

# Lenin, Stalin, and Communist Russia, 1921 - 1939

## Vladimir Lenin and the New Economic Policy

- Widespread famine, a deteriorating economy, and increasing unrest all plagued Russia following the civil war.
- In March 1921, Lenin launched the New Economic Policy.
  - Lenin pragmatically realized that he needed to make a tactical retreat.
  - The policy called for a temporary compromise with capitalism.
    - Small businesses were denationalized, and peasants were allowed to establish free markets in agriculture products.
    - The Communist Party still maintained control of large industries such as oil and steel.
- The New Economic Policy successfully revived the Russian economy. By 1928, the country's farms and factories produced as much as they had before World War I.

## Joseph Stalin versus Leon Trotsky

- Lenin's death in 1924 created a power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin.
- As a charismatic leader since 1905, Trotsky was second only to Lenin in fame.
  - Trotsky believed that Russia should support communist revolutions around the world.
- In contrast, Stalin was a quiet man who preferred to work behind the scenes. As general secretary of the Communist Party, Stalin placed his supporters in key positions.
  - Stalin argued that communism should first gain a firm hold in Russia before supporting a global revolution.
- Stalin proved to be cunning and ruthless. He successfully expelled Trotsky from the Communist Party. By 1927, Stalin stood alone as the Soviet Union's undisputed leader.



'We kolkhoz workers call for the liquidation of the kulaks as a class'  
**An anti-kulak demonstration on a collective farm in 1930.**

## The Five-Year Plans

- In 1928, Stalin launched a series of five-year plans designated to transform the Soviet Union's economic and social structure. The plans included the following goals:
  1. End the New Economic policy
  2. Create a socialist command economy in which government makes all economic decisions
  3. Promote the rapid development of heavy industries
  4. Collectivize agriculture
- Stalin's commitment to a program of massive, large-scale industrialism produced results.
  1. By 1940, the Soviet Union was a major industrial power, trailing only the United States and Germany.
- Stalin's campaign to collectivize agriculture was less successful.
  1. Conservative Russian peasants opposed surrendering their land and joining a collective farm.
    - Stalin denounced resisting peasants as **kulaks** and ordered party officials to "liquidate them as a class."
    - **Kulaks** and other peasants were executed, starved, and deported to forced labor camps.



"Oust kulaks from kolkhozes!"

## The Great Terror (1934 - 1938)

- Stalin was a totalitarian dictator who was more powerful than the most autocratic tsar.
- During the mid-1930s, Stalin launched a program of state-sponsored terror that began with show trial to eliminate Old Bolsheviks.
  - The Great Terror expanded to include intellectuals, army officials, party members, and ordinary citizens
- Stalin's "politics of fear" included the use of secret police and purges of political rivals.
  - At least 8 million people were arrested.
    - Many innocent people died in forced labor camps called **gulags**.