

How did Stalin transform the economy of the USSR in the late 1930s?

At the end of the 1920s, Stalin launched radical economic policies that literally changed the face of Russia, creating a new industrial and agricultural landscape. In Russia this was called the 'Great Turn'. Historians have talked about a second revolution (1917 being the first) and a 'revolution from above' since it was instigated by Stalin and the Communist leadership. The NEP was cast aside and Stalin introduced Five-Year Plans for industry and agriculture. A cultural revolution also accompanied the Great Turn which effected women, minorities, education, young people and the arts.

1. How, according to Sources 1 and 3, are the Communists defining the idea of 'building socialism'?
2. Using Sources 2 and 4, find at least three reasons why Stalin wanted to transform Soviet society.
3. Study the pictorial Sources 5-8. Explain, referring to the detail in the source, what message each is conveying about the way Soviet society is going to change.

SOURCE 1 – S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution 1917-1932*, 1994, pp.9-10

In theory, industrialisation and economic modernisation were only means to an end for Russian Marxists, the end being socialism. But the more clearly and single-mindedly the Bolsheviks focused on the means, the more foggy, distant and unreal the end became. When the term 'building socialism' came into common use in the 1930s, its meaning was hard to distinguish from the actual building of new factories and towns currently in progress.

SOURCE 2 – Stalin, writing in *Pravda*, 5th February 1931

To lower the temp [of industrialisation] means falling behind and those who fall behind get beaten. But we don't want to be beaten... The history of old Russia consisted, amongst other things, in her being beaten continually for her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys... She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the Anglo-French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. She was beaten by all of them because of her backwardness, her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness... We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.

SOURCE 3 – R.W. Davies, 'Stalin and Soviet Industrialisation', *History Sixth*, March 1991

This was the first attempt at the comprehensive planning of a major economy, and was thus an important turning point not only for Russian history, but also for the history of world industrialisation... In 1929, Stalin launched the so-called 'socialist offensive', which combined rapid industrialisation with the forcible collectivisation of peasant agriculture.

SOURCE 4 – Stalin, in an article entitled 'Year of the Great Breakthrough', *Pravda*, 7th November 1929

From small, backward, individual farming to large-scale, advanced, collective farming. The new and decisive feature of the peasant collective farm movement is that the peasants are joining the collective farms not in separate groups, but in whole villages, whole regions, whole districts, and even whole provinces... We are becoming a country of metal, an automobilised country; a tractorised country. And when we have put the USSR on an automobile, and the muzhik [peasant] on a tractor, let the esteemed capitalists, who boast their 'civilisation', try to overtake us.

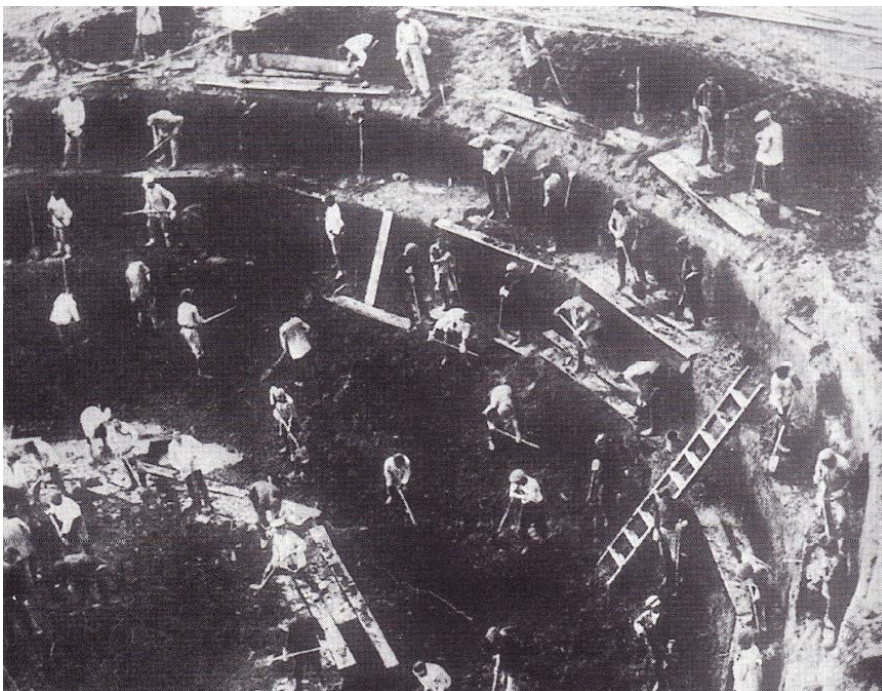
SOURCE 5 – Uzbek peasants in Samarkand crowd around a tractor for a lesson in the new farming methods. The tractor came to symbolise the changes taking place in the countryside; children were even named ‘Tractor’ in honour of the new machines



SOURCE 6 – Workers looking at a board showing production plans and targets



SOURCE 7 – Workers digging in Magnitogorsk, an industrial centre that expanded rapidly in the early 1930s



SOURCE 8 – A women’s construction brigade, whose job was to build a factory in Moscow, 1931

