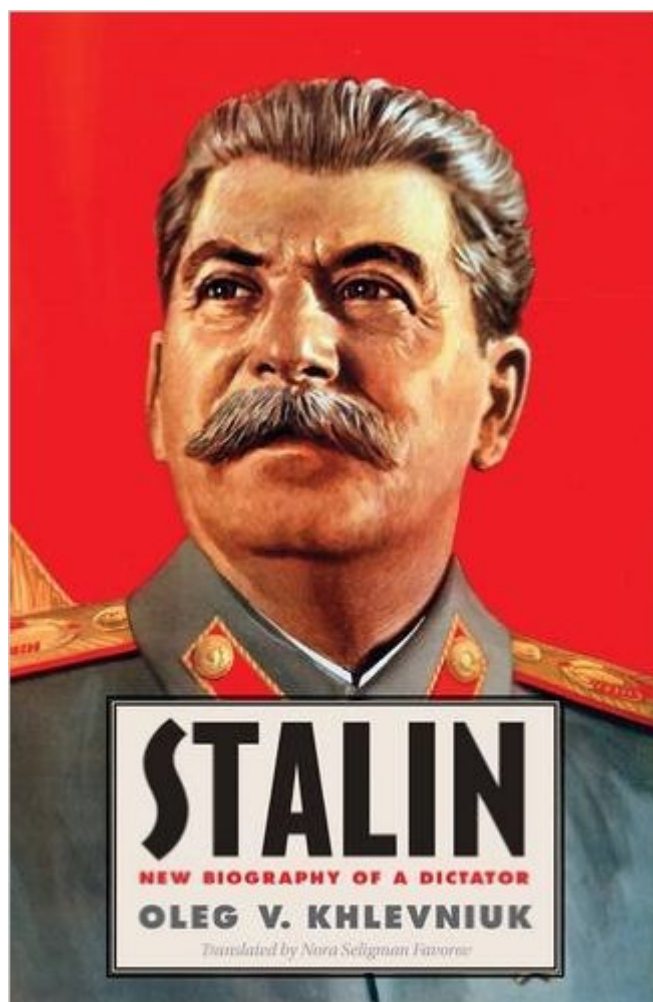


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Stalin: New Biography Of A Dictator



Synopsis

The most authoritative and engrossing biography of the notorious dictator ever written Josef Stalin exercised supreme power in the Soviet Union from 1929 until his death in 1953. During that quarter-century, by Oleg Khlevniuk's estimate, he caused the imprisonment and execution of no fewer than a million Soviet citizens per year. Millions more were victims of famine directly resulting from Stalin's policies. What drove him toward such ruthlessness? This essential biography, by the author most deeply familiar with the vast archives of the Soviet era, offers an unprecedented, fine-grained portrait of Stalin the man and dictator. Without mythologizing Stalin as either benevolent or an evil genius, Khlevniuk resolves numerous controversies about specific events in the dictator's life while assembling many hundreds of previously unknown letters, memos, reports, and diaries into a comprehensive, compelling narrative of a life that altered the course of world history. In brief, revealing prologues to each chapter, Khlevniuk takes his reader into Stalin's favorite dacha, where the innermost circle of Soviet leadership gathered as their *vozhdy* lay dying. Chronological chapters then illuminate major themes: Stalin's childhood, his involvement in the Revolution and the early Bolshevik government under Lenin, his assumption of undivided power and mandate for industrialization and collectivization, the Terror, World War II, and the postwar period. At the book's conclusion, the author presents a cogent warning against nostalgia for the Stalinist era.

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Customer Reviews

To start with, here are some statistics: during the reign of Stalin, between 1930 to 1952, 26 million

people in Russia were put to death, 20 million were incarcerated in labor camps, penal colonies or prisons, 6 million peasants were subjected to administrative exile, and, on average, 1 million people were shot, incarcerated, or deported to barely habitable areas every year. During 1937-1938, Stalin personally initiated all the main repressive campaigns, devised plans to carry them out, and monitored their implementation. He also guided the fabrication of evidence for numerous political trials and in several instances wrote detailed scripts for how show trials should play out. He had a passion for reading the cascade of arrestee interrogation protocols that came before him, and the notations he made on them show he read them attentively. These are just some samples taken from this new and brilliantly written biography about one of the most notorious monsters who ruled Russia during the previous century. What makes this book stand out is the huge effort invested in searching for new, original documents hitherto buried in various Russian archives and it is here where the main strength of this book lies. The author dispels many myths about Stalin. For example, Stalin never gave the order to kill Kirov in 1934. By using many letters, diaries, memos, reports and other marginalia, this work shows the extent of the horror experienced by the Russians in their everyday life. Stalin's paranoia is well documented, but the new angle offered here has to do with one possible and main reason for it.

Josef Stalin's 24-year reign as the supreme power in the USSR resulted in the deaths of millions of its citizens, either directly, as a result of repression, or indirectly, as a result of the famines created in large part by the policies his government pursued. In this new biography, Oleg V Khlevniuk sets out to sift through the massive quantity of documentation available to historians, including material newly released from the archives, with a view to understanding the dictator – his personality and motivations. Khlevniuk claims that many previous biographies have given inaccurate portrayals of Stalin, either because of lack of information or because the biographers were apologists for the regime, or sometimes because they repeated inaccuracies from earlier sources that have passed into the historical mythology. Despite the huge amount of material, Khlevniuk makes the point that there is still much more not yet released by the Russian government. One bonus for historians is that, because Russia was somewhat backwards technologically, Stalin continued to communicate by letter rather than phone until well into the 1930s. I give my usual disclaimer that I am not qualified to judge the historical accuracy of the book. It certainly appears well researched and gives a coherent and convincing picture of the period. Khlevniuk has used an unconventional structure that I think works quite well.

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