War Communism

The development of a communist dictatorship
War Communism in Industry

- By mid 1918 Bolsheviks were fighting for their very existence.
- War communism is the name given to the set of drastic measures taken by Lenin to win the Civil War and stay in power.
- By 1918 industrial production running at 30% of 1913 levels.
- Problems faced by the Provisional Government in 1917 (lack of raw materials, failure transport system, inflation) worsened.
- Management of factories by workers’ committees failing.
- Flight of workers to villages causing labour shortages.
War Communism in Industry

- All industries put under centralised state control in December 1917 and were now run by the Supreme Council of the State Economy.
- Attempt to resolve worker failings: workers fined for being late or not meeting output targets.
- Each worker issued with a record book—without this, no access to rations.
- Trade unions taken over by Communist Party officials who were appointed, not elected, to command workforce.
- Managers/ Experts brought back into industries to make the factories (Munitions, particularly) run efficiently.
War Communism: Terror and the Cheka

- 17 July 1918 Tsar Nicholas and his family murdered by Bolsheviks
- The Civil War, assassination attempt on Lenin, Growing opposition to Bolsheviks, peasant resistant to grain requisition led to an increase in the power and influence of the Cheka
- Prisoners were executed without trial, torture was common.
- By 1918 there were 6300 official executions.
- The Cheka itself became a distinct elite- had own living compounds, restaurants, sports facilities.
Russia in 1921: The Depths of Disaster

- By 1921 the Reds had won the Civil War but the country was in ruin.
- Approximately ten million Russians died between 1917-1921, at least five million as a result of famine.
- This was caused in part by crop failure but also grain requisitioning squads who left the peasants no grain to plant and disruption to crops due to the war.
- Another million died of diseases such as typhus and influenza, worsened by a lack of food/medical care.
In the cities...

- Workers had to spend 3/4 of their income on food- rations were severely short, meaning most food purchased on the black market.
- Cuts in food rations in January 1921 led to demonstrations that were disbanded by the Cheka.
- Many people fled the cities for the villages (population of Petrograd decreased from 2.5 Million in 1917 to 0.75 Million by 1921).
- Water/ Electricity rarely available.
- Members of ‘former classes’ hardest hit- worker received more rations than a bourgeois.
- Housing controlled by committees- many people living in one home.
The Country-side

- Bolsheviks had almost lost control, less and less food reaching the cities
- Peasant rebellions increasing
- Railways hardly functioned, blocked by abandoned trains which were home to gangs/bandits or filled with bodies of typhus victims.
The Bolsheviks

- Now called the Communist Party, increased their membership, though it was a different Party now.

- In 1917 60% of members were workers, in 1921, only 40% were, the rest were government officials.

- Hundreds of Party members lived in luxury in the Kremlin with access to plenty food and fuel.
The End of War Communism

- By 1921 the grim economic situation had undermined the original justification for war communism.
- During its operation industrial and agricultural production had fallen alarmingly.
- Within the Party however, many believed that this policy represented true revolutionary Communism.
- The Party’s leading economist Bukharin urged that war communism be retained as a permanent economic strategy of Bolshevik government.
The End of War Communism

- They saw it as a true socialism in action since it involved:
  - Centralisation of industry
  - Ending of private ownership
  - Squeezing of the peasant

- The policy of war communism was maintained even after the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War.

- The systematic use of terror by the Cheka and the enforced requisition of grain continued.

- As a short term measure the policy produced the results Lenin wanted, but its severity had increased Bolshevik opposition.

- The Party was losing its main source of support: workers and soldiers, culminating in the Kronstadt Uprising which Lenin referred to as
  - “The flash of lightening which lit up reality”