Illustration 17.1 Joseph Stalin

Georgia. His parents were poor peasants; his father, a shoemaker, had been born a serf. Joseph's mother wanted him to become a priest and he was educated for four years at Tiflis Theological Seminary, but he hated its repressive atmosphere and was expelled in 1899 for spreading socialist ideas. After 1917, thanks to his outstanding ability as an administrator, he was quietly able to build up his own position under Lenin. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin was Secretary-General of the Communist Party and a member of the seven-man Politburo, the committee which decided government policy (see Illus. 17.1).

At first it seemed unlikely that Stalin would become the dominant figure; Trotsky called him 'the party's most eminent mediocrity ... a man destined to play second or third fiddle'. The Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov described him as 'nothing more than a vague, grey blur'. Lenin thought him stubborn and rude, and suggested in his will that Stalin should be removed from his post. 'Comrade Stalin has concentrated enormous power in his hands,' he wrote, 'and I am not sure he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution. ... He is too crude, and this defect becomes unacceptable in the position of General-Secretary. I therefore propose to comrades that they should devise a means of removing him from this job.'

The most obvious successor to Lenin was Leon Trotsky, an inspired orator, an intellectual and a man of action – the organizer of the Red Armies. The other candidates were the 'old' Bolsheviks who had been in the Party since the early days; Lev Kamenev (head of the Moscow party organization), Grigori Zinoviev (head of the Leningrad party organization and the Comintern) and Nikolai Bukharin, the rising intellectual star of the Party. However, circumstances arose which Stalin was able to use to eliminate his rivals.

(a) Trotsky's brilliance worked against him

It aroused envy and resentment among the other Politburo members. He was arrogant and condescending, and many resented the fact that he had only joined the Bolsheviks shortly before the November revolution. During Lenin's illness, he was bitterly critical of Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin, who were acting as a triumvirate, accusing them of having no plan for the future and no vision. The others therefore decided to run the country jointly: collective action was better than a one-man show. They worked together, doing all they could to prevent Trotsky from becoming leader. By the end of 1924 almost all his support had disappeared; he was even forced to resign as Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, though he remained a member of the Politburo.

(b) The other Politburo members underestimated Stalin

They saw him as nothing more than a competent administrator; they ignored Lenin's advice about removing him. They were so busy attacking Trotsky that they failed to recognize the very real danger from Stalin and they missed several chances to get rid of him. In fact Stalin had great political skill and intuition; he had the ability to cut through the complexities of a problem and focus on the essentials; and he was an excellent judge of character, sensing people's weaknesses and exploiting them. He knew that both Kamenev and Zinoviev were good team members but lacked leadership qualities and sound political judgement. He simply had to wait for disagreements to arise among his colleagues in the Politburo; then he would side with one faction against another, eliminating his rivals one by one until he was left supreme.

(c) Stalin used his position cleverly

As Secretary-General of the Party, a position he had held since April 1922, Stalin had full powers of appointment and promotion to important jobs such as secretaries of local Communist Party organizations. He quietly filled these positions with his own supporters, while at the same time removing the supporters of others to distant parts of the country. The local organizations chose the delegates to national Party Conferences, and so the Party Conferences gradually filled with Stalin's supporters. The Party Congresses elected the Communist Party Central Committee and the Politburo; thus by 1928 all the top bodies and congresses were packed with Stalinites, and he was unassailable.

(d) Stalin used the disagreements to his own advantage

Disagreement over policy arose in the Politburo partly because Marx had never described in detail exactly how the new communist society should be organized. Even Lenin was vague about it, except that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' would be established – that is, workers would run the state and the economy in their own interests. When all opposition had been crushed, the ultimate goal of a classless society would be achieved, in which, according to Marx, the ruling principle would be: 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. With the New Economic Policy (NEP; see Section 16.3(g)) Lenin had departed from socialist principles, though whether he intended this as a temporary measure until the crisis passed is still open to debate. Now the right wing of the Party, led by Bukharin, and the left, whose views were most strongly put by Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev, fell out about what to do next:

1 Bukharin thought it important to consolidate Soviet power in Russia, based on a prosperous peasantry and with a very gradual industrialization; this policy became known as *'socialism in one country'*. Trotsky believed that they must work for revolution outside Russia – *permanent revolution*. When this was achieved, the industrialized states of western Europe would help Russia with her industrialization. Kamenev and Zinoviev supported Bukharin in this, because it was a good pretext for attacking Trotsky.

2 *Bukharin wanted to continue NEP*, even though it was causing an increase in the numbers of wealthy peasants, *kulaks* (fists), so called because they were said to hold the ordinary peasants tightly in their grasp. Some even employed poor peasants as labourers, and were therefore regarded as budding capitalists and enemies of communism. Bukharin's opponents, who now included Kamenev and Zinoviev, wanted to abandon NEP and concentrate on rapid industrialization at the expense of the peasants.

Stalin, quietly ambitious, seemed to have no strong views either way at first, but on the question of 'socialism in one country' he came out in support of Bukharin, so that Trotsky was completely isolated. Later, when the split occurred between Bukharin on the one hand, and Kamenev and Zinoviev, who were feeling unhappy about NEP, on the other, Stalin supported Bukharin. One by one, Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev were voted off the Politburo, replaced by Stalin's yes-men, and expelled from the Party (1927); eventually Trotsky was exiled from the USSR and went to live in Istanbul in Turkey.

Stalin and Bukharin were now the joint leaders, but Bukharin did not survive for long. The following year Stalin, who had supported NEP and its great advocate, Bukharin, ever since it was introduced, now decided that NEP must go – he claimed that the *kulaks* were holding up agricultural progress. When Bukharin protested, he too was voted off the Politburo (1929), leaving Stalin supreme. Stalin's critics claimed that this was a cynical change of policy on his part, designed simply to eliminate Bukharin. To be fair to Stalin, it does seem to have been a genuine policy decision; NEP had begun to falter and was not producing the necessary amounts of food. Robert Service makes the point that Stalin's policies were actually popular with the vast majority of party members, who genuinely believed that the *kulaks* were blocking progress to socialism and getting rich while the industrial workers went short of food.

17.2 HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS STALIN IN SOLVING RUSSIA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS?

(a) What were Russia's economic problems?

I Although Russian industry was recovering from the effects of the First World War, *production from heavy industry was still surprisingly low*. In 1929 for example, France, which did not rank as a leading industrial power, produced more coal and steel than Russia, while Germany, Britain and especially the USA were streets ahead. Stalin believed that a rapid expansion of heavy industry was essential to enable Russia to deal with the attack which he was convinced would come sooner or later from the western capitalist powers, who hated communism. Industrialization would have the added advantage of increasing support for the government, because *it was the industrial workers who were the communists' greatest allies*: the more industrial workers there were in relation to peasants (whom Stalin saw as the enemies of socialism), the more secure the communist state would

Table 17.2 **Industrial production in the USSR compared with other great powers, 1937**

	Pig-iron	*Steel*	*Coal*	*Electricity* (in billion kilowatts)
USSR	14.9	18.4	164.6	39.6
USA	31.9	47.2	395.0	115.9
Britain	6.7	10.3	227.0	30.7
Germany	18.3	22.7	186.0	55.2
France	6.0	16.1	45.5	19.3

government equipment, and the ruthless ploughing-back of all profits and surpluses. Hundreds of foreign technicians were brought in and great emphasis was placed on expanding education in colleges and universities, and even in factory schools, to provide a whole new generation of skilled workers. In the factories, the old capitalist methods of piecework and pay differentials between skilled and unskilled workers were used to encourage production. Medals were given to workers who achieved record output; these were known as *Stakhanovites*, after Alexei Stakhanov, a champion miner who, in August 1935, supported by a well-organized team, managed to cut 102 tons of coal in a single shift (by ordinary methods even the highly efficient miners of the Ruhr in Germany were cutting only 10 tons per shift).

Unfortunately the Plans had their drawbacks. Ordinary workers were ruthlessly disciplined: there were severe punishments for bad workmanship, people were accused of being 'saboteurs' or 'wreckers' when targets were not met, and given spells in forced labour camps. Primitive housing conditions and a severe shortage of consumer goods (because of the concentration on heavy industry), on top of all the regimentation, must have made life grim for most workers. As historian Richard Freeborn pointed out (in *A Short History of Modern Russia*): 'It is probably no exaggeration to claim that the First Five Year Plan represented a declaration of war by the state machine against the workers and peasants of the USSR who were subjected to a greater exploitation than any they had known under capitalism.' However, by the mid-1930s things were improving as benefits such as medical care, education and holidays with pay became available. Another major drawback with the Plans was that many of the products were of poor quality. The high targets forced workers to speed up and this caused shoddy workmanship and damage to machinery.

In spite of the weaknesses of the Plans, Martin McCauley (in *Stalin and Stalinism*) believes that 'the First Five-Year Plan was a period of genuine enthusiasm, and prodigious achievements were recorded in production. The impossible targets galvanized people into action, and more was achieved than would have been the case had orthodox advice been followed.' Alec Nove leaned towards a similar view; he argued that, given the industrial backwardness inherited from the tsarist period, something drastic was needed. 'Under Stalin's leadership an assault was launched ... which succeeded in part but failed in some sectors. ... A great industry was built ... and where would the Russian army have been in 1942 without a Urals–Siberian metallurgical base?' Nove acknowledged, however, that Stalin made vast errors – he tried to go too far much too fast, used unnecessarily brutal methods and treated all criticism, even when it was justified, as evidence of subversion and treason.

(c) The collectivization of agriculture

The problems of agriculture were dealt with by the process known as 'collectivization'. The idea was that small farms and holdings belonging to the peasants should be merged to form large collective farms (*kolkhoz*) jointly owned by the peasants. There were two main reasons for Stalin's decision to collectivize.

- The existing system of small farms was inefficient, and seemed unable to satisfy the increasing demand for food, especially in the growing industrial cities. However, large farms, under state direction, and using tractors and combine harvesters, would vastly increase grain production, or so the theory went.
- He wanted to eliminate the class of prosperous peasants *(kulaks)*, which NEP had encouraged, because, he claimed, they were standing in the way of progress. The real reason was probably political: Stalin saw the *kulaks* as the enemy of communism. 'We must smash the *kulaks* so hard that they will never rise to their feet again.'

The policy was launched in earnest in 1929, and had to be carried through by sheer brute force, so determined was the resistance in the countryside. It proved to be a disaster, and it took Russia at least half a century to recover. There was no problem in collectivizing landless labourers, but all peasants who owned any property at all, whether they were *kulaks* or not, were hostile to the plan, and had to be forced to join by armies of party members, who urged poorer peasants to seize cattle and machinery from the *kulaks* to be handed over to the collectives. *Kulaks* often reacted by slaughtering cattle and burning crops rather than allow the state to take them. Peasants who refused to join collective farms were arrested and taken to labour camps, or shot. When newly collectivized peasants tried to sabotage the system by producing only enough for their own needs, local officials insisted on seizing the required quotas. In this way, well over 90 per cent of all farmland had been collectivized by 1937.

In one sense Stalin could claim that collectivization was a success: it allowed greater mechanization, which did achieve a substantial increase in production in 1937. The amount of grain taken by the state increased impressively and so did grain exports: 1930 and 1931 were excellent years for exports, and although the amounts fell sharply after that, they were still far higher than before collectivization. On the other hand, so many animals had been slaughtered that it was 1953 before livestock production recovered to the 1928 figure, and the cost in human life and suffering was enormous.

The truth was that total grain production did not increase at all (except for 1930) – in fact it was less in 1934 than it had been in 1928. *The reasons for this failure were:*

- The best producers – the *kulaks* – were excluded from the collective farms. Most of the party activists who came from the cities to organize collectivization did not know much about agriculture.
- Many peasants were demoralized after the seizure of their land and property; some of them left the *kolkhoz* to look for jobs in the cities. With all the arrests and deportations, this meant that there were far fewer peasants to work the land.
- The government did not at first provide sufficient tractors; since many peasants had slaughtered their horses rather than hand them over to the *kolkhoz*, there were serious problems in trying to get the ploughing done in time.
- Peasants were still allowed to keep a small private plot of their own; they tended to work harder on their own plots and do the minimum they could get away with on the *kolkhoz*.

Table 17.3 **Grain and livestock statistics in the USSR**

Actual grain harvest (in million tons)

1913	*1928*	*1929*	*1930*	*1931*	*1932*	*1933*	*1934*	*1936*	*1937*
80.1	73.3	71.7	83.5	69.5	69.6	68.4	67.6	56.1	97.4

Grain taken by the state (in million tons)

1928	*1929*	*1930*	*1931*	*1932*	*1933*
10.8	16.1	22.1	22.8	18.5	22.6

Grain exported (in million tons)

1927–8	*1929*	*1930*	*1931*	*1932*	*1933*
0.029	0.18	4.76	5.06	1.73	1.69

Livestock in the the USSR (in millions)

	1928	*1929*	*1930*	*1931*	*1932*	*1933*	*1934*	*1935*
Cattle	70.5	67.1	52.5	47.9	40.7	38.4	42.2	49.3
Pigs	26.0	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1	17.4	22.6
Sheep & goats	146.7	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2	51.9	61.1

A combination of all these factors led to famine, mainly in the countryside, during 1932–3, especially in Ukraine. Yet 1.75 million tons of grain were exported during that same period while over 5 million peasants died of starvation. Some historians have even claimed that Stalin welcomed the famine, since, along with the 10 million *kulaks* who were removed or executed, it helped to break peasant resistance. Certainly it meant that for the first time the state had taken important steps towards controlling the countryside. The government could get its hands on the grain without having to be constantly haggling with the peasants. No longer would the *kulaks* hold the socialist state to ransom by causing food shortages in the cities; it was the countryside which would suffer now if there was a bad harvest. The statistics in Table 17.3 give some idea of the scale of the problems created.

17.3 POLITICS AND THE PURGES

(a) Political problems

During the 1930s Stalin and his closest allies gradually tightened their grip on the Party, the government and the local party organizations, until by 1938 all criticism and disagreement had been driven underground. Although his personal dictatorship was complete, Stalin did not feel secure; he became increasingly suspicious, trusted nobody and seemed to see plots everywhere. The main political issues during these years were:

1 By the summer of 1930, the government's popularity with the general public had fallen sharply because of collectivization and the hardships of the First Five Year Plan. There was growing opposition to Stalin in the Party; a document known as the 'Ryutin Platform' (after one of the Moscow party leaders) was circulated, advocating

Revisionist historians have tried to shift the blame to some extent away from Stalin. J. Arch Getty argues that the Purges were a form of political infighting at the top. He plays down the role of Stalin and claims that it was the obsessive fears of all the leaders which generated the Terror. Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests that the Purges must be seen in the context of continuing revolution; the circumstances were abnormal – all revolutions are faced by constant conspiracies designed to destroy them, so abnormal responses can be expected.

Some of the most recent evidence to emerge from the Soviet archives seems to bear out the traditional view. Dmitri Volkogonov came to the conclusion that Stalin simply had an evil mind and lacked any moral sense. It was Stalin who gave the orders to Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD (as the secret police were now called), about the scale of the repressions, and it was Stalin who personally approved long lists of people to be executed. After he had announced the end of the Terror, Stalin made Yezhov the scapegoat, accusing him and his subordinates of going too far. Yezhov was a 'scoundrel' who was guilty of great excesses, and he and most of his staff were arrested and shot. In this way Stalin diverted responsibility for the Terror away from himself, and so managed to keep some of his popularity.

The Purges were successful in eliminating possible alternative leaders and in terrorizing the masses into obedience. The central and local government, government in the republics, the army and navy and the economic structures of the country had all been violently subdued. Stalin ruled unchallenged with the help of his supporting clique – Molotov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Zhdanov, Voroshilov, Bulganin, Beria, Malenkov and Khrushchev – until his death in 1953.

But the consequences of the Purges and the Terror were serious.

- Historians are still arguing about how many people fell victim to the Purges. But whichever statistics you accept, the cost in human lives and suffering is almost beyond belief. Robert Conquest gave relatively high figures: just for the years 1937–8 he estimated about 7 million arrests, about a million executions and about 2 million deaths in the labour camps. He also estimated that of those in the camps, no more than 10 per cent survived. Official KGB figures released in the early 1990s show that in the same period there were 700 000 executions, and that at the end of the 1930s there were 3.6 million people in labour camps and prisons. Ronald Suny points out that if you add the 4 million to 5 million people who perished in the famine of 1932–3 to the total figures of those executed or exiled during the 1930s, 'the total number of lives destroyed runs from ten to eleven million'.
- Lenin's old Bolshevik Party was the main victim; the power of the Bolshevik elite had been broken and eliminated.
- Many of the best brains in the government and in industry had disappeared. In a country where numbers of highly educated people were still relatively small, this was bound to hinder progress.
- The purge of the army disrupted the USSR's defence policies at a time of great international tension, and contributed to the disasters of 1941–2 during the Second World War.

(c) The new constitution of 1936

In 1936, after much discussion, a new and apparently more democratic constitution was introduced. It described the USSR as 'a socialist state of workers and peasants' resulting from 'the overthrow of the landlords and capitalists'. It stated that everyone, including 'former people' (ex-nobles, *kulaks*, priests and White Army officers), was allowed to vote

by secret ballot to choose members of a national assembly known as *the Supreme Soviet*. However, this met for only about two weeks in the year, when it elected a smaller body, *the Praesidium*, to act on its behalf. The Supreme Soviet also chose *the Council of People's Commissars*, a small group of ministers of which Stalin was the secretary. *In fact the democracy was an illusion*: the elections, to be held every four years, were not competitive – there was only one candidate to vote for in each constituency, and that was the Communist Party candidate. It was claimed that the Communist Party represented everybody's interests. The aim of the candidates was to get as near as possible to 100 per cent of the votes, thereby showing that the government's policies were popular.

The constitution merely underlined the fact that Stalin and the Party ran things. Although it was not specifically stated in the constitution, the real power remained with the Politburo, the leading body of the Communist Party, and with its general secretary, Joseph Stalin, who acted as a dictator. There was mention of 'universal human rights', including freedom of speech, thought, the press and religion; the right to employment and to public assembly and street demonstrations. But in reality, anybody who ventured to criticize Stalin was quickly 'purged'. Not surprisingly, very few people in the USSR took the 1936 constitution seriously.

(d) Holding the union together

In 1914, before the First World War, the tsarist empire included many non-Russian areas – Poland, Finland, the Ukraine, Belorussia (White Russia), Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Poland and the three Baltic republics were given independence by the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk (March 1918). Many of the others wanted independence too, and at first the new Bolshevik government was sympathetic to these different nationalities. Lenin gave Finland independence in November 1917.

However, some of the others were not prepared to wait: by March 1918, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had declared themselves independent and soon showed themselves to be anti-Bolshevik. Stalin, who was appointed commissar (minister) for nationalities by Lenin, decided that these hostile states surrounding Russia were too much of a threat; during the civil war they were all forced to become part of Russia again. By 1925 there were six Soviet republics – Russia itself, Transcaucasia (consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The problem for the communist government was that 47 per cent of the population of the USSR were non-Russian, and it would be difficult to hold them all together if they were bitterly resentful of rule from Moscow. Stalin adopted a two-handed approach, which worked successfully until Gorbachev came to power in 1985:

- on the one hand, national cultures and languages were encouraged and the republics had a certain amount of independence; this was much more liberal than under the tsarist regime, which had tried to 'Russianize' the empire;
- on the other hand, it had to be clearly understood that Moscow had the final say in all important decisions. If necessary, force would be used to preserve control by Moscow.

When the Ukrainian Communist Party stepped out of line in 1932 by admitting that collectivization had been a failure, Moscow carried out a ruthless purge of what Stalin called 'bourgeois nationalist deviationists'. Similar campaigns followed in Belorussia, Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Later, in 1951, when the Georgian communist leaders tried to take Georgia out of the USSR, Stalin had them removed and shot.

(e) Was Stalin's regime totalitarian?

The traditional western democratic view held by historians such as Adam Ulam and Robert Conquest was that Stalin's regime was totalitarian, in many ways like Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany. A 'perfect' totalitarian regime is one in which there is dictatorial rule in a one-party state which totally controls all activities – economic, political, social, intellectual and cultural – and directs them towards achieving the state's goals. The state attempts to indoctrinate everybody with the party ideology and to mobilize society in its support; both mental and physical terror, and violence are used to crush opposition and keep the regime in power. As we have seen, there was ample evidence of all these characteristics at work in Stalin's system.

However, during the 1970s, 'revisionist' Western historians, among whom Sheila Fitzpatrick was one of the leaders, began to look at the Stalin period from a social viewpoint. They criticized the 'totalitarian' historians on the grounds that they ignored social history and presented society as the passive victim of government policies, whereas, in fact, there was a great deal of solid support for the system from the many people who benefited from it. These included all the officials in the party state bureaucracy and trade unions, the new managerial classes and key industrial workers – the new elite. The social historians suggested that to some extent these people were able to show 'initiatives from below', and even negotiate and bargain with the regime, so that they were able to influence policy. A further twist occurred during the 1980s when a group of historians, notably J. Arch Getty, claimed that the 'totalitarian' historians had exaggerated Stalin's personal role; they suggested that his system was inefficient and chaotic.

The 'totalitarian' writers criticized Arch Getty and his colleagues on the grounds that they were trying to whitewash Stalin and to gloss over the criminal aspects of his policies. The latter in turn accused the totalitarianists of Cold War prejudice – refusing to recognize that anything good could come out of a communist system.

From the new evidence emerging from the archives, it is now possible to arrive at a more balanced conclusion – there are elements of truth in both interpretations. It is impossible to ignore the central role of Stalin himself; all the evidence suggests that after 1928 it was Stalin's policy preferences which were carried out. On the other hand, the regime did not completely ignore public opinion – even Stalin wanted to be popular and to feel that he had the support of the new elite groups. There is ample evidence too that although the regime had totalitarian aims, in practice it was far from successful. Streams of orders came from the top which would have been obeyed without question in a genuine totalitarian state; yet in the USSR, peasants and workers found plenty of ways of ignoring or evading unpopular government orders. The more the government tried to tighten controls, the more counter-productive its efforts often became, and the greater the tensions between central and regional leaderships.

Clearly the Stalinist system was over-centralized, disorganized, inefficient, corrupt, sluggish and unresponsive. But at the same time, it was extremely efficient at operating terror and purges – nobody was safe. Whatever else it was, everyday life under Stalin was never 'normal'. According to Robert Service (in *Comrades*, 2007), 'the USSR was a listening state with an insatiable curiosity, in which maids, porters and drivers were routinely employed to file reports'. It seems clear that many people, perhaps even a majority of the population, lived a kind of double existence. At work and in public they were careful to mouth all the correct opinions and on no account to make the slightest criticism of the regime. Only at home with the family or among the most trustworthy friends would anybody be foolish enough to express their private thoughts and say what they really thought of Comrade Stalin.

17.4 EVERYDAY LIFE AND CULTURE UNDER STALIN

However much they might try, ordinary people in the USSR could not avoid contact with the state – being educated, finding a job, getting promotion, marrying and bringing up children, finding somewhere to live, shopping, travelling, sport, reading literature, going to the theatre and concerts, enjoying the visual arts, practising their religion, reading the news, listening to the radio – in all these activities people came up against the state. This was because the communists had a mission: to eradicate 'backwardness'. The Soviet state must become modernized and socialist, and the new Soviet citizen must be educated and 'cultured'. It was the duty of artists, musicians and writers to play their part in this transformation: they were to attack 'bourgeois' values by producing works of 'socialist realism' which glorified the Soviet system. In the words of Stalin, they were to be 'engineers of the human soul', helping to indoctrinate the population with socialist values. Even the Moscow Dinamo football team was run by the NKVD.

(a) A hard life

Although the ideals were impressive, all the evidence suggests that the most striking point about everyday life in the early 1930s was that everything, including food, seemed to be in short supply. This was partly because of the concentration on heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods, and partly because of famine and bad harvests. In 1933 the average married worker in Moscow consumed less than half the amount of bread and flour consumed by his counterpart around 1900. In 1937, average real wages were only about three-fifths of what they had been in 1928.

The rapid growth of the urban population – which increased by 31 million between 1926 and 1939 – caused serious housing shortages. Local soviets controlled all the housing in a town; they had the power to evict residents and move new residents into already occupied houses. It was common for middle-class families living in large houses to be told that they were taking up too much space and to find their home transformed into a 'communal apartment' as perhaps two or three other families were moved in. Kitchens, bathrooms and toilets were shared between families, and most large houses had people living in corridors and under staircases. Even less fortunate were the workers who lived in barracks. In the new industrial city of Magnitogorsk in 1938, half the housing consisted of barracks, which was the usual accommodation for unmarried workers and students. City conditions generally were poor; most of them lacked efficient sewage systems, running water, electric light and street lights. Moscow was the exception – here the government made a real effort to make the capital something to be proud of.

One of the most annoying aspects of life for ordinary people was the existence of special elite groups such as party members, government officials in the bureaucracy (these were known as *nomenklatura*), successful members of the intelligentsia, engineers, experts and Stakhanovites. They escaped the worst of the hardships and enjoyed many privileges – they had bread delivered to their homes instead of having to queue for hours to buy a loaf, and they were allowed lower prices, better living accommodation and the use of *dachas* (country houses). This resulted in a 'them and us' attitude, and ordinary people felt aggrieved that they were still the underdogs.

(b) Signs of improvement

In a speech in November 1935 Stalin told his audience of Stakhanovites: 'life has become better, life has become more joyous'. This was not entirely wishful thinking: food supplies

improved and all rationing was abolished in 1936. The provision of cheap meals in factory canteens and free work clothes was a great help. Education and healthcare were free, and the number of schools and medical centres was increasing. The government worked hard at the concept of state paternalism – the idea that the population were like children, who must be looked after, protected and guided by the state, which acted as a sort of guardian. The state provided more facilities for leisure: by the end of the 1930s there were close on 30 000 cinemas, there were sports facilities for players and spectators, and there were public gardens and culture parks. The largest and most famous was Gorky Park in Moscow, named after Maxim Gorky, one of Stalin's favourite writers. Most towns of any size had a theatre and a library.

Another important aspect of the state's role was to encourage what the Russians called *kul'turnost'* – 'culturedness'. This involved taking care over one's appearance and personal hygiene. Some industrial enterprises ordered that all engineers and managers should be clean-shaven and have their hair neatly cut. Conditions in barracks were improved by the use of partitions, so that each person had his own space. Other signs of culture were sleeping on sheets, eating with a knife and fork, avoiding drunkenness and bad language and not beating your wife and children. According to Stephen Kotkin, the cultured person was one who had learned to 'speak Bolshevik': he knew how to conduct himself in the workplace, stopped spitting on the floor, could make a speech and propose a motion; and he could understand the basic ideas of Marxism.

'Culturedness' was extended to shopping: at the end of 1934 over 13 000 new bread shops opened across the country; the assistants wore white smocks and caps and had lessons in how to be polite to customers. Strict new sanitary regulations were brought in and loaves had to be wrapped. This campaign for 'cultured trade' spread to every shop in the country, from the largest Moscow department store to the smallest bread shop.

(c) The state, women and the family

The 1930s were a difficult time for many families because of the 'disappearance' of so many men during collectivization, the famine and the Purges. There was a high desertion and divorce rate, and millions of women were left as the sole breadwinner in the family. During the rapid industrialization of the 1930s more than 10 million women became wage earners for the first time; the percentage of women at work rose from 24 per cent to 39 per cent of the total paid workforce. By 1940 about two-thirds of the workforce in light industry were women and many were even engaged in heavier jobs such as construction, lumbering and machine-building, which were traditionally thought of as men's work.

The government faced the dilemma that it needed women to provide much of the workforce for the industrialization drive, while at the same time it wanted to encourage and strengthen the family unit. One way of coping was to build more day-care centres and nurseries for children – the number of places doubled in the two years 1929–30. In the mid-1930s new laws were passed encouraging women to have as many children as possible; abortion was made illegal except in cases where the mother's life was in danger; maternity leave of up to 16 weeks was allowed and there were to be various subsidies and other benefits for pregnant women. Even so, this placed a heavy burden on working-class and peasant women, who were expected to produce children, take jobs, increase output and look after the household and family.

Things were different for wives of the elite, and for educated women, either married or single, who had professional jobs. They were seen by the state as part of its campaign to 'civilize' the masses. The Wives' Movement, as it became known, began in 1936; its aim was to raise the culturedness of the people the wives came into contact with, particularly those in their husbands' workplaces. Their main duty was to make a comfortable home life

for their husbands and families. Towards the end of the 1930s, as war began to seem more likely, the Wives' Movement encouraged women to learn to drive lorries, shoot, and even to fly planes, so that they would be ready to take men's places if they had to go to war.

(d) Education

One of the greatest achievements of the Stalinist regime was the expansion of free, mass education. In 1917 under half the population could be described as literate. In January 1930 the government announced that by the end of the summer, all children aged 8 to 11 must be enrolled in schools. Between 1929 and 1931 the number of pupils increased from 14 million to around 20 million; it was in rural areas, where education had been patchy, that most of the increase took place. By 1940 there were 199 000 schools, and even the most remote areas of the USSR were well provided. Many new training colleges were set up to train the new generation of teachers and lecturers. According to the census of 1939, of people aged between 9 and 49, 94 per cent in the towns and 86 per cent in rural areas were literate. By 1959 these percentages had increased to 99 and 98, respectively.

Of course the regime had an ulterior motive – education was the way by which it could turn the younger generation into good, orthodox Soviet citizens. Religion and other 'bourgeois' practices were presented as superstitious and backward. Ironically, the education experts decided that a return to traditional teaching methods would be better than the experimental, more relaxed techniques tried in the 1920s. These had included the abolition of examinations and punishments, and an emphasis on project work. This was now reversed: teachers were given more authority and were to impose strict discipline, examinations were brought back and more teaching time was to be spent on mathematics and science.

(e) Religion

Lenin, Stalin and the other Bolshevik leaders were atheists who accepted Marx's claim that religion was merely an invention of the ruling classes to keep the people docile and under control – the 'opium of the masses'. Lenin had launched a savage attack on the Orthodox Church, seizing all its lands, schools and church buildings, and having hundreds of priests arrested. After Lenin's death the regime became more tolerant towards religious groups. Many priests were sympathetic towards communist ideals, which, after all, do have some similarities to Christian teachings about the poor and oppressed. There seemed a good chance of complete reconciliation between Church and State; with careful handling the Church could have been useful in helping to control the peasants. However, many militant young communists continued to believe that religion was a 'harmful superstition'. A 'League of Militant Godless' was formed, their aim being to persecute the clergy and eliminate religion, as far as possible.

Relations deteriorated disastrously during Stalin's regime. Many priests courageously opposed collectivization, so Stalin secretly instructed local party organizations to attack churches and priests. Hundreds of churches and cemeteries were vandalized and literally thousands of priests were killed. The number of working priests fell from about 60 000 in 1925 to under 6000 by 1941. The slaughter was not confined to Christians: hundreds of Muslim and Jewish leaders also fell victim. The campaign was relentless: by 1941 only one in 40 church buildings was still functioning as a place of worship. For the Bolsheviks, communism was the only religion, and they were determined that people should worship the communist state instead of God.

The anti-religious campaign caused outrage, especially in rural areas where priests,

mullahs, shamans and rabbis were popular and respected members of the local communities. During the Second World War, State and Church were to some extent reconciled. In 1942, with the war going badly lor the Russians, and both Leningrad and Moscow under attack from the Germans, Stalin decided that religion had a role to play after all, as a force for patriotism. An understanding was reached with Christians, Jews and Muslims that past differences would be forgotten in their joint struggle against the invader. Churches, mosques and synagogues were allowed to reopen, and by most accounts, the religious groups played a vital role in maintaining morale among the general public.

(f) Literature and the theatre

The years 1928 to 1931 became known as 'the Cultural Revolution', when the regime began to mobilize writers, artists and musicians to wage a cultural war against 'bourgeois intellectuals'. At first there were two rival groups of writers: the dedicated communists were members of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) and were committed to 'socialist realism'. The other group were the non-communists, who wanted to keep polities out of literature; they were labelled dismissively by the communists as 'fellow-travellers'. They were members of the All-Russian Union of Writers (AUW), and they included most of the leading writers who had made their names before the revolution. RAPP did not approve of the AUW's attitude and accused some of its members of publishing anti-Soviet works abroad. They were found guilty and the government dissolved the AUW, replacing it with a new organization – the All-Russian Union of Soviet Writers (AUSW). About half the former members of the AUW were refused admission to the new union, which was a serious blow for them, since only union members were allowed to publish.

This left RAPP as the dominant literary organization, but it soon fell foul of Stalin. Its members believed in portraying society as it really was, with all its faults, whereas Stalin wanted it portrayed as he would like it to be. In 1930 Stalin announced that nothing could be published which went against the party line or showed the Party in a poor light. When some RAPP members failed to respond to this clear warning, Stalin disbanded both RAPP and the new AUSW, replacing them with one organization – the Union of Soviet Writers, chaired by Maxim Gorky, whose works Stalin admired. Andrei Zhdanov emerged as the politician most involved in the arts; opening the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, he announced that their guiding principle must be 'the ideological remoulding and re-education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism'.

Among the most popular new works were Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (1934) and Mikhail Sholokov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*, which dealt with collectivization. There were other works of lesser quality, sometimes known as 'five-year plan' novels, in which the heroes were ordinary people who bravely achieved their targets in spite of all kinds of obstacles, like the train driver who overcame all the efforts of wreckers and saboteurs and repeatedly brought his train in on time. They were not great literature, but arguably they served a purpose – they were easily understood, they raised morale and they inspired people to greater efforts.

Writers who did not succeed in producing the right kind of socialist realism ran the risk of arrest. Stalin himself sometimes read novels in typescript and would add comments and suggest changes which the authors were expected to take note of. In the later 1930s many writers were arrested and kept in labour camps for long periods or even executed. Among the best-known victims were the poet Osip Mandelstam, who had written a poem criticizing Stalin; he was sent to a labour camp, where he died. Evgenia Ginsburg spent 18 years in prison and labour camps after being accused of organizing a writers' terrorist group. Some of the best writers, like the poet Anna Akhmatova and the novelist Boris Pasternak,

either stopped work altogether or kept their new work locked away. Pasternak's great novel *Dr Zhivago* was published abroad only after Stalin's death. Mikhail Bulgakov's wonderful novel *The Master and Margarita* lay unpublished for years until after Stalin's death. Soon after Khrushchev came to power in 1956 the authorities announced that at least 600 writers had perished in prisons or labour camps during Stalin's rule.

Theatre people also came under attack: a number of actors, actresses and ballet dancers were sent to labour camps. The most famous victim was the great experimental director Vsevolod Meyerhold. In 1938 his theatre in Moscow was closed down on the grounds that it was 'alien to Soviet art'; Meyerhold himself was arrested, tortured and later shot, and his wife, a well-known actress, was found stabbed to death in their flat.

Ironically, after all the obsession with 'socialist realism', after the first flush of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1930s, the regime decided to reinstate nineteenth-century classical Russian literature. Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev and Chekhov were back in fashion. The government had decided that after all, these were 'revolutionary democrats'.

(g) Art, architecture and music

Artists, sculptors and musicians were all expected to play their part in 'socialist realism'. Abstract art was rejected and paintings were expected to portray workers straining every muscle to fulfil their targets, scenes from the revolution or the civil war, or Revolutionary leaders. They were to be photographic in style and finely detailed. There was a steady flow of paintings of Lenin and Stalin, and worker scenes with titles like *The Steelworker* and *The Milkmaids*. Sculptors were limited to producing busts of Lenin and Stalin, and architecture deteriorated into the uninspiring and dull, with grandiose neoclassical façades and featureless tower blocks.

Music followed a similar pattern to literature. The committed communist members of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) condemned what they described as the 'modernism' of western music. This included not only the atonal 12-note music of the Austrians Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, but also jazz, music hall-style 'light' music, and even the foxtrot. However, in the mid-1930s the regime relaxed its attitude towards non-classical music, and jazz, dance and 'light' music were permitted.

The USSR had two outstanding classical composers who had achieved international reputations by the 1930s – Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich. Prokofiev had left Russia soon after the Revolution but decided to return in 1933. He was especially successful at producing music of high quality which could be readily appreciated by ordinary people – his ballet *Romeo and Juliet* and his musical story for children, *Peter and the Wolf*, were highly popular with audiences and the authorities. Shostakovich was not so successful: his first opera, *The Nose*, based on a short story by Gogol, was condemned and banned by RAPM (1930). His second opera, *Lady Macbeth ofMtsensk*, was well received by audiences and critics in 1934 and ran for over 80 performances in Leningrad and over 90 in Moscow. Unfortunately, in January 1936 Stalin himself went to a performance in Moscow and walked out before the end. Two days later a devastating article, thought to have been written by Stalin himself, appeared in *Pravda*\ the opera was dismissed as 'a cacophony, crude and vulgar' and Shostakovich's work was banned. Basically, Stalin thought it had no good tunes that you could hum on the way home. Badly shaken, Shostakovich expected to be arrested; for some reason he was spared, though he remained in official disgrace for some time. He was saved from a spell in the Gulag probably because Maxim Gorky, one of Stalin's favourites, defended him, pointing out that some of his music was much more tuneful than the opera.

After the *Lady Macbeth* incident, the American ambassador in Moscow noted that 'half the artists and musicians in Moscow are having nervous prostration, and the others

are trying to imagine how to write and compose in a manner to please Stalin'. Apparently Stalin, who was a great lover of ballet, liked music which was approachable, tuneful and inspiring, like that of the great nineteenth-century Russian composers Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Shostakovich redeemed himself with his *Fifth Symphony* (1937), a fine piece of music which also fulfilled the requirements of the regime.

(h) The cinema

Stalin, like Lenin, considered that film was probably the most important form of communication; he loved films and had a private cinema in the Kremlin and one in his *dacha*. He demanded that Soviet films should be 'intelligible to the millions', telling a simple but powerful story. In 1930 Boris Shumyatsky was given the job of modernizing the film industry; he aimed to make films which were genuinely entertaining as well as being full of 'socialist realism'. Unfortunately, he was hampered by the arrival of sound films – these were more expensive to make, and there was a language problem in a country where so many different languages were spoken. Another difficulty was the almost impossible demands of the regime, which wanted film-makers to incorporate so many different and sometimes contradictory themes into their work – proletarian values, classless Soviet nationalism, the problems of ordinary people, the heroic exploits of the revolutionaries and the glorious communist future.

In 1935 Shumyatsky went to Hollywood to look for new ideas; he decided that the USSR needed a Soviet equivalent of Hollywood and chose the Crimea as the best site. But the government refused to provide the necessary finance and the project never got off the ground. Stalin was not satisfied with Shumyatsky's progress, and in 1938 he was arrested and shot. In spite of all these problems, over 300 Soviet films were made between 1933 and 1940, some of which were of high quality. There was a huge increase in the number of cinemas during the same period – from about 7000 to around 30 000.

Not all of these films found favour with Stalin, who became so obsessed that he vetted many scripts himself. He had to be satisfied that they successfully put over the message that life in the USSR was better and happier in every way than anywhere else in the world. Sergei Eisenstein failed to repeat his great masterpieces of the 1920s – *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin* and *October* – until in 1938 he salvaged his reputation with his great patriotic film *Alexander Nevsky*. This told the story of the invasion of Russia by Teutonic knights in medieval times and their defeat. Given the international situation at the time, this hit exactly the right note with the censors; it gave a clear warning as to what the Germans could expect if they invaded Russia again.

17.5 STALIN'S FINAL YEARS, 1945–53

(a) The aftermath of the war

The Soviet victory in the Second World War was only achieved by enormous sacrifices of human life, far in excess of the losses of all the other participants put together. There were 6.2 million military personnel dead, 15 million wounded, and 4.4 million captured or missing. On top of that there were about 17 million civilian deaths, giving a total Soviet war dead not far short of 25 million. The areas occupied by the Germans were left in ruins; 25 million people were homeless. In effect, the entire modernization programme of the Five Year Plans had to be started all over again in the western parts of the country. Stalin saw the victory as the ultimate vindication of his entire system of government; it had passed

the sternest test imaginable – total war. As far as he was concerned, the Russian people now faced another challenge – the battle to rebuild the Soviet Union.

(b) Stalin's last battles

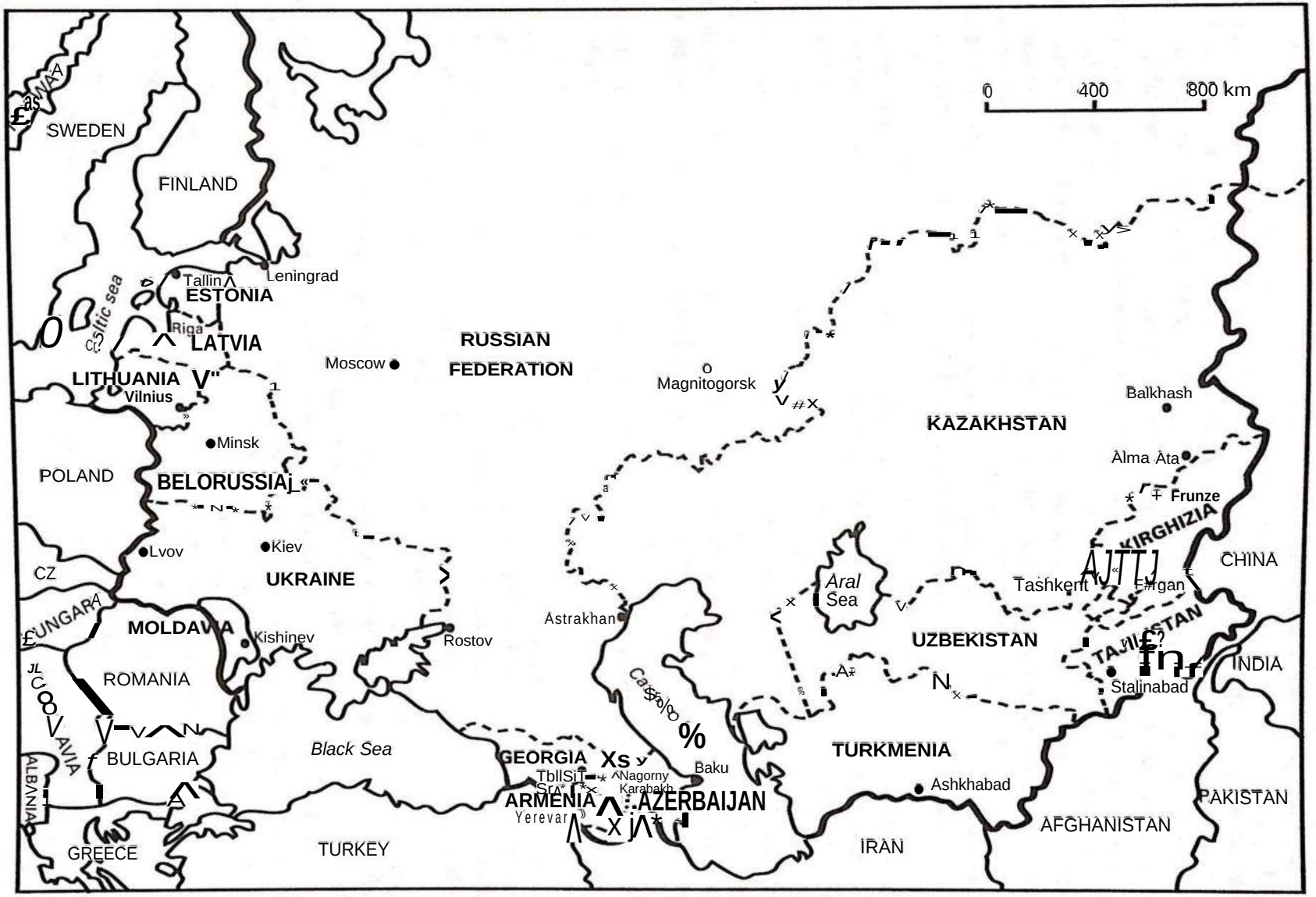
Any Soviet citizens who were expecting more freedom and a more relaxed way of life as a reward for their superhuman efforts during the war were quickly disillusioned. *Stalin was well aware of the growing unrest and the desire for radical change*. Peasants were disgusted with the tiny wages paid on the collectives and were beginning to take land back and farm it for themselves. Industrial workers were protesting about low wages and rising food prices. People in the newly acquired areas – the Baltic states and western Ukraine (see Map 17.1) – bitterly resented Soviet rule and resorted to armed resistance. Stalin was utterly ruthless: nationalist risings were crushed and about 300 000 people deported from western Ukraine. The population of the labour camps more than doubled to about 2.5 million. Peasants and industrial workers once again came under military-style discipline.

Stalin saw enemies everywhere. Soviet soldiers who had been captured by the Germans were seen as tainted, potential traitors. It seems beyond belief that 2.8 million Red Army soldiers, who had survived appalling treatment in Hitler's prison camps, returned to their homeland only to be arrested by the NKVD. Some were shot, some were sent to the Gulag and only about a third were allowed home. One of Stalin's motives for sending so many people to labour camps was to ensure a constant supply of cheap labour for coalmines and other projects. Another category of 'tainted' people were those who had come into Allied hands during the final months of the war. They were now suspect because they had seen that life in the west was materially better than in the USSR. About 3 million of them were sent to labour camps.

The task of rebuilding the country was tackled by the Fourth Five Year Plan (1946–50), which, if the official statistics are to be believed, succeeded in restoring industrial production to its 1940 levels. The outstanding achievement was considered to be the explosion in Kazakhstan, in August 1949, of the first Soviet atomic bomb. However, the great failure of the Plan was in agriculture: the 1946 harvest was less than that of 1945, resulting in famine, starvation and reports of cannibalism. Peasants were leaving the collectives in droves to try to find jobs in industry. Production of all agricultural commodities was down. Even in 1952 the grain harvest reached only three-quarters of the 1940 harvest. As Alec Nove commented: 'How could it be tolerated that a country capable of making an atomic bomb could not supply its citizens with eggs?'

Stalin also launched *the battle to re-establish control over the intelligentsia*, who, Stalin felt, had become too independent during the war years. Beginning in August 1946, Zhdanov, the Leningrad party boss, led the attack. Hundreds of writers were expelled from the union; all the leading composers were in disgrace and their music banned. The campaign continued into the early 1950s, though Zhdanov himself died of a heart attack in August 1948. After Zhdanov's death, Stalin carried out a purge of the Leningrad party organization, who were all arrested, found guilty of plotting to seize power, and executed.

The final act in the drama was the so-called Doctors' Plot. In November 1952 13 Moscow doctors, who had treated Stalin and other leaders at different times, were arrested and accused of conspiring to kill their eminent patients. Six of the doctors were Jewish and this was the signal for an outburst of anti-Semitism. By this time nobody felt safe. There is evidence that Stalin was working up to another major purge of leading figures in the party, with Molotov, Mikoyan and Beria on the list. Fortunately for them, Stalin died of a brain haemorrhage on 5 March 1953.



Map 17.1 The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics after 1945, showing the 15 republics

tried to co-operate with the invading Germans. Thousands died on the way, and thousands more perished when they were abandoned at their destinations without any accommodation. Stalin always made sure that other members of the Politburo signed death warrants as well as himself. There were huge numbers of people, from those at the top right down to interrogators, torturers, guards and executioners, who were willing to carry out the orders. Local party bosses – little Stalins – often initiated their own terrors from below. Alexander Yakovlev, the former Soviet ambassador to Canada and later a close colleague of Gorbachev and a Politburo member, recently published an account of the terror and violence which took place during the communist regime. He was once a committed Marxist, but the more he learned about the past, and the longer he experienced life at the top, the more disgusted he became at the corruption, lies and deceit at the heart of the system. Convinced that communism was not reformable, he played an important role, along with Gorbachev, in destroying the system from the inside. He estimates the number of victims of communism after 1917 at between 60 million and 70 million.

Some historians argue that Stalin was paranoid; psychologically unbalanced. Khruschehev seemed to think so; lie claimed that Stalin was a 'very distrustful man, sickly suspicious'. On the other hand Roy Medvedev believes that Stalin was perfectly sane, but coolly ruthless, one of the greatest criminals in human history, whose main motives were inordinate vanity and lust for power. Fifty years after his death, more information is available from recently opened Soviet archives, though it is clear that many vital records have been destroyed, probably deliberately. Revisionist historians like Arch Getty still maintain that Stalin had no overall plan for terror. Getty believes that the Terror developed out of the anxieties of the entire ruling elite: 'Their fears of losing control, even of losing power, led them into a series of steps to protect their position: building a unifying cult around Stalin.' So for Getty, Stalin was not the master criminal, he was just one among the rest of the elite taking the necessary measures to stay in power.

(d) Was Stalinism a continuation of Leninism?

The current trend among Russian historians is to demonize both Stalin and Lenin. Alexander Yakovlev condemns both of them and produces ample evidence of their crimes: Stalin simply carried on from Lenin. However, it is important to compare their policies in more detail. Leninism was a complex mixture of a basic ideology, a particular style of leadership and government and a programme of policies:

- Lenin's ideology and political style were based on the Marxist concept of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. However, Lenin also believed that a tightly disciplined party was needed to guide the proletariat after the successful revolution. Under the supervision of the Party, the people would run their own affairs working through the soviets. This was seen as the highest form of democracy: since the Party and the soviets were mainly made up of members of the proletariat, they would know what was best for the people. Lenin also believed that this could only survive and work in Russia if it was accompanied by revolutions in some of the more advanced countries, such as Germany. Towards the end of his life, however, Lenin suggested that NEP would improve people's lives so much that 'permanent revolution' would not be necessary. This brought him closer to Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country'. Dmitri Volkogonov stresses that both Lenin and Stalin were violent and brutal in their methods, Lenin during the Civil War and Stalin's treatment of the kulaks and the 'Great Terror' of the 1930s.
- Nevertheless, there were clear differences between the two: Inna Pavlova maintains that it was only under Stalin that the party apparatus, the bureaucracy,

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QUESTIONS

1 How important were the divisions among his opponents in explaining Stalin's rise to supreme power during the 1920s?
2 How accurate is it to talk about the 'Stalin Revolution' in economic and political affairs in the USSR during the period 1928 to 1941?
3 To what extent did the lives of ordinary people in the USSR improve or worsen as a result of Stalin's policies during the period 1928 to 1941?
4 'Agriculture was always the basic weakness of the Soviet economy.' Assess the validity to this view of the Soviet economy during the Stalin years.
5 'Stalin's power during the 1930s was based almost entirely on terror.' How far would you agree with this view?
6 How effective were the Five Year Plans in creating a successful economy in the USSR up to 1941?
7 How far would you agree that Stalinism was just a continuation of Leninism?

IV There is a document question about Stalin, the *kulaks* and collectivization on the website.