



Why did Stalin want to industrialise the USSR?

In 1928 Stalin began one of the most dramatic transformations of a country's economy that the world had ever seen. There were political and ideological reasons for putting communist theories into practice. There were also practical reasons to change the economy of the USSR.

World War I devastated Russia. Towns, factories, roads and railways were destroyed. Farmland was ruined. Millions of people died. The Bolshevik revolution also caused havoc and then revolution turned to civil war. A drought in 1921 led to famine. All this meant that economic rebuilding was necessary.

After the death of Lenin in 1924, there was a power struggle from which Stalin gradually emerged as winner. Stalin was aware that he had to assert his leadership. One way he could do this was to make a success of his policies, especially by making the USSR strong through industrialisation.

The USSR had a large population, but the majority of people worked in agriculture. A small amount of industry existed in the west of the country. Stalin wanted to create more industry and industry in the east. To do this, transport links between the regions had to be improved and peasants had to be turned into industrial workers.

The race to industrialise was spurred on by the fear that capitalist countries would try to destroy communism in the USSR. At the First Conference of Workers in 1931, Stalin delivered a passionate speech, commanding workers to play a crucial role in industrialisation. He said: "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make up this gap in ten years. Either we do it or they will crush us."

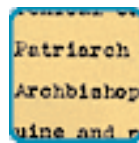
Examine these sources to find out more:



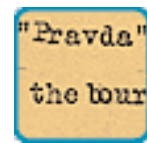
Map of industry in the Russian Empire, c.1914



Account of disruption during civil war, 1919



Report on starving Soviet peasants, 1921



Pravda's view on help from other nations, 1921



Article on preparations for world war, 1933