



The Soviet Union

MAIN IDEA

After World War II, the Soviet Union was the most powerful country in Europe, but life for most Soviet citizens was difficult.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Russia, the former Soviet Union, remains powerful and is currently experiencing great change.

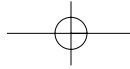
TERMS & NAMES

Iron Curtain
puppet government
one-party system
Joseph Stalin
collective farm
Warsaw Pact
Cold War



East Against West

After World War II, political differences divided the Soviet-controlled countries of Eastern Europe from those of Western Europe. These differences gave rise to an invisible wall known as the **Iron Curtain**. While there was no actual curtain, people of the East were restricted from traveling outside of their countries. Westerners who wished to visit the East also faced restrictions.



The Strongest Nation in Europe The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR, was the official name of the Soviet Union. It included 15 republics, of which Russia was the largest. The Soviet Union entered World War II in 1941, when Germany invaded its borders. German troops destroyed much of the western Soviet Union and killed millions of people. This invasion brought the Soviet Union close to collapse. However, with the defeat of Germany, the Soviet Union rose to become the strongest nation in Europe.



Region • The hammer and sickle became the symbol of Soviet communism. The tools represent the unity of the peasants (sickle) with the workers (hammer). ▲

Vocabulary

establish:
set up; create

Communism After World War II, the Soviet Union established Communist governments in Eastern Europe. The Soviets made sure—either by politics or by force—that these new Eastern European governments were loyal to the Soviet Union.

Soviet Control of Eastern Europe The Soviet Union controlled the countries of Eastern Europe through puppet governments. A **puppet government** is one that does what it is told by an outside force. In this case, the Eastern European governments followed orders from Soviet leaders in Moscow.

Most Eastern Europeans did have the chance to vote, but they had only one political party to choose from: the Communist Party. All other parties were outlawed. This meant that there was only one candidate to choose from for each government position. This is an example of a **one-party system**. Soviet citizens could not complain about the government. In fact, they could be jailed for expressing any view that the Soviet leaders did not like.

Reading Social Studies

A. Making Inferences
How do you think the Soviet Union enforced a one-party system in Eastern Europe?



Movement • The government-controlled factories in the Soviet Union did not produce enough of certain items. When goods that were often in short supply—such as bread and shoes—finally became available, people had to wait in long lines to buy them. ◀



Region • Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union from 1928 to 1953. ▲

Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin (STAH•lin) (1879–1953) ruled the Soviet Union during World War II. Stalin took power after the death of Vladimir Lenin. Lenin was a Communist leader who had helped overthrow the czar and ruled the Soviet Union from 1917 until his death in 1924. The name Stalin is related to the Russian word for “steel.” Stalin was greatly feared, and his rule was indeed as tough as steel. He controlled the government until his death.

The Five-Year Plans Under Stalin, the government controlled every aspect of Soviet life. Stalin hoped to strengthen the country with his five-year plans, which were sets of economic goals. For example, Stalin ordered many new factories to be built. The Soviet government decided where and what types of factories to build, how many goods to produce, and how to distribute them. These decisions were based on the Communist theory that this would benefit the most people.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Region** • Which countries are behind the Iron Curtain but not in the Soviet Union?
- Location** • What is the westernmost country in the Warsaw Pact?

Region • The Soviet government managed the factories while citizens provided the actual labor. ◀



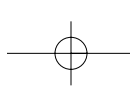
The Iron Curtain and the Warsaw Pact Nations, 1955



Soviet Agriculture Stalin also hoped to strengthen the Soviet Union by controlling the country's agriculture. During the 1930s, peasants were forced to move to collective farms. A **collective farm** was government-owned and employed large numbers of workers. All the crops produced by the collective farms were distributed by the government. Sometimes farm workers did not receive enough food to feed themselves and their families.

Region • Similar to urban factory workers, Russian peasants labored on government-controlled collective farms. ▼





The Secret Police Stalin used his secret police to get rid of citizens he did not trust. The secret police arrested those who did not support the Soviet government. Suspects were transported to slave-labor camps in Siberia. Millions of men and women were sent to this remote and bitterly cold region of northeastern Russia. Many never returned home.

The Cold War

From 1941 to 1945, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union shared a goal: to defeat the Axis Powers. They became allies to make that happen. Once the war ended, however, these countries no longer had a common enemy—and had little reason to work together. Most Western European countries were constitutional monarchies or democracies, and most Eastern European countries had Communist, largely Soviet-controlled, governments.



Soviet Film The Russian director Sergey Eisenstein (EYE•zen•stine) (1898–1948), bottom right, made only six movies, but they are among the most important works in film history. The silent film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), whose poster is to the right, is one of Eisenstein's most famous. It is about a mutiny at sea. The director's use of close-ups and his method of combining short scenes changed the way films were made all over the world.

Just before the start of World War II, Eisenstein made the film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). It tells the story of a historic battle that the Russians won against German-speaking invaders in the 1200s. This film became very popular during World War II, which it seemed to foreshadow.



THINKING CRITICALLY



1. Clarifying

What influenced Eisenstein to direct war films?

2. Synthesizing

What did Eisenstein want to show about the relationship between Russians and Germans?



Region • The Brandenburg Gate was a part of the Berlin Wall that separated East Berlin from West Berlin. ◀

Reading Social Studies

B. Comparing

Compare the Soviet Union's fears in the Cold War with those of the United States and Western Europe.

The members of NATO and the nations in the **Warsaw Pact**—the alliance of Eastern European countries behind the Iron Curtain—refused to trade or cooperate with each other. The countries never actually fought, so this period of political noncooperation is called the **Cold War**. Both sides in the Cold War were hesitant to start a war that would involve the use of newly developed nuclear weapons, which could cause destruction on a global scale.

The United States and Western Europe feared that the Soviet Union would influence other countries to become Communist. At the same time, the Soviet Union wanted to protect itself against invasion. This led the countries on either side of the Iron Curtain to view and treat each other as possible threats. The tense international situation caused by the Cold War would continue for almost 40 years.

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) Iron Curtain (b) puppet government (c) one-party system (d) Joseph Stalin
(e) collective farm (f) Warsaw Pact (g) Cold War

Taking Notes

2. Use a chart like this one to describe three elements of Joseph Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union.

| Five-Year Plans | Agriculture | Secret Police |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
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Main Ideas

3. (a) What happened to the Soviet Union during World War II?
(b) How did the governments of most Western and Eastern European countries differ?
(c) How did Joseph Stalin rule the Soviet Union?

Critical Thinking

4. Analyzing Motives

Why do you think the Soviet Union wanted to control the countries of Eastern Europe?

Think About

- ♦ the events of World War II
- ♦ the location of the Eastern European countries
- ♦ the governments of the Soviet Union and Western Europe

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the information about the secret police. Write a dramatic **scene** in which the main character is sent to a labor camp in Siberia.