

Collectivisation

What

In order to facilitate the 5YPs, Stalin introduced Collectivisation as part of the 1st 5YP. It was a plan to mechanise the farming, thereby improving production and freeing up workers for the new industrial centres. It was a process by which farms were collectivised, or grouped together, in order to combine their tools and resources.

As a key part of the plan, Stalin introduced Dekulakisation, whereby kulaks, or wealthy farmers were victimised and either executed, sent to slave labour camps (gulags) or exiled to Siberia.

Key features

- *Dekulakisation*
- Mechanisation
- *Kolkhoz* and *Sovkhoz*
- Motor Tractor Station (MTS)

Why

In simple terms, Collectivisation was a way of freeing up workers and providing not just the food needed for the growing cities, but also generating a surplus of grain that could be sold abroad to bring in investment to further industrial development.

However it was far more than a production plan. It was a way of controlling the peasants, the majority of the population. The previous such attempt, War Communism, had been a total failure. By victimising the Kulaks and trying to make it seem a desirable way of farming, Stalin was aiming to get the peasants willingly fall in line. This would enable him to extend his control over all areas of the country.

Successes

- After a slow start, farms began to fall into line; by the end of the 1930s, 98% of farms were collective.
- Whilst there was some fluctuation of production, grain produce became more stable from about 1934.
- Grain requisition for sale abroad became stable and regular by the mid-1930s, even in years of poorer production.
- By 1933, no kulaks existed and they were therefore no longer a problem for Stalin (after 1933, however, Stalin still used "kulak-spirited" as a reason to remove offending peasants, though none were actually kulaks).
- The number of factory workers rose significantly in the 1930s, afforded by the more effective farming techniques used.
- More mechanised forms of machinery were used, particularly tractors.
- The Law of 7/8th allowed harsher punishments on peasants sabotaging equipment and this virtually ended active peasant resistance.
- The private plots of land after 1931 were a huge success. Though only 3-4% of farmland, they produced 25-24% of food output.

Failures – in a statistical sense, though recall our lesson on how Stalin may have viewed failures

- Peasants resisted violently and murdered officials and sabotaged buildings and equipment. However this did not last longer than about 1933.
- The over-collection of grain in 1929-30 led to a temporary break in collectivisation and Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" article.
- Peasant resistance led to a huge drop in livestock as they culled animals to prevent them being requisitioned – between 1929 and 1933, the number of cows fell from 70 to 38 million, pigs fell from 26 to 11 million, and sheep & goats from 146 to 50 million.
- The loss of kulaks essentially meant that the most effective and innovative farmers had gone, which weakened production.
- Few of the *Twenty-Five Thousanders* who led the collectives had any real experience, and the peasants resented them.
- The poor infrastructure and high requisition rate led to famine, especially in the Ukraine. Perhaps 7 million starved to death.

Observations

The damage done to agriculture was long lasting, and not really recovered until post war. Even then, the fear and lethargy that existed in Russian agriculture meant that later efforts to improve it had little success. The very iron handed control that allowed the plan to work also created a glass ceiling against further improvement. Yet Stalin had obtained exactly what he wanted. He had the peasants working for him, albeit not necessarily enthusiastically, rather than opposing him. He had peasants freed to swell the industrial population, food to provide for the growing cities and an annual surplus of grain which was available for sale abroad.