

The NEP, Lenin: Red Tyrant/Great Hero, Emergence of Stalin

The New Economic Policy 1921

Task: To read through the following text as a class (supplemented by the text book), and then write the answers to the questions in our exercise books.

So, the Communists were victorious, but the Kronstadt rising, political opposition and the economic crisis in Russia meant that Lenin had to scrap War Communism. To avoid disaster, a real change of policy was needed, something a lot less harsh than that in place during the war. To counter the food shortages and the forced seizures of grain that had in part caused the March 1921 naval mutiny, two things needed to happen. Firstly, the peasants had to be given an incentive to produce more food, and secondly, they were going to have to be persuaded to release this produce for sale. How was Lenin going to do this? Really, this was only going to be achieved if state control was relaxed and the peasants were allowed to make a profit on what they produced. So, in March 1921, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy.

1. *These measures meant that which type of economic system was being reintroduced into Russia?*
2. *How do you think the communists felt about this and why?*

So, once peasants and shopkeepers could work for a profit, goods appeared for sale. New small businesses and market stalls sprang up in the towns. A new class of profiteers emerged who did very well out the new freedom to trade. They became known as the NEP men. Capitalism had started to make a comeback then, but although the profiteers, peasants and shopkeepers were happy, many workers who had supported the revolution thought that the NEP was a betrayal of their values. Lenin, although suffering bitter opposition, saw it as the only way to get Russia back on track, his Communism and further plans would have to wait a little while longer...

3. *What happened to production in Russia under the NEP?
Be specific about where the recovery occurred and how it was received.*

The NEP was only going to be a temporary measure. The Russian government would soon regain more control again once it was more secure.

In some ways the NEP was highly successful. Peasants and workers were happier and produced more food and goods, but their farms were small and quite inefficient. The profiteers, aka Kulaks, grew rich by selling their surplus crops at a high profit and in fact, began to get some of the less well off peasants to work for them causing a **split** in this particular group of people in society. Lenin's policy had allowed a capitalist class of peasants to develop and this meant that in future, agricultural reform was going to be much more difficult to engineer as Stalin was to discover in 1929.

Death of Lenin: Red Tyrant or Great Hero?

In March and December 1922 and in March 1923, Lenin suffered three heart attacks and on 21st January in the following year he died. For an entire week after his death, thousands of mourners queued in the freezing weather to pay their last respects. The first phase of the Communist transformation of Russia was over. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in his honour, and his remains were embalmed and housed in a specially created tomb in Moscow.

Here are five key strengths attributed to Lenin:

- His **organisation** and the **leadership** of the Bolshevik party transformed it into a success.
- He had a **pragmatic** and **realistic** approach to the problems he faced.
- He was able to '**seize the moment**' which was vital in the Bolsheviks gaining power in 1917.
- He could be **ruthless**: he set up the Cheka (Secret Police) and the Labour Camps. He also was not afraid to use force during the Kronstadt mutiny.
- He was able to **change his policies** e.g. he was able to adopt War Communism to win the Civil War, and then reverse it in the form of the NEP in order to help the economy to recover afterwards.

His contemporaries, and indeed historians since then have many differing opinions of Lenin. To some, he was a great hero in the Soviet Union: he had helped to organise the Bolshevik party and had led the successful November 1917 revolution. He had defeated the enemies of communism and had introduced several communist reforms.

But, to others, and especially Russia's political opponents like Winston Churchill, Lenin was no better than the Tsar. Under Lenin the Russian people still had to face hardship and lack of political freedom. Tyrants force their people to obey them. Did Lenin use force, or were the Russian people prepared to suffer in the cause of a fairer social system?

4.
 - a) *Do you get the impression from your notes that Lenin was a tyrant or hero?*
 - b) *Take the stance of a Russian peasant and write a few sentences describing how you feel about his death. Are you sad? Are you relieved?*

How did Stalin gain power after Lenin's death?

When Lenin died in 1924 there was a struggle for power between Stalin and Trotsky that went on for several years before Stalin emerged victorious in 1929. Stalin then wanted to modernise the Soviet Union as he feared an attack from the west and was determined that Russia would be able to resist. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union underwent another period of revolutionary turmoil and despite fierce opposition, he set up 'collectivisation' and a series of 'Five Year Plans' to improve the Soviet's industries.

Lenin was only in his mid-fifties when he died in 1924. Immediately after this, 7 members of the Politburo (the communist ruling body) ran the country between them. For the next five years they spent most of their time in a struggle to gain the leadership of the party and the government of Russia.

Members of the Politburo in 1924

Trotsky:	Commissar for War
Stalin:	Communist Party Secretary
Kamenev:	Chairman of the Politburo
Rykov:	Chairman of Sovnarkom
Zinoviev:	Chairman of Comintern (est. 1919 to help communists in other countries)
Bukharin:	responsible for propaganda
Tomksy:	responsible for Trade Unions

The two serious contenders that emerged were Leon Trotsky and Josef Stalin.

5. Draw up a short fact file or CV on each of these men side-by-side in your exercise books. Take up a whole page and try and arrange it so that you have similar 'fields' for each man together on the page: this will make comparing them easier. There is a useful green text box in the OCR book on Stalin.

As the Secretary of the Party, Stalin could affect who got important party jobs. While Trotsky had been away fighting in the Civil War, Stalin had been in Petrograd being very friendly to all the people that mattered, including Lenin. Lenin however did not like Stalin and did not think he would make a very good leader. He wrote a letter to the rest of the party when he got very ill explaining these sentiments, but the letter was never made public to the Politburo.

Stalin was a clever man and knew how important a good image was. He made sure that he had an important role at Lenin's funeral while Trotsky did not even make it on the day! Trotsky was actually in Southern Russia at this time recovering from malaria and it is said that he phoned Stalin to find out when the funeral was and Stalin gave him the wrong date!

6. Using the textbook, find out why some Communist leaders may have preferred Stalin to Trotsky.

Stalin, along with Zinoviev and Kamenev emerged quickly as strong leaders within the Politburo and together they accused Trotsky of trying to split the communist party. He was so unpopular by this time that very few of his colleagues were prepared to defend him against these charges.

So, from 1924, Trotsky lost more and more of his jobs in the party and in 1929 was exiled from the Soviet Union and was forced to live in Mexico.

Further Tasks and Questions:

1. Simply identify how Stalin managed to engineer the rest of his rise to power after getting rid of Trotsky. Look in particular at how he dismissed Zinoviev and Kamenev and moved new people into the Politburo who were loyal to him.