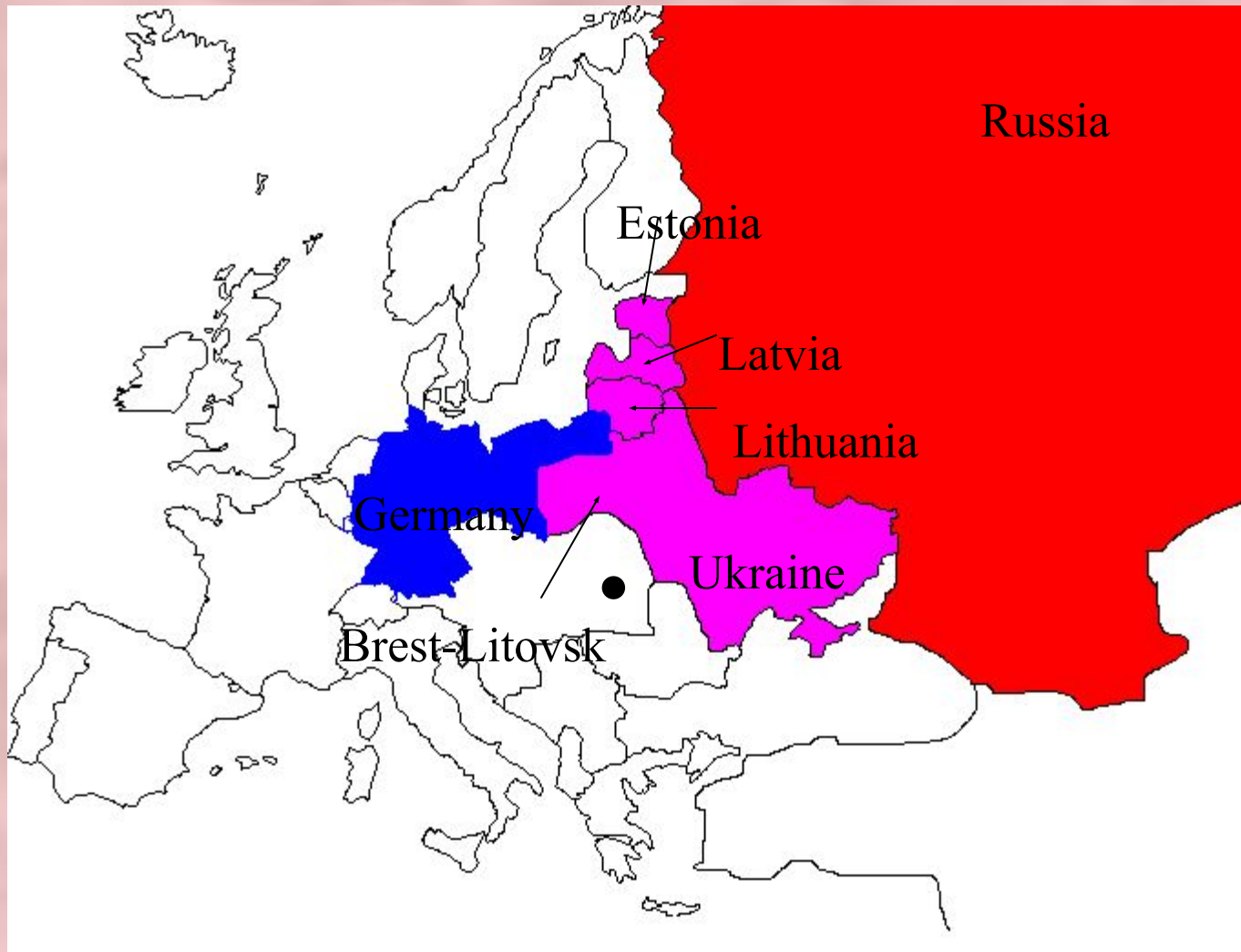
To successfully impose Communist control in Russia, Lenin realised that he would have to bring Russia out of the First World War. He feared that the war might bring about an end to Communist rule.

By this time the Russian army was weakened by poor morale, desertions and a break down in discipline. It was incapable of resisting the Germans.

In March 1918 Russia signed a humiliating peace treaty with Germany. Russia lost a huge amount of land in the West. This included about one-sixth of the population (60 million people), three-quarters of its iron and coal and over a quarter of the best farmland in Russia.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk came at a high price for Russia, but Lenin knew he could not defeat Germany and his opponents in Russia at the same time.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918



Russian territory ceded to Germany

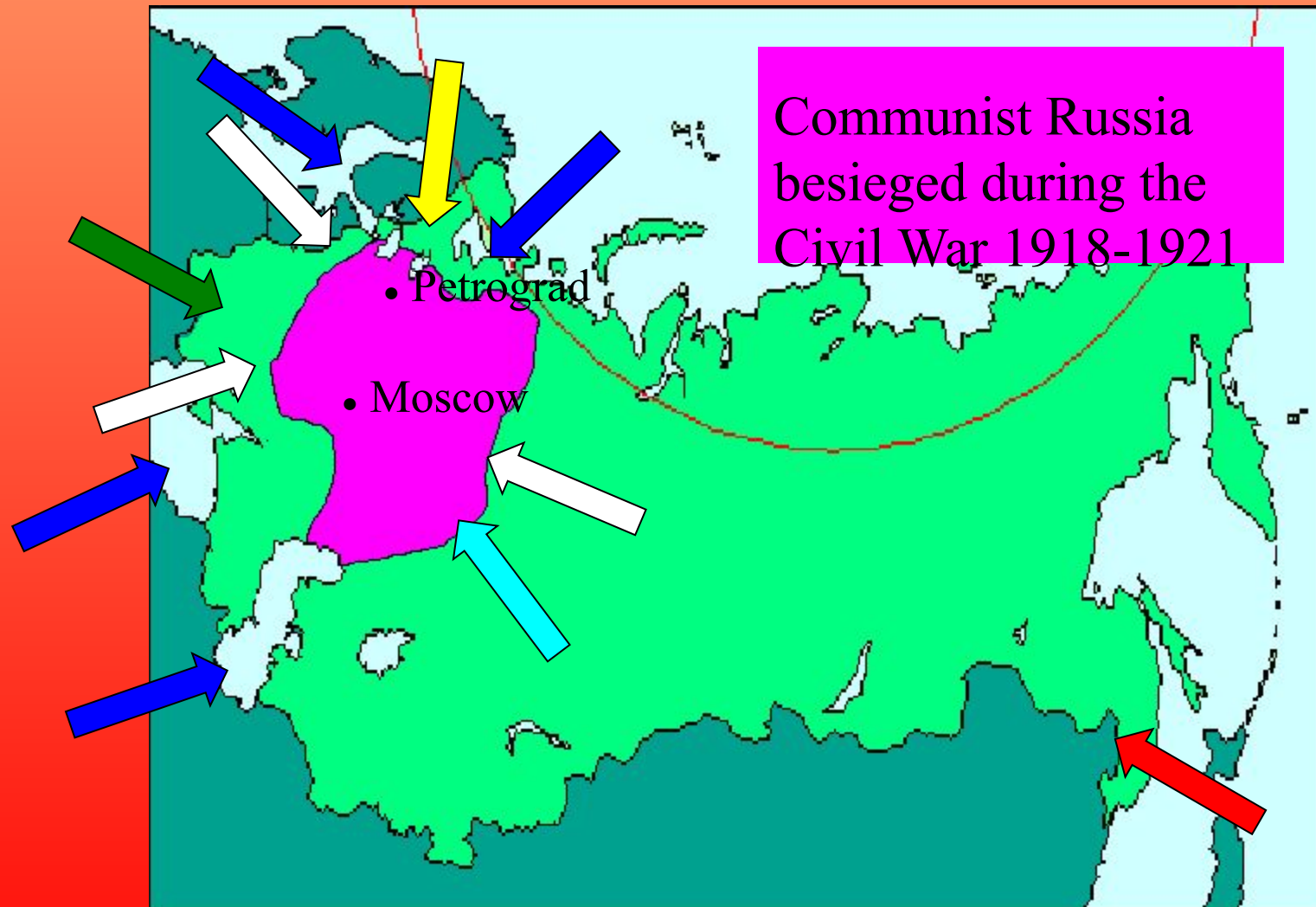
The Civil War 1918-1921

The opponents of the 'Reds', Lenin and the Communists, were known as the 'Whites'. The Whites were a mixture of aristocrats, royalists, churchmen, army officers and many others. The Whites were led by Admiral Kolchak and Generals Deniken and Wrangel.

The Whites were supported by Britain, France, Japan and the USA, countries that were alarmed at the possible spread of communism. At the same time, Lenin fought a war against Poland, a new country formed by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Although in a very dangerous position, the Communists were able to win the Civil War. This was because the Whites were divided, while the Reds controlled the key cities, industrial centres and communication links. Trotsky's tough leadership of the new Red Army proved decisive in the victory over the Whites.

Japanese armies Finns Czechs (ex-prisoners of war)



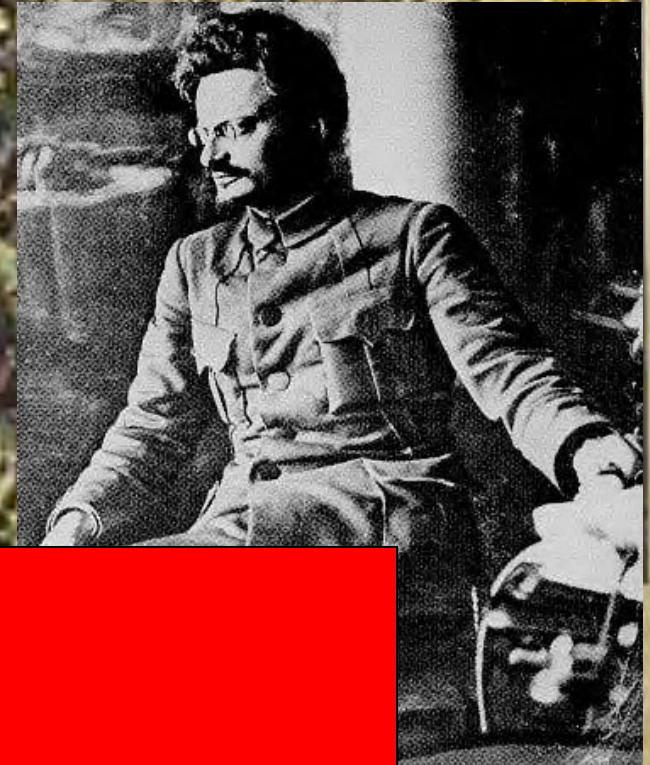
Allied armies White Russian armies Polish armies

1919 — 1920

Every scoundrel who
incites anyone to retreat
or to desert will be
shot!

Every soldier who
throws away his rifle
will be shot!

Leon Trotsky – founder and
commander of the Red Army





The execution of Tsar Nicholas II July 1918

After his abdication in March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II and his family were arrested and sent to Siberia.

In July 1918, the Romanovs were in Ekaterinburg, with a White army closing in on the town. Local communists were worried that the Tsar might be a rallying point for the Whites. As a result, Tsar Nicholas, his wife, their five children and four attendants were shot and bayoneted.

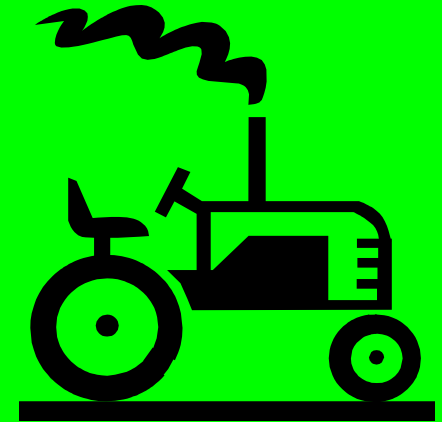
War Communism

To win the Civil War and impose Communism in Russia, Lenin needed a strong Red Army supplied with weapons and food.

The state took control of the factories and appointed managers to run them. Work was hard and long, food was rationed to only those who worked and trade unions were banned.

To get enough food, the Cheka seized all surplus grain from the peasants. The peasants hid food or preferred to grow less rather than give it away free to feed the towns.

Drought and famine hit Russia in 1921 – over 4 million people died.



Food?

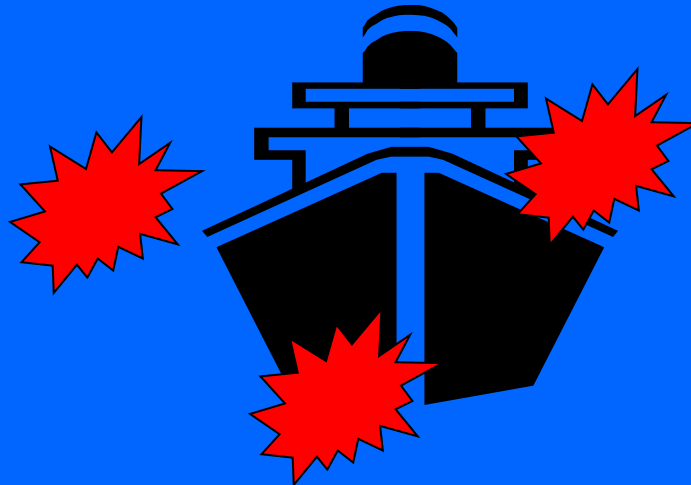


The Kronstadt Revolt 1921

War Communism made Lenin's government very unpopular. Discontent amongst the peasants led to violence in the cities. Workers went on strike, in spite of the death penalty for striking.

The most serious opposition to Lenin's government came in March 1921. Sailors at the Kronstadt naval base near Petrograd revolted. They accused Lenin of breaking his promise to help the workers.

Lenin ordered the Red Army to put down the revolt. This caused 20,000 casualties and the leaders of the revolt were executed. However, the mutiny was a warning to Lenin that he might have to relax War Communism.

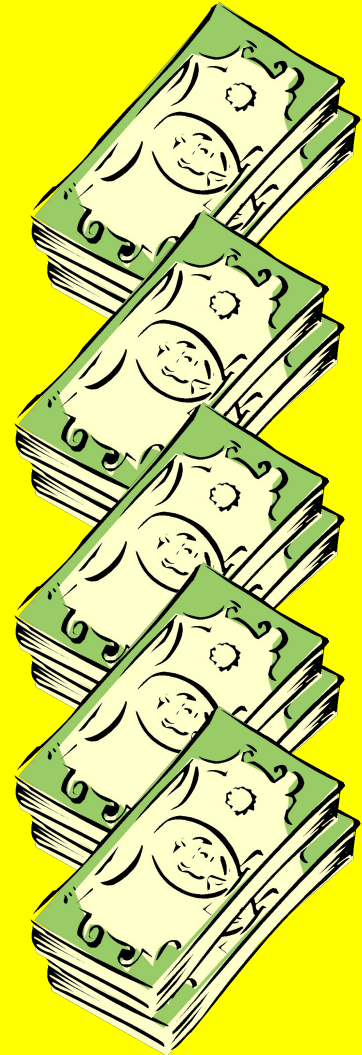


Success of the New Economic Policy 1921

To regain popular support, Lenin relaxed War Communism with the New Economic Policy (NEP). Smaller industries were returned to private ownership and peasants could sell their surplus on the open market. This was a return to capitalism and competition.

Lenin hoped that NEP would give Russia 'a breathing space' to get back on its feet. Most of the Communist Party saw the need for NEP, but some were against it.

On the whole NEP was a success. But it did create some problems. Some peasants, the Kulaks, became rich, while 'Nepmen' or businessmen made a profit in the towns. Some saw NEP as a betrayal of communism and return to the old system.



Communist control of the USSR by 1924

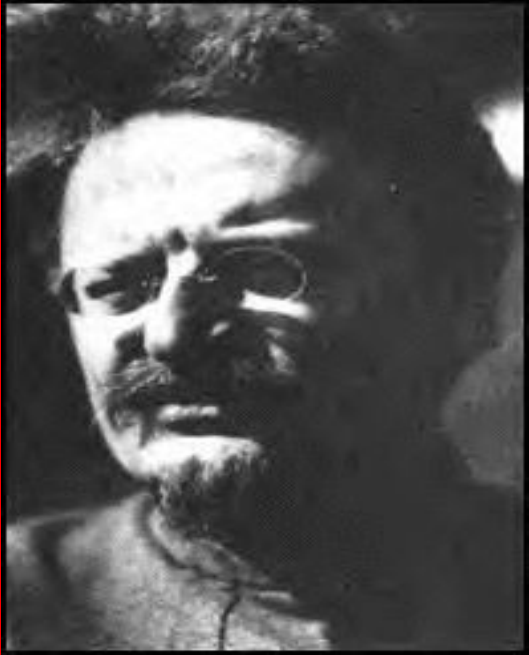
- Leningrad
 - Moscow
- 
- A map of the Soviet Union in 1924, showing the extent of communist control. The territory is colored in a solid magenta. The map includes the Baltic states, Poland, and the vast majority of the Russian Empire's former lands. A red line, likely representing the 180-degree meridian, curves across the map. The surrounding areas, including Western Europe, the British Isles, and parts of North America, are colored in a dark teal. The text 'Communist control of the USSR by 1924' is at the top, and two bullet points, '• Leningrad' and '• Moscow', are on the left side of the map.

When Lenin died in 1924, he had been very successful in imposing a communist dictatorship in Russia.

He had defeated all of his opponents and established a strong communist government. As each of the areas formerly belonging to the Tsar came under communist control, they were turned into socialist republics. In 1923 these became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

But, Lenin failed to provide a clear successor on his death. This led to four years of bitter struggle.





Who
would
succeed
Lenin?



OR

Trotsky – Red Army
Commander and
Commisar of Foreign
Affairs

Stalin – Commisar for
Nationalities



How did
Stalin rule
the USSR
between
1928-1941?

The Struggle for power: Stalin v Trotsky

After the death of Lenin in 1924, there was a four year power struggle between Josef Stalin and Leon Trotsky over the succession to the Russian leadership.

Trotsky believed that under his leadership Russia would become a catalyst for the spread of communism across the world. He had been very successful as commander of the Red Army in the civil war and appeared to have Lenin's support.

Stalin had not played a significant part in the revolution of 1917, but since then he had gathered control of a number of key posts in the Communist Party. Stalin was determined to win control of Russia for himself. He was not interested in international communism, he wanted to make Russia strong and with himself at its head.

By 1928 Stalin emerged as the successor to Lenin and Trotsky was forced into exile.



Reasons for Stalin's success

When Lenin died he had warned the Communist Party of Stalin's threat in his 'Political Testament'.

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has great power in his hands, and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution.

Comrade Stalin is too rude.

Reasons for Stalin's success

Although Lenin had not supported him, Stalin was in a strong position. As General Secretary of the Communist Party Stalin had responsibility for appointing posts in the Party. This meant he could remove opponents and replace them with his supporters. He was also popular in the Party as he wanted to concentrate on turning Russia into a modern, powerful state; this approach was called 'Socialism in one country'.

In contrast Trotsky was much less popular. He had been a Menshevik and had only joined the Bolsheviks in 1917. Trotsky was dismissed as Commissar for War in 1925 and from the Central Committee in 1926. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party and forced into exile in 1929. Stalin had Trotsky assassinated in Mexico in 1940.

Other leading figures of 1917, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin, were also removed by Stalin.

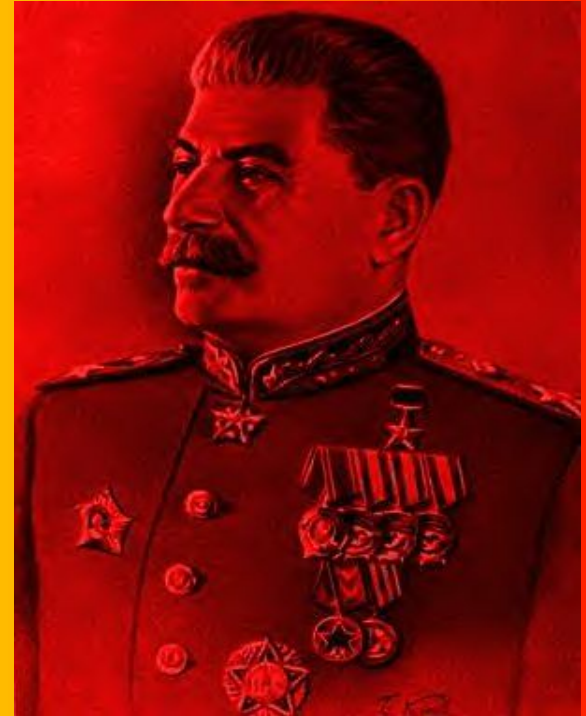
Stalin's dictatorship: purges and propaganda

Even with his opponents removed, Stalin still felt insecure. He conducted a policy of purges between 1934-1938. Millions were arrested, executed or sent to labour camps.

Stalin used the NKVD, the secret police, to undertake the 'Great Terror'. Stalin purged:

- 90% of the army's top officers,
- every admiral in the navy,
- 1 million Communist Party members,
- some 20 million ordinary Russians.

At the same time Stalin encouraged a cult of personality. Propaganda was used to make people aware of the part Stalin was playing in every aspect of life – work, home and leisure.



Stalin's face is seen everywhere. His name is spoken by everyone. His praises are sung in every speech. Every room I entered had a portrait of Stalin hanging on the wall. Is it love or fear? I do not know.



A foreigner describes the glorification of Stalin in the USSR.



Stalin in 1928

Reasons for Collectivisation

Agriculture is developing slowly, comrades. This is because we have about 25 million individually owned farms. They are the most primitive and undeveloped form of economy.

We must do our utmost to develop large farms and to convert them into grain factories for the country organised on a modern scientific basis.

Collectivisation

In the late 1920s, Russia suffered a food crisis. To feed starving workers, Stalin ordered the seizure of grain from the farmers. But, just as happened under War Communism, the peasants hid food or produced less. In 1929 Stalin announced the collectivisation of farms.

The most common was the Kolkhoz in which land was joined together and the former owners worked together and shared everything. Stalin persuaded peasants to join by attacking the Kulaks, peasants that had grown as a result of the NEP.

Collectivisation had limited success and a terrible human cost, between 10 to 15 million people died as a result. Between 1931 and 1932, there was a famine in Russia as not enough food was being produced. By 1939, Russia was producing the same amount of food as it had in 1928. Collectivisation was clearly a disaster and the problem was even worse as its population had increased by 20 million - all of whom needed feeding.



Grain

1928 = 73.3 million tons

1934 = 67.6 million tons

Cattle

1929 = 70.5 million

1934 = 42.4 million

Pigs


1928 = 26 million

1934 = 22.6 million

Sheep and goats

1928 = 146.7 million

1934 = 51.9 million



We are 50-100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make up this gap in ten years. Either we do it or they crush us.

Stalin 1931

The Five Year Plans

Stalin believed that industry could only develop through state control. Under GOSPLAN, three Five Year Plans set targets between 1928-1941 to increase production.

Russian industry changed enormously. New towns such as Magnitogorsk grew up and large projects such as the Dnieper hydroelectric dam were developed. The USSR became a major industrial country.

The human cost was high. Forced labour killed millions, working conditions were poor and hours of work were long.



The effects of Stalin's rule on men and women

Millions of people suffered in Stalin's purges – workers, peasants and members of the Communist Party itself.

There was brutality, persecution, executions and forced labour. Millions died of starvation and overwork. The shops were empty ; clothes were dull and badly made and household items difficult to find. Although the USSR was a Communist state, the dictatorship of Stalin was just as complete, and in some ways even more bloody, than that of Hitler.

But despite these appalling tragedies, there were some positive aspects to Stalin's rule.

For example schools were built and social insurance schemes were introduced. Russia became a modern industrial country.



The Great Patriotic War 1941-1945

When Nazi Germany attacked the USSR in 1941, Stalin used the same ruthlessness to defend his country.

The defence of the USSR was the bloodiest war in history and cost the lives of millions of people and the destruction of thousands of villages, towns and cities.

The final victory in 1945 was, like everything else, put down to the personal leadership of Stalin by the Soviet propaganda machine.

After the war, Stalin built up the USSR as a superpower, in opposition to the USA. This conflict was known as the Cold War. Stalin died in 1953.