

SOURCE A

It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slow down the tempo a bit, to put a check on the movement. No, comrades, it is not possible! The tempo must not be reduced! On the contrary, we must increase it as much as is within our powers and possibilities ... We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us.

Extract from an article written by Stalin in 1931, on the need to industrialise as quickly as possible. Quoted in Laver, J. 1991. *Russia 1914–1941*. London, UK. Hodder Arnold H&S. pp. 60–61.

In December 1932, Stalin announced that the first Five-Year Plan had been fulfilled. This was an exaggeration – despite tremendous growth, no major targets had actually been met.

The crisis year, 1932–33

The successes of the first plan created problems in the period 1932–33 when the second Five-Year Plan was drafted. Implementation costs had been much greater than allowed for by Gosplan, and the enormous increases in coal, iron and industrial goods proved too much for the railway system to cope with. At the same time, as urban populations rapidly expanded, there were soon housing shortages, which threatened continued industrialisation. Moreover, the effects of forced collectivisation led to food shortages, rationing and eventually famine (see page 46). In this situation, many workers changed jobs frequently. Managers had to increase wages and offer unofficial perks in order to retain skilled workers so that they could meet their targets.

The second Five-Year Plan, 1933–37

Nonetheless, in 1933 Gosplan drew up the second Five-Year Plan, which was at first intended to create a fully socialist economy. However, the final draft, approved by the 17th Party Congress in January 1934, simply called for increased production and improved living standards, and the need to build on the achievements of the first plan. From 1934 to 1936, there were many successes – in particular, machine-production and iron and steel output grew rapidly, making the Soviet Union practically self-sufficient in these areas.

The Stakhanovite movement

Part of the reason for the success of the second Five-Year Plan was the huge increase in labour productivity. In August 1935, Aleksei Stakhanov, a miner in the Donbas mining region, dug out a massive amount of coal in one shift (102 tonnes – the normal figure was 7 tonnes). Following Stakhanov's success, production targets were greatly increased as workers were urged to follow his example. Most industries had their own model workers, who received higher bonuses and other material advantages (e.g. new flats) as well as 'Heroes of Socialist Labour' medals. At the same time, the worst effects of forced collectivisation were over, allowing rationing to be abandoned in 1935.

Question

Who was Stakhanov and what was his significance for Stalin's industrialisation programme?

The third Five-Year Plan, 1938–42

The industrialisation programme was hit by problems again in 1937, despite significant achievements and successes under the second plan. The problems included the growing impact of the purges, which saw thousands of Gosplan specialists, managers and experts either imprisoned or executed (see pages 36–37), and the worsening international situation, which resulted in funds being diverted to defence.

Consequently, the third plan was not formally approved until the 18th Party Congress in March 1939. By then, proposals to develop light industry and increase the production of consumer goods were being undermined by emphasis on heavy industry and defence. Nonetheless, huge increases in production were planned. **Molotov** claimed that the first two plans had laid the foundation for a socialist economy and the third plan would complete the process and enable the Soviet Union to begin the transition to communism. The third Five-Year Plan, however, was disrupted in June 1941, when Germany launched its invasion.

Agriculture

From 1924 to 1926, the NEP had led to a gradual increase in agricultural production. However, despite a good harvest in 1926, state collections were 50% of what had been expected. Emergency measures were taken in some areas against kulak 'speculators' and nepmen, including the seizure of grain and increasing the taxes on kulaks to force them to sell more grain to the state. Low state purchases of grain in 1927 threatened hunger in the expanding towns and undermined increased industrialisation.

Thus, by the time of the 15th Party Congress in December 1927 (later known as the 'collectivisation congress'), many communists saw continuing the NEP as blocking both agricultural and industrial development. However, Stalin argued that the problems could be overcome by strengthening co-operative farms, increasing mechanisation and supporting the voluntary collectivisation of farms. At this stage, there was no mention of forced collectivisation. In 1928, however, the problem of insufficient grain purchases continued. In Siberia, Stalin instructed local officials to increase state grain procurements. They seized more grain and closed markets – those who resisted were arrested. After the 1928 harvest, these actions (known as the Ural-Siberian method) began to result in serious unrest in rural areas and bread shortages.

In July 1928, at a Central Committee meeting, Bukharin managed to agree an increase in the price of grain and an end to the forcible measures. However, Stalin was determined that industrial development should not be disrupted by any diversion of money to the kulaks. After the meeting, Stalin ordered that emergency actions should continue.

The crisis in agriculture continued. By the end of 1928, a combination of a fall in sales of grain to the state and a crop failure in the central and south-eastern regions of the USSR led to dramatic increases in free-market prices, a further slump in grain deliveries to the state and the introduction of rationing during the winter of 1928–29. During 1929, the forcible Ural-Siberian method was used in most of the Soviet Union, and the NEP was destroyed in all but name. In November and December 1929, Stalin (having defeated the right at the 16th Party Conference in April) launched a programme of forced collectivisation and called for the kulaks to be 'liquidated as a class'.

Vyacheslav Molotov (1890–1986) Molotov was a great supporter of Stalin, becoming a member of the Politburo in 1926. He backed Stalin's economic policies (as well as the Great Purge). From 1939 to 1949 he was commissar for foreign affairs. He continued to hold high office after Stalin's death, but was removed from the Central Committee in 1957.

Question

Why were Bukharin and the right opposed to Stalin's policy of forced collectivisation?

Collectivisation of agriculture

Stalin was determined to resolve the crisis in agriculture before the spring sowing for the 1930 harvest. As an emergency measure, a massive grain procurement campaign was launched. Officials, determined to avoid punishment for failure, arrested, deported and confiscated the property of any peasant who failed to hand over their grain quota. In all, some 16 million tonnes were collected – in some areas over 30% of the entire crop was taken.

Campaign against the kulaks

To bring about lasting changes in order to safeguard industrialisation plans, Stalin decided the kulaks needed to be 'liquidated' as a class. He called for this in December 1929. Action was taken first against kulaks who resisted the grain collections, although 'identification' of kulaks often went beyond Stalin's definition of a peasant with two horses and four cows.

Mass collectivisation, 1930

Action against kulaks was stepped up after January 1930 to organise the setting up of collectives. Initially, persuasion was the main method, but Stalin pressed for rapid results, and violence was increasingly used. The kulaks were divided into three categories: two groups, 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'exploiters', were given harsh punishments – execution or deportation, respectively.

Richer peasants often destroyed their crops and livestock rather than hand them over to the local *kolkhoz*, or they raided the *kolkhozes* to re-take their property. Local parties were given targets of how many households should be collectivised. Official figures identified about 4% of households as kulaks, but in the end some 15% of households were affected. Around 150,000 people were forced to migrate to poorer land in the north and east.

By March 1930, it was reported that 58% of peasant households had been collectivised – but the process provoked serious resistance. In March 1930, Stalin was pressurised by the Politburo into calling a halt. Official policy returned to voluntary collectivisation, and many peasants – wrongly classified as kulaks – had their property restored. By October 1930, only about 20% of households were still collectivised.

Collectivisation, 1930–37

The retreat from collectivisation in 1930 was only temporary: once the 1930 harvest had been secured, collectivisation resumed in earnest. By 1931, 50% of Soviet households were in collective farms – it was 70% by 1934, 75% by 1935, and by 1937 the official figure was 90%. Between 1929 and 1932, over 2500 Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) were established to supply seed and to hire out machinery to local *kolkhozes*.

Behind these statistics, there was great upheaval and confusion, which resulted in a dreadful famine in the years 1932–33. The first sign of problems came in October 1931, when many agricultural areas were affected by drought. Famine first appeared in Ukraine in the spring of 1932. It spread to several more areas, especially parts of the North Caucasus, and eventually became the worst famine in Russia's history. The worst was over by 1933, but some areas were still affected by serious food shortages in 1934. Despite this rural catastrophe, Stalin persisted with forced collectivisation and high state grain procurements. Millions died.

kolkhoz A *kolkhoz* was a co-operative or collective farm operated by a number of peasant families on state-owned land. Peasants could use a *kolkhoz* rent-free in return for fulfilling the state grain procurement quotas. Any surplus was divided amongst the members, according to how much work they had done for the *kolkhoz*. Each family was also allowed access to a small plot of land and to keep some animals. Before 1930 these collective farms were set up on a voluntary basis, but after 1930 forced collectivisation was common. A *kolkhoz* should not be confused with a *sovkhoz*, which was a state farm, with the workers being paid a regular wage.

Question

What happened in several important agricultural areas of the Soviet Union in the years 1932–33?

Historians are still not agreed on the total number of deaths – in part, because the Great Purge and the Great Terror in the second half of the 1930s make it difficult to establish the number of deaths resulting solely from the famine (see pages 36–37).

After 1933, agriculture did revive, although grain production only increased slowly. In 1935, it finally surpassed pre-collectivisation figures (75 million tonnes). Livestock numbers increased even more slowly, and in fact did not exceed pre-collectivisation levels until 1953. As a result, life on the collectives remained very hard for most of the 1930s.



A Soviet photograph of a pro-collectivisation demonstration in 1930. The banner reads: 'We demand collectivisation' and 'Liquidate the kulaks as a class'

How successful were Stalin's economic policies?

Did Stalin plan his 'revolution from above'?

Many historians have suggested that Stalin did not have a 'master plan' that he decided to implement in 1928, once he had defeated his opponents in the Communist Party. They point to the fact that changes came about in both agriculture and industry because of unforeseen problems arising from the NEP. It can also be argued that Stalin's constant interference – especially by increasing the targets – prevented the plans from being coherently and successfully implemented.

Questions

Does this photo show that many peasants wanted collectivisation? What are the value and the limitations of this source for a historian trying to find out about the degree of support for Stalin's policy?

In particular, Stalin's initial response to the grain crisis of 1927–28 is seen by some historians as an emergency short-term measure that triggered off a sequence of developments that led to more and more radical decisions being taken. Lewin, for example, argues that Stalin did not really know where his policies might take the Soviet Union.

Others, such as Tucker, argue that Stalin clearly intended to modernise the Soviet Union, and adopted deliberate agricultural and industrial policies to do so, once he considered that political factors enabled him to begin. Others go on to argue that Stalin was deliberately attempting to complete the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 – once he felt politically secure, he consciously launched a 'second revolution from above'.

How reliable are the statistics?

Official statistics about the increases in productivity achieved by the Five-Year Plans, produced during and after Stalin's rule, are highly suspect. For the period 1928–40, the official figure for increased industrial production is 852%. Similar doubts apply to figures relating to specific industries. However, most historians, such as Alec Nove, accept that there were tremendous increases, especially in heavy industry.

SOURCE B

Production table of first and second Five-Year Plans. The 'real' figures in the table are those calculated by British economic historian Alec Nove, as opposed to Soviet claims.

Production in 1928		First Five-Year Plan		Second Five-Year Plan	
		Real	Planned	Real	Planned
Electricity (million Kwhs)	5.05	13.4	17.0	36.2	38.0
Coal (million tonnes)	35.4	64.3	75.0	128.0	152.5
Oil (million tonnes)	11.7	21.4	22.0	28.5	46.8
Pig iron (million tonnes)	3.3	6.2	8.0	14.5	16.0
Steel (million tonnes)	4.0	5.9	10.4	17.7	17.0

Todd, A. 2001. *The Modern World*. Oxford, UK. Oxford University Press. p. 95.

One problem with the official statistics is that many factory managers were fearful of being punished for non-fulfilment of targets, so they claimed production figures that were higher than those actually achieved. Another problem was the lack of skill of many of the industrial workers in state enterprises. Many were ex-peasants, who had little basic training – most were under 29, and less than 20% had five years' experience of factory work.

Nor was production helped by 'storming'. This involved workers and machines working for 24 hours or more at a time, in order to meet or surpass targets. Machines frequently broke down, so disrupting production.

Impact on workers

In order to meet the high targets, new work practices were introduced. In 1929, an **uninterrupted week** was introduced, with shift work organised so that factories were not idle at the weekend. Absenteeism and late arrival were punished by loss of one's job and factory housing. After 1931, such offences were criminalised and punished by imprisonment or sentence to a labour camp. This strict discipline led many workers to change jobs frequently, especially once the plans had ended unemployment and created extra employment.

Overall, most historians agree that the rushed pace of industrialisation – especially during the first plan – drastically reduced living standards, especially via food shortages and rising prices, as well as continued housing shortages. According to John Barber, even recovery during the mid 1930s did not restore living standards to pre-1928 levels. However, the plans did end the high unemployment of the 1920s and the huge increase in the numbers of workers (including many women) enabled joint family incomes to increase. Those peasants who became industrial workers also experienced improvements in their standard of living, and many younger women (who under the tsars might have become domestic servants) found employment in offices. Many workers also benefited from the opening up and expansion of education from 1929, especially technical colleges and universities – designed to increase the skills and hence the productivity of the workforce.

The Gulag

As early as 1929, in order to overcome immediate labour shortages, the OGPU was instructed to establish timber camps in the remoter regions of the country – initially to earn foreign currency via the export of timber. In 1930, the OGPU set up a special department to run them – the Chief Administration for Corrective Labour Camps (Gulag). From 1934, all prisons, camps and colonies were under Gulag control. Conditions were hard and food was often scarce. This was particularly so in the Kolyma camps, where prisoners worked the goldfields under extremely primitive conditions. Prisoners (*zeks*) were used to undertake huge construction projects, such as canals and railways. Many were deported ex-kulaks or workers who had committed labour discipline offences, and many more came from those 'purged' during the 1930s.

Collectivisation

Collectivisation was intended to solve a serious shortfall in the amount of grain needed to feed the urban population. However, the destructive resistance by kulaks and the disruption caused by deporting about 2.5 million people to the Gulag in 1930–31, led to a serious and sudden drop in food production, and to a famine in the years 1932–33.

Historians are not agreed on the total number of famine deaths – estimates vary from Stephen Wheatcroft's 3.5 million to Conquest's 7 million. However, deaths resulting from famine were not the only deaths that can be attributed to the process of collectivisation in general. Again, historians are divided – estimates of the total number of deaths including the famine range from 6 million (Wheatcroft) to 20 million (Steven Rosefielde).

uninterrupted week (also known as the 'continuous work week'). The uninterrupted week meant four days of work, then one day off.

Historical debate

Previously, some historians had estimated that the number of prisoners in forced-labour camps grew from about 30,000 in 1928 to about 2 million in 1932. By 1938, there were an estimated 8 million *zeks* – about 8% of the total workforce. However, since glasnost and the collapse of the Soviet Union, historians such as R. W. Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft have used newly available evidence and estimate that, by 1939, the total detained in such camps was just below 3 million. A similar debate surrounds the numbers who perished in the Gulag.

Historical debate

There has been considerable debate amongst historians about the numbers who died during Stalin's regime, and whether Stalin or Hitler was responsible for more deaths. Some have included the children who might have been born if the adults had not died in Stalin's Russia. Do you think this is a legitimate method?