UNIT 29 THE SOCIALIST WORLD-II

Structure

29.0 OBJECTIVES

Thematically this Unit is in continuation with previous Unit. It takes up the story of Soviet Russia from where the last Unit left. After reading this Unit, you will learn

- the major political and economic developments in the USSR in the 1930s,
- the nature of planned industrialisation initiated from 1929 onwards,
- the essence of collectivisation of agriculture and its impact on the Russian peasantry, and
- the political factors that led to the terror and the purges of the 1930s.

29.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous Unit narrated to you the story of the Russian Revolution and the major developments in the post-revolutionary Russia. You learnt, for instance, that the period after the revolution was characterized by a phase of war communism. Around 1921 the policy of war communism was replaced by the New Economic Policy (NEP). Around 1928, the NEP gave way to a policy of planned development of industry and agriculture in Soviet Russia. This Unit tells you the story of the planned phase of Russian Economy. It starts by telling you what is meant by planned economy. It then takes up three crucial developments of the 1930s; planned industrialization in phases, collectivisation of agriculture and the purges of the 1930s. All the three influenced the history of USSR very significantly.

29.2 BACKGROUND

The comparatively brief period of rapid industrial expansion in the USSR between 1926 and 1941 did not initiate the modern industrialisation of Russia. It was preceded by the spurt associated with tsarist Finance Minister S.I. Witte in the 189Os, the boom on the eve of the

First World War, and the expansion of the armaments and engineering industries during the World War. But the pace of the inter-war development was so rapid and the scale so vast that the USSR was transformed by the end of the 1930s into a great industrial power. This laid the basis for its emergence as a super-power after recovering from the devastation of the Second World War. Soviet economic development from 1926 to 1941 also constitutes the first global attempt at comprehensive state planning and is therefore important in the history of world industrialisation.

There was no disagreement within the Soviet government that a socialist economy and society could be created only by the modernisation and expansion of industry. This would also provide the USSR, the world's only socialist country till 1949, with the means of defence in a hostile capitalist world. Nor was there any disagreement that industrialisation could not proceed without the modernisation of agriculture. Without a sustained rise in agricultural productivity, it would be impossible to provide the food needed to support an increase in the numbers and standard of living of industrial workers, to export grain in order to pay for imports for technology and machinery, and to build up reserve stocks in case of war and famine.

Marxists like the Soviet Bolsheviks had always believed in 'planning' of the economy. Marx had argued that a socialist society would be free of the arbitrary control of market forces, or the self-interested control of the capitalist class to maximise profit. Instead socialist society would control resources directly and plan production to meet the real needs of the people.

29.3 PLANNING AND INDUSTRIALISATION

The idea of a long-term plan of ten to fifteen years dates from 1920. Annual plan forecasts were drawn up as Control Figures from 1925. From 1926 various drafts of prospective five-year plans were made both by the State Planning Commission (Gosplan) and by the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh). This had a dual significance. It marked the beginning of a commitment to industrialisation and state direction of that development through a comprehensive plan. Secondly, it adopted a medium-term period to put it into operation.

By 1926, most of Soviet industry had been restored to 1913 levels of production and some industries had even exceeded that level. Thereafter, the main strands of government industrial policy were:

- rapid industrialisation in a socialist manner, and
- a pattern of industrialisation where large-scale industry manufacturing machinery would dominate the national economy.

The construction of Socialism in One Country, surrounded by a hostile capitalist world, imperatively required that Soviet industry must become 'self-sufficient', in the sense that it should not depend on the capitalist countries for any major type of product. A vital objective was to achieve and surpass the most advanced capitalist countries in a relatively minimal historical period.

This required the establishment of a capacity to produce capital-equipment, chemicals, and other advanced products which were lacking in the industry inherited from the tsarist period. Closely associated with the principle of self-sufficiency was the further requirement that Soviet industry should be based on the most advanced technology. It was also agreed that a substantial proportion of new factories should be located not in the traditional centres of modern industry in northwest and central European Russia and in the Ukraine, but in the Urals and Siberia, and in backward Central Asia. The needs of defence required the construction of iron and steel, engineering, and armaments industries in these relatively inaccessible areas of the Soviet Union.

29.3.1 The First Five Year Plan, 1929-33

Since 1928 was a successful year for industrial growth, earlier plan targets were revised upwards. In reality no one had the statistical information or the theoretical understanding to predict the workings of a whole economy. As the dominant Soviet leader Stalin became more and more impatient with the rates of growth within the market economy of the NEP, careful planning gave way to the demands of politics. Instead of a planned economy-running according to carefully formulated estimates of economically practicable targets, there appeared a 'command' economy, running according to the political orders and priorities of the government.

The first five year plan focused on iron and steel, but tractor plants also had high priority. The machine tool industry was rapidly expanded in order to free the country from dependence on machinery imports from abroad.

The Soviet leadership led by Stalin nursed certain obsessions that were detrimental to planning as a process of balanced and realistic economic growth. The first has been referred to as 'gigantomania', or the demand to build gigantic industrial complexes on a scale beyond the available resources to construct or operate. Consequently, they took longer to complete than was economical and then were constantly subject to breakdowns, or were left unfinished. This obsession with size was accompanied by an unrelenting insistence on haste, captured in the slogan, "tempos decide the whole thing." To illustrate this, the first five year plan was formally adopted in mid-1929; simultaneously backdated to October 1928, when it was retrospectively deemed to have begun; and finally declared in January 1933 to have been fulfilled, not in five, but in four and one quarter years.

Fig.1: Joseph Stalin

Plan targets were usually set in terms of volumes of production or quantitatively. The Plan gave only the vaguest indication of where the real material resources for increased production were to come from. Industry was exhorted to overfulfil the Plan rather than simply to carry it out. This Plan was not meant to allocate resources or balance demands but to drive the economy forward pell-mell. The quality of output dropped alarmingly, and there was abundant evidence of the rapid deterioration of expensive new machinery.

The First Plan had mixed results. Although everything was sacrificed for metal, the output of coal, oil, iron ore and pig iron fell short of expectation. The targets were surpassed only in machinery and metalworking, and this was partly caused by statistical manipulation. The goals for steel production were fulfilled only in 1940, for electric power in 1951, and for oil in 1955. Consumer goods, agriculture and, temporarily, military strength were sacrificed to a rapid growth in heavy industry.

The organisation of supply and distribution was possibly the most formidable task assumed by the state during the first five year plan. As it had unsuccessfully and temporarily done during the Civil War a decade earlier, the state took over almost total control of the urban economy, distribution and trade. This time the take-over lasted until the 1980s. Curtailment of private manufacturing and trade began in the late 1920s and the process gathered speed with a drive against 'NEP men' (private traders) - combining vilification in the press, legal and financial harassment, and numerous arrests of private entrepreneurs for 'speculation' - in 1928-29. By the early 1930s, even the artisans and small shopkeepers had been put out of business or forced into state-supervised co-operatives. An alternative structure of trade and distribution had not been established yet. With the simultaneous collectivisation of agriculture, the mixed economy of the NEP, combining state and private sectors, disappeared.

29.3.2 The Second Five Year Plan, 1933-37

The second five year plan was adopted in February 1934. Its three guiding principles were:

- consolidation,
- mastering techniques, and
- improving living standards.

In this plan the principle of rational planning came closer to realisation. More moderate and realistic production targets were set. In industry the watchwords were now to be raising productivity and acquiring skills.

This plan envisaged a larger increase in the output of, and investment in, consumers' goods rather than producers' goods. Urban real wages were expected to double as a result of an increase in money wages and a simultaneous fall in retail prices.

The large number of new industrial enterprises built during the second plan meant that by 1937 more than 80 per cent of all industrial products were manufactured in new or entirely reconstructed enterprises. During this plan, the heavy industrial targets were mostly met and the output of machinery and electric power rose dramatically.

The production of consumer goods, however, rose less than expected and per capita consumption of these essential items of household use in 1937 was lower than in 1928. Completed metallurgical works in Magnitogorsk, Kuznetsk, and Zaporozhye further reduced

Soviet dependence on foreign capital goods, relieved the strain on the balance of payments, and permitted repayment of earlier debts. By 1937, the basic tools of machinery and defence were being built in the USSR. During this plan there was a conscious effort to develop the more backward national republics in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, although it was not economically the best way of using scarce resources there.

29.3.3 The Results of Planned Industrialisation

In the decade after 1928, Soviet industry developed at a rate and on a scale entirely without precedent in world economic history. Industrial production in 1937 reached 446 per cent of the 1928 level according to official Soviet figures, and 249 per cent according to the most conservative Western estimate; the corresponding annual per cent rates of growth were 18 and 10.5.

On the basis of official Soviet figures, the Soviet share in world industrial production amounted to 13.7 per cent in 1937, compared to 3.7 in 1929 and 2.6 in 1913. The USSR achieved these gains while the western countries experienced a terrible depression and mass unemployment. In 1928 Soviet industrial output was comparable to that of second rank capitalist countries, such as Germany, France and Great Britain. By 1937, it was second only to the United States. By then, the Soviet Union had twice the productive power of the major European powers. Soviet industry became large-scale industry : while one-third of Soviet industrial production came from small-scale industry in 1913, by 1937 the proportion had fallen to a mere six per cent.

Major new industries were established with the assistance of substantial imports of machinery and know-how from the West. By 1937, the Soviet Union could produce in substantial quantities its own iron and steel-making and electric power equipment, tractors, combine harvesters, tanks and aircraft, as well as almost all types of machine tools; and the level of technology rose throughout industry. Labour productivity (output per person employed) increased annually on an average by six per cent, much more rapidly than in Britain or the USA at any time in the nineteenth century.

A major new industrial complex was established in the Urals and beyond, and this formed the basis of the Soviet armaments industry in the darkest period of the Second World War, when much of the European USSR was occupied by the enemy. The foundations of modern industry were also established in some of the most backward republics.

29.3.4 The Third Five Year Plan, 1938-41

The period between 1938 and 1941, when the Germans invaded the USSR, covers three and a half years of the third five year plan. The plan was interrupted by the Second World War in June 1941 and never completed. In intention it aimed at an impressive per cent increases over the five year period: 92 in industrial output, 58 in steel, 129 in machinery and engineering. Priority was once again given to heavy industry rather than consumer goods' industries.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What do you understand by planned industrialisation? Answer in five lines.

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2) How did the first two five year plans affect the Russian economy? Answer in ten lines.

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29.4 COLLECTIVISATION OF AGRICULTURE

The previous section on industrialisation has depicted the successful effort of the Soviet leadership to rapidly transform the country into an advanced industrial economy. Industrialisation, however, could not have succeeded without major changes in agriculture. In spite of substantial improvement in output after the Civil War, Soviet agriculture was more backward than that in any other major European country, in terms of both yields per hectare and labour productivity. While the state had succeeded in extending and consolidating control over the greater part of industry by nationalisation, the predominance of private peasant farms meant that production and marketing decisions in agriculture remained beyond central planning and therefore state control.

The Bolsheviks were convinced that socialised or collectivised agriculture had to be promoted against private farms of capitalist agriculture. Larger farms would be more productive because better machinery and fertilisers could be used on them. They would generate the agricultural surpluses essential for industrialisation. In addition, larger farms would even out the differences in wealth between peasant households by pooling productive resources within a single farm. It was assumed by the Bolsheviks that converting the peasants to this belief in collective or socialised agriculture would be a long and arduous process. In one of his last articles, 'On Co-operation', Lenin had argued that the government would have to gradually persuade peasants to give up their private farms and join together in collective farms. This would have to be done by providing peasants with modern equipment, credit and agronomic support.

The advanced technology that would induce the peasant to choose collectivisation was absent through the NEP. Until such time as Soviet Russia acquired tractors, most Bolsheviks believed that a number of measures preparatory to socialist agriculture had to be adopted. The peasants must be led through a series of intermediate steps from simple co-operatives for selling consumer goods, the marketing and supply of agricultural products, and credit, to production co-operatives for machinery, seed, reclamation, construction, and finally to collective farms.

During the 1920s agronomists and land-consolidation experts occasionally succeeded in persuading the households involved in the consolidation of landholdings divided into strips to set themselves up as collective farms. But such collective farms tended to be small and few. Hoping that co-operatives would inculcate collectivist habits in the peasantry, the Soviet state offered the co-operative movement easy credit, tax exemptions and priority in the delivery of scarce manufactured goods. But co-operatives too attracted small numbers of peasant households.

The spread of rural capitalism, by the differentiation of the peasantry, was worrying to the Soviet leadership. Rural capitalism would benefit a *kulak* or rich peasant at the expense of the peasantry as a whole. Differentiation occurred in three ways, namely the leasing of land; the loaning of money, draft animals, implements and machinery; and, the hiring of labour. In defining the kulak, the following criteria were adopted: the systematic employment of hired labour; the acquisition of land by purchase or lease; extensive ownership and the leasing of agricultural means of production; and, income from commercial and financial activity. But no clear or convincing definition of the kulak was ever produced.

29.4.1 The Weaknesses of NEP Agriculture

Peasant farming methods and technology under NEP had remained extremely backward. In 1927, 88 per cent of all arable land was in small peasant holdings, and less than five per cent of farms were wholly or partly enclosed. The small size and fragmentation of farms prevented modern farming methods and the use of better implements. Three-field rotation systems predominated with autumn-sown rye or wheat, spring-sown wheat or other grain, followed by

fallow; even more primitive two-field or shifting systems of cultivation were found in many areas. This resulted in the fact that one-third of land was not sown at any given time.

Improvements in technology were eagerly sought by the regime but not easily brought into practice. Almost one-quarter of peasant households in the Russian Federation had no horses or oxen in 1927 and almost one-third of them lacked ploughing implements. Most households owned or used no horse-drawn machines. Machinery was concentrated in the major grain-growing regions of the country.

29.4.2 Grain Harvests and Marketings

Although grain production had recovered to pre-war levels by the mid-1920s, much less grain was marketed in the 1920s than before the First World War. This was partly a consequence of the increase in rural population: while this was six million higher in 1926 than in 1913, per capita grain production was 16 per cent lower than it had been in 1913.

Fig.2: A picture of one of the collective farms at Ukraine

A real problem was that there was more than one market for the sale of agricultural products. The state agencies and the co-operative network only accounted for part of the overall market in grain and other crops, with the private market offering a dispersed and profitable alternative to producers. It was more advantageous for peasants to sell on the private market, with its higher prices, than to state collection agencies. The problem for the state was to attract a greater share of the marketed harvest to its own collection agencies rather than to private traders.

The terms of trade, or the relationship between industrial retail prices and state agricultural procurement prices, were much less favourable for peasants than before the war. In addition to the unfavourable price ratios for his products, the peasant also had less easy access to industrial goods than before the war. Throughout the 1920s, industrial goods were expensive, of poor quality and scarce.

Prices paid by the state for procurements (*zagatovki*) of grain were low and often failed to cover the cost of production. Prices for livestock products and industrial crops were much more favourable for peasants and discouraged grain marketings.

Another reason for the decline in agricultural marketings was the changed social and economic organisation of the countryside after the agrarian revolution of 1917-20. The redivision of the large private estates removed those farming units which were most oriented towards the market.

29.4.3 The Procurement Crisis of 1927-28

Despite a good harvest in the autumn of 1927, peasant marketing and state procurement of grain fell far below expectation to a level that was insufficient to feed the towns and the army, and export grain in order to pay for the import of machinery. If the state had chosen to raise its procurement prices for grain, to match private market prices, funds available for industrial expansion would have suffered.

The rapid rise in industrial investment during 1927-28 was a major factor leading to the grain crisis from October 1927. Consumer goods became even more scarce (the "goods famine") as investment shifted to heavy industry; and, they cost more to buy as state procurement prices for grain remained low.

In answer to this goods famine, the peasants went on what the regime called a "production strike" by refusing to market at state-determined prices the quotas of grain set by the state. Instead, the peasants chose either to sell to private traders at higher prices or to meet their tax obligations by selling higher priced industrial crops or livestock products.

In other words, the crisis of 1927 was not an *economic* crisis in the sense of a failure of market mechanisms or a decline of productive capacity. This is clear from the fact that a high share of the harvest was marketed, but often to private traders. The peasants were willing and able to produce a surplus if they could buy industrial goods with the proceeds.

In December 1927 Stalin had argued that the process of consolidating the peasants' small, scattered strips of land must be carried out 'gradually, steadily eschewing forcible methods, through demonstration and persuasion'. By the next month, in January 1928 he said that "We cannot allow our industry to be dependent on kulak whims; (collective farms) must be developed to the full ... so that within 3 or 4 years (by 1931 or 1932) they would supply at least one-third of all the grain requirements of the state."

The Party leadership decided on a policy of confrontation rather than conciliation of the peasantry. From early in 1928, markets were closed and grain was seized from peasants and traders alike. Those guilty of speculating in grain or concealing it rather than delivering it could be imprisoned and their property confiscated. As a result the state managed to procure a substantially greater amount of grain.

In the summer of 1928 the Party launched an all-out drive to collect more grain more rapidly than in any previous year. In November the authorities called for the comprehensive collectivisation of the main grain-surplus regions within five months. In 1928, there was a harvest failure in the Ukraine and North Caucasus, important grain producing regions. The best harvests had been in the distant, eastern parts of the country (Volga regions, Kazakhstan, Urals and Siberia), precisely where the state procurement apparatus was weakest and the communications infrastructure least developed and especially slow in winter. This crisis was compounded by manufactured goods shortages. Grain marketings declined sharply and grain collections by state agencies were a failure. The shortfall in state collections of rye and wheat, food staples, forced the state to curtail grain exports and to reintroduce rationing during peace time.

Soviet leaders faced two alternatives. They could continue with the New Economic Policy - balanced industrialisation, gradual collectivisation, and adjust agricultural delivery prices to induce the peasants to market more grain; this was the policy advocated by leaders like Bukharin. Or they could institute a radical new policy of accelerated collectivisation and forced industrialisation. Stalin opted for the second alternative.

Collectivisation policy was now aimed at the formation of large collective farms covering whole villages and districts. In the spring of 1929 a scheme was launched for the establishment of a few 'districts' of comprehensive collectivisation in which all or a majority of households were collectivised. By early July, eleven such districts were recognised.

There were no plans for mass collectivisation immediately prior to its introduction. Even the first five year plan still marked no radical departure in agricultural policy. It was envisaged that three out of every four peasant farms would still be private farms in 1934, and their output would contribute more than one-half of grain marketings. When the decision to introduce mass collectivisation by force was made, it was done quickly and without legal backing or party discussion.

The *kulak* was to be liquidated as a class and the collectivisation campaign was to sweep through the countryside in tandem with a 'dekulakisation' campaign. The campaigns for procuring grain and for forcing peasants into the kolkhozes were merged together.

No guidance was available about the structure and organisation of the collectives; nor on how decisions were to be taken, not even how payment should be made to the members. Within seven weeks, by February 1930, about half the peasantry had been herded into collectives.

29.4.4 Peasant Resistance to Collectivisation

The peasants met forced collectivisation with large-scale passive resistance and sporadic armed resistance. Active peasant resistance to the regime and its representatives took the form of mass demonstrations involving thousands as well as 'terrorist acts', a term that covers murders, beatings-up and arson. By and large, however, peasant protest was local and vocal rather than semi-military. Resistance was evidently most stubborn on the part of the richer peasants, but it is clear that every section of the peasantry was affected and participated in the resistance to collectivisation.

Rather than hand over their animals to the kolkhoz, many peasants slaughtered them (despite the decree of 16 January 1930 that prohibited such slaughtering on pain of confiscation of property and imprisonment or banishment) or rushed to the nearest town to sell them. As a result, in 1933 there were only one-third as many sheep, half as many horses and pigs, and 54 per cent as many cattle as in 1928.

The attack on the peasant economy was accompanied by a fierce campaign against the Orthodox Church, the centre of traditional peasant culture. Historic Russian churches became the object of destruction or wrecking and many priests were arrested. The monasteries were closed, although many of them had operated as model agricultural co-operatives, and thousands of monks and nuns were deported to Siberia. By the end of 1930, roughly 80 per cent of village churches are said to have been closed. Dekulakisation deprived about one million peasant households (an average of about one household per village), or about five to six million individuals of their land and houses.

This was a veritable civil war raging in the Russian countryside. The surviving livestock herds and the spring ploughing were in jeopardy because of the lack of seed grain. The regime thus faced a disastrous situation. In March 1930, in an article called "Dizzy with Success", Stalin blamed local officials for excesses he had authorised. He called for a temporary halt to the collectivisation drive, ordered that most of the collectivised animals (except those of kulaks) be returned to their original owners, and that attempts to completely eliminate the peasant market be ended. Interpreting this as repudiation of compulsory collectivisation, the majority of peasants hastily left the collectives. The percentage of peasant households officially collectivised throughout the USSR dropped from 56 to 23 between 1 March and 1 June 1930 and then to 21.4 in August.

In another concession, a new model statute for the kolkhoz allowed its members to keep a cow, sheep and pigs, and the implements to work private plots of their own. The peasants' real efforts were reserved for these small private plots, whose food sustained them and whose sales augmented their paltry earnings.

The collapse of the collectivisation drive was only temporary. The climate was kind and the harvest was good in 1930. As soon as the grain was safely in state storage, the collectivisation drive resumed but with clearer guidelines this time. Tens of thousands of communists and urban workers were urgently mobilised to work in the countryside as kolkhoz organisers and chairmen. Villagers were steadily persuaded or coerced by discriminatory taxation to return to the collectives. By 1937, 86 per cent of sown area had been brought within the kolkhozes and collective farms accounted for 89 per cent of the grain harvest and 87 per cent of grain procurements by the state.

29.4.5 Nature of Collectivisation

Collectivisation, sometimes called the "Second Revolution", changed the peasant way of life more radically than did the Bolshevik Revolution. The fact that it was not carried out by peasants voluntarily, but by a largely urban and proletarian Party, and by force, meant that it was authentically a 'revolution from above'. The lynchpin of the difference between peasant life before and after collectivisation was that the collective farmer had no control over the grain

and cash crops that were produced on the collectivised land. As most collective farms coincided with the former communes, the parallels with serf villages were close. The ban on travel outside the farm without permission reinforced the impression in peasant minds that collectivisation meant a new form of serfdom. Peasants joked bitterly that the initials of the All-Union Communist Party (VKP in Russian) spelt out 'second serfdom' (*Vtoroe Krepostnoe Pravo*).

Collectivisation was a process which enabled the state to increase its procurement of grain, potatoes and vegetables and the flow of peasant labour to industry, at the expense of livestock, the harvest retained in agriculture and the living standards of the rural and urban population. It was not able to bring about an expansion of agricultural production to a degree corresponding to the growing demand and to this extent it was a failure.

Grain harvests, yields and state procurements

Years	Grain harvest Million tons	Yield Quintals per hectare	Procurements
1909-13	72.5	6.9	—
1928-32	73.6	7.5	18.1
1933-37	72.9	7.1	27.5
1938-40	77.9	7.7	32.1

Source: Moshe Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia, London: Methuen, 1985, table 6.2, p. 167.

Check Your Progress 2

1) How was the colletivasation of agriculture carried out? Write in ten lines.

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2) How did the Peasants respond to the collectivisation drive? Answer in fifty words.

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29.5 THE TERROR AND THE PURGES

The rigours of collectivisation and industrialisation were followed not by any period of improvement in the lives of the Soviet population, but by a renewal of the 'revolution from

above', culminating in a reign of terror. This was directed not against peasants and the survivors of capitalism, but in successive waves of arrests, trials and purges against industrial workers, the Communist Party and finally the secret police itself, the executors of the purges and the terror.

Historians have identified at least three political needs Stalin nursed in the 1930s. The first was to overcome opposition to and criticism of his policies within the Communist Party. In 1933-34 this functioned as pressure for relaxing the industrialisation and collectivisation drives, for making concessions to the working population and for reconciliation with former opponents. His second need was not only to defeat the opposition but to attack and root out the source of *all* potential opposition and criticism in the democratic traditions of party leadership. The logical conclusion of this, and Stalin's third need, was to move from a single-party to a single-ruler state. The only reason Stalin advanced for his actions was a huge conspiracy to overthrow the regime, involving not only the party organisation throughout the country, but other post-revolutionary elites and networks, like the secret police and the armed forces. The menacing international situation and the danger of war were used to lend substance to the threat. But not a single authenticated case of a spy or traitor was ever identified among the victims of the purges and terror.

29.5.1 The Four Trials

Among the most dramatic aspects of the purges were the four show trials of 1936, 1937 and 1938.

1) At the "Trial of the Sixteen" (August 1936), Prosecutor Vyshinsky accused Kamenev, Zinoviev and others of conspiring with Trotsky to overthrow the regime and to remove Stalin and other Politburo members. After confessing and incriminating the "Right" Opposition, the defendants were convicted and shot.

2) At the "Trial of the Seventeen" (January 1937), featuring Piatakov, Muralov and Radek, the accused confessed to treasonable dealings with Japan and Germany. They too were executed.

3) The military chiefs, especially Marshall Tukhachevskii, who had made the Red Army an effective fighting force, apparently had been highly critical of the trials. In May 1937, he and other prominent Generals were arrested, accused of treasonable collaboration with Germany and Japan, and shot.

4) "The Trial of the Twenty-one" (March 1938), included Bukharin, Rykov and Iagoda. Foreign espionage agencies, claimed the prosecutor, had set up a bloc of "Rightists and Trotskyists" on Soviet soil to bring a bourgeois-capitalist regime to power and detach non-Russian regions from the USSR.

This was only the tip of the iceberg. For two full years in 1937 and 1938, top communist officials in every branch of the bureaucracy - government, party, industrial, military and finally even police - were arrested as 'enemies of the people' and disappeared into prisons and labour camps. Those who were tried and executed, or died by other means, included all surviving members of Lenin's Politburo, except Stalin. A former Prime Minister, two former chiefs of the Communist International (Comintern), the trade union head, and two chiefs of the political police were executed.

29.5.2 Purges and the Communist Party

Proportionately, the purges hit the Party worst of all. They shattered the group of Communist leaders formed in the pre-revolutionary underground, the Civil War and the period of collectivisation and the first five year plan. When Russia entered the Second World War in 1941, her connections with the leadership of the Russian Revolution had practically ceased to exist. The terror thus destroyed the old Communist Party, which was not seriously rebuilt until Khrushchev's time. It assured Stalin's complete control of the Party, the government and the country.

29.5.3 Purges and the Armed Forces

The Party was not the only institution that was destroyed; also destroyed was the established military elite. The Great Purge decimated between 35 and 50 per cent of the entire officer

corps of the Soviet armed forces. Well-known members of the General Staff, such as Marshals Tukhachevsky and Bluecher, and Generals Gamarnik and Yakir were killed, along with most members of the Supreme War Council, three of five Marshals, 14 of 16 Army Generals, and all full Admirals. Also affected were the commanders of all the military districts, practically all brigade commanders, one half of all regimental commanders, and all but one fleet commander.

These purges were an insult to Red Army patriotism and a grave weakening of the armed forces. More senior officers were killed during the purges than during the entire war with the Nazis.

29.5.4 Purges and the Soviet Society

The terror of the 1930s permeated the everyday life and the most intimate experience of the Soviet people. Most estimates agree that about five per cent of the population was imprisoned during the period, making a total of some eight million persons, of whom perhaps ten per cent were killed. By 1938, almost every other Soviet family had had one of its members imprisoned. The proportions, however, were substantially higher, the more educated the group.

The terror of the 1930s differed from that of the collectivisation in that it was directed against the urban population, against political and military elites, and against the better-educated intelligentsia. Action was taken against people for their supposed readiness to do injury to Soviet society. This was inferred on the basis of their social category: social origin, nationality or group membership. This social category determined a person's fate.

The question of how many people were arrested and died in the purges is difficult to answer accurately because of the secrecy that still guards the relevant files. In 1990, Soviet researchers claimed that between 1931 and 1953 government tribunals sentenced almost four million people, of whom about one-fifth were executed. But since many more died unrecorded, and the records were tampered with, lost or destroyed, this figure is necessarily an underestimate of the truth.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What according to historians were the main political priorities of Stalin in the 1930s? Write in five lines.

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2) How did the Purges of the 1930s affect the Communist Party and the armed forces? Answer in five lines.

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29.6 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has discussed three crucial aspects of the Russian economy and polity between the period 1928 and 1941: industrialisation through planning, collectivisation of agriculture and the purges of the 1930s. Planned industrilisation meant setting targets for industrial production for a period of five years and systematically going about achieving the targets. Collectivisatioin of agriculture stood for a transformation of plots of agricultural land under individual possession into large collectives which could be exposed to modernised farming through state initiative. Large scale opposition to Stalin's policies both within and outside the party coupled with a desire to convert Russia from a single party rule

to single ruler state led to the purges of the 1930s. In these purges a number of trials took place in which old Bolsheviks, members of Lenin's politbureau, a number of army officers and many state officials were executed. Virtually anyone who did not agree with Stalin's policies was put to death. All dissent was suppressed. Whereas the victims of collectivisation were invariably members of the rural population, the purges of the 1930s targetted mainly the urban population, the military and the political elites and the educated sections of the population. It can be said that the Russian society paid a heavy price for the official policies of the 1930s.

29.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) Planning in industrialisation meant deciding beforehand the direction of industrial development and setting targets for output for a period of five years. See Sec.29.3.

2) Soviet Russia achieved unprecedental industrial growth in a very short time. See Sub-secs.29.3.1., 29.3.2 and 29.3.3.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Cultivable land, which, under NEP, was under the control of kulaks (rich peasants) was brought under the control of the collectivs. All land could thus be exposed to modern farming. See Sec.29.4.

2) Whereas all sections of the peasantry resisted the collectivisation drive of the Soviet government, the richer peasants resisted more vigorously as they had more to lose. See Sub-sec.29.4.4.

Check Your Progress 3

1) In your answer you should refer to Stalin's desire to eliminate all political opposition so as to move from a single party to a single ruler state. See Sec.29.5.

2) The purges destroyed the old communist party and also the military leadership of the times of revolution. See Sub-secs.29.5.2 and 29.5.3.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Empire*, New York, 1987

Joll, James, *Europe Since 1870: An International History*, Penguin, 1976

Shirer, William, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Greenwich, 1959

Carr, E.H., *The Russian Revolution From Lenin to Staline: 1917-21*, London

Sitzpatrick, Sheila, *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford, 1982

Robert, J.M., *Penguin History of Europe*