

Soviet Russia

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Lenin's Era

THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHES ITS AUTHORITY (1918-1924)

The Bolshevik party was a small party when it seized power. It had to adopt skilful tactics to maintain its power. With Lenin as its leader, the Bolsheviks adjusted their policy to accord with the needs of the people in order to stay in power. (The Bolsheviks changed their name to Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks in March 1918 when the seventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party was held.)

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A Flood of Decrees

As soon as Lenin came to power, he passed a series of decrees to satisfy the immediate wants of the Russian people. These included giving land to the peasants, giving control of the factories to the workers, the introduction of 8-hour day, repudiation of foreign debts and secret treaties, and the beginning of an effort to make peace with Germany. The decrees which legalized the seizure of land by the peasants and allowed workers to control the factories won most support from the people as their life-long wishes suddenly came true.

Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly

Lenin understood that many Russians had hoped for the election of a Constituent Assembly. In November, the nation-wide election for the Constituent Assembly was held. The Bolsheviks won only 1/4 of the votes in this election. (It must be remembered that the Bolsheviks got support chiefly from the revolutionary centres—the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets and the soviets in other places still supported the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries). Most of the votes went to the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. The liberals also won some votes. Lenin had no intention to give up power to a freely elected Constituent Assembly. After the Assembly had sat for one and a half day, Lenin ordered the Red Guards to disperse it by force. Although this repressive action led to a hardening of opposition to Lenin on the part of the non-Bolshevik parties, Lenin had secured temporary control of the political situation.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Lenin realized that the Russian people desired peace. In December 1917, an armistice was signed with Germany. After some haggling, Trotsky finally made the peace treaty with the victorious Germans in March 1918.

Soviet Russia ceded to the Germans vast territories, including parts of Russian Poland, Lithuania, Kurland, Latvia, and Estonia. To Turkey she gave Ardahan, Kars and Batum in the Caucasus region. The surrender of Bessarabia to the Rumanians was added later. Soviet Russia had to give recognition to the independence of Finland, Georgia and the Ukraine. Reparations of 6 billion marks were exacted in instalments.

The peace treaty was a humiliation for Russia. It deprived Russia of nearly 1/3 of her agricultural land and population, more than 3/5 of her iron-ore and coal production and 1/2 of her industrial plants. By a single treaty, Russian territorial gains over the past centuries, dating back to Peter the Great, were wiped out. Russia was pushed back and virtually cut off from the Baltic.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk gained some support from the Russians who desired peace; but it hurt the pride of those Russians who had never agreed to peace at any price and felt humiliated by the harsh terms of the Treaty. The most discontented group was the Social Revolutionaries. The Social Revolutionaries had great influence over the peasantry in the territories lost. They even made an attempt to kill Lenin. They also stirred up peasant uprisings. The former members of the Provisional Government which had advocated the continuation of the war were also infuriated.

To sum up, in its early years, the Bolsheviks were able to make peace and give satisfaction to the peasants and the workers but the non-Bolshevik political groups were dissatisfied with the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the humiliating Brest-Litovsk peace treaty.

The Civil War (1918-1920)

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The Participants

The non-Bolshevik political groups attempted to oust the Bolsheviks from power. Between 1918 and 1920, there was a civil war between the 'Red' Russians and the 'White' Russians. The 'Red' Russians were the Bolsheviks. The 'White' Russians were the Social Revolutionaries, the Czarist supporters (e.g. the army officers and Cossacks), the Cadets and members of other 'bourgeois' political parties. The Mensheviks occupied an ambiguous position in the Civil War. Some sided with the 'White' Russians but most of them were in sympathy with the 'Red' Russians.

Ex-allied countries, at one time reaching fourteen in number, joined in the Civil War to fight on the side of the 'White' Russians. These countries included the U.S.A., Britain, Japan, France and Poland. Their motives were mixed:

- (i) some disliked Communism and had a fear of revolution;
- (ii) some hated the Bolsheviks for repudiating the foreign debts, nationalizing foreign investments and publishing the secret treaties between the powers;
- (iii) some wanted to take revenge on the Bolsheviks who withdrew from the war;
- (iv) some wanted to protect their oil, coal and iron interests in South Russia;
- (v) some of the neighbouring countries of Russia had a greed for Russia's territories.

The Course of the Civil War

The Civil War took place in five main areas on the periphery of the Russian state: in the Caucasus and Southern Russia, in the Ukraine, in the Baltic, in Northern Russia (Murmansk and Archangel) and in Siberia. The White governments were proclaimed in these areas, rivalling the Bolshevik government. The greatest crisis for the Bolshevik government came in the summer of 1919. Admiral Kolchak advanced from Siberia. General Denikin advanced from Southern Russia. General Yudenich advanced from the Ukraine to the outskirts of Petrograd. But these three movements were not well co-ordinated and were defeated by the Red Army organized by Trotsky.

By the end of 1920, the White governments in these five regions were defeated by the Red Army. The Civil War petered out. But in May 1920, Poland suddenly launched an attack on Kiev. The Red Army fought back but was finally defeated by the Polish troops aided by the French government. By the Treaty of Riga, Russia surrendered extensive parts of White Russia (including Kiev) and part of Ukraine to Poland. In these areas, there were about 4 million Russian and Ukrainians. (Stalin recovered these areas through a deal with Hitler on the eve of the Second World War).

Reasons for the Bolshevik Victory

The Bolsheviks' victory was chiefly attributed to their superior understanding of modern warfare. They made a total war (a war which combined military operations with economic, psychological and other activities):

(i) Trotsky, the Commissar of War, was chiefly responsible for the successful military operations. He exercised a central command over the whole army, emphasizing discipline and obedience. The recruitment of the Red Army was based upon conscription. The commanders of the Red Army were staffed with former Czarist officers who were willing to co-operate. These ex-Czarist officers were watched over by the Political Commissars, who had also the duty to teach the army revolutionary theories, and explain to them the importance of fighting the Civil War against the counter-revolutionaries. Officers would be punished to death if they were defeated in any single battle. Fear of death compelled the Red Army to fight bravely.

(ii) Lenin also ordered an economic reorganization to co-ordinate with the war effort. This was called 'War Communism'. This meant that all the economic resources and products of the country were to be nationalized by the government. In practice, the government sent army detachments and committees of poor peasants to confiscate food crops from the peasants. The industrial plants of the country were taken over by the government. All private banks were closed and their resources were taken over by the State Bank. Internal and foreign commerce became a state monopoly. Railroads and shipping lines were also put in the hands of the State. Compulsory labour for everyone was introduced. No strikes were allowed. Overnight the regime had at its disposal the entire national resources to carry on a war against its enemy.

(iii) In contrast, the White Army had poor discipline. They were unco-ordinated in their war efforts. The White General often acted independently. They fought at vast distances from one another. Moreover, the White Army took food from the peasants and so did not have much economic support from the peasants. The White ill-treated the peasants under their rule. They shot their prisoners indiscriminately.

(iv) Psychological fear was exploited to the full by Lenin. Many members of the old Czarist secret police, the Okrana, were used to establish a new secret police, renamed Cheka. It came to employ a staff of 30,000 and its own army. By 1922, the secret police was believed to have put to death about 50,000 persons. The Czar and his family were shot dead. So the Russians dared not oppose Lenin.

(v) The workers rallied under the Bolsheviks. The peasants did the same because they feared that once the Whites were in power, they would repudiate the Bolsheviks' decree of giving land to the peasants.

(vi) The 'White' Russians obtained aids from the Allies. Foreign intervention brought national danger to Russia. A sense of nationalism brought Russians to support Bolshevik government. Except in munitions, allied help to the Whites was too small and unreliable. (e.g. The total British casualties in Northern Russia were less than a thousand men.) The people of the allied countries were too tired of war. Once the war ended, both the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in Britain were objected to British intervention in the Russian Civil War. There were serious mutinies in the French fleet in the Black Sea. The allies withdrew their troops before the end of 1919.

The New Economic Policy (1921-1927)

After the Civil War the first and most important problem facing Lenin was how to restore order and prosperity out of the appalling state of social disruption and economic chaos.

A Devastated Russia in 1921

A Retreat from Communism

The Comintern

Effects of the New Economic Policy

A Devastated Russia in 1921

In agriculture, the peasants did not show any interest to grow their crops as their produce was confiscated arbitrarily to feed the townworkers and the soldiers. Some rich landowners (Kulaks) refused to hand in their crops to the soldiers. They made risings in the countryside. Some peasants murdered the communist agents. By 1921 the annual grain yield was about one half of the pre-war production. The drought in the same year immediately brought famine to most of the Russians. From 1918 to 1920, about 6 million died of starvation, hunger and cold. Banditry became widespread. In sympathy with the hungry masses, the American Relief Administration sent reliefs to Russia and saved many lives.

In industry, the workers also lost their interest to work because they received no cash wages. This led to a drastic decline in industrial output. Many industries produced just 15% of the pre-1914 production. Many workers were unemployed. They moved back to the countryside to seek food.

Trade declined because the communication system and the monetary system had broken down. In fact, the only form of trade was barter.

After the [Kronstadt Uprising](#) of March 1921, Lenin saw that the situation was dangerous. The livelihood of the people was too bad indeed. Thus Lenin proclaimed, "Everything must be set aside to increase production."

Kronstadt Uprising 1921

Kronstadt Uprising was of great importance to the communists because the sailors of this place had taken part in the March Revolution and the November Revolution. Even these revolutionaries made an uprising and demanded 'Soviets without Bolsheviks'. It means that sufferings of the Russian people were a bit too much. The rising was suppressed by Trotsky after ten days of vicious fighting.

A Retreat from Communism

Lenin thought that the collapse of Russian economy was mainly due to the introduction of 'War Communism' during the Civil War. As nationalization of both agriculture and industry

had gone too far, individuals soon lost their initiative to work because they could not make private profits. Thus Lenin declared a 'Retreat from Communism'.

In 1921, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy. "In order to take two steps forward", Lenin said, "we shall have to take one step backward." The New Economic Policy offered some concessions to the 'capitalistic' desire of the people.

In agriculture, the policy of confiscation of peasant produce was discontinued. The peasants could sell their produce in the market after they had paid a tax on their produce. They were given security of land tenure, permitted to sell or lease their own land and even hire labourers to work on their own land.

The main industries such as banking, mining and transport were industrial still controlled by the Soviets or Workers' Councils. They employed about 80% of the total industrial labour force in 1923 and accounted for 90-95% of the total production by value. But small industrial enterprises were allowed to be in private hands. The private manufacturers were allowed to introduce piece-work rates, preferential rations and bonuses to stimulate the incentives of the workers.

The government also allowed trade to be handled by private domestic traders. The middle men or Nepmen were active in retail and wholesale trade. These private traders controlled about 70% of the retail and wholesale trade between the town and the countryside. The Russian government encouraged trade by signing trade treaties with the outside world, by setting up a State Bank (which issued a new ruble based on gold — an orthodox financial practice of the capitalist nations) and pushing up the schemes of electrification.

To mark the retreat from Communism, Russia re-established friendly relations with the outside world. In 1920 Russia had signed treaties with Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, recognizing their independence. In 1921, a treaty of peace was concluded with Poland, and a commercial treaty was made with Britain. In 1922 the Soviet Union also sent representatives to attend an important international conference at Genoa. By 1924, the Soviet government was trading with, and was recognized by Britain, France and Italy. Many western countries remained suspicious of Russia. (The U.S.A. accorded recognition to the Soviet Union as late as 1933. The Soviet Union entered the League of Nations only in 1934.) They were alarmed by the Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and Russia in 1922 because both countries were regarded as two 'disgraced' nations of Europe at the time. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Big Three had set up a chain of states to surround 'Bolshevik Russia' and 'aggressive Germany'. Rapallo Treaty threatened to break this protective chain.

Although Russia had re-built her diplomatic relations with the European countries, she had never given up her long-term objective of world revolution. The [Comintern](#) was not dissolved. Throughout 1920's while the Soviet government maintained relations with the European countries, the Comintern continued to promote subversive activities within those countries.

The Comintern

In March 1919, Lenin founded the Third International (or Comintern) in Moscow with Zinoviev as its President. Its avowed object was to replace World Capitalism by World Communism. Its methods were to set up communist parties in all countries of Europe. All

these newly-established communist parties would accept instructions from the Comintern. They would break away from the existing Social Democratic parties which worked for immediate social reforms through parliamentary legislation. These new communist parties would preach the workers to seize power through a revolution. Zinoviev was the President of the Comintern from 1920 to 1926. (In 1926, he was branded as a supporter of Trotsky and lost his position. During the great purges of 1934-1936, he was tried and finally executed in 1936). The Third International lasted until 1943.

Effects of the New Economic Policy

By 1928, Russian agricultural and industrial production went back to their 1914 level. The N.E.P. had successfully allayed the economic discontent of the Russian people.

Because the peasants, the small factory owners and merchants were allowed to produce and sell more of their products to increase their private profits, private capitalists soon emerged in the Russian towns and countryside. The rich peasants in the countryside were called the kulaks and the rich businessmen and manufacturers in the towns were called the Nepmen. These capitalists posed a new threat to the survival of the Soviet regime.

An Appraisal of Lenin

Lenin's period of rule was comparatively short. In 1922 and 1923, he had a series of strokes. At the beginning of 1924, he died. Lenin had dedicated himself to the cause of revolution. Before 1917 he organized the Bolshevik Party, provided the revolutionary ideology for the Party and led the Party to make the 1917 Revolution.

After 1917 Lenin successfully established the Communist government in Russia by skilfully adjusting the Party policy to suit the needs of the changing circumstances from 1917 and 1924. He was, in fact, the greatest architect of the Bolshevik Revolution and Father of the Soviet Union.

Stalin's Era: Socializing Russia (1924-1939)

The Struggle For Leadership (1924-1927)

The Second Revolution in Russia (1927-1939)

The Constitution of 1936

The Great Purge (1932-1938)

Other Accomplishments

The Struggle For Leadership (1924-1927)

After Lenin's death in early 1924, there was a struggle for power among the top-level members of the Communist Party—Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Kamenev. In his will, Lenin did not mention anyone to succeed him as the leader of the Party and the country. At last, Stalin gained complete power for himself in 1927. There were several reasons which accounted for Stalin's success.

[Stalin's Dominant Position in Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat](#)

[Stalin's Rivals Lacked Popular Support in the Party](#)

[Socialism in One Country Versus Permanent Revolution](#)

[Stalin's Political Intrigues Against his Enemies](#)

Stalin's Dominant Position in Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat

There were three essential organs within the Communist Party: the Politburo (which decided the party policy and thus the policy of the state), the Orgburo (which decided the party organization and party discipline) and the Secretariat (which executed the Party's decisions and co-ordinated the local and regional parties with the Communist Party). In 1924, Stalin was a key figure in all these three bodies, but his position as the General Secretary in the Secretariat was particularly important. As the policy of the Party and the state did not change much from 1922 onwards, the Politburo and Orgburo declined in importance. The Secretariat, carrying on its routine administration, became the most important organ of the government. As the General Secretary, Stalin was actually controlling the administration of the country. He could appoint his supporters to important positions in the administration. As a result, Stalin had quietly established his power within the Party before Lenin's death.

Stalin's Rivals Lacked Popular Support in the Party

Stalin's rivals, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin all held higher rank than Stalin in the party. Trotsky joined the Bolshevik Party only in 1917. Although Trotsky played a leading role in making the coup d'etat in the November Revolution and in fighting against the Whites during the Civil War, he remained an isolated figure in the party. Some party members feared him for his ambition—he had the potential to become a Soviet Bonaparte.

Zinoviev had compromised himself by his own record of hesitation before the coup in 1917. Bukharin was an intellectual. He was a doctrinaire and did not have much appeal to the party members as a leader. Stalin was not distinguished as an intellectual. He was least feared by the Communist Party members and got their support more easily. Moreover, Stalin also took an active part in the 1917 November Revolution and the Civil War.

Socialism in One Country Versus Permanent Revolution

'Socialism in One Country' has more popular support than 'Permanent Revolution'

Trotsky had lived in many countries before 1917. He acquired an international outlook. He deeply believed that a socialist country could not be built up in Russia unless the revolution

spread to other parts of the world. So Trotsky advocated immediate revolutions abroad, rapid industrialization and rapid collectivization of agriculture at home. In short, Trotsky asked for 'a short cut' to communize Russia and the world as soon as possible. This was Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution'.

Stalin thought differently. He advocated 'socialism in one country'. He believed that Russia, with her vast resources, could build up herself as a socialist country alone, without support from the outside. There was no need for a world revolution. At home, Stalin urged for slow collectivization of agriculture.

The masses and the party, enjoying stability after 1922, desired normalcy. They distrusted Trotsky and therefore turned to Stalin. Moreover, the Russians welcomed Stalin's 'Socialism in one country' as a national programme. It gave pride to the Russians that they would lead the world in creating a socialist society without foreign aid.

Stalin's Political Intrigues Against his Enemies

Stalin was the craftiest master of political intrigue. On January 21, 1924, Lenin died. Trotsky remained in the Caucasus to recover from an illness and failed to attend the funeral in Moscow. Stalin immediately opened a press campaign against Trotsky and discredited him. In 1924, Stalin secured the help of Kamenev and Zinoviev (the left-wing of the party) to isolate Trotsky in the Politburo. United opposition forced Trotsky to resign from the Politburo and to leave his post of War Commissar. In 1925 Trotsky had lost all his important posts in the party.

After Trotsky was removed from power, Stalin worked with Bukharin (the right-wing of the party) in the Politburo and provoked quarrels between Kamenev and Zinoviev in order to weaken their power.

In 1927, both Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the party. In 1929, Trotsky was deported from Russia. In 1940, he was assassinated in Mexico. Having removed his political opponents from power, Stalin dealt with Bukharin and expelled him from the party in 1928. (Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin were reinstated in the party by publicly acknowledging their errors. But during the great purges they were tried and condemned again.)

By his skilful use of the 'divide and rule' policy in the party, Stalin's position as the sole leader of Russia was now secure.

The Second Revolution in Russia (1927-1939)

In 1927, the power struggle within the Communist Party was over. Stalin had gained full political power. Stalin thought that rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture would transform Russia into a rich and strong socialist state. (Stalin suddenly accepted Trotsky's ideas after the power struggle. Actually, Stalin and Trotsky differed in their means but not in their goals.) He made use of the State Planning Commission (Gosplan) to make a survey of the country's economic resources. Targets were then set for each of the industries

and each of the collective farms. The industries and the farms had to increase their rates of production according to these targets.

Rapid Industrialization Under the Five Year Plans

Collectivization of Agriculture Under the Five Year Plans

Rapid Industrialization Under the Five Year Plans

(v) Reasons for rapid industrialization:

(f) By developing heavy industries, Russia hoped that she could first free herself from dependence on capitalist states for machinery and manufactured goods, and finally rival with the industrial production of the United States and Germany.

(g) If Russia was economically strong, she could have the financial resources to produce more powerful armaments that could defend Russia from any possible attacks by the capitalist powers.

(h) Industrialization put all of the national resources under the government and thus enabled the government to impose a stricter hold on the workers.

(i) Finally, Stalin might want to prove that the socialist system, in comparison to the capitalist system, would be more successful in modernizing a nation.

(ii) Results of industrialization:

The First Five Year Plan ran from 1928 to 1932 with heavy emphasis on the development of heavy industries (coal-mining industries, the building of power-stations and tractors, and machine construction). The aims of the First Five Year Plan were declared achieved in 4 years. In 1932, the output of Russian industry more than doubled the pre-war level. New factories were built—the large automobile factories at Moscow, the tractor plants at Stalingrad, the steel plants at Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk Basin, and the hydro-electric stations at Dnieper were all built in this period. The Ural area was developed as an important industrial region. The Trans-Siberian railway, formerly single-track, was now double-tracked.

The Second (1933-1937) and the Third (1939-1943) Five Year Plans attempted to pay more attention to the development of the light industries with the production of more consumer goods. As the Plans were carried out, war threat was increasing. Thus much attention was shifted to heavy industries again. Light industry was neglected. Armaments were produced in great quantities. In 1936, electricity output was 16 times than that of 1913. The output of coal, steel and iron also increased by at least three times than in 1913.

As a result of the Five Year Plans, by the end of 1930's, Russia had become a major industrial power. She was second in production only to the U.S.A. and Germany. In contrast with the defeat of Czarist Russia in the First World War, communist Russia could defeat even Germany in the Second World War. But it should be remembered that the Russians paid dearly for their success in rapid industrialization. Throughout this period, they received low

wages and suffered from the lack of consumer goods and many daily necessities. Perhaps only the tight control of the Communist leaders could make possible such a remarkable success within so short a period of time!

In the Second Five Year Plan, the Communist leaders found that some workers lost initiative to work harder. They compromised the Communist principles with the capitalist principles. 'Capitalistic' incentives were introduced. Good workers were rewarded with higher pay. Competition (with reward) between factories was also introduced. Foreign technicians were employed to give advice.

Collectivization of Agriculture Under the Five Year Plans

Collectivization of agriculture meant that private farms were abolished. In its place large farms were set up. They were run by a number of families under the control of government officials. The kind of crops and the amount of production were decided by the needs of the district and the state. Machines were usually introduced so as to raise productivity of the land.

(i) Reasons for collectivization:

(a) Stalin wanted to raise the agricultural production of the country. Up to 1928, Russian agricultural system remained backward. Wooden ploughs, sickles harvesting on small holding were the common characteristics of the Russian agriculture. Only when the small farms were grouped together could big farms be formed and machines be used. It was expected that within a short period of time, Russian agricultural production would rise rapidly. This was the basic reason for Stalin's insistence on launching collectivization.

(b) As a result of the New Economic Policy, rich peasants (kulaks) grew up in large number in the countryside. The kulaks refused to transport their grains for sale in the cities when the prices were low. Thus the workers had to pay dearly for their food. If the kulaks were forced to become members of collectives, they had to grow and deliver their crops at prices fixed by the government. If the price of the food was low, it would help to reduce the wages of the workers and the cost of industrial production—an important advantage for the industrialization of Russia.

(ii) The process of collectivization:

Beginning in 1928, the government first persuaded and then forced the peasants to merge their holdings into collective farms. In the process, all their belongings (including land) would be confiscated. The kulaks resisted strongly. The government responded by brutal methods. Teams of party members and industrial workers went to the countryside. Very frequently the party members needed to use force. They drove the peasants from their homes, killed them if they resisted and even starved them to death in order to break their resistance.

Because of this brutal treatment, the kulaks (about 2 million in number) had to give up their farms. They expressed their anger by smashing their farm implements, slaughtering their livestock, burning their crops and farm buildings before they left their farms. (Some even attempted to kill the Communist agents.) In this way, in the winter of 1929 to 1930, Russia lost about 1/2 of her livestock. Because of the blind resistance of the kulaks, agriculture was

disorganized. Grain production went down to the 1913 level. In 1932 a crop failure came. This resulted in a famine that cost the country five million lives.

After 1933 more and more peasants joined the collective farms. By 1939, 95% of Russia farms had been collectivized. The chief reason for the rapid success in collectivization after 1930 was that a few concessions had been made to the kulaks. Firstly, the peasants who joined the collective farms were allowed to keep small plots within the collective farm for their own use. Secondly, they were allowed to keep their own cattle and fowls. Thirdly, a quota had been set for the collective farm. After that quota was reached, the peasants of the collectives could sell the rest of the crops in the open markets for their own profit.

(iii) Results:

The first immediate effect of collectivization was that because all the collective farms were under the control of the government and they were obliged to deliver to the government a fixed quantity of their produce (the quota system) at low price, the workers in the towns were guaranteed with supply of cheap food from the countryside.

Another effect was that the peasants were kept at a low income level, so the produce of the collectives (which were handed to the government) could be sold by the government in the overseas markets for big profit. This gave a source of income to the government to invest in industries. In the long run, collectivization helped to raise agricultural production. Big farms economize labour, facilitate the use of system machinery, and permit more efficient marketing of the crops. By 1935 Russia could produce enough food for her home consumption. By 1939, the sown area of Russia was 1/3 larger than that in 1913. The output of grain more than doubled that of 1914.

Socially, collective farms grouped the peasants together and made it easier for the government to control its people. Many excessive farm hands in the collectives were ordered by the government to go to the towns. This provided cheap labour for industrialization. In short, agriculture was being organized on industrial lines and more geared to the needs and development of the whole country.

The Constitution of 1936

In 1936, Stalin judged the time ripe for drafting a new constitution which would preserve his autocratic power in the country. It was adopted by popular vote the following year and went into effect on January 1, 1938.

Reasons for Making the Constitution

Main Features of the Constitution

Criticism of the Constitution of 1936

Reasons for Making the Constitution

(i) In 1936, Stalin might think that both industrial and agricultural reorganisation had been quite successful and Communism was definitely sure to stay in Russia, so a new constitution was needed to preserve his autocratic power in this new state.

(ii) In 1936, Hitler had been in power in Germany for three years. Hitler denounced the 'Jewish' Communism in 'My Struggle', and pointed out that he would attack Russia. To prepare for that eventuality, Stalin wanted to secure the support of the democratic nations of the west. Granting a constitution to the Russian people served to give at least an appearance of democracy to Russia.

Main Features of the Constitution

According to the Constitution, Communist Russia called itself the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. There were 11 republics, representing the different racial groups and possessing limited powers over their own affairs. Of these the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic was the largest and the dominant one.

On paper, the 1936 Constitution had all the democratic features of the Western European parliamentary governments.

It provided for universal suffrage for every man and woman aged eighteen or over. They voted by secret ballot. They had the right to vote for the various soviets, high and low, including the Soviet of the Union

For the whole country, the highest organ of state power was the **Supreme Soviet**:

(x) It was composed of two houses: the Soviet of Union, representing the people of Russia and elected by them in the proportion of one deputy for 300,000 electors; the Union of Nationalities, representing the Union republics and elected by the Union republics (each republic elected 25 members). Both chambers had equal legislative powers. No bill could become law without the approval of a majority of both chambers. The Supreme Soviet met twice a year, usually for more than a week at each time.

(xi) When the Supreme Soviet was not sitting, the Supreme Soviet elected from among its members a standing committee, the Presidium, to perform its functions. The President of the Presidium is usually known as the President of the Soviet Union, but he is only the symbolic head of the state.

(xii) The Supreme Soviet also elected a 'Council of People's Commissars' (the Council of Ministers) to act as a kind of cabinet. Each minister was head of a department such as War, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Heavy Industry and so forth. The administrative and executive work of the country was carried on by this Council of Ministers.

Finally, the 1936 Constitution also had a bill of rights. The citizens were guaranteed the freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly and of religion. They were guaranteed the right to employment and holidays with pay.

There was, however, one feature of the Constitution which marked the Russian Constitution off from the constitutions of the western nations. The Constitution left unimpaired the dominant position of the Communist Party. The Constitution mentioned that the Communist

Party was the only legal party in Russia. The Party controlled the machinery of government, the economic system and the apparatus of culture, alone capable of leading the workers towards communism.

Criticism of the Constitution of 1936

In spite of its democratic appearance, the Constitution of 1936 was far from democratic:

(i) The Communist Party remained to be the only political party in the Soviet Union. In 1939 it numbered just about a million and a half in membership and so it was not fully representative of the wishes of the whole nation.

(ii) Although there were elections to be held, there was usually only one single list of candidates offered by the Communist Party. As a result, no opposition candidate could be elected and those elected in the Supreme Soviet must be Communist Party members.

(iii) Since the Supreme Soviet was controlled by the Communist Party members, the Presidium and the Council of Ministers were filled with loyal Communist Party members. Thus the Party policy became the government policy.

(iv) The Supreme Soviet rarely met and had no real power. The Presidium consisting of the Communist Party chiefs was more important in exercising the legislative power in Russia.

(v) The Constitution was not always followed. Russia remained a police state. The secret police had its officers everywhere. Many thousands of people suspected of disloyalty to communism were sent into labour camps, exiled, imprisoned or put to death without trial. The bill of rights could not guarantee personal liberty. The Constitution consolidated the Communist Party's hold over the country. Stalin, controlling the Communist Party, actually dominated the country.

The Great Purge (1932-1938)

(1) The Process

Stalin wanted to secure his personal dictatorship. At the time when he was promulgating the Constitution, he carried out a series of purges against his real or alleged enemies!

The reasons why Stalin had to carry out purges remain unknown. The following ones were **suggested reasons**:

(i) Khrushchev said that Stalin was a sick man, suffering from the insane disease of persecution.

(ii) In Germany, Hitler had seized power for a number of years, poised to attack Russia. Stalin wanted to purge the party of disloyal members before the German attack..

(iii) Many old Bolsheviks were still surviving. Some of them raised objection to Stalin's policies in the Five Years' Plans. Stalin wanted to get rid of the old Bolsheviks. He wanted to be surrounded by 'yes-men' in order to strengthen his personal authority.

(iv) Stalin built up his present dictatorship by intrigue and guile. To preserve his power, he needed to intrigue against his potential enemies before it was too late.

Stalin began with a mass purge of the party from 1932 onwards. In December 1934, with the assassination of Sergei Kirov, the popular party chief in Leningrad and a close rival to Stalin, Stalin broadened the purge (from the party) to encompass the entire population. From 1936 to 1938, there were a series of [Show Trials](#) for those accused, followed by mass executions.

(2) Results

By 1938, the purges began to slacken its pace. In the process of the mass purge, one third of the leading members of the party was eliminated. They included Lenin's close associates, the old Bolsheviks including Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin, the leading [army officers of the Red Army](#), the members of the secret police. The Russian intelligentsia was also victimized. It has been estimated that those subject to persecution, imprisonment, exile and death sentence during the purge from 1934 to 1938 amounted to seven millions.

When the old Communist Party members were eliminated, the new party members were Stalin's yes-men. Stalin's position in the country was raised to the status of a semi-God.

Show Trials

The pattern of the trials was usually the same. The accused were usually charged for being in league with Trotsky and with having plotted to kill Stalin. Other charges such as plotting against the state by sabotage and espionage were also made. Then the accused confessed and were sentenced to death.

Purging the Red Army

Over 30,000 officers were dismissed or executed. This was about half of the officer corps. The Red Army had been seriously weakened during the Great Purges, but by 1941 it had been reorganized. The five million Red Army fought loyally to defend Soviet Union during the Second World War. Stalin's position was firmly entrenched in Russia because the Red Army was loyal to him.

Other Accomplishments

The Communist regime had certain accomplishments to its credit:

(1) The Communist government spent much effort in providing education for its people. In 1931, compulsory primary education was provided for all children from eight to eleven. After 1934, besides the building of primary and secondary schools, higher education was also provided to growing number of youngsters. By 1938, about 200,000 youngsters graduated from universities and polytechnics. They worked as engineers, doctors, scientists,

agriculturists and managers in factories. Accompanying the growth of education was the printing of a large number of cheap books, the building of libraries and the reduction of illiteracy from 60% in 1917 to 20% in 1939.

(2) The official policy of sex equality was being preached. Women became engineers, doctors and teachers. This raised the status of women.

(3) The social welfare services also expanded. The government provided financial aid for working mothers and their infants. It also provided free medical care and hospitalization for most of the citizens.

Summary

Within a short period of 22 years (1917-1939) Russia was almost completely transformed into a 'modern' nation.

Politically, the state was in the firm control of the Communist Party, which in turn was dominated by Stalin.

Economically, a semi-feudal agricultural country had been modernized and industrialized. The Soviet Union ranked third in the industrial production of the world.

Socially, the old social classes—the nobles and the landlords—were gone. There was far more equality of opportunity than in the Czarist days. Every Russian had a chance to receive education. But a classless society did not occur. Instead a totalitarian society with the Communist Party controlling every aspect of life of its citizens did spring into being. Under the party, everyone is supposed to be equal.

Militarily, Russian military force could withstand the German attack during the Second World War, though with heavy losses.

All in all, the Communist rule has given a new sense of purpose to almost all Russians. However, some historians criticized that Russia had not become a communist society—"From each according to his ability, to each according to his toil." Some said that Soviet Nationalism was stronger than Communist Internationalism under the rule of Stalin.

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