What did Lenin and Stalin contribute to communism in Russia?

Communism is a political ideology that would seek to establish a classless, stateless society. Pure Communism, the ultimate form of Communism as posited by Karl Marx, would see a complete abolition of private property as the means of production fell into the hands of the people and a society free of class and oppression where all decisions are made democratically. Such a state would mean no ownership of private property, democratic decision of policy both economic and political and complete egalitarianism. From the period 1917 to the death of Stalin in 1953, Soviet Russia had gone through political upheaval, beginning with the October Revolution of 1917. Though Russia in this period intermittently possessed some of the above characteristics and was an ostensibly Communist state, the Russians never enjoyed a state of pure Communism. The two main contributors to Communism as it was practiced in Russia were Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin; so much so that the terms 'Leninism' and 'Stalinism' were coined to describe their ideologies and contribution to Communism.

Leninism was heavily based on the ideas of Marxism and served as the basis for the ideology of Soviet Communism in its early stages. Lenin sought to expand on Marxism, taking into account the state of the world at the turn of the century and the condition of Russia, which was not an industrialised nation. According to Marx's theories, a socialist system would precede Communism. Lenin believed that a socialist system would be unable to develop independently in an underdeveloped country such as Russia and proposed two solutions. Firstly, that a revolution in an underdeveloped country such as Russia would trigger a revolution in a larger country such as Germany and secondly, that a number of
small underdeveloped countries would embrace Communism and then join together in a federal state capable of resisting Capitalism. The latter was the original idea behind the Soviet Union. From the beginning, Lenin espoused the need for world revolution in one form or other, and this was one of Lenin's earliest contributions to Communism.

Marx had always argued that Communism was an inevitability, as the Feudal system had ceded to Capitalism, so too would Capitalism cede to Socialism and eventually Communism. Marx argued that the collapse of Capitalism was inevitable and that it would be unable to reform itself as a system of government once this had happened. Lenin's political thought differed from that of Marx in substantial ways. In early 1902, Lenin completed work on the pamphlet 'What Is to Be Done?'. In this, he espoused the need to instigate Communism through the work of a revolutionary party. Leninism held that capitalism could only be overthrown through revolutionary means; any attempts to reform the system and moves towards socialism are doomed to fail. He argued that "The working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness." The goal of Leninism, therefore, is to overthrow the current government by force and install a dictatorship of the proletariat in its place. This idea of armed revolt is markedly different to the Marxist idea of progression towards Communism and may even be called revisionist. Despite this, Lenin's theories were to be the main influence on the attempt to achieve Communism in Russia, as opposed to the Menshevik idea which was more in line with Marx's original theory. Lenin's determination toward achieving his ends through revolt led to the October Revolution of 1917 and this linked Communism with violence thereafter.
Lenin also conceived of a means of guiding the proletariat towards Communism. Lenin argued that the proletariat could only comprehend the idea of Communism through the efforts of a party composed of full-time professional revolutionaries. Lenin further believed that such a party could only achieve its aims through a form of disciplined organization known as democratic centralism, which was, as Lenin described it "freedom of discussion, unity of action." Under democratic centralism, all party members have freedom to discuss the tactical and ideological direction of the Party, but once a decision is made by majority vote, Party members are expected to unanimously uphold that decision. This infrastructure which Lenin put into place was to have massive repercussions in the future, not least as it was the institution of democratic centralism which allowed Stalin to stock the Politburo with his own sympathisers and remove political rivals in order to assume power.

In 1921, lands and people under Soviet control were in desperate need of relief of the famine brought on by Lenin's policy of War Communism. To combat this poverty, Lenin enacted the NEP (New Economic Policy), which relaxed the previous strict Socialism and allowed a limited form of Capitalism. With this, free trade was hesitantly encouraged by the Bolsheviks. Lenin described the NEP as "One step backwards in order to take two steps forward." Lenin hoped that this adoption of Capitalistic elements would pave the way for pure socialism after an adequate waiting period. Lenin suggested that the NEP would morph into something different as the economy improved but this compromise with Capitalism seemed to be a tacit admission that Communism could not be achieved instantaneously and that it was necessary to allow free enterprise before any type of social democracy or Communist state could be established. On the
other hand, under a Stalinist regime the NEP was abandoned in favour of a command economy and the Five-Year Plans. Stalin and the majority of the Communist Party felt that the NEP had compromised their ideals and that it was not conducive to rapid industrialisation which was necessary for Russia to catch up to the West. Under Stalin, the entire economy was nationalised and agriculture was collectivised. Stalin's contribution to Communist economic policy was more in keeping with a Marxist ideal. In spite of their cost to human life, the Five Year Plans were a success and allowed Russia to industrialise rapidly. Arguably, it was the control economy which Stalin introduced that saved Russia in World War 2, turning a peasant country into a mighty world superpower in just 20 years.

Stalin considered himself a Marxist-Leninist, that is, a successor to the theories of Marx which were extrapolated upon by Lenin. Stalin believed Leninism to be the natural evolution of Marxist theory. Lenin had made it clear that the move from capitalism to socialism would need to include a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. As time went on, this apparatus would wither away. This did not happen under Lenin, as the apparatus of state increased and under Stalin this trend continued. It is argued that the Soviet Union was ruled under a dictatorship when Stalin was in power. Though Stalin was an avowed follower of Lenin, he achieved things during his time in office that went far beyond anything Lenin ever achieved. From his earliest time in the Party, Stalin stood for a practical approach to affairs, devoid of ideological sentiment. Stalinism describes the method of rule and policies that were put in place during this time. The term is now closely associated with an oppressive system of government and . Stalin stood for nationalism (Communism in One Country) and his contributions to Marxist-Leninist
theory inextricably linked Communism to oppressive totalitarianism thereafter.

Stalin, more so than any other ruler before him, managed to install a totalitarian regime in Russia; whereby the state regulated almost every aspect of public and private life. Soviet Russia under Stalin engaged in all of the following: spying, extensive use of propaganda to establish a personality cult and extrajudicial punishment including mass executions and purges which decimated the ranks of the Party. Stalin justified all this by putting forth the theory of "Aggravation of the Class Struggle along with the development of socialism" and it was this theory that allowed him to justify successive purges within the Party". Stalin argued that political repression was necessary to prevent remnants of the bourgeoisie infiltrating the Party and achieving their presumed goal of destroying the Soviet Union. Stalin believed that the class enemy could even worm its way into the party claiming to lead a socialist state. He evaluated those who were loyal to him based on whether or not they believed the Party could be infiltrated by the bourgeoisie or that the Party could have no enemies inside itself. Tolerance inside the Party to those who disagreed with the official Party line was called by Stalin "rotten liberalism". Stalin believed that tolerance, even inside the Party, would lead to weakness and he used this mentality to maintain a constant state of fear throughout Russia and to justify the Purges and his Reign of Terror.

The idea of "Socialism in One Country" was adopted as state policy by Stalin. Though promoted at the time as an ideology of necessity, not core belief, the theory came to define the course of political construction within the Soviet Union throughout its history. It held that Russia should adopt
a nationalistic stance and strengthen itself internally. Stalin claimed that his theory of "Socialism in One Country" was a further development of Leninism. Stalin argued that the Soviet Union had everything necessary to create a perfect Communist state and could do so without outside influence. This theory directly contradicted the writings of Engels and even Lenin himself, who was quoted as saying that "We shall perish without revolution in Germany." Stalin was to argue that Lenin himself rejected the idea of world revolution though this was based on a single, ambiguous quote which Lenin said in the months following the October Revolution. The idea of Socialism in One Country was adopted early in Stalin's reign and was indicative of the agenda which Stalin was to pursue thereafter. It was heavily nationalistic, much more grounded in practicality than in ideology and a great departure and had a predilection towards regression rather than advancement of Marxist theory. Indeed, the idea of "Socialism in One Country" was to effect Russian Foreign Policy in the years after World War 2. The isolationist stance which "Socialism in One Country" fostered only enhanced Russian suspicion of the United States and led to the Cold War. Stalin's contribution here was to nurture Russian isolationism and set a precedent for foreign policy in the Cold War.

The Soviet Union was the largest ostensibly Communist state which ever existed and is regarded as an example of Communist theory in practice. Communism as posited by Marx implied a system of government that was completely egalitarian. However, Marx failed to take into account human nature and the ability for an opportunist such as Stalin to seize power and use it to his own ends. Lenin made fundamental changes which allowed this bastardisation of Marxist theory to take place. He instigated violent Revolution
and later the policy of War Communism. From that point on, Communism was no longer regarded as a natural evolution of Democratic Socialism, but rather a system of government which would install itself through violent revolution and maintain its power no irrespective of civilian casualty. The Party, Lenin's creation, was to exert total control over all Russia and it was this level of control which allowed for the totalitarian regime of Stalin. In many ways, it could be argued that Stalin was continuing a Leninist approach to governance when he oppressed the people and conducted purges. In any case, between them, Lenin and Stalin demonstrated the inherent problems with Communism in practice and changed the perception of an ideology which aspired to achieving complete human harmony into an ideology which is now associated with oppression, totalitarianism and human misery.