

Teaching notes

This resource is one of a sequence of eight resources, originally planned for Edexcel's Paper 1 Option: Russia, 1917-91: from Lenin to Yeltsin. The sequence focuses on the theme 'Industrial and agricultural change, 1917-85'. Although the content of the resources is drawn from this particular specification, there is no reason why they couldn't be used to support the teaching of other similar courses, perhaps with some adaptation of the suggested activities.

The eight resources in the sequence are:

1. War Communism (search '25198' to find it on [Teachit History](#))
2. The New Economic Policy (search '25199')
3. The First Five-Year Plan (search '25200')
4. **Collectivisation (this resource)**
5. Soviet Industry and Agriculture in WW2 (search '25202')
6. Virgin Lands (search '25203')
7. Stagnation and the Brezhnev era (search '25204')
8. Reform under Gorbachev (search '25205')

Each resource contains a section of reading followed by some suggested tasks. These could be completed in class or as independent homework tasks.

Background

By the mid-1920s the question of collective farms that had been raised by the Bolsheviks during the NEP era had re-emerged. Whereas previously it had been possible for the peasants to decide whether or not they wished to join collectives, Stalin believed that in order to create a socialist society the process had to be compulsory. In 1929 Stalin wrote an article in the party newspaper *Pravda*, titled 'A Year of Great Change'. In it he claimed that the peasantry was voluntarily adopting collective farming and that agricultural output was rapidly increasing. For Stalin, collectivisation became vital, as the Five-Year Plans required a vast increase in grain production not only to feed a growing industrial workforce but also for exports in order to pay for equipment and infrastructure from overseas.



USSR 1929: Workers leaving for the country to apply collectivisation

USSR 1929: Workers leaving for the country to apply collectivisation / Credit: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group / Copyright © Universal Images Group / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

By 1928 poor grain yields, combined with the drive for industrialisation, began to create a crisis within the Soviet economy. Desperate to avoid criticism, Stalin argued that the reason for the shortfall was speculation and hoarding by greedy kulaks that had emerged as a new capitalist class as a result of the NEP. The peasants were not hoarding in order to make profits at the expense of the workers, the poor harvests combined with low grain prices set by the state, were making it impossible for the peasants to sell their grain and to survive. Instead of raising grain prices, the politburo demanded that grain be seized, effectively returning to War Communism. The result of these seizures was confrontation and conflict with the peasants, but the Soviet state was far stronger than it had been when the Bolsheviks were nearly overthrown by the Antonov revolt in 1921.

Stopping production

By 1929 grain production across Russia had declined, as the peasants feared their harvests would simply be seized by the state. In the year 1928-29, the politburo introduced policies similar to War Communism in the Ural and Siberian regions of Russia. They established new poor peasant committees to divide peasant villages and assigned grain quotas on a class basis, with 'poor' peasants deciding who had to bear the greatest burden of requisitioning. The policy was deliberately designed to create class turmoil in villages and encourage poor peasants to persecute their wealthier neighbours. There were few actual wealthy peasants, just a small minority who had learned better farming techniques and had been thriftier with what little money they had. When grain seizures began, the peasants began to hide grain and violently resist attempts by the state to seize surpluses.

Collectivisation

The growing crisis over grain collection led to a resolution by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1929 to institute collectivisation. Stalin believed that it was the only way that the kulak 'threat' could be eliminated. Two types of collective farm, the kolkhoz and the sovkhoz were established and the NEP policies that had enabled peasants to sell their grain at markets were cancelled. Peasants who had been labelled as kulaks, through denunciation by their neighbours, or by state records about their class origins faced deportation. Hundreds of thousands of kulaks were exiled, with just hours of notice, to inhospitable parts of the Soviet empire. Approximately a fifth died along the way and those that arrived, often in Soviet Central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan were unwelcome by locals who were dealing with food shortages and could not feed the new arrivals. There was an incentive for poorer peasants to denounce others as kulaks, as it enabled their land and property to be looted by the village.

By the winter of 1929, only seven percent of farms had been collectivised, but in the four months between November 1929 and February 1930, an extra 11 million peasant families were forced into collectives. Stalin was certain that the abolition of private ownership in peasant Russia was the key to a vast increase in grain production and the answer to his industrial shortages. However the anticipated fifty percent increase in grain production did not occur, because:



1. Peasants who normally worked hard on their own plots became apathetic and demotivated.
2. The landless peasants who were supposed to have benefitted from collectivisation were far rarer than the soviet government believed. Many had acquired land during the revolution and were devastated when they had to return it.
3. Their equipment was pooled and was often broken by other peasants who had little interest in maintaining it. Prized livestock was often stolen by poorer peasants or simply left to die.
4. The state promised that the vast new collective farms would be transformed by technology, particularly by new Ford tractors from America. These vehicles rarely materialised and when they broke down, spare parts to repair them were scarce.
5. Other plans such as abolishing peasant villages and creating vast new agri-towns failed to materialise.

Dizzy with success

Stalin realised that the policy was not working and knew he had to deflect blame away from himself. In March 1930 he wrote an article in *Pravda* titled 'Concerning Questions of the Collective-Farm Movement'. In it he stated:

'It is a fact that by 20 February of this year 50% of the peasant farms throughout the U.S.S.R. had been collectivised. That means that by 20 February, 1930, we had over fulfilled the Five-Year plan of collectivisation by more than 100 per cent.'

However, he added that:

'But the successes have their seamy side, especially when they are attained with comparative "ease" – "unexpectedly" so to speak. Such successes sometimes induce a spirit of vanity and conceit: "We can achieve anything!"; "There is nothing we can't do!" People not infrequently become intoxicated by such successes; they become dizzy with success, lose all sense of proportion and the capacity to understand realities.'

Stalin was attempting to say that the party members and bureaucrats behind collectivisation had let their successes go to their heads and this vanity was dangerous. It encouraged party members to think that the kulaks could easily be beaten.

Sabotage

Peasants believed they were being returned to serfdom and committed acts of arson, murdered local officials and slaughtered their livestock to prevent the government from seizing them. There was a dramatic fall in livestock numbers as a result of collectivisation which did not recover throughout the next decade:

Livestock (millions)	1928	1941
cattle	33.2	27.8
pigs	27.7	27.5
horses	36.1	21.0

Famine

Between 1932 and 1933 there was a poor harvest across much of Russia, but it was particularly acute in the Ukraine. Stalin ignored pleas from Ukraine to reduce the levels of grain quotas, partly because Ukraine had been a Soviet republic where the peasants had vigorously resisted collectivisation. Instead of relieving quotas, he deliberately introduced a number of punitive policies, many of which specifically targeted Ukraine. Other peoples of the Soviet Union were also devastated by Stalin's policies, including the nomadic herding tribes in Kazakhstan. In August 1932 the Soviet Government passed the Decree about the Protection of Socialist Property, allowing the state to execute anyone who damaged kolkhoz property. This was followed by the 'law of spikelets' which threatened the death penalty for anyone caught eating stray bits of grain as it constituted theft from the state.

In November 1932 the Soviet government:

1. Demanded that state-supplied food advances given to peasants who beat their targets had to be returned, depriving the few areas with surpluses of any grain they had. Two days later, a similar meat penalty was introduced, and peasants unable to hit grain quotas had to pay a penalty in meat instead.
2. Established a blacklist of all farms failing to meet quotas. They were expected to surrender fifteen times the regular monthly target. This led activists and police to arrive and take all foodstuffs, right down to family store cupboards, as a punishment. Farms on the blacklist were also banned from trading at all, making their plight even more desperate.

Stalin's security chief for the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Vsevolod Balytsky, told a receptive Stalin that the famine in Ukraine was a nationalist plot, connected to Poland. Stalin was deeply suspicious of the Poles, and this argument from Balytsky made all Ukrainian nationalists, even those linked to earlier Soviet initiatives encouraging Ukrainian culture, enemies of the state. Soviet authorities failed to deviate from or lessen requisition quotas from an already starving Ukraine. Owing to Ukraine's traditional role as the Russian empire's breadbasket, it now had to supply a third of the entire quota for the USSR, which could only be done by a policy of mass starvation. Stalin sealed the borders of Ukraine in January 1933, preventing peasants from escaping to find food elsewhere, and Ukrainian peasants were denied internal passports. This took away any chance of escaping the hunger and the requisitions which continued long after quotas were met in 1933.

The final numbers of those killed in the Soviet famine is unknown. Some historians have estimated that it might be between five and seven million. Stalin himself conceded to Winston Churchill in 1945 that it might have been as many as ten million.

Tasks

1. How do sources two and three support the statements made in source one?

Source 1:

The below are examples of the slogans on banners carried by party activists who travelled to the countryside to enforce collectivisation.

- a. 'We will exile the Kulaks by the thousands and when necessary, shoot the Kulak breed.'
- b. 'We will make soap of the Kulaks.'
- c. 'Our class enemy must be wiped off the face of the earth.'

Source 2:

An OGPU (secret police) report from 1931:

'These people (activists) drove the dekulakised naked into the streets, beat them, organised drinking bouts in their houses, shot over their heads, forced them to dig their own graves, undressed women and searched them, stole valuables, money etc.'

Source 3:

A report by the Welsh journalist Gareth Jones:

'... A woman on the boat turned to me and said quietly, "Do you see those? They are kulaks, being exiled, just because they have worked hard throughout their lives. The peasants have been sent away in thousands to starve. It is terrible how they have treated them. They have not been given bread-cards or anything. A large number were sent to Tashkent and were left bewildered on the town square. They did not know what to do and very many starved to death.'"

2. Essay: 'Collectivisation was a deliberate policy of starvation.' How valid is this statement?