



Was industrialisation a success?

By 1939 Russian industrial production levels were far higher than they had been in 1928. The USSR was able to play a major part in the defeat of Germany during World War 2 and emerged as a superpower, ranked second only to the USA.

Centralised decision-making under the Five Year Plans was not always the most efficient way to run an economy. However, particular successes were the improved supply of electricity and the greater number of machines built. Almost all heavy industries enjoyed substantial increases in production. There were many large-scale industrial and building developments, such as the Dneiper dam, the Moscow metro and the steelworks at Magnitogorsk, Gorky and Kuznetsk.

Life for many ordinary Russians improved after 1917. They had city housing schemes, universal health care, pensions and sickness benefits. From 1934 onwards, it was compulsory for children to receive eleven years of education. Illiteracy declined from about 50% in 1924 to 19% in 1939. The USSR was also largely free from the unemployment suffered in other countries during the 1930s depression.

Much of the new wealth of the country was never seen by ordinary citizens. Most of it went to the government to pay for more industrialisation, as well as for military and police costs and the bureaucracy that kept control of the economy. There was little in the way of luxury consumer goods and sometimes there were shortages in the necessities.

The reforms of agriculture that went hand-in-hand with industrialisation actually harmed agricultural production. Collectivisation resulted in a famine in 1932-33, as well as the exile of uncooperative peasants to labour camps where they lived in terrible conditions. Maybe 10 million peasants died as a result of Stalin's policies.

Were the means by which Stalin achieved his goals totally necessary? Does the end justify the means?



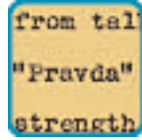
HEROES & VILLAINS

Stalin & industrialisation > Was this a success?

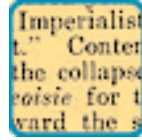
Examine these sources to find out more:



Targets for heavy industry, 1938



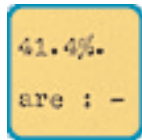
Inconsistencies in Soviet production figures, 1937



Stalin on the success of the Five Year Plan, 1933



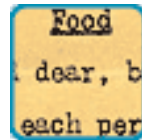
Statistics on food & livestock, 1928-32



Report on production of consumer goods, 1938



Article about wages & standards of living, 1938



Letter from a British woman living in the USSR



Table of world gold production, 1938