Joseph Stalin:
Dictator, Ruler of the Soviet Union

Stalin in Russian means “Man of Steel.” Joseph Stalin was born in 1879. As a young man he became involved in revolutionary politics, trying to overthrow the Russian czar (king). In 1917, the czar was overthrown and Russia soon came under a communist government. Now known as the Soviet Union, the new government was first led by revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin. Shortly after Lenin died in 1924, Stalin worked to the top of the communist party and soon became the dictator of the Soviet Union, a position he would keep until his death in 1953.

In the 1930s Stalin launched his Great Purge, killing millions of his own people who he believed might threaten his rule. As Secretary General, Stalin also had the power to appoint people to important positions in the government. The new holders of these posts were fully aware that they owed their promotion to Stalin. They also knew that if their behavior did not please Stalin they would be replaced.

Stalin was probably the most ruthless and successful tyrant the world has known. He created in the Soviet Union a totalitarian state in which the government controlled everything - all agriculture, all industry, the arts and sciences, sports, entertainment, the media, and religion. Every aspect of society was under the control of the government. The government decided what should be produced, how much, and at what price. All wages and prices were subject to government control. In return, the people got a welfare state: cradle to grave security. Hospitalization, education, housing, and pension plans were all guaranteed by the state, as were jobs. The people, in turn, gave up every trace of freedom. To make sure that his commands were obeyed and that no one disagreed with him, Stalin employed a vast network of secret police. A large system of prison camps was built to accommodate all who were accused of subverting the state.

Stalin brutally transformed Soviet agriculture through a process called collectivization-- by taking over private farms and creating a system of government-owned farms. These farms were called collective farms. Stalin controlled manufacturing and production in all industries. Anyone who disagreed with Stalin could be arrested and sent to labor camps in Siberia. By some estimates, Stalin was responsible for the deaths of 20 million people during his brutal rule.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST:
Think back to what you know about the rise of Hitler in Germany. How was the situation in the Soviet Union similar? How was it different? Fill in the Venn diagram below with as much as you can think of.