

PART

2

FROM VICTORY TO SPUTNIK 1945-1960



The Soviet Union was shattered by the Second World War. It had endured some of the fiercest and most destructive battles of the whole conflict and faced a monumental task to rebuild its shattered towns, factories and landscape. However, there was a sense of optimism in the air – the Allies had defeated the Nazis and the Japanese and could now look forward to an era of peace. All across the world people exhausted by war looked forward to more from their lives, regardless of whether their governments were communist, capitalist or something in between.

Sadly, the political and governmental relationships developed during the war evaporated as the ideological battle between communism and capitalism gained speed. The two sides eyed each other with increasing suspicion – Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill summed up the mood when he said an Iron Curtain had been pulled down across Europe. Both sides were determined to show that 'their' system was best when it came to meeting the needs of the ordinary man in the street, and the motor industry was just one of the many weapons they deployed.

The Soviet system remained, however, heavily geared towards defence and heavy industry. Family-owned cars were relatively few, and for a long time remained a luxury in Russian eyes. Lots of vehicles were demanded by the army, the government and municipal agencies, and making trucks remained the state's primary concern until the 1960s. Private cars accounted for just