In this section, we will examine the nature of political authority in Russia from 1917 to 1941 and consider some of the changes that were taking place and how these changes began to affect the relationship between the people and the Bolsheviks. We will look into:

- how the Bolsheviks consolidated power in Russia
- the nature of the Bolshevik regime in the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR)
- opposition from within the party and external opposition
- Lenin’s and Stalin’s impact on Russian society
- Lenin’s and Stalin’s economic policies.

**Introduction**

Lenin believed the providence of history had worked to create the Bolshevik-led revolution of October 1917, but he was not so naïve as to assume that his position was secure. In fact, Lenin was prudent in attempting to preserve the successes won in October and, of course, liquidating those phenomena in Russia which appeared to him to be oppressive or backward. Lenin’s ideological commitment remains a much debated topic, although there is evidence to suggest that he was often forced to make pragmatic concessions to resolve the considerable
political pressures he faced in the years following 1917. There is no doubt about the personal impact Lenin had on the nature of the Bolshevik regime in his time: it was crucial. The abandonment of moral consideration, the use of terror, the one-party state and Comintern were all established under his leadership. Lenin’s unshakeable confidence that his ideas were superior led to deep-seated factionalism within the Bolshevik party, which was perhaps exacerbated by his ill health after 1921. Joseph Stalin managed to use his position as General Secretary of the party during 1922 to 1924 to rise to the fore as an unrivalled dictator of the party, something which even Lenin had not attempted. Under the auspices of ‘Leninism’, Stalin attempted to build ‘Socialism in one country’, which justified an increased use of terror, party purges and transformative state-led economic policies to crippling effect. The ‘Five Year Plan’ sought to mobilise the masses towards building a utopian Socialist society, but it had catastrophic consequences in the countryside and many workers in the factories suffered too as a result of the optimal targets set by the state. On the eve of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ against their ideological enemies (Nazi Germany) in 1941, the USSR was a totalitarian state with a seemingly unassailable leader – although Stalin was about to face his most severe test yet.

**Political authority and government**

**New leaders and ideologies; Lenin’s Russia, ideology and change**

Lenin’s ideology
The interplay between Lenin’s ideology and implementation of policy is a huge area of research and one which has provoked virulent debate between historians. Ideology was central to Bolshevik policy-making and cannot be ignored if one is to understand the pragmatic steps undertaken by the Bolsheviks, from 1917 till Lenin’s death in 1924. It is well known that, in their long careers as revolutionary thinkers and activists, Marx and Engels devoted comparatively little attention to the institutional forms and governing principles of the post-revolutionary political order. Therefore the Bolsheviks, who had no experience of governance, had to formulate policies in a reactionary way most of the time. Only Trotsky and Lenin dedicated significant amounts of time to policy consideration as most members of Sovnarkom concentrated on their institutional functions. For example, Yuri Larin composed weekly proposals for the fundamental reconstruction of one or other of the People’s Commissariats rather than contributing to policy formation. This, as well as the forcefulness of Lenin’s personality, can partly account for the dominance his ideas were to have on party policy.

Lenin was a utopian theorist and had spent much of the build-up to the October Revolution writing pamphlets such as, *Imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism* (1916) and latterly, *The State and Revolution* (1917) which indefatigably preached his interpretation of what Marx had called ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’. Lenin used this to initiate a period of severe repression of those who opposed the revolution – namely, the workers and the peasants – as a historical necessity. The age-old tension between proletarian self-determination and the party’s vanguard (leading) role was woven into the fabric of Russian Social
Democracy and was to remain a contentious issue when the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917. Lenin took the view that the Paris Commune established during the French Revolution of 1789 had been the ideal example of proletariat autonomy, which might explain why he stifled initiative from below time and again during the course of 1918–21.

Development of the Bolshevik dictatorship
How the Bolsheviks survived the first few years following the revolution has been extensively debated. Historians such as Schapiro:1960 have argued that Lenin was a fanatical leader who reinforced the worst traditions of Tsarism. However, this view has been supported more recently by Orlando Figes: 1997, who has argued that by 1921, ‘the revolution had come full circle, and a new autocracy had been imposed on Russia which in many ways resembled the old one’1. Although a persuasive argument, Robert Service:1997 takes a broader view by suggesting that the Bolsheviks, if they wanted to impose order on the country, had to rule firmly. Transport, communications and particularly the economy were in a dreadful condition by the beginning of 1918 and the war with Germany had caused ruin in many of the states bordering Europe. In this context, the dictatorial nature of Lenin’s leadership of the party and the highly centralised one-party state that developed, was perhaps not completely unexpected.

The first signs of difference between Bolshevik objectives and those of the masses (the workers of major towns and cities) became apparent very early on. The masses had a programme which included ‘All Power to the Soviets’ as one of its main elements (evident in the slogans chanted through the streets in 1917), and the programme took precedence over parties, largely because most people were not so politically engaged that they bothered with comparing manifestos of parties. Parties had only received support insofar as they adhered to and publicised the popular programme. The Bolsheviks set up a Soviet-based government, peasants were encouraged to seize land and workers increasingly took over factories, all of which was in line with the calls made for revolution in February and July. As Christopher Read (2013) argues, for the masses these actions were the core of the revolution, for the Bolsheviks they were just the first step. Lenin’s party had a longer term agenda which sought to transform society completely.

Early after their seizure of power (as discussed in Chapter 2) the Bolsheviks sought to exclude members of other socialist groups to preserve control of the rapidly changing situation in Russia. By November 1917, the Bolsheviks had already established Sovnarkom and the Central Executive Committee, which was supposed to act as a restraining force on Sovnarkom (made up entirely of Bolsheviks) and drew its legitimacy from the Congress of Soviets. Very early on,
Lenin claimed that Sovnarkom must be able to pass decrees independent of the Central Executive Committee. Lenin justified this on the grounds of urgent necessity and doing away with ‘bourgeois formalism’ (to rid the country of unnecessary bureaucracy which slowed the promotion of moral socialist values), but it effectively gave Lenin the power once enjoyed by the Tsar. The Constituent Assembly, which had gained sovereignty since its conception in February 1917, was dismantled within a few days with little bloodshed and secured Bolshevik supremacy in central government. Following this, policy would become the reserve of a small number of those on the party’s Central Committee, which was formalised in early 1919 into the Politburo, which Lenin also dominated. Lenin now in effect reversed his former theories that the state would gradually ‘wither away’, arguing that the greatest concentration of power in the hands of the state was necessary to radically transform the economic and social base, and that the road to a stateless society ran through the temporary strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

However, the historian Siegelbaum (1992) convincingly argues that the Soviet state that evolved after 1917 was not a monolithic bloc, but a constellation of four functionally distinct sub-systems or networks:

• a military and police state
• a civilian state focused on the Soviets
• an economic state revolving around the commissariats and the trade unions
• a political state residing within the Communist Party.

How the networks would operate were (like everything else) not worked out in advance, and this provoked considerable debate within the party. All developed in a similar way however, that is, towards a centralised bureaucratic system. The ministries, which became commissariats, and many of the regional and branch institutions governing the economy as well as the Provisional Government’s state militia, which was renamed the Workers’ and Peasants’ Militia, were largely inherited from the Tsarist regime and staffed by the same people. Others, such as the Soviets, the trade unions and the co-operatives, had formed non-governmental bodies before the October Revolution but were ‘statised’ after 1917 (brought under the control of the government). The Cheka (secret police) had equivalents in the Tsarist period (the gendarmerie or Okhrana), but little if any continuity in personnel. Finally, certain institutions, including the court system, much of the educational system and almost the entire party apparatus, were newly created during the civil war period 1918–21.
All of the revolutionary institutions created in 1917 were housed in one building, the Smolny Institute. The Bolshevik, Central Committee, the Military Revolutionary Committee, Sovnarkom, the Petrograd Soviet and the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets were all housed there. This meant that Lenin could exercise a direct and steady influence over all of them as he could literally walk between departments. It also meant he was continually hounded by committee members and so, in December 1917, he escaped briefly to Finland (ironically, where he had just granted independence and was therefore illegally crossing a state border without permission). Incidentally, there are accounts that in Finland Lenin started to talk in a low voice so the political agents of the Ministry of the Interior would not hear him; he had forgotten it was he that was now in control of the secret police. Whilst in the tuberculosis sanitorium of Halila, Lenin instituted a number of rules to enhance the operational procedure of the new government institutions in order that they could respond to the growing turbulence outside Petrograd. He gave commissars a maximum of ten minutes to deliver reports, interrupting them if he felt their words were too doctrinal in nature. He personally reprimanded anyone who was late to meetings and he banned smoking in Sovnarkom meetings, which upset the chain-smoking Felix Dzerzhinsky (Head of the Cheka): Policy formation was a matter of urgency to Lenin but seemingly no one else in the party. This encouraged Lenin’s authoritarian tendencies, as political consolidation seemed an elusive prospect by December 1917.

Ideology and change during the Civil War
Many historians (such as Richard Pipes, (1997) have criticised the highly centralised nature of the Communist regime that developed during the Civil War. Robert Service (1979) has suggested that ‘centralisation’ can mean a host of different organisational methods, and the party exhibited several of them during its first years in power. The serious splits which had occurred at central committee level in November 1917 and again over Peace in March 1918 (see Section ‘New leaders and ideologies: Lenin’s Russia’) demonstrate the inexperience and
experimental nature of Bolshevik rule and can explain the regime’s faltering stance on centralisation. Provincial committees became increasingly important and, within local committees, individual secretaries progressively assumed more responsibility for day-to-day affairs. Service (1979) also argues there was an increasing reliance on ‘appointmentism’ as officials nominated those below them along lines of loyalty rather than specialism or talent. All these measures were justified by civil war conditions, which, as a resolution of the Eighth All-Russian Congress (December 1920) defined at length the division of power between central and provincial organs. The Congress agreed the division on the basis of the ‘dual subordination’ of commissariat officials. They were supposed to carry out their tasks in accordance with resolutions of the provincial executive committees to which they were assigned and the commissariats from which they received instructions at the same time. This was not an easy task during peacetime let alone in the midst of a bitter civil war. However, centralism, although borne out of civil war, certainly outlived it and was to become a key feature of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin in the late 1920s.

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Voices from the past: The Paris Commune

Extending reading: Discussion of links to French Revolution

The Paris Commune was a socialist government that briefly ruled Paris from 18 March until 28 May 1871 during the French Revolution. The killing of two French army generals by soldiers of the Commune’s National Guard and the refusal of the Commune to accept the authority of the French government led to its harsh suppression by the regular French Army.

Lenin, along with Marx, judged the Commune a living example of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, though Lenin criticised the Communards:

‘But two mistakes destroyed the fruits of the splendid victory. The proletariat stopped half-way: instead of setting about “expropriating the expropriators”, it allowed itself to be led astray by dreams of establishing a higher justice in the country united by a common national task; such institutions as the banks, for example, were not taken over, and Proudhonist theories about a “just exchange”, etc., still prevailed among the socialists. The second mistake was excessive magnanimity on the part of the proletariat: instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war; and instead of launching a resolute offensive against Versailles that would have crowned its victory in Paris, it tarried and gave the Versailles government time to gather the dark forces and prepare for the blood-soaked week of May.’


Lenin and the Bolsheviks interpreted the Paris Commune to suit their political strategy for Russia. Lenin presented the Commune as a working model of a broad people’s revolution and used this to justify his assertion that an alliance between the peasants and the workers was necessary to bring about Socialism. He believed the Commune failed because the members had been led astray by dreams of justice and patriotism, not because they had taken power too early (as some commentators suggested at the time). Lenin used this to justify the liquidation of the bourgeoisie in the first few years of Bolshevik rule and for strong party rule to instil discipline in those who might be distracted by class enemies. The Penguin Classics edition of The Communist Manifesto has a fantastic introduction written by Professor of Political Science, Gareth Stedman Jones.
The Treaty of Brest–Litovsk
The American journalist John Reed gave an emotive account of the Decree on Peace delivered by Lenin to the Second Congress of Soviets on 26 October 1917 which was welcomed with thunderous applause. However, the reality of withdrawing from the First World War provided Lenin with what historian Robert Service (1997) suggests was the fiercest struggle of Lenin’s career. Persuading the other Bolsheviks and SRs to accept the terms of peace thrust upon them by the Central Powers in December 1918 was a costly undertaking. Millions of soldiers had demobilised themselves upon hearing the Decree on Peace, allowing the Germans to press their advantage as the Russian front melted away. Trotsky (as People’s Commissar for External Affairs) had believed that he could facilitate the spread of revolution when Russian and German soldiers mixed, if negotiations with the Germans were strung out. After all, most Bolsheviks had assumed that without the revolution spreading to Germany, the Russian revolution would ultimately fail. However, Trotsky’s weak policy of ‘neither war, nor peace’ was exposed in February 1918 when the Central Powers offered an ultimatum at

Figure 3.1 illustrates the various government organs during 1921–24 – can you draw links between them to show how they related to each other?

**ACTIVITY 3.1**

Government structure in Russia 1918–24

Figure 3.1 illustrates the various government organs during 1921–24 – can you draw links between them to show how they related to each other?
Speak like a historian: democratic centralism

Lenin founded what is now understood to be democratic centralism in his early text *What is to be done?* It ultimately caused the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Lenin defined these principles as the freedom of members of the party to discuss and debate matters of policy and direction. However, once the decision of the party is made by majority vote all members are expected to uphold that decision.

**Brest–Litovsk**: either the Soviets signed a peace treaty or the German advance would resume in two days. By 18 February, the Germans were within 400 miles of Petrograd and Lenin threatened to resign from Sovnarkom if members did not agree to peace. Lenin eventually won against significant opposition and the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk was signed on 3 March 1918. Sovnarkom members were still unconvinced that the Germans would retreat and so the seat of government was hurriedly (and reluctantly) moved from Petrograd, the heart of the October Revolution, to Moscow. Following this, on 8 March 1918, the Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist Party, in honour of Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, which they claimed to be putting into practice.

Historians have often been highly critical of Soviet leaders’ willingness to use Marxism to justify political decisions, even when they appear to be misinterpreting Marx’s texts. It is true that much of what Lenin and later Stalin call Marxist is in fact at best an interpretation and at worst a perversion of his original thoughts. However, Marx was a theoretician and deviation from his theories was bound to happen.

There seems to be no doubt amongst historians such as Lieven (2015) that if Russia had not withdrawn from the First World War in March, the Central Powers would almost certainly have conquered Petrograd and the October Revolution would have been lost. The Treaty of Brest–Litovsk was, to many, a shameful peace where the Bolsheviks were forced to relinquish most of the states in European Russia – Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania were all granted autonomy and with them 89% of Russia’s coalmining and 54% of Russia’s industrial regions were lost too, not to mention the breadbasket of the Ukraine (which provided approximately 60% of all grain procurement in 1916 – along with the North Caucasus). The Treaty of Brest–Litovsk also foreclosed any possibility of testing Lenin’s Decree on Nationalities which had been formalised at the Third Congress of Soviets, January 1918, when he announced the formation of the **Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR)**. The Russian in the title was deliberately *Rossiiskaya* (not *Russkaya* which had an ethnic dimension); this emphasised his belief that Russians should not enjoy any privileges as they had under the old Tsarist system. By March 1918 however, the Bolsheviks were trapped in a country which reflected the amount of territory Russia had occupied in the 16th century, with very few ethnic minorities now part of the state, and mounting opposition in the south threatened even this.
Civil War 1918–21
There is much evidence to suggest that Lenin and Trotsky viewed war against the opponents of the revolutionary regime as part and parcel of the revolutionary process. As Sheila Fitzpatrick (2008) reasons, such conflict was inevitable and even sought after. However, Lenin had assumed that after the Brest–Litovsk conflict was subsiding, the real job of ruling could begin. He vastly underestimated the level of discontent amongst nearly all groups in society or the threat of complete annihilation that his party was under from the allied forces and old Tsarist supporters. The Civil War, which began in earnest in May 1918, was a most complicated affair. Christopher Read: 2013 helpfully describes the frequent changes in advantage between ‘the Reds’ (the Communists) and ‘the Whites’ (anti-Bolshevik forces ranging from proto-fascists to Kadet Liberals to Tsarists) as ‘a political patchwork quilt’; he writes, ‘Over the next four years or so the colours on the quilt changed but never reverted to a single colour.

At the peak of the conflict in 1919 at least 23 groups claimed to be governments of all or part of the former Russian Empire. Politically the next four years were marked by confusion and conflict...

This map illustrates the main ‘fronts’ of the Civil War and which White General led them. As you can see, the Bolsheviks faced attack from every direction at one time or another during the war.

The Whites
Threats to the Communists had been building since November, but the Civil War beginning was marked by a bizarre, and in some ways, unnecessary incident in March 1918. Approximately 30,000 Czechoslovakian soldiers had been fighting with Russia hoping to gain independence from the Austro–Hungarian Empire and were attempting to return to the fight after Brest–Litovsk had dissolved the Eastern Front. The Communists were allowing them to leave the only way they safely could, via the Trans-Siberian railway eastwards. Local Communists spread rumours that the Czechs were going to join with the Social Revolutionaries against the new government and so Trotsky (now Commissar for War) told them to disarm. This was a disastrous order and only encouraged the Czechs to join some Social

Key terms: Lenin’s Decree on Nationalities

Lenin’s Decree on Nationalities (carried out by Commissar for Nationalities – Stalin) suggested that the Bolsheviks promulgated self-determination for ethnic minorities, who had a right to decide how they wanted to participate in the federal Soviet institutions. Lenin did this in the belief that ethnic minorities were too closely integrated into the Russian economy to withdraw. He never expected the Ukraine, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Transcaucasia to leave Russian control. Lenin was forced to renege on self-determination pledges during the Civil War as the territorial land of Russia shrunk. Instead, he reverted to a pseudo-federalism which gave all legislative and executive power to the Communist Party, but the state would be divided along ethnic lines – providing little satisfaction to anyone.

Key terms

The Reds were a paramilitary organisation within the Bolshevik party, made up of factory workers, peasants and ex-soldiers. They were reorganised into the Red Army during the Civil War beginning 1918.

The Whites formed as a loose confederation of anti-Bolshevik forces who fought the Bolsheviks for control of Russia 1917–22. Some wore the white uniforms of imperialist Russia but some chose white to be distinct from the Reds.
Revolutionaries ejected from the Constituent Assembly in January and who had a good deal of support in this region. Together they proclaimed a new government based in Samara (the Volga region), known as Komuch.

By June 1918 Komuch had control of the whole of the Trans-Siberian railway from the Urals to Vladivostock. In July, the Czechs took Simbirsk and advanced on Ekaterinburg, where Tsar Nicholas II and his family had been kept in custody. The Bolsheviks ordered the immediate execution of the Romanovs to remove the threat of Nicholas becoming a figurehead for anti-revolutionary activity. In fact,
Nicholas was largely unaware of the events that were unfolding outside of his compound and had spent most of his days shovelling snow. By November 1918, however, the Czech resistance had fallen apart as their reason to fight had been negated by the end of the First World War.

Trotsky saw the need for a new army but volunteers were not forthcoming from the war-weary population. In June 1918 he introduced mass conscription; 275 000 enlisted but on the day of enrolment only 40 000 men attended. Trotsky abandoned earlier assumptions he had promoted after the February revolution in ‘Order Number One’ and reorganised the ‘Red Army’ along Tsarist lines. The election of officers was abolished and he set up his own mobile headquarters in a train carriage so he could visit the front lines speedily. The Red Army grew extremely quickly, with 48 000 former Tsarist officers drafted in to lead a defence against the Whites. This caused deep fracture lines within the Communist Party itself (none more so than between Trotsky and Stalin – Stalin disliked the practice of employing ‘bourgeois officers’), but Trotsky was not going to allow doctrine to stand in the way of utilising expertise. However, he did take precautionary measures by employing 180 000 loyal commissars to ensure the strict supervision of every military unit. The descent into all-out war caused chaos in political terms too, and Lenin saw this as an opportunity to tighten the hierarchical authority he already wielded. Power at the party’s apex was devolved from the Central Committee to two inner sub-committees in January 1919. The Politburo was to decide strategy and policy and the Orgburo to oversee internal party administration. Robert Service:1997 contends that the ascendancy of the Politburo was a turning point in Communist supremacy because the party’s functions had expanded so much it had become the supreme agency of state by 1919.

Figure 3.3: Trotsky leading the Red Army. Trotsky was an inspirational speaker and a ruthless commander of the Red Army, despite having little military experience.
Meanwhile, during April 1918, a number of Tsarist generals including Deniken (who replaced Kornilov after his death in April) and Krasnov had amassed 9000 soldiers from Cossack regiments in the south and south east. Trotsky arrived in his Command train and gave spirit to the Red forces there. Although Deniken’s troops made terrific advances in May to August 1918, reaching 400 miles from Moscow, his forces were worn down by continuous counter-attacks from the Red Army and the Whites rapidly retreated thereafter. A third, rather modest army, led by General Yudenich, would also threaten the Bolshevik regime by attacking Petrograd from Estonia. Co-operation between these forces, though theoretically possible, was difficult and unlikely. Trotsky masterfully saw off Yudenich’s threats within a week.

The SRs had fled to Omsk in September 1918. There, a brief Directory Government was set up but later overthrown by officers, who wanted to establish Admiral Kolchak as a military dictator there. The historian, Jonathan Smele (1996), suggests that the White army in Siberia experienced only short-lived success under Kolchak because he was a poor leader. Kolchak’s fragile nerves seem to have cracked altogether under the strain of a Red Army counter-attack in June 1919. Eyewitnesses invariably talk of his ‘appearing to be in a state of extreme nervous tension’ in July and his looking ‘really and truly worn out’, and speak of ‘gloomy, mistrustful and suspicious moods, alternating with ‘uncontrollable fits of anger’ as Kolchak snapped pencils or paced manically about his office, railing against everyone from the Allies to the Masons for sabotaging the White cause. By 1920, the final blow to the White armies came when Kolchak had been handed over (by his own troops) to the Communists and shot.

The year of 1919 saw large-scale offensives by the White armies on all three fronts and they posed a severe threat to the Communist regime, gaining large tracts of land (although not necessarily heavily populated) as they attempted their respective advances on Moscow. In the south, Baron Wrangel, who had taken over from Deniken, was unable to repel the Communist invasion of the Crimea and was defeated. In April 1920, the Poles came to the defence of the Ukraine but were soon repulsed, allowing the Red Army to advance to within 480 miles of Warsaw. The Communists signed a peace accord in March 1921 which gave the valuable Ukraine back to the Russians: they had won the Civil War.

Civil War: an analysis
Christopher Read (2013) argues that a primary reason for the Whites’ failure was that its only secure territory was that on which its armies stood. As the Whites moved forwards they left political vacuums or worse, opponents, to take over. Whereas Orlando Figes (2014) believes it was the Whites’ failure to accept the peasant revolution on the land that led to their failure: they simply didn’t frame policies that won mass support. It is widely agreed amongst historians that the Whites were politically divided and got little co-operation from the peasant population who, although treated atrociously by both sides, still felt some loyalty to the Communists who had nationalised the land. The Allies were too occupied with fighting Germany in the first instance, and too weary thereafter to provide much support to the Whites. The Reds used the railways to excellent effect, had an organised and inspirational leader in Trotsky and above all possessed a fanatical unity of purpose in defeating anti-revolutionary forces.
The Greens

The desire to evade military conscription, which had been introduced in June 1918, eventually gave way to a more militant form of neutralism that saw hundreds of thousands of young men take up arms in or near their native villages, shifting major confrontation to that between the Reds and the ‘Greens’. The Greens were irregular bands of peasant insurgents, most of whom had seen service in the Tsarist army and/or deserted from the Red or White camps. The Greens’ primary aim was to rid their districts of all officials, both zolotopogonniki (gold-epaulettes, meaning White officers), and ‘commissars’ (a generic term for representatives of Soviet power that included local Communists, food collectors and Cheka). Their characteristic military action was raiding railway depots, local military training units and state farms. Their punishment of captives took such ancient and brutal forms as live burial and disembowelment. The historian Erik C. Landis (2008) suggests that former officers of the Tsarist army and other individuals with service experience played a prominent role in the organisation of these groups of ‘Greens’, both because of their own status as deserters and, presumably, their willingness to assume a leadership role among local men in a similar position.

The disturbances associated with the Greens were in areas encroached upon by the shifting front lines of the Civil War. The uncertainty regarding the approach of Denikin’s armies from the south, or of the fortunes of the other White forces in the east and north, heightened anxieties in the villages and towns alike. Mobilisations to the Red Army, in some areas, were combined with declarations of martial law and even evacuations of Soviet personnel. The Greens cannot be understood exclusively in terms of widespread unwillingness to serve in the Red Army. It was the strategic context, with all the risk and uncertainty that it entailed in the summer of 1919, that made something like the ‘green army’ possible.

Perhaps the most well-known example of ‘green resistance’ came from Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian peasant. Makhno and his anarchist army increased after the defection of 40 000 Red Army troops in Crimea to the Black Army in July 1918, pitting them against the Communists. By late 1920, Makhno had successfully halted General Wrangel’s White Army advance into Ukraine from the south-west, capturing 4000 prisoners and stores of munitions, and preventing the White Army from gaining control of the all-important Ukrainian grain harvest. Even though this helped the Red Army, Makhno and the anarchists maintained their main political structures, refusing demands to join the Red Army, to hold Bolshevik-supervised elections or accept Bolshevik-appointed political commissars.

When General Wrangel’s White Army forces were decisively defeated in November 1920, the Communists immediately turned on Makhno and the anarchists once again. On 26 November 1920, less than two weeks after assisting Red Army forces to defeat Wrangel, Makhno’s headquarters staff and many of his subordinate commanders were arrested and later executed. Makhno escaped, but was soon forced into retreat as the full weight of the Red Army and the Cheka’s ‘Special Punitive Brigades’ was brought to bear against not only the Makhnovists but all anarchists, even their admirers and sympathisers.

The second major Green force took shape in the late summer of 1919, where full-scale insurrection erupted in Tambov province where as many as 50 000 insurgents
were led by a former left-SR peasant, A.S. Antonov. By January 1921, much of Omsk province in western Siberia was in the hands of peasant insurrectionaries. These and many other widely scattered rebellions lasted well into 1921, but were ruthlessly crushed by units led by Red Army Commander, Tukhachevskii, who shot hundreds without trial and deported thousands to newly created labour camps.

### Summary of key events

- Lenin created a government which concentrated decision-making power in the hands of a few Bolsheviks, but set up complex administrative systems which increased bureaucracy.
- Almost as soon as Lenin and the Bolsheviks had signed the crippling Treaty of Brest–Litovsk to end war with Germany, Russia descended into Civil War.
- The ‘Whites’, led by Yudenich, Deniken and Kolchak attacked from the south-west and east.
- The Bolsheviks army, ‘The Reds’, reinstated conscription and used the Cheka to spread terror in the countryside to enforce support, and eventually won in 1924.

### Stalin’s rise, ideology and change

#### Finding Lenin’s successor

Lenin’s illness became apparent in February 1921 when his bouts of insomnia and headaches stopped him from writing. At the Eleventh Party Congress he made two rambling speeches which attacked anyone who disagreed with him and it was clear to all of his closer associates that the search for a successor should begin. Given his masterful leadership of the Red Army during the Civil War and his mesmerising oratory skills, Trotsky seemed the natural heir. Although Trotsky had not joined the Party until 1917 (when he had returned from America to find the Mensheviks co-operating with the Provisional Government, he joined the Bolsheviks), something for which the old guard never forgave him. He also never held an executive post in the Party, unlike his main rivals Zinoviev (member of the Politburo), Stalin (General Secretary of the Central Committee) and Kamenev (full member of the Politburo but also acting Council of People’s Commissars and Politburo chairman during Lenin’s illness). Trotsky was arrogant and ambitious and gained few friends in the Party as a result; even Lenin had a low opinion of him, stating that when it came to politics Trotsky ‘didn’t have a clue’.

In April 1922, the amiable, seemingly moderate, quiet Georgian, Josif Stalin was appointed General Secretary by Lenin. At the time, this did not seem of great importance but it was to give Stalin a unique power base as from here he could use his authority to appoint executive positions within the Party to those who were loyal to him. During 1922 alone, more than 10 000 provincial officials were appointed by the Orgburo and Secretariat. At the end of May 1922 Lenin suffered his first stroke, resulting in the temporary paralysis of his right leg and arm and loss of speech. During this period his responsibilities would be taken over by a troika, or triumvirate, of Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin. Stalin would visit Lenin to
solicit his counsel and then submit matters to the Politburo who would routinely approve his ideas as, by now, other members of the Politburo – Rykov, Tomsky and Bukharin – had come to support the triumvirate. Stalin seemingly deceived everyone by taking a moderate line on every issue. In September 1922, Lenin sent a note to Stalin asking the Politburo to appoint Trotsky deputy chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars and Kamenev deputy chairman of the Council of Labour and Defence. The minutes of the Politburo meeting show that Trotsky ‘categorically refused’ the position, which was an unprecedented move and served to undermine his position further in the Party.

Figure 3.4: The Troika. From left to right: Stalin, Rykov, Zinoviev, Kamenev.

Stalin was afraid of a Lenin–Trotsky alliance towards the end of his life when it had become clear that he and Lenin fundamentally disagreed on the nationalities question and the spread of the revolution. Stalin headed the Commissariat for Nationalities that wished to deprive Soviet republics of their formal independence by turning them into autonomous republics within the RSFSR; this was a form of federalism which would bring the Ukraine, Belorussia, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan into an enlarged RSFSR. Lenin thought this smacked of imperialism and discussions on the matter became acrimonious. In Lenin’s testament, dictated in January 1923, he criticised all of the members of the Politburo, although described Trotsky as the most capable. It was clear that Lenin advocated a collective leadership for the future of the Party, although this was perhaps because he inflated his abilities to lead. In a postscript he added, ‘Stalin is too coarse, and this shortcoming … becomes intolerable in a General Secretary.’ Following this, Stalin announced the delay of the Twelfth Party Congress for one month, hoping that this would stifle Lenin’s opportunity to denounce him. His gamble paid off as

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Lenin suffered a massive stroke that prevented him from speech until his death on 21 January 1924.

The consolidation of Bolshevik authority and the development of the Stalinist dictatorship

Just after Lenin’s death, Trotsky was accused of the terrible crime of ‘factionalism’ by the triumvirate: the charge against him was that, supported by 46 Party members, he criticised the ‘police regime’ the Party had become. Trotsky, once thought to be the natural successor to Lenin, had become hopelessly alienated. However, Stalin had more Party support as demonstrated at the Thirteenth Party Congress a few months after Lenin’s death where the dead leader’s testament was read out – including his negative comments about Stalin (which Zinoviev and Kamenev persuaded the meeting to ignore). This Congress had come after Trotsky had denounced the ‘old guard’ for stifling debate. Bukharin accused Trotsky of factionalism and Zinoviev had branded ‘Trotskyism’ as a particular tendency within the Russian workers’ movement. By the time the Congress met, the triumvirate had become the ‘semerka’ (the seven) and completely isolated Trotsky. Stalin’s position was enhanced by the launch of the ‘Lenin enrolment’, which sought to increase the membership of industrial workers in the party. Over 500,000 workers were recruited between 1923 and 1925, supervised by Stalin. The new recruits to the party were mostly politically naïve due to their lack of education. This probably strengthened Stalin’s position further as many joined the party to obtain better living quarters or promotions at work. It has also been suggested that Stalin’s humble Georgian background and ‘proletarian look’ gave him an advantage over the intellectuals such as Trotsky and Bukharin. Trotsky defended his position in a series of seven letters, which were collected as The New Course in January 1924, but it was too late: he was removed from office in 1925 and expelled from the party altogether by November 1927.

Cult of personality

Following Lenin’s death, the party sought to create a ‘cult of personality’ around the leader of the revolution and increasingly depended upon it for a source of legitimacy. Monuments to Lenin were erected everywhere. Stalin even forbade Lenin to be buried next to his mother (as he had wished) and instead embalmed him to be displayed like a saint in a church in Moscow, where he still is today. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad and schools set up ‘Lenin corners’, elevating him to idol status. Zinoviev introduced the term ‘Leninism’ at his funeral and the triumvirate sought to present themselves as true defenders of his beliefs, marking anyone out (mainly Trotsky) as ‘anti-Leninist’ if they contradicted their ideas. This marked a change in the ideology of the Party away from Marxism and traditional Socialist beliefs, as had been the case under Lenin’s leadership. In fact, Lenin’s ideas had always evolved and changed to suit the circumstances and Stalin took full advantage of this by assembling a doctrine, drawn selectively from the dead leader’s writings, which he published as The Foundations of Leninism. Stalin also set up two special institutes, which collected the works of the founding fathers of Communism, allowing Stalin to attack the ideas of opponents as illegitimate. One aspect Stalin invoked without exception at almost every congress was ‘Party Unity’, which had been established at the Tenth Party Congress. This enabled him
to build upon his dictatorship in the 1930s, but for the time being, meant that the Party line would hold against Trotsky.

Figure 3.5: Lenin’s body lying in state in the Kremlin. The onlookers include his wife Krupskaia and his sister Mary Illichna.

‘Socialism in One Country’
By 1923, it was evident that revolutions were unlikely to occur in Europe as the Spartacist Uprising failed in Germany in 1919 and the fascist dictator, Mussolini, had grabbed power in Italy in 1922. Stalin began to advance the idea of ‘Socialism in One Country’ from 1924 onwards as a form of protection for the USSR, which was encircled by hostile capitalists. ‘Socialism in One Country’ would be a dramatic departure from the Party’s Marxist revolutionary strategy, and was another area where he could undermine Trotsky and the Left Opposition as ‘anti-Leninist’ if they disagreed with him. Historians have debated whether Lenin would have approved of this policy or not; there is evidence to suggest he was less convinced that spread of revolution was needed for the Bolsheviks to succeed. The policy became Party doctrine when the Fourteenth Party Congress, in April 1925, resolved that ‘in general the victory of socialism is unconditionally possible in one country’. It was obvious that Stalin was successfully developing his own brand of Communism, which would have dramatic consequences for the people of the Soviet Union.

It is difficult to pinpoint when Stalin became absolute dictator of the USSR as he was obliged to operate in a collective leadership in the years following Lenin’s death. It was not until the 1930s when it was clear he was absolute premier. However, there is much evidence to suggest that the point when the Party agreed to build ‘Socialism in One Country’ in 1925 was when Stalin asserted his
dominance over the Party. It was assumed by most Party members that building socialism meant increasing the USSR’s industrial base. Trotsky and the Left Opposition (including economist Evgeny Preobrazhensky) contended that New Economic Policy (NEP – described in a later section) created money-grabbing peasant markets and reversed the effects of the revolution. Trotsky suggested that rapid industrialisation was necessary, enabling agriculture to be mechanised and thereby facilitating the creation of collective farms. Bukharin and Stalin argued that Lenin had explicitly sought an alliance between the proletariat and peasantry therefore consolidation of the NEP was needed.

Moves and counter-moves
Having sided with Trotsky against NEP, with the Left Communists and Workers’ Opposition in 1925 to form a United Opposition, Zinoviev and Kamenev faced a similar fate to the once hailed leader of the Red Army. Stalin exploited their weaknesses and potential divisions well. Defeated at a Central Committee meeting in April 1926, the Opposition then tried to present their case to the Fifteenth Party Conference in October, but was denied the right to speak. Party militants then broke up meetings they had tried to hold with factory workers; this marked the first time the Party had used violence against its own members. The Opposition began working in secret on a statement to give to Party members; however, the State Political Administration or GPU (the secret police 1922–34) discovered their clandestine printing press, constituting criminal activity. Zinoviev and Kamenev were subsequently expelled from the Party (although only for a short time – they were allowed to return in 1928 as long as they publicly denounced ‘Trotskyism’ and repudiated any oppositional activity they had been involved with). Trotsky was later deported from the Soviet Union in 1929 and was famously found with a mountaineer’s ice axe in his back on 20 August 1940, reportedly murdered by undercover Stalinist agents.

After 1927, Stalin turned against Bukharin and the NEP, mobilising his supporters in the Party for a return to Civil War methods to fight the ‘kulaks’ in the ‘battle for bread’ and force through the rapid industrialisation strategy called the Five Year Plan to industrialise the Soviet Union. It was through this struggle against Bukharin and the other members of the Politburo who would form the ‘Right Opposition’, namely Aleksei Rykov (Lenin’s successor as the Head of Government) and Mikhail Tomsky (Head of the Trade Unions), that Stalin consolidated his leadership of the Party.
A grain crisis in 1927 provoked Stalin and his supporters to maintain that the peasantry, kulaks in particular, was holding the proletarian state to ransom in an attempt to raise grain prices. Stalin’s response was to revert to grain requisitioning, as had taken place during the Civil War. Bukharin and his allies, Rykov and Tomsky, baulked at the violence used in the villages, which Stalin successfully managed to turn against them as ‘right-wing deviations’ from Leninism. Bukharin and his supporters did little to rally support as war scares from Britain, France and China in 1928 persuaded them that any in-fighting could damage the country as a whole. This combined with the ‘Shakhty Affair’, when 55 engineers from the Donbass mines were convicted of ‘sabotage’, and many bourgeois specialists were arrested, convincing most Central Committee members that NEP should be abandoned. In Comintern too, Bukharinists were defeated in 1929 when Stalin identified ‘social democrats’ with ‘social fascists’ who were responsible for repressing the proletariat. Stalin’s ultra-leftist tactics again forced Bukharin to the right, and he was finally excluded from Comintern’s Executive Committee in July 1929.

Stalin’s rise to power was not just about consolidating his own supremacy, but about the direction the revolution should take. All of the inner-party factionalism was couched in ideological and policy-making terms. Factionalism occurred because of fundamental questions about the spread of revolution and the best way to achieve socialism in the USSR. However, the effect of Stalin’s victory was to severely curtail scope for inner-party discussion or disagreement over policy. Stalin was now free to initiate his utopian vision for socialism, which would completely transform the social structure and economy, and ultimately the political system of the USSR.

**Economic developments**

**Lenin’s decrees**

**State capitalism**

In May 1918 Lenin wrote the persuasively titled pamphlet, *Left Infantilism and the petty bourgeois spirit*, which advised fellow Russian socialists to ‘study the state capitalism of the Germans, [and] to adopt it with all possible strength’. In Lenin’s view, this meant co-operation with employers whilst asserting the power of the state and was completely necessary if the Bolsheviks were to survive the first few months in power, roughly from October 1917 to June 1918. A flood of decrees issued from Sovnarkom created this ‘mixed economy’ and began by initiating the seizure of the State Bank and subsequent nationalisation and amalgamation of all private banks into the People’s Bank of the Russian Republic in November 1917. In January 1918, all Tsarist domestic and foreign debts were annulled. The bourgeoisie were attacked as personal ownership of large houses was declared illegal, just as large landowners had had their estates taken over by peasants.

Lenin imagined factory committees would assume managerial roles within the general framework laid down by the central executive committee of the Soviets. However, control of industry was incredibly difficult as, since October, production had slumped and even ground to a halt in some factories, and radical local Soviets sprung up throughout towns and cities. ‘Nationalisation’, which had already occurred in agriculture, spread to industry as workers took control of factories.
throughout the early months of 1918. Lenin acted to ban further ‘nationalisation from below’ without permission in January 1918 and again in April, but such decrees went ignored until June. The decree of June 1918 began a process of imposing greater discipline on the workers, introducing ‘bourgeois specialists’ and one-man management. SRs and Left Communists deplored this aspect of Lenin’s industrial policy, as they predicted his encouragement of State Capitalism.

Below are two interpretations of the rise of Stalin, written by two prominent historians of the period. Read them and try to distinguish where they differ and what, if anything, they agree on.

Extract A - Lewin, Moshe 2005, page 38 The Soviet Century

[in 1924] ‘The party as known to its first members, and to those who had joined its ranks during the Civil War, was fast disappearing. Henceforth everyone other than rank-and-file members was a ‘cadre’ – in other words, worked in an apparatus where each person held a precise post in a hierarchy of disciplined functionaries. Some appearances were still preserved, as in the case of the Central Committee, which for a few more years continued to be elected, to deliberate, and to vote on resolutions. But the selection of its members was completely outside the control of party members.

In this way, Stalin accomplished his ‘master plan’ to become sole ruler. The party was stripped of the very thing Stalin wanted to strip it of: the ability to change its leadership through elections.’

Extract B - Ward, Chris: 1993p. 37 Stalin’s Russia

Revolution and Civil War gave birth to a ‘politics of permanent emergency’. This had two consequences. In the first place militarization conditioned behavior within the leadership long after the guns fell silent, persuading them that the best way to get results was to utilize the symbols and structures of command and authority. One form of Bolshevism was being selected out by elite perceptions of contemporary realities, and to some extent Stalin’s success was due to his adroit use of skills learned in the harsh world of the immediate post-revolutionary years. Second, permanent emergency precluded consensus or coalition, within and outside the party. Stalin was one among many – Lenin included – who were intolerant of dissent and anger and eager to brand opponents as deviationists.

Discussion Points
1. What is Lewin’s argument about how Stalin became leader of the Party?
2. What is Ward’s argument about how Stalin became leader of the Party?
3. Which do you think more plausible? Discuss in groups.

Go back over your notes and find evidence to support one of these interpretations.
would lead to bureaucratic centralisation, in which commissars might destroy the independence of local Soviets. Lenin’s imperative was survival and a restoration of order.

**War Communism**
The onset of Civil War created massive problems of supply; until 1920 the Communists were cut off from coal in the area of the Don and from the oil of Baku. **War Communism**, a term coined by Lenin to refer retrospectively to the Party’s civil war-induced economic policies, was his first attempt at a command economy to deal with the disastrous economic situation.

However, as several Marxist commentators have argued, these priorities were always latent in the Bolshevik schema and became manifest even before the onset of full-scale civil war. As early as December 1917, Lenin established a Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenkha) to organise a general economic plan and financial administration for the state, although it did so on a small scale. Headed by A. Rykov from April 1918, Vesenkha took its place in Sovnarkom and developed an elaborate infrastructure of sections and departments to handle its enormous but ill-defined responsibilities.

**Grain requisitioning**
Lenin’s economic policies can be seen to have an ideological underpinning in more ways than one. War Communism, it has been argued, was Lenin’s way of dealing with the bourgeois influences in the countryside. Since Stolypin’s agricultural reforms in 1906 (see Chapter 2) that allowed consolidation of farms, there had been a low but marked growth in richer peasants or ‘kulaks’. Lenin voiced his abhorrence of this perceived class of peasant who, in his mind, were responsible for hoarding and withholding grain in order to get the highest price, as rationing had been in place under Tsar Nicholas II from 1916. Therefore, the party introduced grain requisitioning, or in Russian *prodrazverstka*, in June 1918. This involved sending ‘food detachments’, squads from the cities under the control of the Cheka, who would seize what they defined as ‘surplus’ grain. Lenin intended to promote class war between the poorer peasants and their better-off neighbours. Lenin issued further decrees in June tasking ‘committees of the poor’ with achieving the expropriation of the *kulaks*. The consequences of this process were calamitous because they created antagonism in the peasants, but also because they failed to improve food distribution. Peasants, knowing their surplus will be seized, sowed smaller acreages and more actively hoarded and hid their grain. The food detachments confiscated any grain they could, including seed grain which was required to sow the following harvest. This created a vicious cycle of lower grain production and ever more punitive requisitioning. As an economic policy and a way of feeding the cities, grain requisitioning was a failure.

**A crisis in industrial production**
Critical food shortages, caused by grain hoarding by angry peasants, and rapid inflation caused by the printing of paper money, meant food was so scarce, workers in the cities were forced to return to the countryside to look for food. Between 1918 and 1920, Moscow experienced a loss of approximately 100 000 workers and, over the same period, the number of factory and mine workers in the Urals dropped from 340 000 to 155 000. Among the major branches of
industry, textiles experienced the greatest reduction, declining in terms of its workforce by nearly 72% between 1917 and 1920. Large enterprises, where the Bolsheviks had concentrated their agitational and recruitment efforts, suffered disproportionately, partly owing to the shutting down of entire shops (tshekhy) and partly due to heavy mobilisation for the Red Army and food procurement detachments. Petrograd, whose population had swelled to 2.5 million by 1917, had only 722,000 inhabitants by 1920, or approximately the same number as in 1870. Moscow’s population, which had stood at slightly more than 2 million in February 1917, shrank to just over 1 million by late 1920, or less than the number recorded in the 1897 census. Shliapnikov (a leading Bolshevik) said the party were ‘the vanguard of a non-existent class’ as it is estimated by historian Donald Raleigh (2004) that epidemics of typhus and cholera killed up to 5 million and the famine of 1921–2 killed approximately 5 million people too; this is set against battle dead figures of approximately 350,000.

The famine of 1921–2 affected primarily the Volga and Ural river regions. Historians have suggested that although problems with grain production began during the First World War, it was War Communism (and grain seizures) that really disturbed these areas because the rail systems could not distribute food effectively. This problem was compounded by intermittent droughts during 1921, leading to catastrophe. Writer Maxim Gorky issued appeals to the Western powers for aid, resulting in Britain sending over 600 tons of supplies to the Soviet Union and the US Hoover administration sending aid too.

Extending state control
The extension of the state was an obvious response to these desperate circumstances. From the autumn of 1918, the level of rations distributed was tied to the ‘class principle’. This meant that manual workers (and among them, those engaged in the most physically demanding work) were permitted more than clerical personnel, who received a higher ration than ‘the bourgeoisie’. The system proved unwieldy and, as E.H. Carr (1952) notes, led to ‘widespread anomalies, jealousies and discontents’. This exacerbated already critical problems: by linking rations to livelihood rather than individual performance, it provided little or no incentive for improved productivity. The inability of the state to accrue adequate measures of rations meant that, even for workers in the highest category, the amount of food remained well below the calorific minimum – evidence suggests that workers in this category received one quarter pound of bread and a bowl of meat soup per day at some points during the war.

Urban contraction was essentially the result of the catastrophic decline in supplies of food and fuel. This decline was itself the product of a combination of factors:

- The breakdown of the rail transport system owing to wartime overstrain and the inadequacy of repairs.
- Foreign and/or White occupation of some of the former empire’s richest food and fuel producing regions.
- Peasants’ reduction of sown area and resistance to grain requisitions.
- Priority given to the Red Army in the field.
Lacking adequate nourishment, shelter, warmth and medicines, many urban residents found themselves engaged in what Isaac Deutscher (1965) called ‘an almost zoological struggle for survival’. Epidemics of typhus, cholera, influenza and diphtheria wiped out tens of thousands of urban residents, many already weakened by deficiency diseases. In Moscow, the death rate soared from 23.7 (per thousand) in 1917 to 45.4 in 1919.

In such circumstances, workers had to resort to other sources for food. Illegal private markets flourished outside railway stations. The biggest was perhaps at Orel station where up to 3000 traders (called ‘bagmen’) would pass through every day, exchanging household goods for food. According to one estimate, such illegal channels accounted for 60% of the urban consumption of bread grain in 1918–19. But as the state increasingly resorted to raising funds by printing more paper money, the value of currency plummeted. Eventually, the government acceded to

Voices from the past: Yevgeny Zamyatin

Eyewitness account

Yevgeny Zamyatin was a Russian author. He is most famous for his 1921 novel We, a story set in a dystopian future police state. Despite having been a prominent Old Bolshevik, Zamyatin was deeply disturbed by the policies pursued by the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) following the October Revolution. In 1921, We became the first work to be banned by the Soviet censorship board. Sombre sentiments began to transpire ever more palpably in Zamyatin’s writing. In 1921 he published the article ‘I Am Afraid’, which addressed the suppression of freedom of thought, and the short story ‘The Cave’, which juxtaposed communism with prehistoric primitivism. On several occasions over the next few years, his fearless calls ‘to defend the human being and humanity’ saw Zamyatin put in prison. The following extract is taken from ‘The Cave’.

GLACIERS, mammoths, wildernesses. Pitch-dark, black rocks, somehow reminding one of houses; in the rocks—caves. And one cannot tell who trumpets of a night along the stony path amid the rocks and, sniffing his way, drives the white snow dust before him. It may be the grey-trunked mammoth; it may be the wind; and it may be that the wind is only the icy roar of some super-mammothish mammoth. One thing is clear: it is winter. And one must clench one’s teeth as tight as possible, to prevent them from chattering; and cut wood with a stone axe; and each night move one’s fire from cave to cave, always deeper, and muffle oneself up in an always increasing number of shaggy hides.

Of a night, among the rocks where ages ago stood Petersburg, roamed the grey-trunked mammoth. And muffled up in hides, in coats, in blankets, in rags, the cave-dwellers were constantly retreating from cave to cave. On the 1st October Martin Martinych and Masha barred up the study; on the 22nd they abandoned the dining-room and entrenched themselves in the bedroom. They had nowhere to retreat now; here they must hold out, or die.

In this cave-bedroom of Petersburg things were like in Noah’s ark: clean and unclean creatures in ark-like promiscuity; Martin Martinych’s writing-desk books; cakes of the stone age looking like pottery; a flat-iron; five lovingly white-washed potatoes; nickelled bed-frames; an axe; a chest of drawers; a stack of wood. And in the middle of all this universe was its god: a short-legged rusty-red squatting greedy cave-god: the iron stove.

Discussion Points

1. Why is he referencing pre-historic phenomena in this passage? What effect is it meant to have on the reader?

2. Zamyatin is writing from experience – what is he criticising in this passage?

Research Zamyatin and find out what happened to him under Stalin’s regime.
the demands of trade unions for payment in kind, that is, in ‘natural’ goods. These rose as a proportion of the average Moscow worker’s wage from 48% in late 1918 to 93% two years later. This suited those on the left of the party like Bukharin, who saw money as a symbol of capitalism, therefore bartering in goods was a sign of revolutionary progress. Lenin seems to have abandoned strict Marxism as he pursued his policy of one-man management, nationalising industry in 1919 so he could threaten workers with dismissal if they showed intentions to strike. Trotsky, having established the Red Army, began to advocate the militarisation of labour, particularly in 1920 as the army was demobilised.

New Economic Policy (NEP)

By the autumn of 1920, when Wrangel had been defeated and a treaty signed with the Poles, the Communists had survived civil war, but their country lay in ruin. The end of the war arguably allowed internal opposition to resurface in the form of ferocious peasant revolts in the Tambov province, and this convinced Lenin that something other than force was needed to quell them. The Party had promised the masses so much but delivered crippling hardships not even experienced during the First World War. Historian Isaac Deutscher (1965) suggests the ‘vicious circle of war communism’ had reached its fullest extent. Unable to supply enough goods to the peasants or food to the cities, the state had to tolerate and even rely on private trade. Initially, Lenin focused the New Economic Policy (NEP) on the peasantry. There was to be a reduction in the amount of grain requisitioned by imposing a tax-in-kind and peasants would be allowed to trade some of their surplus again; this would cause a rise in prices in the towns. The monopoly on industry exercised by Vesenkha would also have to be relaxed so that peasants would agree to sell their crops as they would have goods to buy; within a year, 3800 nationalised industries had been leased out. Lenin even signed a trade treaty with the British to encourage foreign investment in the Soviet republic once more. This created a new class of private trader called the ‘Nepman’. By 1923, these traders had captured almost half the market, taking full advantage of what was a resurgence in capitalism.

While Lenin, of course, claimed that this was an improvised response to economic circumstances and that war communism had to be abandoned wholesale to save the revolution, in fact it was a tactical retreat. It could be argued that Lenin was trying to stifle internal opposition against Trotsky’s efforts to militarise labour in 1920. Bourgeois experts were brought in to stabilise the currency and introduced limits on public spending, which meant that schools and medical care ceased to be free at the point of use and pensions and sick pay became contributory. Large industries were broken up into trusts, which had to compete with each other and with the private sector (although Vesenkha still supervised their activities). Wages were reintroduced and rationing was abolished in November. Inflation, however, continued and trusts were unable to pay their workers, resulting in rising unemployment. In July 1922, a new currency, the chernovet, was introduced but the previous currency, the rouble remained in circulation until February 1924. The government maintained command of heavy industry and banking, however it was clear Lenin was allowing a bourgeois class of shopkeepers and farmers to re-emerge. William Rosenberg (1991) argues that NEP was a period in which the Communist Party ‘were forced to come to terms with the complex cultural residues
of pre-revolutionary Russia, implicitly at odds with ongoing goals of building a Socialist or Communist order.

ACTIVITY 3.2

It is a good idea to consider how far Lenin had departed from Marxist principles and which of the economic systems that existed under Lenin was the most Marxist.

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The Stalinist economy

The departure from NEP

Although the departure from NEP seems inextricably tied to Stalin’s quest to broker his own dictatorship of the Party and eliminate opposition to him, there were clear economic and ideological imperatives for abandoning NEP too. Lenin had presented NEP as a ‘strategic retreat’ in order to revive the economy after the Civil War, but he argued that it would still advance the state towards socialism through a mixed economy because the state would maintain control of the ‘commanding heights’ of heavy industry. The slow pace of NEP raised concerns within the Party, however, as it threatened to restore old enemies (kulaks and petty capitalists) to Russia.

A particular source of grievance for the workers was that wages had failed to increase after the revolution. In fact, it took until 1926 for wages to be raised to the average amount paid before 1914. Unemployment reached 1.74 million by 1929 – a massive increase from the 160,000 unemployed in 1922. This was wholly unimpressive given the promises the Bolsheviks had made to be the vanguard of the working classes. Strikes were therefore frequent under NEP. Urban opposition was also galvanised when food shortages occurred due to a lack of consumer goods to trade with the peasants for their grain. The result was the widening gap (which Trotsky referred to as the ‘scissors crisis’) of deflated agricultural prices against steeply rising prices for consumer goods in 1927.

In 1927, the official government statisticians claimed there were 20,100 strikes in that year alone (or approximately 77 per day given a five-day working week), although the figure was undoubtedly more. However, strikes were short-lived and the GPU advised management about who to sack after the event, preventing any protracted action. By 1928, it was clear that although the NEP had saved the Communist regime from destruction, the principle of private profit clashed in
important economic sectors with central planning objectives. It was clear to Stalin that radical change was needed to avoid the anarchic boom and bust of NEP and the social inequalities it had reinforced. The state planning authority, GOSPLAN, set up in 1921 to collect economic data, could by 1925 produce economic projections and began to develop longer term growth plans for the state, providing evidence that change was needed. Stalin decided to embark on building a utopian vision of mass industrialisation, borrowed from the Left Opposition, which would see a ‘great break’ from everything that had gone before.

Collectivisation and the Five Year Plans

Collectivisation

Stalin’s words to the masses, ‘there are no fortresses which the Bolsheviks cannot capture’, reveal his understanding that resolve and determination were going to be needed if modernisation were to occur. The ominous signs of what Stalin might unleash on the peasantry were already evident by 1928 after the grain crisis threatened mass food shortages. Stalin combated this with more grain requisitioning, which only temporarily solved the problem. After a trip he took to Siberia in January 1928, he became convinced that coercion, forced collectivisation and dekulakisation was needed to finally bring the peasantry under full state control.

Requisitioning was backed up by a series of emergency measures, including Article 107, which allowed brigades to arrest any peasants and confiscate their property if they were suspected of withholding grain; it became known as the ‘Urals-Siberian method’ of grain extraction. As Moshe Lewin (1994) and Orlando Figes (2014) have argued, this paved the way for Stalin to implement all-out war against those peasants who would refuse to conform to the Soviet ideal or collective productivity by 1929.

Collectivisation, which meant the pooling of land, equipment, tools and livestock into collective farms (Kolkhozy), began in December 1929. At the time there were 1.9 million peasants in collectives (although they were loose producer cooperatives really), which had increased since a recorded 1 million in June of that year. Stalin used these figures as a basis for arguing that peasants were joining collectives of their own free will and so the process needed to speed up. However, it is unlikely this was occurring spontaneously. The drive for collectivisation was carried out by squads of party activists, secret police detachments and
approximately 25,000 volunteers who swept through the countryside persuading, cajoling and if necessary coercing peasants into the collectives. Stalin refused to urge caution, supported by the Head of Propaganda, Kamisky, who declared, ‘If in some matters you commit excesses and you are arrested, remember that you have been arrested for your revolutionary deeds.’ Fearful of accusations of right-wing deviation, local activists responded enthusiastically to the call, perhaps accounting for the confusion which followed. The regime publicised one incident where a 15-year-old boy from a village in the Urals, Pavlik Morozov, denounced his father as a kulak. The boy was named a model Young Pioneer (see Section ‘The effect of Leninist/Stalinist rule on young people’) and statues of him were erected.

Collectivisation went hand in hand with the policy of dekulakisation, at first deliberately giving the ‘middle peasants’ high procurement quotas so that they could be expropriated for failing to deliver, but moving towards (in Stalin’s own words) ‘a determined offensive against the kulaks, eliminate them as a class’.

Kulaks were to be divided into three categories: the first were ‘actively hostile’ and handed over to the OGPU (name given to the secret police in 1922) and sent to labour camps or inhospitable areas of Siberia; the second, ‘the most economically potent’, were to be deported outside the region of residence, and the third, ‘the least noxious’, given the worst land in their region. This involved confiscating property and deportation for approximately 1.5 million people by July 1930, a further 400,000 households uprooted, 390,000 sent to labour camps and 21,000 peasants shot.

Local activists used the threat of being labelled a kulak to encourage peasants to join the collective farms; it was reported that, by February 1920, over 50% of peasants had transferred, although of course these government figures must be treated with caution. The speed at which collectivisation was carried out seems to have worried even Stalin about the prospect of grain shortage, therefore he bizarrely called a halt to the policy in a famous article of March 1930, titled ‘Dizzy with Success’. In the article, he condemned feverish cadres or coercing peasants and suggested that small-holdings would still be allowed to exist. Within weeks, the proportion of peasantry collectivised fell from 55% to 23%, and Table 3.1 (taken from historian Alec Nove’s (1993) masterly account of the economic history of the USSR) demonstrates the dramatic instability that the people of Russia endured and the extent to which many remained in collectives in certain areas.
The peasants, particularly women, responded with fierce and sometimes armed resistance to collectivisation. In 1930, it is reported that 13,754 outbreaks of mass demonstrations occurred involving over 2.5 million peasants and killing 3,155 Soviet officials. There is evidence to suggest that peasants were more perturbed by the attack on the traditional way of life and culture rather than the imposition of collective methods per se. The abolition of the village commune (mir), closing down of Orthodox Churches and fears of state requisitioning of livestock led to the mass slaughter and consumption of cattle, sheep and pigs, from which the USSR did not recover until the 1950s. The most common response to collectivisation was to migrate to the towns and cities: approximately 19 million peasants followed this course between 1926 and 1939, an unprecedented demographic shift.

The Great Famine
The ‘Great Famine’ of 1932 and 1933 was the inevitable result of the catastrophic policy of forced collectivisation. It is estimated that 5.7 million people died of hunger in those years, an enormous figure primarily caused by Stalin’s procurement policies. In 1931 there were already grain shortages due to poor harvests, demoralised peasants, inefficient collective farms and too few mechanised tractors for sowing fields. This was compounded by very high exports in 1931 which depleted reserves, and a rapid growth in the urban population which lead to a sharp increase in food requirements and higher procurement quotas, leaving the peasants and what animals they had left very little to eat. The Ukraine and North Caucasus suffered severely, so much so that requisitions had to be returned so that there would be some seeds for food and fodder. Stalin relaxed the procurement quotas in 1932 from the impossibly high 29.5 million tons to 18.1 million. However, persistent poor harvests, combined with high free market prices, meant grain was hoarded by the peasants or sold privately – discipline collapsed altogether in some areas.

Stalin implemented state counter-measures for which historians such as Robert Conquest (2002) have vilified him because collections and exports of grain were maintained despite widespread starvation. More recent historians, Robert Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft (1994), have concluded that Stalin was undeniably responsible for the deaths of so many Russians. Stalin implemented a new law in April 1932 which introduced the death penalty for anyone found pilfering foodstuffs from the Kolkhozy, but it was used to purge any groups of peasants or local party leaders who could not meet the procurement demands. Mass arrests were carried out in the North Caucasus and the Ukraine and all grain was removed without exception, creating grave shortages. The wave of liquidation against kulaks carried out in 1930 was also repeated in 1931 and 1932, causing many ‘middle peasants’ to starve in the inhospitable areas of northern Siberia or be left with unfarmable land.
During collectivisation, the Party sent out 25,000 urban activists to supervise the transferral process through MTS (Machine Tractor Stations). Peasants had to use one of the 2,500 MTS to gain access to tractors and other machinery, and payments were taken in kind (20% of the harvest that year). This meant they became both a service agency but also supervisors of production too (as the Party introduced ‘political departments’ to MTS, staffed by OGPU representatives) by February 1933. MTS were meant to increase tractor production but also ensure that the ‘silent war’ against the Soviet Union (grain hoarding) was destroyed, which of course involved rooting out the enemy. However, many political departments came to support the peasants they were meant to supervise as the famine deepened; some officers even condemned procurement quotas, leading the Party to abolish the departments by November 1934. This also coincided with a relaxation on private food-growing after the immediate push for collectivisation, which allowed peasants to sell surpluses of their own produce. However, speculators, dealers or middle-men selling foodstuffs on behalf of peasants were decreed to spend five to ten years in a labour camp from August 1932 onwards, thereby putting the final nail in the coffin of NEP.

The first Five Year Plan: industrialisation
Some historians, such as Geoffrey Hosking (1992), have referred to the First Five Year Plan (1928–32) as a special type of ‘revolution from above’ – the accelerated conversion of the Soviet Union into a socialist industrial society by means of the state’s coercive power to mobilise the masses for its goals. Kevin McDermott (2006) argues that Stalin had inherited a state-led model from Tsarist Russia (for example, Witte’s industrialisation policy) and this was bolstered by collectivist ‘statism’ embedded in Leninism, therefore it was perhaps a natural development that the

Table 3.1: Percentage of peasant households collectivised, 1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 March</th>
<th>10 March</th>
<th>1 April</th>
<th>1 May</th>
<th>1 June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR Total</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Caucasus</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Volga</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central black-earth region</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urals</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow province</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western region</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussia</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bogdenko (citing archive and other materials), page 31
period of industrialisation would be lead by the Party. Yet Stalin was not the only
decisive motor pressing for change; anti-NEP sentiment was strong amongst party
activists, militant young workers and Civil War veterans alike, providing pressure
from below for change too. On 7 November 1929, the 12th anniversary of the
Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin wrote an article in Pravda named, ‘The Year of the
Great Break’, in which he heralded the Five Year Plan as the start of the last great
revolutionary struggle against ‘capitalist elements’ in the USSR, leading to the
foundation of a socialist industrial society not only able to defend itself against the
capitalist states but eventually overtaking them.

Gosplan (see ‘Speak like a historian’) was put under huge pressure to plan the
future of the economy to match Stalin’s utopian vision, which was primarily
focused on heavy industry. Some former Mensheviks (including Groman) were
publicly tried in 1931 for trying to retard the country’s industrial development for
suggesting equilibrium planning instead. People’s Commissariats were set up to
take over from Vesenkha the task of administering burgeoning sectors of industry.
Once projects had been established, ‘over-fulfilment’ of the targets became the
priority for these secretaries, sacrificing health and safety and other sectors of the
economy. In 1929, industry was seen to be expanding so successfully that the Five
Year Plan was reduced to four years, which Nove describes as an ‘upward revision’
where targets were altered.

As Table 3.2 shows, the new targets were impossibly high, causing rush, strain,
shortages and disorganisation across industry as well as pernicious strategies
used by local secretaries in competition with others, such as pilfering, lack of
attention to quality and repression of the workforce. However, Gosplan did create
a centralised, planned economy with detailed quarterly and annual production
targets, allocation of capital to certain parts of the economy, centrally organised
wages and the distribution and pricing of goods.

The leap made in only four years was remarkable (however dubious some
of the figures were – see Table 3.3). Examples of great success were found
in Magnitogorsk, which was a great new metallurgical centre, created in the
wilderness, and exemplified the focus on heavy industry Stalin had envisaged
when he first implemented the Five Year Plan. The Dnieper Dam and Volga-White
Sea canal (although largely built using forced labour) also represented speedily
built infrastructure that supported the growth in heavy industry. The focus and
success of heavy industry was costly for other sectors of the economy, for example
the chemical, housing and consumer industries were seriously neglected. Some
of the most ambitious projects, however, did not come online until the Second
Five Year Plan (1933–7), which might account for some of the disappointing
growth areas up until 1932. It is also important to note that the Soviet Union was
experiencing growth when the rest of the world was suffering the effects of the
Great Depression, however this lead to reduced imports of cotton (explaining
the falling levels of textile production) and machinery which the USSR needed.
Combined with collectivisation, grave railway inefficiencies and excessive
investment in heavy industry led to severe living conditions for workers during the
early 1930s.
Table 3.2: Figures for industrial growth, 1927–1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1927–8</th>
<th>1932–3 (‘Optimal’)</th>
<th>1932 (amended)</th>
<th>1932 (actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal (million tons)</td>
<td>35·0</td>
<td>75·0</td>
<td>95–105</td>
<td>(64·0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil (million tons)</td>
<td>11·7</td>
<td>21·7</td>
<td>40–55</td>
<td>(21·4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron ore (million tons)</td>
<td>6·7</td>
<td>20·2</td>
<td>24–32</td>
<td>(12·1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig iron (million tons)</td>
<td>3·2</td>
<td>10·0</td>
<td>15–16</td>
<td>(6·2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Bessonov, S. 1929 Problemy ekonomiki, No. 10–11, page 27 and plan-fulfilment report

Table 3.3: Achievements of the first Five Year Plan (Nove, 1993, p.191)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1927-8 (actual)</th>
<th>1932-3 (plan)</th>
<th>1932 (actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National income (1926–7 roubles in 100 m.)</td>
<td>24·4</td>
<td>49·7</td>
<td>45·5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross industrial production (1926–7 roubles in 100 m.)</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producers’ goods (1926–7 roubles in milliards)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers’ goods (1926– roubles in milliards)</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross agricultural production (1926–7 roubles in milliards)</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity (100 m. Kwhs)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard coal (million tons)</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil (million tons)</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron ore (million tons)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig iron (million tons)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel (million tons)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery (million 1926–7 roubles)</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>4688</td>
<td>7392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superphosphates (million tons)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool cloth (millionmetres)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total employed labour force (millions)</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1932 figures from Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel’stvo (1934) and the fulfilment report of first five year plan.

The Five Year Plans – a review

Overall, historian Robert Davies (1994) concludes that significant advances were made throughout the first three Five Year Plans (1928–41). Although the second Five Year Plan had to be revised and delayed by two years – as dangerous strains on the economy were evident, targets were recognised as being wildly unrealistic,
costs were running far in excess of Gosplan’s predictions and bottlenecks in production appeared everywhere – steady growth was maintained. The second Five Year Plan was meant to focus on housing and consumer goods – as cities had grown by up to 50,000 people a week as numbers employed in industry and bureaucracy mushroomed – however, the reality was very different and as the years went by plans were altered to shift towards heavy industry again. The second Five Year Plan saw the worst excesses of collectivisation come to an end, therefore boosting productivity across the economy. The metallurgical projects begun in the first plan in Tula and Ural-Kuznetsk were able to deliver returns on investment in the second and the USSR became virtually self-sufficient in this area. It was during the second plan that industries were being relocated away from strategically vulnerable European borders too, which slowed the growth rate in certain industries. The three good years of 1934–6 gave way to stagnation in 1937 however, primarily due to the Great Purges (discussed in next section) and a redirection of investment towards the defence industries, which caused fuel shortages, crisis on the railways and enterprises starved of the materials needed to meet their targets. However, it is likely that industrial output trebled between 1928 and 1940 overall, an annual growth rate of 10%. The total number of industrial enterprises rose from 9,000 in 1929 to 64,000 in 1938. Crucially, armaments and the defence sector (for example, aircraft and tanks) grew 28-fold between 1930 and 1940 which was initiated no doubt by the threat of war in Europe and probably accounts for the emphasis on heavy industry throughout the second and third Five Year Plans. The third Five Year Plan was halted after only three years (running from 1938 to 1941) due to the invasion of the USSR by Germany.

Workers
In 1929, the Party introduced the seven-hour day, which in theory provided workers with the best conditions in Russian history, however this was complicated by the introduction of the ‘uninterrupted five-day week’. The rationale was that factories would run every day but staff would complete four days of work with one day free. In November 1931, the working week was lengthened, increasing to five days working then one day off (it had the benefit of eliminating Sunday as a day of rest and therefore provided a profitable attack on religion too). This, combined with the hasty expansion of the labour force, caused huge disruption to secondary schooling and training of workers as well as disillusioned peasants leaving work to find better opportunities; in these circumstances, production levels did not improve as Gosplan had hoped, outside of the metal industries.

The great influx of labour to the towns as a result of collectivisation put unbearable pressure on housing, amenities and clean water provision and there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that living standards declined considerably throughout the 1930s. However, there were more opportunities than ever before for young workers to become Stalinist cadres, or managers in factories, as the war against the ‘bourgeois specialists’ under NEP was waged. Interestingly, women were employed more than ever before under the second Five Year Plan and, notably, medicine and teaching became almost wholly the preserve of women as, by 1935, almost 8 million women were employed, compared to 3.3 million in 1929.

Historians are in agreement that unemployment had disappeared altogether by 1930, which ended the misery of thousands who had suffered in the 1920s,
however the problems of unemployment were replaced by other concerns. The erosion of the power of trade unions had been instilled under Lenin, though between 1932 and 1949 the all-union Trade Union Congress did not meet at all and the People’s Commissariat for Labour was abolished in 1934. Real wages also increased for workers during this period, however they had less leisure time and consumer goods to spend it on. This, combined with the chronic food shortages during 1932, made workers turn to the black market where prices rose dramatically for basic goods – therefore inflation hit workers very hard. During the second plan, more food was made available as new bakeries and meat-packing plants were built in many areas, however historian Chris Ward (1999) suggests that in 1935 workers were consuming less meat and dairy products than they had ten years previously.

Pressure was applied in ruthless ways to ensure workers met their targets. This was easy in the early 1930s when it seemed as if building Socialism was winning against the capitalist West, who were undergoing economic depression. However, motivation to continue the relentless pace of work waned, and so the regime had to look for new ways to motivate workers. In 1935, a coal miner called Alexei Stakhanov was reported to have dug 102 tons of coal in a single six-hour shift (14 times greater than the norm). Stakhanov was rewarded and praised as an example to all other workers; the authorities neglected to inform the public that Stakhanov had two co-workers, plus machinery in perfect working order, to help him achieve so much as the propaganda machine sought to draw their own conclusions from his achievements. Therefore, Russians were told to model themselves on Stakhanov and joined what became known as the Stakhanovite Movement. Stakhanovites tried to perform feats of great productivity, through working harder and also through reorganising the way things were done in their place of work. They were rewarded with better pay and also publicity. This, combined with other incentives such as recasting wage scales as well as implementing new training schemes at all levels, led to increased productivity up until 1937. After 1937 there was a great industrial downturn which Alec Nove (1993) suggests was not only due to a shift in resources to the arms industry, but was primarily due to the purges (discussed in a later section).
ACTIVITY 3.4
Split into pairs or small groups – one person must find evidence to support the view that the Five Year Plans were a success; the other must find evidence to support the view that they were unsuccessful in achieving their aims. Then come together and debate the overall success of the Five Year Plans.

Some historians have suggested that Stalin’s Five Year Plans are only successful in light of the state of the economy under Lenin. Do you agree with this? Compare the achievements of the Five Year Plans with the NEP.

ACTIVITY 3.3
Use this table to organise your notes on the Five Year Plans – consider economic output against the human cost of the plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Five Year Plan 1928–32</th>
<th>Second Five Year Plan 1933–7</th>
<th>Third Five Year Plan 1938–41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key successes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key failures or limitations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gulags
The first corrective labour camps (Gulags – an acronym for ‘Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Settlements’) after the revolution were established in 1918 after the attempted assassination of Lenin and a rapidly growing internment system during the Civil War. The Gulag, famously written about by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, was formally and legally created and recognised much later, on 25 April 1930. In March 1940, there were 53 separate camps and 423 labour colonies in the USSR and the utilisation of deportees and prisoners was fundamental to the realisation of some of the greatest achievements in industrialisation during the 1930s. For example, the Belomor Canal, which connects the White Sea with the Baltic, was almost entirely constructed by hand, using 250,000 prisoners between 1931 and 1933. It is estimated that almost 25,000 prisoners died in the first winter building the canal, their bodies thrown into the ditch they had been digging. Prisoners also worked in mines or cut timber without pay. The increase in prisoner numbers coincided with collectivisation; even political prisoners would now be forced to carry out hard labour, and prisoners were underfed, housed in poor conditions and worked long hours in a difficult climate. Prisoners could be executed if they refused to work. It is possible that around 10% of prisoners in the Gulag died each year, although official figures obscure accuracy. The Gulags were situated all over Russia – some of the most hostile in Siberia, Kazakhstan and arctic Russia – and by 1939 it is estimated there were approximately 2.9 million people in the labour camp system forced to maintain the state’s industrial output.

In 1935 Stalin announced, ‘Life has improved, comrades. Life has become more joyous.’ The intense human suffering caused by collectivisation and forced industrialisation would suggest otherwise, but for Stalin the price was clearly worth paying as, by 1941, he ruled over a country with a modern industrialised economy and an efficient, well-equipped army.
Social developments

Effect of Leninist/Stalinist rule on class, women, young people and national minorities

Class

Marxist class analysis, which the Bolsheviks had clung to leading up to the revolution, had proven inappropriate to Russian reality in 1917. Fitzpatrick (2008) argues that Russia’s weak class structure crumbled under the impact of war, revolution and civil war. The old upper classes (land-owning and service nobility, capitalist bourgeoisie) were destroyed by peasant land seizures and emigration. The middle classes (merchants, shopkeepers and small manufacturers) were put out of business because of war communism. The peasantry, reasserting the traditional communal organisation, dragged Stolypin’s independent farmers back into the village, redistributed the land, and, for the time being, eliminated

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**Voices from the past: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**

Alexander Solzhenitsyn fought for the Soviet Union in the Second World War. However, he was arrested in 1945 for writing a letter that criticised Stalin. Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to eight years in various prisons and labour camps. These institutions were similar to the ones he describes in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) and in his groundbreaking novel about the Soviet labour camp system, *The Gulag Archipelago* (published 1973 but probably written in 1958).
the differences between peasants of the late imperial period. This meant the Bolsheviks had to find rhetorical class enemies, as the collapse of the old upper classes had been so thorough.

However, the historian Lewis Siegelbaum (1992) argues convincingly that ‘if, by 1920–1, Soviet Russia was essentially a one-party state, it certainly was not a one-class society’. The Soviet state was far from the classless society envisaged by early Marxists, in fact the Bolsheviks themselves had created some new groups during the civil war – the intelligentsia, technical and cultural; the army of clerical, technical and military employees within the state apparatus itself; and last but not least, the village-based small property-holding peasantry that comprised the vast majority of Soviet citizens. Therefore, what it meant for the ‘proletarian dictatorship’ to preside over a society in which the proletariat was a tiny and, to use Lenin’s term, ‘unhinged’ element – and, indeed, to what extent it did preside – is a fundamental question still debated today.

The October revolution and civil war bequeathed to the Soviet state in the 1920s a society that in many ways resembled that under the old Tsarist regime. For example, Sovnarkom’s members were drawn entirely from the Communist Party – after the withdrawal of the Left SRs in March 1918 – in which they all enjoyed prominence, and with the early exception of A.M. Kollontai who served briefly as People’s Commissar for Welfare, were entirely male. In other respects – age, social background, ethnicity, pre-revolutionary occupations, educational levels and convictions – they were a diverse group, though one dominated by the offspring of ethnically or assimilated Russian families from the middle and upper echelons of Tsarist society, who chose the precarious career of professional revolutionary.

Under Stalin it was the administrative elites who were handsomely rewarded in a society which had undergone dramatic change after the abandonment of NEP. Grain traders, shopkeepers and workshop owners were eliminated in the same way the aristocracy had been following the revolution of 1917 and a new class of nomenklatura had been created as state bureaucracy ballooned fourfold between 1926 and the end of the 1930s. Yet at the same time, Stalin continued to wage a war on ‘class’ as the purges (discussed in the next section) illustrate.

Village-based small property-holding peasantry
Lenin had become convinced since the summer of 1917 that to defy the peasants on the land question would be tantamount to political suicide. Therefore, the initial policy of the Soviet state was to legitimise the seizure of landlords’ property and promote the equal distribution of land among those who worked on it. This policy, announced in the Decree on Land of 26 October 1917, was elaborated in the law ‘On the Socialisation of the Land’ of 19 February 1918. Both acts were loosely based on the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. ‘Socialisation’ basically left the peasants to implement the law as they saw fit.

As a result of the redivision of land, the number of landless peasant households dropped from 15.9% of all households in 1917 to 8.1% by 1920. Perhaps ironically, Lenin’s decrees actually strengthened the village commune, and in many areas revived its repartitional functions (that is – deciding which families were allocated to specific strips of land). Historians have described a process
of ‘traditionalisation’ that occurred in peasant life, a process that was integral to what Moshe Lewin (1994) has called the ‘archaisation’ of the socio-economic system. Reverting to a form of self-government that was as old as serfdom and relying on methods of production that were similarly centuries old, the peasantry retreated from urban society and thereby was able to survive the degradations of the civil war better than any other social class. Indeed, it survived not merely as a class but as a social system with its own specific culture. It was this that made the peasantry so awkward, so impenetrable to the designs of ‘intruders’ (and for most peasants, both Reds and Whites were intruders). The peasantry had ceased to be merely awkward for the state and instead, as was to be the case again during forced collectivisation under Stalin, had become its main antagonist.

There was no pretence about equality before the law, particularly in the area of voting rights. Certain categories of people – large property owners, clerics, White officers and many Tsarist officials – were completely deprived of voting rights. To stress the privileged place of urban workers in the new political order, the Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), which was approved in July 1918 by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, stipulated that in elections to all-Russian Soviet congresses, one urban voter was to be the equivalent of five rural inhabitants.

Under Stalin, the peasantry were brought to their knees due to forced collectivisation (see Sections The Stalinist economy; Collectivisation and the Five Year Plans; Collectivisation). Collectivisation had to occur if socialism was to be built in the Soviet Union as the Party could not allow private landholders to exist in a socialist state. The impact of collectivisation was devastating as over half of the most enterprising peasants who resisted were deported or shot. Peasant women led the most vociferous protests against collectivisation but with limited success, as they had specific goals of retrieving collectivised horses or refusing to give over grain that was requisitioned. Although Stalin seemed to backtrack in 1930, the campaign was resumed in 1931, and by 1934 over 70% of peasants were in collectives. Now the peasants had little to work for, passive resistance in the form of apathy took hold and production slumped. Many peasants referred to collectivisation as a second serfdom. They were broken, but not defeated.

The intelligentsia

When the Bolsheviks swept to power in October 1917 they were forced to make use of the Tsarist-trained intellectuals who possessed the enviable skills and experience of administering the state. Lenin and Trotsky referred to them as cadres or ‘technical intelligentsia’ to signify their allegiance to the party and the revolution. The Bolshevik Party actually contained a strong contingent of genuine intellectuals. However, this involvement of the Bolsheviks with the intelligentsia proved to be a chronic source of discord. As Robert Daniels: 2008 asserts, it was this antagonism, between the literary intellectuals adhering to Communist principles (Bukharin, Zinoviev) and the quasi-intellectuals attracted to the Communist organisation (Stalin), which was to be a major factor in the factionalism that threatened to permanently divide the party between 1918 and 1925.
The technical intelligentsia appeared in Russia from the later 19th century as job opportunities (such as government service during the reforms or in factories during industrialisation) created trained experts and professionals whose income was based on their specialisation or skills. Lenin wrote in Will the Bolsheviks retain State Power? in 1917:

'We need good organisers in banking and the work of enterprises; we need more and more engineers, agronomists, technicians, scientific experts of every kind. We shall give all such workers work which they are able and are accustomed to do; probably as we shall ... leave a temporary higher rate of pay for such specialists during the transition period.’

(cited in Daniels, Robert 2008, page 57)

Lenin never seemed to turn his back on this view. Perhaps because there was no practical alternative, this group of bourgeoisie simply grew under Lenin’s rule.

The cultural intelligentsia were an awkward set for the Bolsheviks because they always contained intellectuals seeking new theories and challenging old ideas. Christopher Read (2013) argues that where the cultural intelligentsia were concerned, the broad trajectory across the decade was in the direction of tighter restrictions, and most were under routine surveillance by the Cheka (later the GPU). In the summer of 1922, most writers who hadn’t already fled during the civil war for fear of facing the Red Terror, were deported. This included world-renowned philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, who wasn’t socialist enough for Dzerzinskii’s liking. The deportations coincided with the re-introduction of censorship through the agency of a Main Administration for Affairs of Literature and Publishing Houses (it became known as Glavlit); the aim was to insulate Russian society from capitalist ideas or those that sought to undermine socialism, and remained in place until the 1980s. Musicians and artists also suffered the same fate as the example of Shostakovich (a world-renowned composer even today) who was denounced twice (under Lenin and Stalin) for failing to conform to the Socialist conventions and was lucky to avoid arrest.

The Cultural Revolution

The ‘Cultural Revolution’, as some historians have called it, began in 1928 after the Shakhty Affair (see Section ‘Five Year Plans’) – that is, a far flung revolutionary plot to overthrow the economy – caused accelerating tensions among the cultural and technical intelligentsia. Widespread cries to root out ‘bourgeois’ traitors actually came, in part, from below as activists sought to ‘unmask’ non-Marxists, which involved denunciations. The moderate Commissariat for Enlightenment, Lunarcharsky, was dropped in 1929 and waves of academics at universities were subject to dismissals for being ‘ideologically suspect’, bringing higher education to the point of collapse in 1930. This revolution also saw the ‘Association of Proletarian Writers’ (RAPP) exhorted to engage fully in the construction of socialism, and pressure was intensified after the show trials of 1930–1. However, as the economy neared the point of collapse during the Great Famine of 1932, the regime realised that stability was needed amongst those with skill to lead the economy, therefore a strategic retreat was enacted and in 1934 Zhadnov (who had
a special responsibility for ideology and political education) created the Union of Soviet Writers whose task was to educate the masses about Socialism.

In Article One of the Soviet Constitution (1936), the Soviet Union is defined as a ‘socialist state of workers and peasants’. Stalin even reported in 1936 that 80% of the intelligentsia came to be offspring of ‘the working class, the peasantry, and other strata of labourers’. Official party congresses later suggested there had been a completely new intelligentsia rooted in the working class and the peasantry; this was merely the regime wielding propaganda to gain support. Soviet trainees in government, industry and propaganda began to replace the old intelligentsia borrowed from the Tsarist regime during the 1930s. By 1939, they accounted for approximately 14% of the Soviet population but seemed to be restricted to functions such as conveying the party line to the masses rather than formulating policy, which was left to the inner circles of the Communist Party.

The effect of Leninist/Stalinist rule on young people

The Communist Youth League

It is difficult to distil the effects Leninist rule had on young people given the short amount of time he was in power for before his untimely death. The Communist Youth League (Komsomol) was founded in 1917–18 for young people aged 14 to 26; similar organisations – the Young Pioneers for ages 9–15 and Little Octobrists for ages 7–9 – were also established in urban centres.

These were training grounds for future party members and their organisations corresponded to that of the Communist Party (i.e. highly bureaucratic). The organisations set out to instil discipline, inspire a love for work, to limit the influence of the church, to strengthen Soviet-approved arts and cultural activities and generally aid the party in developing staunch defenders of socialism.

However, during NEP, Komsomol struggled to attract youth workers or convince them to follow the moral, righteous path Marx had expounded. Komsomol central committee concluded in 1927 that the Soviet youth organisation ‘still does not answer completely the needs, demands and interests which youth have’. This might have been due to poor living conditions, for example a youth worker health survey was carried out in Petrograd in 1924; 52% were found to be ill and 25% were suffering from tuberculosis (due to sharing beds the disease spread quickly among workers).

Komsomol’s leadership’s perception of the peasantry and its quest to maintain a respectable proportion of workers in the membership impeded expansion in rural areas in the early years of Bolshevik rule. Historian Isabel A. Tirado (1993) explains that demographic realities made the Komsomol’s outreach to young peasants imperative: peasants made up 80% of the Russian population; their children 19 years of age or younger accounted for half of the rural population in the mid-1920s. Perhaps more importantly, the party had seen a reduction in personnel at the end of the civil war due to demobilisation, and the Komsomol found itself pressured to fill the gap.

The youth organisations became instrumental in assisting the regime to carry out the industrialisation project of the Five Year Plans. In 1929, over 7000 young
people from Komsomol were sent to build the tractor factory in Stalingrad, 66 000 to build new factories in the Urals and 36 000 to work underground in the Donets coal mines. In collectivisation the komsomolites also played a role in joining the kolkhozy – over 15 000 had done so by June 1929 – but more importantly through denunciations of the nomenklatura and kulaks. This was practised through games such as ‘Search and Requisition’ where children would role play requisitioning brigades and kulaks. By 1925, one in five children were members of Young Pioneers and Komsomol had one million members (although these figures are low, it can be explained by the difficult physical and IQ tests members had to pass as membership led to a career in the party). Whether the young did all of these activities willingly is impossible to assert, but it would seem that Soviet policies aimed at the young were on the whole successful by the mid 1930s.

Education
Education was seen as a battlefront to the Bolsheviks and education was perhaps the party’s greatest achievement. The Komsomol succeeded in becoming a major political educator in villages, so that by the end of NEP more than a million young peasants had joined its ranks. By 1921, the villages of European Russia contained some 70 000 primary schools, 30 000 likpunkty (term used to describe schools and courses set up by the Bolsheviks to eradicate illiteracy), 13 532 libraries and nearly 20 000 reading rooms. Historians have suggested that youths were less resistant than their elders to the propaganda efforts of the Communists and many responded positively to the propaganda, particularly when Stalin introduced the plans to construct new towns, dams and mines; they felt it was they who were building the new society. Stalin extended the drive for literacy begun under Lenin so that by 1939 over 94% of males between the ages of 9 and 49 could read and write. This was partly because education was made compulsory and also reading materials such as the party newspapers Pravda and Izvestia were sold very cheaply at ten kopeks daily, increasing circulation from 9.4 million copies in 1927 to 38 million by 1940.

The effect of Leninist/Stalinist rule on women
Historian Barbara Evans Clements (1997) carried out research into the lives of six women (Stasova, Zemliachka, Samilova, Bosh, Nikolaeva and Artiukhina) who had joined the Bolshevik party around the 1905 revolution and noted that the revolutionaries tended to come from noble or middle-class backgrounds and tended to be ethnically Russian. She argues that the Bolsheviks gave women opportunities to take positions within the Party they wouldn’t have had under the Tsarist regime and suggests the Civil War saw a new generation of women join the Party, although figures are unreliable given poor census data. However, Clements points to the ‘masculinist’ culture of the movement itself – and to the militarisation of the ‘party culture’ during the Civil War. She sees this as a turning point for women. The process of consolidating power and transforming the revolutionary party into a ‘governing regime’ produced a patriarchal and ‘tyrannical’ regime in which any serious rethinking of gender relations became impossible.

Some women in rural districts certainly did venture across the formidable cultural chasm that had always existed in Russia. Defying male mockery and
prohibitions, they attended literacy classes, voted in Soviet elections, served in rural Soviet administration, and participated in meetings and excursions to the towns sponsored by Zhenotdel, the Women’s Section of the Party. Who these women were is not entirely clear, but Red Army wives and widows, often single householders, appear to have been the most venturesome. During the Five Year Plans, millions of women went to work as teachers but also in factories, particularly during the second plan when wage levels were recast more equally. Statistics suggest however that, in 1936, women were still spending five times longer than men on household chores, so fundamental perceptions of women’s role in society had not significantly changed. As the horrors of forced industrialisation and collectivisation were realised, the regime focused a huge amount of attention on the role of family life and the role of the parent was supported as a figure of authority to reinforce Soviet rule at home.

Effect of Leninist/Stalinist rule on religion and national minorities

Religion
The Orthodox Church alarmed Lenin, as a survey in the mid 1920s had suggested that over 50% of peasants considered themselves to be active Christian worshippers. Following his founding of the ‘League of the Militant Godless’ in December 1922, Lenin arranged the execution of several bishops on the pretext that they were refusing to help famine relief in the Volga region and anti-religious persecution was certainly a feature of the Leninist era as priests were denied any civic rights. Many bishops and priests fled Russia as a result; interestingly, even those who remained never joined the Whites during the Civil War. During the mid 1920s, the focus of the Party shifted to the demoralisation of the Church by promoting the ‘living church’ movement, which opposed official ecclesiastical hierarchy. This served to drive a wedge in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The limited tolerance shown to organised religion under NEP was thrown aside during the late 1920s. De-clericalisation was not an official policy as such under Stalin, however the authorities turned a blind eye to physical attacks on religious leaders and during the first Five Year Plan mass killings did take place. In the Russian Orthodox Church alone, the number of active priests plummeted from around 60 000 in the 1920s to only 5665 by 1941. Other religious leaders, such as rabbis and mullahs, were also butchered at this time as Socialism was built in the USSR. Only one in 40 churches was functioning by 1940, the others had been recommissioned for secular purposes; some, like the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, were blown up (albeit secretly in the dead of night).

National minorities
The nationalities were given greater freedom than at any other time in Russian history under Lenin. Under the ‘Affirmative action Empire’ policy a process of ‘indigenisation’ took place so that minorities would not feel that Russia was imperialist, instead they sought to create unity along socialist lines instead of nationalist ones. For example, the Laz people (numbering 635 people and native to the Black Sea coastal regions of Georgia) were given their own school building. The Party was not so concerned with language or culture but ideology, therefore steps were taken to train cadres of the local nationality to promote party ideals. On 31 December 1922, central government declared a new constitution for all of
the Soviet republics and renamed the country once more to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This meant that Russia (RSFSR) was, for the first time, given boundaries within the larger state it belonged to. The central government newspaper hailed it as a ‘New Years’ gift to the workers and peasants of the world’. However well this was accepted in the regions, it might only have been so because Lenin had sanctioned ‘National deportations’ in 1921: hundreds of Cossacks were rounded up from the southern regions and sent to other Soviet territory in the north to avoid any backlash.

One of the reasons Stalin had wanted to abandon NEP was to allay the assertiveness of the national minorities. Nationalism was to be fought ruthlessly as imaginary anti-Soviet organisations were ‘discovered’ in Ukraine (1929) and later in Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Anti-Semitism persisted throughout the Stalinist era and to it added a resentment towards those from the Transcaucasus nations. Most deaths, however, were suffered by the less urbanised nationalities during collectivisation. Therefore, the Kazakh nomads suffered disproportionately during 1931–3 when up to 1.8 million of them died because of the punitive policies implemented against peasants. The Ukraine was subject to particular forms of persecution under Stalin: borders were sealed in 1932 by Red Army units and the majority of the Ukraine’s peasantry were labelled kulaks, forcing them to acquiesce to state requirements. The regime did respond to reports of widespread famine in 1932 by cutting grain collection quotas, but this was nowhere near enough to stop widespread suffering in the Ukraine. It should be noted, though, that the famine was also grievous in parts of Russia too.

Hidden voices: Georgian affair of 1922

Stalin had already asserted his view on the national minorities during the Georgian affair of 1922 – where Georgian nationalists had tried to assert their independence. The Red Army and Cheka troops, under orders of Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, suppressed the insurrection and instigated a wave of mass repressions that killed several thousand Georgia citizens. This can be seen as part of the leadership struggle that developed with Lenin’s illness. Stalin wanted Georgia to be Sovietised otherwise his claim to becoming leader of the Soviet Union would be severely weakened. For this reason, he advocated Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia become republics within the Soviet Union.
Minorities and the Great Terror

Recently unearthed archives have resulted in research being carried out on the national or ethnic components of the Great Terror. Eastern Europeans, Koreans, Chinese, Afghans were all subject to ‘national sweeps’ of ‘ethnic cleansing’ during 1937. The ‘Polish operation’ resulted in the arrest of 140,000 people of which a staggering 111,000 were shot dead – all perceived to be real or potential ‘spies’ of hostile states and agents of anti-Soviet foreign intelligence services. Jews were also repressed in large numbers, although this may have been due to the proliferation of Jews at the higher levels of organisations, rather than it being any attempt to persecute this minority above any other. Such was the scale of ‘national operations’ that they became the prime function of NKVD activity after February 1938.

The reasons for the abolition of nationalism and, therefore, nationalities were ideological. Stalin had read in Marx that the antidote to national conflicts were to create unifying principles behind which all could unite. Stalin knew that as only 52% of the USSR’s population were Russian in 1932, a new way of inspiring unity and pride was needed. This coincided with growing concerns about the strength of the Third Reich under Adolf Hitler. Therefore, it was during the 1930s that the privileges of Russian nationhood were expounded. This also coincided with the purges where almost the entire leadership of the party in non-Russian republics was replaced with Russian cadres. The Russian language was given heightened status from 1938, becoming one of the compulsory subjects in all schools. (Over 130 languages were recognised by the authorities, but in practice there was a strict hierarchy with Russian at the peak.) There were also moves to alter non-Russian

**Key term**

**NKVD:** the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, it contained the regular police force (including traffic police and firefighting and border guards). It became infamous for running the Gulag system after 1934 where it conducted executions as well as maintained harsh conditions within the camps.
languages to a Cyrillic-style alphabet, therefore from 1940 the Uzbek tongue was no longer allowed to be written in Arabic characters. Russian patriotism did not extend to village traditions, however, which continued to exist. So-called 'former people' such as the aristocracy and gentry had to be denounced in any literature or histories as Marxism-Leninism had to remain at the core of state ideology.

Propaganda and cultural change
Among the arts, the cinema probably suffered more than any other under Lenin. This was ironic, given Lenin's well-known assessment of it being the most important art form. None of the 143 theatres operating in Moscow before the First World War showed films by the autumn of 1921. Literature suffered too, if only because of the acute shortage of paper and the appropriation of many resources by the party press. In 1913, 392 000 tons of paper and cardboard were produced within the empire; by 1920, Soviet Russia produced only 34 700 tons. Compared to 1913, when 20 000 book titles were published, only 3260 appeared in 1920. Figures for 1914 show that of 4130 titles, over half were in the social sciences.

Under NEP the ethnic Russians were most harshly restricted in their cultural expression. Classic Russian writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose major works include the world-celebrated Crime and Punishment (1866), were banned. However, art forms flourished particularly after the Civil War, most notably poster art, film and theatre, both of which fed the workers with stories of heroism during the revolution. Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, facilitated hundreds of films about the revolution and by the end of the 1930s the USSR had 28 000 cinemas. Radio, too, was harnessed as a medium of mass communication, and performers and broadcasters became celebrities across the country.

The USSR began to look different too: under Stalin, vast apartment blocks were built at Magnitogorsk and other areas to replace wooden huts, although housing was not built as fast as factories. By 1940 significant change had occurred in almost every town and village. Stalin claimed this as a triumph of modernity, although it was a distinctly Stalinist view of it. Typical apartment blocks contained flats called kommunalki which were shared by several families, using the same kitchen and bathroom. Cafeterias were provided at most factories so that workers need not return home to eat. This collectivist approach was extended to consumer goods too, as competition between similar products was seen as a capitalist mentality. Therefore clothes, shoes, tins of food, lightbulbs would be the same wherever you bought them in the USSR. This had the effect of creating a drab uniform which most people wore and saw local dress disappear.

The cults of Lenin and of Stalin
The cult of Lenin really began after his death in 1924. Indeed, there are numerous examples of Lenin being arrested during his lifetime, as the people did not recognise him, even when he said his name. This was certainly not the case when Stalin became leader of the party. The cult of Stalin was simultaneously created alongside that of Lenin to underscore the legitimacy of the regime and to affirm that the state possessed a strong, determined leader. Even though there had been a revolution, the Communists recognised the importance of continuity as well as disruption, therefore some of the regal pomp associated with Tsarism was kept by Stalin, for example his having an official birthday and renaming Tsaritsyn.
as Stalingrad. Crucial to the cult of Stalin was his preservation of the heritage of Marxism-Leninism. The heroism, justice and inevitability of the October Revolution were repeatedly proclaimed, as were the glorifications of the successes of the Five Year Plans. After 1935, the regime consciously sought out artists who could raise workers’ awareness of the need for a radical attempt to build socialism. Most propaganda posters reflect the ‘Socialist Realism’ that was born in the USSR – a mix of the realist traditions of the 19th century with the romanticism of the Bolshevik tradition.

Figure 3.10: This poster says ‘Great Stalin is a Flag of the USSR’s Friendship’ and epitomises the type of propaganda that created the Cult of Stalin.

Robert Service: 1997 argues, however, that Soviet propaganda was not so effective; despite the proliferation of films, radio programmes and newsreels
demonstrating adulation for the Georgian leader, there remained a paucity of spectators. For example, by 1937 there were only 3.7 million radios in the country (for a population of 162 million) and communication in rural areas was patchy at best. Several weeks at a time passed between official visits to villages, therefore mass indoctrination was not achieved due to insufficient infrastructure. This view is supported by the historian Sarah Davies: 1997 p. 183 who suggests that Soviet propaganda ‘failed to extinguish an autonomous current of popular opinion’. Perhaps the main reason for the failures of Soviet propaganda was the relentless hardship caused by state measures as well as a lack of ability to access the cinema or radio for the majority of the population.

**ACTIVITY 3.5**

Look back through your notes on the social changes that took place under Lenin and Stalin and complete the table below. This should help you form some conclusions about whether life got better or worse for people under Lenin or Stalin.

You could even stretch yourself and compare life for peasants under the Tsarist regime in 1914 with life in 1941. Had peasants’ lives changed much?

Some historians have referred to the policies of the government as ‘zig-zag’ in approach, which makes the topic a complex one.

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Opposition from the Left

Perhaps the most serious threat to the Bolsheviks in the early years of the revolution were the Left Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Although there were some disagreements over Brest–Litovsk (as there were within the Bolshevik Party), major disagreements arose over domestic politics. Bolshevik agricultural policy (in the form of grain requisitioning) as well as government-appointed commissariats being given unlimited authority to dissolve soviets that
failed to implement the policy from May 1918, forced the Left SRs into opposition. In June 1918, they were expelled from the Central Executive Committee and subsequently formed many provincial soviets. In retaliation, two of their members – Bliumkin and Andreev – assassinated Count Mirbach (a German envoy) in the hope of inciting a renewal of the conflict between Russia and Germany. Although parts of Moscow sympathised with the Left SRs, the Bolsheviks had enough forces to crush the rebellion within hours of it starting. They arrested 260 SRs and forced the rest to reject their central committee or be expelled from the Petrograd Soviet. The leaders were imprisoned and many others implicated in the plot, thereby passing a death sentence to any threat from the Left SRs again.

The Kadets
The fate of the non-Bolshevik political intelligentsia was intrinsically bound up with that of the political parties. The Kadets (Constitutional Democrats), who had enjoyed the largest intelligentsia following, constituted the thin political infrastructure of the White governments. As such, P.N. Miliukov and other leading Kadet politicians hoped to gain international support for a counter-revolution against the Bolsheviks. However, neither the Germans in 1918 nor the allied powers thereafter were willing to commit themselves to full-scale armed intervention. Beset by internal wrangling as well as conflict with the White generals, the Kadet politicians eventually removed themselves from Russian soil and took up residence in Paris and other European centres. The Right SRs followed a similar trajectory; the problem was they were supported by Czechs and peasant worker armies and the agendas of these forces differed from that of the civilian politicians as well as from each other. In November 1918, the SR-dominated Directory based at Omsk was overthrown by Kolchak and, for all intents and purposes, the Right SRs were finished as a political movement. Forced into emigration, such leading SR politicians as N.D. Avksentiev and V. Zenzinov urged the allies to step up the interventionary campaign, but to no avail.

Popular resistance
Resistance to Soviet authorities took increasingly active forms throughout the cataclysmic Civil War. There were paralysing strikes among workers in Moscow and Petrograd, and 344 peasant insurrections in 1919. This discontent intensified after the Tambov uprising in 1920 provided ample evidence of popular disenchantment with Bolshevik governance. Peasants and workers did not coordinate their activity but their demands were similar. Both groups called for the abolition of grain requisitioning, better food supplies, for a return to democracy and an end to the Communist monopoly of power.

Perhaps the most iconic and threatening of the rebellions was the Kronstadt uprising of February 1921, which took place on the naval base situated approximately 12 miles from Petrograd. The Kronstadt sailors had been at the forefront of the revolution in 1917, though many were not Bolshevik but anarchists. This was not so much a problem in the first year when the sailors were encouraged to assist in land redistribution in the countryside and many fought valiantly in the Red Army during the Civil War. However, as the party expanded its power and Soviet power was reduced at the hands of party Commissars, hostilities would erupt. The Kronstadters tried to support the strikers in Petrograd
and joined their calls for freedom for all left-wing, soviet-oriented parties and for a reduction in Communist influence over elections. Lenin and Trotsky ordered a ruthless repression of the Kronstadters. In dramatic fashion, Trotsky sent 50,000 infantry across the ice to reach Kronstadt and capture the city. Cheka execution squads followed closely behind, killing over 2,500 men. Just as the Bolsheviks were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Paris Commune of 1871, they were suppressing Kronstadt. Revolutionary Victor Serge, who witnessed the atrocities, called it ‘ghastly fratricide’.

Suppressing the opposition
The opposition was largely thwarted after 1921 when it was clear the Reds had been victorious during the Civil War. Both Mensheviks and Left SRs continued to participate in the Soviets, had a persistent following in the trade unions and sent delegates to the next all-Russian Soviet congress. However, Lenin was fearful about their influence and as material conditions worsened, it became all too easy to construe opposition as treason and to make Menshevism a convenient scapegoat for unrest among workers. Lenin associated Martov’s calls for democracy at the Seventh Congress of Soviets (December 1919) as ‘bourgeois’ and linked his ideas to the foreign intervention that had come from Kolchak. Without any formal decree, the Soviet government rounded up the leading figures of the opposition parties and imprisoned them in early 1921. Some, including leading Socialist Revolutionaries, were eventually put on trial and convicted of ‘terroristic’ acts for which they received (commuted) death sentences and long terms of imprisonment. Some were permitted to emigrate; others were released after promising to abandon all political activities, while still others were sent into internal exile. In some senses, this represented the annihilation of the political intelligentsia outside the Communist Party.

During the days of the Tsarist regime, the ‘dark masses’ (peasants and workers) caused the most anxiety for those who governed Russia. However, even under the Communist regime, set up in the name of the workers, it was still the working classes who posed the greatest threat.

The Red Terror
Perhaps the institutions that grew the most quickly under Bolshevik rule were the coercive organs, specifically, the army and the main security apparatus, the Cheka. From its founding in February 1918, the Red Army was staffed largely by former Tsarist officers who were euphemistically referred to as ‘military specialists’. To ensure their loyalty, political commissars, usually Communists, exercised supervisory power and were held jointly responsible for all orders. But the appointment of officers by the Revolutionary Military Council, the allocation to them of special rations and other privileges, rankled with many party members and frontline soldiers.

The Cheka
The Cheka (short for All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter-revolution, Sabotage and Speculation) was the ‘sword of the Revolution’, explicitly conceived as an organ of ‘mass red terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents’. Headed by the Polish-born revolutionary, Felix Dzerzhinski, it possessed...
unrestrained powers of arrest, interrogation, intimidation and execution, all of which it applied liberally, though probably no more so than its White counterparts. At the peak of its strength in mid-1921, the Cheka of the Russian Republic is estimated to have contained 250,000 members including 100,000 Frontier Troops and a civilian staff of 30,000. The list of enemies expanded rapidly in 1918 from ‘bourgeois opposition’ to many Mensheviks, SRs and anarchists, particularly after 30 August 1918 when party member Uritsky was killed in Petrograd and Lenin was seriously wounded when he was shot down in the street in Moscow. The executive committee of the Soviets responded with an uncompromising policy of terror, carried out by the Cheka. During the early months of 1919 it is said to have suppressed 245 uprisings or, more likely, resistance to grain requisitioning, where 3057 people were killed. In terms of executions, there had reportedly been 6300 by the end of 1918 and a further 3456 in 1919, although unofficial figures tend to be much higher. By 1922 the Cheka was no longer ‘extraordinary’ and so was renamed the GPU (State Political Administration).

Civil war

In December 1918, following excessive desertions from the front and many refusing to enlist at all, combined with mounting threats to the Bolshevik hold on power, the All-Russian Soviet Executive Committee (VTsIK) ordered the creation of a separate bureaucracy – the Central Anti-Desertion Commission – to round up those who refused to enlist. This followed Lenin’s decree on the kulaks (or wealthier peasants) in the Penza region for those who refused to hand over their grain. Lenin referred to them as ‘kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers’ who had to be hanged in full view of the villagers. The terror was moving into rural districts, towards ordinary people rather than just political opposition.

By April 1919, several provincial commissions had managed to organise their own armed patrols that would comb the countryside, and they were also given formal
powers to confiscate movable property from the families of known deserters and those suspected of assisting them. In Kostroma, the work of the anti-desertion squads – a low-prestige assignment that frequently enlisted the participation of one-time deserters themselves – inspired revulsion amongst peasants.

Justice

The Constitution of the new Soviet republic was promulgated (declared) on 10 July 1918; however, it left the implementation of everyday law to judges. Wherever there were gaps, judges were ordered to carry out justice according to the ‘revolutionary conscience’ of people’s courts. Most courts consisted of two lay assessors and a full-time judge, and for more serious cases, revolutionary tribunals (inspired by the French Revolutionary precedents) on which sat six assessors and a judge; their task was to judge cases brought by the Cheka. In 1920 alone, the people’s courts tried 881,933 people, of whom nearly 300,000 were found innocent. Among those convicted, 34% were sentenced to confinement, 30% were fined and 23% had to perform compulsory labour. The revolutionary tribunals handled only 26,738 cases, but the rate of conviction was higher (85%) and among those convicted, 16,107 (70.7%) were sentenced to confinement and 766 (3.4%) were shot. Examples of tribunals found in the archives demonstrate that sentencing was very much affected by the class one belonged to, rather than the crime committed. For example in Lugansk, archives show that the two individuals it had convicted of speculation in matches were proletarians, therefore reduced their sentence from five to two years of forced labour. Then again, it was primarily workers who were subjected to another form of revolutionary justice, namely, the comrades disciplinary courts. These courts, administered by the trade unions, had the power to reprimand, dismiss and sentence to forced labour those guilty of absenteeism and other violations of labour discipline.

Faction

Marx had expounded the view that governments were created for the interests of those that held economic power, and the exploited classes would seek to oust those in power to create institutions of their own. Under NEP, instated in 1921, this had worrying consequences for the Communists as they had effectively reinstated bourgeois supremacy. Lenin had to therefore buttress the regime against those who would threaten a revolution (standing Marxism on its head), centring the basis of power in political structures not economic orders. The political crisis that followed was due to factionalism and dissent within the Party. In the words of Trotsky, ‘our party is now the only one in the country; all discontent goes exclusively through our party.’

Factionalism violated the central tenet of Bolshevism as developed under Lenin: that disciplined unity required complete compliance with decisions made by the directing organs. In some ways, the growth of factionalism was not unexpected given the radical departures the Bolsheviks had made from their Marxist ideology and the sheer growth of the party. Between 1917 and June 1921, the number of government employees grew nearly five times – from 576,000 to 2.4 million (to put that in context, that was nearly twice as many government employees as factory workers – not quite a dictatorship of the proletariat).
Alexander Shliapnikov, an old reliable Bolshevik, formed the ‘Workers’ Opposition’ during the Ninth Party Congress (March 1920) which ended any form of workers’ control in the factories, retuning to a managerial system akin to that under the Tsarist regime. Although Shliapnikov and the Metallurgical Union he led had supported the party in suppressing the Kronstadt rebellion, he began to question what the workers had actually won since 1917, given the hardship of civil war and limited power of the soviets. At the Tenth Party Congress the Workers’ Opposition introduced two motions: increased worker participation in the party apparatus and a gradual transferral of control over the economy to trade unions. Lenin took the extraordinary measure of the banning of factions at the Congress in March 1921 and therefore the toleration of dissentient minorities outside the party became all the more strange. Just as the party was embarking on a policy designed to loosen the reins of economic control (under NEP, also discussed at the Congress), it was tightening the political reins. Historians such as Richard Pipes (1997) have suggested, convincingly, that it was this measure undertaken by Lenin which not only played a decisive role in Stalin’s ascent to power, but also paved the way for the kind of state Stalin would run in the future – a dictatorship.

The purges

Represive policies had been a key feature of Stalin’s rule from at least the late 1920s because of his belief and fear of the ‘enemy within’, be they kulaks, White guardists, priests or disloyal party members. As we have already seen, Stalin was willing even from 1924 to purge the party of unwanted comrades, and many foreign members of the Communist party were cast out because of their perceived Trotskyist or Bukharinite beliefs (see Section ‘Development of Stalinist Dictatorship’). By 1928, Stalin had personally overseen the trial of 53 ‘bourgeois specialists’ accused of sabotage of mines in Shakhty (area in Southern Russia) and five of these were executed. Stalin played on the idea of class struggle and capitalist encirclement from 1928, particularly during forced industrialization, to account for the increasing resistance he faced and to justify greater state coercion against its own people. The First Five Year Plan also saw ‘saboteurs’ and ‘wreckers’ become key accusations levelled at ordinary citizens who were not seen to be fulfilling their targets enthusiastically enough and, as a result, many qualified personnel were deported to the labour camps. The attack was levelled at economists in Gosplan and included the superb chronicler of 1917, N. Sukhanov and prominent economist V. Bazarov, and the liberal professor of the old regime L. Ramzin – drawing no distinction between the revolutionary socialists and the former Kadet sympathiser.

Stalin also encouraged denunciations of the nomenklatura by ordinary workers, which were obviously open to abuse but helpfully kept the local politicians in a state of permanent trepidation. Collectivisation led Stalin to pursue pernicious policies against kulaks, who were allegedly seeking to destroy the new social order, and deportations and executions were commonplace in 1932. Stalin also sought tirelessly to control the nomenklatura (a category of people within the Soviet Union who held various key administrative positions in government, industry, agriculture and education), as he believed they were frequently accused of incompetence and ‘yawning’ on the job. In 1933 there was a purge of the party where up to 854 300 people identified as careerists or drunkards were expelled
from the Party. In fact, nearly a million Soviet citizens languished in prisons and labour camps of the OGPU by 1933 and further millions had been deported and placed in resettlement areas. In all these attacks a pattern of scapegoating emerges; Stalin used this tactic to deflect popular discontent from himself and the regime and create warnings to any potential opposition in the future. The slave labour created in the camps also supported the drive for industrialization that he needed.

Silencing political opponents
Violence had been carried out against the people of Russia under Lenin too, however, from 1937 Stalin used it against his own party members. The turning point seems to have been 1 December 1934 when Sergei Kirov was assassinated by a young ex-Zinovievite (Leonid Nikolaev). Stalin had lost the title of General Secretary of the Central Committee and Kirov had been given the same title in the spring of 1934 – how this happened is still clouded by the fragmentary evidence that has survived. However, Stalin seemed to accept this situation and even made concessions during the summer, transferring the activities of the OGPU to the control of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), seemingly weakening the mechanisms for repression. Yet this only produced an even larger centralised organ for policing and security. Kirov’s death at the end of the year was highly suspicious given the rapid way the killer was dealt with and the mysterious disappearance of even the van drivers who transported him which followed. There were widespread rumours that Stalin himself connived the assassination, although this remains unproven.

The first high profile victims of the purges were Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were accused of conspiring in Kirov’s death. The filmed trial that followed in January 1935 saw them admit to political and moral responsibility for the death of their adherent. Both were consigned to ten and five years imprisonment respectively and 663 former supporters of theirs followed them into custody. A further 30,000 deportations of local groups ‘hostile’ to communism were deported from Leningrad as repression intensified and by May 1935 approximately 281,872 persons had their party membership cards removed. This had been calculated by Stalin but carried out enthusiastically by Andrei Zhdanov who had become a Central Committee Secretary by 1934. Zhdanov wanted to restore the authority of the party and so thought ‘cleansing’ the party would help to bring into line the commissariats. Stalin had ulterior motives to settle old political scores and resolve any outstanding political tensions within the central organs of state. On 20 May 1935 the Politburo ordered that every former Trotskyist be directed to a labour camp for a minimum of three years. When evidence was found that Trotsky had been maintaining contact with groups from abroad in August 1936, Stalin frantically set the NKVD to work – Zinoviev and Kamenev faced a public show trial this time, with the added accusation of plotting to assassinate Stalin as well as Kirov, again they were found guilty but this time condemned to death and shot the following morning.

The Great Terror
The Great Terror began in earnest in 1937 and as historian Robert Tucker (1979) asserts, there is no doubt that Stalin was the Director General of the systematic
extermination of Communist oppositionists. Following the show trials of unreliable members of the Politburo (namely, Karl Radek and Pyatakov) the last remaining oppositionist (Ordzhonikidze) shot himself – rumours again circulated that he was murdered on Stalin’s orders. Stalin was able to create a commission who could take decisions on behalf of the Politburo, which empowered him to extend the terror further. The next group that incurred suspicion was the Red Army leaders, especially Marshal Tukhachevski who had argued for a more adventurous military strategy than the one Stalin proposed. He, along with several other high-ranking commanders, were arrested in May 1937 and beaten into confessing plotting a coup d’état; they were shot in June. On the same occasion, Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov (once leaders of the Right Opposition) were found guilty of espionage, again on highly spurious evidence collected by the NKVD. Bukharin was slightly luckier as he was not physically beaten, as the others had been; he was put on show trial in March 1938 and he ‘confessed’ to terrorist activity in a deal to save the lives of his wife and child. Bukharin’s last message to Stalin was, ‘Koba, why do you need me to die?’ in a note to Stalin just before his execution. (‘Koba’ was Stalin’s revolutionary pseudonym and Bukharin’s use of it was a sign of how close the two had once been.) Stalin kept this letter in his desk until his own death in 1953 – perhaps illustrating the personal importance of this particular comrade’s slaying.

The role of Nikolai Yezhov
The Great Purges of 1937–8 are sometimes referred to as the ‘Yezhovshchina’ (the Yezhov era). Nikolai Yezhov started his career as a secret police official under Stalin and became head of the NKVD from 1936 to 1938, during the most severe period of the Great Purge. The historian Robert Service: 1997 has described him as gleefully fanatical in his administering of repression. After presiding over the arrest of 259 450 persons in the spring, he implemented torture as a form of interrogation in Soviet prisons, which was sanctioned in August 1937. Victims were tried by trios, typically an NKVD chief, party secretary and procurator, and trials were extremely brief and afforded the accused no right of appeal.

According to official records, Yezhov presided over the execution of 681 692 persons in 1937–8 – although this figure is likely to be an underestimate; the figures do not account for the 1.5 million who are likely to have perished from the inhumane conditions of the Gulags or killed by firing squad. Yezhov ironically became a victim of the instruments he had helped to foster after unexpectedly resigning from his post at the NKVD and resorting to flying paper aeroplanes around his bedroom. He was arrested, confessed under torture to anti-Soviet activity, and executed in February 1940. This reveals somewhat the chaos of the era and the vast punitive industry that must have ballooned at this time to

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keep the executions concealed from the public. The ritual of denunciations, confessions, trials, sentencing, imprisonment and executions created thousands of jobs for willing torturers, jailers and grave-diggers, amongst others.

The resolution on anti-Soviet elements was extended to include anyone who had been active or sympathetic to oppositionist factions and virtually no institution was left unscathed. Only one in 30 delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934 returned to the Eighteenth Congress in 1939; the Central Committee also haemorrhaged 55 members (out of 71); the Red Army was devastated by the loss of thousands of highly-trained military officers, and the arrest of People’s Commissariats impeded industrial output. On the eve of the Second World War (which, by 1938, seemed fairly inevitable) this seemed a baffling policy, but perhaps demonstrates the hysteria that had swept through government organs to root out ‘spies, wreckers and saboteurs’ under Stalin’s direction.

In the days of Tsarism and under the new Communist regime, terror was widely used as a tool for repression. In fact, the use of a secret police organisation to root out internal enemies was established under Nicholas I in 1825 and, if anything, was used to an even greater extent under the Communist regime.

**The political, economic and social condition of the Soviet Union by 1941**

Stalin continued to use terror fairly liberally throughout the rest of his premiership, however the floodgates of the Great Terror closed behind Yezhov in 1940. Five years had passed between the party congresses, and Stalin only met with certain members of the Politburo when it suited him and needed to foster tension between the Red Army and NKVD, Commissariats and Council or Trade Unions, for example so that he could maintain his position. Therefore, by 1940, Stalin had

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**Voices from the past : Motives for killing Sergei Kirov**

Kirov was a rising star in the Party before his assassination, and although a loyal supporter of Stalin, was not afraid to speak against him.

When a group of older Bolsheviks (led by Martemyan Ryutin) were found to be writing a manifesto called, ‘Stalin and the crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship’ in 1932 and were known supporters of Bukarin, Stalin demanded the death penalty. He was betrayed by their denunciation of him as a mediocre politician but also because Stalin’s wife, who had committed suicide on 8 November 1932, had read the manifesto and seemed to suggest in her suicide note that she supported it. Sergei Kirov pleaded that Ryutin and his followers were not executed because it would oppose Lenin’s dictum against spilling Bolshevik blood. Kirov’s card was surely marked when he had become extremely close to the leader following the death of Stalin’s wife, but he was seen as a moderate in the party and received more votes than Stalin at the Party Congress in January 1934. Kirov was assassinated on 1 December 1934 and complicity in Kirov’s assassination was a common charge to which the accused confessed in the show trials of the period. The cities of Kirov, Kirovohrad, Kirovakan and Kirovabad, as well as a few Kirovsks, were renamed in Kirov’s honour after his assassination.

**Discussion Points**

1. If Stalin did order the murder of Kirov, what motives did he have?
2. Why is Stalin’s reaction to the death controversial amongst historians?
elevated himself above the party, people’s commissariats, army, trade unions and police – formalising his dictatorship.

**Stalin’s totalitarian state**

It is agreed by most historians that, by 1939, Stalin had transformed Russia into a totalitarian state, principal characteristics of which the historian Hosking (1992) describes as: ‘the central direction of the economy, a single mass party mobilising the population to build “Socialism in One Country”, an official monopoly on mass communications, ubiquitous and terroristic security police force, adulation of a single leader and a single official ideology projecting the final state of mankind’.9 However apt this description seems, it belies the active role the peasants and workers had in shaping this system; they were not always simply passive victims. Of course, the power of the ‘Police State’ should not be underplayed by suggesting that the peasants and workers would have been free to oppose the dictatorship – many would have feared execution or exile for exhibiting discontent.

There was a whole new raft of upwardly mobile technical graduates – of which the later leaders of the party, for example Khrushchev and Brezhnev, would derive their early success. The social and educational background of the party had changed dramatically since Lenin’s day and leading *cadres* now worked their way up through the youth organisations, such as *Komsomol* and other organs of the party, or held technological posts. A similar process had taken place in the military, education, health, law and the diplomatic service: as long as they were loyal to the party they could enjoy thorough professional training. This developing ruling class enjoyed privileges most ordinary workers could only dream of; yet this *nomenklatura* were subject to scrutiny by the NKVD and could lose everything from a denunciation.

The First Five Year Plan saw changes to Soviet tastes in architecture, the arts and attitudes. In 1934, 37 divorces were reported for every 100 marriages and Moscow hospitals witnessed 57 000 births but 154 000 abortions in the same year. In the face of these unwelcome developments, the regime’s propaganda began to reinforce traditional family values in the hope of increasing the birth rate and stabilising society once more. In education, too, the state sought to reverse the effects of the initial cultural revolution that had occurred after October 1917. Knowledge was put back on the curriculum with the addition of instruction in Marxism–Leninism. By 1939, the entire education system had been remodelled on pre-revolutionary lines for a society which had largely returned to the hierarchical, imperial and conservative one seen under Tsarism.

Yet for all his successes in developing a cult around his personal leadership and eliminating enemies from within, Stalin was extremely vulnerable when, on 22 June 1941, the Nazi invasion of the USSR took the supposedly infallible leader by surprise, despite his military advisers’ warnings. Stalin had declined to mobilise the Soviet armed forces on the Western Fronts and had even signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in 1939, who had now humiliated Stalin in his betrayal. Stalin was about to lead his people into the most severe of tests – named ‘The Great Patriotic War’ because it was an ideological war for survival.
**Conclusion**

Historians such as Pipes: 1997 and Figes: 2014 have claimed that the basic elements of the Stalinist dictatorship were already in place by 1924. The Party apparatus had already become an obedient tool under Lenin during the Civil War and the regime's reliance on terror as a form of political control was instigated almost as soon as the October Revolution of 1917 had taken place. However, the development of the Stalinist dictatorship saw him break away from Leninism in marked ways. Although Lenin had no problem liquidating opposition to the revolution, he took a much more respectful approach to political comrades who disagreed with him, unlike Stalin who carried out purges in 1937–8 against anyone who contradicted him. Lenin had practised mass terror during the Civil War and continued to demand its application under NEP, however it was unlikely that Lenin would have approved of the torturous and degrading methods used against those arrested. Lenin would probably never have undertaken collectivisation in the violent manner Stalin did, as NEP showed Lenin was willing to win the peasantry over through persuasion. However, what mattered to ordinary Russians was not whether Stalin continued Lenin's ideology but whether they could earn a decent living, and despite Stalin's brutal dictatorship, by 1941 they could. Whether the population had bought into the Stalinist cult would be tested in unimaginable ways during the 'Great Patriotic War' of 1941–5, but if they proved disloyal, Stalin had the apparatus of terror ready to enforce patriotism.
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Stalin uses coercion in the grain shortage crisis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shakhty affair</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Trotsky is deported from the USSR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bukharin is defeated and removed from the Politburo</td>
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<td>Full scale collectivisation is announced</td>
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<td>Cult of Stalin is launched</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>‘Revolution from above’ begins</td>
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<td>Stalin’s ‘Dizzy with success’ article calls a temporary halt to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>collectivisation</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Stalin’s wife commits suicide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ryutin platform discovered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First Five Year Plan considered complete in 4.5 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Famine begins in grain-producing areas</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>Official party purge</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>Seventeenth Party Congress – some opposition to Stalin shown</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assassination of Kirov</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>Trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yezhov appointed head of the NKVD – terror intensifies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adoption of Stalin constitution</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>Yezhovschina – climax of the purges – leading military figures purged</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>‘Right Opposition’ purged Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yezhov replaced by Beria as head of NKVD</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>Nazi-Soviet pact signed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Stalin becomes Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nazi Germany attacks Russia</td>
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Practice essay questions

1. ‘All the rudiments of the Soviet order were implemented in the period 1917–41.’ Assess the validity of this view.

2. ‘The Bolshevik state under Lenin, between 1918 and 1924, was just as ruthless as the Communist state under Stalin, between 1928 and 1941.’ Assess the validity of this view.

3. ‘The Bolsheviks eradicated class between 1917 and 1941.’ Assess the validity of this view.

4. Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in Extract A and either the Lewin or Ward extracts on page XXX are in relation to the successes of the Five Year Plans under Stalin.

Extract A

At the end of the 1920s, Stalin launched the Great Leap Forward, an economic revolution of unprecedented speed and magnitude. Although crash industrialization brought workers certain benefits, such as virtually full employment, it also created enormous hardship. Despite a modest improvement in their living standards during the second five-year plan, the immediate priority for most workers in the 1930s was sheer survival. Unsurprisingly, economic questions featured more prominently that any other issue in popular opinion...

Workers were acutely aware of fluctuations in their standard of living, frequently comparing prices with wages. It was patently obvious to them whether their own economic situation was improving or deteriorating, and they were not deceived by official rhetoric about rising standards.


Chapter summary

After studying this period, you should be able to:
- describe the formal structures of the Communist government in 1941
- compare the political authority possessed by the leaders Lenin and Stalin
- assess how successfully the economic policies of the Communist Party were implemented under Lenin and Stalin
- assess how much society changed under Lenin and Stalin
- evaluate the political, economic and social conditions in Russia in 1941.
Further reading

If you only read one book about Stalin’s Russia, it should be that written by Christopher Ward (1999) – also called *Stalin’s Russia* – where he not only synthesizes other historians’ views on Stalin, but provides his own convincing evaluation of the era.

If you want to know more about Lenin then Robert Service’s (2000) biography of the leader – *Lenin* – is highly acclaimed and paints an interesting portrait of the private Vladimir Ilych and the public Lenin.


For further reading about Trotsky you may want to read Isaac Deutscher’s *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879–1921: Oxford Paperbacks.*

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End notes

2. Read G. *War and Revolution in Russia 1914-22, European History in Perspective: 2013: Palgrave Macmillan p.127*