

War communism and the new economic policy essay sample

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



The policies of war communism and the New Economic Policy (NEP) had a great impact on both the peasantry and the proletariat. Both policies were a desperate attempt to preserve the revolution and this greatly reflects the reasons why some groups were advantaged and why others were disadvantaged.

War communism was implemented as a result of the civil war. Historians such as Maurice Dobb, E. H. Carr, and Stephen Cohen — have interpreted war communism as a short-term expedient imposed on the Bolsheviks by the emergency demands of civil war and foreign intervention. According to this version, the system was never intended to last into normal peacetime conditions and had no special ideological significance. While this has since become “ the standard account,” several well-informed economists writing in the 1920s, such as Boris Brutzkus and Leo Pasvolsky, viewed war communism in a much more ideological light — as an attempt to realise Marx’ anti-market socialist or communist utopia. The features of war communism were that peasant land was seized and then nationalised, however the peasant’s control. As insufficient grain was reaching the cities the government introduced grain requisition, excess food was seized with Cheka support, it couldn’t be sold for a profit. Large scale businesses were nationalised without compensation; this was extended to all business with more than ten people by 1918. All private trade was abolished, and the government controlled food with ration cards and workers were paid through food rations. Workers were told when and where to work, often working up to ten hours a day, and strikes became illegal.

The impact of War Communism was great on both the peasantry and the proletariat. Most peasants were prepared to burn their crops and kill their livestock rather than hand them over to the Cheka, however the dire consequences that resulted in doing this meant that many peasants did reluctantly hand them over. As the Cheka also took the seed grain an acute shortage of food and a great famine occurred during the period 1920-1921. Peasants resented these changes and there were many great uprisings during this period of time. This included the peasant revolution led by Antanov and the Tambok region in 1921. Peasants that did not cooperate were sent to concentration camps and labour camps. The famine of 1921 caused peasants to flee urban centres in search of food. The impact on the peasants were that their livelihood was destroyed they had no way of feeding their families and hence dissatisfaction with the government grew. A wave of strikes in Pertograd demanded the abolishment of grain requisitioning, freedom for peasant to run their own farm, a Soviet based government rather than a Bolshevik based government and amnesty for political prisoners.

War communism also caused dissatisfaction within the proletariat. They were unhappy about the extremely long working hours and the punishment they received simply for being late. Industrial production declined, as raw materials were not reaching the factories. Food shortages occurred and many starving workers went to the countryside to try and find food. Factories had to close down as raw materials and fuel was not reaching them. The disfavour towards the government by the proletariat was shown as

membership of the proletariat to the Bolshevik party greatly declined during this period of time. The great number of illegal strikes and demonstrations caused Lenin to rethink his policy of war communism in order to preserve the revolution.

The solution to War Communism was done through the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP partly reintroduced capitalism as it was a return to small industries. The NEP abolished requisitioning, concessions were given to the Kulaks, who were allowed to sell their surplus after paying a tax, who could rent land for limited periods of time, hire labour for cultivation and choose what they grew. It was a limited return to the cash economy with cash given rather than the ticketing system in place and private ownership of factories were allowed. Small business owners (Nepman) could purchase raw materials and sell their products but the state still had control of large scale heavy industries within its central planning regime. Lenin was quick to recognise that the peasants were very important stating that " Only the agreement with peasants can save the socialist revolution in Russia" hence the policy seemed to benefit the peasants more than the proletariat, whose lives the revolution was supposed to benefit.

When firstly introduced in 1921 the NEP had no impact on the peasants as it was introduced too late for the 1921 sowing and severe droughts ruined crops in Central Russia and Volga area. This led to the great famine of 1921. However in the period 1922-1923 the harvests were so good, largely due to corn seedlings from the USA, that Russia was able to export a small amount of grain. With the new conditions peasants were able to diversify and

produce vegetables and fruits. As a result of this the peasants' standard of living began to improve. However agriculture still remained primitive and inefficient as peasants did not have the capital for investment, and peasants had a tendency to hoard food until prices were higher. This meant that although initial successes had been gained by 1926 production levels were only equal to that of 1913. Hence the NEP had initial positive impacts on the peasants, however this was not so with the proletariat.

Large industry was much slower to recover from the detrimental effects of war communism as was the proletariat, who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the October Revolution. Although major industries were owned by the government, 'Red Mangers' (former factory managers) were employed to run nationalised industries. They were often brutal and caused hostility by the proletariat towards the government, as their methods seemed to be a reversal for what the revolution stood for. With demobilisation there was a surplus of labour in town which caused unemployment and low wages at a time of rising agricultural prices. Industrial prices remained low so there was little profit and consequently little investment to expand industry. In the early years the proletariat questioned the NEP more and more and they suffered while the peasantry prospered. The proletariat saw it as the "New Exploitation of the Proletariat".

In conclusion both War Communism and the NEP had a great impact on the lives and livelihood of both the peasantry and the proletariat as described above. Whilst the NEP caused a refreshing new outlook to the peasantry

after the suffering under War Communism this was not so for the proletariat. Both policies were implemented to preserve the revolution and although the initial revolution was to benefit the proletariat, the preservation of the revolution benefited the peasants.