

People in World History Activity 26

Profile 1

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953)

The guilt of Stalin and his immediate entourage . . . for the mass repressions and lawlessness they committed is enormous and unforgivable.

Mikhail Gorbachev in a 1987 speech on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution

Joseph Stalin rose from a life of poverty to become the dictator of the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1953. A brutal ruler, he systematically imprisoned or killed anyone who opposed his decisions. As a result, he was feared and hated around the world. Nonetheless, Stalin helped transform the Soviet Union from a developing country into an industrial and military giant.

When Stalin was 19 years old, he joined a secret group of Marxist revolutionaries. Social and economic conditions were very bad in Russia. Farmers were starving; factory workers could not earn enough to live. Czar Nicholas restricted education, forbade student groups, and censored newspapers.

Using various false names, Stalin helped organize strikes and set up a secret press. He was arrested and imprisoned many times during these years. In 1904, he joined the Bolsheviks, a wing of the Russian Marxist movement. By 1912 Stalin was one of their inner group of leaders.

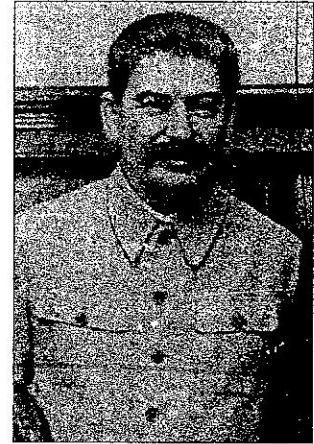
World War I was a very harsh time for Russia. Food shortages led to riots and strikes. On March 15, 1917, the czar was forced from his throne. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin took charge. In November 1917, the

Bolsheviks seized control of the government. During the civil war that followed, Stalin was appointed to the Politburo, the policy-making committee of the Russian Communist Party.

From this position of power, he plotted to become dictator. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin continued to maneuver into power, destroying his rivals along the way. Five years later, Stalin became dictator of the USSR, rejecting many of Lenin's policies.

In 1929 Stalin transferred control of all farms to the government. Farmers who resisted collectivization were exiled or killed—more than a million in all. In the 1930s, Stalin purged millions more—anyone who opposed him. During World War II, he first allied Russia with Germany, but in 1943, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin joined forces with the Allies.

After the war, Stalin cut off all contact with non-Communist countries. Even after his death, many Communist countries ruled as he had done—a style of government known as Stalinism. Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, initiated a de-Stalinization program from 1956 to 1964 to reverse many of Stalin's policies.



REVIEWING THE PROFILE

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Why did Stalin become a Marxist?
2. Why did Stalin join forces with the Allies during World War II?
3. **Critical Thinking** Evaluating Information. What words could you use to describe Stalin and his type of leadership?

[illegible]