Daniel Stambler Journal 2

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was an important phase in Soviet Russian history that historians should study in-depth. The NEP represents a departure from the Bolsheviks’ unpopular War Communism program. The NEP came about when the Soviet government caved into pressure from peasants and made some concessions to Capitalism by legalizing trade for Russian farmers to a certain extent. The great irony of the NEP is that it was more successful than War Communism. Capitalism and free trade, ideologies which Lenin and his Bolsheviks completely opposed, saved the Soviet Union’s economy.

Although Lenin was hesitant to implement the NEP, he ultimately gave into some of the peasants’ demands. He nevertheless remained doubtful of the program as it wasn’t true to the nature of Communism. Since implementing the NEP, Lenin changed his rhetoric about the Revolution. His new stance advocated that the path to true Communism would be a long one. (Brooks and Chernyavskiy, 116)

The press presented the NEP in a contradictory manner. Its introduction pushed the press to adopt a more open and pragmatic tone. (Brooks, 21) The NEP made it easier for hard-working peasants to succeed. In addition, the press encouraged peasants to improve their production. However, the press also warned peasants to avoid becoming well-off like the kulaks (Brooks, 31). Despite its ambiguous and contradictory tone during the NEP, the press’ statements marked a positive shift in journalism as newspapers became slightly tolerant of different views. For a short period of time, newspapers could even criticize the actions of some officials (Brooks, 28). Therefore, the unique tone during the NEP should interest historians.

Ilf and Petrov depict the NEP as a negative time period. (Ilf and Petrov, 43) They allude to how the NEP gave rise to private interests. (Ilf and Petrov, 51) One can argue that the authors’ stance on the NEP is a byproduct of the nature of the time the book was released. By this time, Stalin had firmly established himself as dictator of the Soviet Union and had already began his Five Year Plan of industrial development and collectivization. (Brooks, 55)

The book by Brooks provides the best insight to the NEP as it goes into an in-depth analysis of how the era affected the mindset of the press and thus the Russian populace. Overall, the NEP is a critical era for historians to study given its Capitalist elements and moderate success.