

THE PROBLEM

SOURCE A

Date	Harvest (millions of tons)	Average yield (centner per hectare)
1913	80	—
1921	42	5.5
1924	51.4	6.2
1925	72.5	8.3

Grain harvests in Russia.

SOURCE B

The civil war in Russia affected farming regions very badly, with land being ruined and crops being destroyed. It is estimated that five million people died during the famine.

Two doctors working in the Ufa region, reported that people were so desperate for food that they would do anything. They claimed the following story was typical:

'A Tartar killed a 13 year old girl, a relative, who had come to visit him, by hitting her over the head with a log. He not only ate her but also cut off from her several pounds of fat, which he sold at the market.'

The famine of 1921-2. L. and L. Vasilievski, Kniga o golode (1922).

SOURCE C *A peasant farmer in the mid 1920s.*



SOURCE D *Threshing grain in Russia, 1920.*

SOURCE E

The symbol of the unproductive peasant was the wooden plough which was still the peasants' main tool. As late as 1928, 5.5 million peasant holdings were still using this ancient implement which was at least as old as the Pharaohs . . . Three-quarters of the land was sown by hand; 40% of the harvest was threshed with the flail, and almost half of it reaped with the sickle and the scythe.

The farms were often too small for it to be profitable to keep a horse . . . it was not unusual to see a wretched old wooden plough . . . dragged along . . . by the farmer, or even his wife.

There was an aspect of the situation which was even worse. The lands belonging to one peasant were not grouped together but widely scattered in single strips.

A modern historian.

SOURCE F

It was absolutely necessary for Russia, if we were to avoid periodic famine, to plough the land with tractors. We must mechanize our agriculture. When we gave tractors to the peasants they were spoiled in a few months. Only collective farms with workshops could handle tractors. We took the greatest trouble to explain it to the peasants. It was no use arguing with them. After you have said all you can to a peasant he says he must go home and consult his wife, and he must consult his herder . . .

Stalin speaking to Churchill, from W. S. Churchill, The Second World War (1951) Vol. IV.

Questions

- 1(a) What does Source A say was wrong with agriculture in the USSR?
- (b) Why would the Bolsheviks (the new government) be unlikely to publish these figures?
- 2(a) What was the major problem in Russia in 1922 according to Source B?
- (b) Give reasons why Source B might be unreliable.
- 3(a) What do Sources C and D tell you about Soviet agriculture?
- (b) Do they tell the whole story? Explain your answer.
- (c) Describe the methods of agriculture being used in these pictures. What is wrong with them?
- (d) Do these photographs support or contradict the evidence given in Source E?
- (e) List three problems faced by the farmer shown in Source C in 1923?
- 4(a) What was the general state of Soviet agriculture according to Source E?
- (b) What evidence does the writer of Source E give to back up his conclusions about agriculture?
- (c) Is Source E a primary or secondary source? Was its information available to (i) Stalin; (ii) Soviet farmers in 1925?
- 5(a) What does Stalin (Source F) say is wrong with Soviet agriculture?
- (b) What did (i) Stalin; and (ii) Soviet farmers think about tractors being used on the land?
- (c) What clues does Source F give you as to the way that Stalin operated? Was he firm or soft, clear or muddled, tolerant or intolerant?

THE SOLUTION

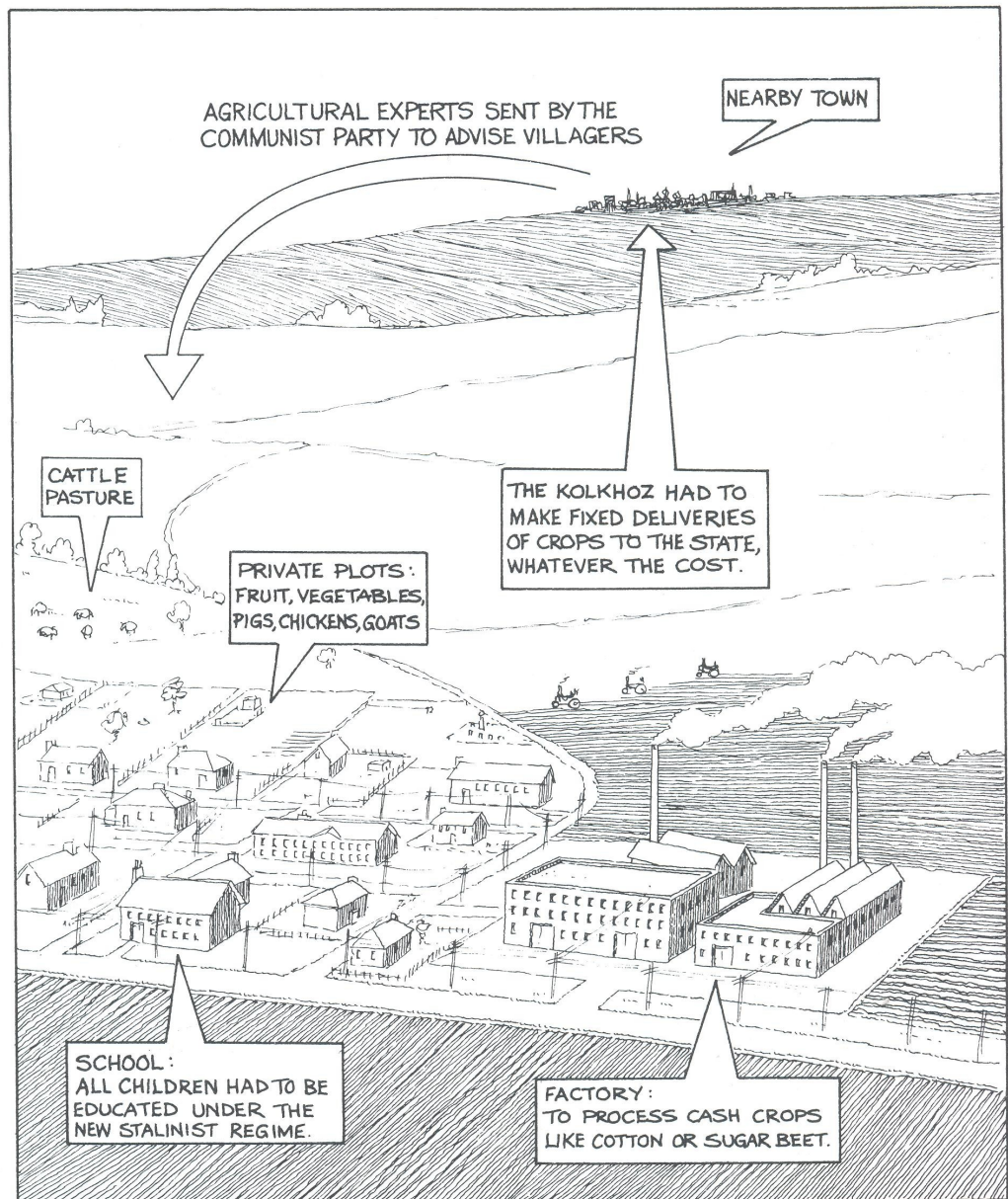
Questions

- 1 Explain carefully how a collective farm works using the evidence on these pages.
- 2 What did collective farms get from the towns? What did they give to the towns?
- 3 What was the main advantage that collective farms gave to Stalin's general policy?
- 4 Select one of the following methods to explain collectivisation to the peasants of the Ukraine in 1929.
 - (a) A poster to be displayed in every village.
 - (b) A personal letter from Stalin to be sent to every household.
 - (c) A speech to be given to the peasants by the local Communist party official.
- 5 Explain the choice you made for question 4, then design, draw or write the poster, letter or speech.

One possible solution to the problems of Soviet agriculture was the development of the collective farm (kolkhoz). A kolkhoz was a very large farm, formed by peasants pooling their land and animals, which then became the property of the collective. The members of the kolkhoz were paid

wages for the work they did but any profits went to the kolkhoz to buy new machines, livestock or crops. Machines such as tractors or combine harvesters could be supplied by the new factories built under the First Five Year Plan (1927–32).

A typical kolkhoz, 1937.



SOURCE A

What is the way out? The way out is to turn the small and scattered peasant farms into large united farms gradually but surely, not by pressure, but by example and persuasion, into large farms based on common, co-operative, collective cultivation of the land... There is no other way out.

Joseph Stalin, 1927.

In 1928, about 3% of the total land being farmed in the USSR was organised into collective farms. The First Five Year Plan calculated that up to 20% of output would come from collective farms by 1933. However, the pace of change was set by Stalin at breakneck speed so that there could be no growth of opposition to his plans. In March 1930, Stalin announced that 58% of land in Russia had been collectivised. Stalin blamed 'over-zealous officials' for the speed of change.

A visitor to the USSR, Maurice Hindus, went to see his friend, Yekim Lavrentin, a peasant farmer in 1929. The peasants from Yekim's village explained how they felt about collectivisation.

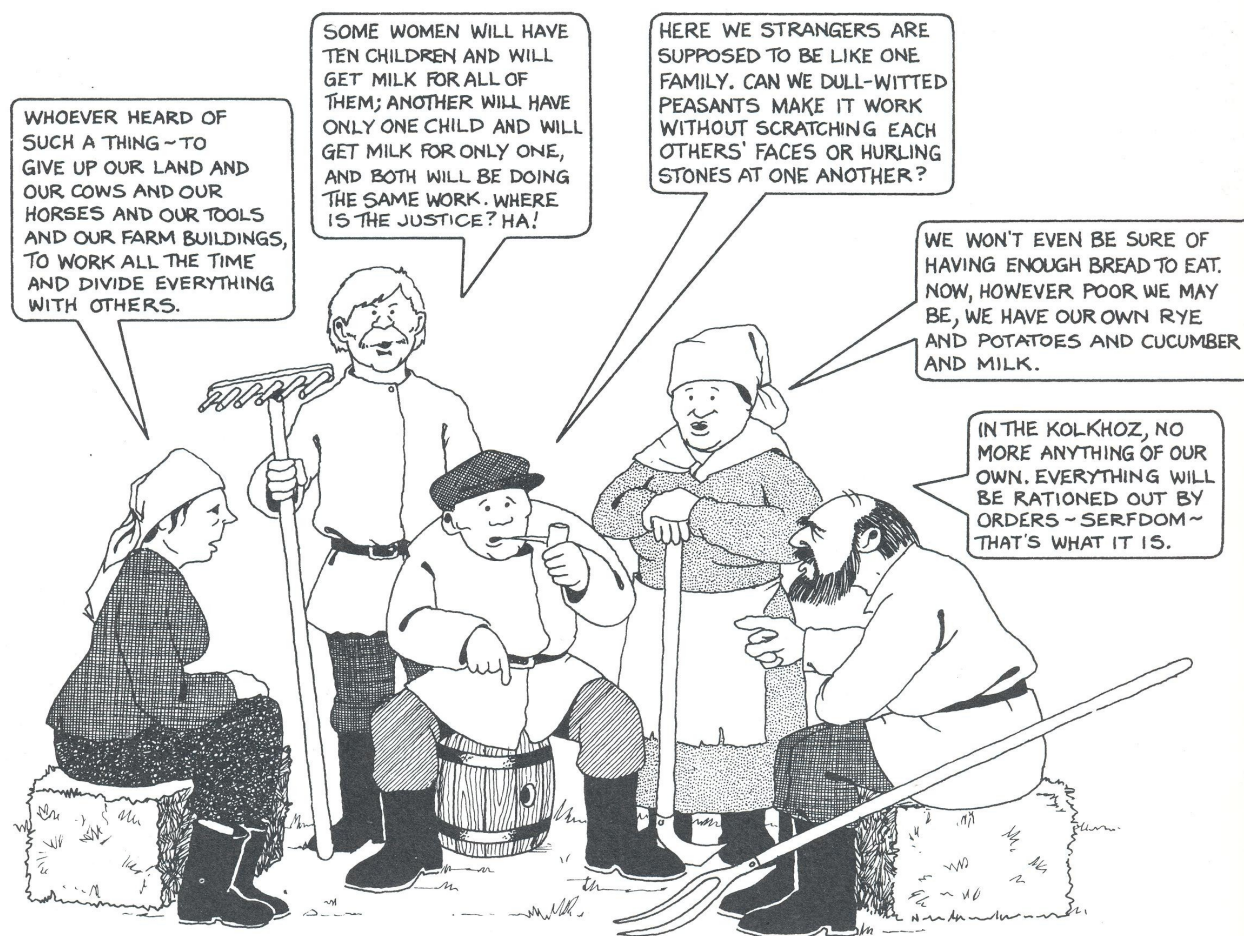
Questions

6 What was the general reaction of the villagers pictured below to the idea of collectivisation?

7 What would these villagers do if it was suggested that they should join a collective or state farm?

8 The comments below were made during a village meeting. Write two reports on this meeting: (a) as the leader of the village; (b) as a Communist official, reporting to OGPU (the secret police).

Describe their feelings and ideas in each case.



THE OUTCOME

The three peasants described below are typical of the millions of people who farmed land in central and southern USSR in the 1920s.

The blacksmith

Lukyan owns two acres of land in the village, along with his blacksmith's forge. He spends most of his time working on his land, helping other villagers and mending tools. He grows wheat on some of his land and some he allows others to use for free grazing. He also makes horseshoes which he trades for eggs or vegetables.

He believes strongly in tradition and old methods. He refuses to make an iron ploughshare as he believes it will be unlucky.

Lukyan has no animals of his own, but he has an excellent supply of food through trading his skills. He often makes a meal for friends and occasionally throws a party for the whole village. He is, therefore, respected by the villagers and something of a leader.

His two sons were killed fighting for the Red Army against the Whites in 1920.



The bedniak (poor peasant)

Eva owns one acre of land in the village, as well as a few pigs, geese and one very old, thin cow. Her husband was killed in an accident two years ago, leaving her to raise six children.

Eva cannot sell her land or move away from the village, so she works the land herself. She has to borrow a plough from her neighbours. Her two eldest children put the yoke of the plough over their necks and pull it along. She sows seed by hand, digs the soil with a wooden shovel, and cuts wheat with a bill-hook.

Her land has always grown wheat, which she gives the state as payment for her taxes. She works 14 hours a day, seven days a week on her own land. She cannot read or write.

The kulak (rich peasant)

Sergei owns ten acres of land in the village, dotted about in various strips. His wife died some years ago, but he has one son, Nikolai, whom he hires out as a shepherd or general labourer during the summer.

Sergei works his own land as well as land on the local State Farm (sovkhoz). Last year he saved all his wages from the sovkhoz and bought a spinning wheel and weaving frame. In winter he makes clothes which he sells at the local market. He has already made enough money to buy two cows and a horse.

He lives in a small hut, which was built by his grandfather, on the edge of the village. He grows wheat and barley in rotation, as well as peas and sugar beet.



Collectivisation report: instructions

You have been asked by the Central Committee to report on this village and in particular on these three households. Your report should cover the following points:

- 1 Who is the richest person?
- 2 Who works the hardest?
- 3 Who will have the most to lose if the village is collectivised?
- 4 Who will have the most to gain?
- 5 Will any of them support collectivisation?
- 6 How will a kolkhoz improve the village?
- 7 How might the villagers be persuaded to join a collective?
- 8 Who will be the most dangerous opponent of your plans?
- 9 What skills do they each have?
- 10 What do they own?

11 Who will be the most useful to the collective?

Note: The organisation of the report is left up to you. You need not cover all the points above, or you may wish to add more points of your own.

Destruction of the kulaks

It soon became clear that force would be necessary to persuade villagers to join collectives. In 1930, the Communist Party declared war on all kulaks.

'We must smash the kulaks. We must strike at the kulaks so hard as to prevent them rising to their feet again. We must wipe them out as a social class.'

All kulaks lost their property and possessions which were confiscated and added to the local kolkhoz. Kulak families were deported to new regions, either to farm in the icy north or to join work gangs in the industrial districts. The army was sent into villages to enforce these new rules and given orders to shoot anyone who resisted.

Deportation of the kulaks

Over two and a half million kulaks were deported between 1930 and 1932. Here are two eyewitness accounts.

SOURCE A

Trainloads of deported peasants left for the icy north, the forests, the steppes, the deserts. There were whole populations denuded of everything. The old folk starved to death in mid-journey, new born babies were buried on the banks of the roadside and each wilderness had its crop of little crosses.

SOURCE B

Stock was slaughtered every night. Hardly had dusk fallen when the muffled short bleats of sheep, the death squeals of pigs, or the lowing of calves could be heard. Both those who had joined the kolkhoz and individual farmers killed their stock. The dogs began to drag entrails about the village; cellars and barns were filled with meat. 'Kill, it's not ours any more. Kill, they'll take it for meat anyway.' They ate till they could eat no more. Young and old suffered from stomach ache.

Questions

- 1 What effects would this new policy have on Lukyan, Eva, Sergei and their families?
- 2 How would 'war on the kulaks' help Soviet agriculture?
- 3 Why did the peasants kill their own animals in 1930?
- 4 What evidence was there in your report that peasants might react this way?
- 5 How does the reality of collectivisation compare with Stalin's view of it?
- 6 Why was collectivisation slowed down after 1930?

DID IT WORK?

The questions for this section are on **Worksheet 4** which your teacher will give to you.

Yes

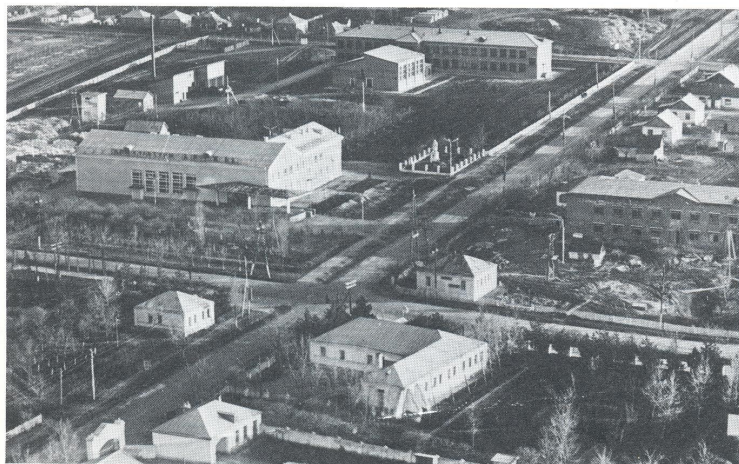
SOURCE A

Tell me, you wretched people, what hope is there for you if you remain on individual pieces of land... From year to year as you increase in population you divide and subdivide your strips of land. You cannot use machinery on your land because no machine man ever made could stand the rough ridges that the strip system creates. You will have to work in your own old ways and stew in your old misery. Don't you see that under your present system there is nothing ahead of you but ruin and starvation?

You accuse us of making false promises. Let us see. And please do not interrupt and do not giggle. Last year you got a schoolhouse, and have you forgotten how we of the Party and of the Soviet had to squeeze out of you, through voluntary tax, your share of the cost of the schoolhouse. And now? Aren't you glad that your children can attend school? Were we wrong when we urged you to build a fire station? Were we wrong when we urged you to lay decent bridges across your stream in the swamp? Were we wrong when we threatened to fine you if you didn't take home two loads of peat to mix with the bedding for your stock so as to have good fertiliser for your fields.

A Communist Party official speaks to the villagers about the kolkhoz, in Red Bread by M. Hindus (1934).

SOURCE D



SOURCE B

Transporting grain from the Burevestnik collective farm, Stalingrad District. The banner refers to promises about grain deliveries.

SOURCE C

Stalin, ignoring the great cost in human life and misery, claimed that collectivisation was a success; for, after the great famines attending the amalgamation of the peasant farms were past, no more famines came to haunt the Russian people. The collective farms, despite all their inefficiencies, did grow more food than the tiny, privately-owned holdings had done; for example, 30–40 million tons of grain were produced every year. Collectivisation also meant the introduction of mechanisation into the countryside... Now two million hitherto backward peasants learned to drive a tractor. New methods of farming were taught by 110,000 engineering and agricultural experts. The countryside was indeed transformed.

E. Roberts, Stalin: Man of Steel (1968).

A collective farm.

No

SOURCE E

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Grain harvest (million tons)	73.3	71.7	83.5	69.5	69.6	63.4
State grain procurements (million tons)	10.8	16.1	22.1	22.8	17.5	22.6
Livestock (million head)						
Cattle	70.5	67.1	52.5	47.9	40.7	38.4
Pigs	26.0	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1
Sheep and goats	146.7	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2

Collective farm production figures.

SOURCE F

There was mass starvation in the USSR in the winters of 1932 and 1933, on a far larger scale than the famine of 1920–21. It is estimated that 10–15 million people died of hunger during these years. Bread rationing was introduced into every town and city.

A modern historian.

SOURCE G



Starving children, 1931.

SOURCE I

Within a short time rural Russia became pandemonium. The overwhelming majority of the peasantry confronted the Government with desperate opposition. Collectivisation degenerated into a military operation, a cruel civil war. Rebellious villagers were surrounded by machine-guns and forced to surrender. Masses of Kulaks were deported to remote unpopulated lands in Siberia . . . The bulk of the peasants decided to bring in as little as possible of their property to the collective farms, which they imagined to be state owned factories, in which they themselves would become mere factory hands. In desperation they slaughtered their cattle, smashed implements and burned crops . . . Vast tracts of land were left untilld. Famine stalked the towns and black soil steppe of the Ukraine.

Isaac Deutscher, Stalin (1949).

SOURCE H



Red Army soldiers planting a tree.