

## Document A

### Gulags: Forced Labor Camps

The system of **forced labor camps** was established in the first years of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. It became essential part of the Soviet repressive system.

The Communist takeovers in the Eastern and Central Europe during the World War II led to mass arrests of non-Communist politicians and people identified as class-enemies. Many of them were sentenced to forced labor camps. In 1952 the International League for the Rights of Man was able to document the existence of **more than 400 forced labor camps in Central and Eastern Europe**.

Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. Prisoners received inadequate food rations and insufficient clothing, which made it difficult to endure the severe weather and the long working hours; sometimes the inmates were physically abused by camp guards. As a result, the death rate from exhaustion and disease in the camps was high.



*Pictures of the Gulags.*



## Document B

### Collectivization

In November 1927, Joseph Stalin launched his "revolution from above" by setting two extraordinary goals for Soviet domestic policy: rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture.

**His aims were to erase all traces of the capitalism that had entered under the New Economic Policy and to transform the Soviet Union as quickly as possible**, without regard to cost, into an industrialized and completely socialist state.

Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, adopted by the party in 1928, called for rapid industrialization of the economy, with an emphasis on heavy industry. It set goals that were unrealistic-- a 250 percent increase in overall industrial development and a 330 percent expansion in heavy industry alone.

**All industry and services were nationalized**, managers were given predetermined output quotas by central planners, and trade unions were converted into mechanisms for increasing worker productivity. Many new industrial centers were developed, particularly in the Ural Mountains, and thousands of new plants were built throughout the country. **But because Stalin insisted on unrealistic production targets, serious problems soon arose.** With the greatest share of investment put into heavy industry, widespread shortages of consumer goods occurred.

The First Five-Year Plan also called for transforming Soviet agriculture from predominantly individual farms into a system of large state collective farms. The Communist regime believed that collectivization would improve agricultural productivity and would produce grain reserves sufficiently large to feed the growing urban labor force. **The sweeping collectivization often involved tremendous human and social costs, including millions of deaths.**



*Soviet propaganda emphasized the benefits of collectivization.*

## Document C

### Kulaks and Collectivization

Collectivization was expected to free many peasants for industrial work in the cities and to enable the party to extend its political dominance over the remaining peasantry. When some peasants did not want to give up their land, Stalin persecuted them.

Stalin focused particular hostility on the wealthier peasants, or kulaks. **About one million kulak households (some five million people) were deported and never heard from again.**

Joseph Stalin requested severe measures to put an end to the kulak resistance. In 1930, Stalin declared:

*In order to oust the kulaks as a class, the resistance of this class must be smashed in open battle and it must be deprived of the productive sources of its existence and development... That is a turn towards the policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class*

The Communist party agreed to the use of force in the collectivization and dekulakization efforts. The kulaks were to be liquidated as a class and subject to one of three fates: death sentence, or deportation "out of regions of total collectivization of the agriculture". **Tens of thousands of kulaks were executed, property was expropriated to form collective farms, and many families were deported to unpopulated areas of Siberia and Soviet Central Asia.**



*A dispossessed kulak and his family in front of their home in Udachne village in Donets'ka oblast', 1930s.*

## Document D

### The Great Terror/The Great Purge

Stalin introduced extreme laws against political crimes and conducted a witch-hunt for alleged conspirators against him. Hundreds of thousands of victims were accused of various political crimes (espionage, wrecking, sabotage, anti-Soviet agitation, conspiracies to prepare uprisings and coups) and then executed by shooting, or sent to the Gulag labor camps. Many died at the penal labor camps due to starvation, disease, exposure, and overwork. Other methods of dispatching victims were used on an experimental basis. One secret policeman, for example, gassed people to death in batches in the back of a specially adapted airtight van.

In total, the Great Terror (sometimes called the Great Purge) involved a large-scale purge [elimination] of the Communist Party and government officials, repression of peasants, Red Army leadership, and the persecution of unaffiliated persons, characterized by widespread police surveillance, widespread suspicion of "saboteurs", imprisonment, and executions



*Victims of the Great Purge.*



## Document E

### Ukrainian Famine

The dreadful famine that engulfed Ukraine, the northern Caucasus, and the lower Volga River area in 1932-1933 was the result of Joseph Stalin's policy of forced collectivization. The death toll is thought to be between six and seven million people. . Many recognized scholars, however have estimated the number between 5 million to 8 million.

Stalin was determined to crush Ukrainian nationalism. Thus, the famine was accompanied by a devastating purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Ukrainian Communist party itself. Some scholars have called this a genocide. The famine broke the peasants' will to resist collectivization and left Ukraine politically, socially, and psychologically traumatized.

Stalin's decisions about how to pursue collectivization and the methods used to implement it condemned millions of peasants to death by starvation. Party officials, with the aid of regular troops and secret police units, waged a merciless war of attrition against peasants who refused to give up their grain. Even indispensable seed grain was forcibly confiscated from peasant households. Any man, woman, or child caught taking even a handful of grain from a collective farm could be, and often was, executed or deported. Those who did not appear to be starving were often suspected of hoarding grain. Peasants were prevented from leaving their villages by the NKVD and a system of internal passports.

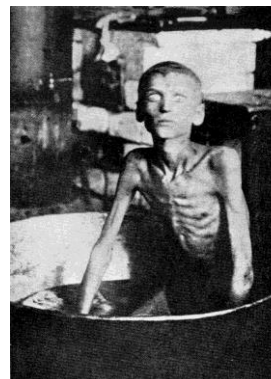
#### Writer Arthur Koestler:

Arthur Koestler, the famous writer who visited Ukraine in late summer of 1932 and fall 1933 and who spent about three months in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv writes in *The God That Failed*:

*"I saw the ravages of the famine of 1932-1933 in the Ukraine: hordes of families in rags begging at the railway stations, the women lifting up to the compartment window their starving brats, which, with drumstick limbs, big cadaverous heads and puffed bellies, looked like embryos out of alcohol bottles ..."*



Deaths from the famine.



## Document F

### Censorship

**Context:** There is a saying that goes, “A picture doesn’t lie.” This statement would not hold true if you were referring to Stalin’s regime. Members of Stalin’s government took to rewriting history by **doctoring** (changing) photos and removing key figures from the photos. The following images show the original versions of photographs and their edited counterparts which appeared in Russian newspapers.



*Lenin and Trotsky celebrate the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution in Red Square.*



*Lenin celebrates, but Trotsky (Stalin’s enemy and opponent) has been airbrushed out.*



*Postcard 1917: Soldiers with sign stating, “Watches of gold and silver.”*



*New postcard 1917. Same photo, but signboard is replaced with slogans supporting Communism.*

## Document G

### Cult of Personality

**Context:** During the years that Stalin was in power, massive amounts of propaganda was created. One of the main purposes of the propaganda was to help establish what became known as the **Cult of Stalin**, the goal of which was to **make Stalin almost god-like in the eyes of the Soviet people**. The propaganda took various forms: art, poetry, literature, architecture, etc.

One technique that was used repeatedly was making a very clear connection between Stalin and Lenin. Because Lenin was seen as the true father of the revolution, emphasizing this connection boosted Stalin's legitimacy in the eyes of the people by convincing them that he was merely carrying out Lenin's vision for the Soviet Union.

The following quote comes from a speech by the author A. O. Avdienko to the seventh congress of the Soviets, 1935. In this poem, A. O. Avdienko **illustrates the emotional bonds that people felt tied them to Stalin**, and the prodigious (extraordinary) transformation of the Russian state and society that Stalin was attempting.

I write books. I am an author. All thanks to thee, O great educator,  
Stalin. I love a young woman with a renewed love and shall perpetuate  
myself in my children—all thanks to thee, great educator. Stalin. I shall  
be eternally happy and joyous, all thanks to thee, great educator, Stalin.  
Everything belongs to thee, chief of our great country. And when the  
woman I love presents me with a child the first word it shall utter will  
be: Stalin.

O great Stalin, O leader of the peoples,  
Thou who broughtest man to birth.  
Thou who fructifies the earth,  
Thou who restored to centuries,  
Thou who makest bloom the spring,  
Thou who makest vibrate the musical chords...  
Thou, splendor of my spring, O thou,  
Sun reflected by millions of hearts.

## Document H

### Purges

In the mid-1930s, Joseph Stalin became aware that opposition to his policies was growing. In September 1936, the head of the secret police—acting on Stalin’s orders—quickly arranged the **arrest of all the leading political figures in the Soviet Union who were critical of Stalin**. The secret police broke prisoners down by intense interrogation, including threatening to arrest and execute members of the prisoner’s family if they did not confess. The interrogation went on for several days and nights and eventually they became so exhausted and disoriented that they signed confessions agreeing that they had been attempting to overthrow the government.

In January 1937, seventeen leading members of the Communist Party were put on trial. They were accused of attempting to overthrow the Soviet government with the objective of restoring capitalism. **Thirteen of the accused were found guilty and sentenced to death**. Three others were sentenced to ten years. The next trial in March 1938 involved **twenty-one leading members of the party**. They were accused of being involved in a plot against Joseph Stalin and with spying for foreign powers. They were all found guilty and were either **executed or died in labor camps**.

Stalin now decided to purge (quick, violent removal) the Red Army. In June 1937, eight top Red Army commanders were charged with conspiracy with Germany. All eight were convicted and executed. All told, **30,000 members of the armed forces were executed**. This included **50%** of all army officers.

The last stage of the terror was the purging of the secret police. Stalin wanted to make sure that those who knew too much about the purges would also be killed. He appointed a new head of the secret police, who **arranged for the execution of all senior figures in the police**.

| The Purge of the Red Army 1937-38   |                 |            |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Political Officials of Officers   | Original Number | Executed   |
| Members of Supreme Military Soviet  | <b>80</b>       | <b>75</b>  |
| Vice-Commisars of Defense   | <b>11</b>       | <b>11</b>  |
| Army Commisars  | <b>17</b>       | <b>17</b>  |
| Corps Commisars   | <b>28</b>       | <b>25</b>  |
| Brigade Commisars   | <b>36</b>       | <b>34</b>  |
| Military Officers   |                 |            |
| Marshalls   | <b>5</b>        | <b>3</b>   |
| Army Commanders   | <b>16</b>       | <b>14</b>  |
| Corps Commanders  | <b>67</b>       | <b>60</b>  |
| Division Commanders   | <b>199</b>      | <b>136</b> |
| Brigade Commanders  | <b>397</b>      | <b>221</b> |
| *Note: Precise figures were never produced. These figures are based on a soviet estimate made many years later, after Stalin’s death. |                 |            |

**Source:** The Stalin Project, a multi-media, interactive resource about Stalin and the Soviet people. This site includes text written by the top scholars in the field, a database of over 500 images, primary source documents, videos, lesson plans, and other interactive material.