

# Collectivisation essay sample



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Collectivisation is the policy of creating larger agricultural units where the peasants would farm collectively rather than on individual farms.

It was a policy, which had fundamental consequences for the rural population of the Soviet Union.

What were the reasons for collectivisation?

The NEP left agriculture largely unchanged since the revolution of 1917. By 1928 agriculture in the Soviet Union was still run largely on an individual basis by peasant households under the supervision of the MIR.

MIR- an organisation made of village elders that controlled agricultural life in the villages. Since the revolution it had become a genuine peasant body but the Communist Party found it difficult to influence

By 1928 economic and political forces were pushing for the abandoning of the NEP and forcing peasants into the collectivisation of farming

The link with industry

Industrial development would be possible only if it was supported by an increase in agricultural productivity. Industrialisation would lead to an increase in population of towns and cities, a population that would need to be fed by an increase in food supply. The new industries could also require some technology from abroad and the Soviet Union would therefore need a source of foreign exchange to pay for this, thus the government needed food surpluses to export in order to get foreign exchange.

In 1928 arguments arose, Stalin had become convinced that the state of agriculture and the attitudes of the peasantry were holding back industrial progress. State Procurements had been falling since 1926.

State Procurements – The amount of surplus grain, which had to be given to the government by the peasants.

The peasants became wary of growing too much food, as they knew it would be seized by the state at a low price. The problem for the government was that industrial production could be increased only if food production rose. This problem (‘scissors crisis’) provided the government with its central economic dilemma.

Scissors Crisis – the widening gap between prices for industrial goods and those for agricultural goods. The increase in prices for industrial goods meant that peasants had less incentive to grow food for a surplus.

Stalin saw the solution as a forced policy of collectivisation to raise food production.

#### Economic Factors

The creation of collective farms would create economies of scale; the larger units of farms would make the use of machinery viable and cost-effective. The use of machinery would enable food production to be increased and reduce the labour requirements of agricultural production. This would therefore release much-needed workers for the growing industrial plants.

#### Political Factors

Collectivisation would help extend socialism to the countryside. It provided the opportunity for getting rid of the Kulaks – who, eyes of the communists, hoarded food for their own consumption. This led to pressure on the government to rid the country of this capitalist class. To fail to do so would hold back the progress towards socialism.

### The Role Of Stalin In The Launching Of Collectivisation

The policy of collectivisation also allowed Stalin to rid the party leadership of the Right (those who had been in favour of NEP). Thus, the decision to collectivise, like that of the 5-year plans, was aimed at increasing his position.

Stalin and many other leading members saw collectivisation as an economical and political necessity. It would sweep away the remaining elements of capitalism. It would ensure the Soviet Union was modernised in order to defeat the threats to the revolution from both inside and outside the country.

What were the results?

The process of collectivisation involved local party officials going into villages and announcing the organisation of a collective farm (kolkhoz) and lecturing the peasants on the advantages of farming a collective.

The implementation of collectivisation led to violent opposition from a large number of peasants. Rather than hand their property to the state many kulaks set fire to their farms and slaughtered their animals. Party officials

were sometimes murdered on arrival in the villages. Dekulakisation squads were used to help, forcefully, organise collectives.

Dekulakisation squad – loyal party members sent into countryside to force peasants into collectives. In practice Dekulakisation covered a range of methods for eliminating the kulaks, including murder.

The OGPU – Secret police were also used to round up kulaks that refused to co-operate. They (kulaks) were deported to remote regions of the USSR, often to labour camps. On some occasions the Red Army brought in.

The peasant's opposition led to a temporary back down from Stalin. Some concessions were made to the peasantry. Members of the collectives could have some animals and a small garden plot of their own, but the programme of collectivisation continued to be passed. By 1932 62% had been collectivised – rising to 93% in 1937.

The effect of collectivisation was substantial. 1930 the MIR was abolished and replaced by the Kolkhoz administration members of the Communist Young Pioneers organisation used wooden watchtowers to spy on the peasants in the fields to ensure they did not steal food to feed their own families.

The total cost in lives is difficult to quantify. Historians estimate between 5-10 million.

Although the political aim of ridding Soviet society of the kulaks was achieved, the economic results of collectivisation were more mixed. The slaughtering of animals by the kulaks had a serious effect on livestock

numbers – 50% reduction in the cattle. The consequence of this was a shortage of meat and milk. Grain production also fell – 73.3 million tonnes – 67.6 million.

The aim of producing enough food to feed the towns and Red Army was achieved but only by taking much-needed supplies from the countryside. The result was a widespread famine 1932-33 (particularly affected Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Caucasus)

The government officially denied any existence of famine; a claim supported by foreign visitors but they had been escorted to model collectives well away from the famine areas.

The economic failure of collectivisation was partly due to inadequate planning and chaotic implementation of the policy. The collectives were too large and suffered from too much central control – with party officials in Moscow giving orders to collectives which took little account of conditions on the ground.

The divide between town and countryside was deepened by collectivisation.

#### The Tragedy Of Collectivisation

1. There were 120 million people were affected by collectivisation.
2. 25 Million holding were consolidated.
3. There were 240,000 state controlled collectives set up in the first few months of 1933.

4. According to Robert Conquest the human toll was “ higher than the total deaths for all countries in World War 1”

5. By living Standards, Russia was not ready for mass collectivisation, as he had argued that there would be a need for 100, 000 tractors and cultural development in the peasantry and in 1927 there was only 28. 000 tractors and illiteracy was 70% to 85%.

6. The peasantry made up 80% of the population. The communist Party had to work grip on the countryside and therefore a weak grip on the majority of the population. They system of small individual farms gave way for class divisions; collectivisation would bring the peasant much closer to socialism. The peasants could farm enough grain to feed the cities, the yield surplus workers and still have enough to export to generate capital for industries – if they were moved into mechanised agriculture. Therefore it was natural to see the peasantry as a force against modernisation.

7. Grain was need for export for economic reasons – to boast the Soviet Union’s economy. I. e. for the foreign currency. But peasants didn’t want to give away their grain, as market prices were low. By early 1929 USSR were forced to import grain and introduce bread rationing.

8. Molotov illustrates the fear of foreign invasion was why the policy of collectivisation was introduced, as he said. “ The imperialists have not so far decided to attack us directly”, therefore, “ we must utilise this moment for a decisive advance”. Thus collectivisation provided a ready solution to both short-term and long-term economic problems of the countryside.

9. It was the poorest peasants who volunteered to go into collectives as they had least to lose.

10. Stalin justified his decision to ‘liquidate the kulaks’ by arguing that he found the authority to do it in the Lenin of “War Communism” that Lenin who called the Kulak, “bloodsuckers, vampires, robbers of the people”.

11. By saying the term Kulak was elastic means that it could be applied to any peasant resisting collectivisation, as a Kulak class barely existed by the late 1920’s.

12. Historians J. Arch Getty and Lynne Vola are insistent that the social upheavals were not simply imposed from above, but that Stalin’s plans found clear resonance ‘below’, in the party and in Society.

13. Tractors, kerosene, salt, matches and soap were all promised to the peasants if they joined the Kolkhoz.

14. Right deviationists were the term used to describe peasants who didn’t work enough.

15. Between Jan and March 1930 the number of collectivised households raised from 4.4 Million to 14.2 Million.

16. OGPU and the Red Army were called in if active resistance flared up. They caused mass shootings, arrests and deportations seen followed.

17. The mass slaughter of livestock took place by the peasants to show resistance to the collectivisation. In five years, 46% of cattle, 47% of the horses and 65% of the sheep were lost.



18. The purpose of the article ‘ Dizzy with success’ was to clear Stalin from what had happened in the countryside. Stalin blamed the recent excesses on party activists and restated that collectivisation must be voluntary.

19. By the end of 1934 90% of the town acreage of the USSR was collectivised.

20. The MTS – Machine Tractor Stations – were established in order to provide tractors, but its main significance was political. It was a proletarian bastion in the countryside, staffed by workers including the ‘ political department’ of the OGPU.

21. The peasants were denied internal passports as the Government wanted/needed them to stay in the countryside to produce food for the country.

22. The increase in procurements from 18. 2 million to 27. 5 million was not due to improved efficiency but at the expense of peasant living standards as harvests had actually declined.

23. The ‘ five stalks law’ were passed by Stalin whereby stealing of any Kolkhoz property was punishable by a minimum of ten years imprisonment with no amnesty and a maximum penalty of death by shooting.

24. By saying the famine was ‘ a deliberate instrument of policy’ it is suggesting that a famine was created to show the peasants, “ who is master here”.

25. 7 million were said to have died due to the famine, but that was only half of the final human cost of the collectivisation campaign.

26. An estimate of 6.5 million died in the extermination of the kulaks.

27. The historian Alec Nove explains Stalin's actions were, 'necessary'. None argued that, given the Tsarist inheritance and party ideology, it is difficult to conceive that there were viable alternatives to the path Stalin took.

28. James R. Millar does not agree with Nove's view saying the grain crisis was resolvable and called collectivisation an 'economic policy disaster'.