

Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich

(1879--1953), Ruler of the Soviet Union. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Stalin became a prominent member of the Bolshevik Party. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin fought tooth and nail to replace him as Soviet premier. By 1928, he rose to undisputed leadership.

As soon as he came to power, Stalin called for a Soviet industrial revolution. In 1929 he took control of the secret police. Stalin used "total terror" to impose his radical policies on his constituents. Anyone suspected of disagreeing with him was put in jail. Beginning in 1935, Stalin subjected many of his opponents to "show trials" in order to discourage opposition---based on trumped up charges, these former Communist leaders were tried for conspiracy, and many executed. During the late 1930s, Stalin launched a purge of millions of alleged opponents. An entire generation of Jewish Communists was destroyed, and a new generation of Communist peasants came to power. Antisemitism became a secret, yet major part of their ideology.

In August 1939 Stalin shocked the world by signing a non-aggression agreement with his country's former enemy, Germany, called the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In June 1941 Hitler betrayed that alliance and invaded the Soviet Union. During 1941 and 1942, the Soviet army suffered colossal defeats at the hands of the Germans, but Stalin eventually turned the war around. Between 1943 and 1945, Stalin met with Western leaders at conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, where, as imminent victors, they shaped Europe's future map.

In 1947 Stalin extended his support to the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel; apparently, he hoped that it would become a Soviet satellite state. However, when that did not come true by the end of 1948, Stalin withdrew his support and began implementing antisemitic measures in the Soviet Union. All Jewish organizations were dissolved, Jewish leaders were rounded up and executed, and many Jews were deported to Siberia. In 1953 Stalin dreamed up the "Doctors' Plot," in which he accused several Jewish doctors of trying to poison him. Stalin began preparing for the deportation of Soviet Jewry---but died before the expulsion could be implemented.

