

# Totalitarianism

## CASE STUDY: Stalinist Russia

### MAIN IDEA

**POWER AND AUTHORITY** After Lenin died, Stalin seized power and transformed the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

More recent dictators have used Stalin's tactics for seizing total control over individuals and the state.

### TERMS & NAMES

- totalitarianism
- Five-Year Plan
- Great Purge
- collective farm
- command economy

**SETTING THE STAGE** Stalin, Lenin's successor, dramatically transformed the government of the Soviet Union. Stalin was determined that the Soviet Union should find its place both politically and economically among the most powerful of nations in the world. Using tactics designed to rid himself of opposition, Stalin worked to establish total control of all aspects of life in the Soviet Union. He controlled not only the government, but also the economy and many aspects of citizens' private lives.

### TAKING NOTES

**Categorizing** Create a chart listing examples of methods of control used in the Soviet Union.

Methods of control	Example
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

## A Government of Total Control

The term **totalitarianism** describes a government that takes total, centralized, state control over every aspect of public and private life. Totalitarian leaders appear to provide a sense of security and to give a direction for the future. In the 20th century, the widespread use of mass communication made it possible to reach into all aspects of citizens' lives.

A dynamic leader who can build support for his policies and justify his actions heads most totalitarian governments. Often the leader utilizes secret police to crush opposition and create a sense of fear among the people. No one is exempt from suspicion or accusations that he or she is an enemy of the state.

Totalitarianism challenges the highest values prized by Western democracies—reason, freedom, human dignity, and the worth of the individual. As the chart on the next page shows, all totalitarian states share basic characteristics.

To dominate an entire nation, totalitarian leaders devised methods of control and persuasion. These included the use of terror, indoctrination, propaganda, censorship, and religious or ethnic persecution.

**Police Terror** Dictators of totalitarian states use terror and violence to force obedience and to crush opposition. Normally, the police are expected to respond to criminal activity and protect the citizens. In a totalitarian state, the police serve to enforce the central government's policies. They may do this by spying on the citizens or by intimidating them. Sometimes they use brutal force and even murder to achieve their goals.

**Indoctrination** Totalitarian states rely on indoctrination—instruction in the government's beliefs—to mold people's minds. Control of education is absolutely essential to glorify the leader and his policies and to convince all citizens that their



▲ Members of a Russian youth group called Young Communists line up for a parade. Notice the picture of Stalin in the background.

tarian leaders often create “enemies of the state” to blame for things that go wrong. Frequently these enemies are members of religious or ethnic groups. Often these groups are easily identified and are subjected to campaigns of terror and violence. They may be forced to live in certain areas or are subjected to rules that apply only to them. Ⓐ

### Religious or Ethnic Persecution

Totalitarian states spread propaganda, biased or incomplete information used to sway people to accept certain beliefs or actions. Control of all mass media allows this to happen. No publication, film, art, or music is allowed to exist without the permission of the state. Citizens are surrounded with false information that appears to be true. Suggesting that the information is incorrect is considered an act of treason and severely punished. Individuals who dissent must retract their work or they are imprisoned or killed.

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## CASE STUDY: Stalinist Russia

### Stalin Builds a Totalitarian State

Stalin aimed to create a perfect Communist state in Russia. To realize his vision, Stalin planned to transform the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state. He began building his totalitarian state by destroying his enemies—real and imagined.

**Police State** Stalin built a police state to maintain his power. Stalin’s secret police used tanks and armored cars to stop riots. They monitored telephone lines, read mail, and planted informers everywhere. Even children told authorities about disloyal remarks they heard at home. Every family came to fear the knock on the door in the early morning hours, which usually meant the arrest of a family member. The secret police arrested and executed millions of so-called traitors.

In 1934, Stalin turned against members of the Communist Party. In 1937, he launched the **Great Purge**, a campaign of terror directed at eliminating anyone who threatened his power. Thousands of old Bolsheviks who helped stage the Revolution in 1917 stood trial. They were executed or sent to labor camps for “crimes against the Soviet state.” When the Great Purge ended in 1938, Stalin had gained total control of the Soviet government and the Communist Party. Historians estimate that during this time he was responsible for 8 million to 13 million deaths. Ⓑ

**Russian Propaganda and Censorship** Stalin’s government controlled all newspapers, motion pictures, radio, and other sources of information. Many Soviet writers, composers, and other artists also fell victim to official censorship. Stalin would not tolerate individual creativity that did not conform to the views of the state. Soviet newspapers and radio broadcasts glorified the achievements of communism, Stalin, and his economic programs.

Under Stalin, the arts also were used for propaganda. In 1930, an editorial in the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* explained the purpose of art: “Literature, the

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cinema, the arts are levers in the hands of the proletariat which must be used to show the masses positive models of initiative and heroic labor.”

**Education and Indoctrination** Under Stalin, the government controlled all education from nursery schools through the universities. Schoolchildren learned the virtues of the Communist Party. College professors and students who questioned the Communist Party’s interpretations of history or science risked losing their jobs or faced imprisonment. Party leaders in the Soviet Union lectured workers and peasants on the ideals of communism. They also stressed the importance of sacrifice and hard work to build the Communist state. State-supported youth groups trained future party members.

**Religious Persecution** Communists aimed to replace religious teachings with the ideals of communism. Under Stalin, the government and the League of the Militant Godless, an officially sponsored group of atheists, spread propaganda attacking religion. “Museums of atheism” displayed exhibits to show that religious beliefs were mere superstitions. Yet many people in the Soviet Union still clung to their faiths.

The Russian Orthodox Church was the main target of persecution. Other religious groups also suffered greatly. The police destroyed magnificent churches and synagogues, and many religious leaders were killed or sent to labor camps.

Achieving the perfect Communist state came at a tremendous cost to Soviet citizens. Stalin’s total control of society eliminated personal rights and freedoms in favor of the power of the state.

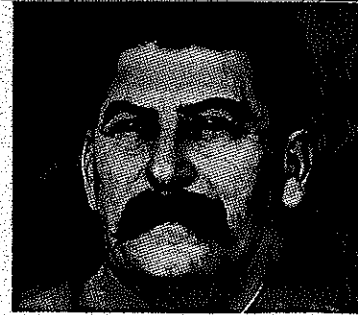
## Stalin Seizes Control of the Economy

As Stalin began to gain complete control of society, he was setting plans in motion to overhaul the economy. He announced, “We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years.” In 1928 Stalin’s plans called for a **command economy**, a system in which the government made all economic decisions. Under this system, political leaders identify the country’s economic needs and determine how to fulfill them.

**An Industrial Revolution** Stalin outlined the first of several **Five-Year Plans** for the development of the Soviet Union’s economy. The Five-Year Plans set impossibly high quotas, or numerical goals, to increase the output of steel, coal, oil, and electricity. To reach these targets, the government limited production of consumer goods. As a result, people faced severe shortages of housing, food, clothing, and other necessary goods.

Stalin’s tough methods produced impressive economic results. Although most of the targets of the first Five-Year Plan fell short, the Soviets made substantial gains. (See the graphs on page 444 for coal and steel production.) A second plan, launched in 1933, proved equally successful. From 1928 to 1937, industrial production of steel increased more than 25 percent.

## History Makers



**Joseph Stalin**  
1879–1953

Stalin was born in bitter poverty in Georgia, a region in southern Russia. Unlike the well-educated and cultured Lenin, Stalin was rough and crude.

Stalin tried to create a myth that he was the country’s father and savior. Stalin glorified himself as the symbol of the nation. He encouraged people to think of him as “The Greatest Genius of All Times and Peoples.”

Many towns, factories, and streets in the Soviet Union were named for Stalin. A new metal was called Stalinite. An orchid was named Stalinchid. Children standing before their desks every morning said, “Thank Comrade Stalin for this happy life.”

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**INTERNET ACTIVITY** Create a Web page on Joseph Stalin. Include pictures and a time line of his rule in the USSR. Go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com) for your research.

### Vocabulary

**atheists:** people who do not think there is a god

**An Agricultural Revolution** In 1928, the government began to seize over 25 million privately owned farms in the USSR. It combined them into large, government-owned farms, called **collective farms**. Hundreds of families worked on these farms, called collectives, producing food for the state. The government expected that the modern machinery on the collective farms would boost food production and reduce the number of workers. Resistance was especially strong among kulaks, a class of wealthy peasants. The Soviet government decided to eliminate them.

Peasants actively fought the government's attempt to take their land. Many killed livestock and destroyed crops in protest. Soviet secret police herded peasants onto collective farms at the point of a bayonet. Between 5 million and 10 million peasants died as a direct result of Stalin's agricultural revolution. By 1938, more than 90 percent of all peasants lived on collective farms. As you see in the charts below, agricultural production was on the upswing. That year the country produced almost twice the wheat than it had in 1928 before collective farming.

In areas where farming was more difficult, the government set up state farms. These state farms operated like factories. The workers received wages instead of a share of the profits. These farms were much larger than collectives and mostly produced wheat.



**Clarify**



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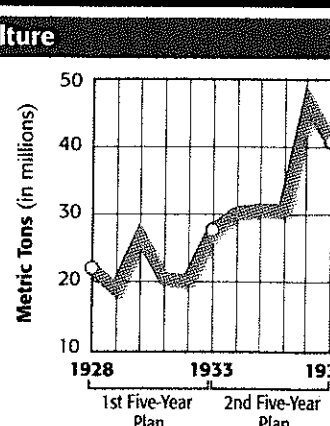
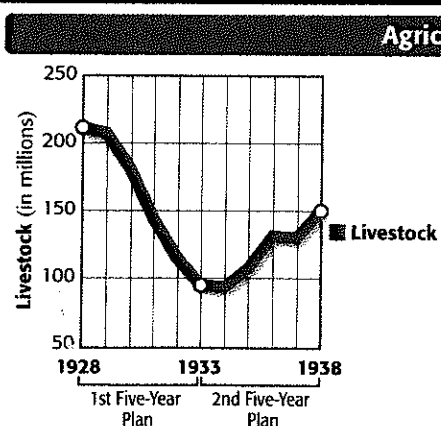
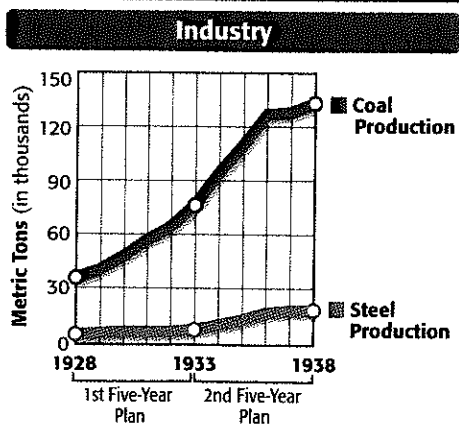
## Daily Life Under Stalin

Stalin's totalitarian rule revolutionized Soviet society. Women's roles greatly expanded. People became better educated and mastered new technical skills. The dramatic changes in people's lives, came at great cost. Soviet citizens found their personal freedoms limited, consumer goods in short supply, and dissent prohibited.

Stalin's economic plans created a high demand for many skilled workers. University and technical training became the key to a better life. As one young man explained, "If a person does not want to become a collective farmer or just a cleaning woman, the only means you have to get something is through education."

**Women Gain Rights** The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 declared men and women equal. Laws were passed to grant women equal rights. After Stalin became dictator, women helped the state-controlled economy prosper. Under his Five-Year

### The Buildup of the Soviet Economy, 1928–1938



Source: *European Historical*

#### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Graphs

- Clarifying** How many more metric tons of coal were produced in 1938 than in 1928?
- Drawing Conclusions** What do the graphs show about the contrast between the progress of industry and agriculture production under Stalin's first Five-Year Plan?

Plans, they had no choice but to join the labor force. The state provided child care for all working mothers. Some young women performed the same jobs as men. Millions of women worked in factories and in construction. However, men continued to hold the best jobs.

Given new educational opportunities, women prepared for careers in engineering and science. Medicine, in particular, attracted many women. By 1950, they made up 75 percent of Soviet doctors.

Soviet women paid a heavy price for their rising status in society. Besides having full-time jobs, they were responsible for housework and child care. Motherhood is considered a patriotic duty in totalitarian regimes. Soviet women were expected to provide the state with future generations of loyal, obedient citizens. ①

## Total Control Achieved

By the mid-1930s, Stalin had forcibly transformed the Soviet Union into a totalitarian regime and an industrial and political power. He stood unopposed as dictator and maintained his authority over the Communist Party. Stalin would not tolerate individual creativity. He saw it as a threat to the conformity and obedience required of citizens in a totalitarian state. He ushered in a period of total social control and rule by terror, rather than constitutional government.

Like Russia, China would fall under the influence of Karl Marx's theories and Communist beliefs. The dynamic leader Mao Zedong would pave the way for transforming China into a totalitarian Communist state, as you will read in Section 3.

## Social History



### Ukrainian Kulaks

The kulaks in Ukraine (shown above) fiercely resisted collectivization. They murdered officials, torched the property of the collectives, and burned their own crops and grain in protest.

Recognizing the threat kulaks posed to his policies, Stalin declared that they should "liquidate kulaks as a class." The state took control of kulak land and equipment, and confiscated stores of food and grain. More than 3 million Ukrainians were shot, exiled, or imprisoned. Some 6 million people died in the government-engineered famine that resulted from the destruction of crops and animals. By 1935, the kulaks had been eliminated.

**MAIN IDEA**  
**Summarizing**  
 How did daily life under Stalin's rule change the lives of women in the Soviet Union?

## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.  
 • totalitarianism • Great Purge • command economy • Five-Year Plans • collective farm

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of the methods of control do you think was most influential in maintaining Stalin's power? Why?

Methods of control	Example
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

### MAIN IDEAS

- What are the key traits of a totalitarian state?
- What are some ways totalitarian rulers keep their power?
- How did the Soviet economy change under the direction of Stalin?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

- CONTRASTING** How do totalitarian states and constitutional governments differ?
- SUMMARIZING** Summarize Joseph Stalin's rise to power and how his control expanded.
- EVALUATING COURSES OF ACTION** Were the Five-Year plans the best way to move the Soviet economy forward? Explain.
- WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** As an industrial worker, a female doctor, a Russian Orthodox priest, or a Communist Party member, write a **journal entry** about your life under Stalin.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** **Graphing Russia's Economy**  
 Research Russia's industrial and agricultural production in the last 10 years. Create a series of **graphs** similar to those found on page 444.