



RUSSIA AT THE CROSSROADS

As Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin's death ended the greatest dictatorship ever known, one that ruled the destinies of nearly 800 million subjects, the world wondered whether any one man, or group of men, could hold together the vast Red empire that now circled half the globe.

A ruthless organizer with strength, guile and limitless patience inherited from his peasant background, Stalin took up the reins of a war-exhausted agrarian nation in the mid 1920's. He forged it into a super police state, the second strongest industrial power on earth. He controlled it completely.

The legacy of power came to Stalin from Nikolai Lenin, first Red dictator, who had returned to Russia during World War I, after the Czar was overthrown. Lenin's Bolsheviks (later called Communists), a tight-knit minority, made capital from chaos. Calling for "peace and bread," they infiltrated the army and factories, led a revolution that ended parliamentary rule in Russia.

The Lenin years (1917-24) saw civil war, mass murder of old leaders, and economic ruin. Closely aided by Old Bolshevik Leon Trotsky and ambitious organizer Joseph Stalin, Lenin set Russia's sights for world dominion, zigzagging whenever strength or weakness dictated. This pattern, and a myth of godliness, outlined the path for Stalin.



The Struggle for Power

Lenin died in 1924, and Trotsky expected to succeed him. But he underestimated old rival Stalin who, as general secretary of the party, had built a machine loyal to him alone. In a triumvirate, Stalin took charge, declared open warfare against Trotsky. Within three years, the party, led by Stalin, expelled Trotsky and soon liquidated the other two members of the triumvirate. (Trotsky was murdered in Mexico in 1940.)

Rid of his greatest enemies, Stalin (*con't on p. 9*)

... STALIN RULED THE RULERS

now unleashed the fastest, harshest social and economic upheaval the world had ever seen. His aim: to build a strong, modern Communist state that could dominate the globe. His Five-Year Plans sacrificed living standards to heavy industry. He forced 80 million peasants into giant collective farms for more efficiency, shot or starved 4 million of them.

Always in complete control of the party and government, he made certain that the rulers controlled the ruled. The secret police, under the feared Lavrenti Beria, grew to 250,000 agents who also managed the empire's atomic research and its 20 million slave laborers.

The Red Army, which Stalin directed and expanded, was closely supervised. To undercut opposition at top levels, the regime eliminated thousands of officers and old Bolsheviks in the 1936-8 purges. (Chief prosecutor Andrei Vishinsky, Stalin's last foreign minister, now has felt the axe himself, been demoted to chief U.N. delegate.)

Stalin kept the Communist party unrivalled—and small (6.3 million, 3% of the population). Its intricate organization—from cells up to the Central Committee—



Stalin



Trotsky



Lenin

... AND WELDED AN EMPIRE

had only the powers he willed it. The organs of government, which paralleled the party's setup, were directed by Communists. Atop both was Stalin, head of the party's Presidium (the old Politburo) and the government's Council of Ministers, or cabinet. More than mere window-dressing, the complex system encouraged what the Kremlin wanted—enthusiasm, new blood, but no rivalry.

Stalin always insisted on the last word in all realms of thought. An almost-illiterate Russia learned to read, but most books were propaganda. Religion was again tolerated, but all sects were controlled by the Kremlin and helped build the Stalin myth. He surpassed the Czars in nationalism and deification. "Oh, Great Stalin," ran one ode; "Oh, leader of the people; You who created man, You who populated the earth."

Foreign policies under Stalin swung between sword-rattling and pacifism but the ultimate goal of world domination remained. Like Lenin, he used the fifth columns of foreign Communist parties. Fearing Adolf Hitler, he and his Western Communists urged collective security of the "democratic" states. Then, in 1939, he joined with Germany, sparked the start of World War II. Hitler's strike at Russia, in 1941, sent Stalin into a Western alliance—after he'd swallowed half of Poland, all the Baltic republics, parts of Finland and Rumania.

When his organizing genius, his Red Army and strong Lend-Lease aid brought victory, Stalin ruled from the Sea of Japan to Germany's Elbe River, and soon won China as an ally through his disciple, Mao Tse-tung. The Cold War was his final turn. But when he died, he had yet to ruin his foreign enemies or consolidate his empire.

Whether successor Malenkov, or heirs Molotov, Beria, Bulganin or Kaganovich could control Stalin's intricate network of power, replace him as symbols and quash internecine warfare remained a mystery as deep as the mystery called Russia. The world may yet see another Stalin-Trotsky style battle for survival.



Sovfoto.

Malenkov, Beria, Molotov and Stalin at 1946 funeral of Pres. Kalinin.

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS: Area, 8,524,750 sq. mi.; pop., 215 million; world's second largest steel producer; 56% agricultural (U. S., 15%).

Production (in millions)

	U.S.S.R.	U.S.
Steel (met. tons)	25	95.5
Petroleum (met. tons)	47	307.5
Electricity (kw. hrs.)	117	482.3
Coal (met. tons)	300	523.0

SATELLITES (Albania, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, E. Germany, Hungary, N. Korea, Poland, Rumania): Area, 4,202,300 sq. mi.; pop., 560 million.

ARMED FORCES of U.S.S.R. and satellites — 9-11 million men; of the West—8-9 million men.

Quick

Vol. 8, No. 11

MARCH 16, 1953

p. 6

OldMagazineArticles.com