

Collectivization: Agriculture in the USSR

Collectivization was a policy of forced consolidation of individual peasant households into collective farms as carried out by the Soviet government in the late 1920's - early 1930's. By introducing this system, **Stalin** meant to overcome the food crisis holding the country and to increase peasant labor productivity.

In autumn of 1927, the government reduced bread purchase prices. The peasants, who were obligated to sell bread to the state, answered with "the bread strike": they decided to wait until spring to sell their grain, because in spring the prices were to grow. This added to the problem of crop failure and caused supply troubles in many industrial centers. To improve the situation, in some regions people were forced to surrender limited amounts of bread to the state. This policy had already been used once, several years before. In 1928, crops failed again, and in spite of measures taken, famine returned to the country. By 1927, there had been 14 thousand collective farms of different kinds in the USSR. The government saw them as more productive and easier to control, so it gave the collectives privileges: modern equipment and tax remissions. Facing the crisis, Stalin decided to consolidate all individual households into *kolkhozes*, by propaganda or by force. All lands, cattle and equipment were to become collective property.

The poor peasants were glad to hear this news, but the wealthy ones were not ready to give away everything they owned. In despair, people killed their own cattle and burned their own fields. Livestock population decreased to half its size. Riots started here and there, and after being suppressed they turned into acts of terror and sabotage.

The government answered with a wave of repression, known as "*dekulakization*": **wealthy farmers, called kulaks**, who did not want to enter kolkhozes were considered public enemies and arrested, exiled, or executed. At the same time, if such a *kulak* changed his mind and tried to join a *collective farm*, it was prohibited to let him in. Stalin aimed to "liquidate the kulak class." To do this, the government confiscated kulak land and sent them to labor camps in Siberia where thousands were killed or died from overwork.

In 1930, when 60% of peasants were in collective farms, Stalin suddenly addressed his citizens with an article, in which he criticized his own previous actions. According to this article, it was a mistake to drive people into collective farms by force, and so everyone had right to own a farm. 21% of the peasants left the collective farms immediately, but in half a year they had to return: the government introduced unbearably large taxes for individual households.

To get at least a handful of grain, peasants sneaked into fields to cut spikes left after cropping or to pick up some seeds. It was extremely dangerous: people caught stealing collective farm property were arrested and executed or imprisoned for ten years. Yes, the aforementioned actions also counted as stealing. Peasants called this law "The Law of Three Spikes", and 55,000 peasants fell victim to it. Peasants resisted by only growing enough to feed their families. The government began to seize peasant grain supplies. This

led to a famine known as the Holodomor in Ukraine, leading to the deaths of over 7,000,000 people.

In 1933, the reorganization of the administrative apparatus finally helped to stop the disaster and to secure a significantly large crop. In 1935, the ration system in the cities was abolished. However, forced collectivization nearly destroyed Soviet agriculture, and it took years to restore it

Define: Collectivization-

In what ways would the collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union benefit the people?

What is a Kulak? What did the Kulaks do in regards to collectivization? How did Stalin respond?

How did the peasant farmers and agricultural workers feel about collectivization? What did this lead to?

Explain the problems people faced in the Soviet Union due to the collectivization of agriculture.

How did the peasant class resist collectivization?