

SAMPLE PAGES ONLY

**RUSSIA ^{AND} THE USSR
1917-41**

Jonathon Dallimore
and Lani Blackman

**These pages are not sequential and represent a small sample of
the features included in this work.**

SAMPLE PAGES ONLY



Russia and the USSR, 1917- 41

ISBN: 978 0 85854 389 8

© HTANSW, 2020

First published 2020

Published by the History Teachers' Association of NSW Inc.

PO Box 219

ANNANDALE NSW 2038

ph: (02) 9518 4940

email: htansw@gmail.com

website: htansw.asn.au

Cover design: Dana Eager, twiceaseager.com

Book design: Hannah Angus

This book makes some use of images and source material. Every care has been taken to acknowledge the original source and seek permission for republication where required. HTANSW apologises for any oversight and will make redress where required.

CONTENTS

SAMPLE PAGES ONLY

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Engaging with the USSR, 1917 – 41.....	9
Chapter 2: Marxism and Leninism	14
Chapter 3: The Bolshevik Consolidation of Power, 1917 – 24	31
Chapter 4: The Impact of the Bolshevik Consolidation of Power ...	59
Chapter 5: Stalin’s Rise to Power, 1922 – 30	79
Chapter 6: Transforming the Soviet Economy, 1928 – 41.....	112
Chapter 7: Transforming the Soviet Political Order, 1928 – 41	142
Chapter 8: Transforming Soviet Society and Culture, 1928 – 41 ...	184
Chapter 9: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917 – 41.....	216
Chapter 10: Stalinism as Totalitarianism?.....	251
Appendix 1: Sample Essays	261
Appendix 2: Glossary	275
Appendix 3: Key individuals and groups.....	279

The three major transformations, 1928 – 41

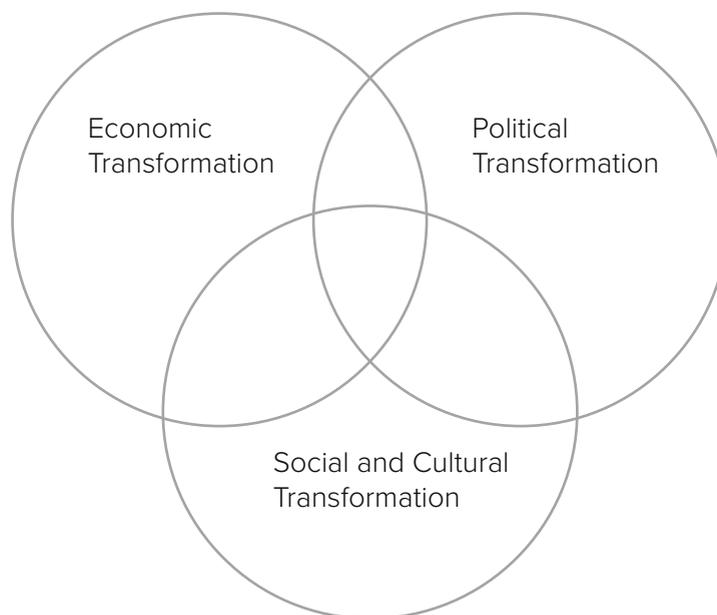
One of the central aspects of the topic is Stalin's 'revolution from above'. This began in 1928 while Stalin was emerging victorious from the power struggle following Lenin's death in 1924. This 'second revolution' (as some historians call it) dramatically changed many features of the Soviet Union and the syllabus requires you to explore three key aspects of this: the economic, political and social-cultural transformations.

What is a 'transformation'?

In the context of this topic, the term 'transformation' refers to broad and fundamental changes that took place in the USSR under Stalin's leadership. It is important not to see this concept uncritically. For example, your analysis might lead you to the conclusion that there were limits to some of the transformations taking place in this period. You may also come to the conclusion that some transformations were more complete than others.

As you explore these three transformations, it is important that they are seen as complementary or overlapping aspects of Stalin's broader aims to force the Soviet Union into modernity and prepare it for a major war. In other words, the economic, political and social-cultural changes in the USSR were linked in important ways and it is difficult to completely separate each transformation from the others. For example, if you are exploring the effects of the economic policy of collectivisation, it is impossible to ignore the social changes that this brought about, such as mass urbanisation (movement from the villages to the towns and cities). Similarly, the widespread instability caused by Stalin's economic policies inspired changes to important political aspects of the USSR, including a greater reliance on labour camps (gulags) and state security forces such as the secret police. So, although each of the three transformations is covered separately in this book, you should notice a range of connections between them.

Diagram B: The three interrelated transformations of Stalinism, 1928 – 41



2

Marxism and Leninism

SAMPLE PAGES ONLY

Key questions

- ▶ What is communism?
- ▶ What is Marxism?
- ▶ How did communism and Marxism evolve in the Russian Empire during the 19th century?
- ▶ How did Vladimir Lenin adapt Marxism in the early 20th century?
- ▶ What were the key ideas of Lenin and the Bolsheviks by 1917?



The broad ideas that underpinned the Russian Revolution that began in 1917 were a form of Marxism. These ideas were largely developed by Vladimir Lenin and built into a radical plan for revolution by late 1917. To understand much of what took place in Russia and the USSR from October 1917, it is crucial to understand Bolshevik ideology.

Vladimir Lenin

Source: Jim Pruitt/Shutterstock

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Lenin and the Bolshevik Party provided a unique and very powerful set of answers to these kinds of questions. Historians have, however, found it difficult to easily summarise the exact nature of Lenin's ideas for various reasons.

- A very large volume of Lenin's speeches and writings survived his death in 1924 but Lenin never recorded a major summary or synthesis of his work.
- Making this issue worse is the fact that Lenin seems to have often changed his thinking on many issues over the decades in which he wrote.
- The historian Richard Pipes argues that Lenin was primarily a 'tactician' and that this led him to change his ideas as circumstances evolved.² These developments make it difficult to know exactly what Lenin's 'real' ideas were.



BIOGRAPHY

Vladimir Lenin (1870 – 1924)

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Vladimir Lenin) was born in April 1870 in Simbirsk to relatively well-educated parents. His brother Alexander became politically active, eventually joining the Narodnaya Volya movement. Alexander was arrested and executed by hanging in 1887 for his alleged involvement in a plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. Many historians see this as an important turning point in the young Lenin's life.

Lenin was intelligent and ultimately studied law around the same time as he began to read Marxist literature. He was expelled from university for his role in a major student protest in 1887 but continued to develop a revolutionary outlook and became inspired by the works of Marx, Engels and Plekhanov. In 1893 he moved to St. Petersburg and began practicing law and associating more closely with revolutionary political groups.

In 1897, Lenin was arrested and exiled for his political activity, married fellow revolutionary Nadezhda Krupskaya and spent some

time in Britain, Germany and Western Europe developing his political thought. Soon after Lenin joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). He rose to prominence through political activity and his involvement in writing for and editing the radical journal *Iskra* ('the spark'). In 1903 he began to lead a more radical faction of the RSDLP called the Bolsheviks and continued to write important political works. In 1912 the Bolsheviks permanently split from the Mensheviks and Lenin continued to push the Bolsheviks in an ever more radical direction, especially after the Great War broke out in 1914.

After the successful October coup, which brought the Bolsheviks to power in 1917, Lenin was a key influence on the development of the early Soviet state. He was linked with most of the new government's key decisions and policies. Lenin died in January 1924 without explicitly naming a successor or a procedure for replacing him in his dominant Party role.

² Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996, p. 1

The New Economic Policy (NEP)

Although Sovnarkom emerged victorious from the Civil War, it was in a fragile position. Their key opponents had been eliminated and by 1921 much of the former tsarist empire had been reconquered. Nevertheless, the battle to consolidate power was far from over. Not only did they have to overcome several major rebellions in the Russian heartland in 1921, such as those in Kronstadt and Tambov, there were other problems too.

- Soviet citizens were exhausted by 1921. They had essentially been at war since 1914 making nearly seven years of constant conflict. Millions had died from war and famine and others had fled to Europe and the United States to escape the chaos.
- The Communist Party had not experienced a dramatic increase in popularity even though the number of members increased during the Civil War from less than 100,000 to 732,521 in 1921.
- Unrest in the Russian 'borderlands', which had begun to escalate during the First World War, also continued. Uprisings among the nationalities ruled by Sovnarkom were common and some of the most serious were repressed after the Russian republic began to reconquer former imperial territories from April 1920 (see chapter 4).

Economic breakdown

An equally concerning problem confronting Sovnarkom by the end of 1920 was the economic breakdown as a result of war and the collapse of the tsarist regime. Major trouble was evident in almost every aspect of the economic system.

- The industrial sector was in ruins. In 1920, only 9 million tons of coal were produced, down from 29 million tons in 1913 (the year before the First World War broke out). Iron ore production had collapsed from 9.2 million tons in 1913 to just 100,000 tons by 1921. In 1923 the entire Russian economy could still only produce a total of 100 cars and 11 tractors. Even the size of the Russian proletariat had shrunk from 3.6 million workers in 1917 to 1.5 million in 1920 and those who remained became agitated by Sovnarkom's treatment. There were, for example, major strikes in Moscow and Petrograd during 1920 and 1921.
- The agricultural economy was in a similar state. In 1921, the peasants only sowed about 50% of the agricultural land they had done in 1913. Massive famine throughout 1921 and 1922 killed about five million people and further disaster was only prevented by the assistance of international government aid and charities. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that by 1921, the Russian countryside was in a state of chaos.

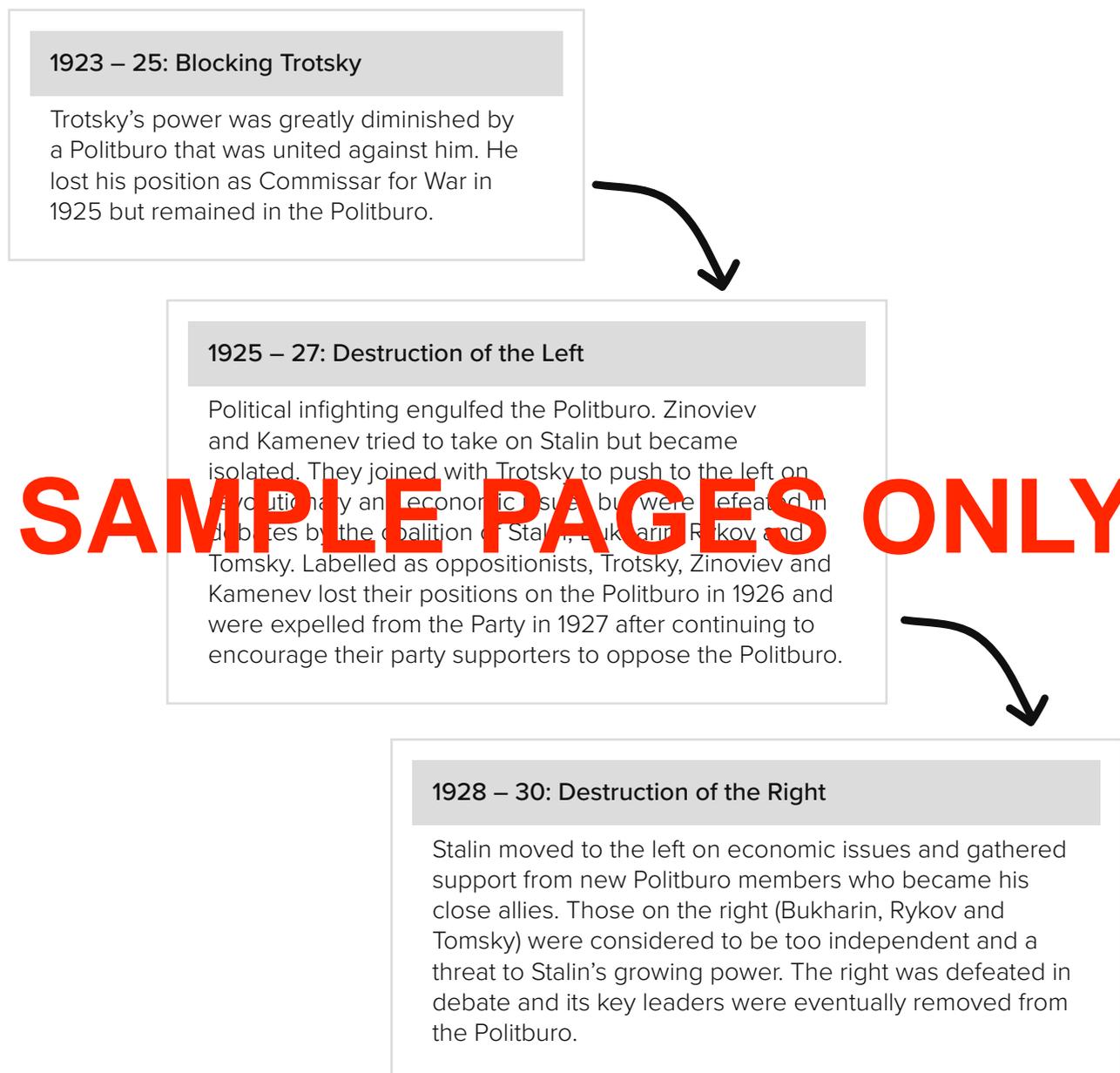
“

Iron ore production had collapsed from 9.2 million tons in 1913 to just 100,000 tons by 1921. In 1923 the entire Russian economy could still only produce a total of 100 cars and 11 tractors. The size of the proletariat had shrunk from 3.6 million workers in 1917 to 1.5 million in 1920.

2. Stalin's path to power

The developments discussed so far in this chapter form the broad context and background in which Stalin's rise to power took place. They highlight some of the key issues that divided the most prominent Party leaders as they tried to steer the USSR towards socialism after Lenin's death. Within this context, Stalin's rise to power took place in three overlapping stages between 1923 and 1930. These are summarised briefly in Diagram 5.3.

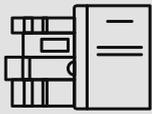
Diagram 5.3: A brief summary of Stalin's Path to Power



A growing industrial and technical workforce

One important outcome of industrialisation from the government's point of view was the increase in industrial and technical workers across the USSR. This was a long-term aim of the Communist Party, which claimed to be a party representing workers and leading the Soviet Union towards a modern, industrial future.

- Between 1926 and 1939, the total urban population in the USSR doubled.
- Between the years 1928 and 1936, the industrial workforce also doubled in size. The number of heavy industrial workers in the USSR increased from 2.5 million in 1928 to 5.6 million in 1935. In Moscow alone, the overall number of industrial labourers increased from 186,500 to 614,000 between 1928 and 1939.
- Many of these workers were also young. In 1933, for example, 41% of all industrial workers were no older than 22 years of age.
- In 1924, industrial workers represented about 10% of the total Soviet workforce. By 1939, this had increased to about 34%. In the same period, the number of 'white collar' workers (managers, engineers and other professionals) rose from 4.5% of the working population to about 16%. Between 1928 and 1940, the number of engineers in the USSR increased from 47,000 to 900,000.



HISTORIAN PROFILE

Wendy Goldman: Soviet women at work

In her book *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (2002), Wendy Goldman has argued that the participation of women in the workforce was crucial to the growth of Soviet industry. The government actively recruited women during the first *piataletka*, but Goldman also shows that women were often segregated from men in the workforce and given the

lowest paid positions – they were rarely treated as equals. In addition, after 1935 the government made it more difficult for women to enter the industrial workforce, but by this stage the already made up a significant portion of Soviet workers and in some sectors such as textiles they even made up a majority.

All of this opened up some promising opportunities to citizens who managed to be promoted within the growing industrial system.

- Under the Romanov tsars it was almost impossible for a poor peasant to work their way out of rural poverty. In the new Soviet economy of the 1930s, many peasants left the countryside, obtained jobs in industry and were promoted through the system. Many were rewarded in the process with decent housing, food and educational opportunities for their children. Although this may not have been the experience of a majority in the new industrial workforce, there were certainly many Soviet citizens who benefited from the 'social mobility' created by the expanding industrial economy.
- The class of industrial elites were part of the *vidvizhentsy* ('those brought forward'). They were those who had worked their way into managerial positions in factories or in the growing number of bureaucratic organisations overseeing the planned economy. Many became loyal supporters of the Stalin regime because they were the few who most clearly benefited from the dramatic changes taking place.

Education

Stalinism produced major achievements in the Soviet education system during the 1930s. The education system was expanded and more people moved through school, colleges and universities. Not only was education seen as a right of the working classes, it was also a necessary requirement if the USSR was to become a more modern and technical society as Marxism envisaged.

- Funding for education in the USSR increased by 400% between 1932 and 1937.
- By the end of the decade, there were 199,000 schools in the USSR and the number of school children increased from 12 million in 1928 to 31 million by 1940. Children were required to attend school for seven years, but the government hoped they would complete ten.
- As the system expanded a wider range of education providers developed. These included regular academic schools and trade schools. There were also technical colleges which had one million enrolments in 1939 – 40, and 14 million adults were enrolled in literacy classes by 1932.
- With better basic education, literacy rates in the USSR reached 94% in urban populations and 86% in rural areas (for people between the ages of 9 and 49) by the end of the decade.
- After the brief and limited war with Japan in 1939, the government also introduced compulsory military training for students in years 5 – 10.



Funding for education in the USSR increased by 400% between 1932 and 1937. The number of school children increased from 12 million in 1928 to 31 million by 1940.

Problems and continuities in Soviet education policy

This rapid expansion of the education system also created many challenges for Soviet leaders. Infrastructure such as school buildings was easier and quicker to construct than a well-ordered and professional education system.

- Teachers often had only a simple education and were then rushed through training that did not thoroughly prepare them for managing children or their learning.
- Most schools suffered from shortages which could include anything from pencils to textbooks to desks.
- Many students fell behind in their learning and failed to complete the required number of years. For some, their schooling was disrupted by major crises such as the famine, when thousands of students left school to find work or beg.
- During the Terror of the late 1930s, history textbooks also had to be quickly revised to keep up with the growing number of former Communist Party ‘heroes’ who were accused of sabotage and anti-Soviet activity. Teachers who felt very anxious during periods such as these, for which their activities could be reported to the NKVD by colleagues, students or parents.

Video footage of Soviet schools in 1933

<https://bit.ly/2yt414u>



SAMPLE PAGES ONLY