

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 (search '25201')
5. **The Second World War (this resource)**
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

From 1936 onwards, Stalin became convinced that a counter revolutionary war against Russia was inevitable. He believed that Germany, Japan and Poland were the most likely aggressors and began to re-arm the USSR. Collectivisation had catastrophically weakened the country's food economy and created millions of opponents of the regime. Ironically, throughout the period of collectivisation and the later great terror from 1936 onwards, Stalin had been obsessed with strengthening the Soviet economy, ready for war. He believed that the economic weaknesses of Tsarism had caused the regime to collapse during the First World War, and the Bolsheviks had nearly been defeated on the economic front during the Russian Civil War. Therefore, strengthening economic production and the output of arms was a high priority, especially as the world situation became increasingly threatening after 1936. Stalin was mindful that mass mobilisation had destroyed the Tsarist economy through taking men and horses from peasant villages and diverting factory production away from making goods that the peasants would trade food for. The result had been peasant hoarding of food and hunger in the towns and cities, contributing to the fall of the regime. The policy of collectivisation was in part designed to prevent peasants from ever exercising this power over rest of Russia again.



Soviet artillery shells undergoing quality control inspection

Soviet artillery shells undergoing quality control inspection by civilian women workers at a munitions plant during world war2 / Credit: Sovfoto / 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

The soviet economy was already highly geared towards military production by the end of the first Five-Year Plan, but it was the third plan that began in 1937 that was specifically dedicated to defense production. Initially Stalin had planned to keep a certain amount of factories set aside for military production if war broke out, but by the mid-1930s he decided instead to simply use this industrial capacity to create as much military equipment as possible. Between 1930 and 1940, for example, some 30,000 tanks were built and approximately 40,000 planes. During this period, new manufacturing techniques developed and the USSR began to use western methods of mass production. Factories produced simple parts for tanks and aircraft that were easy to produce and interchangeable in a variety of vehicles, meaning that when the fighting began, Soviet armies were highly mobile.

Industrial and agricultural change in Russia 1917-85: The Second World War

The Molotov Ribbentrop era

In 1939, weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany. The pact stunned Stalin's admirers in the west and a secret clause in the pact agreed the division of Poland, which was invaded first by Germany and then the USSR in September 1939. The pact was also an economic agreement which had consequences for soviet industry and agriculture. Stalin believed that the real power in Germany wasn't Hitler and the Nazi Party but the capitalist oligarchs that he was certain funded the Nazis. Marxist theory explained fascism and Nazism as simply the devices that capitalism developed in order to protect itself. Stalin realised in 1939 that the USSR was vulnerable to attack from Germany (in the previous year, during the last phase of the terror, he had executed many of the Red Army's most talented commanders and generals), and the only way to appease the Germans for long enough to rebuild the Red Army was to placate her capitalist class. Stalin knew that the USSR's abundant raw materials were sought after by Germany, intent on conquering Russia and overthrowing Communism. He therefore offered resources to Germany in two far reaching economic agreements. The German-Soviet Trade and Credit Agreement meant that the USSR would supply Nazi Germany with 180 million Reichsmarks of raw materials including oil, soya beans, manganese, iron ore and timber. In return, 120 million Reichsmarks of industrial goods and equipment would be supplied from Nazi Germany to the USSR. A second agreement the following year extended the scope of economic cooperation. Soviet raw material exports to Germany increased to 420 Reichsmarks in value. Nazi Germany, in return, supplied 230 million Reichsmarks of industrial hardware to the USSR.

The war years 1941-45

When Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, Russian industrial workers and peasants faced not only famine and the immediate threat from the invaders, but also the coercive violence of the soviet state. Controlling both industry and agriculture were vital for the survival of the regime and as a result were subject to central organisation and repression. The war exposed both weaknesses and strengths in soviet industry and agriculture which had undergone such dramatic changes and crises since 1928.



German troops in Russia 1941/42

German troops in Russia 1941/42 / Credit: akg-images / Universal Images Group / Copyright © akg-images / 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

Industrial and agricultural change in Russia 1917-85: The Second World War

War production

In 1942, when the USSR came closest to collapse, Stalin's war economy was capable of out-producing that of Nazi Germany. The table below shows the levels of war production for both regimes in that year:

Armaments	Soviet Union	Nazi Germany
aircraft	13,000	10,000
tanks	15,000	7,000
rifles	5,500,000	1,000,000
artillery	110,000	60,000

Throughout the war, despite the fact that the USSR was very nearly defeated by Nazi Germany, the soviet government was able to equip bigger armies and produce more tanks, planes, artillery and rifles. The reason for this success was the almost complete diversion of all resources into war production. Food, fuel, metals and manpower were diverted to war production and fighting, along with the entire transport network. Two thirds of the economy's GDP was dedicated towards war production, but the size of the economy had shrunk by a third because of the German invasion, showing that all remaining resources were directed towards the war effort. The soviet civilians who were most likely to be able to eat were those who worked in munitions factories.

Tankograd

One of the key advantages the USSR had over any invader was the country's immense size. Stalin knew that the Germans would be unable to reach beyond the Ural Mountains which divided Russia beyond the Volga River. One of the most important sites of tank production was the city of Chelyabinsk, which had seen a huge tractor factory established there in 1933 during the second Five-Year Plan. In 1941 the manufacturing infrastructure from seven other soviet cities was loaded on to trains, along with tens of thousands of workers and re-built at Chelyabinsk. By 1944 there were 60,000 tank workers, and the factory built 18,000 tanks during the course of the war, earning it the nickname Tankograd. The tank works at Karkhov, in their entirety, were evacuated east of the Ural Mountains after the German invasion, and having been merged with the Dzerzhinsky works in Nizhny Tagil, became the Stalin Ural Tank Factory no. 183, the largest producer of tanks in the world. In total, 1,523 factories were dismantled and moved east of the Urals, proving to be one of the largest feats of logistics and planning ever undertaken, and ensuring that the USSR continued to have a war industry that could not be reached by German bombers. This was one of the most significant factors in enabling the USSR to eventually defeat Nazi Germany.

Workers

The strict military style discipline of the War Communism era, reintroduced during the Five-Year Plans was intensified during the Second World War. However, to describe the soviet worker during the war as motivated only from a desire to avoid harsh punishment would be incorrect. The war generated a widespread upsurge in nationalist sentiment from millions of Russian workers. Many joined the army, while other essential workers who were forced to remain at their posts raised and donated money for the war effort and factory committees sponsored individual tanks and aircraft. Overall there was a high degree of popular participation in the war effort and Stalin often earned the respect of soviet workers. His decision not to abandon Moscow when the city was under siege in 1941 demonstrated to millions of ordinary Russians that Stalin had the leadership skills and courage to win the war. Many cities came close to starvation and in the case of Leningrad mass starvation led to the deaths of over a million people. The threat of the gulag for poor workplace performance, combined with mass overcrowding and hunger led to large numbers of workers sleeping at the production line in the tanks and planes they were building.

Tasks

1. 'The Second World War was won in the Soviet Union's factories.' How valid is this statement?
2. The Five-Year Plans and collectivisation were Stalin's greatest contribution to victory'. Discuss.