

policy of War Communism. This turned the state into a centralised command economy. Industry was brought under state control, with the nationalisation of the railways and merchant fleet in the spring of 1918, and of the factories in June. In December, Vesenkha (the Supreme Council of the National Economy) was set up, and this council gradually assumed control over industrial enterprises. Professional state-employed managers, with a duty to increase production and maximise efficiency, replaced the factory committees. Often, these 'specialists' were actually the same bourgeois factory owners who had recently been displaced.

Labour discipline was tightened. Fines were re-introduced for workers who arrived late or failed to turn up to work. Furthermore, internal passports were issued to try to stop workers leaving the cities. By 1921, workers could be imprisoned or shot if targets were not met. Unions became a means of keeping the workers under control and payment took the form of ration tokens. Only the labour force and the Red Army soldiers were given adequate food under the new rationing system. Essential civil servants and professionals, such as doctors, were given a lower level of rations. The former burzhui ('non-persons' or 'bourgeois parasites') were left on the edge of starvation.

Private trade and manufacture were forbidden, and money became less important as it was replaced with ration tokens. Rationing helped create a system of semi-controlled barter, which was suggestive of socialism. However, in the circumstances of civil war this meant a huge black market trade. According to Martin Sixsmith, 'A siege mentality informed the government's every act. Workers were no longer seen as agents of the revolution but as raw material, an expendable force to be exploited in the great experiment of building socialism.'

War Communism also brought more forcible requisitioning of grain from the peasants. The Food-Supplies Dictatorship, set up in May 1918, sent detachments of soldiers, Red Guards and workers from the large towns to force peasants to hand over their grain. Officially the grain was bought, but in fact it was often brutally confiscated and the requisitioning detachments were allowed to keep a share of whatever they collected, as a reward. This often caused the peasants great hardship by leaving them with insufficient grain for the months ahead. They also lost other important items, such as horses, carts and firewood, to the squads.

less poor were regarded as allies of the proletariat, but the 'grasping fists' (the kulaks who had made personal wealth from their farming) were seen as 'enemies of the people'. The Volispolkom (Vik) encouraged the seizure of kulak stocks. The more efficient farmers therefore disappeared and grain supplies fell to dangerous levels. One-third of the land was abandoned to grass, while cattle and horses were slaughtered in their thousands.

There has been some debate as to whether War Communism was simply a pragmatic reaction to the civil war or a strategy that had been deliberately planned. There is evidence that Lenin saw War Communism as the natural extension of the class warfare that he had deliberately stirred up in the early days of the Bolshevik regime. He referred to it as the 'internal war to destroy "bourgeois attitudes".'

Trotsky, on the other hand, had initially opposed War Communism and put forward his own mixed socialist/capitalist scheme in 1920, but this had been rejected by the party. Consequently, he had taken the view that greater discipline was the only way of countering Russia's imperial legacy and the economic devastation of the civil war. According to David Christian, 'The party emerged from the years of civil war, militarised, brutalised and aware that direct methods of mobilisation might be a workable alternative to the methods of capitalism.'

Whatever the reason, initial promises of freedom, justice and self-determination were swept aside by 1921. The early socialist experiments came to an end and a new autocratic political culture was established.

Theory of knowledge

Historians have given the name War Communism to the economic system practised during the civil war. Do such labels help or obstruct our study of history?

Economic problems and political unrest

By 1921, the civil war was over and yet, for the peasants and workers, economic conditions were getting worse rather than better. Total industrial output had fallen to around 20% of its pre-war levels. With a collapse in the rail and river transport systems, factories were struggling to get necessary supplies. Worse still, food prices escalated as a severe famine hit Russia in 1921. The harvest of 1921 yielded only 48% of what had been produced in 1913.

A major drought in the south of the country had contributed to the famine but it was at least partly the result of communist policies. Price controls and requisitioning had encouraged the peasants to plant less, which meant there were no reserves to fall back on. Lenin must have known the dangers of his policies but, according to Richard Pipes, he repeatedly said that he would sooner the whole nation die of hunger than allow free trade in grain. Deaths from malnutrition and disease were certainly high, and possibly as many as 25 million died. According to Mawdsley, more than a million people died of typhus and typhoid in 1920, compared with 63,000 in 1917. A Northern European influenza epidemic also carried away thousands, and there were 3 million deaths as a result of higher child mortality. Numbers might have been higher still had it not been for foreign relief efforts. There were even reported incidents of cannibalism.

The famine was accompanied by a new outbreak of peasant violence. The worst occurred in Tambov province, 480 km (300 miles) south-east of Moscow, in August 1920. The requisitioning squads arrived here at a time when the peasants had almost no reserves. For nearly a year, until June 1921, the peasants fought for their freedom and their right to the land. They were led by Alexander Antonov, who gathered a 70,000-man peasant army. Over the next two years, the revolt spread across large areas of south-eastern Russia.

A Russian couple with their starving children during the famine of 1921-22



The government called up 100,000 Red Army troops to deal with the troubles, and even used poison gas to massacre the rebels as they hid in the forests.

SUPPRESSED

Lenin blamed the kulaks for the unrest and demanded that they be punished.

The insurrection of the kulaks must be suppressed without mercy. We need to set an example. You need to hang (I repeat, hang, without fail, in full public view) at least a hundred kulaks, the rich, the bloodsuckers. Then publish their names and take away all of their grain. Also execute the hostages. Do it in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will tremble and cry out, 'let us choke and strangle those bloodsucking kulaks!'

Quoted in Sixsmith, M. 2011. Russia. London, UK. BBC Books. p. 238.

There were also strikes and riots in the towns, as the food crisis deepened. Workers protested against the strict discipline in factories and the lack of union representation. Support for the other socialist parties revived, and there were calls for 'soviets without communism'. In January 1921, the bread ration was reduced by one-third in several cities, including Moscow and Petrograd. Martial law was declared and the Cheka was used to crush demonstrations, since regular soldiers refused to take action against the protesters.

This was the final straw for the 30,000 sailors stationed in the Kronstadt naval base. In March 1921, they sent a manifesto to Lenin. They demanded concessions that included free elections, free speech, freedom of the press and the ending of one-party Communist rule.

Although few of the original Kronstadt sailors of October 1917 remained (many had been killed in the civil war and others had moved on to become administrators), they were remembered as the 'shock troops' of the Bolshevik Revolution. Lenin was alarmed and ordered an immediate assault on the base. Red Army men marched 8 km (5 miles) across the ice, supported by artillery from the shore. The Cheka were positioned to their rear, in case any man should think of deserting. After nearly 24 hours of bitter and bloody fighting, which left more than 10,000 bodies strewn across the ice, the Kronstadt rebellion was crushed and the ringleaders were rounded up and shot. In total, 15,000 rebels were sent to the prison camp at Solovetsky on the White Sea. Lenin denounced the sailors as 'White Traitors', but the incident had shaken him. *narrative as it came first when the*

These troubles also caused divisions within the Bolshevik Party itself. The Workers' Opposition Group, set up under Alexander Shiyapkinov and Alexandra Kollontai, argued for greater worker control and the removal of managers and military discipline in factories. This group strongly opposed those in the party, including Trotsky, who wanted to continue and intensify War Communism and use the Red Army to build socialism by force.

Activity

Make a chart summarising the reasons why Lenin was forced into a change of policy in 1921. Begin with the general reasons and work towards the more specific ones.

Lenin later claimed that the Kronstadt revolt was the 'flash that lit up reality'. But it was probably the combination of the many troubles of 1921 which persuaded him that a change of direction was necessary. Amid fierce debate at the 10th Party Congress, Lenin announced a New Economic Policy. Although he was supported by Nikolai Bukharin, Grigori Zinoviev and most of the leadership, many Bolsheviks saw this as a betrayal of their ideological principles.

The New Economic Policy

The New Economic Policy (NEP) of August 1921 reinstated a money economy, and was intended to encourage greater interaction between the town and countryside. Most importantly, it ended the requisitioning of grain in rural areas. Although peasants still had to give a certain proportion of their produce to the state as a form of tax, they were permitted to sell any surplus. The state retained control over the heavy, military and strategic industries - such as coal, iron and steel and oil - as well as the transport and banking systems. However, private ownership of smaller businesses (usually through co-operatives and trusts) and private trade were permitted once again. Rationing ended and industries had to pay their workers wages from their own profits, thereby ensuring that they were run efficiently.

The NEP soon showed results. Although the larger industries took longer to revive and the production levels of 1913 were not reached until 1926, cereal production rose by 23%. Factory production increased (from a very low starting point) by a staggering 200% between 1920 and 1923. The peasants were encouraged to produce more, in order to sell grain for money, and they then bought the products of small-scale industry. Living standards rose, peasant revolts declined, and the industrial disputes ended. The change of policy also meant that foreign nations, such as Britain and Germany, were willing to make much-needed trade agreements with Russia.

Traders (known as Nepmen) travelled the country, buying grain and selling industrial goods. They could make big profits and enjoyed frequenting the gambling halls, night clubs, brothels and expensive restaurants that accompanied the return of private wealth. Lenin was not at ease with the changes, and the hardliners grumbled. But the breathing space allowed by the NEP ensured that the Bolsheviks continued to hold on to power.

There was one more adjustment to the policy in 1923, when the Scissors Crisis - as Trotsky called it - became acute (see graph on page 198). As the peasants responded to the NEP more quickly than the industrial co-operatives, the towns became flooded with food, but had insufficient goods to offer in exchange. This encouraged peasants to hold back surpluses, as food prices started to fall and the cost of industrial goods was high. Consequently, from 1923, industrial prices were capped by the state and the peasants' food quotas were replaced by money taxes, so the peasants were forced to sell their produce.

Source

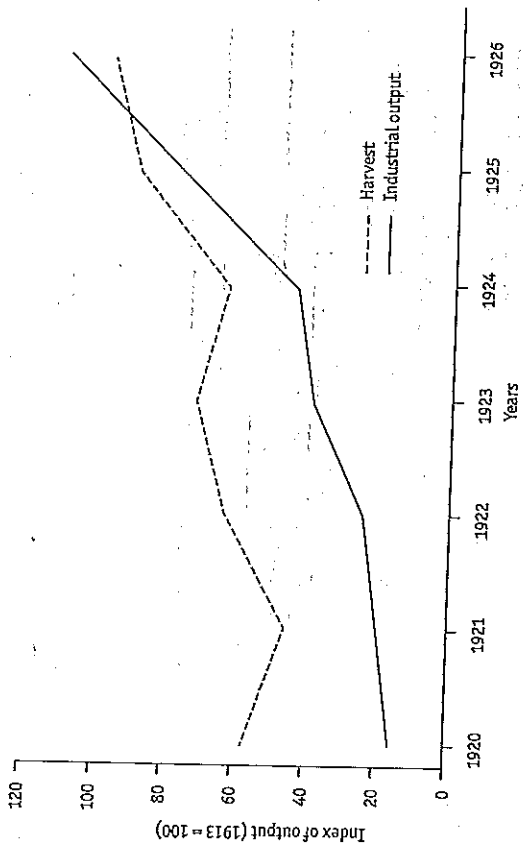
Table showing the Soviet economy under the New Economic Policy 1920-26

	1913 figures = 100									
	1913	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926		
Industrial production	100	14	20	26	39	45	75	108		
Coal	100	30	31	33	47	56	62	95		
Electricity	100	-	27	40	59	80	150	180		
1945 m. kilowatt hours	100	-	3	4	7	18	36	58		
Pig iron	100	-	4	9	17	27	50	74		
4,231,000 tonnes	100	-	30	30	44	51	63	-		
Rail freight carried	100	-	4	14	27	37	65	89		
132 m. tonnes	100	-	86	74	87	93	105	-		
Cotton fabrics	100	58	47	63	71	64	91	96		
2582 m. metres	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Sown area	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
105 m. hectares	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Grain harvest	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
80.1 m. tonnes	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		

Notes: m. = million; - = figures not available; the 1913 grain harvest was unusually high, so the figures in the final row exaggerate the decline in agricultural production in the early 1920s.

Adapted from Nove, A. 1992. An Economic History of the USSR, 3rd edn. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, p. 89.

Economic growth under NEP 1920-26, based on the figures in Source D (page 197); the Scissors Crisis got its name because the graph resembles scissors



AGRICULTURE

How successful was the New Economic Policy? Try to find some more relevant statistics to demonstrate its effects.

DISCUSSION POINT

What role do statistics play in history? Do statistics provide better evidence than written records?

To what extent did the new Soviet state rely on terror and coercion?

Terror and coercion were built into the Bolshevik state from its earliest days. The Cheka was established to root out political enemies in December 1917. Over the following months and years, its activities expanded. In March 1918, the government requisitioned the Lubianka building, the former headquarters of the All-Russian Insurance Company, as the Cheka's new base in Moscow. A prison was established inside and a contemporary joke referred to it as the tallest building in Moscow, since Siberia could be seen from its basement. Iron' Felix Dzerzhinsky was placed at the head of the operation.

Handwritten notes: "Terror and coercion", "Scissors Crisis", "Lenin's support for terror"

Dzerzhinsky was well known for his ruthlessness and single-minded determination. He told Sovnarkom, 'Do not think I seek forms of revolutionary justice; we are not in need of justice. It is war now - face to face, a fight to the finish. Life or death!' By September 1918, most provinces had their own Cheka branch, with officials reporting directly to Lenin and the Politburo.

Initially, most of the Cheka's work was directed at political opposition. In the summer of 1918, it pursued the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) so relentlessly that they reacted by capturing Dzerzhinsky, assassinating the German ambassador and murdering two Bolshevik Party leaders. Despite the capture and execution of 350 SR rebels, the Socialist Revolutionary Fanny Kaplan nearly succeeded in assassinating Lenin on 30 August 1918 by firing three bullets into his arm, neck and jaw. Although Lenin survived (albeit with injuries that would contribute to his early death five years later), the incident had severe consequences.

Red Terror was extended throughout the country as civil war tensions intensified because of the White Terror and foreign intervention. All remaining SRs and Mensheviks were branded traitors, and 500 were shot in Petrograd alone. A determined onslaught was launched against 'class enemies' everywhere, in an attempt to enforce loyalty to the Bolshevik Revolution and communism. Yakov Sverdlov, chairman of the Bolshevik Central Committee, spoke of 'merciless mass terror against all opponents of the revolution'. On 5 September 1918, Sovnarkom authorised the Cheka to find, question, arrest and destroy the families of any suspected traitors. 'Class enemies' were identified by their aristocratic or middle-class backgrounds, or from information gathered by spies or collected from informers. 'Confessions' were obtained under torture and the convicted faced immediate execution.

DISCUSSION POINT

If Kaplan had not attacked Lenin, would this have affected the course of Russian history? Is all history based on chance events of this type?

Once terror became a legitimate policy of the state, it was hard to control. Local Cheka agents acted as their own masters, keen to show their enthusiasm. An estimated half a million people were shot in the following three years. Victims ranged from the tsar and his family, shot on 17 July 1918 (though not only for ideological reasons - see page 186), to townsfolk suspected of associating with another 'class enemy' or perhaps with the misfortune to have neighbours who bore a grudge. Priests, Jews, Catholics and, to a lesser extent, Muslims also suffered. Around 8000 priests were executed in 1921 for failing to hand over Church relics, supposedly for the relief of famine victims.