

# STALINISM

Just two years after his establishment of a communist system in Russia, Lenin began to suffer from a series of strokes. He became increasingly disabled as the strokes get worse. In a secret meeting with some of his most trusted advisors, one of the last instructions that he leaves with his followers is for them to not allow Joseph Stalin to succeed him in power, because Lenin feared that Stalin's ambition and brutality would not be well-suited to the communist dream for Russia. Lenin would be right.

## Stalin takes control

In 1924, Lenin finally succumbed to a stroke and was laid to rest in the Red Square. This would lead to a period of time in Soviet history during which different factions would vie for



*Red Square, Moscow. The center of the Soviet government, much like Capitol Hill, in Washington, DC.*

control of the new government. Despite Lenin's warning about Stalin, many of his former advisors saw Stalin as a resource that they could carefully control and manipulate to help themselves gain power. Stalin would out-manuever all of them, eventually using his relationships with these men to manipulate his way into gaining more and more power. In back-room deals, back-stabbing maneuvering, and brutal executions, Stalin would eventually emerge as the man at the top of the Communist Party, and therefore also at the top of the Soviet Union. In 1927, just three years after Lenin's death, Stalin had consolidated his power, and was ready to work toward the transformation of Soviet society.

## Changes to the Soviet Union

**Collectivization.** One of the first changes that Stalin pushed for was collectivization of the farming system in the Soviet Union. This meant that the State would assume control and ownership of all of the farms, and therefore the food supply of the country. Collectivization is a communist ideal, since it is necessary for the government to control and own the production of key materials like housing, food, and clothing in order to make sure that everyone is equal. As collectivization of the farms continued, and millions of farms across the Soviet Union were brought under state control, Stalin's power also grew. Displaced farmers had no place to go except to the cities, where they would work in the factories of the rapidly industrializing nation.



*1929 - Kulaks Dispossessed*  
*Stalin took possession of many of the farms owned by the proletariat kulaks. This take-over led to food shortages and a famine that killed millions.*

**The 5-year Plans.** Stalin had a plan for this also, as he had deliberately displaced these farmers to fit his goals of rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union. This plan, called "the 5-year plan" was to take the Soviet Union from a backward and agrarian society to an industrial juggernaut and world super-power in 5 years. He used his new workforce to build and work in thousands of state-owned factories being built all over the country. Despite his very ambitious plans and huge goals, several years into the plan, it

became obvious that the 5 year plan would fall very short of the stated targets, so Stalin simply reset the timeline and started over.

**Gulags.** Stalin also brought another change to the society, in the form of the KGB. The KGB, or secret police, were tasked with the job of hunting down all people who were against the changes Stalin was making to the country, and reporting them to the government. Since they were secret police, these officers could be anyone in the country, which served to make ordinary citizens terrified to express any opinion that was against Stalin or the government. Anyone found guilty of sedition or anti-government acts would be put through a very quick trial without a jury, and sentenced to the gulag. Gulags were forced labor camps that Stalin set up all over the Soviet Union. These workers were forced to work in mines, build dams, factories, and other public buildings, and in general do jobs that were too dangerous for regular citizens to do. Throughout the 15 years following the initiation of the first 5-year plan, up to 18 million people would go through the gulags. Many of them would not survive their experience.



*Work in the gulag was dangerous, hard, and never-ending.*

**Deportation.** The other major change that Stalin would implement to transform his society was deportation of different ethnic groups. Poles, Armenians, Germans, immigrants, and many other groups of people would at one point be forced to leave their homes and in many cases relocate to inhospitable parts of the Soviet Union or leave all-together. Millions of people would die of starvation and disease during these mass-deportations.

## Stalinism

Stalin and Lenin ended up having very different visions for the direction and purpose of communism in Soviet society. Lenin and his followers, most notably Trotsky, seemed to really view communism as a way to make a better society for all Russian people. They believed that the government needed to control the production of the resources to avoid the rich owners, nobles, and tsars from taking advantage of the poor people. Lenin and Trotsky didn't have a problem with the rulers living a life that was better than everyone else, as long as their lives weren't so privileged that they lost touch with the common people. Stalin, on the other hand, used communism as a way to centralize power all under the government, and then under himself. Stalin did not believe in using communism to make the proletariat and bourgeoisie equal, he believed in using it to create a dictatorship with himself and his leaders at the top of society. It is this version of communism, where the power is used by the leader to cement and entrench a dictator as the ruler of a nation, which is frequently referred to as Stalinism. It is this model, which has strongly influenced the use of communism in modern Cuba and North Korea.

### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How did Stalin gain control of the Soviet Union?
2. What were the positive and negative changes that Stalin made to the Soviet Union?
3. How was Stalin's vision for the Soviet Union different from Lenin's?

Write about it.

Pretend you are a Russian poor person. Write an obituary for Joseph Stalin listing all of his life's accomplishments and what you think about them.