

b) With the death of Lenin in the January of 1924, the Soviet Union lost its leader, its instigator and its key ideologist, marking a watershed in the history of the USSR. In the power struggles that followed, Josef Stalin, regarded by the brilliant Leon Trotsky as a "dull mediocrity" successfully outmaneuvered all his rivals, including Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev and install himself as the totalitarian leader of the Soviet Union. His particular system of government, now dubbed "Stalinism," had a great many impacts on Soviet society, the majority admittedly negative. The view that "Stalinism produced positive changes for Soviet society" is one that certainly cannot be taken at face value, as to do so is to ignore the totalitarian, autocratic nature of Stalinism. The policies that characterised Stalinism, collectivisation, industrialisation, the personality cult and the "Great Terror" produced some positive results, particularly collectivisation and industrialisation, but only at the expense of great loss of life which became one of the hallmarks of, according to David Christian, "High

Stalinism."

Stalin had declared that it was vital "to convert the USSR from an agrarian and weak country, dependent upon the caprices of capitalist countries, into an industrial and powerful country..." This policy necessitated a huge industrialisation drive, but before this could be achieved, the government needed to unlock the wealth in the countryside to generate the huge cash and labor investments needed to fuel industrialisation. As far as Stalin was concerned, this necessitated the collectivisation of agriculture and the breaking of the peasantry, who had always been the most reactionary stratum of Soviet society. To this end, Stalin declared in an article dubbed "The Great Turn" on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1929 the need to "collectivise agriculture, expropriate the rich peasants (kulaks) and abolish the private sector in the countryside." Stalin had experimented with the direct mobilisation of resources before with his "Urals-Siberia" methods of

grain requisitioning in 1928. Now, Czech historian Michael Reizna claims, "Everything that was to be done economically was to be decided in a totally new way... through the total mobilisation of the machinery of administration and repression." There can be no doubt that this new system of "administration and repression" bore little positive change for the average Soviet citizen, the peasants least of all.

Over 10 million kulaks were driven off the land as they were officially demobilised as a class. Arthur Koestler, on a trip to the Ukraine in 1933, declared, "These wretched cranks were kulaks, rich peasants who had resisted the collectivisation of the land and whom it had therefore been necessary to evict from their farms." Over half of all livestock were killed by protesting peasants, which represented the loss of a quarter of all agricultural capital. It is estimated that at least 4 to 6 million peasants died in famines during 1932 and 1933 caused

by excessive procurements. The collectivisation drive achieved what the government desired, however. By July 1936, more than 94% of peasants lived on collective farms, or "kolkhozy" and where before there was over 25 million small peasant holdings, there were now 250 000 collectives under the control of a state-appointed manager. As can be seen, however, it is highly debatable as to if this generated positive changes for Soviet society.

There can be little doubt that in essence the forced collectivisation drive was economic totalitarianism which only occurred at great loss of life. The ~~peasants~~ expropriated peasants, or kulaks, some 10 million of them, suffered terrible hardships, as did man-made famines caused by huge procurements. This has prompted economic historian Alec Nove to state "1933 saw the most precipitous peacetime decline in living standards known in recorded history." Life on the collectives was strictly controlled

with the state managers able to control output and even the travel of members of the kolkhozy. ~~The~~ On the other hand, collectivisation did achieve the government's aim of generating the huge cash and labour investments needed to industrialise on a heroic scale. Although grain production actually fell from 80 million tonnes in 1930 to 69 million tonnes in 1934, procurements rose from 15% in 1928 to over 40% in 1938. This represented a huge fiscal victory for the government. But in this understanding one perhaps be gleaned ~~the~~ the nature of these "positive changes" for Soviet society, and that is that the benefits were not for society at all, but instead increasing the power of the Party and the strength of Stalin's totalitarianism. The historian J.P. Nettl elaborates, saying, "Collectivisation and the first Five-year Plan meant a greatly strengthened role for the Party..."

The only ~~for~~ tangible positive to come out of the collectivisation drive, the accruing of huge financial and capital

resources, was of course used to fuel the industrialisation drive. Stalin had declared the USSR was "between 50 and a 100 years behind the capitalist countries" and they had to "make up that difference in a decade" otherwise face defeat at the hands of the capitalist nations.

As such, an emphasis was placed on increasing the heavy industrial output of the country, which met with startling results. In the ten years up to 1937 that encompassed the first two Five-Year Plans, oil production trebled, coal and steel output quadrupled, and electricity multiplied an amazing 7.24 times. Industrial output in 1940 was up 2.6 times on the 1928 level, and by 1937 the USSR was second only to the United States in output. Perhaps more significantly, the Soviet Union's economic ranking shot up rapidly, as Soviet Gross National Product tripled in the 1930s, a time of the Great Depression when no other economy even doubled. This growth in industry was also marked by the growth in the urban proletariat,

which grew to 11 million new workers joining in 1932, including some 8.5 million peasants.

As is obvious, the industrialisation drive produced some tremendous and startling increases in Soviet heavy industrial output, which must be counted as a positive change from the agrarian economy it had initially been. Again, however, can be seen the understanding that this benefit was more shared by the ruling Communist elite rather than the ordinary Soviet citizen. Whereas the government now had its control a modern, industrialised economy, very little had changed for the ~~ordinary~~ Soviet people. The emphasis on heavy industry had perforce to ~~encompass~~ be accompanied by a drop in the production of consumer goods and services. Historian David Christian declares, "the resources used to fuel industrialisation were taken out of the consumption fund of Soviet society as a whole." Living standards, real wages and working conditions declined markedly, and people had to work

harder than ever, particularly women who often had to balance work and their responsibilities to the family. The participation rate of employment increased from 57% in 1928 to 70% in 1937 as more people were absorbed in the labourforce. The fact that the people's working harder did not result in appreciable gain for them is further demonstrative of the unequal sharing of the few benefits of Stalinism between the ruling elite and the masses.

One particular aspect of industrialisation must be measured as being positive, however, and that is the increase in the defense capabilities of the armed forces. Stalin had declared that "The final task of the Five-year Plan is to create all the necessary technical and economic pre-requisites so that ~~the~~ we can increase to the utmost the defence capacity of the country." The government indeed perverted the concept of the Five-year Plan, when David Christian ~~states~~ states "Where the plan conflicted



with the priorities of the government, the plan was adjusted." This so-called "command" economy, however, proved to be the key to the Soviet Union's ability to repulse the German invasion in 1942 and eventually defeat Nazi Germany. This is perhaps the only benefit of Stalinism that was shared by all, in that life under Stalin ~~could~~ was perhaps more palatable than life under Hitler, who considered the Russians as "slaves" and "sub-human."

The benefits to emerge from collectivisation and industrialisation were reaped largely by the government and not the people. ~~Along with~~ of this reality there is no greater demonstration than the "Great Terror" of 1936 to 1938. Although Stalin had conducted purges before, the height of the "Great Terror" saw some two million people imprisoned in labour camps, or gulags, and perhaps between 8 and 14 million people executed. After the implementation of the "Khrushchev Decrees" in December

1934, the secret police, or NKVD, had the right to arrest without a warrant, refuse right to appeal and deny the accused a defence counsel. NKVD agents dubbed "black ravens" descended of a night to imprison thousands for so-called "crimes against the state." One historian, N. Madelstam, recalls how "Nobody trusted anybody else. Every acquaintance was a suspected police informer." Over 250 000 Party members were shot, and some 65% of the army command was removed, including 3 out of 5 marshals and 13 out of 15 generals. People lived in constant fear and the community was replete with police spies. In the "Great Terror" is the ultimate expression of the nature of Stalinism. There is no benefit or "positive change" for the Soviet people - the only advantage lies with the ruling elite who are concerned with further bolstering their power.

Stalinism is obviously a political order based on the

powerful few controlling the powerless many, and this basic schematic entails the demonstrated nature of "positive change" in Soviet society - change and benefit to the ruling elite, dubbed the "vydvizhenitsy," whilst there is suffering and hardship for the majority.