

Reason bank

1. To move towards a socialist society

According to Marxist theoreticians, socialism could only be created in a highly industrialised state where the overwhelming majority of the population were workers. In 1928, only 20% of the population were workers.

2. To increase military strength in preparation/fear of war

Stalin knew that a country that was not industrialised was weak. To fight a modern war required a well-developed industrial base to manufacture the quantities of weapons and munitions needed. A number of factors contributed to a war scare in the late 1920s. Germany had joined the League of Nations in 1926 leaving the USSR isolated in foreign affairs. Fractious relations with Britain after the Zinoviev letter culminated in the end of diplomatic relations following a 1927 British police raid on a Soviet trade delegation. Relations with France and Poland deteriorated and Russia feared Japanese intentions. Were these events a sign of a forthcoming attack by capitalist powers on the world's only Marxist state? Were the wars of foreign intervention 1918-20 to be repeated? During the 1930s Stalin became increasingly convinced that the USSR would be attacked.

3. To achieve self-sufficiency

Stalin wanted to make the USSR much less dependent on Western manufactured goods, especially the heavy industrial plant that was needed for industrial production. It was important that the USSR had a strong industrial base to produce the goods its people needed, without relying on foreign imports or resources. This would make them self-sufficient and independent in the world, especially important if war were to break out.

4. To increase grain supplies and industrial output

Stalin wanted to end the dependence of the economy on a backward agricultural system. In the past, this had created major problems whenever there was a bad harvest or the peasants did not produce enough food e.g. the 1921 famine. He did not want the new socialist state to be at the mercy of the peasantry. Surplus grain was required to buy the machinery that would help the USSR to industrialise.

5. For Stalin to establish his leadership credentials and create an international profile

Stalin needed to prove to himself and other leading Bolsheviks that he was the successor and equal of Lenin. His economic policies were central to this. The economic transformation of the USSR, taking the revolution forward in a giant leap of socialism, would establish him as a leader of historic importance. His economic policies would be the 'second revolution' with himself playing the role of Lenin.

6. To improve standards of living and promote Communism

Stalin wanted to catch up to the West, not just militarily, but also in terms of the standard of living. A good standard of living would help to ensure a more harmonious society. The communist life should be a good life and people in other parts of the world should appreciate what it had to offer working people. Stalin said 'We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.'

7. The limitations of the NEP by the late 1920s

The NEP was not producing the sort of society that many communists wanted by the end of the 1920s. Few communists liked the outward manifestations of the NEP: the Nepmen and the strength of the private market. Nor did they like being held to ransom by the peasants. By the end of the 1920s, the workers were suffering high unemployment and low wages. The peasantry were starting to hold back food from the market causing grain shortages in 1928-29 including a Kulak grain strike. The NEP was not enough to move industrialisation forward. The 1926 Party Congress called for the leadership to 'transform our country from an agrarian into an industrial one, capable by its own efforts of producing the necessary means'. By 1926, industrial capacity had recovered to pre-1914 levels. A massive injection of funds and capital was now needed to move industrialisation forward.

Great turn priority tree

Highest priority



Lowest priority

