

## From Stalin to Khrushchev

Although the Soviet Union experienced more military and civilian casualties during World War II than any other nation, the communist leaders emerged from the conflict victorious—in control of a vast empire which included Eastern Europe and much of the Balkan states, plus land gained from Japan in the Far East. Joseph Stalin then presided over one of the world's two superpowers.

But the Soviet Union still had much to recover from as World War II ended. At least 20 million Soviet citizens had lost their lives in the war and major cities such as Leningrad and Kiev had been nearly destroyed. Soviet steel production had been reduced to half of its prewar level and farming production was down by 40 percent. Many of the citizens of the Soviet Union were living as peasants in poverty and misery.

Yet the Soviet Union achieved a remarkable come back. Much of this recovery was a result of the hardships and sacrifices made by the Soviet people. Many worked with no pay—especially women—who comprised 40 percent of the manual labor force, as they mass produced goods for export.

New construction flourished, replacing damaged bridges, roads, buildings, and canals. By 1947, the Russian industrial level was up to its 1939 capacity and, by 1950, it had grown another 40 percent. Factories were built or rebuilt, new power plants constructed, and oil fields were opened in Siberia and Soviet Central Asia.

Little of this economic recovery yielded more consumer goods for the people of the Soviet Union. Much was invested in the development of Soviet technology, especially military. Russia put much of its economic energy into creating more and more powerful rockets and thermonuclear weapons. The first Russian atomic bomb was tested in 1949, and, in 1955, the first Russian hydrogen bomb was tested.

The Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, was the driving force behind Soviet economic recovery. Stalin established economic and political reforms which he forced on the Soviet people. During the years following World War II, Stalin consolidated his power, killing or imprisoning anyone he suspected of disloyalty. By the late 1940s, Siberian concentration camps were home to an estimated nine million Soviet

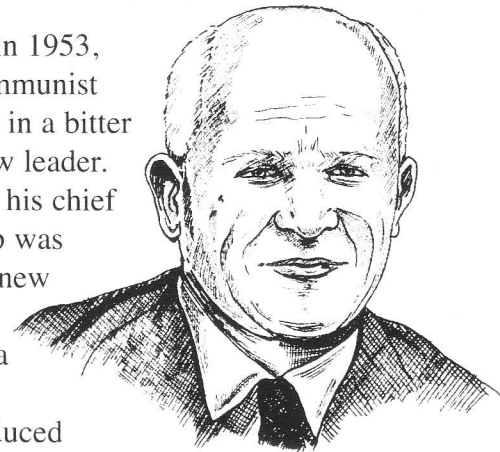
citizens.

Stalin died in 1953, leaving the Communist Party to engage in a bitter rivalry for a new leader. After removing his chief rival, leadership was claimed by the new party general secretary, Nikita Khrushchev.

Khrushchev reduced tensions with the West and improved the Soviet standard of

living. He sought greater growth for the Soviet economy by eliminating much government control, abolishing dozens of inefficient bureaucracies.

Yet many of Khrushchev's plans did not improve the Soviet economy. Khrushchev's "streamlining" of the Soviet government alienated many party officials. The industrial growth rate of the Soviet Union fell from a high of 13 percent in 1953 to 7.5 in 1964, his last year in office. Further, Khrushchev's attempts to curb some of Stalin's political excesses (he released thousands from political prisons) did not win support from the Communist Party. Finally, in 1964, after his plan to establish Russian missiles in Cuba caused a direct confrontation with American president John Kennedy, Khrushchev was removed from power.



*Nikita Khrushchev*

---

### *Review and Write*

1. Describe the destruction brought to the Soviet Union during World War II.
2. In what ways had the Soviet Union recovered economically from the war in just a few years after its conclusion?
3. How successful was Khrushchev as a leader of the Soviet Union? Explain.