

A central planning agency, known as *Gosplan*, had been introduced earlier under Lenin. However, what was different about Stalin's schemes was their scale, speed and intensity. Under Stalin, State control was to be total. Historians are still not entirely sure of Stalin's motivation. Before 1928 he had had no great reputation as an economic thinker and seems to have relied heavily on the theories of Evgeny Preobrazhensky, the leading economist among the Left Bolsheviks. The strongest probability is that Stalin saw in a hard-line policy the best means of confirming his authority over Party and government. When he introduced his radical economic changes Stalin claimed that they marked as significant a stage in Soviet Communism as had Lenin's fateful decision to begin the October rising in 1917. This comparison was obviously intended to enhance his own status as a revolutionary leader following in the footsteps of Lenin.

Yet it would be wrong to regard Stalin's policy as wholly a matter of political expediency. Judging from his speeches and actions after 1928, he had become convinced that the needs of Soviet Russia could be met only by the collectivisation and industrialisation programmes. That was the essence of his slogan 'Socialism in One Country'. The survival of the Revolution and of Soviet Russia depended on the nation's ability to turn itself into a modern industrial society within the shortest possible time. Stalin expressed this with particular clarity in 1931:

1 It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slow down the tempo somewhat, 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. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the working class of the whole world. To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten.

No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish boys. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her – because of her backwardness, military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity.

Do you remember the words of the pre-revolutionary poet: 'You are poor and abundant, mighty and powerless, Mother Russia.' Those gentlemen were quite familiar with the verses of the old poet. They beat her, saying 'You are abundant, so one can enrich oneself at your expense'. They beat her, saying 'You are poor and powerless, so you can be beaten and plundered with impunity'. Such is the law of the exploiters – to beat the backward and weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak – therefore you are wrong;

25 hence you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty – therefore you are right; hence we must be wary of you. That is why we must no longer lag behind.

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed. This is what our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR dictate to us.¹

This passionate appeal to Russian history subordinated everything to the driving need for national survival. Stalin would later use this appeal to justify the severity that accompanied the collectivisation of Russian agriculture.

2 Collectivisation

KEY ISSUE What purpose was the collectivisation of the peasantry intended to serve?

At its introduction in 1928, collectivisation was referred to as 'voluntary'. Stalin claimed that it was the free choice of the peasants, but in practice it was enforced on a very reluctant peasantry. Stalin had adopted the ideas of the Left. He justified collectivisation by playing on the natural antipathy of the Bolsheviks towards the peasants. In a major propaganda offensive, he identified a class of 'Kulaks', who were holding back the workers' revolution. These Kulaks were defined as rich peasants who had grown wealthy under the NEP. They monopolised the best land and employed cheap peasant labour to farm it. By hoarding their farm produce they kept food prices high, thus making themselves rich at the expense of the workers and poorer peasants. Unless they were broken as a class, they would prevent the modernisation of the USSR.

The concept of a Kulak class has been shown by scholars to have been a Stalinist myth. The so-called Kulaks were really only those industrious peasants who, by their own efforts, had proved more efficient farmers than their neighbours. In no sense did they constitute the class of exploiting land-owners described in Stalin's propaganda campaign against them. Nonetheless, given the tradition of landlord oppression going back to tsarist times, the notion of a Kulak class proved a very potent one and provided the grounds for the coercion of the peasantry as a whole – middle and poor peasants, as well as Kulaks.

Stalin defined his peasant policies in terms of Party principles. Bolshevism was a proletarian creed. It taught that the days of the peasantry as a revolutionary social force had passed. The future belonged to the urban workers. October 1917 had been the first stage in the triumph of this proletarian class. Therefore, it was perfectly fitting that the peasantry should, in a time of national crisis, become wholly

subservient to the demands of industrialisation. The USSR needed industrial investment and manpower. The land could provide both. Surplus grain would be sold abroad to raise investment funds for industry; surplus peasants would become factory workers.

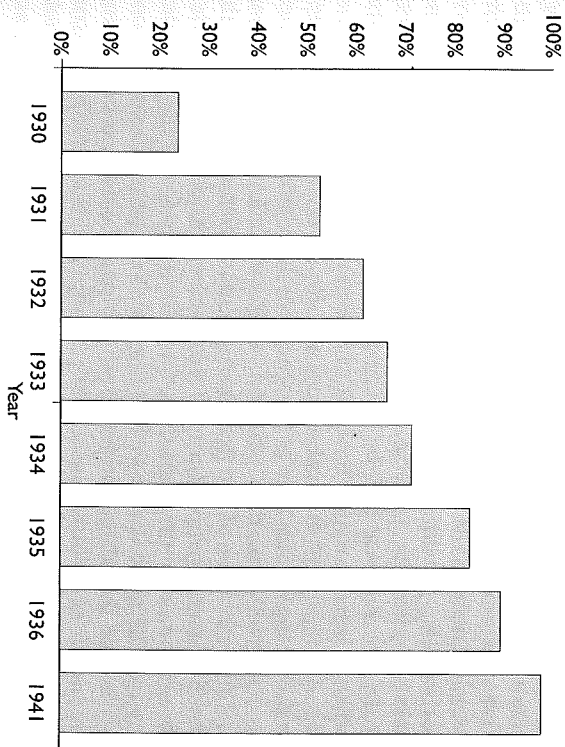
One part of the formula was correct for generations the Russian countryside had been overpopulated, creating a chronic land shortage. The other part was a gross distortion. There was no grain surplus. Indeed, even in the best years of the NEP, food production had seldom matched requirements. Yet Stalin insisted that the problem was not the lack of food but its inefficient distribution; food shortages were the result of grain-hoarding by the rich peasants. This argument was then used to explain the pressing need for collectivisation as a way of securing adequate food supplies. It also provided the moral grounds for the onslaught on the Kulaks, who were condemned as enemies of the Soviet nation in its struggle to modernise itself in the face of international, capitalist hostility.

In some regions 'de-Kulakisation' was undertaken with enthusiasm by the poorer peasants, since it provided them with an excuse to settle old scores and to give vent to local jealousies. Land and property were seized from the minority of better-off peasants, and they and their families were physically attacked. Such treatment was often the prelude to arrest and deportation by the official anti-Kulak squads, authorised by Stalin and modelled on the gangs which had persecuted the peasants during the State-organised Terror of the Civil War period (1918-20). The OGPU (the successor of the Cheka as the State security force) was entrusted with the recruitment and organisation of these squads.

The renewal of terror also served as a warning to the mass of the peasantry of the likely consequences of resisting the State reorganisation of Soviet agriculture. The destruction of the Kulaks was thus an integral part of the whole collectivisation process. As a Soviet official later admitted: 'most Party officers thought that the whole point of de-Kulakisation was its value as an administrative measure, speeding up tempos of collectivisation'.

In the period between December 1929 and March 1930, nearly 25% of the peasant farms in the USSR were collectivised. As a result, civil war broke out in the countryside. Peasants in their millions resisted. Such was the savagery and the degree of suffering that Stalin called a halt, blaming the troubles on over-zealous officials, 'dizzy with success'. Many of the peasants were allowed to return to their original holdings. However, the delay was only temporary. Having cleared his own name by blaming the difficulties on local officials, Stalin restarted collectivisation in a more determined, if somewhat slower, manner. The data on the next page indicates that by the end of the 1930s virtually the whole of the peasantry had been collectivised.

Behind these remarkable figures lay the story of a massive social upheaval. The peasants were disorientated and alienated. They either would not or could not co-operate in the deliberate destruction of their traditional way of life. The consequences were increasingly



Percentage of Peasant Holdings Collectivised in the USSR, 1930-41

tragic. The majority of peasants ate their seed corn and slaughtered their livestock. There were no harvests left to reap or animals to rear. The Soviet authorities responded with still fiercer coercion, but this simply made matters worse: imprisonment, deportation and execution could not replenish the barns or restock the herds. The ignorance of farming techniques among those Party members (called the 'Twenty-five Thousand' after the number forming the first contingent) who were sent from the towns to restore food production levels, only added to the disruption. By a bitter irony, even as starvation set in, the little grain that was available was being exported as 'surplus' to obtain the foreign capital that industry demanded. By 1932 the situation on the land was catastrophic, as the following figures show.

The Fall in Food Consumption (in kilos per head)

	Bread	Potatoes	Meat & Lard	Butter
1928	250.4	141.1	24.8	1.35
1932	214.6	125.0	11.2	0.7

The Fall in Livestock

	Horses	Cattle	Pigs	Sheep and goats
1928	33 million	70 million	26 million	146 million
1932	15 million	34 million	9 million	42 million

These figures refer to the USSR as a whole. In the urban areas there was relatively more food available. Indeed, a major purpose of the grain requisition squads was to maintain adequate supplies to the industrial regions. This meant that the misery in the countryside was proportionally greater, with areas such as the Ukraine and Kazakhstan suffering particularly severely. The devastation experienced by the Kazhaks can be gauged from the statistic that in this period they lost nearly 90 per cent of their livestock.

Starvation, which in many parts of the Soviet Union persisted throughout the 1930s, was at its worst in the years 1932–33, when there occurred a national famine. Collectivisation led to despair among large sections of the peasantry. In many areas of the USSR the uprooted peasants simply stopped producing, either as an act of desperate resistance or through sheer inability to adapt to the bewilderingly new and violently enforced regime. Few peasants understood the economic thinking, still less the ideological justification, behind it. The harsh fact was that, as a subordinate part of a grand industrial design, Soviet agriculture had been burdened with a task that it could not fulfil. The result was that for a significant period it ceased in any meaningful sense to function at all. So great was the migration from the rural to the urban areas that a system of internal passports was introduced in an effort to control the flow. Some idea of the horrors can be obtained from the following contemporary accounts:

1 Trainloads of deported peasants left for the icy North, the forests, the steppes, the deserts. These were whole populations, denuded of everything; the old folk starved to death in mid-journey, new-born babes were buried on the banks of the roadside, and each wilderness had its little cross of boughs or white wood. Other populations dragging all their mean possessions on wagons, rushed towards the frontiers of Poland, Rumania, and China and crossed them – by no means intact, to be sure – in spite of the machine guns ... Agricultural technicians and experts were brave in denouncing the blunders and excesses; they were arrested in thousands and made to appear in huge sabotage trials so that responsibility might be unloaded on somebody.²

1 Along with the peasants who flock to the towns because there is no hope of survival in the country, there are children who are simply brought here and abandoned by their parents who then return to their village to die ... A medical team [in the Kharkiv region] does a sort of selection process. Anyone who is not yet swollen up and still has a chance of survival is directed to the Kholodnoya Gora buildings, where a constant population of about 8,000 lies dying on straw beds in the big hangars. Most of them are children. People who are already starting to swell up are moved out in goods trains and abandoned forty miles out of town so that they can die out of sight. When they arrive at the destination, huge ditches are dug, and the dead are carried out of the wagons.³

Despite such evidence of the tragedy that had overtaken the USSR, the official Stalinist line was that there was no famine. In the whole of the contemporary Soviet press there were only two oblique references to it. This conspiracy of silence was of more than political significance. As well as protecting the image of Stalin the great planner, it effectively prevented the introduction of measures to remedy the distress. Since the famine did not officially exist, Soviet Russia could not publicly take steps to relieve it. For the same reason it could not appeal, as had been done during an earlier Russian famine in 1921, for aid from the outside world. Thus, what Isaac Deutscher, the historian and former Trotskyist, called 'the first purely man-made famine in history' went unacknowledged in order to avoid discredit falling on Stalin. Not for the last time, a large proportion of the Soviet people was sacrificed on the altar of Stalin's reputation. There was a strong rumour that Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, had been driven to suicide by the knowledge that it was her husband's brutal policies that had caused the famine. Shortly before her death she had railed at Stalin: 'You are a tormentor, that's what you are. You torment your own son. You torment your wife. You torment the whole Russian people.'⁴

De-Stalinisation in the 1950s revealed Stalin's crimes against the Party (see page 112). However, it was not until the 1980s that Stalin's offences against the Russian people began to be publicly admitted in the USSR. In 1989 the Soviet historian, Dmitri Volkogonov produced the first unexpurgated Russian biography of Joseph Stalin. Volkogonov confirmed many of the suspicions long entertained in the West of his inhumanity. Of special interest in relation to the collectivisation period was Volkogonov's discovery from official Soviet records that Stalin went into the countryside on only one occasion, in 1928, and visited a factory only twice.

It is difficult to justify collectivisation even on economic grounds. Historians find little evidence that it provided the Soviet Union with the growth in capital that had been one of the pretexts for its introduction. The truth was that there was never a genuine food surplus that could be sold to raise capital. Although the famine had eased by 1939, agriculture continued to produce less than was required to feed the Soviet population. Despite an increase in grain production, stocks of other food stuffs declined. There is broad agreement among modern economic analysts that a policy of state taxation of an uncollected peasantry would have produced a much higher level of investment capital, while avoiding the social dislocation and misery of Stalin's measures. (This was the very policy that had been urged by Bukharin and the Right.)

It has also been suggested that if, instead of trying to increase grain production by fighting a class war, Stalin and his officials had encouraged the peasants to adopt common-sense methods, such as using rat poison and ventilating their barns adequately, the consequent saving



An anti-Kulak demonstration on a collective farm in 1930. The banner reads: 'Liquidate the Kulaks as a class'.

of food stocks would have made collectivisation unnecessary. This, of course, overlooks the ideological dimension of Stalin's land programme and gives no place to his deep sense of vindictiveness towards the Russian peasantry.

Even allowing for the occasional progressive aspect of collectivisation, such as the spread of the Machine Tractor Stations (MTS), the overall picture remains bleak. By 1939 Soviet agricultural productivity had barely returned to the level recorded for tsarist Russia in 1913. But the most damning consideration still remains the man-made famine, which in the 1930s killed between ten and fifteen million peasants.

3 Industrialisation

KEY ISSUE How close did the Five-Year Plans come to achieving Stalin's aims for Soviet industry?

Stalin's programme of industrialisation for the USSR is best understood as an attempt to establish a war economy. He declared that he was promoting a great leap forward, as a war on the failings of Russia's past, as a war against the class enemies within, and as a preparation for war against the nation's capitalist enemies abroad. His martial imagery helps to explain the form that Soviet industrialisation took. For Stalin, industry meant heavy industry. He saw the production of iron, steel, and oil as the genuine measure of industrial growth, as it was these that provided the sinews of war. He believed that the industrial revolutions in Europe and North America had been based on iron and steel production. So, the USSR must adopt a similar industrial pattern in its drive towards modernisation. The difference would be that, whereas the West had taken the capitalist road, the USSR would follow the path of socialism.

This was not mere rhetoric. It has to be remembered that Stalin's industrialisation drive in the 1930s coincided with the Depression in the Western world, a period of economic stagnation which was interpreted by Marxists as marking the final collapse of capitalism. Stalin claimed that the USSR was introducing into her own economy the proven technical successes of Western industrialisation but was rejecting the self-destructive capitalist system that went with them. By socialist-inspired choice the USSR would avoid the errors that had begun to undermine the Western economies. This gave plausibility to Stalin's concept of a planned economy for the Soviet Union.

The character of industrialisation under Stalin is best studied in relation to the Five-Year Plans (FYPs). These were a series of pro-