The consequences of collectivization
- Collectivization created a massive social upheaval. Bewildered and confused, the peasants became disorientated by the deliberate destruction of their traditional way of life. The consequences were increasingly tragic. The majority of peasants ate their seed corn and slaughtered their livestock. There were no crops left to reap or animals to rear.
- Starvation, which in many parts of the Soviet Union persisted throughout the 1930s, was at its worst in the years 1932–33, when a national famine occurred. Estimates suggest that 6 to 8 million people died, with the population of Ukraine and Kazakhstan suffering particularly severely.
- Desperate peasants moved to the towns in huge numbers. So great was the migration that a system of internal passports had to be introduced in an effort to control the flow.
- Despite overwhelming evidence of the tragedy that had overtaken the USSR, there were only two oblique references to it in the state press. As well as serving to protect the image of Stalin the great planner, this conspiracy of silence effectively prevented the introduction of measures to ease the distress.
- Leaving aside questions of human suffering, the enforced migration under Stalin had one positive economic result: it relieved the pressure on the land and provided the workforce that enabled the industrialization programme to be started.

Industrialization
Stalin described his industrialization plans for the USSR as an attempt to establish a war economy. He declared that he was making war on the failings of Russia’s past and on the class enemies within the nation. He also claimed that he was preparing the USSR for war against its capitalist foes abroad. This was not simply martial imagery; Stalin regarded iron, steel and oil as the sinews of war. Their successful production would guarantee the strength and readiness of the nation to face its enemies.

Soviet industrialization under Stalin took the form of a series of Five-Year Plans (FYPs). Gosplan was required by Stalin to draw up a list of quotas of production ranging across the whole of Soviet industry. The process began in 1928 and, except for the war years 1941–45, lasted until Stalin’s death in 1953. In all, there were five separate plans:
- First FYP: October 1928 to December 1932
- Second FYP: January 1933 to December 1937
- Third FYP: January 1938 to June 1941
- Fourth FYP: July 1941 to December 1945

What trends are evident in the tables in Sources H and I? What are the possible explanations for the trends shown?

KEY TERM
Gosplan The Soviet state economic planning agency.
Fourth FYP: January 1946 to December 1950
Fifth FYP: January 1951 to December 1955.

The First Five-Year Plan, 1928–32
The term ‘plan’ is misleading. The First FYP laid down what was to be achieved, but did not say how it was to be done. It simply assumed the quotas would be met. What the First FYP represented, therefore, was a set of targets rather than a plan. As had happened with collectivization, local officials and managers falsified their production figures to give the impression they had met their targets when, in fact, they had fallen short. For this reason, precise statistics for the First FYP are difficult to determine. A further complication is that three quite distinct versions of the First FYP eventually appeared.

Impressed by the apparent progress of the Plan in its early stages, Stalin encouraged the formulation of an ‘optimal’ plan which reassessed targets upwards. These new quotas were hopelessly unrealistic and stood no chance of being reached. Nonetheless, on the basis of the supposed achievements of this ‘optimal’ plan, the figures were revised still higher. Western analysts suggest the figures in Source J are the closest approximation to the real figures.

SOURCE J

Industrial output in million tons of the First Five-Year Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>96–105</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>40–55</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron ore</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>24–32</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig iron</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>15–16</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The importance of these figures should not be exaggerated. At the time it was the grand design, not the detail, that mattered. The Plan was a huge propaganda project which aimed at convincing the Soviet people that they were personally engaged in a vast industrial enterprise. Nor was it all a matter of state enforcement. Among the young especially, there was an enthusiasm and a commitment that suggested that many Soviet citizens believed they were genuinely building a new and better world.

To show how successful they were, officials often exaggerated the production figures. Nevertheless, the First FYP was an extraordinary achievement overall. Coal, iron, and generation of electricity all increased in huge proportions. The production of steel and chemicals was less impressive, while the output of finished textiles actually declined.

The Second and Third Five-Year Plans
Although the Second and Third FYPs were modelled on the pattern of the First, the targets set for them were more realistic. Nevertheless, they still revealed the same lack of co-ordination that had characterized the First. Over-production occurred in some parts of the economy and
under-production in others, which frequently led to whole branches of industry being held up for lack of vital supplies. As a result there was hoarding of resources and a lack of co-operation between the various parts of the industrial system. Complaints about poor standards, carefully veiled so as not to appear critical of Stalin and the Plan, were frequent. What successes there were occurred again in heavy industry where the Second FYP began to reap the benefit of the creation of large-scale plants under the First Plan.

**Stalin’s industrial record**
The four key products coal, steel, oil and electricity provided the basis for the war economy which enabled the USSR not only to survive four years of German occupation (1941–45) but eventually to win a great victory over Germany in May 1945.

**SOURCE K**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal (million tons)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel (million tons)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil (million tons)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity (million kWh)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Stalin’s industrial programme succeeded in the areas of heavy industry. The building of large projects such as factories, bridges, refineries and canals were impressive achievements.
- However, the Soviet economy itself remained unbalanced. Little attention was given to light engineering, which the advanced industrial nations were successfully developing. Stalin’s love of what he called ‘the Grand Projects of Communism’ meant too little attention was paid to producing quality goods that could then be profitably sold abroad.
- Stalin’s schemes failed to raise the living standards of the Soviet workers. Indeed, such measures as direction of labour and the imposition of severe penalties for slacking and absenteeism created harsher conditions for the workforce. In 1941, when the German invasion effectively destroyed the Third FYP, the living conditions of the Soviet industrial workers were lower than in 1928.

**The early purges**

Having become the **Vozhd** of the Soviet Union by 1929, Stalin spent the rest of his life consolidating and extending his authority. The purges were his principal weapon for achieving this. They became the chief mechanism for removing anyone he regarded as a threat to his authority. The Stalinist purges, which began in 1932, were not unprecedented. Public show trials had been held during the early stages of the First Five-Year Plan as a way of exposing ‘saboteurs’ who were accused of damaging the USSR’s industrial programme.
KEY TERM

Party card The official CPSU warrant granting membership and privileges to the holder. It was a prized possession in the Soviet Union.

Ryutin affair In 1932, the followers of M. N. Ryutin, a Right communist, published an attack on Stalin, describing him as 'the evil genius who had brought the Revolution to the verge of destruction'. The Ryutinites were put on public trial and expelled from the Party.

At the beginning, Party purges were generally not as violent as they later became. The usual procedure was to oblige members to hand in their party card for checking, at which point any suspect individuals would not have their cards returned to them. This amounted to expulsion since, without cards, members were denied access to all Party activities. Under such a system, it became progressively difficult to mount effective opposition. Despite this, efforts were made in the early 1930s to criticize Stalin, as the Ryutin affair in 1932 illustrates. Yet, although the Ryutinites had clearly failed, their attempted challenge convinced Stalin that organized resistance to him was still possible.

In analysing Stalin's rule, historians generally accept that they are dealing with behaviour that sometimes went beyond reason and logic. Stalin was deeply suspicious by nature and suffered from increasing paranoia as he grew older, as the letter below from his daughter, Svetlana, attests (see Source L).

SOURCE L


If he cast out of his heart someone who had been known to him for a long time and if in his soul he had already translated that person into the ranks of 'enemies', it was impossible to hold a conversation with him about that person.

Stalin's methods of control

In the years 1933–34, as an accompaniment to the purges, Stalin centralized all the major law enforcement agencies:

- the civilian police
- labour camp commandants and guards
- border and security guards.

All these bodies were put under the authority of the NKVD, a body which was directly answerable to Stalin.

The post-Kirov purges, 1934–36

In Leningrad on 1 December 1934, Kirov, the secretary of the Leningrad Soviet, was shot and killed in his office. It is possible Stalin was implicated. What is certain is that the murder worked directly to his advantage. Kirov had been a highly popular figure in the Party and had been elected to the Politburo. He was known to be unhappy with the speed of Stalin's industrialization drive and also with the growing number of purges. If organized opposition to Stalin were to form within the Party, Kirov was the most likely individual around whom dissatisfied members might have rallied. That danger to Stalin had now been removed.

Stalin was quick to exploit the situation. Within two hours of learning of Kirov's murder he had signed a 'Decree Against Terrorist Acts'. On the
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's. On the pretext of hunting down the killers, a fresh purge of the Party was begun, led by Genrikh Yagoda, head of the NKVD. Three thousand suspected conspirators were rounded up and then imprisoned or executed and tens of thousands of other people were deported from Leningrad. Stalin then filled the vacant positions with his own nominees:

- In 1935, Kirov's key post as Party boss in Leningrad was filled by Andrei Zhданov, a dedicated Stalinist.
- The equivalent post in Moscow was taken by Nikita Khrushchev, another ardent Stalin supporter.
- In recognition of his successful courtroom bullying of 'oppositionists' in the earlier purge trials, Andrei Vyshinsky was appointed State Prosecutor.
- Stalin's fellow Georgian, Lavrenti Beria, was entrusted with overseeing state security in the national minority areas of the USSR.
- Stalin's personal secretary, Alexander Poskrebyshev, was put in charge of the Secretariat.

As a result of these placements, there remained no significant area of Soviet bureaucracy which Stalin did not control.

The outstanding feature of the post-Kirov purge was the status of many of its victims. Prominent among those arrested were Kamenev and Zinoviev. Their arrest sent out a clear message: no Party members, whatever their status, were safe. Arbitrary arrest and summary execution became the norm, as the fate of the representatives at the Party Congress of 1934 suggests:

- Of the 1,996 delegates who attended, 1,108 were executed during the next three years.
- In addition, out of the 139 Central Committee members elected at that gathering, all but 41 of them were executed during the purges.

Historian Leonard Shapiro, in a celebrated study of the CPSU, described these events as 'Stalin's victory over the Party'. From this point on, the Soviet Communist Party was entirely under his control. It ceased, in effect, to have a separate existence. Stalin had become the Party.

The Stalin Enrolment, 1931–34

Stalin's successful purge was made easier by a recent shift in the make-up of the Party, known as 'the Stalin Enrolment'. Between 1931 and 1934, the CPSU had recruited a higher proportion of skilled workers and industrial managers than at any time since 1917. Stalin encouraged this as a means of tightening the links between the Party and those actually operating the First Five-Year Plan, but it also had the effect of bringing in a large number of members who joined the Party primarily to advance their careers. Acutely aware that they owed their privileged position directly to Stalin's patronage, the new members eagerly supported the elimination of the anti-Stalinist elements in the Party – it improved their chances of promotion. The competition for good jobs in the Soviet Union was invariably fierce and purges always left positions
Why was Stalin able to extend the purges on such a huge scale?

→ ‘The Great Terror’, 1936–39

It might be expected that the purges would stop once Stalin’s complete mastery over the Party had been established, but they did not; in fact, they increased in intensity. Repeating his constant assertion that the Soviet Union was in a state of siege, Stalin called for still greater vigilance against the enemies within who were in league with the Soviet Union’s foreign enemies. Between 1936 and 1939, a progressive terrorizing of the Soviet Union occurred affecting the whole population. Its scale merited the title, given to it by historians, of ‘the Great Terror’, which took its most dramatic form in the public show trials of Stalin’s former Bolshevik colleagues (see page 41). The one-time heroes of the 1917 Revolution were imprisoned or executed as enemies of the state.

The descriptions applied to the accused during the purges bore little relation to political reality. ‘Right’, ‘Left’ and ‘Centre’ opposition blocs were identified and the groupings invariably had the catch-all term ‘Trotskyite’ tagged on to them, but such words were convenient prosecution labels rather than definitions of a genuine political opposition. They were intended to isolate those in the CPSU and the Soviet state whom Stalin wished to destroy.

Stalin’s ‘Great Terror’ programme breaks down conveniently into three sections, which are:

- the purge of the Party
- the purge of the armed services
- the purge of the people.

The purge of the Party

Stalin’s destruction of those in the Party he regarded as a major threat was achieved by the holding of three major show trials:

- In 1936, Kamenev and Zinoviev and fourteen other leading Bolsheviks were tried and executed.
- In 1937, seventeen Bolsheviks were denounced collectively as the ‘Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre’, and were charged with spying for Germany. All but three of them were executed.
- In 1938, Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky and twenty others, branded ‘Trotskyite-rightists’, were publicly tried on a variety of counts, including sabotage, spying and conspiracy to murder Stalin: all were found guilty. Bukharin and Rykov were executed; Tomsky committed suicide.

Remarkably, the great majority went to their death after confessing their guilt. An obvious question arises. Why did they confess? After all, these men were tough Bolsheviks. Physical and mental tortures, including threats to their families, were used, but arguably more important was their sense of demoralization at having been accused and disgraced by the Party to which they had dedicated their lives. In a curious sense, their admission of guilt was a...
The last act of loyalty to the Party. In his final speech in court, Bukharin accepted the infallibility of the Party and of Stalin, referring to him as 'the hope of the world'. Whatever their reasons, that the leading Bolsheviks did confess made it extremely difficult for other victims to plead their own innocence. The psychological impact of the public confessions of such figures as Kamenev and Zinoviev was profound. It created an atmosphere in which innocent victims submitted in open court to false charges, and went to their death begging the Party's forgiveness.

The legality of the purges
Stalin's insistence on a policy of show trials illustrated his astuteness. There is little doubt that he had the power to conduct the purges without using legal proceedings. However, by making the victims deliver humiliating confessions in open court, Stalin was able to suggest the scale of the conspiracy against him and thus to prove the need for the purges to continue.

SOURCE M
This montage, composed by Trotsky's supporters, illustrates the remarkable fact that of the original 1917 Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party only Stalin was still alive in 1940; the majority of the other 23 members had, of course, been destroyed in the purges.

The purge of the armed forces
A particularly significant development in the purges occurred in 1937 when the Soviet military came under threat. Stalin's control of the Soviet Union would not have been complete if the armed services had continued as an independent force. It was essential that they be kept subservient. Stalin also
had a lingering fear that the army, which had been Trotsky’s creation (see page 23), might still have sympathy for their old leader. In May 1937, Vyshinsky, Stalin’s chief prosecutor, announced that ‘a gigantic conspiracy’ had been uncovered in the Red Army. Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who had been one of the founders of that army, was arrested along with seven other generals. On the pretext that speed was essential to prevent a military coup, a trial was held immediately, this time in secret. Tukhachevsky was charged with having spied for Germany and Japan.

The outcome was predetermined. In June 1937, after their ritual confession and condemnation, Tukhachevsky and his fellow generals were shot. To prevent any chance of a military reaction, a wholesale destruction of the Red Army establishment was undertaken. During the following eighteen months:

- All eleven War Commissars were removed from office.
- Three of the five Marshals of the Soviet Union were dismissed.
- Ninety-one of the 101-man Supreme Military Council were arrested, of whom 80 were executed.
- Fourteen of the sixteen army commanders, and nearly two-thirds of the 280 divisional commanders were removed.
- Up to 35,000 commissioned officers were either imprisoned or shot.
- The Soviet Union’s Navy did not escape: between 1937 and 1939 all the serving admirals of the fleet were shot and thousands of naval officers were sent to labour camps.
- The Soviet Union’s Air Force was similarly purged during that period: only one of its senior commanders survived.

The result was that all three services were left seriously undermanned and staffed by inexperienced or incompetent replacements. Given the defence needs of the USSR, the deliberate crippling of the Soviet military is the aspect of the purges that appears to be the most irrational.

The purge of the people
Stalin’s gaining of total dominance over Party, government and military did not mean the end of the purges. The apparatus of terror was retained and the search for enemies continued. Purges were used to achieve the goals of the FYPs: charges of industrial sabotage were made against managers and workers in the factories. The purges were also a way of forcing the regions and nationalities into total subordination to Stalin. To accommodate the great numbers of prisoners created by the purges, the Gulag, a network of prison and labour camps, was established across the USSR.

The show trials that had taken place in Moscow and Leningrad, with their catalogue of accusations, confessions and death sentences, were repeated in all the republics of the USSR. For example, between 1937 and 1939 in Stalin’s home state of Georgia:

- two state prime ministers were removed
- four-fifths of the regional Party secretaries were dismissed
- thousands of lesser officials lost their posts.
Mass repression

No area of Soviet life entirely escaped the purges. The constant fear that the purges created conditioned the way the Soviet people lived their lives. Their greatest impact was on the middle and lower ranks of Soviet society:

- One person in every eight of the population was arrested during Stalin’s purges.
- Almost every family in the USSR suffered the loss of at least one of its members as a victim of the terror.

In the years 1937–38, mass repression was imposed. Known as the ‘Yezhovschina’, after its chief organizer, Nicolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD in 1937, this purge was typified by the practice in which NKVD squads entered selected localities and removed hundreds of inhabitants for execution. The number of victims to be arrested was specified in set quotas, as if they were industrial production targets. There was no appeal against sentences and the death warrant invariably required that the execution ‘be carried out immediately’. The shootings took place in specially designated zones. One notorious example of this was Butovo, a village outside Moscow, which became one of the NKVD’s killing fields. Excavations have revealed mass graves there containing over 20,000 bodies dating back to the late 1930s and indicating that nightly, over many months, victims had been taken to Butovo and shot in batches of a hundred.
Insofar as the terrorizing of ordinary people had a specific purpose, it was to frighten the USSR’s national minorities into abandoning any remaining thoughts of challenging Moscow’s control and to force them into a full acceptance of Stalin’s enforced industrialization programme.

→ Later purges, 1941–53

The purges did not end with the onset of the Great Fatherland War in 1941 or with the coming of peace in 1945. They had become an integral part of the Stalinist system of government. After 1947, Stalin dispensed with the Central Committee and the Politburo, thus removing even the semblance of a restriction on his authority. In 1949, he initiated another Party purge, ‘the Leningrad Affair’. Leading party and city officials were tried on charges of attempting to use Leningrad as an opposition base, and shot.

The Doctors’ Plot

Soviet Jews were the next section of the population to be selected for organized persecution. Anti-Semitism was a long-established aspect of Russian society and it was a factor in the last purge Stalin contemplated. Early in 1953 it was officially announced that a ‘Doctors’ Plot’ had been uncovered in Moscow; it was asserted that the Jewish-dominated medical centre had planned to murder Stalin and the other Soviet leaders. Preparations began for a major assault on the Soviet medical profession. What prevented those preparations being put into operation was the death of Stalin in March 1953.

→ Lack of resistance to the purges

Robert Service, a celebrated biographer of Stalin, says of him: ‘Nowadays virtually all writers accept that he initiated the Great Terror.’ Stalin exploited the Russian autocratic tradition that he inherited to rid himself of real or imagined enemies. Yet Service, along with all the leading experts in the field, is careful to acknowledge that, while Stalin was undoubtedly the architect of the terror, the responsibility for implementing it goes beyond him:

- Stalinism was not as monolithic a system of government as has been often assumed. The disorganized state of much of Soviet bureaucracy, particularly at local level, allowed officials to use their own initiative in applying the terror.
- How the purges were actually carried out largely depended on the local party organization. Many officials welcomed the purges as an opportunity to increase their local power.
- Revolutionary idealism was swamped by self-interest as Party members saw the purges as a way of advancing themselves by filling the jobs vacated by the victims. This relates to an argument advanced by some historians that the purges came as much from below as from above. The suggestion is that the purges were sustained in their ferocity by the lower rank officials in government and Party who wanted to replace their superiors, whom they regarded as a conservative elite.
- The purges were popular with those in the Soviet Union who believed their country could survive only by being powerfully and ruthlessly led. Such people judged that Stalin's unrelenting methods were precisely what the nation needed.
- The disruption of Soviet society, caused by upheavals of collectivization and industrialization, destroyed social cohesion and so encouraged Party and government officials to resort to the most extreme measures.
Stalin’s domestic policies and their impact, 1929–53

**Key question:** What impact did Stalinism have on the lives of the Soviet people?

→ **Arts and the media**

**Literature**

In 1932, Stalin declared to a gathering of Soviet writers that they were ‘engineers of the human soul’. Their task was essentially a social not an artistic one. They had to reshape the thinking and behaviour of the Soviet people. The goal of the artist had to be social realism. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the Soviet Union of Writers was formed in 1934 it declared that its first objective was to convince all its members of the need to struggle for socialist realism in their works. This could be best achieved by conforming to a set of guidelines. Writers were to make sure that their work:

- was acceptable to the Party in theme and presentation
- was written in a style immediately understandable to the workers who would read it
- contained characters whom the readers could recognize as socialist role models or examples of class enemies.

These rules applied to creative writing in all its forms: novels, plays, poems and film scripts. It was not easy for genuine writers to continue working within these restrictions, but conformity was the price of acceptance, of survival even. Surveillance, scrutiny and denunciations intensified throughout the 1930s. In such an intimidating atmosphere, suicides became common. Historian Robert Service notes in his biography of Stalin that ‘more great intellectuals perished in the 1930s than survived’. In 1934, Osip Mandelstam, a leading literary figure, recited a mocking poem about Stalin at a private gathering of writers, which contained the lines ‘Around him, fawning half-men for him to play with, as he prates and points a finger’. He was informed on and died four years later in the Gulag. He once remarked, ‘Only in Russia is poetry taken seriously, so seriously men are killed for it.’

Stalin took a close personal interest in new artistic works. One word of criticism from him was enough to destroy a writer. The atmosphere of repression and the restrictions on genuine creativity had the effect of elevating conformist mediocrities to positions of influence and power. This was a common characteristic of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century.

**How was Soviet culture manipulated to strengthen Stalin’s power?**

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### KEY TERM

**Social realism**
Representational work which related directly to the lives of the people.

**Soviet Union of Writers**
The body which had authority over all published writers and had the right to ban any work of which it disapproved.
Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn
Among the most prominent of the writers persecuted under Stalin were Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Pasternak's works were regarded by the authorities as implicitly critical of the Soviet system and therefore unacceptable. His Dr Zhivago, a novel that later became greatly admired in the West, was refused publication in the USSR during his lifetime. Solzhenitsyn, a deeply spiritual man, was regarded by the authorities as a subversive and spent many years in the Gulag for falling foul of Stalin's censors. His documentary novels, such as One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and The Gulag Archipelago, which was published after Stalin's death, described the horrific conditions in the labour camps.

Theatre and film
The Union of Writers set the tone for all other organizations in the arts. Film-making, opera and ballet, all had to respond to the Stalinist demand for socialist realism. Abstract forms were frowned upon because they broke the rules that works should be immediately accessible to the public. An idea of the repression that operated can be gained from the following figures:
- In the years 1936–37, 68 films out of 150 had to be withdrawn mid-production and another 30 taken out of circulation.
- In the same period, ten out of nineteen plays and ballets were ordered to be withdrawn.
- In the 1937–38 theatre season, 60 plays were banned from performance and 10 theatres closed in Moscow and another 10 in Leningrad.

Vsevolod Meyerhold
A prominent victim was the director, Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose concept of total theatre had a major influence on European drama. Despite his wish to bring theatre closer to the people, his appeal for artistic liberty – 'The theatre is a living creative thing. We must have freedom, yes, freedom' – led to a campaign being mounted against him by Stalin's sycophantic supporters. He was arrested in 1938. After a two-year imprisonment during which he was regularly beaten until he fainted, he was shot. His name was one on a list of 346 death sentences that Stalin signed on one day – 16 January 1940.

Sergei Eisenstein
Even the internationally-acclaimed director, Sergei Eisenstein, whose films Battleship Potemkin and October, celebrating the revolutionary Russian proletariat, had done so much to advance the communist cause, was heavily censured. This was because a later work of his, Ivan the Terrible, was judged to be an unflattering portrait of a great Russian leader and, therefore, by implication, disrespectful of Stalin.

Painting and sculpture
Painters and sculptors were left in no doubt as to what was required of them. Their duty to conform to socialist realism in their style and at the same time

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**KEY TERM**

**Total theatre** An approach which sought to break down the barriers between actors and audience by novel use of lighting, sound and stage settings.
honour their great leader was captured in an article in the art magazine Iskusstvo describing a prize painting of Stalin in 1948: 'The image of Comrade Stalin is the symbol of the Soviet people's glory, calling for new heroic exploits for the benefit of our great motherland.'

**SOURCE O**

Posters from the 1930s, typical of the propaganda of the time, showing Stalin as the leader of his adoring people. Poster art was a very effective way for the Stalinist authorities to spread their propaganda.

'Under the leadership of the great Stalin, forward to Communism!'
Music
Since music is an essentially abstract art form, it was more difficult to make composers respond to Stalin’s notions of social realism. Nevertheless, it was the art form which most interested Stalin, who regarded himself as an expert in the field. He claimed to be able to recognize socialist music and to know what type of song would inspire the people. He tried to impose his judgement on the Soviet Union’s leading composer, Dmitri Shostakovich, some of whose works were banned for being ‘bourgeois and formalistic’. However, the Great Fatherland War gave Shostakovich the opportunity to express his deep patriotism. His powerful orchestral works depicted in sound the courageous struggle and final victory of the Soviet people. At the end of the war, in return for being reinstated, he promised to bring his music closer to ‘the folk art of the people’.

Stalin’s cult of personality
One of the strongest charges made against Stalin after his death was that he had indulged in the cult of personality. He had certainly dominated every aspect of Soviet life, becoming not simply a leader but the embodiment of the nation itself. From the 1930s on, his picture appeared everywhere. Every newspaper, book and film, no matter what its theme, carried a reference to Stalin’s greatness. Biographies poured off the press, each one trying to outbid the other in its veneration of the leader. Every achievement of the USSR was credited to Stalin. Such was his all-pervasive presence that Soviet communism became identified with him as a person.

The cult of personality was not a spontaneous response of the people. It was imposed from above. The image of Stalin as hero and saviour of the Soviet people was manufactured. It was a product of the Communist Party machine which controlled all the main forms of information – newspapers, cinema and radio, as Roy Medvedev, a Soviet historian who lived through Stalinism, later explained (see Source P).

SOURCE P


Everywhere he put up monuments to himself – thousands upon thousands of factories and firms named after Stalin, and many cities: Stalinsk, Stalinograd, Stalingrad … more than can be counted. When Stalin was encouraging the cult of his personality he and his cohorts shamelessly falsified party history, twisting and suppressing many facts and producing a flood of books, articles and pamphlets filled with distortions.

The Stakhanovite movement
A fascinating example of distortion was the Stakhanovite movement. In August 1935, it was claimed that a coal miner, Alexei Stakhanov, had hewn fourteen
times his required quota of coal in one shift. The story was wholly fabricated, but the authorities exploited it so effectively that Stakhanov's purported achievement became an inspiring example of what heights could be reached by selfless workers responding to the call of their great leader, Stalin.

**Stalin in print**

Stalin's wisdom and brilliance was extolled daily in the official Soviet newspapers. Hardly an article appeared in any journal that did not include the obligatory reference to his greatness. Children learned from their earliest moments to venerate Stalin as the provider of all good things. There were no textbooks in any subject that did not laud the virtues of Stalin the master builder of the Soviet nation and inspiration to his people.

**Komsomol**

A particularly useful instrument for the spread of Stalinist propaganda was the Komsomol, a youth movement which had begun in Lenin's time but was created as a formal body in 1926 under the direct control of the CPSU. Among its main features were the following:

- It was open to those ages between 14 and 28, with a Young Pioneer movement for those under 14.
- It pledged itself totally to Stalin and the Party. (In this regard it paralleled the Hitler Youth in Germany – see page 93.)
- Membership was not compulsory but its attraction for young people was that it offered them the chance of eventual full membership of the CPSU.
- It grew from 2 million members in 1927 to 10 million in 1940.

Komsomol members were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Five-Year Plans, as they proved by going off in their thousands to help build the new industrial cities. It was Komsomol which provided the flag-wavers and the cheerleaders, and organized the huge gymnastic displays that were the centrepieces of the massive parades on May Day and Stalin's birthday.

**Treatment of national minorities**

Although as a Georgian, Stalin belonged to one of the USSR's minority peoples, his concern was always with promoting the dominance of Russia within the Soviet state. He feared that to allow minority rights would encourage challenges to his central authority. One of his motives in implementing the purges was to suppress any signs of national independence by removing potential leaders of breakaway movements. A basic method he employed to suppress possible opposition was to deport whole peoples from their homeland to a distant region of the USSR. Outstanding examples of this were:

- In 1940, the takeover of the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia), and of Bukovina and Bessarabia resulted in 2 million being deported, the majority of whom died.
Chapter 2: The USSR under Joseph Stalin, 1924-53

- In 1941, after the outbreak of war, Stalin, anxious to prevent the peoples of the western region of the USSR from actively supporting the invading German armies, ordered the deportation to Siberia of various national groups, including Kalmyks, Ukrainians, Chechens, Crimean Tatars and Volga Germans; the deportations led to the deaths of one-third of the 4 million involved.

- By 1945, some 20 million Soviet people had been uprooted.

SOURCE Q
Map of Stalin's deportations of minority peoples.

Religion

Religious persecution
Stalin shared Lenin's notion that religious faith had no place in a communist society. Religion, with its other-worldly values, was seen as an affront to the collective needs of the nation. In 1928, a campaign to close the churches was begun. The Russian Orthodox Christian Church was the main target but all religions and denominations were at risk. Clerics who refused to co-operate were arrested; thousands in Moscow and Leningrad were sent into exile.

The suppression of religion in the urban areas proved a fairly straightforward affair. It was a different story in the countryside. The destruction of the rural churches and the confiscation of the relics and icons that most peasants had in their homes led to revolts in many areas. The authorities had failed to
understand that what to their secular mind were merely superstitions were to the peasants a precious part of their traditions. The result was widespread resistance across the rural provinces of the USSR. The response of the author was to declare that those who opposed the restrictions on religion were really doing so in order to resist collectivization. This allowed the requisition squads to brand the religious protesters as Kulaks and to seize their property.

Such was the bitterness these methods created that Stalin instructed his officials to call a halt. But this was only temporary. In the late 1930s, as part of the Great Terror, the assault on religion was renewed:

- 800 higher clergy and 4,000 ordinary priests were imprisoned, along with many thousands of ordinary worshippers
- by 1940, only 500 churches were open for worship in the Soviet Union – 1 per cent of the figure for 1917.

**Worship of Stalin**

Despite the Soviet denunciation of religious faith, the authorities were not above using the residually powerful religious sense of the Soviet people to promote Stalin’s image. Traditional worship, with its veneration of the saints, its icons, prayers and incantations translated easily into the new regime. Stalin became an icon. This was literally true. His picture was carried on giant flags in the great organized processions, such as those held on May Day and Stalin’s birthday. A French visitor, present at one of these processions in Moscow’s Red Square, was staggered by the sight of a flypast of planes all trailing huge portraits of Stalin. ‘My God!’ he exclaimed. ‘Exactly, Monsieur’, said his Russian guide.

**Impact of the war on religious persecution**

The war against Germany and its allies, which began for the Soviet Union June 1941, brought a respite in the persecution of the churches. While official policy was to denigrate religion, there were occasions when it proved highly useful to the authorities. Wartime provided such an occasion. Stalin was shrewd enough to enlist religion in fighting the Great Fatherland War. The churches were re-opened, the clergy released and the people encouraged to celebrate the uplifting Orthodox Church ceremonies. For the period of the war, the Soviet authorities under Stalin played down politics and emphasized nationalism. Talk of the proletarian struggle gave way to an appeal to defend holy Russia against the godless invaders.

The Church leaders responded as Stalin had intended. The clergy turned their services into patriotic gatherings, which expressed passionate defiance of the Germans. They urged their congregations to rally behind their great leader, Stalin, in a supreme war effort. The reward for the Church’s co-operation was a lifting of the anti-religious persecution.

**Post-war suppression**

The improved Church-state relations continued after the war. By the time of Stalin’s death in 1953, 25,000 churches had re-opened along with a number
of monasteries and seminaries. However, this did not represent any real freedom for the Orthodox Church. The price for being allowed to exist openly was its total subservience to the regime. In 1946, Stalin required that all the Christian denominations in the Soviet Union come under the authority of the Orthodox Church which was made responsible for ensuring that organized religion did not become a source of political opposition. The Church became, in effect, an arm of government.

**Education**

Stalin believed that a first step in modernizing the USSR was to spread literacy. To this end, formal education was made a priority, with these key features:

- ten years of compulsory schooling for all children aged five to fifteen
- core curriculum specified reading and writing, maths, science, history, geography, Russian language and Marxist theory
- state-prescribed textbooks to be used
- homework to be a regular requirement
- state-organized tests and examinations
- school uniforms made compulsory
- fees to be charged for the last three years (ages fifteen to eighteen) of non-compulsory secondary schooling.

**Development of an elite**

The emphasis on regulation was not accidental. The intention was to create a disciplined generation of young people ready to join the workforce which was engaged through the Five-Year Plans in constructing the new communist society. The last feature, regarding the payment of fees, may appear to challenge the notion of an egalitarian education system. The official justification for it was that the Soviet Union needed a specially trained section of the community to serve the people in expert ways; doctors and scientists were obvious examples. Those who stayed on at school after the age of fifteen were obviously young people of marked ability who would eventually enter university to become the specialists of the future. This was undeniably a selection process, but the argument was that it was selection by ability, not by class.

That was the official line. However, although there was an undoubted rise in overall standards, the system also created an educated elite. Those who continued their education after the age of fifteen were mainly the children of government officials and Party members who could afford the fees. Private tuition and private education became normal for them. As a consequence, as university education expanded, it was Party members or their children who had the first claim on the best places. As graduates, they then had access to the three key areas of Soviet administration - industry, the civil service and the armed services.

**The nomenklatura**

The promotional process had an important political consequence. It enhanced Stalin’s power by creating a nomenklatura that had every motive for...
supporting him. The poet, Osip Mandelstam, described this precisely: 'A thin layer of privileged people gradually came into being with “packets”. Those who had been granted a share of the cake eagerly did everything asked of them.'

→ The status of women

Marriage
In keeping with their Marxist rejection of marriage as a bourgeois institution, Lenin’s Bolsheviks had made divorce easier and had attempted to liberate women from the bondage of children and family. However, after only a brief period of experiment, Lenin’s government had come to question its earlier enthusiasm for sweeping change in this area. Stalin shared their doubts. Indeed, he was convinced the earlier Bolshevik social experiment had failed. By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet divorce rate was the highest in Europe – one divorce for every two marriages. This led him to embark on what has been called ‘the great retreat’. Stalin began to stress the value of the family as a stabilizing influence in society. He let it be known that he did not approve of the sexual freedoms that had followed the 1917 Revolution. He argued that a good communist was a socially responsible one: ‘a poor husband and father, a poor wife and mother, cannot be good citizens’.

Stalin, aware of the social upheavals collectivization and industrialization were causing, was trying to create some form of balance by emphasizing the traditional social values attaching to the role of women as home-makers and child-raisers. He was also greatly exercised by the number of orphaned children living on the streets of the urban areas. Left to fend for themselves, the children had formed themselves into feral gangs of scavengers and violent thieves. Disorder of this kind further convinced Stalin of the need to re-establish family structures.

Changes in social policy
His first major move came in June 1936 with a decree that reversed much of earlier Bolshevik social policy:

- Unregistered marriages were no longer recognized.
- Divorce was made more difficult.
- The right to abortion was severely restricted.
- The family was declared to be the basis of Soviet society.
- Homosexuality was outlawed.

Conscious of both the falling birth rate and of how many people were dying in the Great Fatherland War, the authorities introduced measures in July 1944 re-affirming the importance of the family in the USSR and giving incentives to women to have large numbers of children:

- Restrictions on divorce were further tightened.
- Abortion was totally outlawed.
- Mothers with more than two children were declared to be ‘heroines of the Soviet Union’.

**KEY TERM**

‘Packets’ Special benefits, such as villas and cars.

How did the status of women in the Soviet Union change under Stalin?
Heavier taxes were imposed on parents with fewer than two children.
The right to inherit family property was re-established.

Women and equality
One group that certainly felt they had lost out were the female members of the Party and the intelligentsia, who had welcomed the Russian Revolution as the beginning of female liberation. However, the strictures on sexual freedom under Stalin, and the emphasis on family and motherhood, allowed little room for the notion of the independent female.

Soviet propaganda spoke of the equality of women, but there was no great advance towards this in practical terms. A 'Housewives' Movement' was created in 1936 under Stalin's patronage. Composed largely of the wives of high-ranking industrialists and managers, it set itself the task of 'civilizing' the tastes and improving the conditions of the workers. However, the reality was that few resources were allocated and little attention was paid to organizations such as this. Stalin spoke continually of the nation being under siege and of the need to build a war economy. This made any movement not directly concerned with industrial production or defence seem largely irrelevant. Most women's organizations fell into this category.

Impact of war on women's status
There were individual cases of women gaining in status and income in Stalin's time. However, these were in a small minority and were invariably unmarried or childless women. Married women with children carried a double burden. The great demand for labour that accompanied Stalin's industrialization drive required that women join the workforce. They now had to fulfil two roles: as mothers raising the young and as workers contributing to the modernization of the Soviet Union. This imposed great strains upon them, markedly so during the war of 1941-45. The loss of men at the front and the desperate need to keep the armaments factories running meant that women became indispensable. In 1936 there had been 9 million women in the industrial workforce. By 1945, the number had risen to 15 million.

Equally striking figures, such as those in Source R (page 56), show that during the war over half a million women fought in the Soviet armed forces and that, by 1945, half of all Soviet workers were female. Without their effort the USSR could not have survived. Yet women received no comparable reward. Despite their contribution to the Five-Year Plans and to the war effort, women's pay rates in real terms dropped between 1930 and 1945.

The clear conclusion is that, for all the Soviet talk of women's progress under Stalinism, the evidence suggests that they were increasingly exploited. It is hard to dispute the conclusion of the distinguished scholar, Geoffrey Hosking, that 'the fruits of female emancipation became building blocks of the Stalinist neopatriarchal social system'.

KEY TERM
Intelligentsia Persons of influence in the intellectual world; for example, academics and writers.
Neopatriarchal A new form of male domination.
Study Source R. What main trend is observable regarding women's role in Soviet industry?

**SOURCE R**

**Number of women in the Soviet Industrial workforce.**

![Graph showing the number of women in the Soviet industrial workforce from 1928 to 1945.](chart)

**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

Stalin's domestic policies and their impact, 1929–53
Key debate

Key question: How far did Stalin achieve a totalitarian state?

There will probably never be total agreement as to what Stalinism actually was, but the following list suggests some of the principal features of the system which operated during the quarter of a century during which Stalin had mastery over the USSR:

- Stalin ran the USSR by a bureaucratic system of government.
- He fulfilled the work begun by Lenin of turning revolutionary Russia into a one-party state.
- Political and social control was maintained by a terror system whose main instruments were regular purges and show trials directed against the Party, the armed services and the people.
- Stalin created a command economy with agriculture and industry under central direction.
- Stalin’s highly individual rule developed into a ‘cult of personality’ which led to his becoming absolute in authority since he was regarded as the embodiment of the Communist Party and the nation.
- He created a siege mentality in the USSR, insisting that even in peace time the Soviet people had to be on permanent guard from enemies within and hostile nations outside.
- He imposed his concept of ‘socialism in one country’, a policy which subordinated everything to the interests of the Soviet Union as a nation.
- Stalin’s rule meant the suppression of any form of genuine democracy, since he operated on the principle, laid down by Lenin, of democratic centralism (see pages 19–20), which obliged members of the CPSU to accept uncritically and obey all orders and instructions handed down by the Party leaders.
- The USSR recognized only one correct and acceptable ideology: Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. All other belief systems were prohibited.
- Strict censorship was imposed as a means of enforcing cultural conformity in accordance with Stalin’s notion of socialist realism.

Character of the Soviet state

Such details present a strong argument for defining Stalin’s regime as totalitarian. However, some historians are reluctant to use that particular adjective to describe Stalin’s domination of the USSR. They suggest that he was not all-powerful – no one individual in a nation can be – and that his power depended on the willingness of thousands of underlings to carry out his orders and policies. While not disputing the huge impact that Stalin had upon his country, such writers point to other areas of significant development that occurred which did not depend on Stalin. This school of thought concentrates not so much on what Stalin did during the era he dominated the USSR, but on the character of Soviet communism itself.
Intrinsic violence of Soviet communism

Richard Overy draws attention to the violence that was intrinsic to Soviet communism. He quotes Stalin’s assertion that violence was an ‘inevit law of the revolutionary movement’ and links it to Lenin’s declaration that the task of Bolshevism was ‘the ruthless destruction of the enemy’. The Stalinist purges, therefore, were a logical historical progression.

Lack of a tradition of civil rights

In this connection, other scholars have laid weight on how undeveloped the concepts of individual or civil rights were in Russia. Tsardom had been an autocracy in which the first duty of the people had been to obey. The Communists had not changed that. Indeed, they had re-emphasized the necessity of obedience to central authority.

Self-interest of the nomenklatura

It was certainly true Stalin had no difficulty in finding eager subordinates to organize the purges. The common characteristic of those who led Stalin’s campaigns was their unswerving personal loyalty to him, a loyalty that overcame any doubts they might have had regarding the nature of their work. They formed the new class of officials that Stalin created to replace the old Bolsheviks, whom he had decimated in the purges. One prominent historian, M. Agursky, has stressed this development as the basic explanation of why terror became so embedded in the Stalinist system. Dedicated to Stalin on whom their positions depended, the nomenklatura enjoyed rights and privileges denied to the rest of the population. Including their families, they numbered around 600,000 (1.2 per cent of the population) by the late 1930s. Such persons once in post were unlikely to question Stalin’s or the more potential rivals they exterminated the safer their jobs were.

Fear of Stalin

In a major study, Simon Sebag Montefiore has added an interesting slant by illustrating the eagerness with which Stalin’s top ministers carried out his campaigns of terror and persecution. Though they were terrified of him, they did not simply obey him out of fear. People like Beria and Molotov derived the same vindictive satisfaction from their work as their master. Like him, they appeared to have no moral scruples.

Revolution from above

Yet the hard fact remains that, notwithstanding the attitudes of ordinary Soviet people, of the nomenklatura, and of government ministers, it was Stalin who gave the USSR its essential shape. Whatever the motives of those who carried out Stalin’s policies, he was the great motivator. Little of importance took place in the USSR of which he did not approve. That is why some prominent historians, such as Robert Tucker, still speak of Stalinism as ‘revolution from above’, meaning that the changes that occurred under Stalin were directed by him from the top down. This is one definition of Stalin’s totalitarianism that is likely to stand.