4 Domestic policies and their impact

Key questions

- What were the main features of collectivisation and the Five-Year Plans?
- How successful were Stalin's economic policies?
- What was the position of women in Stalin's Russia?
- What were Stalin's policies towards religion and ethnic minorities?
- What impact did Stalinism have on education, young people and the arts?

Overview

- This unit will examine the reasons behind Stalin's main economic and social policies, their outcomes, and whether they contributed to the further consolidation of his rule.
- By 1928, problems with agricultural production under the NEP led Stalin to consider collectivising agriculture and to push for more rapid industrialisation. This led to a clash with Bukharin and the right, who wanted to continue the NEP and *smychka* (see page 42).
- In 1928, the first Five-Year Plan for industrialisation was drawn up. It concentrated on heavy industry, with high targets for increased productivity being set for each industry.
- In 1929, Stalin announced the forced collectivisation of agriculture. The *kulaks* strongly opposed the policy and often destroyed their animals, crops and tools rather than hand them over to the collectives. In 1930, Stalin determined to destroy the *kulaks* as a class. Around 1.5 million (out of 5 million) were forcibly deported to poorer parts of the Soviet Union. Many died on the journey.
- By 1932, the disruption of agriculture had led to famine in some parts of the USSR, as food production slumped.
- Results in industry were better. In 1933, a second Five-Year Plan was drawn up, which continued the emphasis on heavy industry. 'Shock brigades' of super-workers – the Stakhanovites – were set up to encourage workers to beat their production targets.
- In 1938, a third Five-Year Plan began, which was to concentrate on light industry and consumer goods. In 1940, this was shifted to the production of armaments as fears of a Nazi invasion increased.
- Despite unrealistic targets and practical problems, industrial production increased, and many new railways, canals, dams and industrial centres were built.
- While reasserting his political control, Stalin launched the reconstruction of the Soviet Union via the fourth and fifth Five-Year Plans. Industry soon revived but agriculture continued to present problems of under-production.
- As regards social policies, Stalin attempted to increase control over minorities and religion, young people, education and the arts, while women both lost and gained some important rights.

Timeline

1925 **Dec:** 14th Party Congress (the 'industrialisation congress')

1927 **Dec:** 15th Party Congress (the 'collectivisation congress')

1928 **Jul:** Bukharin wins Central Committee vote to slow down collectivisation

Oct: first Five-Year Plan starts

1929 **Apr:** 16th Party Conference; right is defeated over collectivisation; first Five-Year Plan is approved

Dec: Stalin calls for *kulaks* to be 'liquidated as a class'

1930 **Jan:** start of mass collectivisation

1932–33 crisis in industry; forced collectivisation causes famine

1934 **Jan:** 17th Party Congress approves second Five-Year Plan

1935 **Aug:** start of the Stakhanovite movement

1936 **Jun:** new family law is introduced

1939 **Mar:** 18th Party Congress approves third Five-Year Plan

1946 fourth Five-Year Plan is announced

1951 fifth Five-Year Plan starts

A Soviet poster encouraging women to work; the poster says: 'The development of a network of crèches, kindergartens, canteens and laundries will ensure that women take part in socialist construction'

Question

What messages does this poster give about Soviet priorities under Stalin? As you work through this unit, try to decide whether this poster gives a fair reflection of the realities of the lives of Soviet women during Stalin's rule.

What were the main features of collectivisation and the Five-Year Plans?

Why Stalin changed economic policies

smychka This term refers to the economic link between the town and countryside/workers and peasants. This was the cornerstone of the NEP.

Initially, Stalin and the right had rejected calls by Trotsky and the Left Opposition for industrialisation. Instead, Stalin and his supporters defended the maintenance of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and ***smychka***, and warned against the dangers of creating 'a state of war' with the peasantry. In 1925, Bukharin had dismissed the left's arguments that the NEP was generating

a capitalist class of *kulaks* and nepmen (see page 22), which threatened the socialist nature of the Soviet state. However, as early as November 1925, Stalin had started to contemplate a new revolutionary shift from the NEP to a socialist economy. After 1928, his economic policies focused on two interrelated areas, both of which were presenting problems: industry and especially agriculture.

Industry

At the 14th Party Congress, in December 1925 (later called the 'industrialisation congress'), the principle of economic modernisation was supported. At the 15th Party Conference in the autumn of 1926, Stalin called for the Soviet Union to catch up with and overtake the West in industrial production – though insisting on maintaining the worker–peasant alliance. During the years 1925–26, the organisations Gosplan and Vesenkha drafted schemes for developing the Soviet economy. By 1927, fears of imminent war led many to believe that rapid industrialisation was necessary. Furthermore, by 1927, with the United Opposition defeated, Stalin felt able to adopt some of their economic policies.

Fact
Gosplan and Vesenkha were, respectively, the State General Planning Commission and the Supreme Council of the National Economy. Gosplan was based in Moscow and each Soviet republic had its own Gosplan that was subordinate to Moscow. Vesenkha existed from 1917 to 1932, and was responsible for state industry. There was great rivalry between Vesenkha and Gosplan.

However, in December 1927, the 15th Party Congress still spoke of maintaining the basic elements of the NEP, although Stalin stressed the foreign threats and the need to develop heavy industry. Production figures for heavy industry had virtually returned to pre-war levels, but there was still unemployment so many in the party called for the state sector to be developed.

During 1927–28, a 'grain crisis' in agriculture (see page 45) persuaded Stalin that the NEP should be abandoned in favour of rapid industrialisation. This led to a serious split between Stalin and Bukharin. By the end of 1928, with the right virtually defeated, Stalin pushed for higher production targets from Vesenkha and Gosplan. By April 1929, two draft Five-Year Plans were presented to the 16th Party Conference – the 'basic variant' and the 'optimum variant'. Stalin persuaded the Politburo to accept the 'optimum' plan, to double Soviet industrial production by 1932. This was a much bigger increase than the left had called for or believed possible.

The first Five-Year Plan, 1928–32

The first Five-Year Plan began on 1 October 1928. It concentrated on heavy industry – coal, iron, steel, oil and machine-production. Overall production was planned to increase by 300%. Light industry was to double its output and, in order to ensure sufficient energy was available, electricity production was to increase by 600%. Many workers were enthused by the vision of creating a socialist economy and worked hard to fulfil each year's targets. Soon, reports (mostly unreliable) arrived in Moscow of how targets were being exceeded. In 1929, people talked of fulfilling the plan in four years rather than five. Stalin officially backed this in June 1930 and posters appeared proclaiming '2+2=5'.

There were significant achievements, which fundamentally transformed the Soviet economy. In particular, hundreds of new factories and mines were set up in many regions, some of which had had no industrial developments before 1928. New rail links, hydroelectric schemes and industrial complexes (such as Magnitogorsk) were built.

Part of the reason behind Stalin's push for rapid industrialisation was fear of the international situation. In 1931, Stalin pointed out the USSR's relative economic backwardness (50 to 100 years) and said that the Soviet Union had to make this up in ten years.

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.

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.

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'.

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.

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.

Question

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

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

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?

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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).

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?

Activity

Using the information in the chapters of this book which you have already read, and any other materials you have used, write a couple of paragraphs to explain the reasons why Stalin launched a 'second revolution from above'.

The economic results of collectivisation are also an area of controversy, although historians are agreed that, after 1928, grain deliveries to the state increased – despite total agricultural production suffering a serious decline in the 1930s. One group of historians supports the orthodox standard model, which argues that, while agricultural output declined, collectivisation shifted resources and funds from rural to urban areas, and so allowed rapid industrialisation. Michael Ellman, for example, claims collectivisation provided food, labour and funds for the first Five-Year Plan; others argue that, had the NEP continued, industrial growth rates would have been much lower than those achieved by the Five-Year Plans. However, historians such as James Millar and Holland Hunter offer a revisionist argument, claiming that collectivisation was an economic disaster that made little contribution to the industrialisation programme.

Economic reconstruction after the Second World War

During the Second World War, nearly 100,000 *kolkhozes*, 2000 *sovkhozes* and almost 5 million homes were partially or completely destroyed, and over 17 million cattle were lost. Railways, roads and bridges were also destroyed in large quantities. Retreating German armies stripped the occupied areas of all the industrial equipment and agricultural produce they could carry, and destroyed the rest. After the war, with the USA and Britain refusing to agree to massive reparations from Germany, it was clear that the Soviet Union would have to rely on its own resources for reconstruction.

Fact

Between 1941 and 1945, the Soviet Union suffered staggering losses; the USA was the only power to emerge richer from the war. According to the historian Chris Ward, by 1945, 25% of the USSR's pre-war capital stock had been destroyed. It was even worse in those western regions of the USSR that had been occupied by Axis forces – there, the figure was 66%, while, according to Robert Service, population losses were an incredible 25%. As the Axis forces retreated in 1944–45, they carried out systematic destruction – hardly a mine, factory or collective farm remained intact. In addition, over 1700 towns and over 70,000 villages were razed to the ground. One result of this deliberate destruction was that over 2.5 million civilians were forced to live in makeshift underground hovels. By May 1945, the Soviet economy was in turmoil and the Soviet people were traumatised.

The fourth Five-Year Plan, 1946–50

Stalin outlined a 15-year programme for long-term recovery, and a fourth Five-Year Plan was announced in March 1946. Hopes were dashed that the pre-war drive for industrialisation and collectivisation might be eased, but the harsh labour laws and methods of the 1930s did not reappear. Emphasis was placed on re-building heavy industry and on reviving agriculture. However, civilian needs were also given priority – within nine months of the end of the war in Europe, over 2.5 million homeless people had been re-housed.

The first year of the plan was not very successful. However, once the surviving mines and factories had re-opened and war industries switched back to industrial production, the industrial revival took off. By 1950, Stalin was claiming that the targets set had already been exceeded and that production levels were equal to or higher than those for 1940. These were exaggerations, but a surprisingly rapid and extensive industrial recovery was being made.

Agriculture

The revival of agriculture was less successful. Even before 1941, agricultural production had been insufficient, but the effects of war were disastrous. In many areas, the collective system had totally collapsed and many peasants had grabbed land to work as private plots and sold produce on the black market. In September 1946, Stalin announced that all previously collectivised land would be reclaimed, but the drought that hit many areas and the genuine lack of labour resulted in a poor harvest. The reduced number of farm animals also led to a drop in meat production. However, things began to improve after 1946. By 1950, state meat procurements were just about back to 1940 levels, although the 1950 harvest was still about 15% below the figure for 1940. Significantly, by 1950, almost half of agricultural production was still in the hands of the private sector, despite the existence of over 250,000 *kolkhozes*.

The fifth Five-Year Plan, 1951–55

The fifth Five-Year Plan, which ran from 1951 to 1955, set relatively lower targets than the previous plan. The Cold War resulted in increasing amounts of state funds going to the defence industry. Despite this, tremendous improvements had been made by the time of Stalin's death in 1953. Rationing had ended in 1947, and real wages (which by 1947 were only about 60% of 1940 levels) began to rise steadily from 1948; by 1952, they had surpassed the 1940 levels.

What was the position of women in Stalin's Russia?

There were fundamental differences between fascism/Nazism and Marxism/communism over the emancipation and role of women in society.

In 1926, a new Family Code consolidated earlier rights (see Fact box, right), and also gave women in 'common law' marriages the same rights as those in registered marriages. In Muslim regions, where feudal forms of social structure remained, women were a subject class. The communists raised the minimum age of marriage in these regions to 16 (it was 18 in the European parts of Soviet Russia), and polygamy and bride money were banned. They also organised mass political activity, known as the *khudzhum*, to mobilise women to oppose traditional practices. At the same time, education was provided equally for both males and females. State nurseries and workplace crèches and canteens were provided to enable mothers to work outside the home.

However, under Stalin some of these reforms and benefits were reduced or removed. Fear of war was growing following Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, and Soviet population growth was in decline. For these reasons, from 1935 Stalin decided on policies to promote 'traditional' family values in order to increase the Soviet population. Although most of the rights established by the 1926 Code remained intact, a new family law was introduced in 1936. This made divorce more difficult, with a rising fee for each divorce, and restricted abortion to those required for medical reasons only. In addition, in order to encourage bigger families and so raise the birthrate, tax exemptions were given to families with large numbers of children. From 1944, only registered marriages were recognised, children born outside marriage were no longer allowed to inherit property from their father, and divorce became even more difficult and expensive. During the Second World War, medals were awarded to mothers with large families and unmarried people were taxed more heavily.

However, women in particular benefited from new welfare reforms introduced under Stalin – a free health service, accident insurance at work, the expansion of kindergartens for working mothers with children, and paid holidays for many workers. Equal educational provision continued. Nonetheless, the provision of sufficient and adequate housing continued to be a problem.

In employment, women had traditionally been found mainly in agriculture, textiles and services. Their position improved considerably under the Bolsheviks, and even more so under Stalin's rule. Women were actively encouraged to play their part in the economic development of Soviet Russia, and all employment was thrown open to women, who had the same rights as men. By 1939, a third of all engineers and 79% of doctors were women.

Fact

Before 1924, the Soviet government had tried to liberate women and establish equality between the genders. Steps were taken to weaken the traditional family, which was seen as contributing to the exploitation of women. Left-feminist Bolshevik leaders such as Alexandra Kollontai pushed hard for this, although Lenin's views were more conservative. Early reforms included free contraceptive advice. Abortion was legalised in 1920 and made available free on demand. Marriages were to be performed in brief civil ceremonies in register offices, and divorce was made much easier – all that was necessary was for one partner to request it.

Fact

Many Muslim women removed their veils at mass meetings on International Women's Day, 1927. This continued in the following years and hundreds of women in traditional areas were raped and killed by male fundamentalists for 'outraging' Islamic customs.

Fact

By 1934, the divorce rate in Moscow was 37% and there were over 150,000 abortions for every 57,000 live births. Population growth dropped and there was an increase in the number of abandoned children. Between 1923 and 1928, the population had grown by 4 million a year – in 1928, the rate of population growth had been 24%. But from 1928 to 1940, rates of population growth fell almost continuously.

Women learning to write as part of the literacy campaign, using the new Russian alphabet, imposed in the late 1920s

In 1928, the number of women listed as 'workers–employees' had been 2,795,000. By 1939, this had risen to just over 13 million. By 1933, women made up 33% of the industrial workforce, rising to 43% by 1940.

Despite the emphasis on family life during the 1930s, women of all ages continued to work. There were many women 'hero-workers' in the Stakhanovite movement, though in a smaller proportion than men; by 1936, a quarter of all female trade unionists were classified as workers who had exceeded their production targets. However, access to the higher administrative posts was unequal and the patriarchal tradition was still widespread in society, leaving many working women with the bulk of household chores. Despite these realities, the attitude of the Stalinist state to women was very different from that in Nazi Germany. Nazis considered women to be inferior to men and thought they should be confined mainly to domestic concerns. Communists believed in total equality between the sexes in education, employment and the law.

SOURCE C

Though women were restricted in their access to the highest jobs and had to cope with the pressures of running a household and a job, they were regarded as an integral element in the construction of the new community. Stalin's rhetorical claim in 1938 that 'Woman in our country has become a great might', if it still disguised the social reality of discrimination, it nonetheless exposed a priority very different from that of the Third Reich.

Overy, R. 2004. The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia. London, UK. Allen Lane/Penguin Books. p. 260.

What were Stalin's policies towards religion and ethnic minorities?

Religion

Under the tsars, the Russian Orthodox Church had been the national Church of the empire. As Marxists, the Bolsheviks had always seen religion and the

Churches as aspects of class-divided societies which tried to reconcile the lower classes to poverty, inequality and exploitation, and to uphold the privileges of the ruling classes. Marx described religion as 'the opium of the people.'

After the November Revolution, the Bolsheviks did not see religion as a threat – freedom of religion was allowed and churches were not closed. However, lands owned by the Churches were confiscated, and Church and state legally separated. In addition, registration of births, marriages and deaths became secular rather than religious. In 1921, the giving of religious instruction to those under 18 was banned and anti-religious campaigns were allowed. However, in 1927, the Orthodox Church was granted official recognition in return for promises to stay out of politics and to be loyal to the Soviet regime.

Then, in 1928, Stalin began a vigorous anti-religious campaign, involving the closure or confiscation of places of religious worship. Church bells were melted down into scrap metal for use in the new blast furnaces. By the time of the Nazi invasion in 1941, nearly 40,000 Christian churches and 25,000 Muslim mosques had been closed down and converted into schools, cinemas, clubs, warehouses and grain stores, or Museums of Scientific Atheism.

In 1929, worship was restricted to 'registered congregations', and the 1936 Constitution made pro-religious propaganda (such as study groups and Bible circles) a crime. This particularly hit the various Protestant sects, especially evangelical groups such as the Baptists, many of which were seen as having links to religious groups abroad. In 1930, Church leaders were banned from conducting religious services – those who resisted were arrested and imprisoned. Many thousands of Church leaders and priests were sent to the Gulag, or even killed. In 1932, a new 'uninterrupted work week' was introduced, partly to prevent church attendance.

The anti-religion drive spread to cover Buddhism and the Armenian and Georgian Churches, as well as Islam. In the Islamic republics of the USSR, **Sharia courts** were abolished; the frequency of ritual prayers, fasts and feasts (which interfered with the working day) was reduced; Muslim women were granted equality and wearing the veil was forbidden. In 1935, pilgrimages to Mecca were made illegal.

However, religious belief and worship persisted – the 1937 census showed that 57% of the population still defined themselves as believers.

Stalin's attitude to religion was variable. In the 1936 Constitution, priests regained the right to vote (which they had lost in 1918); in 1937, while the central authority of the Orthodox Church was recognised, 50 bishops were imprisoned or shot for counter-revolutionary activities. Then, during the Second World War, Stalin removed many restrictions on the Orthodox Church. In 1943, the post of patriarch or head of the Russian Orthodox Church (which had disappeared in 1925) was re-established as part of the new Soviet patriotism.

Stalin also allowed the re-opening of churches – by 1947, about 20,000 existed, along with 67 monastic houses. Although it had some aspects of a state–Church concordat, this accommodation had its limits. In 1944, Stalin revived anti-religious propaganda once a Soviet victory seemed certain. While Orthodox priests and congregations were still kept under observation, Protestants and Catholics continued to suffer more severe persecution, especially in Ukraine and the Baltic republics re-annexed in 1940.

Fact
In 1923, the League of the Godless (known as the League of Militant Atheists from 1929) was set up to turn people against all religion. By 1933, it had over 5.5 million members.

Fact
The 1936 Constitution was often known as the Stalin Constitution. It claimed the Soviet Union was socialist and listed various individual rights, but political freedoms were not honoured.

Sharia courts These are the courts that apply Sharia law in most Muslim societies, based on a combination of sources, including the Qu'ran, the teachings of Mohammed and rulings by Islamic scholars. The Bolsheviks were mainly opposed to this as they saw Sharia law as oppressing women.

A front cover of Bezbozhnik *('The Godless'), an anti-religious magazine published in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s; it shows the Church and religion keeping the Russian people in superstition and ignorance*

Great Russian chauvinism This term refers to a form of nationalism associated with Imperial Russia, whereby the non-European parts of the empire were forced to adopt European Russian language and culture. After 1917, Stalin increasingly took this approach – leading to a clash with Lenin over the 'national question', shortly before he died.

Ethnic minorities

Tsarist Russia had been a multi-national empire, with Slavonic groups in the western and central European parts and mainly Muslim and Asiatic groups in the central and eastern areas. After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks campaigned against Slav and **Great Russian chauvinism**. Native languages were tolerated and even encouraged through literacy campaigns, and a degree of self-determination was allowed. The early Communist Party allowed all the major nationalities – including Soviet Jews – to have separate party sections.

However, this changed in the 1930s under Stalin. Once he had decided on his 'revolution', Stalin's desire for central control led to greater assimilation of the various national groups, in order to achieve a 'Soviet' identity. Many historians see Stalin's policies as those of a Great Russian nationalist. For example, Russification of education was accompanied during the 1930s and 1940s by a clear policy of equating Soviet patriotism with Great Russian nationalism. Russian became the official language.

By 1936, Stalin had divided central Asia into five separate republics, in order to weaken any pan-Turkic loyalties (many Turkic people wanted to join together in one state). According to Ward, a semi-colonial relationship developed between Moscow and these republics. According to some Soviet calculations published under Gorbachev in the late 1980s, almost 3.3 million non-Russians were deported to special settlements in the 1930s and 1940s, while a vigorous policy against Soviet Jews was also followed.

However, Richard Overy states that Stalin was not a Russian nationalist, suggesting that his policies were political and strategic rather than ethnic or racial. In the face of growing threats from Japan and Nazi Germany, Stalin was trying to construct a Soviet patriotism to unite all nationalities in a common commitment to building socialism and defending the Soviet 'motherland'. Stalin's actions were directed against what he saw as a reactionary nationalism (i.e. anti-socialist and anti-Soviet). Many of the resettlements were due to the fear – and later the results – of war. For example, national groups living on the Soviet borders were moved if they shared ethnic origins with potential enemies.

Immediately after the Second World War, there were more violent measures against ethnic groups accused of collaborating with the Nazi invaders. Thousands were imprisoned or resettled in areas far from their original homes. However, this declined after 1945.

Jews

Before 1917, there were 5 million Jews in Russia. They suffered considerable persecution under the tsars. As a result of this persecution, Russian Jews were the first to develop **Zionism**.

In 1917, all anti-Semitic laws were abolished. Many of the early Bolshevik leaders (such as Trotsky) were Jews themselves. However, in common with their attitudes to the Christian and Islamic religions, the Bolsheviks had opposed the activities of Jewish religious leaders and Zionists. Hence, Yiddish was an acceptable language; Hebrew – because of its religious connotations – was not.

Under Stalin, between 1926 and 1931, the number of Jewish workers in industry more than doubled and, by 1939, 77% of Jewish workers were wage earners in industry and offices. Thus hopes for rapid and full integration and assimiliation were high. Nonetheless, anti-Jewish prejudices began to re-emerge in some sections of the population – especially in rural areas – in the campaigns against 'subversives' and 'saboteurs' during the purges. However, it is important to note that the Jews arrested in the 1930s were arrested – like Russians and other non-Russians – as suspected counter-revolutionaries or reactionary nationalists, rather than as Jews. In fact, in the Gulag population of the late 1930s, Jews were actually under-represented.

Zionism This term refers to a movement for the re-establishment of a Jewish nation. Because of persecution throughout Europe, a minority of Jewish leaders during the 19th century came to believe that Jews should have their own state. At first, these Zionists considered several possible locations, including parts of Africa and Latin America; eventually, they decided on Palestine. Between 1881 and 1891, over 10,000 Jews from all over the world settled there. Soviet Jews supporting Zionism were seen as disloyal.

In 1926, Soviet Jews were granted a special 'national homeland' settlement in part of the far eastern region; in 1934, this became an autonomous republic – but only about 50,000 settled there. In 1939–40, the USSR gained an extra 2 million Jews by incorporating the east of Poland and the Baltic republics – Zionism was especially strong in these areas. This, and the Nazi invasion of 1941, led to strong campaigns against Zionism – thousands of rabbis and community leaders were arrested.

Those Soviet Jews who survived the Nazi death squads and were part of the intelligentsia suffered from some persecution after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. They were called 'Zionists' and 'rootless cosmopolitans', and emigration to Israel was banned. Following accusations that Jewish doctors in the Kremlin were planning a coup, several Jewish academic and cultural figures were sacked from positions of responsibility and several were arrested. Rumours began to circulate that Stalin intended to deport all Jews to the 'national homeland' in the far east of the USSR. Just before the 'unmasking' of the so-called Doctors' Plot, 26 were executed. This persecution ended with the death of Stalin in 1953 – although discrimination against Zionists continued because of their alleged links to and support for Israel.

Fact
That Stalin's regime kept racism in check is illustrated by the thousands of Ukrainians who, once removed from Soviet control after the Nazi invasion, eagerly co-operated with the SS and participated in the round-up and murder of Ukrainian Jews.

However, such policies were essentially anti-Zionist rather than anti-Semitic as far as Stalin and the rest of the government were concerned. Racism and anti-Semitism clearly existed against Jews and between other ethnic groups, but the Soviet state was strongly against all forms of overt or violent racial discrimination. Communists – unlike the Nazi Party in Germany – believed all races were equal and welcomed inter-marriage as a way of assimilating the different national and ethnic groups. Hence those policies that affected many Jews under Stalin were politically, not biologically, motivated, and were not intended to be genocidal.

What impact did Stalinism have on education, young people and the arts?

Education

One aspect of the crusade against religion was the spread of state education. The early Bolsheviks realised that an educated workforce was vital if they were to create a modern socialist industrial society – education was thus seen as a priority in providing the skilled workers needed for industrial and technological expansion. Mass provision of primary education – with equal opportunity for all – had been their first aim, in order to overcome the high illiteracy rate that was inherited from tsarist Russia. Education was made free, comprehensive and co-educational. At first, the Commissariat of the Enlightenment, which organised education, tried to encourage individuality and creativity; there was little political restriction on work in science and the arts; and physical punishment was banned.

Under Stalin, the provision of secondary and higher education expanded. In 1927, the 15th Party Congress greatly increased expenditure on education. As a result, primary and secondary schooling grew immensely – from 7.9 million students in 118,558 schools to 9.7 million in 166,275 schools by 1933. By 1939, illiteracy had been almost eradicated: 94% of those aged 9–49 in towns could

read and write; in rural areas, the figure was 86%. The proportion of working-class students in higher technical education doubled after 1928 to about 62% as a result of a class-quota system that operated until 1935; thereafter, the percentage dropped to about 45%. However, this was still a marked improvement on pre-1917 Russia.

Young people

From the beginning, the early communists wanted to influence and recruit young people. In 1918, they formed a communist youth organisation. At first this was radical and, unlike Nazi youth organisations (see pages 101–02), largely independent of the adult party. Age of entry was 15 (reduced to 14 in 1949) and membership continued until 21. However, membership was not compulsory. Again unlike the Nazi youth movements, entry was closely controlled: youths had to be sponsored by an adult communist. In the 1920s, a junior organisation was set up for those aged 10 to 15: this was known as the Pioneers. By the 1940s, most children of school age belonged to this organisation.

During the power struggle in the 1920s, the radicalism and independence of the youth movement was ended, as many sections tended to support Trotsky and the Opposition. In 1926, it became the Communist Union of Youth (or **Komsomol**). In 1939, it was directly affiliated to the party. Membership rose quickly from 4 million to 9 million by 1939, and to 16 million by the time of Stalin's death in 1953.

Komsomol This is the Communist Union of Youth, set up for young people aged 18–28. It provided volunteers for various party programmes and policies, and also assisted the police and the Red Army. Many went on to join the Communist Party as full members.

As in Nazi Germany, there was a militaristic element to some Komsomol activities, with an emphasis on national service, but unlike in Nazi Germany, this included girls as well as boys. In fact, all students in universities, higher and middle schools had to do some military training.

Stalin's main aim concerning young people was to ensure that future workers would be skilled enough to play their part in Russia's industrial and scientific development. From the early 1930s, Stalin insisted that education and school life became more strict. Thus the libertarian trends of the 1920s were reversed: for example, school uniforms, report cards and test results were reintroduced, and teaching became more formal. In 1943, co-education in urban areas was replaced with single-sex schools.

Education was specifically geared to the needs of the state, as well as being designed to make all citizens educated and cultured. One aim was the creation of a new 'socialist citizen' who accepted collectivist rather than individualistic ideals. Later, as fear of war increased, nationalism was stressed in history teaching, with tsars such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great being referred to as national heroes. In order to ensure that he could control what people were taught and thought, Stalin had teachers and university lecturers arrested if they were suspected of opposing such principles.

Fact
Two examples of secret youth organisations were the Enlightened Communist Youth and the Communist Party of Youth. In 1945, the Enlightened Communist Youth claimed they were a better kind of communist, while in 1948 the unofficial Communist Party of Youth discussed political issues outside those permitted by the state.

However, as in Nazi Germany, there were examples of youth lifestyle rebellion. Mostly, such young people opted out by listening to forbidden music (especially jazz) or simply avoiding Komsomol activities. There were many small, secret youth organisations in the Soviet Union before 1941, and again after 1945. However, open political revolt was rare, and all rebels were quickly rounded up by state security.

Culture

During the early 1920s, there had been a flourishing of modern art. Lenin and Trotsky were just two of the Bolshevik leaders who supported avant-garde artists. They tended to let people write what and how they liked – provided it was not overtly 'counter-revolutionary'. However, under Stalin, state control was tightened – all writers had to belong to the Union of Soviet Writers and to write about aspects deemed compatible with 'socialist realism'. If you were not a member, your works would not be published. This affected newspapers, magazines, novels, poems and plays – all of which had to show support of Stalin, the Communist Party and Soviet Russia, and to praise ordinary workers, or show peasants as happy with their lives on the new collective farms. As the 1930s progressed, and fears of war increased, nationalism became another theme that writers and artists were expected to portray favourably.

These controls applied to all creative artists – including musicians, film makers, painters and sculptors. All works of art had to show the progress and successes achieved under Stalin and communism. Those that didn't were censored, and many artists were denied work opportunities, or ended up in the labour camps of the Gulag.

End of unit activities

1 Carry out some research into the economic and human impact of Stalin's agricultural policies. Then write a couple of paragraphs to summarise the different estimates of the number of deaths resulting from forced collectivisation, and list the ways in which different historians have disputed the various calculations.

2 In pairs, carry out further research into the role and status of women in Stalin's Russia. Then present your findings in the form of two charts – one to show how the lives of women improved during his rule, and another to highlight the ways in which women experienced a worse life than during the early 1920s.

3 Find out more about the experiences of religious groups in the period 1928–41. Then draw up a list of the main religious groups, giving details of their treatment, and highlighting any similarities and differences. Finally, make an assessment of the success of Stalin's policies against religion.

4 Carry out an investigation into the ways in which ethnic and national minorities were treated under Stalin. Then produce *two* arguments – one for and one against – the proposition that 'The Stalinist state was not a racist state'.

Theory of knowledge

History and science

What are the similarities and differences between the methods used by historians and scientists to establish the 'truth'? Is scientific knowledge always more 'objective' than historical knowledge?