

Examine the impact  
of policy changes of  
1921 on the  
development of the  
soviet sta...



During the years of 1917 up to 1924, Lenin and his Bolshevik party consolidated power and authority of the Russian Soviet state and introduced and removed policy changes which affected the state and had a impact on the development of the economy, society and political aspects of Russia.

The Bolsheviks faced major opposition when they came to power, but with power being concentrated in Petrograd and Moscow, the rest of the country would have to be won over. The war was still being waged and arrangements for an armistice would have to be made. With political opponents of the Bolsheviks on the loose, civil war seemed imminent and eventually took place in 1918, lasting three years up to 1921 where the major New Economic Policy and the Ban on factionalism were introduced.

These policy changes were needed to consolidate power for the Bolsheviks, but to also accommodate the social and economic needs of the people in Russia because the entire state machinery was collapsing.

The initial actions from the Bolsheviks were the decrees on land, peace and on nationalities. The decree on land benefited the peasants and also saw the introduction of all industries, banks, transport and communication systems being taken over by the state. The decree on peace led to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk- a severe peace and the decree on nationalities which allowed the right of self Government to any national group. The Red Army was created which became very important in the victory of the Civil war. Leading Kadets were arrested and opposition newspapers were closed down. Many of the policies reduced opposition to the Bolsheviks, however the Socialist

Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, civil servants, workers and peasants were still evident and present within the Russia state.

Lenin's objective had ever been the win mass support but to create a party capable of seizing power when the political situation permitted. The fear of opposition groups increased when Lenin allowed elections to go ahead in January 1918 and the outcomes were not favourable for the Bolsheviks. They won only 25% of the seats with 177 votes and the Socialist Revolutionaries huge 410 votes. Lenin simply forcibly closed the constituent assembly in which a Sovnarkom directive authorised this. The next day Lenin's response was ruthless, as he sent the Red Guards in and they dissolved the assembly with an "act of violence."

Dissolution provoked opposition from other socialist groups and Russia was still at war with Germany.

On the 7th December 1917, the CHEKA(secret police) was set up and proved to be an effective mechanism in dealing with opposition and after the closure of the constituent assembly, repression intensified and the CHEKA was beginning its reign of terror and by the end of 1924, over 400, 000 people were killed.

The treaty of Brest-Litovsk took place in 1918 to discuss the war with Germany. Lenin wanted an immediate peace and Trotsky anted a delay. He copied the slogan of "No peace, no war" and in the Polish town where they met to discuss peace terms. Trotsky embarrassed and annoyed he German delegation. Russia needed to pay 3 million roubles in war reparations, but

Lenin's argument at the treaty was a powerful one and in the end gained a  
<https://assignbuster.com/examine-the-impact-of-policy-changes-of-1921-on-the-development-of-the-soviet-state-by-1924-essay-sample/>

majority of one in a crucial committee division as he insisted party loyalty. The terms of the treaty horrified patriotic Russian's and caused a split in the Bolshevik party and caused the left Socialist Revolutionaries to withdraw from the Government. Lenin had strengthened his hold over the party and was interested in a dictatorship only.

People were angry and opposition as well as the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty made Civil war happen in the years of Summer 1918 up to 1921, and there were efforts from several disparate groups to overthrow Bolshevism. The Civil war was not just a matter of the Bolsheviks (the reds) in which Trotsky was war commissioner against their political enemies, the whites who were liberals, former tsarists, Socialist Revolutionaries, nationalists, separatists and other moderate socialists along with the greens who were a peasant army, but from the start the Civil war was a more complex affair. The Bolsheviks presented it as class war but it was never simply this as most of the leading Bolsheviks were non-Russian.

By June 1918, a "white" army of over 9, 000 had been assembled. On occasion the fighting was simply a desperate struggle for food as famine provided the backdrop for the Civil war. The dislocation of the supplies that had occurred during war against Russia persisted and until this was remedied, areas of Russia remained in desperate economic plight. The failure of the new regime to end hunger was an important factor in creating the military opposition to the Bolsheviks in 1918.

In addition to the problems of a fractured transport system, Lenin's Government was faced with the loss to Germany of Russia's main wheat

supply area, the Ukraine which resulted in Petrograd's bread ration reaching its lowest ever allocation of 50 grams per day.

Workforces were shrinking due to hunger and overall population declined from three to two million, and the Bolsheviks control over the workers had decreased. Russia's former allies in the war sent troops to Russia in an attempt to re-open the Eastern front and forestall world revolution!

The Bolsheviks, for security reasons replaced Petrograd with Moscow as the capital of Soviet Russia but this eventually failed and their terrorism came closer to success.

Lenin narrowly survived two attempts on his life in July and August and the murder of the Tsar and his family happened in May 1918 which the Bolsheviks ordered. Fighting took place along ill-defined fronts across Russia and the fights were bitter and ferocious in which millions died.

The Red Army was extremely effective and wiped out threats in June 1919 from Kharkov in the North-East and the Summer of 1918 where Denikin and Kornilov's attack on the South was wiped out. Trotsky had a military army that was disciplined and effective. Peasants were fighting for the Bolsheviks as they gave the peasants land and victory over the Whites.

The most dangerous of the green armies was Makhno's Insurgent Army, which successfully used guerrilla warfare against the Whites and the Reds. There were major peasant uprisings happening but the CHEKA roamed there way into villages and the countryside to remove any opposition violence.

Foreign Interventions offered large amounts of money and military supplies to Russia, in return for a firm commitment from the Provisional Government to continue the war against Russia, however it appeared to the Bolsheviks that Britain and its allies views were intent on destroying them.

The Civil war was a movement largely dictated by the layout of Russia's railway system. It was because the Bolsheviks were largely successful in their desperate fight to maintain in control of the railways that they were able to fight to keep themselves supplied. The reasons for the final victory of the Red's in the Civil war are not difficult to determine. The various white armies fought as separate detachments, as they were not bound together by a single aim. This allowed the Red's to pick of the White armies separately who lacked unity and coordination. The Bolsheviks controlled the central industrial and infrastructure rich area of Russia, and the Reds were strong with great advantage of railways. No white leader emerged of the stature of Trotsky or Lenin around whom an effective anti-Bolshevik could unite.

The policy of " War Communism" helped the cause of the Reds at Civil War and was the term applied to Bolshevik economy policy between 1917 and 1921. The Communist regime instituted there series of drastic economic measures to sustain the war effort in the years of the Civil war, and Lenin abruptly abandoned state capitalism. The main features of War Communism was the ruthless policy of requisitioning of grain from the peasantry to ensure that industrial workers and the Red Army were fed. Private trade was banned although there was a " black" Markey going on as well as a nationalised industry. There was strict labour discipline and rationing was all having an effect on the Russian society.

<https://assignbuster.com/examine-the-impact-of-policy-changes-of-1921-on-the-development-of-the-soviet-state-by-1924-essay-sample/>

Every aspect of life, social, political and economical had to be subordinated to the task of winning the Civil war. The industry was collapsing due to the policy of War Communism, the economy was in ruins, cities were depopulating, strikes were happening due to famine, especially in 1920-21 where 5 million died in the countryside and at this was all accompanied by the Civil war. CHEKA detachments were sent into the countryside to requisition grain by force and the CHEKA were armed therefore the countryside was terrorised.

Harvests of 1920 and 1921 produced less than half the 1913 harvest and even the Pravda stated that 20% of the population was starving.

War Communism was failing economically and there was an industrial collapse. In July 1918 the decree on nationalisation was put into place which meant the state took over the industries. Production collapsed in all key areas and the mining, coal, metal, and cotton output was failing. The transport system was on the verge of collapse and there was a rapid urban depopulation due to food shortages. These led to food demonstrations which had to be broken up by the CHEKA.

The rural unrest of the country was in turmoil, millions died in the 1920-21 famine and even cannibalism was happening. There was widespread hostility to “ War Communism” and there were open revolts against Bolshevik rule, however this policy contributed to a military success in helping the Reds win the Civil War. Lenin held on to Communism so they defeated the White army. The intensity of repression led to more resentment and unrest.

As rural and urban discontent grew, a general disillusionment with Bolshevik rule was setting in. The policy of War Communism had benefited the Bolsheviks by winning the Civil war but the Soviet state had developed into a failure. Economic liberalisation and a relaxation of Communist control over the economy was needed and Lenin considered possible alternatives.

By 1921, there were expressions of anti-Bolshevik feeling expressed in uprisings. In 1921 February, there were 118 separate peasant uprisings, the most serious in Tambov. The mood of the peasants had turned to apathy to resentment and open opposition due to grain requisitioning and resentment of “ War Communism” policy. This led to a peasant force of 40, 000 led by Antonov waging guerrilla warfare against the Bolsheviks and the Red Army. The Soviet power and control was collapsing and there were no go areas for the Bolsheviks. The Red Army responded through brutality and repression. Russia was close to paralysis with food crisis in towns and peasant violence. Lenin would have to consider concessions as some kind of policy to suit the peasants as they were a main threat to the Communist Government.

This was followed by the Kronstadt Rising in March 1921 where 10, 000 sailors of the Baltic fleet at Kronstadt mutinied in support of strikers in Petrograd. The mutiny lasted for two weeks but was eventually suppressed by 50, 000 Red Army troops. This was highly embarrassing for the Bolsheviks at a time where they had won the Civil War, however Lenin saw the desperate economic circumstances and concessions were needed in order to consolidate Bolshevik control.



At the tenth party conference of the Communist party, which opened in March 1921, Lenin declared that the Kronstadt rising had “ lit up reality like a lightning flash.”

At this tenth party conference, representatives of Bolsheviks met and made policy changes that were published in Pravda (Bolshevik newspaper.) The introduction of the “ New Economic Policy,” a move to lessen opposition to Bolshevism and was big retreat to capitalism. War Communism had failed on an economic and political level. Lenin accepted the need to abandon the ineffective method of coercion and needed to replace grain requisitioning with a system which would increase food production and reduce the animosity of the masses. Lenin judged, if the peasants could not be forced, they must be persuaded.

The features of the New Economic Policy liberalised the economy and Lenin said this was a temporary retreat to capitalism. Grain requisitioning was abolished and replaced with a ‘ tax in kind.’ This meant peasants had to hand over a fixed proportion of their grain to the state and any surplus left could be sold for profit on the open market. Another feature was the ban on private trade being removed and meant foods and goods could flow more easily with private shops being allowed to open again. Rationing was abolished and the market economy was restored. Small scale businesses were allowed to re-open and make a profit and the state kept control of large scale industries like coal, steel and oil.

The New Economic Policy re-introduced the idea of a mixed economy-capitalist features alongside socialism. Trotsky and Preobrazhensky saw War Communism as the proper revolutionary strategy against the peasants.

In comparison to the policy of War Communism the New Economic Policy had a great economic, social and political impact on the Soviet state. The New Economic Policy helped the state develop economically and in 1923, cereal production increased by 23% between 1920 and 1923. Factory output rose 200% as it had virtually started with nothing and as a result, distribution systems were running again, especially the railway system. Although large scale industry was a bit slower, by 1924 the economy of the Soviet state was on the verge of recovery and was a definite improvement. Peasants were working independently, making profit in a capitalist market.

The state also developed socially with the re-emergence of the Kulak farmers who were prosperous and commercially minded peasants. There was also a new group emerging in society called the “NEPmen” who thrived on the New Economic Policy and were taking advantage of the policy by making links between the town and the countryside. Lenin knew this would be a consequence and by 1923, “NEPmen” handled  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the retail trade. The Communists were not happy with them, however restaurants, huge markets and luxuries were in society again. There was the problem of the increasing amount of prostitution, gambling and crime, however workers wages increased from 10 roubles a week in 1921 to 25. 2 trouble in 1925, with unemployment still being high.

The New Economic Policy also politically stabilised Russia and squashed opposition as the Tambov and Kronstadt risings were crushed. However the opposition within the party from 'workers opposition' and the 'democratic centralists' was crushed and the Politburo had too much control with 8-9 members being from the Communist party.

The Bolsheviks had no intention of letting the limited capitalism of the New Economic Policy develop into a full-scale restoration of capitalism, but repression followed.

Censorship became more systematic and writings had to be submitted to an administration before they could be published. There was also an attack on political rivals, as the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had become more popular during the strikes and revolts, therefore the Bolsheviks used this as an excuse to arrest some 5,000 Mensheviks for counter-revolutionary activities. This developed Russia into a one party state and show trials were making its appearance resulting in eleven executions. The crushing of peasant revolts saw harsh Government brutality from the Red Army troops in Tambov. The CHEKA whom had a bad name from the peasants were renamed the GPU in 1922. The attacks on the church saw priests imprisoned and death penalties due to communism not having an idea on the church.

As well as the New Economic Policy being accompanied by this 'stick' of political repression, Lenin introduced the policy of a Ban on Factionalism which tightened party discipline as it got rid of any opposition left and no-one could oppose party policies once decided. This Ban on Factions was a

result of the New Economic Policy but was a policy itself that saw Lenin purge 120, 000 party members because their loyalty was doubted.

By 1924 Bolshevik power had been consolidated and the Communist state developed into a centralised one party dictatorship, with no challenges to its power. This was the result of the New Economic Policy and the Ban on Factionalism. It could be argued that Bolshevik policy far from being a matter of structured economic planning, was never anything more than a set of fragmented responses to a series of desperate situations, however the policy did had a successful economic, social, and political impact on the state.

Lenin was chairman of the Sovnarkom and also a member of the Politburo which meant Lenin's ideas would have to be put through! The policy of War Communism did its job in having a great effect on the civil war resulting in victory, but the New Economic Policy and the Ban on Factionalism gave the Communist party overall strength and authority as well as having a positive impact on the development of the Soviet state.