Joseph Stalin

When **Joseph Stalin** came to power in the mid-1920s, the Soviet Union was a vast but under-developed country, mostly agricultural with little industry. Russians had been through World War I, two revolutions in 1917, civil war and famine. These events had left their impact on the state of the economy.

In 1928, Stalin began a state-run program of rapid industrialization. Factories were built, transport networks developed and workers encouraged, even forced, to work harder. Stalin intended to turn the economy around and make the USSR competitive with capitalist countries. To bring about this huge change, he acted ruthlessly.

Whether as a result of his direct orders or as a result of his policies, it is possible that 20 million people died during Stalin's reign. He was hated and feared as a dictator. He was also adored. During his lifetime he was glorified in newspapers and films, cities and streets were named after him, and statues of him were put up around the USSR. He was seen as the man who turned an undeveloped and divided nation into an industrial superpower.

World War II

During World War II, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin needed help from President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Despite Stalin's agreement with the German dictator Adolph Hitler, German forces were attacking the Soviet Union.

On August 13, 1942, Stalin wrote a memorandum to Roosevelt and Churchill opposing their decision not to invade Western Europe at that time. Stalin wanted the Americans and British to distract the Germans in Russia by fighting them on another front, Western Europe. Where were the Americans?

Just a few months after Stalin's letter, Great Britain and the United States (who were already fighting in the South Pacific) entered Africa to fight the Germans. But it was not until 1943 that the American and British forces would invade Italy. Then, on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Americans and British invaded Western Europe on the beaches of Normandy, France, almost one year after the German army began its retreat from Russia.

The USSR became strong enough to help defeat Germany during World War II and after the war was one of the most powerful nations in the world. Stalin's policy of industrialization helped achieve this, but at the cost of many Russian lives.