

## The Soviet Union

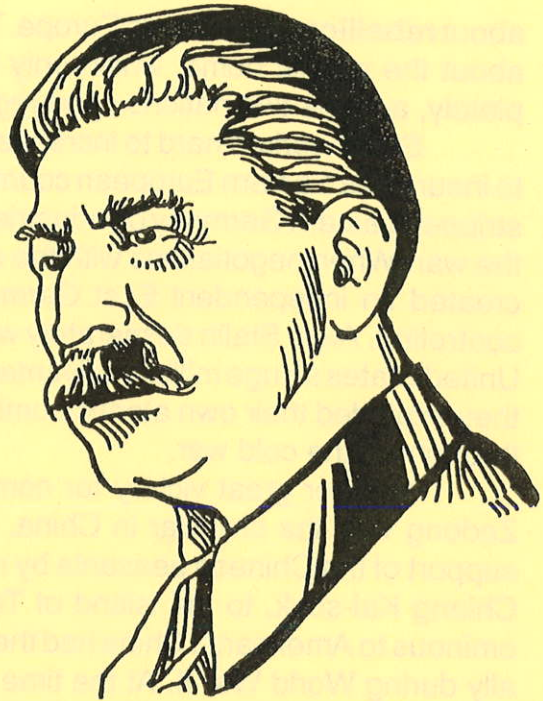
The Soviet Union had made a strange ally for the United States. The two countries were bound together in their common struggle against Hitler's Germany, but beyond that the nations had little in common. In fact, prior to World War II, the countries were hostile toward each other. As a capitalist and democratic nation, the United States was by nature opposed to communism. When Russia experienced a communist revolution in 1917, the United States refused to recognize the new communist government. There was a long history of mistrust between the two nations.

Of all the allies, the Soviet Union suffered the most from World War II. Nearly 20 million Russian soldiers and civilians died during the war. Many Russian cities were in ruins, and the countryside was devastated by the fighting. For the second time in twenty years, Russia had been invaded from the west and had fought a war on her own soil. Although they were victorious, the war was a catastrophe for the Soviets. In comparison, the United States had suffered only half a million deaths, and its cities and factories were untouched by the war.

Even during the war, many American leaders were suspicious of the Soviet Union. They did not trust Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader. They pointed out that Stalin had often treated his own people brutally. They were strongly opposed to communism. They believed that the Soviet Union would continue to promote communist **revolutions** after the war. President Roosevelt largely ignored these arguments. He knew that the United States needed to keep good relations with the Soviets during the war.

After the war, Stalin took actions that appeared threatening to some people in the United States. While pushing back the German armies, the Soviet Union liberated several Eastern European countries. At the Yalta conference, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill had agreed that free elections would be held in these countries. After the war, elections were held, but American government officials contended that the elections were rigged so that the communists would win. Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia were all soon ruled by communist governments. Stalin argued that it was necessary for Russia's neighbors to have friendly governments, for Russia could not afford to be invaded again. Many people in the United States were reluctant to accept this explanation. In a speech given on March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill warned that "an iron curtain is descending upon Europe." Stalin closed off all contact between Eastern Europe and the West. (See map on page 83.) American leaders could only guess what Stalin's plans were and what was happening behind the iron curtain. People wondered if Stalin was protecting the Soviet borders or planning a worldwide communist revolution. Only Stalin knew for sure.

Soon, American and Soviet leaders began to disagree about almost everything. They argued about the future of their recently defeated enemy, Germany. They argued



Joseph Stalin



about **rebellions** in Asia and Europe. They argued in United Nations meetings. They argued about the atomic bomb, which only the United States had. The alliance crumbled completely, and the two nations soon regarded each other as enemies.

Stalin worked hard to increase the Soviet Union's power. Russian troops were used to insure that Eastern European countries had governments friendly to the Soviet Union. He stripped eastern Germany of industrial equipment and natural resources as **reparations** for the war. When negotiations with the other allies over Germany's future broke down, Stalin created an independent East Germany and installed a communist government that he controlled. Also, Stalin desperately wanted to obtain the atomic bomb. He knew it gave the United States a huge military advantage. In 1949 Russian scientists stunned the world when they exploded their own atomic bomb. It marked the beginning of an arms race that lasted throughout the cold war.

Another great victory for communism occurred in 1949 when the armies of Mao Zedong won the civil war in China. Mao was a devoted communist who had rallied the support of the Chinese peasants by redistributing farm land. He drove the army of his rival, Chiang Kai-shek, to the island of Taiwan. (See map on page 85.) Mao's victory looked ominous to Americans. China had the world's largest population and had been an American ally during World War II. At the time it seemed certain that China would follow the Soviet Union's leadership. Americans believed that all communist countries worked together. Suddenly, America had lost another ally.

### Think about It

1. The Soviet Union had suffered tremendously during World War II. Does this fact justify their desire to control the governments of their neighboring countries after the war? Why or why not?
2. The United States and the Soviet Union were easily the most powerful nations in the world following World War II. Was it inevitable that they would eventually regard each other as enemies? Was a lasting alliance possible considering their differences?

### Dictionary Exercises

Find the definitions of the following words:

1. Ally
2. Revolution
3. Rebellion
4. Reparations