

# Was Stalin a Great Leader?

## YES, Stalin was a Great leader - lines of argument

1. Stalin won World War II, defeating the great military power of Nazi Germany.
2. He rapidly modernised and industrialised the USSR's economy.
3. He established the USSR as a world power that was only rivalled by the USA.
4. Free healthcare and much greater workers' rights were enshrined by law.
5. He transformed the education system and greatly increased the USSR's literacy rate.



Ministry of Information:  
Original Art Work.  
The National Archives, Kew.

Accessible here: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3454537>

**Source 1:** A British propaganda poster from the Ministry of Information. The text reads 'Together we shall strangle Hitlerism'.

THE great offensive of the Red Army in 1943–1945 had no parallel in military history. The offensive started in July 1943, after the Germans had made another attempt (which proved to be the last) to break through the Soviet front in the central sector (Orel-Kursk-Belgorod<sup>1</sup>). The German offensive began on July 5

...

From that time on, the Soviets advanced continuously for some sixteen months, through October 1944, winning victory upon victory. As a result, the front of the Red Army, at the beginning of 1945, extended for over a thousand miles from the Baltic sea (near Memel) around Warsaw and Budapest to the Drava river in Yugoslavia. On January 12, following a brief interval of two months and a half, the Soviet offensive was resumed and, three months later, was completed victoriously in Germany. On April 21 the Soviet troops entered Berlin.

Nikolaieff, A. M. "The Red Army in the Second World War." *The Russian Review* 7, no. 1 (1947) p. 49

**Source 2:** An extract from A.M. Nikolaieff, *The Red Army in the Second World War*.

Nikolaieff explores the movement of the Red Army across Eastern Europe from 1943–1945.

### World War II Military Deaths (Allies)

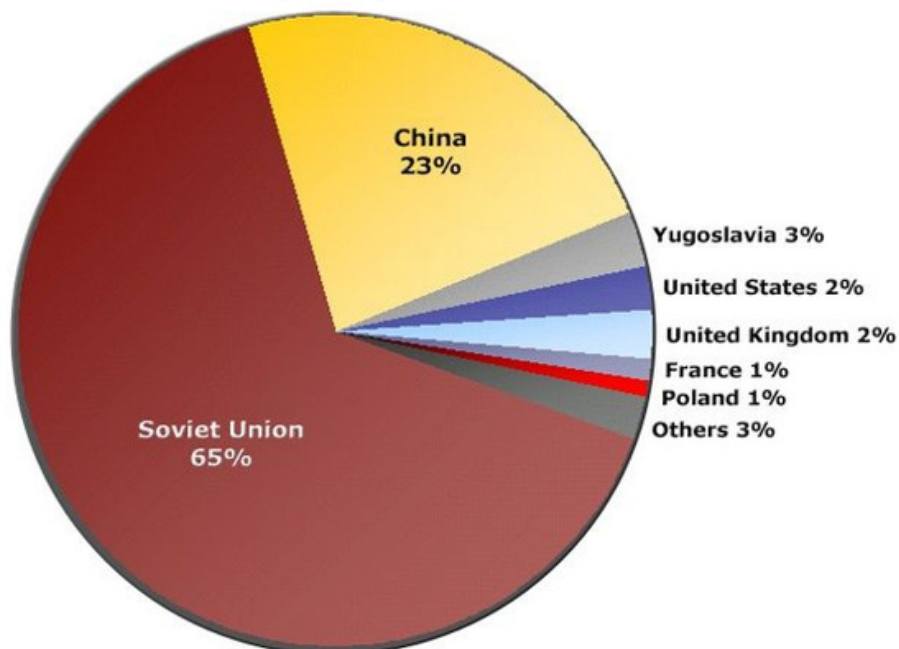
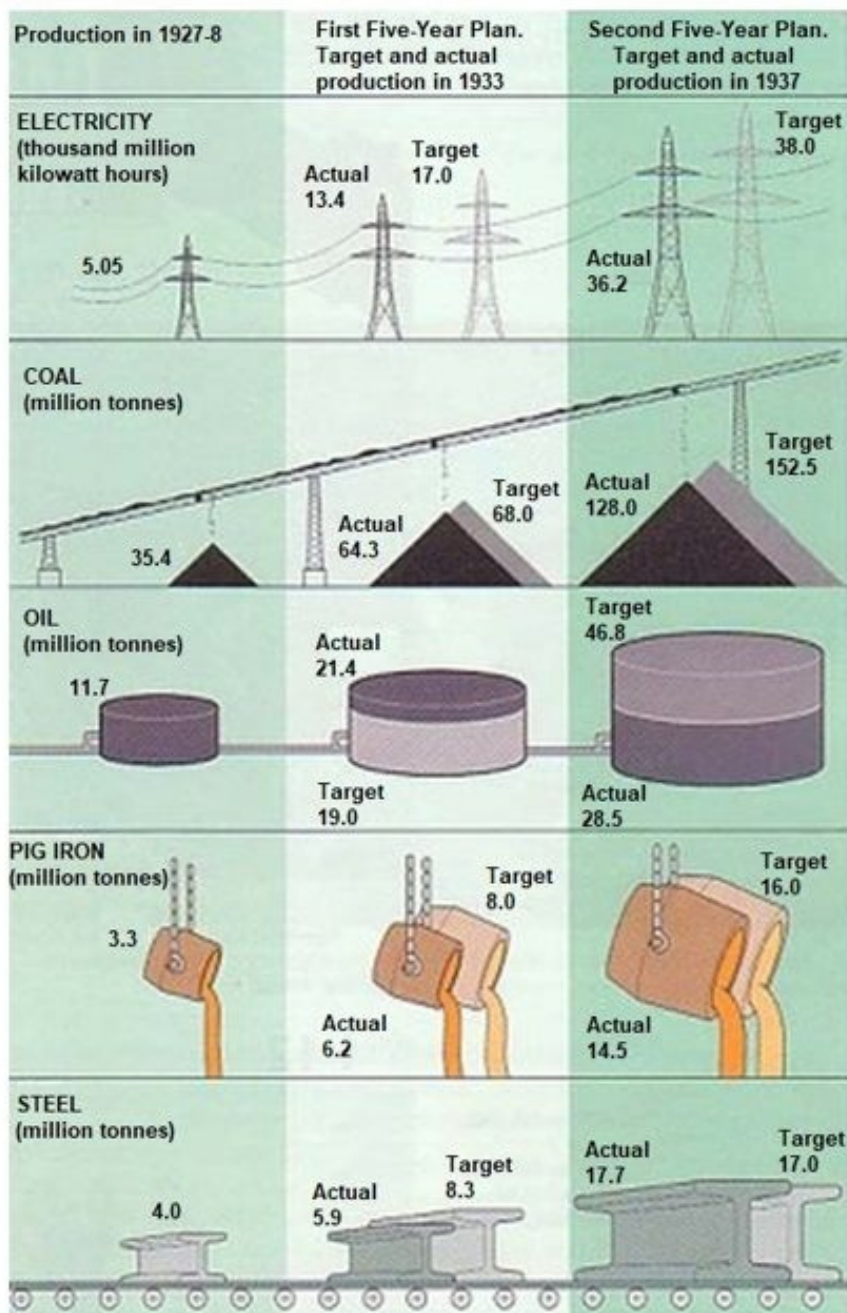


Image accessible here: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WorldWarII-MilitaryDeaths-Allies-Piechart.png>

Based on figures available here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_casualties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties)

**Source 3:** A graph showing World War II military deaths from Wikipedia.





Figures taken from *An economic history of the U.S.S.R.* by Alec Nove, 1992. Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books.

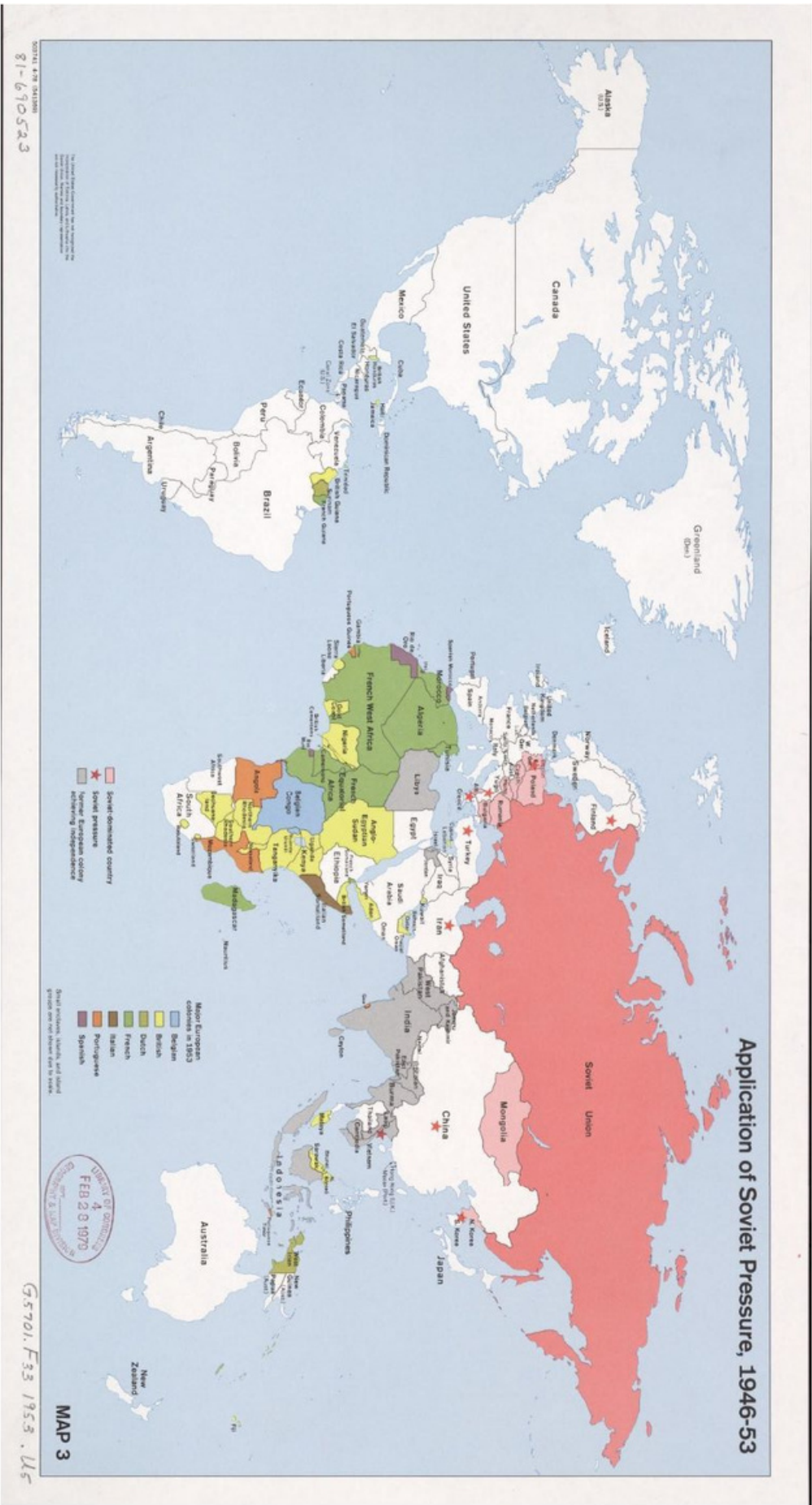
**Source 4:** A diagram showing the production of coal, oil, steel and power supplies from 1927 and 1937 from *An Economic History of the USSR*, by Alec Nove, created in 1992.



Image accessible here: <https://bearkunin.medium.com/soviet-union-facts-and-fictions-part-1-the-economy-2a79ff1013a7>

**Source 5:** A propaganda poster produced in 1930. It shows the introduction of modern farming equipment, like tractors. The text reads "*Day of Harvest and Collectivisation*".





Application of Soviet pressure, 1946-53. Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1978. Image accessible here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/81690523/>

**Source 6:** A map produced by the USA in 1978. It shows the nations the Soviet Union dominated and the nations it had a strong influence over.

THE U.S.S.R.'S FIRST STEPS IN THE  
EGYPTIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN ARENA

After the Second World War, Soviet policy towards the Middle East was intended to end British hegemony in the area and to fill the vacuum as soon as conditions would allow... Despite their arguments that the struggle for liberation in the Arab world would succeed only under Communist leadership, the Soviets were in practice willing to support and cooperate with any Arab government who wished to liberate its country of foreign troops. They did not take into account the socio-political nature of these governments, even when such governments as was the case with Egypt had declared the Communist Party illegal.

Ginat, Rami (1991) Soviet Union and Egypt, 1947-1955. PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, p. 88. Accessible here: <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1145/1/U048346.pdf>

**Source 7:** An extract from Rami Ginat, 1991, titled *The U.S.S.R's First Steps in the Egyptian and Middle Eastern Arena*.

\*Hegemony = The dominance of one state over others

\*Socio-political = combining social and political issues



The working population of pre-revolutionary Russia worked 10 to 12 hours per day, six days a week...By the end of 1926, the national economy was restored to its pre-revolutionary level and it was decided that there should be a gradual transition from an 8- to a 7-hour working day. The first 5-year plan (1928-1932) was formulated on the basis of a 7-hour working day. The transition of the economy to a 7-hour day was effected between 1927-1933.

Bosch, G., Dawkins, P., & Michon, F. (1994). Times are changing: working time in 14 industrialised countries. Geneva, International Institute for Labour Studies, p. 313.

Accessible here: [https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1994/94B09\\_66\\_englp2.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1994/94B09_66_englp2.pdf)

**Source 8:** An extract from Bosch, Dawkins and Michon, 1994. It explores the impact of the Five Year Plans on the working week.



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Image accessible here: <https://www.allnumis.com/postcards-catalog/ussr-union-of-soviet-socialist-republics/sochi-soi/sochi-soi-sanatorium-ordzhonikidze-27455>

**Source 9:** A postcard of a Sanatorium, a kind of health spa, built under Stalin as places where workers could enjoy holidays that were subsidised by the state. This postcard shows one example, Sanatorium "Ordzhonikidze", built in 1936 in Sochi.

Three different measures of population health show a consistent and large improvement between approximately 1945 and 1969: child height, adult height and infant mortality all improved significantly during this period...The significant improvements in population wellbeing before 1970 may in part be related to the expansion of the national health care system, public education, and improved caloric and protein supply during this period. While the Soviet experiment of the twentieth century clearly failed and in countless ways harmed the lives of Soviet citizens, the record of Soviet health achievement prior to 1970 remains impressive.

Brainerd, E. (2010). Reassessing the Standard of Living in the Soviet Union: An Analysis Using Archival and Anthropometric Data. *The Journal of Economic History*, 70(1). P. 112-3/P. 28 Accessible here: [https://web.williams.edu/Economics/brainerd/papers/ussr\\_july08.pdf](https://web.williams.edu/Economics/brainerd/papers/ussr_july08.pdf)

**Source 10:** An extract from an article by E. Brainerd, 2010 titled *Reassessing the Standard of Living in the Soviet Union*. The article explores the impact Soviet rule had on health and education.



Percentage of Men and Women with higher <b>Fig. 1</b> Education by Birth Cohort		
	Higher Education	
Birth Cohort	Men	Women
1925- 1929	10.6	6.8
1930- 1934	11.1	9.0
1935- 1939	17.4	13.0
1940- 1944	19.2	16.2
1945- 1949	23.0	23.0
1950- 1954	19.9	20.4
1955- 1959	18.6	21.2
1960- 1964	19.1	22.6
1965- 1969	18.9	23.9
Source: Osnovnye itogi microperepisi naselenia 1994 (The main results of the microcensus 1994). Moscow, Goscomstat, 1994, p. 71.		

Accessible here: <https://historyofyesterday.com/universities-in-the-soviet-union-how-did-they-change-c1542533572d>

**Source 11:** A diagram, published in 1994, showing the percentage of men and women in universities.



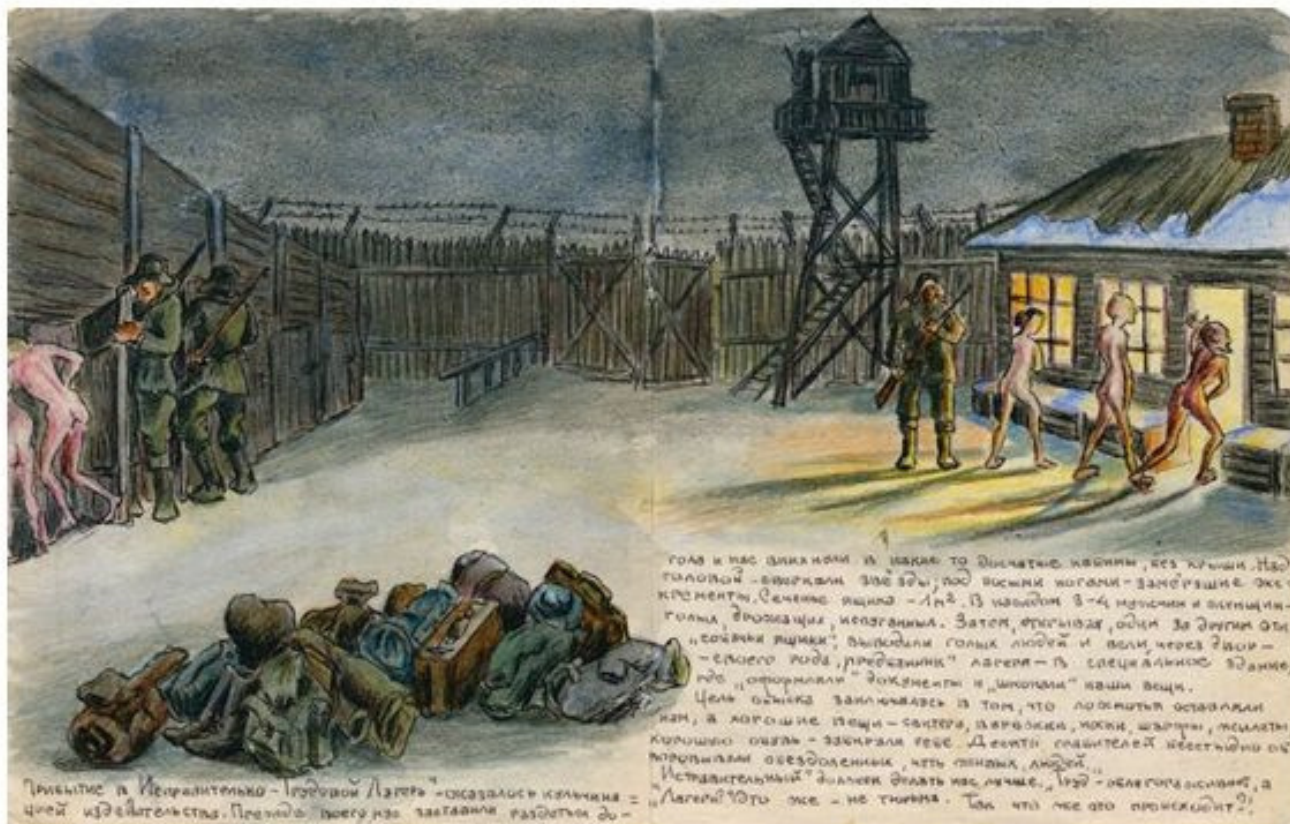
**Source 12:** A propaganda poster by Alexander Pavlovich Mogilevsky published in 1925. The text reads *"if you don't read books, you'll soon forget your grammar"*.

# Was Stalin a Great Leader?

NO, Stalin was not a Great leader - lines of argument

1. Stalin was responsible for the deaths of millions of Soviet citizens.
2. Stalin posed as the liberator of Europe from the Nazis, but he was only interested in dominating the countries his army occupied. He only decided to fight the Nazis when they broke the pact that they had signed with him in 1939.
3. Using his secret policy, Stalin fostered a culture of paranoia among the population. He minimised political freedom through meaningless elections, constant propaganda, and by developing a personality cult around his leadership.
4. The quality of life of Soviet citizens was poor compared to Western Europe and the USA.
5. Stalin's USSR was a pro-Russian project that marginalised other nationalities in the Soviet Union.





*A drawing and description by Evfrosiniia Kersnovskaia, a former Gulag prisoner.*

First we were made to strip naked and were shoved into some roofless enclosures made out of planks. Above our heads the stars twinkled; below our bare feet lay frozen excrement... the naked people were led across a courtyard "the camp version of a foyer" into a special building where our documents were 'formulated' and our things were "searched."

The goal of the search was to leave us with rags, and to take the good things sweaters, mittens, socks, scarves, vests, and good shoes for themselves. Ten thieves shamelessly fleeced these destitute, barely alive people.

Courtesy of Evfrosiniia Kersnovskaia Foundation, Moscow.

Accessible here: <https://gulaghistory.org/nps/onlineexhibit/stalin/women.php.html>

**Source 1:** A drawing and description from a former Gulag prisoner.

*\*Gulag= a system of forced labour camps introduced under Stalin*



A father and a son, the father, a Russian skilled worker in a Moscow factory and the son a member of the Young Communist League, stood glaring at one another. The father trembling with excitement, lost control of himself and shouted at his Communist son. It is terrible now. We workers are starving. Look at Chelyabinsk where I once worked. Disease there is carrying away numbers of us workers and the little food there is uneatable. That is what you have done to our Mother Russia.

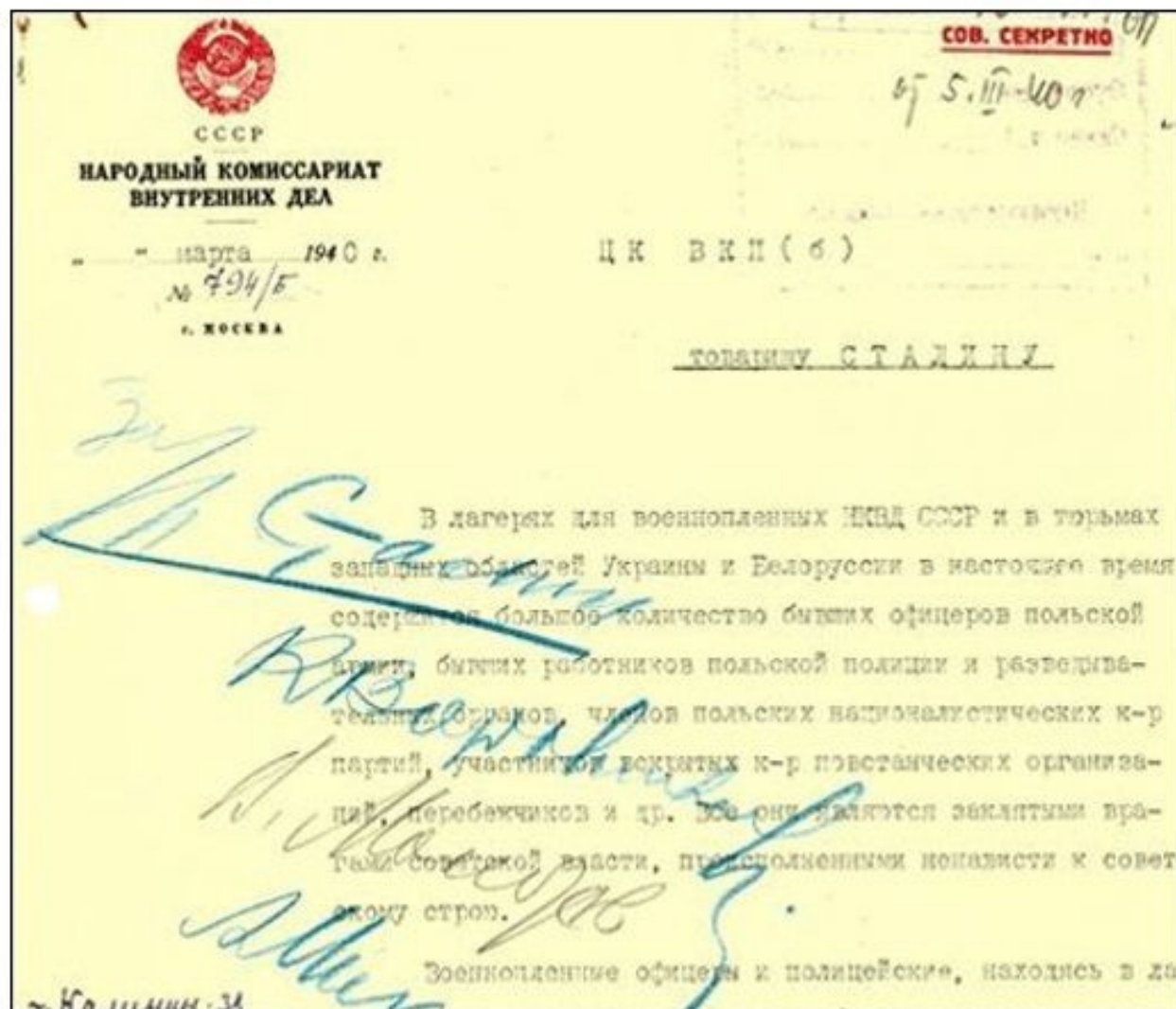
The son cried back: "But look at the giants of industry which we have built. Look at the new tractor works. Look at the Dniepostroy. That construction has been worth suffering for." "Construction indeed!" Was the father's reply: "What's the use of construction when you have destroyed all that's best in Russia?" ...What did the peasants say? There was one cry which resounded everywhere I went and that was: "There is no bread."

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[T]oday the famine is everywhere, in the formerly rich Ukraine, in Russia, in Central Asia, in North Caucasia - everywhere.

Gareth Jones, *FAMINE RULES RUSSIA - The 5-year Plan Has Killed the Bread Supply*. The London Evening Standard, March 31st, 1933.  
Accessible here: [https://www.garethjones.org/soviet\\_articles/famine\\_rules\\_russia.htm](https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/famine_rules_russia.htm)

**Source 2:** An article from *The Evening Standard*, a newspaper. Published on 31st March, 1933. The article is by Gareth Jones who explores the impact of Stalin's 5-Year Plans.

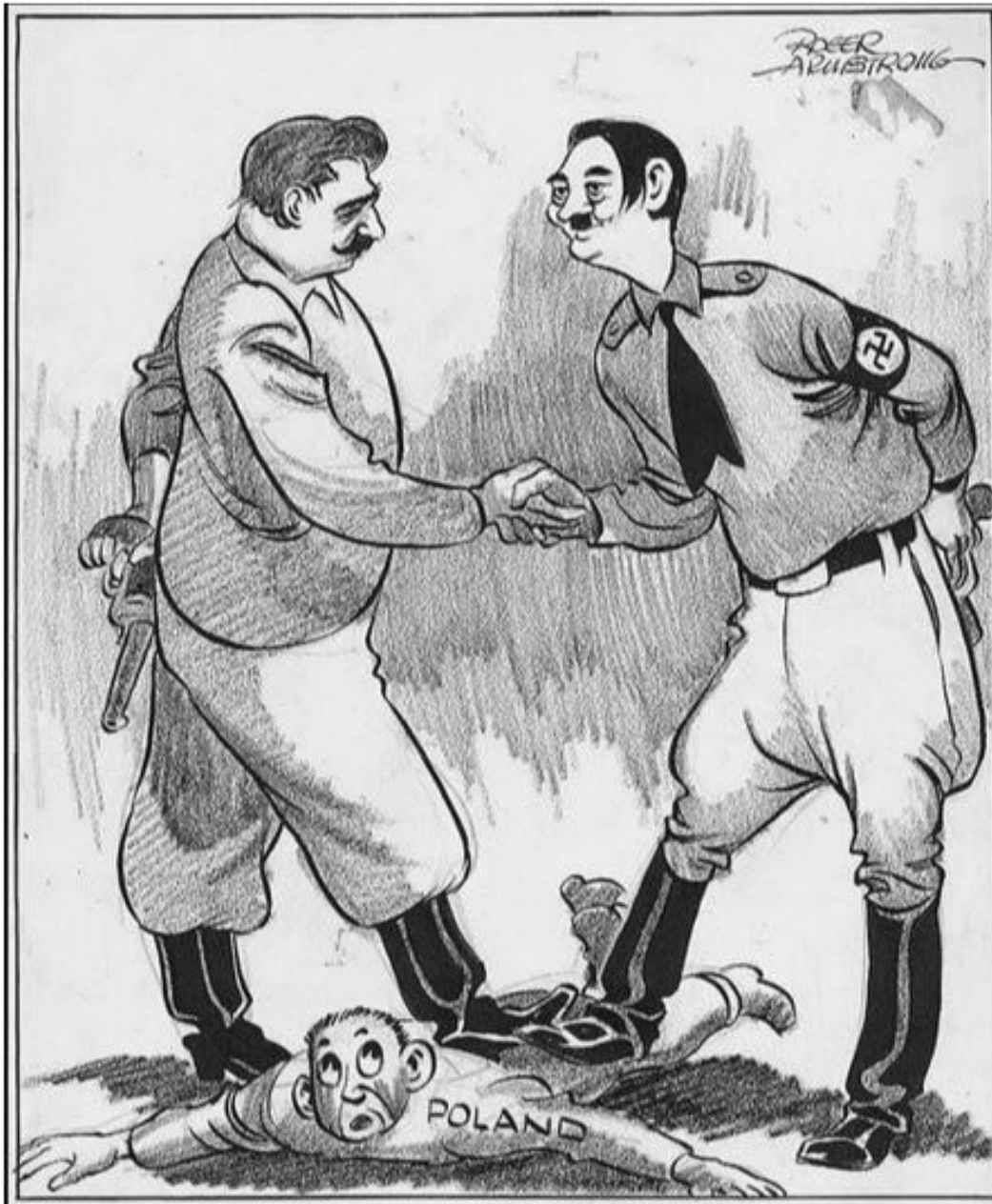


**Source 3:** An extract from *Beria letter to Stalin on Katyn*, BBC News, 2010

Stalin's signature on a document that approved the execution of "bourgeois" Poles following the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland in 1939. As a result, around 22,000 Polish officers and intellectuals were executed by Soviet secret police at Katyn Forest and other locations in western Russia in April-May 1940. This event was blamed on the Nazis by the Soviet government.

\*Bourgeois = a middle class or ruling person who owns private property and means of production





**Source 4:** A cartoon depicting the Nazi-Soviet Pact by Roger Armstrong, a political cartoonist, 1939.



Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

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The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish States and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments. In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement...

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This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

**Source 5:** A photograph of Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as Joseph Stalin watches, 1939.

A district Party conference was under way in Moscow Province. It was presided over by a new secretary of the District Party Committee, replacing one recently arrested. At the conclusion of the conference, a tribute to Comrade Stalin was called for...The small hall echoed with "stormy applause, rising to an ovation." For three minutes, four minutes, five minutes...palms were getting sore and raised arms were already aching. And the older people were panting from exhaustion. It was becoming insufferably silly even to those who really adored Stalin. However, who would dare be the first to stop? The secretary of the District Party Committee could have done it...But he was a newcomer. He had taken the place of a man who'd been arrested. He was afraid! After all, NKVD men were standing in the hall applauding and watching to see who quit first!... Then, after eleven minutes, the director of the paper factory assumed a business like expression and sat down in his seat...To a man, everyone else stopped dead and sat down...That, however, was how they discovered who the independent people were. And that was how they went about eliminating them. That same night the factory director was arrested. They easily pasted ten years on him on the pretext of something quite different.

**Source 6:** An extract from *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, published in 2002. Solzhenitsyn was a famous Soviet dissident who was imprisoned and then deported from the USSR due to his writings. His writings explore Soviet repression, especially the Gulag system.





Credit: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images & AFP/Getty Images.

Accessible here: <https://www.history.com/news/josef-stalin-great-purge-photo-retouching>

**Source 7:** A photograph published in [www.history.com](http://www.history.com) shows Nikolai Yezhov, pictured right of Stalin, later fell from favour and was removed from this photograph at the Moscow Canal.



463. Говорков В.  
Спасибо любимому Сталину — за счастливое детство! 1936

**Source 8:** A propaganda poster by Govorkov, 1936. The text reads, "*Thank you beloved Stalin - for a happy childhood*"

The large cities had limited sewerage systems, but they did not extend to the majority of the population. Most smaller industrial towns had virtually no sewerage at all...The main stumbling block was lack of investment in sanitary infrastructure. Millions of new workers and their families poured into towns and cities, but the state made almost no effort to erect the housing, sanitary facilities, or water supply that such population shifts demanded

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Very few people lived in buildings with indoor plumbing. People had to fetch water from street pumps and then haul it in buckets back to their flats. Supplies were also unreliable.

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Given the difficulties most urban residents had in accessing clean water and the general dirtiness of the environment, people relied heavily on the traditional Russian bathhouse to keep themselves clean. Here, too, however, facilities could meet only a small fraction of overall need. Most people could bathe just once or twice a month.

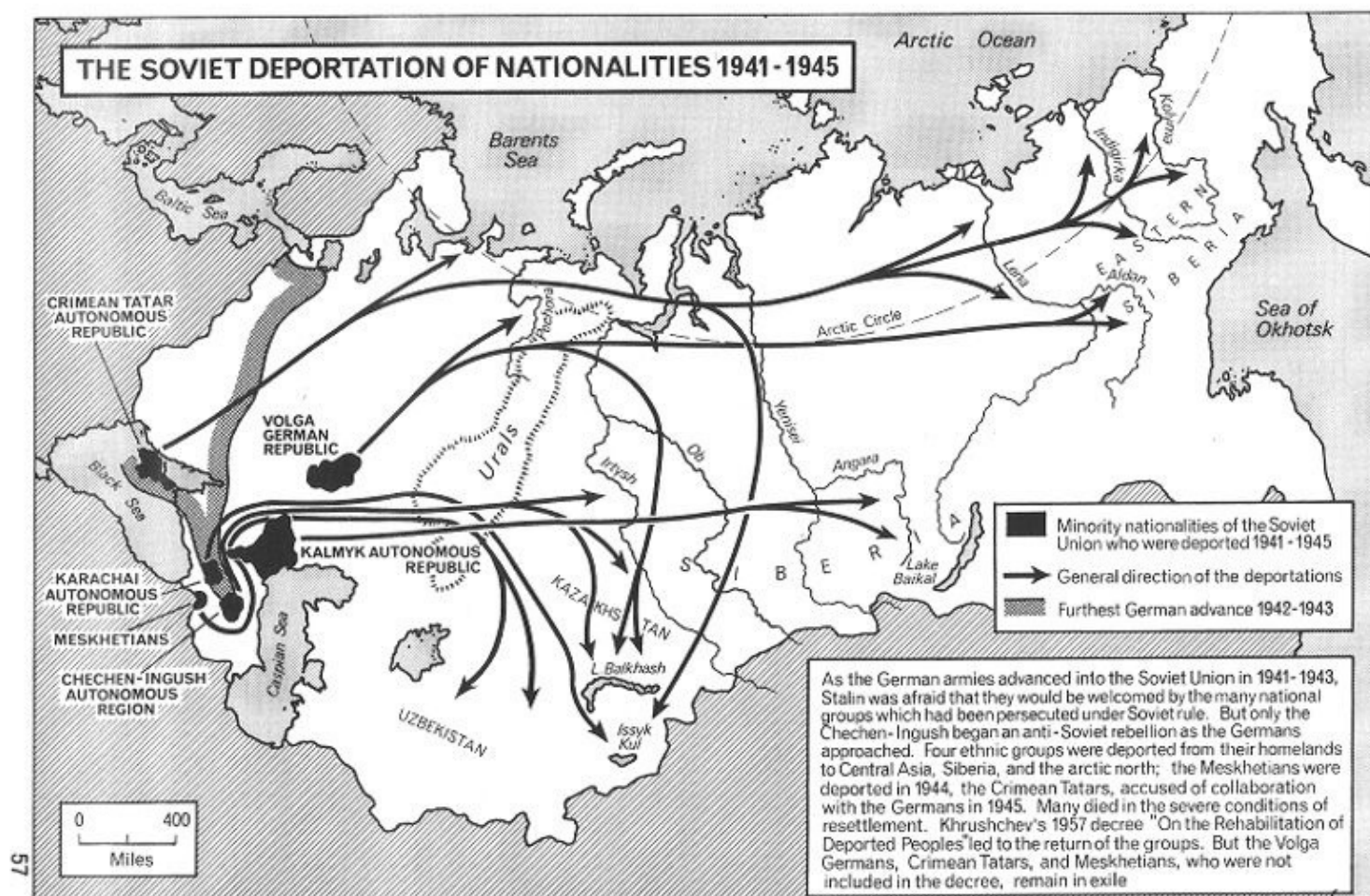
**Source 9:** An extract from Donald Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943-1953*.





Accessible here: <https://www.history.com/news/ukrainian-famine-stalin>

**Source 10:** A photograph of an armed man guarding emergency supply grain during the Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s.



**Source 11:** A map by Martin Gilbert and Arthur Banks, 1979. It shows the Soviet deportation of nationalities during the Second World War.



The Finnish language does not allow our Finns to grow culturally together with all the Soviet people and take part in the development of the socialist culture. On the contrary, it paves the way for the development of a bourgeois culture in the spirit of nationalism. Ignorance of the Russian language puts Finns below Russians... The Russian language is the language of Lenin and Stalin, the language of Revolution that opens a wide road for our youth.

Quote accessible here (p. 109-110):

<https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1164774/FULLTEXT02.pdf>

**Source 12:** An extract from a newspaper, Polar Collectivist. The Polar Collectivist was the official newspaper of the Finnish national district of the Murmansk region. Murmansk is near the Finnish border, and many people living there speak Finnish as a first language. It was written by Nikolay Ivanov in 1938.