

RUSSIA, 1917-39

Key Topic1: The collapse of the Tsarist Regime, 1917

The Nature of Tsarist Rule

Russia in 1917

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Russian economy was much less developed than other countries in Europe country. Only 2% of the population worked in industry; 80% worked in agriculture, which was often very primitive, and there was 80% illiteracy. Many Russians distrusted Western ideas and preferred to use old-fashioned methods. For example, army generals disliked the machine gun and preferred to rely on bayonet charges in battles.

In Russia, there were extremes of wealth and poverty, far greater than in any other European country. These were made worse by big increases in the populations of the two main cities, St Petersburg and Moscow. The number of people living in these cities nearly doubled between 1880 and 1914. This led to overcrowding, shortages of food and unrest. The opposition groups in Russia took advantage of this situation. In 1917 events in Petrograd were all important.

Autocracy, the form of government in Russia, meant that the Tsar had absolute power. He could make laws, appoint ministers and decide on all policies completely on his own. Autocracy led to the creation of many opposition groups in Russia. The most powerful and the biggest was the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who were strongest in the countryside, where they had the support of many peasants. In the cities, the Social Democrats were more influential.

Tsars had traditionally relied on repression to deal with opposition. The secret police, the Okhrana, were very efficient; street disturbances, which were common were broken up by the Cossacks (mounted soldiers from the south of Russia). These methods had usually worked in the past and he had no other alternatives. However, this meant that opposition groups also tended to be violent. Tsar Alexander II was killed by a bomb in 1881 and a Grand Duke was killed in 1904.

Tsar Nicholas II had come to the throne in 1894, when his father Alexander II had died suddenly. Nicholas had had very little preparation for ruling. He was a devoted family man but as Tsar he was weak and easily influenced by others. Even when he took the right decision, he often changed his mind later on. He did not want to be Tsar and was not capable of acting sensibly. However, he felt he had to keep going to pass the throne on to his son.

Tsar Nicholas II



Nicholas's son, Alexei, suffered from haemophilia, a disease of the blood which prevented it from clotting. Consequently, he had to be very careful at all times. When he was young, he was usually carried at all times in case he fell over, but from 1906, Nicholas and his wife, Alexandra, began to rely on a Russian monk, Gregory Rasputin, who seemed to be able to stop blood flowing. Whether he could actually do this is uncertain, but Rasputin definitely began to gain influence over the family and in particular over Alexandra. This led to rumours spreading that Alexandra and Rasputin were lovers and that the monk influenced decisions taken by the Tsar. These rumours were almost certainly untrue, but led to Nicholas becoming unpopular as he appeared to be even more weak and indecisive. Alexandra did not help Nicholas. She was short-sighted and became very unpopular herself in Russia because she was German. During the First World War she was suspected of being a German spy and gave Nicholas a very misleading picture of events in Petrograd in 1916 and 1917.

Click here for more photographs of Nicholas II and his family [Romanovs](#)

Checkpoint: Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century

In what ways did each of the following pose threats to Russia?

Illiteracy	
Autocracy	
Overcrowding in the big cities	
Nicholas II's Character	
Social Democrats	
Alexandra	
Gregory Rasputin	
Differences in wealth	

1905: a rehearsal for 1917

In 1905, Nicholas had faced a major challenge when revolution had broken out in Russia. There had been three main causes of the revolution. Firstly, in 1904, Russia had gone to war with Japan. Most Russians had expected an easy victory, but in fact the Russian army and navy had experienced heavy defeats and thousands of lives had been lost. This had been a major shock and had led many people to demand changes to the way Russia was governed.

Secondly, there were protests in many Russian cities; the most famous was 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1905, when Russian troops had opened fire on a column of unarmed people in St. Petersburg. Hundreds were killed including women and children. There had been more protests and marches and strikes throughout the year. In St. Petersburg, the capital, workers took control and formed the St. Petersburg Soviet (council), under the leadership of Leon Trotsky. Similar soviets were set up in other cities and the Tsar's government rapidly lost control.

Thirdly, in the countryside, law and order broke down as peasants began to riot and attack the houses and estates of landowners. Until the nineteenth century, most peasants had been serfs and had been controlled by landowners. They had been set free in 1861, but had only been given very small plots of land and were still having to pay fees to their former masters. The peasants wanted more land and the only way to get it was by taking it from the estates of landowners.

These events forced Nicholas to accept some changes. A parliament was set up called the Duma; he published the October Manifesto, which appeared to offer more freedom to the Russian people and it seemed as if he had learned his lesson. In the next few years, reforms were introduced which allowed peasants some more land and abolished the fees that they were paying to landowners and many Russians breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, however, Nicholas had not learned his lesson. He soon went back on many of his promises. The Duma had very little power and was not allowed to pass laws. He remained an autocrat, which meant that he alone could appoint the government and issue legislation. Gradually he fell back into his old ways, assuming that Russia had turned the corner and that he had regained his popularity.

However, the real extent of Nicholas's unpopularity was hidden; he had been able to survive in 1905 because the army stayed loyal. Most soldiers were peasants, from the countryside. They were instinctively conservative and loyal to the Tsar. In 1913, when the Romanov family celebrated its 300th anniversary on the Russian throne, peasants all over Russia turned out to greet the Tsar, his wife and children as they toured Russia. This suggested that the Tsar had indeed recovered from the effects of the 1905 Revolution and was still very popular, but this picture was misleading. The peasants were still loyal, but their grievances had not really been met. In particular, they still wanted more land. Most still only had small plots while landlords had large estates. Many peasants expected land to be taken away from landlords and be re-distributed. The attempt to do this in 1905 had failed, but if something similar happened in the future, peasants could easily try again.

In fact, the most serious opposition to the Tsar was in the big cities, such as St. Petersburg and Moscow. These had doubled in size in less than fifty years and workers lived packed together in the city centres and worked in appalling conditions in industrial factories. The Okhrana and the Cossacks could usually keep the situation under control, but there was growing support for opposition groups, of which the most dangerous was the Social Democrats. They had been founded at the end of the nineteenth century, but had split into two sections in 1903. The Mensheviks (Minority – although there was actually more of them) believed in gradual change; the Bolsheviks (Majority – but much the smaller group) were led n by Lenin and believed in sudden change – a revolution. Both groups were Marxists, but Lenin wanted a small tightly knit group who he could control.

Neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks were in any position to start a revolution or even causes any real trouble for the Tsar’s government. Most of their leaders were either under arrest in Siberia, like Stalin, or had been forced abroad, like Lenin, who was in Switzerland in 1914. However, any dramatic event which made Nicholas even more unpopular would give them an opportunity to try to overthrow the government. The survival of Russia in its existing form therefore depended on Nicholas’s commonsense. If he avoided trouble and allowed reforms to take place, he would survive, but if anything serious happened, the peasants in the countryside and the urban workers could easily turn against him.

In the years 1912 to 1914, there were two very different pictures emerging of Russia. One the one hand, the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of Romanov rule suggested that the country was calm and the Tsar was popular. Nicholas was reassured as he travelled around the country and was warmly greeted everywhere that all was well. On the other hand, there was a series of strikes starting in 1912 which showed that many workers were deeply unhappy. At the Lena goldfields, the police shot 500 strikers during a demonstration. Nicholas did not find out much about events like this and, even if he did, showed little interest. He had never had much contact with ordinary Russian people. He lived at court surrounded by minsters and courtiers and really knew very little about Russia. He did not usually speak in Russian and always spoke and wrote to his wife, who was German, in English.

Checkpoint: Nicholas II’s position in 1914

Strong	Weak

The Impact of the First World War

In July-August 1914, Russia went to war with Austria and Germany believing that victory would be easy and quick. Vast crowds turned out to cheer the Tsar and columns of troops as they marched off to the front.

This description is from the diary of the British ambassador to Russia; she is describing events in St. Petersburg in August 1914.

The processions in the streets carried the Tsar's portrait, framed in the flags of the Allies, the bands everywhere played the National Anthem; the long lines of khaki clad figures who marched away, singing and cheering; tall, bronzed men with honest open eyes, with child-like faces and a trusting faith in the little Father and a sure and certain hope that the saints would protect them and bring them back to their villages.

Those first days of war! How full we were of enthusiasm, we dreamt dreams of triumph and victory! The Russian steamroller! The British Navy! The French guns. The war would be over by Christmas and the Cossacks would ride into Berlin.

The Russian Army was able to mobilise much more quickly than the Germans had anticipated and in two weeks, two forces were advancing into eastern Germany. The commanders, Generals Rennenkampf and Samsonov were so confident, that they did not bother to communicate with each other and actually raced to be the first to get in contact with the enemy. Unfortunately, they did not realise how powerful the German Army was and how poorly equipped were the Russian soldiers by comparison. They even sent messages by radio without using codes, so that the Germans were able to listen in and find out just what the Russians were doing. The results were disastrous and the Russians suffered a series of massive defeats at the hands of the German army. At Tannenburg and the Masurian Lakes in 1914, the Russians lost more than 100,000 men and Samsonov committed suicide.

In December 1914, the daughter of the British ambassador described a very different scene in St. Petersburg.

War! There were no cheering crowds about the streets, no flags carried around in procession, no band playing the National Anthem outside the window. Only silent throngs on the Nevski Prospekt reading the telegrams posted up on shop-windows, girls in nurses' dresses hurrying to duty, women in mourning, bands of wounded soldiers being taken round the town.

The Russian Army relied on old-fashioned tactics. Commanders believed that the bayonet charge was the best way to win a battle, ignoring the fact that new machine-guns could fire at ranges of hundreds of meters. On the other hand, the Russian Army had few machine-guns and most of the soldiers were poorly trained conscripts. Furthermore, Russian industry was not able to keep the army supplied. There were 6,000,000 men in the army, but only 4,500,000 rifles. Consequently, many soldiers

went into action with no rifles and were told to take them from soldiers who had been killed. Even those that had rifles, often found that the ammunition they were given was useless. The Russian Army had bought so many different rifles over the previous thirty years that it was virtually impossible to get the correct ammunition to each unit. The Russian Army also had completely inadequate medical supplies. Thousands of casualties were left without treatment.

Mikhail Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, described the situation in his memoirs, which were published in 1927.

November 1914, Warsaw: Soon after the first battles shocking reports came in from the front of the incompetence of the sanitary department, of its inability to handle the wounded at the front. Freight trains came to Moscow filled with wounded, lying on the bare floor, in many cases without clothing.

I went to the Warsaw-Vienna station where there were about 18,000 men wounded in the battles near Lodz and Berezina. There I saw a frightful scene. On the floor, without even a bedding of straw, lay innumerable wounded.

A photograph taken in a Russian field hospital in 1914



Nobody had anticipated anything like this. Of course, all of the countries that were involved at the beginning of the war were completely taken by surprise by the numbers of casualties, but the consequences were worst in Russia because there were few hospitals and distances were so vast.

All of the problems were made much worse because the railway network was inadequate and soon broke down. In Germany, the railway system had been developed for the use of the army; it linked the major cities and industrial areas with key points on the border. In Russia, there were few lines and most just linked major cities as opposed to going to the border areas. Consequently, it was much more difficult to move men and supplies to the battle-fronts. Once war had broken out, most locomotives were taken over by the army and used to transport men and war materials. This meant that there were fewer trains to carry food into the big cities. St. Petersburg (renamed Petrograd, because St. Petersburg was a German name), the capital, needed more than 300 trains to bring in enough food to feed the population, but by early 1915, there were only about 100 hundred available. Consequently, shortages of food began to develop. In fact, there was plenty of food, just not enough locomotives to pull the trains. The worst affected places were Petrograd and Moscow. Food shortages led to inflation; in Petrograd prices rose by 300%. The situation became worse because as munitions production increased, more and more people flocked into the city to work in the munitions factories.

In 1915, efforts were made to improve the movement of supplies; the railways were taken over and the economic situation began to improve, but Russian armies had little success and were gradually forced back.

In July 1915, a report by the Russian War Minister explained why the Russian Army was suffering very heavy casualties.

The Germans had forced us to retreat by artillery fire alone. Our own batteries had to remain silent. As the enemy did not need to use its infantry soldiers, they suffered hardly any casualties, whilst our soldiers were dying by the thousand. Cases of desertions and of our soldiers giving themselves up to the enemy are becoming frequent. It is difficult to expect selflessness and enthusiasm from men sent into battle without weapons and ordered to take rifles from their dead colleagues.

Checkpoint: What does this source suggest were the problems facing the Russian Army?

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In August 1915, the Germans occupied Warsaw and the Russians were forced to evacuate Poland. This led Nicholas II to take a momentous decision; he dismissed the commanders of the Russian armies and assumed personal command himself. This was a serious mistake for three reasons.

Why was Nicholas's decision to assume command of the Russian armies a serious mistake?

Firstly, Nicholas had no military experience whatsoever and therefore was completely unsuited to taking command of a group of armies. The only positive outcome was that he realised for the first time just how badly equipped the Russian armies were for warfare.

In a letter to his wife in March 1916, he explained how bad the situation was.

If we should have three days of serious fighting, we might run out of ammunition altogether. If we had a rest from fighting for a month our situation might greatly improve. Please do not say a word of this to anyone.

The maps we have were made eighteen years ago and since then some of the forests have disappeared, while new woods and villages have appeared.

The positions occupied by our troops are flooded with water. It is impossible to sit or lie down. The roads are deteriorating. The artillery and transport are scarcely moving.

I would give a great deal to be able to nestle in our comfortable old bed.

Secondly, Nicholas left Petrograd and never returned, consequently, he soon became out of touch with events in the capital. He increasingly relied on his wife for information, but she only provided information which was at best worthless and at worst was highly dangerous.

This letter was sent by Alexandra to Nicholas in 1916

Now before I forget, I must give you a message from our Friend (Rasputin) based on what he dreamed in the night. He begs you to order an advance near Riga, otherwise the Germans will settle down so firmly that it will cost endless bloodshed.

All my trust is in our Friend who only thinks of you, my Baby and Russia. Guided by him he shall get through this heavy time. My sweet you must back me up, for your baby's sake.

This letter reveals the extent to which the Tsarina had fallen under the influence of Rasputin. Nicholas may not have taken the advice of his wife very seriously, but in his absence, gossip began about the extent to which Rasputin influenced the Tsar and his wife. In 1915, many government ministers were replaced and a new prime minister, Goremykin, was appointed at the age of seventy-five. No one quite knew why he had got the job, not even Goremykin himself and it only served to increase the belief that Rasputin had a hand in appointing and dismissing ministers.

This is part of a report written in March 1917 after the abdication of the Nicholas

Rasputin was a man of large heart. He kept open house, and his lodgings were always crowded with a curiously mixed company. The investigation disclosed an immense amount of evidence concerning the petitions carried by Rasputin to Court, but all of these referred merely to applications for positions, favours, railway concessions and the like.

This cartoon published in 1916 suggested that Nicholas and Alexandra were puppets in the hands of Rasputin.



Click here for more pictures of Rasputin [Rasputin](#)

Mikhail Rodzianko, who was the President of the Duma, commented in his memoirs, which were published in 1923, on the relationship between Alexandra and Rasputin.

The influence of Rasputin on the Tsarina, which affected through her the entire policy of the government, grew to fantastic limits. One need only recall the ministerial changes. From the autumn of 1915 to the autumn of 1916, there were five ministers of internal affairs and four ministers of agriculture. There was confusion, there were contradictory orders, there was no firm will, no decisiveness, no single definite policy for victory.

Photographs such as this (taken in 1916) only encouraged people to believe that Rasputin was the cause of corruption in the Russian court.



By early 1916, an Okhrana report suggested widespread antipathy to Alexandra for several reasons.

The filthy gossip about the Tsar's family has now become the property of the street. We must also note the extreme feelings of disrespect for the person of Her Majesty the Empress, the widespread feeling against her as a 'German'.

In early 1917, Nicholas's absence from Petrograd was to prove crucial. He eventually had two sources of information; his wife and Rodzianko, and he chose to believe his wife. Unfortunately, for the Romanovs, his wife got it completely wrong. She failed to realise that unrest that developed on the streets of Petrograd was the

forerunner of a revolution which would result in the overthrow of the dynasty, and which, in turn, would result in the deaths of her entire family.

The third reason why Nicholas's assumption of command of the Russian armies was a serious mistake was that by dismissing the existing commanders, he made himself responsible for all of the defeats and catastrophic losses that the Russian armies suffered in the remaining years of the war. Until then, he had remained aloof and was able to lay the blame on others; from August 1915, he had nobody to blame but himself. Consequently, the instinctive trust that millions of Russians had in the Tsar was broken. The 'Little Father', the name by which many referred to the Tsar, no longer deserved the support of the Russian people.

Checkpoint: Nicholas II becoming Commander-in-Chief

How did each of the following undermine his authority in Russia?

No military Experience	
Absence from Petrograd	
Blame for the War	

In fact, Nicholas's taking control could have worked. In 1916 he approved a major attack by the Russian Army planned by General Brusilov. In June-August, the Brusilov offensive captures large areas of Austria-Hungary and captured 400,000 prisoners. Brusilov was successful because he used specialised 'shock troops' rather than massed attacks. At the same time, however, more than 58,000 Russian troops deserted; this was a sign that many Russian soldiers were coming to the conclusion that enough was enough. The Russian Army had been fighting for two years with very little success and had suffered heavy casualties; although the Brusilov offensive was a success, it came too late and was not followed up. From late 1916, desertion became much more common and discipline in the Russian Army began to collapse.

The regime also faced increasing problems in Petrograd. Rumours about the relationship between Rasputin and Alexandra had become even more vivid and finally, in December, Rasputin was murdered. His killing was apparently carried out by Count Yusupov, who poisoned his food, shot him and finally pushed him off a bridge into a frozen river, where he drowned. The murder was not very important in itself, but it was a sign of things to come. The authority of the Tsar was wearing very thin and major unrest could easily break out.

An Okhrana agent summed up the situation very effectively in early 1917.

The workers are on the verge of despair. It is thought that the slightest explosion will result in uncontrollable riots. The cost of living has trebled; it is impossible to find food; the time spent queuing for hours outside shops has become unbearable.

The movement which has started has flared up without any party preparing for it and without any preliminary discussion of a plan of action. Now everything depends on the behaviour of the military units; if they do not join the working class, the movement will quickly subside; but if the troops turn against the government, then nothing can save the country from revolutionary upheaval.

Checkpoint: What does this source suggest were the causes of unrest in Petrograd?

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Why did the situation in Russia deteriorate rapidly during the winter of 1916-17?

In the Russian Army, the number of desertions increased and the authority of officers was undermined. Whole detachments mutinied and disappeared. This was not merely caused by the failures at the front; in fact, the front had been reasonably stable since the beginning of 1916. The Brusilov Offensive had been a success, and although ground had been lost since August, the Russian Army was not under any real threat. The desertions were often prompted by rumours from Russia that peasants were trying to take over land from landowners and the soldiers, who were mostly peasants, wanted to join in.

In the big cities, conditions were very hard. The winter of 1916-17 was particularly hard. Russians were used to severe weather, but temperatures at -30 to -40 Celsius proved very difficult when supplies of food were short. In Petrograd, food prices rose by 300% and bread almost disappeared from shops. What bread there was, was often reserved for special customers, which only helped to increase resentment.

Source A: This extract from the diary of Sybil Grey, a British nurse working in Petrograd, shows how unrest was boiling over into violence.

February 21: Today a poor woman entered a bread shop and asked for bread. She was told there was none. One leaving the shop, seeing bread in the window, she broke the window and took the bread. An army general, passing in his car, stopped and told her off. A crowd gathered and smashed his car and then paraded in the street demanding bread.

On top of this was the dissatisfaction that many Russian felt with the government and leadership of the Tsar. Nicholas had left Petrograd in August 1915 and had never returned. He often visited his family at their country estate at Tsarskoe Selo just outside Petrograd, but never entered the city. This meant that it was difficult for ministers to meet him and he became even more reclusive. There had never been anything like a Cabinet – a council of ministers – in Russia; by early 1917, virtually the only way of communicating with Nicholas was by letter and he tended to ignore letters that he did not like.

Source B: This is part of a letter sent to Nicholas in January 1917 from the Grand Duke Alexander

The unrest grows; even the monarchy is beginning to totter; and those who support the Tsar lose the ground under their feet, because disorganisation and lawlessness are everywhere. A situation like this cannot last long. I repeat once more - it is impossible to rule the country without paying attention to the voice of the people, without meeting their needs, without a willingness to admit that the people themselves understand their own needs.

Nicholas had obviously been warned and even moderate politicians began to get exasperated with him and begged him to allow some reforms. Mikhail Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, was a member of the Octobrist Party. This had been set up after the Tsar issued the October Manifesto in 1905 and it supported the monarchy. However, Octobrists wanted Nicholas to reform the way Russia was governed and by February 1917, he believed that the situation was desperate. Rodzianko wanted Nicholas to call the Duma to help tackle the situation. The Duma had dissolved itself when war broke out in 1914, but had been summoned by Nicholas in August 1915, when he had appointed himself commander-in-chief. However, when the members of the Duma had presented Nicholas with a list of demands, he had dismissed them again and it had not met since.

Source C: On 26th February, Rodzianko sent a telegram to Nicholas urging immediate action. He wanted the Duma to be called into session.

The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The government is paralyzed; the transport service has broken down; the food and fuel supplies are completely disorganized. Discontent is general and on the increase. There is wild shooting in the streets; troops are firing at each other. It is urgent that someone enjoying the confidence of the country be entrusted with the formation of a new government. There must be no delay. Hesitation is fatal.

Source D: On the same day, Nicholas received another letter from his wife. She usually referred to Rodzianko as 'that fat pig', because he claimed to be the 'fattest man in Russia'.

My dear, I heard that horrid Rodzianko wants the Duma to be called together - oh please don't do it, it's not their business. They want to discuss things which don't concern them.

Unfortunately, Nicholas took more notice of his wife than he did of Rodzianko, which was a very serious error.

Source E: On the same day, 26th February, Sybil Grey wrote in her diary:

A glorious, sunny, cloudless day. Martial Law proclaimed, people warned not to be outside their houses next day. At about 3 p.m., I went to the window to look out. There were people on the bridge laughing and talking about ten deep. Down Nevsky Prospekt I suddenly saw soldiers lie down in the snow and fire a volley, about seven men were hit. After that the fat was in the fire. Soldiers had fired on the people; nothing now could stop the Revolution.

Source F: On 27th February, Rodzianko sent another telegram to Nicholas.

The situation is growing worse. Measures should be taken immediately as tomorrow will be too late. The government is powerless to stop the disorders. The troops of the garrison cannot be relied upon. The reserve battalions of the Guard regiments are in the grips of rebellion, their officers are being killed. Having joined the mobs and the revolt of the people, they are marching on the offices of the Ministry of the Interior and the Imperial Duma. Your Majesty, do not delay. Should the agitation reach the Army, Germany will triumph and the destruction of Russian along with the dynasty is inevitable.

Checkpoint: February 1917

Reread the last six sources: what evidence is that Nicholas II faced major problems in Petrograd in early 1917?

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B	
C	
D	
E	
F	

The Fall of the Tsar and the Establishment of the Provisional Government

Why did revolution break out in Petrograd in February 1917?

The simple answer is that Nicholas had not learned his lesson from 1905, when he had been saved from revolution by the support of the army. In that year, he had lost control of the big cities, but peasants in the countryside had stayed loyal. Although there had been many local mutinies, the army as a whole had supported the Tsar and he had been able to regain control. In 1917, the situation was quite different. Three years of war and millions of casualties had taken their toll; peasants soldiers wanted to be back in their villages taking advantage of any land that became available.

In many ways the key for Nicholas was retaining control of Petrograd. However, he had not been there for eighteen months and did not realise how bad the situation had become. Prices had risen far faster than wages and along with shortages of food had resulted in severe unrest. On 19th February this resulted in a strike at the Putilov Steelworks in Petrograd. One strike would not have been serious and at first the numbers of workers out of work did not go up significantly. By 21st February, there were 20,000 on strike and by 22nd the number had risen to 30,000; still not that great a number. Yet, within a week, Nicholas had lost control of Petrograd; had attempted to return to the city, but had been forced to abdicate in a railway siding at Pskov. What had gone wrong?

Clearly the army had lost control of Petrograd. In fact there were 340,000 soldiers in the garrison, but most were raw recruits, who did not want to go to the front and who were unwilling to become involved in suppressing unrest. There were comparatively few experienced troops and these soon became overwhelmed by increasing numbers of protestors. By 25th February, the number of strikers had risen to 250,000 and the following day it was 300,000; such numbers were impossible to control, especially after some peaceful demonstrators were shot by troops on 26th February, as Sybil Grey described (see previous section).

Date	No. of workers on strike
21 February	20,000
22 February	30,000
25 February	250,000
27 February	350,000

In fact, the situation was out of control long before 26th February; the key events took place on 23rd February, when the temperature in Petrograd suddenly rose by 20 degrees Celsius.

Average daily temperatures	
Jan-Feb 1916	- 4.4 degrees Celsius
Jan-Feb 1917	-12.1 degrees Celsius
February 22-23 1917	8.0 degrees Celsius

Russians, who had been huddling in their apartments and houses for much of the winter, came out to enjoy the spring-like weather. Striking, which meant getting out of warm factories and onto streets, suddenly became a great deal more attractive.

Furthermore, 23rd February was International Women's Day and many demonstrations were planned. The warm weather attracted many more demonstrators than might have been expected and the photograph below shows that the snow had disappeared from the streets of Petrograd.

A photograph of a demonstration on 23rd February 1917; International Women's Day



The women who demonstrated on 23rd February were an incentive for men workers to go on strike. Indeed, they were almost certainly a major factor in the escalation of the revolution. Even the Tsarina noticed a change of mood.

On 24th February, Alexandra wrote to her husband

There is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working. If the weather were very cold they would probably stay at home. But this will all pass and become calm if only the Duma will behave itself.

Click here for more pictures of the February Revolution [February](#)

Checkpoint: February 1917

Why did Revolution break out in February 1917?

Inflation	
Weather	
Women	
Strikes	

Alexandra realised that the warm weather had had an effect on demonstrators and strikers, but, typically, failed completely to understand the significance of the changes. In addition, she probably did not want to trouble her husband with rumours about minor disturbances. Unfortunately for her and her family, she was witnessing the beginning of a revolution which would result in the deaths of all of them.

With the benefit of hindsight, Leon Trotsky wrote his History of the Russian Revolution in exile in the 1930s.

One half of the industrial workers of Petrograd are on strike on 24 February. The workers come in the morning; instead of going to work they hold meetings; they begin processions towards the centre of the city. The slogan 'Bread' is drowned out by louder slogans, 'Down with autocracy!' 'Down with the war!'

Around the barracks and lines of the soldiers stood groups of working men and women exchanging friendly words with the army men.

Trotsky was obviously trying to make out that the revolution was brought about by the workers and soldiers of Petrograd coming together in a common cause to oppose the Tsarist regime. However, significantly, he referred to the exact date on which the Tsarina wrote her letter to Nicholas.

By the end of February, law and order in Petrograd had completely broken down; the Russian people had simply had enough. There was hardly anybody who was prepared to stand up for the Tsar. The Duma reassembled on 27th February, but when, on 1st March, Nicholas was finally persuaded to return to Petrograd, it was too late. His train was intercepted and forced into sidings at Pskov. The following day he signed the document of abdication. He wanted to name his son as his successor but was persuaded otherwise. Instead, he named his brother, the Grand Duke Michael. He abdicated the following day.

Part of Nicholas's abdication document, 2nd March 1917

In agreement with the Imperial Duma We have thought it well to renounce the Throne of the Russian Empire and to lay down the supreme power. As We do not wish to part from Our beloved son, We transmit the succession to Our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give Him Our blessing to mount the Throne of the Russian Empire.

We direct Our brother to conduct the affairs of state in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative bodies on those principles which will be established by them, and on which He will take an inviolable oath.

Click here to read the full version of Nicholas II's abdication letter. [Abdication](#)

Fill in the gaps of this timeline of key events from January-March 1917.

Date	Event	Effects
January		
	Temperature up 20 c	
		Parades and demonstrations all over the city of Petrograd
24 February		
25 February		
	Telegrams from the Tsarina and Rodzianko	
27 February		
	Demonstrations by workers in Petrograd	
1 March		
	Tsar forced to abdicate	
3 March		

The Provisional Government

The abdication of the Tsar came as a surprise to most Russians. The Romanovs had ruled Russia for more than 300 years; suddenly they were gone and there was no one with any authority to take their place. Members of the Duma rapidly formed a government. It was called 'The Temporary Committee of the State Duma', but is always referred to as the 'Provisional Government'. However, its true title is more useful, because it clearly explains one of the problems that it faced; it regarded itself as a stop-gap while a proper government was elected. In fact, it soon had plans to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly in November, which would then produce a constitution and eventually result in a permanent government for a new Russia.

The leader of the Provisional Government was Prince Lvov, who became prime minister. Most of the members were Octobrists or Kadets (Constitutional Democrats – another party formed before the First World War which encouraged Nicholas II to allow reforms). They had supported the monarchy and would have preferred Nicholas to have remained as Tsar, but having handed power over to an elected Duma. Most members were moderates, they did not expect to see wholesale changes to Russia; they wanted a greater degree of democracy and reform of abuses.

This photograph was taken after Alexander Kerensky joined the Provisional Government on 1st May 1917. He is standing third from the right.



The Provisional Government issued an eight-point programme on 2nd March 1917.

1. The full and immediate amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles
2. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, and strikes
3. The abolition of all class, group and religious restrictions
4. The election of a Constituent Assembly by universal secret ballot;
5. The substitution of the police by a national militia;
6. Democratic elections of officials for municipalities and townships
7. The retention of the military units that had taken place in the revolution that had overthrown Nicholas II.

This was an impressive list of reforms and most Russians were more than satisfied with it. The immediate reaction was one of general support for the Provisional

Government. Unfortunately, the members soon discovered that they had little or no authority whatsoever. In any case, most Russians were far more concerned with the everyday problems that they faced, such as the price of food and the effects of the war. It soon became clear that the Provisional Government was only really effective inside the city of Petrograd, and even there it had a serious rival.

The Petrograd Soviet

The Petrograd Soviet was formed on 27th February from members of earlier committees. It was elected by the soldiers and workers of Petrograd and so had far more authority than the Provisional Government. It governed Petrograd and was controlled at first by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. It offered its support to the Provisional Government on the basis of the eight-point programme, but at the same time issued Military Order Number One; this stated that orders from the Provisional Government were only to be obeyed if they were approved by the Soviet. For the next eight months the Provisional Government always had to gain the approval of the Soviet. The Soviet even went so far as to create a 'shadow cabinet', which often criticised the Provisional Government because it was too middle class

The existence of two separate governments in Petrograd created chaos. The Provisional Government believed that it had to continue to support Russia's allies and became increasingly unpopular because it did not end the war. The members did not believe that they had the authority to make peace. The Provisional Government also made no attempt to introduce land reform, which many peasants wanted. The Provisional Government did try to tackle the problems of shortages and inflation, but, during the summer of 1917, the amount of rations handed out in Petrograd fell. By September, rations were at starvation level.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

In March 1917 Lenin was living in Switzerland. He was sent back to Russia by the Germans, who hoped that he would create as much trouble as possible. This would undermine the Russian war effort. Lenin believed that he could take advantage of the chaos caused by the February Revolution to seize power in Russia. He was determined to stir up as much trouble as possible and to attract as much support by making extravagant promises, which he had no intention of keeping, e.g. allowing peasants to take land.

Lenin returned to Petrograd in April 1917 and immediately published the 'April Theses'. He demanded an end to the war with Germany, the abolition of the Provisional Government, all power to the Soviets, all property and land to be taken over by the state, all banks united into National Bank and put under the control of the Soviets, the army to be transformed into a national militia and all factories to come under the control of the Soviets. His speeches attracted large crowds and 'Pravda', the Bolshevik newspaper, became very popular.

Lenin encouraged criticism of both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. When riots broke out in Petrograd in April 1917, the Bolsheviks tried to take control of the city, but were defeated. In May, when members of the Soviet were invited to join the Provisional Government, he opposed the move unsuccessfully.

Alexander Kerensky, a Socialist Revolutionary (SR), became Minister for War. Lenin was trying to take advantage of the unpopularity of the policies of the Provisional Government and try to force the Soviet to be more outspoken in its opposition.

By June 1917, 100,000 copies of Pravda were being printed every day and Lenin came to believe that the Bolsheviks had a real chance of seizing power. In the 'July Days' (16th-17th), the Bolsheviks used riots as an opportunity to try to seize power again and failed once more. Many Bolshevik leaders were arrested and Lenin was forced to flee to Finland in disguise. However, the 'July Days' did have lasting consequences. Alexander Kerensky became prime minister of the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks began to win much more support within the Soviet. In August elections, they increased their support by 50%.

Lenin in disguise in



August 1917

The appointment of Kerensky also produced a reaction from the army. General Kornilov, the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces at the front, ordered his troops to march on Petrograd. He believed that the Provisional Government had been taken over by Bolsheviks and that Russia was about to descend into chaos. Kerensky ordered loyal troops to stop him and in desperation asked the Bolsheviks to support him. The leaders were let out of prison and 40,000 rifles were handed out to Party members. In fact, Kerensky was over-reacting. The Kornilov Revolt soon collapsed, but the decision to arm the Bolsheviks had very significant consequences.

Click here for more information about Alexander Kerensky [Kerensky](#)

Checkpoint: The Provisional Government

How did each of the following help to undermine the Provisional Government?

Petrograd Soviet	
Order No. 1	
Policies of the Provisional Government	
Lenin	
Kerensky	
Kornilov	

RUSSIA, 1917-39

Key Topic 2: Bolshevik Takeover and Consolidation, 1917-24

The October Revolution

After their 'success' in saving the Provisional Government from the Kornilov Revolt, the Bolsheviks emerged as the most powerful party in the Petrograd Soviet. On 25th September, they achieved a majority and virtually took over the Soviet. They were helped by the actions of Leon Trotsky, a former Menshevik, who became chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet. This allowed him to take control of all of the forces of the Petrograd garrison in October. Trotsky was now by far the most influential figure in the Soviet. Lenin, however, was still in hiding in Finland, and did not return to Petrograd, without his beard, wearing a wig and in disguise until 16th October. By then, most Bolshevik leaders were convinced that they should try yet again to seize power in Petrograd. This time, Lenin argued, they would have a much greater chance of success because the Provisional Government was completely discredited and they controlled most of the military forces inside Petrograd.

Whilst Lenin was instrumental in persuading the Bolsheviks that they could be successful in a third attempt to seize power, it was Leon Trotsky, a Menshevik until September 1917, who was the key figure in the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917. He had taken over and organised the Red Guards, who were to carry out the coup and also took all the important decisions in the take-over itself. Trotsky used his position in the Military Committee to move army units loyal to the Provisional Government out of Petrograd and ordered them to defend the city from an advance by the Germans. He was able to move units that supported the Bolsheviks into Petrograd and ensure that they took no action to help the Provisional Government. It was Trotsky who organised the seizure of power and carried it out. He planned the events of 24th-25th October, cutting telephone wires, seizing control of the post office, railway stations and other key buildings and isolating the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government met.

Despite Trotsky's organisation and discipline, the Bolshevik seizure of power did not go smoothly. On 24th October, the Bolsheviks attacked the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government was based. Bolshevik propaganda, including films, later suggested that the Bolsheviks were overwhelmingly successful by driving the Provisional Government out of the Winter Palace in a matter of minutes. In fact, it took the Bolsheviks almost forty-eight hours to evict the members of the Provisional Government, despite calling a cruiser, the 'Aurora' to bombard the palace with shells.

For his part, Kerensky sent repeated messages to the army appealing for help, but only a few hundred assorted troops turned up, including some students, 140 women and forty soldiers who had been crippled by wounds. The remainder of the Petrograd garrison stood idly by and allowed events to take place. The Petrograd Garrison could easily have stopped the Bolsheviks, but it did not intervene. The Bolsheviks numbered only a few thousand and they were unable to win control of the Winter Palace without great difficulty. They failed to catch Kerensky, who eventually escaped to the USA, where he lived until his death in 1967.

Why did the Petrograd garrison allow the Provisional Government to fall?

Trotsky's use of his position in the Military Committee was obviously very important. He was able to make sure that any units likely to intervene were out of Petrograd. Rumours of a German advance on Petrograd on 9th October were very helpful in this respect. Of much greater importance, however, were the intense unpopularity of the Provisional Government and general desire to bring the war to an end. A final offensive ordered by Kerensky in June had failed and there no longer seemed any point in continuing military operations in a war that could not be won. Furthermore, most Russians appeared to have shown little interest in the fall of the Provisional Government, which only had a month more of life left in it. Elections were due in November and would result in the creation of a Constituent Assembly. Only the Bolsheviks were aware of the real significance of the events of 24th-25th October.

Checkpoint: The Bolshevik seizure of power

What parts did Lenin and Trotsky play in the events of October 1917?

Lenin	Trotsky

Imposing Bolshevik Control, 1917-21

How did Lenin react after the seizure of power?

Lenin was well aware that although the Bolsheviks had won control of Petrograd relatively quickly, elsewhere in Russia it would not be so easy. In Moscow, for example, the Bolsheviks had a week of bitter street-fighting before they could claim victory. However, it was in the countryside that they would face their biggest challenge. The Bolsheviks were, after all, a minority and had no real authority outside Petrograd. There was a general election due in only a matter of weeks and they could easily be swept away just like the Provisional Government. Lenin realised that he had to do all he could to win popular support for the Bolsheviks as quickly as possible. That meant, trying to solve the problems that the Provisional Government had faced and which had made it so unpopular.

There was little that Lenin could do about food shortages and inflation, but he could try to tackle the major grievances of the Russian people in other areas. In the days after the seizure of power, Lenin issued the Peace Decree and the Land Decree. The Peace Decree declared that the war with Germany was over. The Land Decree declared that land belonged to the peasants who farmed it. Next came The Decree on Workers' Control, which allowed committees of workers to run factories. These met the three main complaints of Russian and also carried out the promises made by Lenin in the April Theses. The Peace Decree satisfied the millions of soldiers who no longer wanted to fight; the Land Decree allowed peasants to seize land from the landowners' estates and the Decree on Workers' Control meant that workers could no longer be exploited by employers. There were also many other decrees which reformed education, guaranteed equality and ended the influence of the Orthodox Church.

Passing decrees was relatively easy; it was much more difficult to put them into effect. Although the Peace Decree declared that the war was at an end, Lenin's hope that German soldiers would join the Bolsheviks in revolting against their commanders proved in vain. The Land Decree resulted in chaos as peasants grabbed as much land as possible and law and order broke down in the countryside. The Decree on Workers' Control led to production falling as committees were set up to run factories. Nevertheless, Lenin hoped that by doing something he would gain enough support to win a majority in the general election. He was wrong. Although the Bolsheviks did extremely well in the election in November, the most successful party by far was the Socialist Revolutionaries, who were popular with peasants.

Party	Votes	Percent	Deputies
Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SRs)	17,100,000	41.0	380
Bolsheviks	9,800,000	23.5	168
Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets)	2,000,000	4.8	17
Mensheviks	1,360,000	3.3	18
Others	11,140,000	26.7	120

In fact, the SRs gained an overall majority in the election, which meant that their leader, Victor Chernov would become prime minister of Russia when the Assembly met in January. In the meantime, however, the Bolsheviks pressed ahead with more decrees, including setting up the Cheka, a political police force, in December. When the Constituent Assembly met on 5th January 1918, it was crushed by Lenin and the SRs were driven out. The Kadet Party was abolished and its leaders arrested. Lenin now began to rule as a dictator and used the Cheka, to enforce his policies. In the next few months, all businesses were taken over and at first workers were allowed to elect the managers. All ranks in the Army were abolished and soldiers were allowed to elect their officers. The lands and wealth of the Russian Orthodox Church were confiscated.

Why did Lenin refuse to accept the decision of the election?

Lenin's intended policy was already clear before the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. He would have preferred to have won a majority, but he was quite ready to take power if he did not. The Bolsheviks had been the driving force in the revolution since April and he wanted the fruits of victory. He was not prepared to hand over power to the SRs, who, although they were revolutionaries, would have favoured the peasants. Lenin's power base, on the other hand, was in the big cities where the industrial workers were his strongest supporters and many of his decrees had been aimed to meeting the demands of factory workers. They had been given an eight hour day and the right to elect their managers. All workers had been given insurance against unemployment and sickness and the houses of wealthy people had been taken over to provide accommodation for the poor.

When the SRs won the election, Lenin was faced with a simple choice. He could hand over power to Chernov and retire, giving up all that he had achieved in the previous year, or, he could ignore the result of the election and rule as a dictator. He decided on the latter, but knew that he would face real opposition if he took that course. Russians who opposed the Bolsheviks would be bound to try to force Lenin out by any means possible. In other words, Lenin was going to face a civil war and he would have to win if Bolshevism was going to survive in Russia and in fact in the world.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

If the Bolsheviks were going to face a civil war, Lenin realised that Russia could not go on fighting the Germans. Consequently, in January 1918, Lenin sent Trotsky to try to negotiate a peace treaty with Germany. The talks dragged on for two months, because the Germans were determined to drive a hard bargain. Eventually, the terms were so harsh that Trotsky refused to sign, the other Bolshevik leaders also opposed the terms, but Lenin was determined to accept the treaty, however harsh it was. In March the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed with Germany. The terms were very harsh.

Russia was forced to give up all of her western lands – Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia lost 62 million people (26% of population) 27% of her farmland, 26% of her railways, 74% of her iron ore and coal.

Germany was to receive 300 million gold roubles in reparations.

The area lost by Russia at the Treaty and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk



Why did Lenin force Trotsky to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?

Lenin was convinced that civil war was about to break out in Russia. He did not believe that the Bolsheviks would be able to fight both the Germans and the Whites at the same time. He also believed that the war with Germany would not last long and that, when it finished, there would be a revolution in Germany. Russia would then be able to reclaim all the land that was lost at the treaty. Lenin had also promised 'Peace, Bread and Land' in April 1917 and had issued the Peace Decree in November 1917. He was determined to keep his promise in order to convince the Russian people that he could be trusted. Lenin's actions led to the outbreak of civil war in the summer of 1918.

Click here for more background about the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [Brest-Litovsk](#)

Checkpoint: How did Lenin seize control of Russia?

Why did Lenin carry out each of the following?

The Land Decree	
The Peace Decree	
Crush the Constituent Assembly	
Treaty of Brest-Litovsk	

Why did civil war break out in Russia in 1918?

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks had seized power but were a minority. They were supported by some SRs, but their actions in closing the Constituent Assembly had made them many enemies. They had denied the democratic desires of the people of Russia by the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. Since the seizure of power, the press had been censored and the Cheka had been used to suppress opposition.

The Treaty of Brest Litovsk was a massive humiliation for Russia and the Bolsheviks appeared unpatriotic. The price for peace seemed too high; only the Bolsheviks who expected world revolution could have contemplated it. Patriotic Russians took up arms against the Bolsheviks because they had betrayed Russia. The peace made with Germany also increased the hostility of foreign powers led them to intervene to get rid of the Bolsheviks. Patriotic Russians also wanted to stop the break up of the Russian Empire. The Bolshevik Decree on Nationalities had encouraged the

process. Many territories had declared themselves independent. By June 1918 there were 33 separate governments in Russia.

The middle classes had also suffered under Bolshevik rule; they lost property; the government was anti-capitalist and they would not have been able to make a living under Bolshevik rule. The same applied to the landowners who had lost their land.

Army commanders also opposed Lenin's decision to end the war with Germany. Most joined the Whites, which was the general name for the Bolsheviks opponents. In the Ukraine, the Crimea and Poland, there were attempts to break away from Russian rule. The Allies sent aid in an effort to get Russia back into the war and to recover equipment and loans that had been provided for the Tsarist government. Lenin's political and economic changes also persuaded many Russians to oppose him.

How strong were the Whites?

The most effective White force was the Czech Legion, which had originally been fighting for Austria but had changed sides to fight with the Russians (Czech wanted independence from Austria). They were stationed in the east and were trying to fight their way back to Europe. They numbered about 40,000 men. In the North-East, in Siberia, there were forces commanded by Admiral Alexander Kolchak. In the South, the White 'Volunteer Army' commanded by General Denikin in south, Don region (north of Black Sea). This force was known as the Armed Forces of Southern Russia after Nov 1918. In the North-West, General Yudenich was based in Estonia. In October 1919, he nearly reached Petrograd but was defeated by Trotsky and a large Bolshevik force. In addition, there were Polish and Ukrainian forces who wanted independence from Russia. The Poles were the most effective of all the White units and were successful in a war with Russia and Poland became an independent country for the first time in 150 years.

The Civil War

At first, the Whites were very successful as they closed in St Petersburg and Moscow. Their commanders were experienced and the Bolsheviks were disorganised. All ranks had been abolished in the Red Army and soldiers elected their officers, who were often ignored. The Red Army proved unable to resist the advances of the more disciplined White forces, which were supplied by the Allies through Murmansk and Archangel in the far north of Russia.

In the east, the Czech Legion took control of the Trans-Siberia Railway and attached Ekaterinburg, where the Tsar and his family were held prisoner. They were executed on 17th July, just before the Czechs took control of the town. Admiral Kolchak was appointed War Minister and then became dictator, but this proved to be a mistake because he had little enthusiasm or ability for the role. The success of the Czechs also led to the appointment of Trotsky as Commissar for War. He began to reorganise the Red Army by recruiting former Tsarist officers to command and retrain units. Each unit had a Commissar, who reported to the Bolshevik Party, in case the officers did not obey orders. The Red Army, therefore, became better trained than the Whites.

The Mensheviks and SRs encouraged peasant revolts against the Bolsheviks and these were widespread throughout 1918. However, the Bolsheviks responded by executing large numbers of SRs and using the Cheka to terrorise peasant communities. The appointment of Trotsky and the use of the Cheka began to turn the tide against the Whites.

1919 was the key year of the Civil War. The Whites were in control of many outlying areas of Russia and a new army was being created in the Caucasus (southern Russia) by General Denikin. It seemed as if Bolshevik control was about to collapse; instead, the Red Army launched an offensive in January. Kiev was captured in the south and Ekaterinburg in the east. By December 1919, Siberia was in Bolshevik hands and Kolchak was captured and executed in 1920. In the south, the Bolsheviks were also in control, despite counter-attacks. They were helped by the Whites getting involved in fighting amongst themselves.

The main reasons for the success of the Red Army in 1919 were the reorganisation carried out by Trotsky and the leadership of General Tukhachevsky. Trotsky reforms enabled the Red Army to put ever larger and better organised forces into the field and Tukhachevsky was responsible for the victories in Siberia against Kolchak and in the south against Denikin. Tukhachevsky, however, could do little when General Yudenich advanced on Petrograd from Estonia in October 1919. Some Bolshevik leaders wanted to retreat, but Trotsky ordered the city to be defended and armed workers, both men and women, to fight to the last. In the event, Yudenich retreated; he was unwilling to try to capture the city when it was defended by 700,000 armed people (or so Trotsky claimed).

Click here for more information about the Russian Civil War [Civil](#)

Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

As White forces crumbled, the Allies, British, US and French, withdrew and the Bolsheviks began to round up their opponents. Some fighting continued into 1923, but most had ended by the summer of 1921. Peasant revolts in areas such as Tambov were suppressed with great brutality on the orders of Trotsky. By the end of 1921, the Bolsheviks were in control of almost all of Russia and had regained much of the territory lost at Brest-Litovsk.

Their opponents, the Whites, were divided and never worked together. They were fighting for different purposes. Some wanted to restore the Tsar, Ukrainians wanted independence, army officers wanted to continue the war against Germany. The Bolsheviks controlled the centre and the railway network. They had most of the industry. They were able to keep the Red Army supplied much more effectively.

The total forces of the Whites numbered only about 250,000. The Red Army eventually had 2,000,000 men. Trotsky recruited many officers from the Imperial Russian Army and made them join the Red Army. These provided the organisation and discipline that the Red Army needed. Each unit had a Commissar, who reported to the Bolshevik Party, in case the officers did not obey orders. The Red Army was, therefore, better trained and better supplied.

At first the Western Allies sent men and aid to the Whites, but this was never sufficient to turn events their way and the Allies pulled out in 1919. The Whites were often more brutal than the Bolsheviks. To most Russians, the Reds were a slightly better bet. Bolshevik propaganda portrayed the Whites as brutal dogs and they often lived up to that picture. The Whites failed completely to win the support of the great mass of the Russian people who had little sympathy for the Bolsheviks but also had no choice but to accept them.

Long Live the Red Army



This poster urges Tartars to fight on the side of the Bolsheviks



In this Bolshevik poster, the White commanders, Denikin, Kolchak and Yudenich are shown as dogs.



The key factor was probably the role of Leon Trotsky. He was a good organiser and travelled around the battlefields urging the Red forces to fight. He had a war train to take him from front to front. Most of the fighting took place along railway lines. To back Trotsky up, Lenin introduced War Communism in 1918 to take supplies from the peasants and give them to the Army. Although it has sometimes been interpreted simply as part of the attempts to win the Civil War, it is now seen as the introduction of a completely communist system in Russia.

Checkpoint: The Civil War

Fill in the causes of the Civil War and reasons for the Bolshevik victory

Causes of the Civil War	Reasons for Bolshevik victory
1:	1:
2:	2:
3:	3:
4:	4:
5:	5:
6:	6:
7:	7:

Creating a new Society, 1918-24

Introduction

By the end of 1921, the Bolsheviks were in control of almost all of Russia. However, the Russia that they controlled was very different from the country that had gone to war with such enthusiasm in 1914. About 20 million people had been killed since the summer of 1914, and three-quarters of them had died in the Civil War.

The Russian economy was devastated by the war, with factories and bridges destroyed, cattle and raw materials pillaged, mines flooded, and machines damaged. The industrial production value descended to one seventh of the value of 1913, and agriculture to one third. According to Pravda, 'The workers of the towns and some of the villages choke in the throes of hunger. The railways barely crawl. The houses are crumbling. The towns are full of refuse. Epidemics spread and death strikes -- industry is ruined'.

Total output of mines and factories in 1921 had fallen to 20 percent of the pre-World War level, and other products fell by even more. For example, cotton production fell to five percent, and iron to two percent of pre-war levels. Much of the Russian economy had ground to a standstill. The peasants responded to requisitions by refusing to till the land. By 1921, cultivated land had shrunk to 62 percent of the pre-war area, and the harvest yield was only about 37 percent of normal. The number of horses declined from 35 million in 1916 to 24 million in 1920, and cattle from 58 to 37 million. The exchange rate with the U.S. dollar declined from two roubles in 1914 to 1,200 in 1920.

These changes had partly been brought about by the devastating effects of more than seven years of warfare. However, a major factor in the running of the Russian economy was War Communism, which had been imposed by Lenin in 1918 in an effort to supply the Red Army and win the Civil War.

Why was War Communism introduced?

Many workers responded to the Bolshevik revolution by taking over the factories they worked in. This was spontaneous, not planned or ordered by Lenin. Workers tended to do what they wanted, work when they wanted and production fell. As Bolsheviks were anti-capitalist, owners would have closed down their enterprises anyway. Many only stayed open because the workers took them over. 38% of the country's factories were closed by August 1918.

Production and distribution of food became a massive problem. Tsarist and Provisional Government had problems getting food into towns and the Bolsheviks faced same difficulties. The food situation became very difficult; after Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) the Reds lost access to the grain supplies from the Ukraine. The Whites also controlled food producing areas. The 1917 harvest was down 13% on previous years.

One reason was that peasants were not producing food because there was no point in producing a surplus. Even if they sold part of their harvest for the very high prices, there were few manufactured goods for them to buy. They were better off just producing what they needed for themselves because the money they got for their surplus would not keep its value, due to inflation. The whole of Europe was affected by inflation but the Bolsheviks made it worse by printing large quantities of paper money. Consequently, By mid-1918, food production and distribution were at critical point. The Bolsheviks were clearly were failing to deliver on their promise of 'Bread'.

Thousands of workers began to leave the cities to go to the countryside in search of food. The industrial workers were melting away. These were the core Bolshevik supporters and the people they needed to man industry and fight the Whites. Consequently, Lenin decided to take charge of the Russian economy because he needed to keep the cities and the Red Army supplied with food. He needed to keep factories producing weapons and other materials for war. Every aspect of life had to be subordinated to the struggle against the Whites.

Furthermore, many leading Bolsheviks regarded nationalisation of industry as a positive step forward towards their aim of a Socialist society. They wanted to do away with class differences and create a society in which people were treated equally; taking over factories would be an important step in achieving this goal.

What was War Communism?

All large factories were taken over by government and industrial production planned and organised by the government. Strict discipline imposed on workers. Food was rationed and money became worthless; workers were paid in kind. Peasants were forced to hand over grain to government. If they refused, they were hunted down by the Cheka and their grain was confiscated. About 50,000 peasants were killed. Private trade became illegal (in theory), but in practice a Black Market flourished.

Changes in industry

In June 1918, the Decree on Nationalisation took over all large scale industries. Medium-sized and small factories were exempted from nationalisation. Factory committees were no longer allowed to run their workplaces. Party managers and officials took over. Free trade unions disappeared; trade unions were run by the Party and became responsible for the behaviour of their members; this was just another way of exerting control. In late 1918, the government took over the distribution of all heavy industrial goods and began to allocate raw materials to key industries. This was the end of the free market. In the spring of 1919, all factories/workshops employing over ten people nationalised. Priority was given to the production of military hardware.

Labour became a real problem; workers were conscripted into Red Army and also continued to leave Petrograd and Moscow because of the lack of food. Bread rations fell to 50 grams a day. Most people were fed at communal canteens, when food was available.

Changes in agriculture

At first, in early 1918, peasants were offered a fixed price for their grain. The response of the peasants was to cut back on deliveries to towns in the expectation that this would force the government to offer a higher price. In June 1918 the government created the 'People's Commission of Supply' called Narkomprod. This tried to organise 'committees of the poor' in villages. The idea was that the less well off peasants could be used to spy out the hidden stocks of grain that the kulaks were hoarding. Neither of these policies worked.

In an effort to prevent peasants hoarding grain in the hope that prices would rise, speculation was made a crime. If a peasant had a stock of grain this was considered to be evidence that he was speculating. Even this did not work and consequently, in August 1918, large scale grain requisitioning started. The People's Commissar for Food ordered soviets to send committees into the countryside to seize grain. Armed workers and the Cheka took any grain they considered to be surplus.

Checkpoint: War Communism

Reasons it was introduced	Changes in Russia

What were the effects of War Communism?

Production of all goods declined dramatically and the populations of Moscow and Petrograd halved as workers left the cities in search of food. Rations fell to starvation level; the horses, dogs and animals in the zoos were consumed. Famine in the countryside led to deaths and cannibalism. This was a combination of the results of Bolshevik policy and a drought in 1920, followed by a severe winter. The grain production in the Ukraine fell to 20% of the level pre 1914.

The value of money totally collapsed. Inflation between 1917 and 1922 was one million per cent. Workers were paid in goods. 14 million people were kept alive by relief from overseas; most of it came from the unlikely source of the USA.

The policy of War Communism alienated the peasantry. The peasants did not trust the Communist government. There were minor peasant rebellions against the Communists in 1920-21. A new class of traders emerged as 'men with sacks' travelled the countryside with providing food and goods. Patrols were put on railway stations to try to catch these 'bagmen' as they were called.

The nature of the Party changed. The decline in the number of industrial workers also meant a reduction in the number of their traditional supporters. Bureaucrats outnumbered workers in the membership of the Party. The Party also became more centralised. Debate was stifled and all power concentrated at the centre.

Opposition to the policy emerged within supporters of the Party. Alexander Shlyapnikov, Commissar of Labour, and Alexandra Kollontai, Commissar for Public Welfare, published a pamphlet against War Communism. Workers Opposition groups went on strike Feb 1921 and then strikers crossed to naval base in Kronstadt and got support of sailors and dockyard workers.

The Kronstadt Mutiny

Soldiers and workers at the Kronstadt base demonstrated, demanding greater freedom. Lenin sent commissars to appeal to them but mediation failed. This was a major challenge to the Bolsheviks. The peasant revolts had been relatively easy to suppress and in any case, peasants had never been enthusiastic supporters of Bolshevism. However, the Kronstadt base had been a centre of support for the Bolsheviks and had played a key role in the events of 1917. Their demands were a real threat to the Party. The Bolsheviks tried to present Kronstadt protesters as 'White agents' - in fact they were real socialists previously wholly loyal to Lenin's government but were angry about what they saw as a betrayal of worker's cause. When mediation failed, the 'mutiny was crushed by the Red Army led by Trotsky and the ring leaders were condemned as Whites and shot. 10,000 were killed in all.

Click here for more information about the Kronstadt Mutiny [Kronstadt](#)

Despite the success in dealing with the Kronstadt Mutiny, it was clear that there was widespread opposition to War Communism across Russia and even amongst Bolshevik leaders. Lenin realised that something had to be done to save Russia from

collapse. The picture was very bleak. The period from 1913 to 1921 had seen a collapse of the Russian economy.

Industrial output in millions of tonnes/kilowatts:

	1913	1921
Coal	29	9
Oil	9.2	3.8
Iron	4.2	0.1
Steel	4.3	0.2
Sugar	1.3	0.05
Electricity	2039	520

Lenin's solution was the New Economic Policy.

How did the New Economic Policy change Russia?

State requisitioning of grain was ended and peasants to pay a tax in kind (i.e. in grain) to the government. Private trade legalised, so peasants were able to sell their surplus for profit.

Small scale industry returned to private ownership. Small scale private enterprises legalised. Businesses could employ up to twenty-five workers. However, under NEP the average number of employees in a private business was only two. The State Bank was prepared to advance loans and credit facilities to small business. Money was restored and in 1922 a new rouble was issued.

Heavy industry, transport, banking, foreign trade, the 'commanding heights' of the economy (as Lenin described them) were to remain under State control. State enterprises employed 85% of the workforce. New foreign investment in Russian industry was encouraged.

Was NEP successful?

Production in major industries rose and some exceeded pre-WW1 levels. For example, the production of coal and textiles doubled. Electricity production improved dramatically. Transport and communication gradually improved, with over 1000 new locomotives for the overstretched railway system. Industry began to invest in improved technology and productivity increased. Harvests improved. This was partly due to the weather which was better in 1922 and 1923, but food supplies improved and prices began to fall. The amount of land under cultivation increased by 50% from 1921 and 1927. The number of livestock began to recover. Peasants began to produce more because they could sell surpluses in local markets, keep their profits and pay taxes to the government. Consequently, life began to return to normal. The levels of nutrition in villages improved: standards of living rose slightly. Workers returned to the towns and factories. Working hours were reduced and equal pay for women was introduced. The government budget deficit fell.

A street market during NEP



As far as Lenin was concerned, the New Economic Policy was only a temporary measure. He said he was taking one step forward but two steps back. However, some Bolsheviks, e.g. Nicolai Bukharin, were so impressed that they came to see it as permanent. He is supposed to have said, 'Enrich Yourselves' to peasants to encourage them to produce more.

What problems were there with the economy under NEP?

Industry was slow to make progress and recovered only gradually. It needed new technology from abroad but the government did not have the money to pay for it. It failed to grow at the same rate as agriculture. There was high unemployment in urban areas, as high as 16% of the industrial labour force. This happened because industry was running on more efficient lines and trying to cut costs. On the other hand, agricultural production rose rapidly. Peasants believed that they at last had the opportunity to get more land for which they had been waiting for so long. The fact that the peasants were allowed to make profits resulted in the growth of the kulaks. This concerned the Party and this class was a barrier to their policies in the future.

At the same time, agricultural technology remained primitive and did not improve. Only wealthy farmers were able to afford machinery and most work was done by hand. Nevertheless, production rose and prices fell, which resulted in the 'Scissors Crisis'. By mid 1923 food prices were falling. Prices for manufactured goods were rising steeply. The peasants found that they had to sell more grain to buy the manufactured goods they wanted. They reacted to this by reducing the amount of grain they sold, believing that this would force the price of grain up. This created exactly the same problem that had existed during the Civil War and some leading Bolsheviks became convinced that peasants would never be persuaded to accept changes; somehow or other they would have to be forced to change.

Click here for more information about [NEP](#)

There were similar problems in industry. NEPmen appeared; the owners of small workshops or factories who were able to take advantage of NEP by employing workers and then selling goods at markets. They sometimes became middlemen, selling industrial goods and buying up surplus agricultural produce. Some rural areas became dependent on NEPmen for supplies and for selling their produce. It is possible that NEPmen controlled as much as 75% of the retail trade by the late 1920s. They were never as serious a problem for the government as kulaks, but they were another factor preventing the creation of a true socialist society in which everyone was equal.

NEP started in 1921 and lasted until 1928. By then, the Russian economy, had still not recovered to the production levels of 1913 and was falling further behind the economies of countries in Western Europe. Wage levels were too low to allow people to save and consequently private savings remained low which restricted money for investment in new technology. This had a disastrous effect on foreign trade which failed almost completely to recover and only reached 0.25% of the 1913 level. This was particularly important because the Russian economy needed foreign imports (e.g. of machinery) in order to improve industry. Without that investment and the resulting new technology, Russia would always be at a disadvantage compared to countries in the West.

Checkpoint: NEP; success or failure?

Successes	Failures

Checkpoint: Fill in the differences between War Communism and NEP

War Communism		New Economic Policy
	Owning businesses	
	Taxation	
	Making a profit	
	Employing workers	
	Production	
	Role of the state	
	Selling food	

RUSSIA, 1917-39

Key Topic 3: The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship, 1924-39

The struggle for power 1924-28

Joseph Djugashvili was born in 1879 in Georgia in southern Russia. At some point in the years from 1907 to 1914, he changed his name from Djugashvili to Stalin. This meant 'man of steel'. In 1917 Stalin was editor of Pravda, the Bolshevik newspaper, but otherwise played no special part in the events of 1917. In 1918 he was appointed Commissar for Nationalities in November after the Bolsheviks had seized power. This gave him responsibility for all the non-Russian peoples inside Russia. In 1919 he became a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee. In 1922, the post of General Secretary of the Bolshevik Party became vacant. The other Bolshevik leaders regarded it as a boring and unexciting job. Eventually the post was offered to Stalin, who accepted it immediately.

Why did Stalin become General Secretary?

The first reason was that it immediately promoted him to one of the most important posts in the Bolshevik Party and Russia. In effect Joseph Stalin became the third most important man in Russia. The second reason was that the post of General Secretary gave him opportunities that he would never have got anywhere else.

Stalin had many strengths and perhaps the most important was his capacity for hard work. As General Secretary Stalin got to hear about everything that was happening in Russia. Over the next two years Stalin steadily built up a network of people who he could trust all over Russia. He was planning for the long term. He knew that when Lenin died there would be a power struggle to decide who would succeed him and he wanted to make sure that he was in the best position to take over. Stalin also knew that other Bolshevik leaders were much more popular than him, for example, Trotsky was supported by the Red Army. If Stalin was to succeed Lenin, he would need mass support. He would also need to prevent the other leaders from working out what he was planning. Consequently, he stayed out of the limelight and allowed others to take all of the credit. He gained the nickname 'The Grey Blur' because he was always working in the background. Most of the Bolshevik leaders were happy to let Stalin get on with his work, and only Lenin appears to have suspected what was going on.

In 1922, Lenin suffered a serious stroke and was a virtual invalid for the rest of his life. This allowed Joseph Stalin to play an even more prominent role in the government of Russia. He visited Lenin regularly to keep him informed of events and even had photographs taken of them together. On 25th December 1922, Lenin drew up a Political Testament, in which he summarised the good and bad points of all of the leading Bolsheviks. He then stated that Trotsky should succeed him when he died. The visits that Stalin made to him seem to have convinced Lenin that Stalin was up to no good. Twelve days later Lenin added a further section to the Testament, in which he advised the other leaders to get rid of Stalin. He then gave the document to his wife with instructions to hand it to the Central Committee after his death.

Lenin and Stalin; Stalin used photographs such as this to emphasise his close relationship with Lenin.



Lenin died in January 1924 and Stalin, as General Secretary, organised his funeral and was even allowed to make the funeral speech. This thrust him into the limelight as never before. Trotsky was not present at the funeral; he was recovering from illness on the Black Sea. He later claimed that Stalin had misled him over the date of the funeral, which is quite possible, but it created the impression that Trotsky did not care much for Lenin, while Stalin did. Stalin deliberately disobeyed Lenin's instructions about his funeral. Instead of a simple ceremony and burial in a small plot, Lenin's body was preserved in a mausoleum in Red Square. This was all part of an attempt by Stalin to create the impression that he really knew what Lenin had wanted. He even invented the term 'Leninism', to suggest that he alone really understood Lenin's intentions.

Stalin standing next to Lenin's body at the funeral



Russians filing past the body of Lenin



However, Stalin could do nothing about The Testament, and when it was handed to the Central Committee in May 1924, by Lenin's widow, it came as a great shock. Eyewitnesses stated that Stalin sat down and cried, because he believed that his career was over. However, he was saved; the other Bolshevik leaders decided to keep the Testament secret. They did not want Trotsky to succeed Lenin. Trotsky was outspoken and arrogant and unpopular with the other Bolshevik leaders. The other Bolsheviks also did not believe Lenin's comments about Stalin. Most did not take

Stalin seriously. Trotsky accepted the decision of the Central Committee and this gave Stalin the chance to become the ruler of the Soviet Union.

From 1924, the Soviet Union was ruled by a committee of Lev Kamenev, Gregory Zinoviev and Stalin. Kamenev and Zinoviev wanted to start a massive programme of industrialisation, which would have ended the NEP. They were supported by Trotsky, who believed in 'Permanent Revolution'. He was convinced that the best way to protect the Soviet Union (the name had officially been changed in 1921) was to encourage workers in other countries to revolt against their governments.

Stalin attacked Trotsky's ideas. He put forward the idea of 'Socialism in One Country'. He argued that if communism was to survive, the Soviet Union had to be made as strong as possible. That would prevent foreign enemies from attacking and destroying the successes of the Bolsheviks. Trotsky was dismissed from most of his posts in 1925. In 1927 he lost his place on the Central Committee and in 1928 he was forced into internal exile. He left the Soviet Union in 1929 never to return. While Trotsky had been very popular in the Red Army, he had never made any effort to build up support in the Party or the country. It was all too easy for Stalin to get rid of him because the other leaders disliked his arrogance.

Kamenev and Zinoviev had tried to form an alliance with Trotsky to protect themselves against Stalin but discovered that most of the Party was against them. When Trotsky was dismissed from the Central Committee, they also lost their seats and both apologised for their actions. For the time being, that was good enough for Stalin.

In order to deal with Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky, Stalin had allied himself with the right wing in the Communist Party, Nicolai Bukharin and Alexei Rykov. Bukharin had been the architect of NEP and supported Stalin's idea of 'socialism in one country'. He attacked the plans of the left wing to bring about rapid industrialisation in Russia and sided with the supporters of NEP. However, once he had got rid of the left wing, Stalin announced plans for the collectivisation of agriculture, which included the forced requisitioning of grain. Bukharin opposed these, but like the others before him, soon found that opposition was pointless; Stalin had too great a control of the Party. In 1928, Bukharin and Rykov were dismissed and Stalin emerged as the sole ruler of the Soviet Union.

Having consistently attacked the left wing's ideas of massive industrialisation, Stalin now began that process with even greater determination when he began the First Five Year Plan in 1928.

Checkpoint: Tick whether these reasons for Stalin becoming the leader of the Soviet Union are true or false.

	True	False
Stalin was the Secretary of the Communist Party.		
Lenin chose Stalin as his successor.		
The other Bolsheviks did not want Trotsky to be leader.		
Lenin's Testament was destroyed by his widow.		
Stalin executed his rivals in the 1920s.		

Stalin isolated the left wing and then turned on the right wing.		
Lenin's Testament was not published after his death.		
Trotsky left the Soviet Union in 1924.		
The other Bolsheviks did not take Stalin seriously.		

For more details and photographs of the life of Stalin, click here [Stalin](#)

Checkpoint: How did Stalin become the leader of the Soviet Union?

Sort the following factors into an order that makes sense and explain how each helped Stalin

	Exploiting right and left	
	The post of General Secretary	
	The Grey Blur	
	Propaganda	
	Trotsky's unpopularity	
	Lenin's illness	
	Lenin's funeral	

The Purges of the 1930s

The power struggle after Lenin's death did not involve any executions. All of the Bolsheviks leaders were expelled from the Communist Party but were then readmitted and given new jobs. Most were posts were relatively unimportant, but Bukharin did become editor of 'Izvestia' in 1934. However, Stalin had no intention of allowing them to remain as potential threats to his position. They knew the secret of Lenin's Political Testament and if that was ever made public, it could have serious consequences for Stalin. In the, meantime, however, he had more important matters to tackle; industry had to be modernised and agriculture was to be collectivised.

The First Five Year Plan and Collectivisation began in 1928 and are described in the next section. They were intended to modernise the Soviet economy in the shortest possible time. All factories and farms were taken over by the state and were given targets for production over a period of five years. Many of the targets were widely optimistic and were not met. These failures led to the first stages of the Purges.

The Purges

The Purges were simply attempts by Stalin get rid of anyone who he suspected of opposing him. Although Stalin's position in the Soviet Union was virtually unchallenged, he was constantly afraid that he might be deposed and was determined to root out anyone who he believed was an enemy. At first the Purges concentrated upon technical experts, who Stalin blamed for the failures of the First Five Year Plan. They were accused of sabotage and there was a series of trials in 1930-1. These 'wrecking trials' were to be repeated later in the 1930s as a convenient means of getting rid of suspected enemies. In 1932, Stalin turned on the Communist Party and more than 800,000 members were expelled. Very few reasons were given and many loyal Party members found themselves out in the cold. Stalin was simply trying to get rid of anyone who he believed was not completely loyal. His wife was so disgusted with his behaviour that she committed suicide in December 1932. However, this was only a beginning.

The real purges began with the murder of Sergei Kirov in December 1934. Kirov was the Communist Party boss in Leningrad and was very popular. He was one of the few men in the Soviet Union who was prepared to stand up to Stalin. In 1933, Kirov successfully opposed Stalin's demand for the imposition of the death penalty against a Party leader, Ryutin, who had criticised Stalin in a pamphlet. In the 1934 Party Congress, Kirov received more votes for membership of the Central Committee than anyone else, including Stalin and Stalin seems to have come to have seen him as a possible rival. In November 1934, Kirov urged the Party to adopt a more moderate approach to dissidents, which won enthusiastic applause and approval by the delegates. This would have made Stalin even more suspicious

On the afternoon of 1st December, Kirov was shot by Leonid Nikolaev, a petty criminal. He had been arrested by the police in October 1934, but then released with the gun that he had been carrying at the time. Stalin ordered an immediate investigation and Nicolaev was arrested, tried in secret and shot on 29th December. His wife and all of his close family were also killed or sent to labour camps. Other

key witnesses, including Commissar Borisov, a close friend of Kirov, also died in mysterious circumstances soon afterwards. It seems very likely that Stalin had a hand in Kirov's murder because he feared him as a rival. What is true, however, is that Stalin used the event as an excuse for a witch-hunt in the Soviet Union and the real start of the Purges.

At first, the Purges concentrated in minor figures who were arrested and sent to labour camps. These were used to work on the industrial sites of the Five Year Plans. The Belomor Canal in northern Russia was constructed using slave labour as were the new industrial cities of Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk. Political prisoners worked until they dropped in sub-zero temperatures during the winter and oppressive heat in the summer. Many were locked away for ten years or more.

From 1936, the Purges became even more sinister. Stalin appointed Nicolai Yezhov to be head of the NKVD and mass elimination of opponents began. Each region of the Soviet Union was declared to have a stated number of dissidents. Byelorussia, for example, had 12,000. Dissidents were divided into two categories; Category 1 could be shot on sight; Category 2 were to be arrested on sent to labour camps. In Byelorussia there were 2,000 in Category 1 and 10,000 in Category 2. These figures were obviously just made up and were an excuse for mass executions and arrests. Although they were not supposed to be exceeded, in practice, they often were. Yezhov also turned his attention to the armed forces and began a major purge in 1937, before going on to 'dekulakisation'. Stalin later claimed that 10 million kulaks had been eliminated; many were shot, but vast numbers were starved to death by being surrounded and their crops destroyed.

The most famous examples of purges were the 'show trials' of Old Bolsheviks; the former leaders of the Party who knew the secret of Lenin's Political Testament. In three trials from 1936 to 1938, all former Bolsheviks leaders were eliminated; only Stalin was left. In 1936, Kamenev and Zinoviev and fourteen others were put on trial for assassinating Kirov and plotting to kill Stalin. Kamenev and Zinoviev agreed to plead guilty if their families were spared, but Stalin had them executed in any case. In 1937, seventeen lesser figures were accused and most were shot. In 1938, it was the turn of Bukharin and twenty others, who accused of working with Trotsky and wrecking; they were all executed. Bukharin also agreed to plead guilty and in this case his wife was spared, but was sent to a labour camp.

All of the accused were subjected to immense psychological pressure to confess. They were questioned endlessly, denied sleep and were told that their families had also been arrested and tortured. One prisoner heard a woman wailing endlessly and was told that it was his wife in torment. The NKVD went to these lengths because convictions were important to Stalin. He needed 'proof' that his actions were justified so that the Soviet people would not question them.

Hardly any area of Soviet life was safe from being purged. The composers Shostakovich and Prokofiev both ran into trouble by writing music that was 'un-socialist'. Poets and authors suffered similar fates if their writings did not reflect the 'socialist realism of which Stalin approved. He wanted art and music to glorify the achievements of the soldiers and workers of the Soviet Union (by which he really meant himself).

In 1938, Stalin apparently came to the conclusion that the Purges had gone to far. Yezhov was dismissed and executed and replaced by Lavrenti Beria. However, summary arrests and execution continued.

For more information about the Purges, click here [Purges](#)

What effects did the Purges have?

The Purges ensured Stalin's position in the Soviet Union was unchallenged. By eliminating older figures, Stalin was able to promote younger men who owed their success to him. This made them completely loyal. For example, Lavrenti Beria, became the head of the NKVD, and Georgi Malenkov, who was expected to be Stalin's successor, was promoted.

However, the Purges did serious damage in many other areas. The Red Army lost almost all its experienced officers. In 1941, it stood no chance against the German army. Science and technology suffered as new inventions were stopped. Stalin actually prevented development in some areas by clinging to outdated ideas. Industry suffered because managers were unwilling to try anything new. Literature, art and music were all stifled. Only Stalin's favourite form of art, Socialist Realism, was accepted. This showed workers striving to create the Soviet Union. Quantity rather than quality became the order of the day. Innovation was suppressed and obedience to Stalin's will became all important.

Checkpoint: The Purges; look at this list of groups of people who were purged in the 1930s and match them up with the reasons why they were purged.

Bolshevik leaders who Stalin had forced out in 1925 to 1927.	Stalin took complete control of schools and teachers had to teach his version of history.
Poets, writers, artists, musicians and anyone creative	Stalin wanted to ensure complete loyalty, but many accusations base on jealousy.
Managers of state industries and collective farms	Often they were betrayed by neighbours or colleagues who wanted their flat or their job.
Scientists, engineers, technologists and experts of any kind	They knew the truth about the relationship between Lenin and Stalin. They knew that Lenin had not wanted Stalin to succeed him
Every Admiral of the Soviet fleet, three of the five Marshals of the Red Army, 90% of the generals and more than half of the officers of the Red Army.	Stalin distrusted new ideas and so-called 'experts'. In some cases he rejected new research and clung on to theories that had been proved to be false.
Millions of ordinary Soviet citizens, who often did not know what they had done to anger Stalin.	They might have ideas that Stalin did not agree with and could publicise them through their works.
Schoolteachers, university lecturers and anyone to do with education.	They might have failed to meet targets or could have tried to falsify accounts.
Officials of the Communist Party in Moscow and the regions.	Stalin wanted to ensure that he had total command of the armed forces.

Propaganda and Censorship

Having eliminated the Old Bolsheviks, Stalin wanted to go one step further; he wanted to destroy their reputations and pretend that they had never even existed. Consequently, he began to rewrite the history of Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. He made out that he was much more important than he really had been before he came to power in 1928. Textbooks and encyclopaedias were destroyed or altered. The names of Old Bolsheviks, and particularly Trotsky, were removed and their photographs were altered. He picked on Trotsky in particular, because Lenin had chosen him as his successor. He accused him of treason and said that it he had done nothing to help Russia. Instead of Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin and others, Stalin substituted his cronies and a completely different version of the events of the years from 1917 to 1928 was created. In it, Stalin assumed the most important role; he had been Lenin's closest adviser during 1917; it was he who had won the Civil War, not Trotsky. Children in school had to paste over pages in their books with the new versions of what had happened.

Stalin wanted to make out that he had Lenin had been very close friends and that only he knew what Lenin had intended to do in Russia. This would explain why Stalin had become the leader and would make Russians accept him. He wanted to build himself up to be all-powerful and stop anyone opposing his ideas. This became known as the 'Cult of Personality'. Stalin made out that he was a superman who never made any mistakes.

Source A: A painting produced in the 1930s showing Lenin and Stalin in discussion alone



What was the Cult of Personality?

Stalin created the impression that he was a genius at everything. He was described as the 'wisest man of the twentieth century', the 'genius of the age'. The Soviet people were told that he was never wrong. This protected Stalin from any further challenges. He expected love and worship, not respect and obedience. Stalin made sure that everyone knew about his successes. Huge rallies were held in his honour. He used many forms of propaganda to pass on the news, but his favourite form was paintings and sculptures. These appeared all over the Soviet Union. They showed Stalin meeting smiling people, opening factories and dams, and he always looked rather taller and fitter than he actually was.

This is a typical of the paintings produced in the 1930s. It shows Stalin addressing workers and soldiers during the seizure of power, something he hardly ever did. Everyone is listening closely and one man is writing down notes.

Stalin wanted to create the impression that he had been at the centre of events and had played a key role in the events of 1917.

Source B: Stalin talking to soldiers and workers in 1917; this was painted in the 1930s.



Checkpoint: Stalin and propaganda

Look again at the last two sources; how has Stalin tried to create false impressions of his part in the revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union.

A	
B	

If artists wanted to work, they had to follow the 'party line'; that meant producing works that reflected the success of Stalin and Communism in the Soviet Union. On this page you can see a typical example of 'socialist realist' art. This was intended to glorify the achievements of the Soviet people, the Soviet *Union and of course, principally Stalin himself.

A painting of a construction site during the Five Year Plans



Propaganda and censorship were reinforced by education, which became compulsory for four years in 1930. This was later extended to seven years. Students had to abide by strict discipline and wear uniform. Examinations were set every year to ensure that progress was made. If students did not work satisfactorily, the pay of their parents could be reduced.

All school subjects were designed to glorify Stalin. Only one history textbook was in use and that had apparently been written by Stalin himself. References to the Old Bolsheviks were removed and in their places were the names of cronies of Stalin. In the mid-1930s, changes took place so quickly, that it was impossible to rewrite books as people were disgraced and eliminated; consequently, school-children were given new versions of pages to paste into books to cover up photographs of party officials who had been executed. This practice continued even after the death of Stalin in 1953. In December of that year, Lavrenti Beria, who had been appointed head of the NKVD in 1938, was executed. In the new edition of the Soviet Encyclopaedia, the entry for Beria was hurriedly amended to a reference to the Bering Sea. In effect, Stalin was rewriting history to suit his purposes; consequently, this process has become known as the Revision of History.

Two copies of the same photograph; the missing figure is Yezhov, who was executed in 1940. He was then removed from the photograph as if he had never existed.



The 1936 Constitution

In 1936, Stalin produced a new Soviet constitution to replace one published in 1924. This was intended to take account of all the changes that had taken place in the meantime. A draft was submitted for public consultation in June 1936 and about 5 million people commented on the proposals. When the final version was published on 2nd December 1936, all of the comments had been ignored.

On paper, the new constitution looked very impressive. It guaranteed 'universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot' and created new legislative bodies at the all - union, republican, and local levels. The new Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and all other bodies were to be elected. However, when the first elections for the Supreme Soviet were held in December 1937, each district ballot had only one candidate, who had been chosen in advance by the Party.

The constitution also guaranteed Soviet citizens equal rights irrespective of gender, nationality, or race; freedom of religious worship (but not religious propaganda); freedom of assembly; freedom of association; freedom of the press; and inviolability of person and of the home. On the face of it, this appeared to be more impressive than the rights of citizens in many Western European countries. However, the guarantees remained only on paper, because the Soviet government ignored the civil rights of its citizens through censorship and persecution. Whatever rights were offered by the constitution, the interests of the Party and state took precedence.

For more information about the Cult of Personality, click here [Cult](#)

For more information about the Show Trials, click here [Trials](#)

Checkpoint: The Revision of History

Which of the following sentences would have been included in the history books written in the late 1930s?

1	Trotsky had been the main organizer of the October Revolution.	
2	The main reason why the Whites were defeated in the Civil War was Stalin.	
3	Lenin had wanted Trotsky to lead the Bolshevik Party after his death.	
4	Trotsky was a traitor to the Soviet Union and plotted against it in exile.	
5	Lenin and Stalin were close colleagues and discussed everything together.	
6	Trotsky had led the Red Army during the Civil War.	
7	Stalin followed Lenin's wish and buried him in the Mausoleum in Red Square.	
8	Lenin's ideas were only conveyed and entrusted to Stalin before he died.	
9	Failures in the Five Year Plans were caused by Trotskyite conspirators.	
10	Trotsky did not attend Lenin's funeral because he was disloyal.	

Checkpoint: Revision

What have you learnt about Stalin's regime in the 1930s? Match the key terms, people and words with the correct definitions.

1	Purges	The members of the Communist Party such Bukharin, Rykov and Kamenev who had known Lenin	
2	Sergei Kirov	Name invented by Stalin to describe Lenin's ideas. Only Stalin knew what it meant	
3	Show Trials	Stalin's Secret Police force which was responsible for many of the Purges	
4	Old Bolsheviks	City on the Volga that was renamed in Stalin's honour. It became Volgograd after Stalin's death	
5	Socialist Realism	The building set up in Red Square by Stalin to house Lenin's body although Lenin had forbidden such actions	
6	Leon Trotsky	Stalin's attempts to rewrite the history of Russia and the Soviet Union with himself in the most prominent position	
7	NKVD	Methods used to eliminate Stalin's opponents in the 1930s	
8	Leninism	Stalin's attempts to encourage the Soviet people to venerate him and believe he could do no wrong	
9	Revision of History	Prison camps set up by Stalin to house political prisoners arrested in the Purges	
10	Stalingrad	Trials of Old Bolsheviks where they confessed under pressure to ridiculous crimes and then executed	
11	Cult of Personality	Head of the NKVD from 1938 who was executed after Stalin's death	
12	Lenin Mausoleum	Communist Party leader whose murder in December 1934 was used as the pretext for the start of the Purges	
13	Gulags	Stalin's chosen successor who was outmanoeuvred by Khrushchev after Stalin's death	
14	Lavrenti Beria	Stalin's approved form of art and music that glorified the people of the Soviet Union	
15	Georgi Malenkov	Lenin's chosen successor and Stalin's main rival for the leadership of the Soviet Union. He was murdered in 1940	

RUSSIA, 1917-39

Key Topic 4: Economic and Social Changes, 1928-39

Collectivisation

What was Collectivisation?

Collectivisation was part of the First Five Year Plan. It was an attempt to get rid of the ownership of land by ordinary people and an attempt to solve the food problem in the Soviet Union. Food rationing had been introduced in 1928 because peasants had begun to hoard food. Stalin planned to take all agricultural land in the control of the state and eliminate private production.

Why did Stalin introduce Collectivisation?

Since 1917, Russia and later the Soviet Union had never produced enough food to feed its population. There had been several famines and in 1920-21 5 million people had died from starvation. Stalin was determined to deal with this problem and believed that the best way was to centralise agriculture. All farms should be 'collectivised', which meant becoming part of large 'super-farms' where production could be planned and controlled. This would allow machinery to be used more effectively and increase productivity, because at the time many peasants still worked by hand.

Stalin also saw collectivisation as a way of eliminating the Kulaks. Under NEP, peasants had been allowed to sell surplus produce in markets, pay taxes and then keep the profits for themselves. This had produced a class of richer peasants who became known as Kulaks, or tight-fisted. To some in the Communist Party, Kulaks prevented the development of a true equal society because they employed workers and paid wages. To Stalin, they were a threat because they owed no allegiance to him. Their loyalty, he believed was to their profits and therefore they had to be brought under control.

Collectivisation was a key factor in the Five Year Plans. Stalin was well aware that Soviet industry was way behind that in Western Europe and constantly feared foreign intervention. He believed that if agricultural production was increased, he would be able to sell wheat abroad to raise foreign exchange to buy new technology. He wanted to produce a surplus of agricultural produce to sell abroad so that he could buy the machinery he needed to modernize Soviet industry.

Collectivisation was also part of Stalin's plans to impose total control on the peoples of the Soviet Union. He wanted to create vast state farms where all workers would be paid by the state and would therefore be subject to state (his) control. Agriculture would then become part of a 'command economy', where all farming and industry worked to a national plan, which was intended to transform the Soviet economy.

It is important to realise that collectivisation was not just a change to agriculture; it had far-reaching aims and was part of Stalin's overall attempt to impose his will and control on the peoples and resources of the Soviet Union.

The process of Collectivisation

Stalin's original intention was to produce Sovkhozes, or State Farms, where all the land was owned by the state, all the produce went to the state and workers were paid wages. The wages were paid whether the workers worked well or badly. However, these farms proved very expensive and few were set up. Instead, Kolkhozes, or Collective Farms, were introduced. Here workers kept plots of land for themselves and had to supply fixed amounts of food to the state at fixed prices. The workers kept what was left for themselves. If there was nothing left they starved. 240,000 of these farms were set up by 1940. Poor peasants were encouraged to denounce hoarding, and rewarded with 25% of any grain discovered.

Machine Tractor Stations were set up to supply machinery to collective farms. Each MTS served a number of surrounding farms and would go from one to another during planting and harvest. This should have allowed machinery to have been used very effectively, however, there were few experienced mechanics and few peasants had ever seen a tractor before, consequently, most did not know how to operate them. In any case, the only effective tractors tended to be those that had been imported from the USA; Soviet made tractors often broke down as soon as they had left the factory.

After the harvest of 1929 there was a great campaign to collectivise. Peasants were supposed to vote on collectivisation, but in most cases it was forced through by party officials. After seven years of freedom, peasants were no mood to give up the land they had acquired after so many centuries. However, Stalin was also in no mood to allow his plans to be obstructed by people who he believed were not loyal supporters of him and the Soviet Union.

An attempt by party officials to persuade peasants to join a collective farm



Come and join the Kolkhoz



What were the effects of Collectivisation?

Between November 1929 and March 1930 60% of all farms were collectivised. Opponents were labelled Kulaks and were transported to the Gulags or arrested and shot. At no time was a definition of who was a Kulak actually stated. So 'de-Kulakisation' was hit and miss and encouraged random accusations and violence. Each area was given a target of Kulak families to arrest and deport. An almost arbitrary terror descended on the villages.

Nevertheless there was huge opposition from the peasants, especially when the Churches were ransacked or turned into barns or meeting places and personal property was confiscated too in some areas. Warehouses were often broken open and personal goods restored to their owners. Faced with such widespread opposition the Party had to back down. Stalin made a speech in early 1930 ('dizzy with success') accusing local party officials of being over-zealous and allowing peasants to leave the collective farms. Many did.

Once the 1930 harvest had been safely collected collectivisation began again. By 1931 over 50% of peasant families were collectivised. The consequences of opposition were dreadful. Tractor Stations were linked to collectives, in an attempt to mechanise production. Of course there were not enough tractors, and peasants didn't know how to look after them, so many quickly became unserviceable. 50 per cent of tractors were soon out of action.

Because grain procurements were so high, income for peasants on the collectives was very low, reducing the incentive to work. This encouraged the setting up of Kolkhozes. Many peasants began to spend more time on their private plots – by the end of the 1930s these were producing most of the country's eggs, milk and meat – than on their official duties.

The impact of Collectivisation

Agricultural Production 1928-1935 (Soviet figures)

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Grain (million tonnes)	73.3	71.7	83.5	69.5	69.6	68.6	67.6	75.0
Cattle (millions)	70.5	67.1	52.5	47.9	40.7	38.4	42.4	49.3
Pigs (millions)	26.0	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1	17.4	22.6
Sheep and goats (millions)	146.7	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2	51.9	61.1

Why did famine break out in 1932?

Grain production fell because peasants saw no reason to produce for the state. Kulaks destroyed their grain rather than hand it over. What grain that was produced was collected for the towns and export. In the Ukraine especially – the main grain producing area of the Soviet Union – there was a great famine in 1932-34. The

famine was officially denied. Western visitors were shown successful Collective Farms full of happy, well-fed villagers. The reality was that somewhere between 3 and 4 million people starved to death, in order to fuel industrialisation.

The harvest of 1935 was better. Private plots were allowed, so peasants could keep one cow, some chickens and grow some vegetables. This was an attempt to stop peasants killing off all their livestock rather than hand it over to the collective farm. In 1937, the harvest reached 97 million tonnes according to official Soviet figures. Nevertheless, overall, yields from collective farms remained low – a problem right through to the end of the Soviet Union – but Stalin had managed to browbeat the peasants into doing what he wanted.

Checkpoint: The effects of Collectivisation

Successes	Failures

Industrialisation

Why did Stalin introduce the Five Year Plans?

The reasons for the introduction of the Five Year Plans are very similar to those for collectivisation. Stalin wanted to set up a command economy so that he could plan production throughout the Soviet Union. Under NEP, large-scale factories and industries had been owned by the state – about 85% of industry altogether – but small businesses had been allowed to employ up to twenty-five workers. He now wanted to take those over and eliminate the NEPmen who had taken advantage of the comparative freedom from 1921 to 1928. The Five Year Plans would enable him to achieve these ends. He would be able to decide what was produced in every factory and would be able to control the lives of all workers in the Soviet Union.

The Five Year Plans were intended to transform the industrial capability of the Soviet Union and turn it into a superpower. Stalin believed that Soviet industry and agriculture was one hundred years behind the West. He said that they must catch up in 10 years. Stalin distrusted the West and knew that Britain, France and the USA had tried to intervene in the Russian Civil War; he also suspected that they were supporting Hitler against him during the 1930s. The only sure way of protecting the Soviet Union was massive industrialisation so that the Red Army could be transformed into a force capable of defending it against foreign attacks. To make the Soviet Union even safer, he planned to build new industrial cities east of the Urals and also develop factories that could be dismantled and moved east as quickly as possible. That would mean that an attack on the Soviet Union would become much more difficult.

How did the Five Year Plans work?

The key to the Five Year Plans was planning. Individual factories and workshop[s] would no longer be able to decide what they were going to produce; they would be told what to make and given targets for production. In 1924, Gosplan had been set up to produce figures and targets for industrial production; from 1924, it took charge of the Five Year Plans. An army of state planners, about 500,000 in Moscow, tried to plan increases down to the last detail. Emphasis was to be on heavy industry and infrastructure, with consumer goods and living standards a long way down the list of priorities. No attention was paid to local conditions, about which planners in Moscow had little or no knowledge.

In the First Plan, very ambitious targets were set: coal production to increase by 100%, iron by 200% and electricity by 400%. In most cases the targets were impossible to achieve. Such was the response that new improved targets were set in 1929, and these again revised upwards in 1930. The Plan was actually ended nine months early and declared a great success. The Second and Third Five Year Plans had more realistic targets, which were usually met. However, statistics from this time are notoriously unreliable.

Targets and results of the First Five Year Plan; all figures are millions of tonnes except for electricity which is billions of kilo-watt hours

	1928	Target	1932
Pig Iron	3.3	8	6.2
Steel	4.0	8.3	5.9
Coal	35.4	64.3	68.0
Oil	11.7	21.4	19.0
Electricity	5.0	13.4	17.0

The Second Five Year Plan had some concentration on consumer goods and housing. Propaganda films were made showing workers being moved into new flats with central heating in Moscow. In fact few were ever built, but it held out a carrot to workers to put up with the appalling conditions that they were having to face. However, the main focus of the Second Five-Year Plan was heavy industry, although improved communications, especially railways, became important to link cities and industrial centres. New industries, such as chemicals and metallurgy, grew enormously. It also brought a spectacular rise in steel production, more than 17 million tonnes, placing the Soviet Union not far behind Germany as one of the major steel-producing countries of the world. As was the case with the other five-year plans, the second was not completely successful, failing to reach the recommended production levels in crucial areas as coal and oil. The Second Plan employed incentives as well as punishments and the targets were eased as a reward for the first plan being finished ahead of schedule in only four years. Women were encouraged to participate in the plan as childcare was offered to mothers so they could go to work and not need to worry about their children.

The Third Five-Year Plan ran for only 3 years, up to 1941, when the Soviet Union entered the Second World War. As war approached, more resources were put into developing armaments, tanks and weapons. The first two years of the Third Five-Year Plan proved to be even more of a disappointment in terms of targets reached. Even so, the 12% to 13% rate of annual industrial growth attained in the Soviet Union during the 1930s has few parallels in the economic history of other countries.

What the Five Year Plans do show is that political fervour took over from rational thought. It was almost a Civil War-type crusade to build socialism overnight. There was great enthusiasm amongst many Party members who made huge sacrifices to build new towns and factories. There were great achievements. But there was also muddle, confusion and waste. It is sometimes hard to separate the rhetoric from the reality when we consider the issue. It became crucial to meet your planned target. Never mind the quality, meet the target! Workers would move from job to job to get higher wages, managers would do anything to ensure they met the target, and of course public announcements showed that targets had not only been met, but had been exceeded.

How were the aims of the Five Year Plans achieved?

Forced labour from the Gulags (political prisons) played a large part in many projects. Most of Russia's gold was mined by convict labour, for example. The most famous account of this type of labour is Solzhenitsyn's 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch'. By 1939 there were over 3 million people in Gulags, a vast and constantly replenished source of cheap labour! And totally expendable!

Much of the work was also done by Komsomol volunteers, keen to make their contribution to Russia's 'Second Revolution.' Many suffered severe hardship in 'open-field' sites, in winter, building new factories. There were even volunteers, and recruited specialists, from the West. (Remember the West was suffering from mass unemployment due to the Great Depression). These were partly attracted by the clever use of propaganda by the Soviet state, portraying Russia as a socialist paradise completely different from the West.

It wasn't just the peasants who suffered a drop in their standard of living – wages were kept low to create as much capital as possible. In 1931 Stalin introduced pay differentials – completely counter to Marx's view of each according to his needs. These allowed skilled workers and managers to earn up to four times as much as ordinary workers. This was justified by the need to industrialise quickly.

Stakhanovites – shock workers who exceeded daily norms – helped raise output. In 1935 Alexei Stakhanov had cut 102 tons of coal in one single shift – 14 times the norm. If you exceeded your daily norm you got extra privileges and pay. Stakhanov's record was soon broken by a worker who produced more than 300 tonnes. By mid 1936 20% of workers were classified as Stakhanovites. Of course managers then used this to increase the norms for everybody!

Managers who failed to reach their norms were accused of sabotage and sent to the Gulags. This was a powerful incentive to reach targets! Peasants from the countryside often found themselves operating quite sophisticated machinery with little or no tuition, and few instructions. Of course if the machine broke down they were accused of sabotage! There was a series of 'wreckers' trials throughout the period of the Five Year Plans.

How successful were the Five Year Plans?

There is no doubt, despite the exaggerated figures, that the Five Year Plans completely transformed the Soviet Union. By 1941, it was the second most powerful country in the world; only the USA had a stronger economy. New industrial centres – like Magnitogorsk – were built from nothing. By 1938, the city alone was producing 5,000 tons of steel a day. There were many other examples like this. The fact that Russia was able to resist German invasion in 1941 – just – and then go on and capture Berlin is ample evidence of the success of the Five Year Plans.

Checkpoint: The Five Year Plans

What part did each of the following play in the Five Year Plans?

Gosplan	
Gulags	
Komsomol	
Fear of the West	
Stakhanovites	
Magnitogorsk	

Checkpoint: Magnitogorsk, a case study

Source A: A Soviet photograph of a power plant in Magnitogorsk



Source B: A description of Magnitogorsk published by a socialist publisher in Britain in 1939

On the right bank of the small river which skirted the mountains lay the Cossack village of Magnitnaya. In 1929, windswept flowery meadows lay beyond the village and the mountain was one vast lump of iron ore.

An area 54 square kilometres was selected for the site of Magnitogorsk. Workers of 35 nationalities assembled and built barracks for other workers. The attack upon the mountain began. Ledges 10 metres high were cut into it to get to the ore. Enormous structures rose; the housing of huge ore crushers, batteries of coke ovens and blast furnaces towering to the height of 50 metres. The city itself was planned with care: Soviet factories turn out men as well as steel: seventeen great blocks of buildings, each with its own department store, school, restaurant and crèches; each apartment in the blocks of flats with its own bath, running water, electric light, gas and central heating. By 1934, the mills turned out about 10 million tons of cast iron. By 1937 this had grown to 14.5 million tons. Steel production increased nine and a half times to upwards of 17.5 million tons.

However, there were problems – meeting the target became the priority so quantity became more important than quality. There were projects that were wrong – the Belomor Canal was built at huge human cost but once opened was too shallow for the Navy ships it had been designed to handle – and there were projects that took much longer than expected to complete.

The successes were achieved at great cost in human suffering – living conditions lagged well behind developments in industry. Millions died, especially in the countryside. A key debate amongst historians is whether the advances could have been achieved in a more humane way, or was Stalin right that the only way to modernise the Soviet Union was by force and terror?

Increases in Soviet production 1927 to 1939

	1927	1932	1939
Coal (millions of tons)	35	64	145
Oil (millions of tons)	12	21.4	40
Iron ore (millions of tons)	6	12.1	32

Checkpoint: The Five Year Plans; successes and failures

Successes	Failures

Life in the Soviet Union

How did the standard of living change?

On the face the results of Stalin's changes were impressive. Industrial production rose by about 400% and education and housing improved, literacy increased rapidly. Women were given equality for the first time. By 1940, 40% of workers were women. Creches were set up in factories to allow women to work. The numbers of doctors increased and medical treatment improved. Education was provided for all Soviet citizens

The new constitution that was introduced in 1936 also looked very impressive. It guaranteed democracy, equality, freedom of worship and political freedom, amongst other things. But it did not amount to anything in reality. The needs of the Communist Party could override all other considerations.

The real facts of life in the Soviet Union were very different.

There is no doubt that the standard of living fell for most ordinary Russians during the 1930s. After 1931 most people were paid by piecework, yet average income was probably about 50% of that in 1928. There were often severe shortages, so queuing was a way of life. Fresh foods were often not available. Most people ate meals in the communal canteens at their place of work rather than cook at home. In any case, housing was in short supply, because it was low on the Party's priorities, and overcrowding common. Most people lived in part of a flat sharing a kitchen and, if they were very lucky, a bathroom. Luxury goods were just not available, or were only available in special shops for Party bureaucrats or managers. Clothes, shoes, boots and materials for repair things, were also difficult to get hold of, so the quality of life deteriorated too.

In the cities there were some opportunities for people to improve their prospects if they had the skills or good fortune to get one of the millions of new managerial, technical or even supervisory posts created by industrialisation. With luck a new flat, better rations or access to some of the new, scarce, consumer goods would go with the job. Officially unemployment disappeared in 1932. This fiction was maintained throughout the communist era. In fact often two or three people did a job that could have been done by one.

The situation was particularly desperate in rural areas, especially for Kulaks or better off farmers affected by collectivisation. It was not until the end of the 1930s that collectivisation began to have some visible results. Until then, there were enough tractors to begin to affect their productivity. It was only when private plots were allowed that the standard of living in the countryside began to recover.

The role of women

At first, the Bolsheviks frowned on marriage, saying it exploited women. They made it easier for women to get a divorce; they made abortion easier and encouraged people to live together. Not much of this affected life in the countryside, where 80%

of the people remained in a very traditional life-style. In the towns single workers often lived in barracks, crowded in together. Families – usually three generations – often had to live in one room due to a severe shortage of living accommodation.

Shortages of labour, caused partly by the death toll in war from 1914 to 1921 and by the demands of industrialisation, meant that women found themselves increasingly required to work, but also having to look after the family too – queue for food, cook, clean, etc. In Leningrad by 1937 women made up 50% of the workforce. Crèches were introduced at most work places to make it easier for women to work. Financial inducements were made to encourage larger families. Indeed the birth rate did increase in the later 1930s.

By 1936, new laws had been introduced to try to strengthen family ties. Divorce was made much more difficult – and expensive - and abortion illegal. Stalin had changed his mind (?) completely about the significance of marriage. He now saw it as a way of controlling people and persuading them to accept stereotypes. Although women in one sense gained equality at work and in professions, they also lost because they were tied to their families in an effort to create a stable communist society in the Soviet Union.

The impact on workers

The Five Year Plans increased production, but not quality. 50% of tractors broke down. Managers of plants cheated in any way they could, because if they did not reach the target figures they might be shot. During the Five Year Plans, a seven day week was introduced and absence from work became a crime. Skilled workers were not allowed to leave their jobs. An internal passport was introduced to control movement. Important industrial cities were ringed with border fences so that workers could not migrate. On the other hand, industrial workers could be given higher pay and rewarded with medals; some social security benefits were provided. However, as more people crowded into the cities to work in industry, living standards fell.

Agricultural production suffered as Kulaks destroyed their crops and animals, rather than hand them over. Food shortages continued. In 1932 to 1934 there was a massive famine, which killed 5,000,000 people. Food prices rose and wages did not keep pace.

People who objected found themselves in slave labour camps, called Gulags. These were often in Siberia or in Northern Russia, where the weather in winter was very cold. Here they worked with little food for ten years or more. Many died from exhaustion. Altogether at least 7,000,000 people disappeared in the Purges, perhaps twice or even three times that number.

Stalin forced some ethnic groups to move from their homelands to Siberia. Whole populations were transported from southern Russia to the east. Chechens suffered particularly severely and were subject to severe purges in the late 1930s. These actions were part of Stalin's attempt to 'Russify' the Soviet Union. He wanted to impose the Russian language and Russian control on all of the nationalities of the USSR. During Stalin's rule many ethnic groups were deported including Ukrainians, Poles, Koreans, , Crimean Tatars and Chechens. Large numbers of Kulaks,

regardless of their nationality, were resettled to Siberia and Central Asia. Deportations took place in appalling conditions, often by cattle truck, and hundreds of thousands of deportees died en route. Those who survived were forced to work without pay in the labour camps. Many of the deportees died of hunger or other conditions.

Checkpoint: Life in the Soviet Union

Did life get better or worse for the peoples of the Soviet Union in the 1930s?

Better	Worse

Checkpoint: Revision

		True	False
1	Kulaks were peasants who had become prosperous during NEP.		
2	Stalin hated Kulaks because they were unlikely to be loyal to him.		
3	The First Five Year Plan called for a production increase of 300%		
4	Many of the targets in the First Five Year Plan were too low.		
5	Planning was carried out in Moscow by GOSPLAN.		
6	The First Five Plan concentrated on steel, oil, coal and gas.		
7	Magnitogorsk was the Young Communist League.		
8	Slave labour was used in the Five Year Plans from Gulags.		
9	Stakhanov was a new industrial city built east of the Urals.		
10	The main reason for Collectivisation was to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people.		
11	Stalin wanted to export agricultural produce to pay for imports of machinery and technology from the West.		
12	Stalin believed that the Soviet Union was one hundred years behind the West.		
13	A Kolkhoz was a state farm where peasants were paid wages.		
14	A Sovkhoz was a collective farm where peasants had plots of land.		
15	Stalin originally wanted to set up Sovkhozes because they would give him more control over the peasants.		
16	About 240,000 Kolkhozes were set up in the 1930s.		
17	By 1937 agricultural production had risen by 400%.		
18	By 1941 industrial production had risen by 400%.		
19	Collective farms solved the problem of food shortages in the Soviet Union		
20	The Five Year Plans made the Soviet Union the second most powerful industrial country in the world.		