RENOUNCED WITHOUT REGRET: STATE POWER AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF
RURAL RUSSIA, 1881-1932

Christopher Dale Byrum

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

Robert Spaulding Yixen Chen

Susan McCaffray
Chair

Accepted by

Robert Roer
Dean, Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

Throughout the mid-nineteenth and into the twentieth century many educated Russians debated what to do about the “peasant question.” The construction of the Russian peasantry as backwards and irrational provided the impetus and legitimization for both the pre-and-post-revolutionary governments to establish control and attempt to transform peasants into modern and rational citizens. In order to establish control over the peasantry the tsarist government and the Bolsheviks embarked upon state sponsored economic policies to modernize Russia. The “knowledge” of Russia’s peasantry allowed both the tsarists and later the Bolsheviks to implement radical forms of social change under the guise of achieving modernity. While each government desired different outcomes for the peasantry, similarities existed between the state sponsored economic policies before and after 1917. The diagnosis of what was wrong with Russia for both governments was the inherent backwardness of the peasantry. Therefore, each administration operated from a preconceived notion that something was inherently wrong with the Russian peasantry, and thus intrusion into the village was absolutely necessary. Thus, the debate over the peasant question was concerned, not with the peasants, but their place within the social order. The non-peasants “knowledge” of the peasantry and their understanding of how village life was structured informed and structured the activities and policies of the tsarist officials, agronomists, intelligentsia, and revolutionaries alike. The representation of the Russian peasantry as something that needed to be corrected allowed for decades of social engineering through economic policies in order to gain control and modernize Russia. From the initial inquiry into how the Russian village was structured in the early 1880s to the kolkhozy of the late 1920s, the diagnosis of peasant backwardness prompted state sponsored economic intrusion into the Russian village.
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Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for maintaining, or at least feigning interest throughout this process.
INTRODUCTION

During the Fifteenth Party Congress that took place in December 1927 two topics were at the forefront of conversation; the First Five Year Plan and the expulsion of the Left Opposition. Within one year Stalin’s Five Year Plan and the collectivization of agriculture would effectively end the debate on the role of the peasantry in the industrialization of the Soviet Union. The question of how to modernize a predominantly agrarian country was a question that had faced Russia’s leaders long before the Bolsheviks’ ascension to power. Peter the Great had embarked on his own modernization drives more than 200 years prior. However, following the emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861 a series of high ranking tsarist officials realized Russia’s weak economic position amongst the European powers and sought to remedy this through modernization and industrialization.

Throughout the mid-nineteenth and into the twentieth century many educated Russians debated what to do about the “peasant question.” The “peasant question” entered into the lexicon of Russian discourse following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. To most activists and reformers what to do about the newly emancipated Russian peasantry was at the forefront of discussion. The “peasant question” was one of how to modernize Russia through modernizing Russia’s antiquated agricultural system. In order to do so Russia’s government officials, agrarian specialists, social reformers, and revolutionary activists were forced to ask themselves, what is the Russian peasant? This question of what is the Russian peasant was set within larger questions that plagued many of Russia’s educated population. Identifying the Russian peasant was also linked to the question of what was Russia as well as what was Russia’s future.

During those debates a number of economic discursive practices developed to explain the true character of the Russian peasant. The “peasant question” was not the same for all sectors of
Russian society. Many progressive Russians believed that the peasants lived in a state of stagnation, isolation, and irrationality. The overwhelmingly negative view of the peasantry as backward and irrational surmised that peasants lacked any tools to better their situation. They believed that it was up to specialists and educated leaders to show peasants the way toward modernity and economic rationality. Others, such as the Populists, romanticized the peasantry and village life as a type of utopia. Writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky provided representations of Russian peasants as the very heart and soul of Russia. To Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the Russian peasant remained pure, steadfast, and “naturally Russian” despite the victimization by stronger peasants and tsarist reformers. Despite the differing views concerning the peasantry all shared one basic idea. From the late nineteenth century onward the division of the educated elite and the peasantry was structured as a dichotomy of progress and backwardness. Thus, the debate over the peasant question was concerned, not with the peasants, but their place within the social order. The non-peasants “knowledge” of the peasantry and their understanding of how village life was structured informed and structured the activities and policies of the tsarist officials, agronomists, intelligentsia, and revolutionaries alike.

Russia’s social reformers, which included the tsar’s officials, agrarian specialists, economists, and revolutionaries, believed that the only way for Russia’s peasantry to escape from its dismal situation was through outside intervention into rural life. According to the social reformers, Russian peasants would need education, knowledge, and a firm hand to show them the way towards modernity. Beginning with the commonly held assumption that peasants were inherently backwards and irrational the social reformers rejected the peasants’ ability to act and think for themselves, and instead moved into the countryside to offer guidance. The image of the peasant as backward made intervention into village life not only justified but desperately needed.
The perception of the peasantry as backward by Russia’s educated elite made it the antithesis of progress and modernization. For the tsarist government a fundamental change in the peasantry would first have to be undertaken in order to achieve a modern and industrial Russia.

Beginning in the early 1880s the tsarist government began plans to modernize Russia along western lines primarily through grain exports and taxation in return for western industrial machinery and capital. Minister of Finance, Ivan Vyshnegradsky increased taxation on items that were consumed heavily by the peasantry. Vyshnegradsky’s successor, Sergei Witte attempted to modernize Russia by taxing the peasantry to raise capital for railroad construction. Contemporary with the increase in industrialization was also the change in the attitudes of Russia’s educated elite toward the peasantry. During the 1880s a host of new “specialists” began to make their way into the Russian countryside. Specialists in ethnography, statistics, and economics replaced the amateurs who had concentrated on the study of the peasant soul and instead provided intimate “knowledge” of how the rural village was structured and therefore how it could be controlled. As the perception of the Russian peasantry changed, so too, did the government’s attempt at controlling peasants. In 1906 Finance Minister Peter Stolypin embarked upon a program of modernization through restructuring Russia’s agricultural system. Stolypin’s reforms, which bear his name, attempted to transform Russia’s peasantry into rational, progressive, and productive capitalist farmers. The Stolypin Land Reforms were designed to bring rationality to the irrational Russian countryside by eliminating the peasant commune and therefore increasing prosperity through heightened productivity and order. Despite some success the Stolypin Land Reforms came to a halt as Russia entered the First World War in 1914.

Following the Bolshevik ascension to power in October 1917 a new wave of modernizers and industrialists began to consider the “peasant question.” However, the Bolsheviks had their
own assumptions and preconceived notions concerning the peasantry. While the Bolsheviks did believe that the peasantry represented a potential ally in the struggle against bourgeois capitalism, they also represented a force that lacked both a revolutionary potential and loyalty to the Bolshevik cause. The Bolsheviks, like many of their predecessors, believed that the Russian countryside was a place of stagnation and irrationality. Once again the peasantry represented the antithesis to modernity and therefore the Bolsheviks took steps to “enlighten” the peasantry on the road to socialism. During the Russian Civil War (1918-1921), the Bolsheviks embarked upon an economic policy known as War Communism. War Communism was not only a program to ensure adequate grain supplies to the cities and the Red Army during the Civil War, but also represented an attempt by the Bolsheviks to transform the Russian peasantry into proper socialists.

The oppressive and transformative program of War Communism forced Lenin and the Bolsheviks to reconsider their previous economic policies after the Civil War. The policies of War Communism severed the link between the peasantry and the Bolsheviks and once again threatened the supply of food from the village to the city. In order to reconstruct the link between the peasantry and the Bolsheviks Lenin issued the New Economic Policy in 1921. The New Economic Policy provided more freedom for Russia’s peasantry to sell its grain surpluses for private profit instead of forcing the peasantry to turn over all surpluses to the state. While Lenin’s NEP offered more freedom to the peasantry and increased the amount of food available to the cities, the NEP failed to transform the Russian peasantry into rational socialists. As the 1920s moved toward a close the new Bolshevik leader Joseph Stalin began to implement a new program that would forever end the debate on what role the peasantry would play in modernizing Russia. The collectivization drives of the late 1920s did what War Communism, Stolypin’s Land
Reforms, and the early modernization drives of the 1880s and 1890s had not done. Collectivization linked the peasantry to modernization by forcing it onto giant collective farms and removing any agency that peasants had previously possessed. The peasants were controlled and ultimately transformed into state workers within the newly industrialized agricultural realm of Soviet Russia.

There have been a number of excellent works concerning the role of the peasantry within the narrative of Russian economic modernization. Many of these works have re-examined the notion that peasants operated irrationally and instead have shown that peasants always acted rationally according to their economic circumstances.

Yanni Kotsonis’ *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914*, published in 1999, provides an excellent framework for this study. Kotsonis argues that the cooperative theory and policy reduced the term of a “competent peasant” to the realm of oxymoron. Thus, the law, theory, and practice of the agronomists, tsarist officials, and specialists combined to render the Russian peasantry backward. The importance of Kotsonis’ work is that he challenges the preconceived notion that Russian peasants were inherently backward and in need of rule and rationality. Kotsonis identifies the term “backwardness” against its binary pair “progress.” In doing so Kotsonis echoes the call of Derrida to deconstruct our own perceived explanatory framework. He demonstrates that the preconceived notion of peasant backwardness informed and structured the activities of the agricultural specialists throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Another important addition to the scholarship of Russian peasant studies is Kotsonis’ article entitled “No Place to Go: Taxation and State Transformation in Late Imperial and Early

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Soviet Russia”, published 2004, in The Journal of Modern History. In this article Kotsonis argues that the policy of taxation used by both the tsarist administration and the Bolsheviks was an attempt to control and clearly define Russia’s citizenry through taxation. Kotsonis asserts that the tsarist administration of the 1880s and 1890s used the policy of taxation as a way to include both the urban and rural sectors of Russian society within the politics of the state. By making each citizen responsible to the government for his income the tsarist administration attempted to place each person within Russia into a carefully constructed category based upon income and thus gain a better understanding of the demography of Russia. Kotsonis argues that following the Bolshevik takeover in 1917 Lenin and other top Bolsheviks continued the taxation in order to implant a socialist consciousness within the population as well as to inspire loyalty to the new regime. The strength of Kotsonis’ article is that he clearly shows how tsarist officials, specialists, economists, and revolutionaries perceived the peasantry as childish and ignorant and therefore believed that peasants would need to be transformed into “citizens” through taxation.

Judith Pallot’s Land Reform in Russia 1906-1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin’s Project of Rural Transformation, published in 1999, helps to provide a better understanding to the ultimate goals of land reform in Russia. Pallot argues that the Stolypin Land Reform was much more than an attempt to transform rural Russia into independent capitalist farmers. The reform’s main purpose was to transform the very character of the Russian peasant from the commonly accepted notion of “backwards” and “irrational” into an independent peasantry of rural Russia. However, as Pallot argues, the peasantry would not be allowed to reform on its own. A host of agronomists, tsarist officials, and specialists descended into the Russian

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2 Yanni Kotsonis, “No Place to Go: Taxation and State Transformation in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia” The Journal of Modern History 76 (September 2004): 531-577.
countryside in order to implement modernization reforms from above. What is most important about Pallot’s work is that she clearly shows that far from being included in the debate on how to modernize the countryside, the peasantry was assumed to be incapable of deciding for itself how to reform. This inability to decide was a result of the peasantry’s backwardness and irrationality and therefore provided the agricultural specialists with the legitimacy to implement reform on rural Russia.

Esther Kingston-Mann’s and Timothy Mixter’s *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, published in 1991, provides a collection of essays that offer an in depth look at peasant life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^4\) This edited work provides an analysis of peasant life over a broad array of topics. From an inquiry of peasant communes to the idea of peasant egalitarianism during the Russian Revolution Kingston-Mann and Mixter help to dispel many of the myths that exist concerning the Russian peasantry. Kingston-Mann and Mixter challenge the prevailing discourse that peasants dwelt in a stagnant, isolated, and unchanging world of irrationality as well as the romantic populist view that idealized Russia’s countryside as a primitive utopia. Instead, Kingston-Mann and Mixter suggest that peasants were not without culture, value systems, or standards and did not wait for outsiders to fill the void in their lives with meaning. The strength of Kingston-Mann and Mixter’s work is that it seeks to remove the pre-existing assumptions that the Russian peasantry was backward or embryonically capitalistic. By helping to dispel common assumptions of peasants their work helps to provide a much more grounded and objective view of Russia’s peasantry during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Esther Kingston-Mann’s *Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution*, published in 1983, illuminates the contradictions and inconsistencies of Vladimir Lenin’s policies toward the Russian peasantry. Kingston-Mann argues that the weaknesses of Lenin’s peasant policies were a reflection of the deficiencies of Marxist theory itself. Kingston-Mann asserts that Lenin’s peasant policies were reactions to current political problems and realities that were occurring in Russia at the time. However, she does maintain that Lenin underestimated the actual conditions of Russia’s peasantry at the time and in doing so created a number of problems for his successors. Kingston-Mann provides an excellent overview of Lenin’s thought from the early 1890s through the revolution of 1917. Throughout the work Kingston-Mann provides evidence of Lenin’s belief that peasants could be a potentially revolutionary force as well as his distrust for the peasantry. In doing so Kingston-Mann’s work provides a penetrating analysis of top Bolshevik officials and their assumptions and ideas concerning the peasantry.

Cathy Frierson’s *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia*, published in 1993, offers a historical analysis of the development of the image of the Russian peasantry in the late nineteenth century. Frierson argues that from the mid-1870s to the turn of the century the question of who is the Russian peasant emerged. The challenge of answering the question of who the peasant was defined the way in which ruling officials saw the Russian peasantry in regards to their role in the future of Russia’s economic development. Frierson highlights the changes in the image of the peasantry from the *narod* (folk) with its romantic and simple connotation to the sharply defined exploitative *kulak* (rich peasant) or the village strongman. The strength of Frierson’s work is that she shows that the change in the

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image of the Russia peasantry had little to do with reality or the true character of peasants. Instead the changes in image and representation were due to the desire of the ruling officials to control and understand their “alien” population. Frierson argues that the different images of the Russian peasantry were created by writers, scholars, journalists, and government officials. By providing evidence that the image of the peasantry was created by those who wanted to understand and determine the peasantry’s role in Russia’s development, Frierson challenges the notion that Russia’s peasantry was inherently backward.

Stephen Frank and Mark Steinberg’s *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, published in 1994, offers an excellent addition to the field of peasant studies. Frank and Steinberg offer an edited collection on a variety of subjects from death rituals amongst the peasants to peasant amusement parks in nineteenth century Saint Petersburg. Frank and Steinberg attack the notion of lower class mentalities by ironically including it within the title of their work. The authors argue that terms such as lower class, peasants, and workers conceal the fact that each of these classes experienced their own particular situations, mentalities, and identities in their daily lives. The strength of Frank and Steinberg’s work is that it concentrates on why and how the peasantry became the “other” within Russian society. In doing so Frank and Steinberg help to provide a different view of Russia’s peasantry during the late imperial period. Their work challenges the notion that has been present in much of the historiography of Russian peasant studies of a stagnant and disordered culture. It is this analysis of Russia’s peasantry that makes Frank and Steinberg’s work so important to imperial Russian studies.

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Daniel Field’s *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, published in 1976, provides an early and intriguing look into the myths that surround both the peasantry and their devotion to the tsar. Despite the fact that the majority of Field’s study lies outside of the scope of this study, it does prove to be helpful in illuminating the myths that existed concerning the myth of the peasantry during the late nineteenth century. Field argues that the myth of peasant naïveté in regards to love for the tsar was actually a carefully crafted tactic of achieving what was important to the peasants. Field asserts that as long as the peasantry professed loyalty and undying devotion to the tsar, they were able to gain more land, tax relief, and small amounts of self-rule. Field paints the Russian peasantry as cunning and opportunistic in its relations with government authorities. However, what is most important within Field’s study is his assertion that government authorities, specialists, and later Bolshevik authorities misinterpreted this “devotion” to the tsar as a true testament to the peasantry’s ignorance and naïveté. Field’s work helps to move past common assumptions of peasant ignorance and backwardness to show that authority figures from the tsarist officials to the Bolsheviks misinterpreted and mislabeled strategic peasant actions as something in need of alteration.

Madhavan K. Palat’s edited work entitled *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia*, published in 2001, offers a collection of essays from top scholars on the different identities that pervaded Russian before and after the revolution of 1917. This volume offers an analysis on a great variety of diverse topics ranging from the metaphysics of the Russian idea to the problem of church reform in late imperial Russia. However, what links each of these topics together is the understanding that identities, both real and constructed, played an enormous role in Russian society, politics, and economics before and after the 1917 revolution. Palat’s volume provides

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an explanation of the role of identification for the government, masses, and revolutionaries. Palat argues that the formation of identities allows us to re-examine many historical events afresh. Palat’s edited compilation of essays helps to illuminate the ways in which both peasant and autocracy defined themselves and each other. It is because of this examination into the idea of social identities that Palat’s work is so crucial to this study.

Teodor Shanin’s *Russia as a Developing Society: The Roots of Otherness, Russia’s Turn of the Century*, published in 1985, offers an illuminating study of Russia’s peasantry during the turn of the century. Shanin argues that Russia’s peasantry was misunderstood by tsarist officials, agricultural specialists, and revolutionaries alike. Shanin offers an observation similar to that of Immanuel Wallerstein and his “world systems theory.” According to Shanin, Russia’s peasantry, or the “periphery,” were used as the means to industrialize and modernize, which caused much unrest in the countryside. By concentrating on a few main characters from Peter Stolypin to Vladimir Lenin, Shanin attempts to show how those prominent figures attempted to answer and ultimately solve the peasant question. The strength of Shanin’s analysis is that while he argues Russia’s peasantry were misunderstood by Russia’s policymakers, he also argues that historians, sociologists, and economic theorists have only perpetuated the misunderstandings in their explanation of Russia’s development. It is Shanin’s analysis of constructed “backwardness” that makes his work especially important and useful to the study of peasant Russia.


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aspirations inherent within revolutionary Russia. Stites argues against the pejorative context of “utopia” within the study of Soviet history. Stites asserts that utopia was not exclusively Marxist but that it played a decisive role in the policies and programs of the Bolshevik administration.

The strength of Stites’ work is that he clearly delineates between three Russian utopian traditions. The socialist visions of the Russian intelligentsia, the ordered and rationalized society envisioned by Russia’s administrators, and finally the popular utopianism of the Russian peasantry are described in detail and provide an overall structure to the work. The explanations of utopian visions that culminated in the Russian revolution help to highlight the prevailing ideas about the Russian peasantry and its role within the newly constructed order. What is most enlightening about this work is that by dividing utopianism into three distinct visions Stites shows that Russia’s administrators, and later the Bolsheviks, had different ideas about how utopia was to be achieved. These differences help to highlight the changing discourse that existed concerning the peasantry and provide a better understanding of the myths and rituals that pervaded Bolshevik economic policy throughout the 1920s.

Moshe Lewin’s *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, published in 1975, provides an excellent analysis of the political, economic, and social background concerning the collectivization of peasant agriculture in the late 1920s. Lewin argues that the drive toward collectivization was a result of the grain procurement crisis of 1927. This event convinced Party leadership that the only feasible way of ensuring grain deliveries was through the institution of the *kolkhozes* (collective farms). Lewin’s work is rich in detail and research and offers explanations of peasant village life, the problems of establishing Soviet rule

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in the countryside, and the reasons behind the program of dekulakization. The strength of Lewin’s work is his explanation of the Soviet regime’s inability to establish itself within the countryside. Lewin asserts that while the Bolsheviks believed they understood the Russian peasantry, in fact they had very little grasp upon the wishes and desires of the peasantry. The lack of understanding and misguided beliefs of the way in which village life was structured caused the Bolsheviks to enact their most violent political programs within the countryside. As Lewin argues, the violent political and economic programs can best be seen as culminating in the collectivization of agriculture in the late 1920s. Lewin’s analysis of collectivization offers an excellent portrayal of both the reason and the rationale behind the policy that destroyed the lives of millions.

Much has been written on the modernization attempts in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, much of the literature about this topic is heavily grounded in assumptions concerning the peasantry and often times overlooks the link between the policies of both pre-and post-revolutionary thinkers and their relation to the prevailing economic discursive practices of the time. The majority of the secondary sources include information detailing the need for modernization and industrialization in Russia. The idea of backwardness has become as much a part of the historiography as it was part of the debate among Russia’s educated elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Western scholars Sergei Pushkarev, Hans Rogger, Bertram Wolfe, and Alexander Gerschenkron all based their analysis on the perceived backwardness of Russia. Many of the Soviet sources also labeled pre-revolutionary Russia as backwards in order to justify their intrusion into Russian village life. Before the First World War most critics of Russia’s condition, both Marxist and liberal, believed that Russia was backward, not advancing nearly as quickly as the Western powers and that
eventually Russia could follow the Western path toward prosperity. Moreover, the key to Russia’s backwardness was Russia’s backward peasant.

The preface to Marx’s *Capital* states that “the industrially more developed country presents to the less developed country a picture of the latter’s future.”¹³ Many scholars of Russian history have accepted this and have perpetuated the idea of backwardness. What is lacking within the historiography of Russian modernization policies is the idea of backwardness as a means of legitimizing control and transformation of Russia’s peasantry. An enormous debt is owed to recent scholars, such as Yanni Kotsonis and Esther Kingston-Mann, who have made great strides to dispel the myths of peasant backwardness. Also many scholars have used 1917 as a clear dividing line between the policies of tsarist officials and the policies of the Bolsheviks. The October Revolution installed new leadership in Russia, but with that new leadership came many of the same assumptions and perceived “knowledge” of the peasantry. Both tsarist and Bolshevik regimes struggled with how to industrialize a predominantly agrarian country. Each had to contend with a peasant population that viewed them as alien and outsiders. Because of this both administrations felt the need to control and transform the peasantry into what they believed the peasantry needed to be. While the different administrations had different perceptions of what the peasantry would be transformed into, each believed that it was their duty to construct the peasantry into a more modern version of itself. This thesis will help to establish the link between the pre-and post-revolutionary governments in their attempts to control and transform the peasantry that is lacking within the historiography of Russian economic history.

This paper will argue that the construction of the Russian peasantry as backwards and irrational provided the impetus and legitimization for both the pre-and-post-revolutionary governments to establish control and attempt to transform peasants into modern and rational

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citizens. In order to establish control over the peasantry the tsarist government and the Bolsheviks embarked upon state sponsored economic policies to modernize Russia. The governments, both tsarist and Bolshevik, sought to increase and control agricultural surpluses in order to finance industrialization. Furthermore this thesis will show that the “knowledge” of Russia’s peasantry allowed both the tsarists and later the Bolsheviks to implement radical forms of social change under the guise of achieving modernity and industrialization. While each government desired different outcomes for the peasantry, similarities existed between the state sponsored economic policies before and after 1917. The diagnosis of what was wrong with Russia for both governments was the inherent backwardness of the peasantry. Therefore, each administration operated from a preconceived notion that something was inherently wrong with the Russian peasantry, and thus intrusion into the village was absolutely necessary in order to create what Richard Stites has called “administrative utopia.” The representation of the Russian peasantry as something that needed to be corrected allowed for decades of social engineering through economic policies in order to gain control and modernize Russia. From the initial inquiry into how the Russian village was structured in the early 1880s to the kolkhozy of the late 1920s, the diagnosis of peasant backwardness prompted state sponsored economic intrusion into the Russian village.

I have chosen to contain this study between the years of 1887 and 1932. The year 1887 is significant due to the appointment of Ivan Vyshnegradsky as Minister of Finance. Vyshnegradsky’s policy of industrialization relied heavily on grain exports and the implementation of direct tax increases upon goods consumed heavily by the peasantry. Vyshnegradsky’s policy highlights a trend that would continue well into the twentieth century in which industrialization and the rural population were inextricably linked. The year 1932
provides an appropriate ending due to the fact that collectivization, for all intents and purposes, permanently ended the debate on the role of the peasantry within the program of industrialization.

Chapter Two provides a brief explanation of the way in which the Russian village was structured during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter also examines the early attempts by Finance Ministers Vyshnegradsy and Witte to modernize the Russian countryside through reforms and their reasons for wanting to do so. Chapter Three examines the most extensive attempt at transforming the Russian peasantry, the Stolypin Land Reforms. This chapter shows the change in attitudes toward the Russian peasantry in the early twentieth century and places the reforms within the context of what one scholar has called the “transformative period” of the Russian peasantry.

Chapter Four examines the early period of Bolshevik rule following the October Revolution of 1917. This chapter also illuminates the ways in which early Bolshevik economic policies such as War Communism were attempts to transform the Russian peasants into rational socialists. This chapter argues that the Bolsheviks attempted to transform the peasantry along similar lines as their predecessors. Finally, Chapter Five examines the collectivization drives of the late 1920s. This chapter also examines the way that collectivization marked the final phase of establishing control over the Russian peasantry.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

The humiliating defeat of the Russian army during the Crimean War convinced Tsar Alexander II that the Russian Empire was in desperate need of reforms. In 1861 the tsar issued the Emancipation Reform of 1861 which released the peasantry from bondage. The hope of many state officials was that by freeing the peasantry from the backwardness of serfdom the peasants would be allowed to practice individual capitalist farming and therefore help the Russian economy to grow into that of a European power. In order to foster modernization and industrialization the tsarist administration, particularly the Ministry of Finance, began to seriously consider the problem of how to modernize in a country as economically backward as Russia. The problem of the “agrarian question” continued to plague tsarist reformers, educated Russians, and revolutionaries for the next fifty years. However, beginning in 1881 the Ministry of Finance began to intervene in the lives of the peasantry. The attempt by the finance ministers to gain grain surpluses to finance industrialization drives prompted a new understanding of the peasantry. Increased contact with the countryside by land captains, agricultural specialists, and social reformers brought more attention to the condition of the Russian peasantry than ever before. However, the increased contact with the peasantry convinced Russia’s educated society that the greatest hindrance to Russian industrialization was the “backwardness” of the peasantry. Due to the preconceived notion of peasant irrationality and backwardness a host of specialists descended into the Russian countryside in order to understand the Russian peasant and decide what was best for him. The early modernization attempts of the 1880s and 1890s saw the peasantry reduced to an exploitable natural resource as well as relegated to the role of antithesis to modernity.
Following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 the majority of Russian peasants lived within the obshchina or commune. According to Ben Eklof and Stephen Frank the majority of Russian communes could be classified as “agricultural communes” that contained a predominantly uniform peasant population engaged in agriculture. While other communes did exist where most members engaged in artisan crafts, factory labor, trade, and other types of non-agricultural labor, the largest number of Russian communes was agricultural.¹ The Russian commune was typically comprised of four to eighty peasant households, consisting of twenty to five hundred peasants, and territorial boundaries generally coincided with those of the village. The peasant commune was in charge of regulating periodic land redistribution, collecting taxes for the state, zemstvo, and commune, and organizing labor for tasks such as road maintenance.²

The commune also created both a formal and informal structure of organization. The formal structure of the commune was established by the state and was a means of ensuring that the goals of tax collection, military recruitment, and land allotment were carried out. The formal structure of the commune represented a direct link to the official state apparatus and was supported by the tsarist government. The informal structure of the commune was a much more complex form of organization that relied on unofficial values, norms, roles, institutions, and sanctions which were formed by custom and traditions. The informal structure of the commune was not sanctioned by the state yet was profoundly important in maintaining order and organization within the commune.³

One of the most important tasks of the peasant commune was the redistribution of land amongst peasant households. Land was divided by the leaders of the commune, not into

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³ Eklof and Frank, The World of the Russian Peasant, 10-11.
individual plots, but into strips of land that were periodically redistributed amongst individual peasant households to ensure equal access to the most arable land. The legal sanction given to the customary practice of land redistribution was designed to equalize the burden of taxpaying of individual households and to enable the commune to absorb future population growth. At the same time the repartition was designed to create a mutual responsibility within the commune for the fulfillment of the fiscal obligations to the state, and therefore was supported by the government. However, holding arable land in strips greatly reduced the amount of agricultural productivity as well as agricultural differentiation. The commune’s responsibility of redistributing land was a result of the tsarist government’s policy of non-intervention into peasant life pre-dating the emancipation to the early 1880s. As long as the peasantry was fulfilling its duties to the state by providing taxes, the tsarist government was resolved to treat the peasantry as a natural resource for providing revenue.  

While a policy of government non-intervention in the life of the peasantry was successful throughout the 1860s and the early part of the 1870s, toward the late 1870s the policy came under attack from the public. The changes to government policy toward the countryside began with the appointment of P.A. Valuev to the position of interior minister in 1861. Valuev was charged with reporting on the condition of rural life in Russia and was responsible for suggesting reforms to aid in rural development. In 1872 Valuev was appointed Minister of State Domains and formed the Valuev Commission on the condition of agriculture. Valuev believed that there was no such thing as peasant custom but only an array of customs that resulted in chaos. Valuev believed that the commune was inherently barbaric and chaotic and thus called for the intervention of the government into the village. Valuev urged for the more enterprising peasants

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to consolidate arable plots of land that could be cultivated on an individual basis. Valuev believed that the only way to escape the peasants’ isolation and apathy toward the government was for the government to become involved by persuading peasants to leave the commune.\(^5\) However, unlike the future government reformers who would attempt to eliminate the commune in the name of progress, Valuev called for change on a strictly voluntary basis.

Valuev’s belief that the government should intervene in the affairs of the peasantry sparked a renewed interest in the condition of rural Russia. The newfound attention that Valuev brought to the condition of rural life in Russia put the Russian commune or *obshchina* at the forefront of government policy. His work provided the foundation for those officials who came to believe that the principle cause of peasant impoverishment was inherent in the design of the Russian commune. According to the tsar’s reformists the design of the *obshchina* prevented the application of rational agricultural policies. The design of the commune with its scattered strips of land held in communal tenure prevented individual initiative to produce outputs greater than subsistence levels.\(^6\)

Writing nearly a century later economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron elaborated on this viewpoint. He argued that the formal rules of the commune did not encourage productivity or increases in land improvements. Gerschenkron believed that if the peasant family made land improvements to their land it would only benefit the next family during the next periodic redistribution. The problem of joint responsibility for debts also created a “free rider” problem in which the more industrious peasants were made to pay the debts of the lazy and less industrious peasants.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia*, 12-17.


According to Gerschenkron’s model communal agriculture prevented an attempt at widespread industrialization. The restrictions on labor mobility prevented the burgeoning Russian industry from acquiring the labor it required and thus forced Russian industry to use capital intensive forms of labor production. The low levels of agricultural productivity also prevented the Russian economy from attaining raw materials needed for industrial development. The lack of peasant surpluses also prevented the Russian peasantry from selling surplus on the common market and therefore forced the Russian state to become the main purchaser of industrial goods.  

The agrarian situation in the early half of the 1880s caused government experts, liberals, and even Populists to debate how to solve the problems of Russia’s peasantry. Russia’s depressed economic situation prompted the Russian nihilist Sergei Stepniak to write in 1888 that “as yet Russia is enormous, albeit a comparatively simple, economical organism.” According to mining engineer Alexander Fenin the situation in the Russian countryside was very difficult. Fenin wrote, “the living conditions in our villages were often very hard—an inefficient agriculture carried out on plots of communal land or else on expensive rented holdings, poor harvests, a miserable income, petty and often brutal personal relationships, all against a backdrop of ignorance and hopeless poverty.” While disagreements existed on how to alleviate the problems of peasant poverty, all agreed that there was a need for relief from taxes and redemption payments, cheap credit, and for less frequent division of land allotments.

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8 Paul Gregory, Before Command, 41.
10 Aleksandr Fenin, Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia: Memoirs of a Russian Mining Engineer (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), 53.
11 Rogger, Russia in the Age of Modernization and Revolution 1881-1917, 84.
However, the Russian peasantry was difficult to understand as a class of individuals who were uniform in their desires and hopes. As historian Teodor Shanin has pointed out, “the peasantry is a social subsystem, perpetuating its own structure. This system does not assume, of course, immutable presence but limits change, slows it down and circumscribes its patterns, frustrating the ability of reformers to transform peasantries at will.”

Nikolai Bunge, Alexander III’s first Minister of Finance from 1881 to 1886, developed a plan in 1881 to attack the lack of industrial growth and the problem of rural poverty. Bunge believed that peasant poverty and the lack of industrial growth were linked, and therefore attempts should be made to alleviate peasant poverty. Prior to Bunge’s appointment to the Ministry of Finance he had been an economist. During the 1860s Bunge had professed that ignorance, backwardness, and the imperfections of human nature made the commune’s survival necessary to protect the peasant’s right to land allotments. However, Bunge believed that once peasants became more “civilized” the commune would no longer be necessary. Bunge’s policy during the 1880s was not so much to help the peasant increase his income as to industrialize Russia by increasing the peasant’s capacity to produce. Bunge shifted taxes away from direct peasant taxation and levied sales taxes on tobacco, sugar, oil, and property transfers. Under Bunge’s tenure as Minister of Finance the Peasant Land Bank was established in 1883. The bank was designed to guarantee cheap credit to peasants in order to stimulate land purchasing operations. Bunge attempted to relieve the heavy tax burden on Russia’s rural poor in hopes of

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increasing the peasants’ ability to invest and produce, and therefore to increase the state’s ability to export agricultural products in order to pay for imported capital goods.\textsuperscript{15}

However, it was not until 1887 that industrialization and control of the Russian peasantry became inextricably linked. Bunge’s successor as Minister of Finance, Ivan Vyshnegradsky, believed that it was the peasantry who should and must be forced to pay for industrialization. However, the belief that the peasantry would have to pay for the cost of industrialization was not unique to Vyshnegradsky. In fact, by the late nineteenth century most capitalists and non-capitalists agreed that the peasantry would bear the burdens of economic development, even if they were destroyed in the process.\textsuperscript{16} Vyshnegradsky repealed Bunge’s tax cuts and in turn raised the taxes on items such as kerosene, beer, and vodka, all of which were heavily consumed by the peasantry. The high indirect tax increases levied by Vyshnegradsky, which by 1892 accounted for 72 percent of the Russian government’s public expenditures, helped to enrich the state coffers.\textsuperscript{17} Vyshnegradsky hoped to create a budgetary surplus by reducing instead of stimulating popular consumption. Vyshnegradsky believed that by curbing consumption, imports, and state expenditures he could squeeze the peasantry to produce more or at least force the peasantry to relinquish a larger part of their product for export.\textsuperscript{18} The increase in taxes forced the peasants to export more grain while the profits from the exports increased the state’s ability to pay for aid and machinery to assist in the industrialization of Russia. As Vyshnegradsky once pronounced, “we must export though we die.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18}Rogger, \textit{Russian in the Age of Modernization and Industrialization 1881-1917}, 101.
In addition to raising excise taxes in order to curb consumption rates Vyshnegradsky also greatly raised tariffs in order to protect domestic industry, sought foreign loans from European countries such as France, and pushed for the collection of redemption payments. Vyshnegradsky’s system was able to eliminate the trade deficit inherited from Bunge and produced a massive budget surplus by squeezing the revenues from the peasantry and scheduling loans from France.\(^{20}\) However, despite the fact that Vyshnegradsky’s system filled the state coffers with gold it crippled the rural economy. The lack of grain reserves in the countryside proved devastating with the onslaught of famine in 1891 in which mass starvation ravaged the provinces.\(^{21}\) According to economic historian Peter Gatrell the death rate of European Russia during the famine of 1891 leaped to 27 percent above the natural trend line of that time.\(^{22}\)

The famine of 1891 proved devastating for Vyshnegradsky’s career as well, and Sergei Witte replaced Vyshnegradsky in 1892. Witte was unlike many of his predecessors as he was not of noble birth and had made his career and money as a businessman and railroad administrator. Witte took over the position of Minister of Finance during the worst famine of the nineteenth century. The famine was the result of numerous droughts and a series of crop failures, exacerbated by the depletion of grain reserves, and by 1892 half of Russia’s peasant population was unable to feed itself from harvest to harvest. In European Russia the mortality rates were 400,000 in excess of the normal figures.\(^{23}\) The famine and subsequent condition of the Russian peasantry forced the tsarist government to re-examine its policies toward the agrarian situation in Russia. Russia’s rulers, including Tsar Alexander III and Sergei Witte came to realize that the situation in the countryside could pose serious problems for the safety and

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\(^{21}\) Blackwell, *The Industrialization of Russia*, 33.

\(^{22}\) Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy*, 60.

longevity of the regime. Prior to the famine in 1890 the state issued the New Zemstvo Statute which gave even more control to the government within the villages. Provision five explains that, “the governor shall have supervision over the correctness and legality of the actions of zemstvo institutions.”24 The new statute also allowed the governor to appoint the representatives of village communities and halt the execution of ordinances by zemstvo assemblies that were deemed “not in the general welfare and needs of the state.”25 The same sort of increased control was also evident in the New Statute Concerning Town Government issued in 1892. Therefore, in order to maintain order within the countryside the government was unable to resist social change but instead took control of the change and directed it.26

In the wake of the 1891 famine top officials within the Ministry of Finance argued that economic change was natural and inevitable. The officials in the Ministry of Finance believed that peasants should be drawn into an integrated economy and should be led toward integration through state credit and more rational trading mechanisms.27 Witte wrote the tsar in 1899 that, “the country needs above all, a firm and strict economic system.”28 Witte argued that as long as Russia remained committed to the low productivity agricultural commune, the country could only hope to remain a colony of Western Europe. Witte wrote, in a memorandum to the tsar in 1899, that “Russia was, and to a certain extent still is, a hospitable colony of this type for all the industrially developed states, generously supplying them with the cheap products of its soil and

26 Oberlander, Russia Enters the Twentieth Century, 125.
paying dearly for the products of their labor.” Witte went on to write that, “Russia wishes to be a metropolis itself.”

Due in large part to Witte’s decision to fix the value of the ruble to the gold standard, which attracted a great deal of foreign capital, as well as a state sponsored program of railroad building including the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Russia was achieving an industrial growth rate of eight percent per year. The increase in railroad construction was also seen as a way to promote industry and contend with the overpopulation experienced in the Russian countryside. According to Alexander Fenin, the Russian mining engineer, “a burgeoning industry would drain off a good bit of excess village population, and thus help to alleviate the agrarian overpopulation.” The state sponsored program of railroad construction increased the amount of track from 1,898 miles constructed from 1886-1890 to 10,035 miles constructed from 1896-1900. The massive increase in railroad building also led to the creation of new industrial centers in Novorossiysk and the Ukrainian Donbass area to provide the iron, coal, locomotives, and equipment to boost industrial growth. For Witte, who had begun his career as a railroad man, the railroad represented a way of incorporating the diverse elements of the national economy into a single task and goal of a powerful Russian Empire searching for its rightful place alongside the European order.

By acquiring massive loans from other European powers, particularly Germany, Witte raised tariffs on imports while continuing to dramatically increase exports. Also like his predecessors, Witte continued to enforce taxes upon liquor, which were an attempt to both

29 Adams, ed., Imperial Russia After 1861, 51.
30 Evhutov and Stites, A History of Russia Since 1800, 163.
31 Fenin, Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia, 172.
32 Wolfe, Revolution and Reality, 24.
increase state revenue as well as to transform the peasantry into a sober and productive labor force. Witte wrote “the very condition under which the people live and work will have to be changed. At present a Russian works as he drinks.”35 Witte’s policies, much like the policies of Vyshnegradsky, continued to focus on industrialization while neglecting the problems of the peasantry. The peasants continued to be “bled” through increased exports, via taxes, to pay for the cost of industrialization and modernization. Witte was determined to create a modern and industrial Russia, even at the expense of Russia’s peasantry. 36 In contrast to Vyshnegradsky Witte’s desire to make Russia reliant on its industrial base instead of it agricultural exports was seen, by Witte, as a means of developing along the lines of Britain and not India, Germany but not China. However, to many educated Russians the policies of Witte were beginning to create a political and economic catastrophe in the Russian countryside.37

Many of the educated Russians who believed that Witte’s policies were creating disorder in the countryside were not the Populists or revolutionaries but the tsar’s top advisors. General Lobko, the state comptroller, wrote in 1902 that, “the chief burden of that (Witte’s) system lies undoubtedly upon the agricultural mass, seriously impairing its purchasing power. It has to bear almost the entire burden of direct and indirect taxes. This, according to my deepest conviction, constitutes the chief cause of the present difficulties.”38 Vladimir Gurko, an assistant minister in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, wrote that, “agriculture to him (Witte) was a necessary but purely subordinate branch of public economy; agriculture was necessary to feed the population

37 Blackwell, The Industrialization of Russia, 34-35; Von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia, 33-35.
38 Kochan, Russia in Revolution, 17-18.
but could not serve as the sole source of its well being. This explains his negative attitude toward all measures designed to improve the agricultural situation."

Earlier in Witte’s career he, much like Bunge, professed a certain faith in the virtues of the peasant commune. However, by 1898 Witte pronounced that, “the reason which retards the firm establishment of the economy of our peasants is concealed in the legal conditions of their way of life.” During Witte’s budget report for 1899 Witte expressed the prevailing mood amongst tsarist advisors when he spoke of the hardships of the Russian climate and the state of economic stagnation that existed within Russia’s peasantry. However, Witte defended himself and claimed that peasant poverty was not the result of the heavy tax burden or industrial development. Witte explained that the causes lay in “the undefined economic and social relations among the peasants.”

Witte made clear his belief that the Russian commune and the productive capabilities of capitalist agriculture were incompatible. In the conclusion of Witte’s budget report he exclaimed that, “the final arrangement of the social conditions and property rights among the peasantry is the task for our generation.”

Despite Witte’s initial successes and heightened industrial growth rates, his policies toward the peasantry, like Vyshnegradsky’s, ended in failure. The squeezing of the peasantry had once again sapped the peasantry of its grain surpluses and in 1898-1899 famine struck the Russian countryside. International events such as the Spanish-American War, Boer War, and Boxer Rebellion, and general economic decline also contributed to a decline of foreign loans and capital to Russia. The plunge in available capital led to a decrease in the state’s orders to industry and therefore brought decline to Russia’s industrial growth. To make matters worse the

39 “V.I. Gurko on Witte as Minister of Finance, 1892-1903” in A Source Book, 759.
40 Oberlander, Russia Enters the Twentieth Century, 126.
41 Von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia, 176.
42 Von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia, 176.
squeezing of agricultural surpluses from the peasantry had eliminated any domestic market that could help to alleviate the fall in state demand. Over the period 1900-1906 an international recession caused Russia’s industrial growth to fall from 8 percent to 1.43 percent.\textsuperscript{43} The falling industrial growth led to wage reductions, strikes, and growing hostility within Russia’s cities. Therefore, in 1903 Witte was replaced as Minister of Finance.

The officials within the Ministry of Finance who desired to see Russia become an industrial world power through embracing capitalism and modernity were not the only group of educated Russians debating the role of the peasantry in the industrialization of Russia. The Populists or \textit{narodniki} desired to see Russia maintain its traditional village commune. However, the images of the peasantry that were conjured by the Populists were just as much an exercise in imagination as the images of the tsarist officials. The Populists saw the village commune as superior to private land holding due to its emphasis on community rather than individuals as well as its tradition of opposing modernization.\textsuperscript{44} The Populists agreed that capitalism was coming to Russia as an alien and unwanted force that threatened the very core of what was considered “Russianness.” The Populists Vasili Voronkov and Nikolai Daniel’son rejected the idea that industrialization would absorb the excess rural population, or create a consumer base from which the new volume of industrial goods would be purchased. The growth of competitive capitalism in Russia, according to the Populists, would cause peasants to suffer, industry to stagnate, and Russia to fall into foreign domination. Therefore, capitalism would lead to the ruin of Russia and would collapse under its own weight long before it transformed Russia.\textsuperscript{45} The differences between the Ministry of Finance and the Populists over the peasantry’s role in modernization

\textsuperscript{43} Kochan, \textit{Russia in Revolution}, 17.
highlighted the different aspirations and goals of Russia’s educated population during the turn of the century.

The early modernization attempts of the late nineteenth century, while attempting to promote growth in the industrial sectors of society, also marked a change in the educated elites and government officials’ concept of the Russian peasantry. During the 1880s a host of new specialists began to make their way into the Russian countryside. Specialists in ethnography, statistics, jurisprudence, and economics replaced the amateurs who had concentrated on the study of the peasant soul and instead provided intimate “knowledge” of how the rural village was structured and therefore how it could be controlled.\textsuperscript{46} The end of the nineteenth century provided an image of the peasantry that was filled with discouragement, bitterness, and pessimism as educated Russians fulfilled Dostoevsky’s prophecy that if the peasantry turned out to be “not as we imagined,” then educated Russians would “renounce them without regret.”\textsuperscript{47} By the 1890s and early 1900s educated Russians, for the most part, viewed themselves as distant from the peasantry. Many educated Russians viewed the peasant commune, and thus the peasants themselves, as the chief deterrent in the modernization of Russia.\textsuperscript{48} Educated Russians quickly established the peasantry as the “other” and assumed the role of moving the mass of peasants forward toward progress and development.\textsuperscript{49}

One of the ways in which to gain intimate “knowledge” of the Russian countryside as well as to provide capital for industrialization was through taxation. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s the government began to estimate the amount of taxes that would be collected by introducing tax inspectors into the villages. The creation of the Tax Inspectorate under the

\textsuperscript{46} Cathy Frierson, \textit{Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.  
\textsuperscript{47} Frierson, \textit{Peasant Icons}, 182.  
\textsuperscript{49} Frierson, \textit{Peasant Icons}, 194.
provincial Treasury Offices in 1885 experienced a growth from 500 members in 1885 to over 1,500 in 1911. The tax inspectors who went into the countryside to collect data were not mere civil servants but scholars with high levels of education. The inspectors were required to assess individual renters, businesses, and properties while at the same time collecting intimate “knowledge” of the rural population. As one tax official explained, “the tax is in no way meant as a supplement to the treasury” but was a way to “implicate society itself in this reform, to elicit sympathy.” The use of taxation helped the state gather information on its population as a means of collecting taxes and keeping watch on its citizens. Also by establishing more highly developed taxation the government sought to individualize the peasantry by connecting each property and income to a person, and each person to a property and income. By 1906, during the Stolypin Land Reforms, the government claimed that each homesteader would have the “honor” of a personal tax bill instead of a share of the communal bill.

During the years 1890 and 1891 land captains were introduced into twenty eight provinces of European Russia. The purpose of introducing the land captains into the village was to open the village to outside influence, namely the influence of the state. As the governor of Iaroslavl explained to the new land captains of his province, “if you can become an authority who can discuss all affairs with peasants, understand peasant institutions, then the peasantry will trust government authority, associating firmness with the defense of the weak against the strong.” The land captain represented a form of control within the village and also was a clear example of the government’s belief in the childishness of the Russian village. The decree

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50 Yanni Kotsonis, “No Place to Go: Taxation and State Transformation in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia” The Journal of Modern History 76 (September 2004): 541.
51 Kotsonis, “No Place to Go”, 554.
52 Kotsonis, “No Place to Go, 554.
53 Corrine Gaudin, Ruling Peasants: Village and State in Late Imperial Russia (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 48.
introducing land captains into the village states that, “the land captain is charged with looking after the economic welfare and moral advancement of the peasants in the district entrusted to him.” The introduction of land captains in the early 1890s brought hope and excitement to the zemstvo and public activists who called for fundamental reform within the village. Due to the government’s pessimistic image of the village as a working organism, land captains were introduced to install order into village life as well as to protect the peasant from himself or his neighbor.

The formative period of the late nineteenth century has led one historian to characterize the period as the “making of the peasantry.” In order for Russia to embark upon its modernization drives the educated elite and government officials believed they must control the peasantry and remake it as rational and productive. In order to do so the educated elites constructed the peasant commune as economically irrational, and the peasants as backward. It was this “knowledge” of the peasantry that structured the policies of those who interacted with the peasantry. The reformist state officials, zemstvo activists, and rural professionals would use the language of progress, enlightenment, and science to form their assumptions about the progress of Russia’s peasantry. The assumption that peasants were too ignorant to organize themselves within a Russia wrought with new markets and the onset of capitalism allowed for the intervention of reformers within the countryside.

The view of Russian peasants as uneducated drunkards was evident in the establishment of schools that were shaped by the interplay of popular demands and elite notions. As the

55 Frierson, Peasant Icons, 193.
58 Kotsonis, Making Peasants Backward, 34-35.
59 Eklof and Frank, The World of the Russian Peasant, 115.
Russian noble Princess Marie wrote, “It is true that public education of the Russian peasantry was-and is-fraught with such difficulties as to make a complete conquest over ignorance all but impossible.” The goal of the reformers was to construct a sanitized version of the Russian peasantry, one that could be rationally changed and augmented to fit the necessities of a modern and industrial Russia.

In order to confront the problem of peasant ignorance and backwardness, the 1890s also witnessed an increase in zemstvo efforts to build and support primary schools in the Russian countryside. A delegate to the Khar’kov zemstvo explained in 1897 that, “poverty and ignorance—here are the main reasons for all our ills. . .we are poor because we are ignorant, and ignorant because we are poor—how do we escape this vicious circle, which ill should we cure first?” Whether the reformers were the state, the gentry, or liberal reformers, each shared an image of the peasantry as childish. Therefore all agreed that primary schools would be one way to civilize the masses. Schools also provided the organization of space and time into routine and discipline that would help ease the transition from the village culture to capitalism. The growing industrialization and growing markets in Russia during the 1890s also prompted many peasants to become literate in order to become more successful in dealing with markets. Many peasants remarked that, “it is much easier to cheat the illiterate person, while he who can read doesn’t get caught so easily.” However, while many primary schools were established, often times the villagers would recognize the school as established by outsiders and use them for purposes other than what they were intended to be used for. For example, many schoolrooms or

63 Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*, 419.
64 Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*, 268.
libraries were frequently transformed into clubs for gambling, drinking, and other forms of socializing. Unfortunately for the peasantry, these actions only contributed to the stereotype of backwardness and ignorance.

In addition to the control sought by tsarist officials by placing land captains within the villages, during the 1880s and 1890s an attempt was made to control the very idea and image of the Russian countryside. At the 1882 All Russian Industrial Arts Exhibition held in Moscow, kustar’, or cottage industry, items were placed on display. As soon as kustar’ industry was “discovered” the government, agricultural societies, and local zemstvos attempted to bring assistance and allocate funds to increase its production. Due to the success of the All Russian Exhibition the Moscow zemstvo opened the Moscow Kustar’ Museum in 1885. The success of the kustar’ exhibitions were due to a large extent not to the products but the images and meanings of the products that they helped to reinforce. The kustar’ exhibits of peasant handicrafts served to reinforce the conception of “self” and “other” within Russian educated society. To the educated urban citizens the sanitized version of the Russian countryside in the form of delicate and charming kustar’ products helped to represent the Russian people as small scaled capitalists instead of a dark mass. However, the notion of kustar’ industry also helped to reinforce the countryside as a “different” and an “other-worldly place.”

The changing attitude toward the Russian peasantry was also evidenced in the plays and dramas produced for Russia’s cities. Prior to the 1880s playwrights included qualities that the peasants were praised for such as godliness, kindness, humility, honesty, and the love of labor. However, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century a more negative image of the Russian peasantry began to appear. Plays by Potekhin, Pisemskii, and Kishenskii each created a scene in

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65 Frank and Steinberg, *Cultures in Flux*, 107.
which the underlying assumption throughout the play was that something was utterly wrong with the village. The peasants appeared more vagrant, disordered, drunk, and ignorant throughout the plays. In combination with certain tsarist officials’ belief that the commune represented the antithesis to modernization, the plays written after Kishenskii’s play *Nothing Good Can Come From Hard Drinking* in 1881 show that the peasant has become crude, dirty, somber, less religious, and less compassionate. Also after 1881 the *mir*, far from representing Tolstoy’s idea of the Russian soul, came to represent a place of wickedness and ignorance.

Prior to the 1880s the Russian peasantry was exemplified by moralists and Populists alike as the “soul” of Russia. The youthful Populists who went into the Russian countryside during the “to the people” movements believed that the wise *narod* would show them the way to a simpler and more fulfilling life as well as improve and redeem the very soul of Russia. The populist N.A. Morozov described his view of the *narod* after reading Lavrov’s journals as such, “I passionately wanted to believe that everything among the simple *narod* was as good as the authors of these articles said, and that it was not necessary for the *narod* to learn from us, but us to learn from them.”

Even the author Dostoevsky remarked that, “our *narod* love the truth for truth alone and not for glory.” He also wrote that, “Yes, there is much bestiality in the *narod*, but do not point at it. This bestiality is the slime of centuries; it will be cleansed. Is not Christ’s spirit in our people, dark but good, ignorant but not barbarian?”

The Populists and authors such as Dostoevsky projected their idealized notions of village life upon the dark and undefined mass of Russian peasants. However, the idealized image of the peasantry, while serving the needs of educated Russians, failed to provide a detailed and useful picture of village life. In

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70 Frierson, *Peasant Icons*, 40.
71 Frierson, *Peasant Icons*, 49.
order to change the conditions of the village the reformers would have to define the peasant in more rational and understandable terms.

As mentioned earlier the influx of specialists into the Russian countryside during the late nineteenth century dramatically altered the way in which the peasantry was viewed by government officials, Populists, revolutionaries, and the urban population. The evolution of the peasantry from the narod, which defined the peasants as simple, egalitarian, and essentially as the “soul” of Russia, to the image of the kulak, is striking. The kulak represented the peasant as an individualist and “rational” actor who was concerned, not with the well being of his fellow peasants, but with his own personal power and commercial gain. Aleksandr Engelgardt wrote “every peasant has a bit of the kulak in him; with the exception of those who are stupid. . . every peasant, if the circumstances are favorable, will exploit anyone else in the most splendid fashion.”72 Engelgardt also wrote that, “if there is a chance to extort from someone, he (the kulak) will extort.”73 The kulak also differed with the narod because it represented a concrete ideal. The qualities of the narod were minimally sketched whereas the image of the kulak was sharp, detailed, and scientific.74 The kulak, much like the rest of the peasantry, also represented different images for Russia’s different social reformers. The officials within the Ministry of Finance favored the kulak as the individualistic farmer who wanted to enrich himself by moving away from the commune. The Populists believed that the kulak represented all the evils that capitalism had introduced into the countryside and the Marxists, like Lenin, believed that the exploitative kulak proved the existence of class stratification within the Russian village.75 The changing imagery of the peasant represented the difficulty of Russia’s educated society in

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73 Engelgardt, Letter From the Country, 224.  
74 Frierson, Peasant Icons, 158-160.  
75 Frierson, Peasant Icons, 146.
determining the qualities of the peasantry and thus invoking change in the countryside. The peasant represented something different to government officials, Populists, revolutionaries, and the educated population of Russia. However, while each of the reformers had a different image of the peasantry, the overall fact that the peasantry were in need of help and guidance was clear to all outside of the village.

The attempts to modernize Russia in the 1880s and 1890s provided detailed information on the condition of the Russian countryside. The tsarist reformers like Vyshnegradsky and Witte, who dreamed of a modern and industrial Russia, saw their plans falter under the weight of an impoverished peasantry unable to sustain the strain of increased taxes. The Populists believed that the industrialization and modernization policies of the 1880s and 1890s had brought the alien force of capitalism to the Russian countryside and that capitalism would destroy the very essence of Russia. The Marxist revolutionaries such as Lenin believed that the modernization attempts had brought capitalism to Russia and therefore would be useful in “proletarianizing” the Russian population. The increased contact with the countryside in the form of land captains, increased railroads, agricultural specialists, and social reformists brought more attention to the condition of Russia’s peasantry than ever before. Despite the fact that different reformers had different remedies for Russia’s “backwardness,” it was assumed that the people who knew the least of how to remedy peasant poverty were the peasants themselves. Each group of Russia’s reformers believed they knew what was best for Russia’s maladies. This fact would be even more evident in 1906 with the implementation of bold land reforms under Russia’s new Minister of Finance; Peter Stolypin.
RUSSIA’S RURAL TRANSFORMATION, 1906-1917

The modernization attempts of the 1890s and early 1900s helped to incite peasant uprisings in the Kharkov and Poltava Provinces in 1902 and 1903. Both government officials and revolutionaries believed the uprisings were a response to rural poverty, an inadequate amount of land, disproportionate share of the burden of industrialization, and the peasants’ inferior judicial status.¹ In order to quell the unrest in the countryside tsar Nicholas II turned to his advisors and ministers to solve the problem. The tsar found his answer to the agrarian problem in the form of Peter Stolypin. Stolypin’s Land Reforms and the rural transformation that they were intended to produce once again removed the peasantry from the debate on how to modernize Russia. Similar to the way in which Vyshnegradsky and Witte attempted to transform Russia’s economy through squeezing the peasantry for grain exports, Stolypin attempted to fundamentally transform rural Russians into productive and rational capitalist farmers. The reforms were predicated upon the assumptions of peasant backwardness and therefore only added to the discourse of peasant irrationality. Therefore, the land reforms sought to impose order into the chaotic Russian countryside and show peasants the “true” and “rational” way toward modernity.

In addition to the problems of government policy in the countryside, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905 created a strain on the urban and rural population as well. The increased demand for war materials for the front led to increased production and longer working hours for Russia’s urban workers. In order to protest the increases in working hours Father Gapon led a crowd of 50,000 to 100,000 workers toward the Winter Palace in the streets of Petersburg on January 22, 1905. The protesters called for freedom of speech, equality before the law, abolition

of land redemption payments, an eight hour workday, normal wage rates, social insurance, and worker representation on factory committees. Gapon wrote in his 1905 petition to the tsar that, “only if and when they are fulfilled will it be possible to free our country from slavery and poverty; will it be possible for the workers to organize themselves to protect their interests against the insolent exploitation of the capitalists and the thievish government of bureaucrats who strangle the people.”\(^2\) As the crowd approached the Palace Square the tsar’s Cossack guards opened fire killing around 200 people. The horrific event was christened “Bloody Sunday” and represented to Russia’s public that the regime stood in opposition to its own people.\(^3\)

In order to quell the uprisings that gripped Russia for the next ten months, Nicholas II issued the “October Manifesto” on October 17, 1905. The manifesto expressed the tsar’s grief concerning the unrest that was gripping the country and agreed to grant civil liberties and establish the principle that no law was to take force until it had been approved by the State Duma. The tsar’s manifesto culminated in proclaiming, “We summon all loyal sons of Russia to remember their duties towards their country, to assist in terminating this unprecedented unrest, and together with Us to make every effort to restore peace and tranquility in Our native land.”\(^4\) The manifesto did very little to quell unrest and the number of peasant riots, burnings, and lootings continued well into the fall of 1905. Even the issue of a second manifesto on November 3 that abolished redemption payments for allotment land and the promise to satisfy the vital needs of the peasants failed to solve the situation.\(^5\)

\(^3\) Evtuho and Stites, A History of Russia Since 1800, 225.
\(^4\) “Concessions of Nicholas II in the Revolution of 1905” in Dmytryshyn, ed., Imperial Russia, A Source Book, 1700-1917, 315.
The elections to the first Duma between February and April 1906 sent many representatives to the countryside in hopes of winning the peasantry over to their side. The election process gave the vote to 20 to 25 million citizens who elected a total of 524 Duma deputies. The election provided a clear victory for the center and left wing parties of Russia. The convocation of the First Duma on April 27, 1906 was intended to bring the violence of the countryside to the chambers of political debate. However, the first Duma was short lived, and on July 6, just two months after its creation, the Duma was dissolved by Nicholas II. While the first Duma ultimately failed it became clear to the representatives that the most pressing issue facing Russia was the agrarian question or what role the peasants would play in the modernization of Russia.  

Peter Stolypin was born to a noble family in 1862 and received his education at St. Petersburg University, where he received a degree in the Faculty of Natural Sciences in 1885. After graduating Stolypin entered into the Statistical Section of the Ministry of State Domains and two years later became the district marshal of the Kovno District. In 1902 Stolypin was appointed governor of Saratov and remained there until his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1906. During Stolypin’s tenure as governor he fashioned himself as a “social activist” rather than a government official. Stolypin believed that the roots of revolution lay in the state of agriculture throughout the Russian countryside. Stolypin believed that through government intervention into the Russian countryside the low levels of agrarian production could be raised and thus many of the problems of peasant poverty and unrest would be alleviated. Stolypin also gained attention from the government in St. Petersburg for his repression of peasant revolts within the Saratov Province during 1905. Stolypin was especially known as an outspoken opponent of the open-

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field strip system of cultivation. Stolypin repeatedly wrote to the tsar while governor of Saratov that vital agrarian reform was needed to eliminate the threat of peasant unrest. Stolypin argued that the peasantry should be allowed to hold its own land, independent of the commune, so that those who were industrious could establish themselves as a group of well-off individual landowners.

Following his appointment as Prime Minister in April 1906, the most pressing issue facing Stolypin was the growing unrest in the countryside. The lack of control in both the cities and countryside of Russia forced the tsar to adopt new policies to combat the growing anarchy. Stolypin’s own assassination attempt on August 12, 1906 caused the Prime Minister to invoke the law on field courts martial. The law stated that if it was “so obvious” that a civilian had committed a crime that no investigation was needed then the case would be settled within two days of his arrest by a field court comprised of five military officers. The law was meant to apply to people charged with “murder, robbery, attacks on sentries in military guards, with armed resistance to authorities, assaults on officials of the military and police and on officials in general, or with having been involved in the illegal manufacture, acquisition, storage, carrying, or sale of explosives or shells.”

During the eight months that the field courts existed 1,102 people were executed, 329 people sentenced to hard labor, 443 to prison terms, and 7 people were exiled. Stolypin’s method of dealing with suspected revolutionaries and dissidents was so well known that the hangmen’s noose came to be called Stolypin’s necktie. Stolypin’s repressive measures were harsh, yet they did succeed in quelling much of rebelliousness during

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8 Peter Waldron, Between Two Revolutions: Stolypin and the Politics of Renewal in Russia (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 47.
1906-1907. However, Stolypin’s belief that the true measure of pacifying the rural population lay in agrarian reform caused him to return to his assault on the Russian commune soon after peasant unrest was under control.

Stolypin’s tenure as governor of the Saratov Province prior to his advancement as Prime Minister convinced him that land reform was necessary in order to prevent further peasant unrest. Stolypin’s daughter wrote that, “abolition of communal land holding and transfer of the peasants to private farms had been a vision of my father’s from his youthful years. He saw in this the primary security of Russia’s future fortunes. To make every peasant an individual proprietor and to give him an opportunity to work peacefully on his own land seemed to Papa to be the way to improve the peasant’s situation.”

His time as governor had also convinced Stolypin that the peasantry was unable to conceive of land reform on its own and therefore needed government intervention. In his 1904 report from Saratov Stolypin wrote that, “the Russian peasant has a passion for making everyone equal, for reducing everything to a common denominator, and since the masses cannot be raised to the level of the most capable, the most active, and the most intelligent, the best elements must be brought down to the level of understanding and ambition prevailing among the inferior, inert majority.”

In the same report Stolypin went on to say that, “the natural counterbalance to the communal principle is individual ownership of property. It serves also as a guarantee of order, since the small property owner is the cornerstone of any durable political structure.”

To Stolypin, the commune represented disorder in the countryside and blocked any attempt at modernizing Russia’s economy. It also

10 Ascher, P.A. Stolypin, 144.
13 “Stolypin’s Report from Saratov” in A Source Book For Russian History, 802.
acted as a hotbed of anti-government activism. Russia’s landed gentry as well as top government officials became convinced that the Russian commune was as politically dangerous as it was economically backward. Therefore, it was up to the government to formally end the power of the commune over Russia’s peasantry.\footnote{Esther Kingston-Mann, \textit{In Search of the True West: Culture, Economics, and Problems of Russian Development} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 171.}

Beginning in 1906 the Stolypin Land Reforms attempted to liquidate the powers of the commune over the peasant, to eliminate restrictive communal institutions, such as periodic repartition and mutual responsibility, and to establish a permanent, individual ownership of consolidated plots of land.\footnote{William Blackwell, \textit{The Industrialization of Russia: An Historical Perspective} (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982), 36; Esther Kingston-Mann, \textit{In Search of the True West}, 171-172.} The Danish agronomist Carl Andreas Kofoed, one of the chief architects of the agrarian reforms, wrote that “during my two years on the land in Russia I had seen enough of the peasants’ stupid division of the village land to realize that until the fields of the individual farms were consolidated into territorial units, which were easy to manage, there could be no question of peasant farming making rapid progress.”\footnote{C.A. Koefoed, \textit{My Share in the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms} (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), 17.} Stolypin stated in his speech to the Duma on the agrarian question that, “it is essential to provide the capable, hard working Russian peasant, the salt of the Russian earth, with the opportunity to free himself from the hindrances and the conditions of life which he now faces.”\footnote{“Stolypin’s Speech to the Duma on the Agrarian Question, May 10, 1907” in \textit{A Source Book For Russian History}, 804.} Stolypin’s daughter commented on the problems of the peasant commune in that, “the peasant was able only temporarily to utilize the land portion assigned to him. As temporary owner of a strip of land, the peasant of course, tried not to improve it but only to exploit it.”\footnote{Von Bock, \textit{Reminiscences of My Father}, 175.}

In his famous decree of November 9, 1906 Stolypin formally ended the commune’s hold over the Russian peasant. The decree stated that, “the peasants will have the right of free
withdrawal from the communes, in which case individual householders who make the transfer to personal ownership will be accorded property rights over plots of land from the communal allotment.”¹⁹ The abolition of the Russian commune represented to Stolypin and his supporters the creation of a class of propertied peasants who would align themselves with other landowners and with the government instead of their “needy and drunken” village neighbors. The new landowning peasants would cooperate with government police and magistrates in order to protect their new property from their neighbors.²⁰ To Stolypin the land reforms would eventually break down traditional peasant institutions and convert Russia’s arable land into commercial farms and in the process turn Russia’s peasants into model citizens.²¹

Stolypin defended his policies in his speech to the Third Duma in 1908 when he argued that, “in those localities of Russia where the individuality of the peasant is already definitely developed, where the commune as a coercive union constitutes an obstacle to his independent activity, there must be given the freedom to apply his labors to the land; there he must be given the liberty to work, to enrich himself, to have charge of his own property; he must be given control over the land, he must be saved from the slavery of the obsolescent communal system.”²²

In the same speech Stolypin made his famous statement that, “we must, when we write laws for the whole country, keep in mind the judicious and the strong, and not the drunken and the weak. . . the government . . . placed its wager not on the poor and the drunken, but in the firm and the strong.”²³ Stolypin envisioned a strong, capitalist, monarchial Russia which would provide boldness and stability lay at the root of the land reforms. Stolypin set out to accelerate the

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²⁰ Kingston-Mann, In Search of the True West, 172.
²¹ George Yaney, The Urge to Mobilize: Agrarian Reform in Russia, 1861-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 265.
²² “Stolypin’s Wager on the Strong Speech in the Third Duma, December 5, 1908” in A Source Book For Russian History, 806-807.
²³ “Stolypin’s Wager on the Strong Speech in the Third Duma, December 5, 1908” in A Source Book For Russian History, 807.
transfer of land into the hands of those deemed to be the most efficient, to release the peasant from restrictions on his enterprise, and to build up a new class of prosperous peasants who would be a force both for economic progress and social stability.  

The Stolypin Land Reforms not only envisioned the countryside as a series of individually held plots of land but also hoped to direct the physical make-up of the peasant farm itself. The most desired form of land consolidation was the Type A *khutor* which consisted of “a farm that approximated as nearly as possible to a square and consisted of a single parcel of land incorporating the house and garden plot and with no residual land, such as pastures and meadows, outside its boundaries.” Instructions were also handed down to land-reform agents who imposed limits upon the desirable shape of the consolidated land. For example, no angle on a farm was to exceed forty-five degrees and the length to width ratio of each farm was not to exceed 5:1. The fascination with detail and organization of the land reformers highlights the desire to impose a more rational order upon Russia’s countryside. Within the legal restructuring of the peasant’s land was the perception that the village lacked order and thus was responsible for chaos. It was the goal of the reformers to eliminate that “chaos” that existed in the countryside. In order to impose rationality upon the peasant commune the reformers sought to understand the peasant commune and wage war against its backwardness. Kofoed wrote that “the commune was the Enemy No. 1 of land consolidation. To be able to fight an enemy one must first of all learn to know him. I therefore decided to follow the advice given to me to study the nature of the commune.”

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Though the reform was narrowly focused on the physical and legal restructuring of peasant farms, in its broader conception it constructed a new social identity for Russia’s peasants. The reforms sought not only to restructure the land holdings of the peasantry but also to restructure the way in which peasants were to act. Acting upon the discourses created by agronomists, Stolypin’s Land Reform imposed a certain “rationality” upon the peasants and assumed peasants would act in accord with predominant Western norms such as a tendency toward private and productive land enclosures. Stolypin’s peasants would be distinguished from other peasants in Russia not just by the fact they held title to their land or farmed enclosed fields, but by their sobriety, superior morality, their embrace of modern farming techniques, and their political reliability. The peasants, when actually included in the narrative of reform, were described by the reformers as grateful recipients of enlightenment and progress. As described by the popular publication on the reform entitled The Awakening Village energetic and hard working peasants were able to consolidate their lands and create a much more productive form of agriculture. In short, Stolypin’s peasants would be integrated into society as “reformed” and “corrected.”

The construction of a new social identity for the peasants was one of the ways in which the Stolypin Land Reform sought to impose order in the countryside and to make the previously incomprehensible peasant comprehensible. The reform also sought to impose order in a more direct way by reorganizing village lands and by placing the peasants within their “correct” social order. The land reforms which sought to create a rational, ordered, and capitalistic peasantry also influenced the political aspirations of young Marxists such as Vladimir Lenin. Lenin

30 Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia*, 32.
believed that the reform’s attempt at destroying the peasant commune would only help to create a proletarian village peasant who had been displaced by the more well to do peasants that Stolypin hoped to create.\footnote{David Mitrany, \textit{Marx Against the Peasantry: A Study in Social Dogmatism} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), 68-69.} The Stolypin reforms, for Lenin, represented the ushering in of the unavoidable historical phase of capitalism and therefore represented the historical progress toward socialism. Whether the reforms aided the tsarist administration in its pursuit of administrative utopia or aided in the formation of a revolutionary peasantry, the reforms ultimately took control out of the hands of the peasants and placed it within the hands of an educated elite. Domination of rural popular culture through education, invented traditions, transformation of world views, or even suppression was fundamental to the goals of the government, liberal reformers, and socialists alike, much as it would be to their Bolshevik successors.\footnote{Stephen Frank and Mark Steinberg, eds., \textit{Cultures in Flux: Lower Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107.}

In \textit{Discipline and Punish} Michel Foucault wrote, describing the prison system and disciplinary space, “Each individual has his own place, and each place its individual…Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed…Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at a moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, judge it, to calculate its qualities and merits.”\footnote{Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison} (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 143.} Foucault’s analysis of the penal system provides a close parallel to the ultimate goals of the Stolypin Land Reforms. The Stolypin Land Reforms sought to eliminate the village as a collective unit and instead to create a sense of individualism within the peasantry. Historian Richard Stites has argued that Russia’s rulers have been intent on creating an “administrative
utopia” through rationalism, geometry, and militarization. Stites demonstrates the attempts of Catherine II’s utopian town planning, the creation of the tsarist police state, and militarization of estates as attempts to create an administrative utopia.\footnote{Richard Stites, \textit{Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 19.} However, Stolypin’s Land Reforms were no less of an attempt to obtain control over an alien force such as the peasantry. By recreating the Russian peasantry as an individual rather than a collective unit, the reformers hoped to substitute a system of state control in place of the traditional village authorities.\footnote{Pallot, \textit{Land Reform in Russia}, 33.}

In order to counter opposition claims that the Stolypin Land Reforms were not producing desired results, the Chief Administration for Land Settlement and Agriculture engaged in a number of efforts to publicize achievements. The administration produced publications, promoted lectures, and most importantly implemented public exhibitions to encourage public support of the Land Reforms.\footnote{Palat, ed., \textit{Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia}, 123.} The first major attempt at exhibiting the land reforms to the general public was the Committee for Land Settlement Affairs publication of \textit{Zemleustroistvo: 1907-1910}. The report contained statistical data and numerical reports for the villages where land reform had taken place. However, the most important section of the publication was the series of plans and photographs showing the villages before and after enclosure. The plans included visual representations of the “chaos” of village life and allowed the public to see the true merits of the land reforms.\footnote{Pallot, \textit{Land Reform in Russia}, 49.} The purpose of \textit{Zemleustroistvo: 1907-1910} was designed to show the triumph of bureaucratic order in the Russian countryside and to show Russia’s educated public that the reforms were not only working, but working better than could be imagined. However, throughout most of the publications like \textit{Zemleustroistvo} the peasant themselves were
absent from the discourse concerning the true situation of the Russian village under the reforms of Stolypin.

In August 1910 the Reform Administration constructed a model khutor village at the bicentenary of the founding of the tsar’s palace at Tsarskoe Selo. In an open lot next to the model, village representatives of the St. Petersburg province land settlement commission were on hand to answer the public’s questions concerning the specifics of the land reforms in the country. The exhibitions of model villages were designed to show an uncompromising view of modern Russia. Visitors to the exhibitions were assured that the future of Russia’s modernization lay within the Western styled individualized system of khutor farms and not with the old fashioned system of communal farming.\(^{38}\) In addition to the exhibitions a great deal of publications championing the Stolypin Reforms were published by the Reform Administration in order to gain public support for the reforms. Government sponsored journals such as Khutor and Khutorianin provided information and advice to peasants who left the commune as well as information and detail about the new khutor farms.\(^{39}\) Tsar Nicholas II even expressed his belief in the magic of private property in a speech on February 19, 1911. Nicholas stated that, “I have recognized it as timely to abolish the most material oppressions in the rights of peasants, facilitating their withdrawal from the commune, as also their going over to ownership of farms.”\(^{40}\) Kofoed also contributed to the writings on the land reforms in his manuscript which compared the successes of the Russian land reforms against the land reforms of Western Europe. Kofoed’s work left no doubt that the future of Russian farming and modernization lay in the

\(^{38}\) Palat, ed., \textit{Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia}, 123-125.

\(^{39}\) Kingston-Mann, \textit{In Search of the True West}, 178.

\(^{40}\) “Nikolas II Speech on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Serfs, February 19, 1911” \textit{State Department Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1910-1929}. 

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adaptation of Western style farming. For the government reformers the publications and exhibitions provided the legitimacy for government intrusion into the countryside. However, many of the exhibitions and publications obscured the realities of reform within the countryside.

The largest number of exits from the commune occurred between 1907 and 1909, but the exits experienced a steep decline after 1910. It is estimated that by 1915 one third of household heads filed for separation from the commune, and approximately one quarter of those, or 2.4 to 2.6 million households, completed the process. Only about ten percent of the total household families, 1.25 million, actually set up the consolidated farms which covered about 8.85 percent of arable land. However, of all the peasants that applied for separation from the commune only 320,000 actually left the communal village to create their own homesteads. Those that did leave the communal village tended to have more draft animals and produce greater surpluses, yet there were too few consolidators to end the prevalence of subsistence farming amongst the majority of the peasantry. Much to the chagrin of Stolypin’s reformers few of the consolidators became rural capitalists once they received their private property. A few failed because of their poor managerial skills, but the overwhelming majority failed because of the low level of capital and land that private land enclosures facilitated. Despite the high levels of financing and government loans, the peasantry was unable to gain access to the common resources of the village such as water, woods, and pasture and therefore ultimately was unable to produce above subsistence.

The lack of productivity experienced in the new peasant farms that took advantage of the separation measures of the Stolypin Reforms was also due, in large part, to the underlying problems of the land reform. While Stolypin exalted the strong and industrious peasants of Russia to become the bulwark of modern Russia, many of the peasants who filed for separation

41 Koefoed, My Share in the Stolypin Land Reforms, 146.
42 Hans Rogger, Russia in the Age of Modernization and Industrialization, 1881-1917 (London: Longman, 1983), 244-245.
from the commune came from the marginalized and impoverished areas of Russia. In many areas, particularly the Black Earth Region, most peasants who applied to abandon the commune were widows, the elderly, and families with a declining population. The marginalized peasants saw that due to their shrinking populations their land would be reduced in the next communal land repartition and therefore came forward to claim their allotments as private property. The peasants’ willingness to gain short-term economic gains through separating caused many younger peasants to describe Stolypin’s wager on the strong as a wager on the elderly.\(^{43}\)

In addition to the shortage of industrious peasants, Stolypin’s reforms created a great deal of social conflict within the communes among those that chose not to separate. A great deal of resentment was experienced by those who felt their neighbors were no longer interested in the situation of the commune but instead hungered only for profit and more land. The hotbed of social unrest due to the consequences of the Stolypin Land Reforms only helped to cause more antagonism between the peasantry and the government. Therefore, instead of creating classes of independent yeoman, Stolypin’s Reforms only helped to exacerbate the problems already existing within rural Russia.\(^{44}\) However, despite the acts of violence within the village by peasants against peasants or against agents of the Committee of Land Settlement Affairs, the discourse of a childlike and ignorant peasantry was used as a justification for the violent actions. The most common explanation for disturbances associated with enclosure was that the unrest was engineered by provocateurs and agitators who played upon the peasant’s ignorance and stupidity. Therefore, the very assumption of peasant backwardness that was used to justify the reform also provided the explanation for the opposition to it.\(^{45}\)

\(^{43}\) Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West*, 176.


\(^{45}\) Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia*, 184.
The Stolypin Land Reforms of 1906 were not the only reforms competing for legitimacy over transforming peasants. Following the Revolution of 1905 an array of cooperators, agronomists, and social scientists descended into the Russian countryside. The agronomists and cooperators disagreed with Stolypin’s belief that private property would allow individual peasants to participate in a more modern and rational market economy. However, just as the Stolypin Land Reforms claimed to speak for the more industrious Russian peasants, the agronomists and cooperators claimed to speak for the entire “mass” of Russia’s rural subjects. Therefore, in contrast to Stolypin, agronomists believed that it was their mission to “plow minds rather than land” and reorganize rural Russia through a system known as social agronomy. The rural professionals and agronomists came to be known as the organization-production school and provided alternatives to capitalist development that operated along the same assumptions and prejudices of peasant backwardness as the Stolypin reformers. The new emphasis on educating Russia’s peasants by agronomists such as Alexander Chayanov was seen as a way of transforming a population that could not possibly conceive of transforming itself.\(^\text{46}\)

Chayanov argued that Russia’s peasants faced an economic reality that was very different from market oriented capitalists. Chayanov wrote that, “we shall be unable to carry on in economic thought with merely capitalist categories, because a very wide area of economic life is based, not on a capitalist form, but on the completely different form of a nonwage family economic unit.”\(^\text{47}\) Instead of accepting the assumption that lack of land was the primary precursor to peasant poverty, as argued by Stolypin’s reformers and Marxists, Chayanov believed that labor shortage was the root cause. The amount of labor per peasant household was directly influenced by the age, gender, and health of each family member. Therefore, it was


Chayanov’s belief that peasants operated according to non-capitalist economic considerations due to the family’s consumer to worker ratio. According to Chayanov the peasant family’s labor intensity varied according to its familial contraction and expansion, and therefore the peasant commune would not prove to be the seed of capitalism as Stolypin claimed.48

The social agronomists such as Chayanov, Nikolai Makarov, and Semen Maslov advocated the idea of peasant co-operatives in lieu of the abolition of the peasant commune. The co-operative would allow peasants to buy and sell their agricultural product, attain credit, and most importantly receive education and technical advice about farming. The co-operative, unlike the peasant commune, also united peasants with identical economic interest and allowed for the social agronomist to gain intimate “knowledge” of the peasantry. The co-operative movement was also designed to protect peasants from themselves and the chaotic world around them. The image of the kulak made its way into the lexicon of social agronomists and thus provided the legitimacy for their intervention in the countryside. According to the social agronomists the kulak and other exploitative elements of rural society were intruders in the Russian village and only desired to fragment the population into small competing units while simultaneously impoverishing peasant producers in their pursuit of profit.49

Despite the fact that agronomists such as Chayanov were condemned as Populists by government reformers as well as Marxist revolutionaries did not mean that the social agronomists accepted the peasant commune. In fact, the assumption that peasants farmed incorrectly and irrationally was at the heart of the social agronomist’s beliefs. As Chayanov said in 1911, “if the agronomist wants to create a new agriculture, then he creates a new human

culture, a new popular consciousness, and induces this new human culture to create a new agriculture on its own.” The new science of agronomy was to serve the same purpose as Stolypin’s Land Reforms and Witte’s policies of industrialization. Instead of introducing small material change in order to rescue Russia from “backwardness” a fundamental attempt at social ordering was pursued by introducing “rational” agronomy into the “irrational” Russian countryside. In the co-operative movement the peasants were consigned to roles that concerned them while excluding them. The low levels of productivity, the large numbers of kulaks, and the inability of the peasantry to organize itself properly and rationally into co-operatives only added to the prevailing discourse of peasant backwardness. Nonetheless, both peasants in the commune as well as separators joined to cooperatives in large numbers. The economic benefit of increased raw materials and relative economic safety of the co-op prompted many peasants to join despite the reduced amount of agency. In fact by 1917 Russia had more cooperatives than any other Western European country including Germany. However, the cooperatives failed to undermine the effects of the commune and therefore in the eyes of government reformers, the cooperative movement was a failure.

Radical revolutionaries such as Vladimir Lenin also paid great attention to the events of the Stolypin Land Reforms. Lenin, like most Social Democrats, argued that Stolypin’s program of reform while fostering the emergence of a small class of land owning peasants did nothing to curtail the influence of the landed gentry. Lenin wrote in 1908 that, “if Stolypin’s policy is continued . . . then the agrarian structure of Russia will become complexly bourgeois, the stronger peasants will acquire almost all the allotments of land, agriculture will become capitalistic, and any solution of the agrarian problem- radical or otherwise- will become

51 Pallot, ed., Transforming Peasants, 32.
52 Kingston-Mann, In Search of the True West, 177.
impossible under capitalism.” The Bolsheviks under Lenin believed that only once the retarding influence of the landed gentry was removed could capitalism fully flourish in the Russian countryside. However, Lenin argued that Stolypin’s reforms were disintegrating the Russian commune and creating a new class of revolutionary peasants. Lenin wrote in 1909 that, “Mr. Stolypin cannot take a single step without bringing the precariously balancing autocracy nearer its fall, without creating a new tangle of political impossibilities and absurdities, without adding new and fresh forces to the ranks of the proletariat and to the ranks of the revolutionary elements of the peasant masses.”

The Marxists shared the same assumptions as the government reformers in their analysis of the peasant commune. Marxists saw the commune as a stubborn icon of traditionalism and the commune’s institutions as the prime obstacle to socialist strategies of progress and development. Lenin believed that the agrarian reforms taking place in the early twentieth century were offshoots of the Prussian and American modes of capitalist development. Lenin argued that the Stolypin Reforms followed the same path to development as the Prussian model in which the rich, socially prominent, and incompetent landlord became a bourgeois “Junker” and then invited the enterprising farmers to exploit their fellow peasants. However, Lenin suggested that the countryside be allowed to develop along the American lines of capitalist development. According to Lenin, the American farmer was able to prosper because his land belonged to the state and investments of labor and capital could be achieved without extensive

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expenditures for land rent or purchase. In order to understand the events in the Russian
countryside within a Marxist framework Lenin first had to reassess some of his earlier theories.\footnote{Esther Kingston-Mann, \textit{Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 105.}

It was during 1905 that Lenin abandoned his argument that Russia was already capitalist. In his 1898 book \textit{The Development of Capitalism in Russia} Lenin had written, “and it (capitalism) cannot but be slow, for in no single capitalist country has there been such an
abundant survival of ancient institutions that are incompatible with capitalism, retard its
development, and immeasurably worsen the condition of the producers, who suffer not only from
the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that
development.”\footnote{Vladimir Lenin, \textit{The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large Scale Industry} (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 659.} Although in 1898 Lenin had believed that capitalism was developing slowly, he
still believed that Russia was capitalist. However, in 1905 Lenin proclaimed that Russia was in
fact overwhelmingly feudal. In order to make sense of why peasants acted the way they did in
the 1905 Revolution Lenin proclaimed that peasants were struggling against the last vestiges of
feudalism. Therefore, Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that both feudalistic and capitalistic
elements coexisted in the Russian countryside.\footnote{Kingston-Mann, \textit{In Search of the True West}, 174.}

The Stolypin Reforms, to Lenin, were helping to instill capitalism within the Russian
countryside. Lenin believed that only once capitalism was properly developed in Russia could
the country transition into socialism. Just as Stolypin argued that private property would instill a
sense of cooperation with the government, Lenin argued that the land reforms were driving a nail
into the coffin of Russia’s autocracy. Despite their differences in projected outcomes, both
Stolypin and Lenin saw the peasantry as a conservative, property-minded class that could or
must be used to transform Russia into a modern society. Despite the fact that government
reformers, cooperators, and revolutionaries desired different outcomes for Russia’s peasantry one thing remained clear: the peasantry was too backward and too ignorant to speak for itself and too important to be left alone. Stolypin’s bold land reforms attempted to abolish the commune in order to create a rational, ordered, and modern Russia. The cooperative movement sought to preserve peasant society yet make it more functional and economically rational, and the Marxists assumed that the peasantry were nothing more than a vestige of feudalism that would one day be destroyed. Whereas Vyshnegradsky and Witte sought to extract capital from the peasantry in order to pay for the industrialization of Russia, Stolypin and Lenin sought to develop peasant society in an attempt to ensure order within the Russian countryside. Both Stolypin and Lenin desired to see industry grow and believed that it was the job of the state to promote industry while using the peasantry as both a means of labor as well as a resource for agricultural exports. Just as Vyshnegradsky and Witte saw the peasantry as a natural resource, Stolypin and Lenin saw them as a means to an end.

While government reformers, co-operators, and Social Democrats such as Lenin saw the peasantry as backward and ignorant, a different wing of revolutionaries saw the peasantry as revolutionary and the future of a socialist Russia. The Social Revolutionaries (SR’s) were formed in 1901 as an agrarian party that focused on the needs of Russia’s peasantry. The SR’s focused on terrorism to achieve revolution in Russia and included gentry land expropriation by the peasantry as the most important facet of their political program. The SR’s were the heirs of the Populists and remained one of the few revolutionary parties in Russia to see the peasantry as the main component to a socialist revolution in Russia. Despite Lenin’s negative view of the
SR’s, by 1917 the Bolsheviks’ adopted the main components of the SR’s peasant land policy in order gain the support of Russia's rural population.\textsuperscript{58}

By 1914 Europe was descending into conflict. The First World War proved to be a disaster for the Russian Empire, and by 1917 the Romanov dynasty came to an end when Nicholas II abdicated. After the abdication of the tsar a Provisional Government took power in order to lead Russia through the rest of the war. The Provisional Government represented a short-lived attempt to introduce democracy and other Western institutions in Russia. Despite Stolypin’s assassination in 1911, the Land Reforms which bore his name came to a formal end only in the decree of August 1917 that explicitly ordered a halt to land settlement.\textsuperscript{59} The Stolypin Land Reforms culminated in a failed attempt to destroy the peasant commune, and the Provisional Government abandoned the reforms to focus its energy on fighting the War as well as to appease the peasantry. However, the Provisional Government failed to alleviate the problems of the Russian population and as the war raged on power once again changed hands in October 1917. Lenin wrote in October 1917 that “the oppressed masses will of themselves form a government. The old state machinery will be smashed into bits and in its place will be created a new machinery of government by the soviet organizations. We should now occupy ourselves in Russia in building up a proletarian socialist state”\textsuperscript{60} Lenin’s dreams of building a proletarian socialist state once again brought the “peasant question” back to the forefront of government policy.

\textsuperscript{58} Evhutov and Stites, \textit{A History of Russia Since 1800}, 220.  
\textsuperscript{59} Yaney, \textit{The Urge to Mobilize}, 397.  
\textsuperscript{60}“Lenin’s Speech to the Petrograd Soviet” in \textit{Documents of Russian History 1914-1917}, Frank Golder and Emanuel Aronsberg, eds. (Gloucester, MA: The Century Company, 1927), 618-619.
The Stolypin Land Reforms represented an attempt by the tsarist government to transform Russia’s peasantry into small scale capitalist farmers. Underlying the reforms was the assumption and hopes that Russia’s new capitalist farmers would increase productivity and transform Russia into a modern power comparable to Western Europe. However, peasant non-compliance and the emergence of the First World War thwarted the reformers’ attempts at transforming rural Russia. The fall of the tsar and the ascension of the Bolsheviks to power in 1917 brought the agrarian question back to the forefront of government policies. The leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, shared Stolypin’s desire to transform rural Russia into a modern agricultural sector. Like Stolypin, Lenin embarked upon a policy of rural transformation in the summer of 1918. The Bolsheviks’ policy of War Communism was an attempt to force Russia’s peasantry to release their grain surpluses to the government and the army in order to achieve stability and the security of the Bolshevik regime as well as to win the Civil War. However, War Communism also represented the Bolsheviks’ first attempt to transform the peasantry and establish Bolshevik control in the “alien” and often hostile countryside. Therefore, the Bolsheviks, like Stolypin, embarked upon a program of rural transformation through state sponsored economic policies in order to modernize and establish control of Russia’s peasantry.

As the First World War progressed and food supplies to the cities continued to dwindle the situation in Russia’s urban centers such as Moscow and Petrograd declined precipitously. The combination of food scarcity, war weariness, and rising prices of both food and manufactured goods in the cities caused widespread unrest and factory strikes throughout the capitals. In 1916 alone, the number of strikes numbered 1,049 involving 650, 662 workers and
costing the economy 3,976,215 days lost in labor.\textsuperscript{1} On February 23, 1917 (O.S.), International Women’s Day, throngs of women workers, house wives, and the wives of soldiers flooded the streets of Petrograd in protest of the tsarist government. During the following week of strikes and riots in the streets the situation grew worse as the tsar dismissed the Duma and offered only increased police repression to quell civilian unrest. The week of unrest finally culminated on March 3, 1917 when the Tsar abdicated and the 300 year Romanov dynasty came crashing down.\textsuperscript{2}

Following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II the Provisional Government declared itself the legitimate temporary power in Russia. The Provisional Government was initially led by Georgii Lvov but eventually power was concentrated in the hands of the Socialist Revolutionary lawyer Alexander Kerensky. The other half of the “dual power” was the elected soviets. The soviets were councils of workers charged with the tasks of guarding against counter-revolution and maintaining order until a constituent assembly could take place. The soviets were comprised mainly of Social Revolutionaries but as 1917 continued, the Bolsheviks began to gain support within the soviets. The Provisional Government faced a legitimacy crisis because it had not been elected by the people of Russia. In March 1917 a Moscow worker and army deserter wrote to the Provisional Government, “You have the audacity to say that freedom has come. But isn’t your current power over the people a power that the bourgeoisie had delivered to you, based on coercion?”\textsuperscript{3} In addition to the problem of legitimacy the Provisional Government also refused to put an end to the War which was becoming increasingly unpopular.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} Stanislas Kohn, \textit{The Cost of War to Russia: The Vital Statistics of European Russia During the World War, 1914-1917} (New York: H. Fertig, 1973), 199.
\textsuperscript{4} Evtuhov and Stites, \textit{A History of Russia Since 1800}, 280-293.
In mid-October the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was established to cease the sending of troops toward the front as well as to defend the city from potential German attack. However, Leon Trotsky used the Committee to organize the takeover of Petrograd. Leon Trotsky had been a long time Social Democrat who sided with the Mensheviks after their split with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the early 1900s. However, after August 1917 Trotsky sided with Lenin against Kamenev and Zinoviev when the Bolsheviks decided to stage an armed uprising against the Provisional Government. Under Trotsky’s leadership the Military Revolutionary Committee won support of the military garrisons around Petersburg and on October 23, 1917 (O.S.) Trotsky gained control over the garrison of the Peter and Paul Fortress. After sending Bolshevik forces throughout the city to capture military strongholds, railroad stations, and post offices the Military Revolutionary Committee proclaimed on the morning of October 26 (O.S.) that the Provisional Government was overthrown. After the relatively bloodless seizure of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks on the night of October 26 the soviet congress was informed that the Bolshevik coup d’état had succeeded. Outraged by the actions of the Bolsheviks the moderate socialists walked out of the congress, at which point Trotsky uttered his famous words “go where you belong from now on . . . onto the rubbish heap of history.”

The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 presented the new government with a variety of problems. First, the new leaders had taken control of a country that was in the midst of a world war that had been devastating both physically and psychologically. Secondly, the Bolsheviks had plans to mold their new country into an industrial power that could rival the Western powers,

yet Russia’s economy still remained predominantly agrarian. Lenin concluded that the first step was to take Russia out of the First World War.

On October 26, 1917 the Bolsheviks enacted their first act of legislation. The Decree on Peace called on all belligerent countries to end the War and called upon the proletariat in France and Germany to rise up if the governments failed to respond. The Decree also announced that the Bolsheviks would abolish secret diplomacy and publish all secret treaties from the Provisional Government. Following the Decree on Peace the Bolshevik government issued its second decree in an attempt to stabilize Bolshevik rule in the Russian countryside. The Decree on Land was adopted from the Socialist-Revolutionary land program and stated that, “landlord ownership of land is immediately abolished without compensation.” The decree also removed any legacy of the Stolypin Land Reforms when it stated that, “private ownership of land shall be abolished forever; land shall not be sold, purchased, mortgaged or otherwise alienated.” The Decree on Land ultimately only legalized the actions that peasants were already taking in the countryside. In fact, following the beginning of the First World War most of the homesteads that had gained separation due to the Stolypin Land Reforms were resurrected in the form of the obshchina. The traditional rural community that existed prior to Stolypin’s reforms, once again became the predominant form of rural life throughout Russia with the exception of the western regions where separation from the commune was initially weak or non-existent. However, despite the initial decrees aiding the peasantry in their pursuit of land, the Bolsheviks and Lenin still believed that the peasantry was unreliable and ultimately desired to implant Bolshevik rule in the Russian countryside.

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8 “Decree on Land” in The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union, 58.
The ascension of the Bolsheviks to power in 1917 also brought with it a system of political and economic ideologies that included a particular “knowledge” of the peasantry. The Bolsheviks had formed their “knowledge” of the peasantry from both the writings of Marx and the writings of pre-revolutionary educated Russians. Marx wrote, “large scale industry . . . radically expropriates the vast majority of the agricultural population and completes the divorce between agriculture and rural domestic industry, tearing up the latter’s roots, which are spinning and weaving. It therefore also conquers the entire home market for industrial capital.” Marx believed that the peasantry was doomed to disappear in the face of large scale industry and that the peasants could do nothing to avoid this. Marx also wrote in 1873 that “the peasant will start to create obstacles and bring about the fall of any worker revolution.”

The Marxists believed that alliances with the peasantry were necessary, and yet viewed the small peasant land owners as an unreliable class. To the Bolsheviks, the peasantry represented an unstable ally that was too ignorant to be trusted and too weak to become a revolutionary force. The failure of the peasantry to act as they were “supposed” to would have catastrophic consequences within the following decades.

On February 23, 1918 the Central Committee voted to accept the German peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The treaty called for sacrificing land in Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic but offered Lenin and the Bolsheviks peace in order to provide time and stability until the world revolution began. Following the peace treaty Lenin returned to the problem of shaping the Soviet economy. Initially Lenin advocated the retention of capitalist management and argued that any surviving capitalists should continue working under the supervision of the Soviet state.

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Lenin wrote, “the decisive thing is the organization of the strictest and country wide accounting and control of production and distribution of goods. Now we have to resort to the old bourgeois method and to agree to pay a very high price for the services of the top bourgeois specialists.” In the same speech Lenin argued that, “it would be extremely stupid and absurdly Utopian to assume that the transition from capitalism to socialism is possible without coercion and without dictatorship.”

The Bolsheviks’ insistence upon one-party rule and dictatorship created opposition amongst the other parties including the Social Revolutionaries, Kadets, and Mensheviks. In addition to this opposition a host of anarchists and nationalists rose up against the Bolsheviks throughout Russia but particularly in the countryside. Following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk a coalition of anti-Bolshevik parties, landowners, monarchists, liberals, and conservatives known as the “Whites” organized against the Bolsheviks in 1918. In addition to the Whites, an anarchist movement known as the Black Army and a Ukrainian peasant movement known as the Green Army also declared war against the Bolsheviks. Despite the Bolsheviks’ desire to end the World War and concentrate upon the transition to socialism in Russia, the political policies of the Bolsheviks plunged Russia into a devastating civil war.

The Bolsheviks instituted a policy known as War Communism in hopes of gaining the supply of food and material necessary to win the civil war as well as to restructure society to meet the socialist agenda that they intended to enact. By June 1918 the government embarked upon a flurry of nationalization of state industries. The decrees issued by Lenin’s new administration were designed to consolidate all national industries in the hands of the state. This

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13 “Lenin and State Capitalism” in The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union, 84.
14 Evtuhov and Stites, A History of Russia Since 1800, 302-306.
included light industry, heavy industry, wholesale trade, cooperatives, retail trade, and financial institutions.

In the field of agriculture, too, the Bolsheviks, in keeping with Marxist theory of destroying the last vestiges of capitalism during the dictatorship of the proletariat, decided to nationalize the farming sectors of the economy as well.\(^\text{15}\) In addition to the nationalization of land and industry the Bolsheviks instituted Committees of the Village Poor within the Russian countryside. The main reason for the Committees of the Village Poor was to facilitate grain requisitioning and class struggle against the remaining strongholds of anti-Bolshevik sentiment.\(^\text{16}\) The Committees of the Village Poor represented a stark contrast in the Bolsheviks’ attitudes toward the peasantry. The period of peasant self rule, before May 1918, began to dissipate quickly following the introduction of the Committees as well as introduction of the grain monopoly, mobilizations into the Red Army, and the manufacture of class war.\(^\text{17}\) The introduction of the Committees of the Village Poor demonstrated to the peasantry that the Bolsheviks’ understanding of the revolution was quite different from that of the majority of peasants. The Bolsheviks’ understanding of the village commune as a decaying institution that had been corrupted by the tsarist state and by the emergence of rural capitalism had eliminated any potential for socialist development. Despite the relative persistence of peasant self rule from 1917 to mid-1918 the Bolsheviks’ long term plans for the Russian countryside were just as disruptive as Stolypin’s. While the Bolsheviks did not agree with Stolypin that the end result of land reform was to create a petty class of rural capitalists, the Bolsheviks’ hatred of irrationality

\(^{15}\) Evtuhov and Stites, *A History of Russia Since 1800*, 309.


did prompt them to continue Stolypin’s policy of consolidating the households’ strips of land into modern farms.¹⁸

The reason for the Bolsheviks’ decision to nationalize agriculture was evidenced by the lack of peasant cooperation before the Bolsheviks even took power. In 1917 a peasant village representative wrote that “we the working peasantry can tell that the Bolsheviks of Social Democracy are pursuing only selfish goals and do not want to be a friend and comrade to the working peasantry, and since this is so, then we in turn declare that we can get along without them, but they will die of hunger without us.”¹⁹ As Lenin stated in an address at a meeting of Secretaries and Responsible Representatives in April 1921 that in order to allow farms to transition to the next stage of development the goal “must inevitably be one of gradual amalgamation of the small, isolated peasant farms . . . into large scale collective farms.”²⁰ The goal was to urbanize the countryside and to herd the peasants into collective farms in order to provide foodstuffs for the industrial sector of the Russian economy.²¹

During the period of War Communism The ABC of Communism, written by two leading Bolsheviks, Nikolai Bukharin and Evgeny Preobrazhensky. The ABC of Communism was designed to be an introduction to the goals and policies of the Communist Party. However, what is most important about this work is that it clearly defines the peasants’ place within the Bolsheviks’ newly established social order. Bukharin wrote that, “additional work for the Communist Party, as far as the poor peasants are concerned, is to bring them in closer contact with the urban proletariat, to rid them of their petty-bourgeois habits and of their futile hopes that

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they will be able to continue vigorous, independent, individualist farming.”

Bukharin echoed Marx when he said about the peasants “every one of them, at the bottom of his heart, cherishes the hope of getting on, of growing rich.”

For the Bolsheviks, just as for the former tsarist government, the peasantry represented an alien force that was difficult to understand and hard to control. By defining the peasantry as capitalistic and entrepreneurial the Bolsheviks could legitimize their attempts at transforming the peasants into proper socialists who would benefit the whole of Russia, especially the new Communist state.

Implementation of War Communism offered not only a policy for assuring grain for the Red Army as well as the cities, but brought the discourse on the peasantry to the forefront of Bolshevik economic policy. Reshaping the mentality, work habits, and the modes of production was central to the socialist project. Most Bolsheviks viewed the peasantry as ignorant, economically backward, and culturally primitive. Therefore, to the Bolsheviks, the violence that was associated with the food acquisitions of War Communism were part of the peasantry’s enlightenment, education, and “participation” in the new socialist government.

War Communism, for the Bolsheviks, was a way of transforming the Russian peasants into obedient socialists. The Commissar of Agriculture V. Meshcheriakov stated that “as an independent factor in the struggle for socialism the peasants are of practically no importance…That is the most obvious and irrefutable fact. What is more, the peasants are frankly opposing socialism. That class (the peasants) has nearly everything (except a socialistic consciousness!)” For the

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23 Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, The ABC of Communism, 89.


25 Yanni Kotsonis, “No Place to Go: Taxation and State Transformation in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia” The Journal of Modern History 76 (September 2004): 531-577.
same reason it is hostile toward the workers’ struggle for grain and the food detachments.” 26 The Bolsheviks’ nationalization and monopolization of food requisitions were designed to weaken the market economy of the peasants and marked the Bolsheviks as “different” and in control of the countryside.

As historian Orlando Figes states, “The collective and state farms that were established under the protection of the Bolshevik government after 1918 were intended not only to transfer land and property to hungry proletarians, but also to challenge the domination of the peasant family farms, whose interests were seen at that time to be inimical to the development of socialism.” 27 An observer in the Russian province of Ryazan wrote in 1917 that “Popular peasant ignorance does a bad job of figuring out ideological constructions and slogans. All it knows is the shirt on its own back, and it lives only for today, which gives peasants a chance to scrape together another ruble, but they never even take a peek into the distant tomorrow.” 28 In order to legitimize the policies and violence of War Communism the Bolsheviks proclaimed war against an image of the peasantry as backward and ignorant. In hopes of eliminating backwardness in the villages and raising agricultural productivity the Bolsheviks called upon the agricultural specialists for aid. Most of the agricultural specialists that were employed by the Bolshevik government had begun their careers under the tsar. The Bolsheviks’ lack of control in the countryside allowed the specialists to oversee land reform and increase productivity. In doing so the specialists suggested that collectivization of agriculture was the most advantageous

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28 “Letter to Kerensky from Ivan Shabrov, Ryazan Province, 13 July 1917” in *Voices of the Revolution*, 237.
way to raise productivity and thus, after 1919, the specialist call for agronomic aid was seen as progress toward collectivization.29

In December 1917 Lenin established the All Russian Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, better known as the Cheka or secret police. The most important function of the Cheka was to “persecute and break up all acts of counter-revolution and sabotage all over Russia, no matter what their origin.”30 Although much of the Bolsheviks’ desire to force agriculture into large collective farms remained largely on paper, the state moved quickly to ensure food supplies to the cities. In May 1918, under the context of Civil War, the Bolsheviks’ Supply Commissariat or Narkomprod acquired more maneuverability to obtain and distribute food by offering official state sanctioned prices to peasants in return for grain. This attempt mirrored the early attempts of the Provisional Government to offer unreasonably low prices for peasant surpluses and therefore failed just as miserably.31 The decree stated that, “every possessor of surplus grain must declare within a week from the promulgation of this resolution in the volost that he is ready to hand over all in excess of what he needs, according to the established living standard, for sowing and consumption until the new crop.”32 By 1918, to Lenin, the Cheka was in charge of forcibly attaining grain surpluses from the peasantry, most notably kulaks (rich peasants), who were allegedly hoarding grain in order to sabotage the Bolshevik administration during the Civil War.33

Lenin was unable to hide his contempt for the peasantry during the period of War Communism. He was confronted with the problem of an increasingly revolutionary peasantry

and his denial that peasants possessed a culture, a sense of solidarity, or any economic potential. In an interview with H.G. Wells in 1920 when asked about reconstruction of peasant farms Lenin stated “we have, in places, large scale agriculture. The Government is already running big estates with workers instead of peasants, where conditions are favorable. That can spread. It can be extended first to one province, then another. The peasants in the other provinces, selfish and illiterate, will not know what is happening until their turn comes.” The program of reconstructing the Russian countryside was, to Lenin, a way to eliminate the peasantry as a backward class and to place the farms in the hands of more capable and more trustworthy socialist workers. It is no surprise that Lenin was acting on the assumptions made by the Marxist G.V. Plekhanov that the peasants were “Chinese, barbarian tillers of the soil, cruel and merciless, beasts of burden whose lives provided no opportunities for the luxury of thought.”

In a memo written early in the Civil War in 1918, Lenin said to “hang without fail, so that the public sees at least 100 kulaks, the rich, and the bloodsuckers. This needs to be accomplished in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know, and scream out: let’s choke and strangle those blood-sucking kulaks.” The policies of War Communism sought to eliminate the kulak’s hold on the peasantry and remove them as an exploitative class in the countryside. In a speech by Yakov Sverdlov, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, on May 20, 1918 war was declared against the kulaks. Sverdlov stated “we have succeeded thus far in destroying the bourgeoisie in the cities, but the same cannot be said of the villages . . . we

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must direct our most concentrated attention upon the problem of splitting the village by creating
two diametrically opposed and hostile camps. This we can accomplish by fanning the flames of
civil war in the village by arming the village poor against the village bourgeoisie.”

However, the use of the kulak as a scapegoat for the lack of grain procurements came
under attack by the Socialist Revolutionaries in 1918. The Socialist Revolutionary, Vladimir
Karelin’s speech in the Central Executive Committee during Lenin’s announcement of the food
dictatorship asked, “Who are the kulaks against whom the decree is directed? It is necessary to
define this category with greater precision. The decree is based on the idea of dictatorship and
our party is opposed to dictatorship. The dictatorship in the village will produce nothing but
fighting in the village.” Despite these charges from the opposition party Lenin remarked in
1921 that “the kulak’s position has been undermined and he has been in considerable measure
expropriated.” Despite Lenin’s optimism concerning the success of War Communism, the
kulak as the image of anti-Bolshevik sentiment was to reappear in the policies of Lenin’s
successor; Joseph Stalin.

Within the cities the destruction brought on from a combination of war, revolution, and
the Civil War as well as the oppressive policies of War Communism caused industrial production
levels to plunge to all time lows. The output of large scale industry had fallen to 13 percent of
the 1913 levels and steel and iron production had fallen to only 4 percent of 1913 levels.
However, it was in the rural sectors of the country that War Communism had the most negative
impact. The policies of War Communism did achieve the Bolsheviks’ goal of procuring grain

38 “Sverdlov’s Speech in the Central Executive Committee, 20 May 1918” in Intervention, Civil War, and
Communism in Russia, 1918, 464.
39 “Karelin’s Speech in the Central Executive Committee, 9 May 1918” in Intervention, Civil War, and Communism
in Russia, 1918, 463.
41 Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 23.
for the cities. Agricultural procurements in 1917-1918 amounted to 30 million poods, whereas agricultural procurements for 1918-1919 were 110 million poods.\textsuperscript{42} For the first time since 1916 the cities of Russia were obtaining the amount of grain necessary to feed the urban population.

Despite the increases in food procurement the overall food production actually decreased during the years of War Communism. In the largest grain producing provinces of Samara and Saratov the area of wheat sown in 1919 was only 86.1 percent and 66.9 percent respectively of the area sown in 1913. By 1921 the area sown in these provinces had fallen to 24.1 and 17.9 percent respectively of area sown in 1913.\textsuperscript{43} By 1921 the policies that the government enacted on the peasantry of forcibly seizing grain supplies created hunger and famine in the cities as well as the countryside. The policies of War Communism eliminated any incentives for the peasants to produce the amount of grain necessary for themselves, the Red Army, or the workers within the cities.\textsuperscript{44}

The peasants were unable to see the point in working hard to produce grain surpluses that the government was simply going to take and distribute to the armies and the urban population. Even if the grain was not forcibly taken, the unrealistically low prices that the government set proved to be more of an insult than a practical method of exchange. According to economic historian Raymond Hutchings, by 1921 agricultural prices fell to 20 percent of their 1913 value.\textsuperscript{45} The low prices of agricultural exchange prompted many peasants to sell their surpluses to middle men who would then supply citizens within the cities. This black market proved hard to control and even harder to eliminate, and by 1921 as much as 60 percent of the food supplies to the cities was provided through the black market. To make matters worse anti-communist

\textsuperscript{42} Nove, \textit{An Economic History of the USSR}, 61; 1 pood=36.11 pounds.
\textsuperscript{45} Hutchings, \textit{Soviet Economic Development}, 42.
Whites enacted a blockade that cut Russia off from importing the food and material that it desperately needed in order to maintain consumption levels. The policies enacted by the Soviet government from 1918 to 1921 were an attempt to win the Civil War. However, the wartime policies coupled with the blockade of Russian ports by the Whites created chaos and destruction throughout the country.\textsuperscript{46}

By 1921 the Red Army’s victory was assured. Due in part to the brilliant military leadership of Leon Trotsky and to the breakup of the allied resistance of the Whites the country was firmly in the hands of the Communists. The military victory over the Whites and the consolidation of the rebellious provinces that surrounded central Russia led to the formation of the Soviet Union. The end of the Civil War and the elimination of the threat to Soviet power from within showed the Bolshevik administration that the policies of War Communism were no longer necessary. The oppressive price controls and tight restrictions on private trade as well as the confiscation of grain from the peasants allowed victory for the Bolsheviks, yet had alienated many of the peasants in the countryside. The fact that the Russian population was still eighty percent rural created a situation in which large amounts of dissatisfaction and disappointment existed toward the victorious Communists.\textsuperscript{47} The grain requisitions reinforced the peasantry’s belief that the Communists desired to replace the fabric of village life with policies of unfamiliar and alien practices. The actions of the Bolsheviks toward the countryside caused the peasantry to wonder what the benefits of Bolshevik socialism actually were. The Bolshevik policy toward the countryside of accommodation vs. forced social engineering continued to plague the Party throughout the 1920s.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46}Nove, An Economic History of the U.S.S.R., 63-67.
\textsuperscript{48}Raleigh, Experiencing Russia’s Civil War, 346-347.
The effects of War Communism culminated in famine in 1921. The famine was brought on by a particularly severe drought in the Volga regions of the South. The harvest of 1921 yielded only 36.2 million tons or half the normal pre-war yields. Droughts were not uncommon in this area and, therefore, the Russian peasantry understood the importance of maintaining sufficient grain reserves to aid the poor harvests. However, the policies of forced requisitioning during the years of War Communism left no grain reserves, and malnutrition and starvation caused more than 5 million deaths during the fall and winter of 1921-1922. The high rates of mortality totaled more than all fatalities during the Civil War. The famine became an international affair, and on July 11 a personal appeal for aid by Maxim Gorky was published in most Western newspapers. Gorky wrote “I ask all honest European and American people for prompt aid to the Russian people. Give bread and medicine.” The Kronstadt Rebellion in March 1921 in which sailors and seamen excoriated the Bolsheviks for betraying the goals of the revolution, terrorizing dissenters, and robbing the peasantry of food, coupled with the famine, forced the Bolsheviks to reconsider their approach to solving the agrarian question at the Tenth Party Congress in early March 1921.

The years 1917-1921 highlighted the lack of understanding that existed between the Bolshevik administration and the Russian peasantry. During the October Revolution the peasantry allied itself with the Bolsheviks and helped to displace the former landlords and supporters of the tsarist regime in the countryside. However, once the former landlords were displaced the peasantry quickly lost the desire to aid the Bolsheviks. Although sufficient amounts of grain were obtained during the period of War Communism, the policies severed the

link between Russia’s peasantry and urban proletariat. The policies of War Communism forced the Bolsheviks to mend the break between the urban proletariat and the peasantry. As Nikolai Bukharin wrote in 1921, “the transition to the new economic policy represented the collapse of our illusions.” The lack of peasant support for the Bolsheviks in the countryside threatened the success of the revolution. For Lenin, the success of the revolution rested on re-establishing support for the Bolsheviks in the countryside. In March 1921 at the Tenth Party Congress Lenin wrote on the need for the New Economic Policy that, “we know that so long as there is no revolution in other countries, only agreement with the peasantry can save the socialist revolution in Russia.” The People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgy Tchitcherin spoke of the NEP in saying, “we have not changed; it is the circumstances around us.” The change in policy from 1921-1928 marked an attempt by the Bolsheviks to resurrect the revolutionary alliance of 1917.

Lenin was forced to admit in 1921 that, “the private market proved stronger than us.” Unable to ignore the fact that the policies of War Communism had been detrimental to the economy, Lenin had to compromise. Lenin, who earlier in his revolutionary career had preached a policy of no concessions or compromises addressed the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 that, “concessions are nothing to be afraid of.” The concessions that Lenin called for were a relaxation of War Communism’s policies. The necessity of mending the relationship with the peasantry is evident in Lenin’s speech to the Tenth Party Congress. Lenin stated, “We are

53 Bukharin as quoted in Bertrand Patenaude, “Peasants Into Russians: The Utopian Essence of War Communism” Russian Review 54 (October 1995), 553.
55 “Statement by Tchitcherin” from Krassnaya Gazette (October 2, 1921)
57 Lenin, Works, 32: 298.
raising it (the NEP) because we must subject the relations of these two main classes, whose struggle or agreement determines the fate of our revolution as a whole, to a new or, I should perhaps say, a more careful and correct re-examination and some revision.”

The laws that were enacted by the Soviet government under Lenin’s direction showed the necessity and validity of a system that allowed some economic freedom to its citizens in order to ensure adequate grain surpluses. The grain requisitioning act was replaced by a tax in kind, in which the peasants would be forced to give a certain amount of grain to the government to fill the quotas and the rest they could keep for their own consumption or sell on the open market. It was assumed that the measures would lead to an increase of food production. The tax in kind was calculated as a percentage of the grain harvest and, most importantly, reinstated the peasant’s right to sell their surpluses of grain on an open market. The newspaper Biednota proclaimed that “forcing the peasants to adopt new methods will never get them out of their rut, only when they are convinced that it is to their own interest, will they move . . . let the results appear gradually; that is only what is to be expected in our land among the ignorant agricultural population.”

By May 1921, the law that had nationalized all small industry had been revoked, and by July every citizen was given the freedom to engage in small handicraft production and to engage in small industrial enterprises. These laws showed that the government was still maintaining control of the economy’s “commanding heights” yet conceding control in agriculture and retail trade. Lenin had stated in an earlier speech concerning the necessity of the NEP as a means of competing with the rest of the world, “when living among wolves, let us howl like wolves.”

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59 Ball, Russia’s Last Capitalists, 22.
61 “Regulating the Peasants’ Economy” from Biednota (October 12, 1921)
The New Economic Policy achieved some success and by 1925 employment in private industry had risen by 13 percent. Throughout the 1920s industrial output began to rise in the Soviet Union and by 1926 output eventually rose above that of 1913 pre-war levels. The production of grain by 1928 was over ten million tons more than that of 1913. Within the countryside better equality had also prevailed. While most of the improvements in the Soviet economy were in the agricultural sector, the industrial sector fared much better as well.63

Historian V.N. Bandera states that, “the NEP was a mixed economy in which the coexistence for private and state sectors was sanctioned by the laws.”64 The central tenet of the NEP was the right of citizens to sell agricultural surpluses both nationally and locally, to private traders (Nepmen), or to individuals. The peasants operated almost independently while the industrial sector of the economy was controlled by different state apparatuses, such as the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy (VSNKh), that could keep firm control over the industrial economy. The NEP clearly represented a return of many of the capitalist influences that the Communists had railed against before the revolution, and that War Communism had attempted to destroy.

If any doubt had existed about what sort of economic policy the NEP was, it was laid to rest when in March 1921 Lenin wrote in his article The Tax in Kind, “there is still a great deal that can and must be learned from the capitalist.”65 The NEP had reinstated the private market. It had also created a class of private traders and speculators known as the Nepmen. The Nepmen were men and women who used the laws that the NEP created to engage in and ultimately flourish in private trade. They made it a point to attain consumer goods in order to sell them

back to the population for private profit. In 1925 Trotsky spoke of the dangers of the Nepmen when he wrote, “the state enterprises themselves, in search of raw material, were more and more compelled to deal with the private trader. The rising tide of capitalism was visible everywhere.”\(^{66}\) In effect, the Nepmen became the businessmen and speculators within the new economic order. The Nepmen also proved better at providing goods for the Soviet citizens than the government did. They were able to produce and distribute goods and more cheaply and efficiently than those within the Soviet bureaucracy. As long as the state proved to be unable to provide all of the goods to the Soviet citizens the Nepmen found a niche within the economic system. The NEP’s economic successes produced politically incompatible effects by reinstated the private market and allowing the emergence of a proto-bourgeoisie.\(^{67}\)

Despite increasing agricultural production, the NEP did encounter some problems by 1923. The increases in agricultural production led to greater surpluses not seen since 1913 and thus lowered the prices of agricultural products. However, the industrial sector of the economy recovered much more slowly, and demand and prices for manufactured goods continued to rise. This created the “scissors crisis” in 1923 and led to many peasants once again refusing to sell agricultural surpluses to the state or to the independent traders. However, the Bolsheviks realized the danger of decreases in marketable grain and sought to remedy the problem. In 1924 a People’s Commissariat for Trade was established to help reduce industrial prices by limiting the capital available from the State Bank. The limited amounts of capital forced the industrial sector to unload their goods at much lower prices. In order to raise agricultural prices from their low levels the Bolsheviks altered price policy in grain purchase and offered more liberal credits to grain purchasing organs. These changes in Bolshevik economic policy helped to close the

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blades of the scissor and made marketing surplus grain much more economically advantageous for the Russian peasantry. However, the changes in economic policy represented the politically unsustainable policy of net investment in agriculture.\textsuperscript{68}

As the 1920s continued the preeminence of private peasant agriculture continued. As late as 1927 only 1.1 percent of grain came from state farms and only 0.6 percent of grain was produced in collective farms. Thus 98.3 percent of grain produced in the Soviet Union was produced by independent peasant farms, most still associated with the commune.\textsuperscript{69} The government still remained the main purchaser of grain into the late 1920s, accounting for as much as 75 percent of the total amount of grain purchased. As the peasantry was allowed to produce and remain mostly independent of state control the positive relationship between the Soviet state and its rural population continued to grow.

Despite the fact that the era of NEP provided more freedom and greater relaxation of Soviet economic policies it created a number of problems that proved to be detrimental for the Russian peasantry. The Bolshevik Preobrazhensky wrote in 1924 that “the idea that the socialist economy can develop on its own, not touching the resources of the petty-bourgeois economy, including that of the peasantry, is undoubtedly a reactionary petty-bourgeois Utopia.”\textsuperscript{70} Like the tsarist officials before them, particularly Vyshnegradsky, the Bolsheviks were adamant about the peasantry bearing the brunt of the modernization attempts. However, the grain procurement crises that developed during 1927 showed the Bolsheviks that the peasantry was not creating socialism or modernity quickly enough. Stalin wrote that “the basic cause of our grain difficulties is that the increase in the production of grain for the market is not keeping pace with

\textsuperscript{69} Nove, \textit{An Economic History of the USSR}, 106.
\textsuperscript{70} “Preobrashensky, Primary Socialist Accumulation” in Sakwa, ed. \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union}, 169.
the increase in the demand for grain.”71 Once again the policies of modernization and
industrialization were undertaken without consulting the peasants. Like Vyshnegradsky, Lenin’s
policy of forcibly expropriating grain surpluses from the peasantry created rural unrest that
threatened the stability of the Bolshevik regime. However, after 1921 Lenin’s New Economic
Policy was similar to Stolypin’s attempts at reforming rural agriculture in order to stabilize the
countryside and thus increase industrial growth. The NEP marked a temporary retreat from the
policies of rural transformation, but the grain crisis of 1927 proved to be the deciding factor in
the Bolsheviks’ war against rural Russia. Stalin understood 1927 as a grain procurement crisis
and conspiracy by the peasantry to undermine the Bolshevik regime. However, Stalin failed to
grasp the peasant’s investment of agricultural products in other things as a rational economic
choice. Therefore, the agrarian policies of Joseph Stalin would soon end the debate on the
peasant question permanently.

COLLECTIVIZATION AND THE END OF THE AGRARIAN DEBATE

The policies of War Communism proved successful in procuring grain for the cities and the Red Army during the Civil War. However, the forced procurements and coercion that were used to wrest grain away from the peasantry severed the link between the Bolsheviks and the peasants. Aware that the success of international revolution was no longer realistic Vladimir Lenin retreated from the policies of War Communism and adapted a platform that allowed more economic freedom to the Soviet peasantry. The New Economic Policy represented a return to some of the capitalist tendencies of the tsarist administration but did help to mend the break between the cities and the countryside.

However, the Soviet countryside of the 1920s looked remarkably similar to the countryside before the revolution. The peasant commune was restored after the end of the tsarist regime and was still a major force in the everyday lives of Russia’s rural inhabitants. The peasantry also continued to utilize the same traditional farming techniques of their ancestors, and thus harvests remained close to subsistence levels. The Bolsheviks ascended to power in the hopes of building socialism and transforming the world of Soviet citizens. The problems of how to modernize as well as how to deal with the peasant question continued to plague the Bolsheviks as the decade of the 1920s came to a close.

However, in 1928 the debate on the peasant question and how to modernize the Soviet Union came to an end. That year the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Joseph Stalin, pushed forward the First Five Year Plan, which called for the collectivization of agriculture. The collectivization drives of the late 1920s and 1930s removed any doubt about the policy of the Soviet regime toward the peasantry. The peasantry was herded into collective farms, in which the amount of grain produced could be carefully monitored. As it had been under the policies of
Vyshnegradsky and Witte, the peasantry was relegated to the status of a natural resource to be exploited for the grand plan of industrialization. The process of collectivization fundamentally altered the way of life for over 80 percent of the Soviet Union’s population. In the process millions died or were displaced. While the debate on what to do about Russia’s peasantry as well as the question of how to modernize Russia had existed for over 50 years, it was Stalin who answered the question once and for all. The peasantry, once again, was to be treated as a resource to be rationally controlled and transformed in order to escape Russia’s “backwardness.”

While the NEP provided the Soviet Union with positive growth not seen since the pre-war era many of its problems soon became clear. The system itself came under harsh criticism from the hard-line Leftists within the Communist Party. The most outspoken of these critics was Leon Trotsky. Trotsky, who had led the Red Army to victory in 1921, felt that the NEP represented a return to capitalism and was the antithesis to what the Soviet experiment was attempting to create: a classless society in which private property and exploitation were abolished. Trotsky was most vocal in his opposition to the NEP when he said of the right wing that they, “who were setting the tone at that period, demanded a broader scope of capitalist tendencies in the villages.”¹ The NEP also came under direct attack from the leftist Evgeni Preobrazhenski. Like Trotsky, Preobrazhenski called for all out revolution in the West while promoting the rapid growth of industry and an industrial proletariat at home. In his 1926 work *Novaya Ekonomika* Preobrazhenski claimed that it was time to turn the tables on the private sector, particularly the peasantry that had forced the Bolshevik retreat toward the NEP.²

Preobrazhenski’s former ally turned political opponent, Nikolai Bukharin, represented the right wing in the debate on the agrarian question. Bukharin’s insistence on allowing the

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peasantry, especially the *kulaks*, more economic freedom was similar to Stolypin’s ultimate reading of the value of a capitalist peasantry. Bukharin, like Stolypin, believed that only once a strong and prosperous rural base was developed could industry grow. However, unlike Stolypin, Bukharin believed that a capitalist peasantry was only a phase and an expedient on the road to building socialism. The Commissariat of Agriculture, or Narkomzem, was established in 1923 under the command of Alexander Smirnov, and was devoted to the policies of the NEP. Narkomzem’s devotion to the NEP represented the right wing faction’s adherence to gradual modernization of the Soviet countryside. However, Narkomzem’s policies of concessions to reestablish the link between the peasantry and the Bolshevik administration did not mean that peasants were free to decide what was best for themselves. Smirnov rejected the idea of peasant’s spontaneity to relinquish their grain and focused on ways to limit peasant control and push the countryside closer to socialism. Therefore, Narkomzem’s goals of peaceful modernization, raising living standards, and providing agronomic education conflicted with the peasantry’s desire for limited state interference, individualism, and maintenance of traditional folkways.

Lenin’s death in January 1924 plunged the Communist Party into a succession crisis. The top two contenders for control of the Party were Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. Stalin lacked the credentials of Trotsky and was not considered a charismatic leader, a great orator, or a distinguished Marxist theorist. In fact, Stalin had not played as pivotal role in the revolution as Trotsky had. However, Stalin did hold the position of General Secretary and, therefore, had the authority to appoint secretaries of local party organizations and dismiss them for displaying

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opposing factional leanings. By promoting members of the opposition to distant provincial jobs Stalin was able to consolidate power over the party’s Central Committee. In 1926 Kamenev and Zinoviev broke with Stalin and joined Trotsky in a United Opposition against Stalin. However, due to lack of support within the Party itself the members of the United Opposition were unable to present a formidable force against Stalin and his new, if temporary, ally Bukharin. In 1927 Trotsky and his supporters were defeated and expelled first from the Central Committee and eventually expelled from the Communist Party. In 1928 Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union completely and in 1940 Stalinist agents assassinated him in Mexico.

With Trotsky eliminated from the struggle for power, Stalin was able to concentrate all his efforts on cementing power for himself. Stalin was also forced to consider the next step in the Bolshevik revolution. The Bolsheviks had taken power in 1917 in order to build socialism in Russia. However, by the late 1920s Russia was still as predominantly agrarian as it had been during the tsarist administration. Central to the succession crisis following Lenin’s death was the fundamental question of how to continue the drive toward socialism in Russia. The majority of the succession debates between the right and left were the result of the decisive issue of industrialization. The so called “super-industrializors” led by Trotsky believed that in order to escape Russia’s backwardness capital should be accumulated under conditions of socialism to industrialize the nation. Preobrazhenski dubbed the process of Soviet industrialization as “primitive socialist accumulation.” The policy of primitive socialist accumulation was similar to the policies of Vyshnegradsky, in which peasants’ surpluses would be used to pay for industrialization.

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7 Evtuhov and Stites, *A History of Russia Since 1800*, 335.
On the other side of the debate stood Bukharin, who believed that the NEP should be continued to allow the Soviet Union to “grow into socialism.” In contrast to Trotsky and Preobrazhenski Bukharin desired to introduce consumer goods into the countryside for sale in order to get the peasants to produce more grain and willingly sell it back to the state. Bukharin argued that Lenin’s policy of NEP had returned the rural economy to the petty bourgeois peasantry as well as allowed almost 85 percent of Russia’s industry to remain in private hands. The policy of NEP was successful because it had reestablished the economic link or “symchka” with the peasantry and brought production levels back to the levels of pre-war Russia. However, by 1926 most top ranking Party members assumed that the period of restoration was over. Therefore, by 1927 the question to Stalin and his supporters was: where do we go from here?

Stalin began to change his position on the NEP following the procurement crisis of 1927. The procurement crisis was brought about because during the previous year the peasants only sold approximately half as much grain as they had in 1926. The drop in grain sales was the result of bad harvests as well as a fall in agricultural prices paid to the producers. The amount of grain was not nearly enough to feed the citizens in the cities and was not nearly enough to export and so created a fall in the Soviet economy. A. Yugov wrote in an article in 1927 “since agriculture is the most important producing factor of the country, the tendency of the peasantry to restrict production to its own requirements and the reluctance to market surpluses is a factor which makes normal economic progress impossible.” This event showed Stalin one of the inherent problems of the NEP, the inability of the state to force citizens to give up their

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8 Evtuhov and Stites, A History of Russia Since 1800, 334-335.
10 A. Yugov, “Fundamental Problems of Soviet National Economy” Sotsialistichesky Vestnik (October-December 1927)
agricultural yields. At the beginning of 1928 the Bolsheviks were forced to use compulsion to obtain grain from the peasantry for the first time since 1924 by using “extraordinary measures” and the force of the Cheka. Similar to the situation of 1918-1921 Bolshevik authorities attempted to win the support and grain surplus of the mass of the peasantry by pitting them against the more prosperous peasants or kulaks.

Stalin attributed the grain crisis to the change of the structure of agricultural procurement as well as sabotage by the kulaks. Stalin accused the kulaks of “hoarding” the grain in order to wait for prices to increase and therefore to achieve larger profits. However, Stalin’s accusation of the crisis being spurred on by the kulaks was in reality incorrect. The majority of those who chose not to relinquish their grain were middle and lower-class citizens within the peasantry. Stalin also failed to see the peasantry making rational economic choices of holding on to their surpluses in order to allow grain prices to rise. While this reality had been apparent to some of the Communist leaders, it was the NEP that had created the economic climate that allowed this sort of activity to flourish. The grain crisis of 1927 also alerted Stalin to the problem of ensuring that peasants would provide their grain surpluses to the Soviet state. Stalin believed that the 25 million small farms were far too numerous to be controlled directly. Therefore, to Stalin, the necessity of ensuring grain procurements could be solved by merging the small farms into much larger and less numerous collective farms.

During the years of the NEP the Bolsheviks and their theoreticians embarked upon a mission to define the exact stratification of the peasantry. The results of the classification were

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the categories of *batraks, bednyaks, serednyaks,* and *kulaks.* The classification of the peasantry was an attempt by the Bolsheviks to impose order and stability onto a class of Russian citizens that they believed lacked organization. The classification of the peasantry also allowed the Bolsheviks to clearly define both the allies and enemies of the Soviet state. The Bolsheviks’ ordering of Russia’s peasantry would allow the regime to justify its involvement in both creating a better life for its allies, as well as the destruction of its enemies.

In conjunction with the Party’s attempt at strictly defining the social make-up of the peasantry, an increase in agricultural specialists began to become more prevalent in the countryside. Just as the agricultural specialists who had studied the peasantry during the 1880s and 1890s, the new Soviet agricultural specialists believed that they, alone, held the answers to modernization in the Russian countryside. The ultimate goal of the specialists was to lift the peasantry to a more rational level of production through the application of science. The specialists were therefore part of an old Russian intelligentsia tradition in which it was the state’s duty and obligation to intervene in order to render peasants modern. The new countryside, it was hoped, would become what both the pre and post-revolutionary agricultural specialist had dreamed of: the home of a rational peasantry who understood their place within the industrialization and modernization programs of Russia.

While the NEP represented a temporary relaxation of the Bolsheviks’ attempt at transforming the peasantry, the respite was not to last. Stalin officially denounced the NEP as halting the pace of socialism and succeeded in 1929 of denouncing Bukharin as a “right deviationist.” It is commonly assumed that Stalin’s support of the NEP was a means of ensuring

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16 Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power,* 76.
an alliance against his political opponent Trotsky and not his true economic vision for the future of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately for Bukharin he stood in direct opposition to Stalin’s goals of industrialization, and he would pay for it with his political career, and eventually his life. His earlier speeches that called for, “the removal of many restrictions which put the brake on the growth of the well to do and kulak farm” provided the ammunition for Stalin to accuse him of being a capitalist sympathizer. Bukharin criticized Stalin’s policies in a speech on January 24, 1929 commemorating the fifth anniversary of Lenin’s death. Bukharin wrote, “when we are now surviving a whole series of new difficulties with the peasantry, it is not harmful for us to remember this very simple and at the same time very wise rule. We need to catch hold of the peasant for his interests, not philosophize, be without any kind of idiosyncrasy, we need to search for the simplest approach to him.” Bukharin was ousted from his Comintern position and was eventually purged from the Party once Stalin attained complete power and died in the Gulag in 1938.

The shift away from the policies of the NEP represented a renewed degree of intervention by the state into the affairs of Russia’s peasantry. For the first time since the years of War Communism the Bolshevik regime attempted to reorganize agriculture to ensure the procurement of grain surpluses. For the most part the Bolsheviks had done a poor job of including the peasantry within the Communist Party. By 1928 the Party remained predominantly urban and out of 1,360,000 Party members only 198,000 or 14.5 percent were considered peasants. Despite the fact that the Bolsheviks attempted to circulate pro-Bolshevik newspapers and journals throughout the countryside the Soviet regime was, for most of the peasantry, an alien

and mistrusted external force. The organizations that were established in the Russian countryside were far too inadequate to convince the peasantry to accept the replacement of the market by grain collection at fixed prices. The Bolshevik organizations also proved inadequate to convince the peasantry to replace the family farms with the collective *kolkhoz*. Therefore, the policies developing in early 1928 were aimed at a complete overhaul of the Bolshevik organizations in the countryside. In order to do so the Soviet regime intruded into the peasant villages in numbers not seen for over a decade.\(^{21}\)

Despite Stalin’s ascension to absolute power the agrarian question was still a main concern for Bolshevik leadership. The communal peasantry, with its small plots of land and subsistence agriculture, was a far cry from the efficient, productive, and modern farmers that the Bolsheviks envisioned.\(^{22}\) The Bolsheviks summarized their Party program as the building of socialism. Despite how vague the goals of the Bolsheviks seemed to be, it was clear that the key to building socialism was economic development and modernization. The Bolsheviks believed that what Russia needed was more factories, railways, machinery, and technology. In addition to industrial development Russia needed urbanization and a shift of the population from the countryside to the cities. The goal of building socialism in Russia meant transforming Russian society into a modern industrial force.\(^{23}\) In order to build socialism in Russia the Bolsheviks had created the State General Planning Commission (Gosplan) in 1921. While central planning was reduced during the years of NEP, the Bolshevik desire to plan every aspect of the Soviet economy remained a central tenet of the Bolshevik regime. However, the dream of economic planning was nothing new to the Russian state. In fact, the fundamental reason behind Witte’s

\(^{21}\) Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 54-55.


memorandum to the tsar in 1899 was for the government to sponsor planned development of the Russian economy.\textsuperscript{24}

During the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927, Stalin officially introduced the First Five Year Plan. The debates during the Party Congress outlined the policy that was to be introduced in order to solve the agrarian problem. The policies of the Bolsheviks stressed the renewed prospects for an offensive in the countryside.\textsuperscript{25} The Party Congress stated that, “the organizational form of the economy has become essentially different inasmuch as the possibility has arisen of planned guidance of the economy, increasingly suppressing the anarchy of the capitalist commodity market, on the basis of the nationalization of heavy industry and of the other commanding heights.”\textsuperscript{26} The collectivization drives of the late 1920s were designed to organize the independent peasant farms into large collective farms called \textit{kolkhozy}. Stalin wrote “that the proletariat in power can and must use this reserve (peasantry) in order to link industry with agriculture, to advance socialist construction, and to provide for the dictatorship of the proletariat that necessary foundation without which the transition to socialist economy is impossible.”\textsuperscript{27} By placing the peasantry under the supervision and control of the Soviet state through the collective farm, the Bolsheviks were able to collect all of the grain that was produced. After redistributing some of the meager surpluses of grain back into the countryside

\textsuperscript{25} Lewin, \textit{Russian Peasants and Soviet Power}, 199.
and extracting enough grain to feed the cities, the Bolsheviks would export the bulk of grain supplies in order to pay for the industrialization drives.28

The decision to collectivize agriculture also coincided with the removal of the agricultural specialists from the Russian countryside. The agricultural specialists spent the years of NEP focusing on land settlement and land reform while maintaining the Soviet bureaucracy throughout the Russian countryside. The elimination of the specialists also represented the severing of the Bolshevik link with the countryside. The NEP had been intended to reestablish the link between the Bolsheviks and the peasantry that the policies of War Communism destroyed. Due in large part to the agricultural specialists the link was reestablished and the Bolsheviks were able to achieve stability in the countryside. For over twenty years the agricultural specialists had been remarkably successful in their intrusion of the countryside and had survived political upheaval and rural unrest. The specialist helped the peasantry to maintain relative economic freedom from the control of the Soviet bureaucracy. However, the very success of the agricultural specialists was the root cause of their downfall. In mid-February 1928 Smirnov was removed from his position as Commissar of Agriculture and placed into a position in the Central Committee Secretariat. With the removal of Smirnov the agricultural sector moved into the position of existing primarily to fuel the pace of industrialization.29 Unlike Stolypin, Stalin had no desire to develop peasant society, and therefore the specialists were no longer needed. Stalin’s policies were much more like Vyshngradsky’s in seeing Russia’s peasants as a natural resource for the modernization of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Stalin’s policy of collectivization was not designed to develop the Russian countryside in order to

29Heinzen, Inventing A Soviet Countryside, 196-197.
modernize but to make war against the peasantry in hopes to cement Bolshevik control in rural Russia.  

Stalin’s peasant policy had two primary objectives. The first was to limit and eventually eradicate the economic power of the so called kulaks. The second objective was to transform the small scale individual peasant land holdings into large scale collective farms. Stalin proclaimed that, “the way out lies, above all, in the transition from small, backward, and scattered peasant farms to amalgamated, large scaled socialized farms, equipped with machinery, armed with scientific knowledge and capable of producing the greatest quantity of grain for the market. The solution lies in the transition from individual peasant farming to collective, socialized farms.”

The demands of the state for the agricultural commodities were increasing in order to pay for the industrialization of the Soviet Union. Like Vyshnegradsky, Stalin and his supporters saw the peasantry and the internal accumulation of resources as the way to finance the industrialization plans. The struggle to gain control over the peasants’ grain became emblematic of the Soviet regime’s attempt to control the peasantry. In Stalin’s report of the Politburo to the Plenum of the Party Central Committee on November 19, 1928 Stalin spoke of the necessity of the collective farms. Stalin stated, “I should like to draw your attention to the collective farms, and especially to the state farms, as levers which facilitate that reconstruction of agriculture on a new technical basis, causing a revolution in the minds of the peasants and helping them to shake off conservatism, routine. Such, in general, are the ways and means that we must adopt in our work of solving the grain problem.”

33 “Stalin Moves Toward Rapid Industrialization, Collectivization, and Against Right Deviation” in *Documents of Soviet History, Volume Four*, 358.
The implementation of the First Five Year Plan also led to the reinvigoration of anti-religious sentiment in the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks had attacked the Russian Orthodox Church in 1921-1922. Under the pretext of using church valuables to aid famine victims many churches in rural Russia had been destroyed. However, throughout the years of the NEP rural Russia experienced a revival of religious services. In 1928 the Central Committee closed down all remaining rural monasteries. The first League of the Militant Godless was held in 1924 but by 1929 the Bolshevik government began to consider that religion and the church were obstacles to the building of Soviet socialism. E.M. Iaroslavsky, the league’s founder, proclaimed that, “In our country there exists a whole series of survivors and remnants of different economic relationships, not socialist, there exists remnants of the undefeated exploiting classes, there exists the obscurantism of religious ideology rooted in centuries.”

It was believed by many of the top Bolsheviks that both priests and kulaks were holding on to antiquated religion in order to thwart the regime’s modernization efforts. Following the speech by Iaroslavsky a campaign against religion in the countryside began. The reasons for the pogrom against religion were steeped in the economic policies of the Bolsheviks. The Soviet regime was secretly preparing plans for massive collectivization plans for the countryside, and the Bolsheviks believed that the church would aid in peasant resistance. Therefore, the anti-religious policies of the Bolsheviks were ultimately aimed at making the transformation of the countryside easier.

In September 1929 grain collectors and representatives of the procurement systems arrived in the countryside. In addition to the grain collectors the Central Committee authorized more than 50,000 industrial workers to aid in the procurement process. The workers were armed with rifles and Article 107 of the Criminal Code and forced over 200,000 peasants to bring all of

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34 “Militant Godless League Reinvigorated, E.M. Iaroslavsky’s Speech at Second All-Union Congress” in Documents of Soviet History, Volume Five, 104.
their grain surpluses to the collection agencies under the threat of arrest and deportation. The target of 14 million metric tons of grain was achieved well before the end of 1929, and over 1.3 million metric tons of grain was available for export. Stalin wrote to Molotov in December 1929 that, “the collective farm movement is grown by leaps and bounds. In the lower Volga, 60 percent of peasant farms have been transferred to collective farms. The eyes of the rightists are popping out of their heads in amazement.”

However, in response to state coercion the peasantry began to slaughter their animals and increase their attempts to hide their grain surpluses. The state won the battle of procurement in 1929 but knew that such measures could not be expected to work every year. The Soviet regime understood that the peasantry would be unwilling to continue to work hard during the spring sowing season to produce the projected 15 million metric tons of grain needed to meet the demands of industrial development in 1930.

The Bolsheviks began to include images of war in their assault upon Russia’s “backwardness.” The image of war was meant to reassert the spirit of the Civil War and policies of War Communism. Driven by the desire for production Stalin and his supporters began to remake the revolution of 1917 into an image of rapid industrialization. A propaganda poster distributed in 1931 offers the banner, “the fight for the Bolshevik harvesting of the crop is the fight for socialism.” The image of the kulak was brought to the forefront of Bolshevik rhetoric once again. The basic problem of supply was, for Stalin, the result of peasants hoarding their grain and holding the Soviet state ransom to the demands of the kulaks. By advancing the idea

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that the chief enemy of the Bolshevik regime was the *kulak*. Stalin was drawing upon the pre-revolutionary discourses that labeled the peasantry as the “other.” Bolshevik policy had once again labeled the peasantry as the antithesis to Russian modernization attempts.

The collectivization drive and subsequent war against the countryside caused Stalin to increase his oppressive measures against the peasantry. On December 27, 1929 Stalin gave a speech in which he stated “we have passed from the policy of restricting the exploitative tendencies of the *kulaks* to the policy of liquidating the *kulaks* as a class.”\(^{41}\) The new policy known as dekulakization affected the Russian peasantry as a whole. Since the *kulak* was largely a fictional character and image to justify Bolshevik intrusion in the countryside, those who acted in opposition to the process of collectivization were labeled *kulaks*.\(^{42}\) Stalin’s commander of the OGPU, or secret police, G. Yagoda wrote in February 1930 that, “in order to carry out the liquidation of the kulak as a class in the most organized manner and to decisively suppress any attempts by the kulaks to counteract the measure of Soviet power for the socialist reorganization of agriculture a devastating blow must be delivered to the kulaks as soon as possible. The kulaks’ resistance must be and will be decisively broken.”\(^{43}\) Even the socialist author Maxim Gorky wrote in 1930 “from within the country, cunning enemies organize a shortage of food. The *kulaks* terrorize the collective farm peasants by murder, by arson, by all sorts of villainies; everything that has outlived the term set by history is against us, and this gives us the right to consider ourselves as being still in a state of civil war. The natural conclusion which follows is: if the enemy does not surrender, he must be destroyed.”\(^{44}\)

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41 “Stalin on the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class” in *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*, 180.
descended into the village to eliminate the kulaks, collectivize the village, and force the “backward” peasantry into the socialist twentieth century.\textsuperscript{45}

Despite the fact that the regime had collectivized almost half of the Russian peasantry, the tempo of collectivization produced chaos in the countryside. In March 1930 Stalin was forced to issue his article “Dizzy with Success” in which he blamed the hardships and brutality of collectivization on local officials taking the strategies too far. Stalin proclaimed that, “a radical turn of the countryside towards socialism may be considered as already achieved.” Stalin continued with, “people not infrequently become intoxicated by such success; they become dizzy with success, lose all sense of proportion and the capacity to understand realities: they show a tendency to overrate their own strength and to underrate the strength of the enemy.”\textsuperscript{46} In accordance with the issue of “Dizzy with Success” Stalin temporarily reduced the pace of collectivization. By issuing the article and casting the blame of the chaotic effects of collectivization upon overzealous party members, Stalin was able to retain some support from the peasantry as well as defend the principles of collectivization. However, once the tempo was reduced the peasantry began to flee the collective farms in droves. Despite the brief respite in the speed of collectivization Stalin once again pushed forward and the campaign of collectivization resumed.\textsuperscript{47}

Following the decision to eliminate the kulaks as a class and before the issue of “Dizzy with Success” Stalin pushed forward the second wave of collectivization. In January 1930 the Central Committee stated that, “we have the material basis for replacing large scale bulk production by large scale production in the kolkhozes, for a mighty advance in creating a

\textsuperscript{46} “Dizzy with Success” in \textit{Documents of Soviet History, Volume Five}, 200.
\textsuperscript{47} Evhutov and Stites, \textit{A History of Russia Since 1800}, 361.
socialist agriculture.” In March 1930 approximately 58 percent of the arable land was collectivized into large state controlled farms. In addition to collectivizing agriculture the Soviet regime set up Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) in order to completely modernize Soviet agriculture as well as educate Soviet peasants by inculcating Soviet work habits and respect for socialist property. The MTS were designed both to modernize agriculture as well as replace the livestock slaughtered by the peasantry during the early days of collectivization. According to official Soviet statistics 37,900 tractors were produced in 1931 and by 1932 approximately 48,900 tractors were produced. However, despite the increase in both tractors and MTS within the collective farm the shortage of horses and other livestock continued to plague the productivity of the collective farms. Within the collective farm the land was no longer divided into strips as was the case in the traditional peasant farm. In addition to the new divisions of land almost all of the peasants within the kolkhoz had access to a tractor. These new innovations of the kolkhozes caused the Soviet regime to believe that within years Soviet agriculture would become the most technologically advanced in the world. Stalin’s insistence upon the necessity of industrialization is clear in a speech given in 1931. “All beat her (Russia) for her backwardness: for military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness.” Stalin’s fear of the Soviet Union being defeated by its backwardness provided him with the legitimacy to push forward collectivization no matter how much it destroyed the peasantry. Collectivization dramatically increased the amount of grain procured by the Soviet state. In 1928 State grain procurements

48 “Party Central Committee Resolution on Increasing Rate of Collectivization” in Documents of Soviet History, Volume Five, 189.
50 Medvedev, Soviet Agriculture, 85.
52 “Stalin on Industrialization” in The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union, 187.
were approximately 10.8 million tons. By 1933 that amount increased to 22.6 million tons of grain. Also the amount of grain available for export was dramatically increased. Grain exports for 1927-1928 were approximately .029 million tons. In 1933 the amount of grain exports rose to 1.69 million tons. By 1936 the collectivization of Soviet agriculture was regarded as complete. Close to 99 percent of arable land was under the control of the Soviet collective and therefore almost all grain surpluses were available for export.\(^53\)

In order to quiet the critics of collectivization the Soviet regime, much like the agents of the Stolypin Land Reforms, engaged in “Potemkinism.” Named for General Grigory Potemkin and the fake villages he produced in order to impress Catherine II, the Soviet attempt at “Potemkinism” was designed to elicit support from educated Soviet society for the collective farms. The image of the new Soviet village was created in newspapers, movies, speeches, and statistics that showed how life had improved for the peasantry since the beginning of collectivization. The Potemkin villages of the 1930s used the tropes of Soviet realism to contrast the misery of the peasant village of the tsarist past against the ordered, rational, and productive future of the collective farm. The Potemkin village included houses with white lace curtains and potted plants resting on the windowsills. Inside the village households were radios and sewing machines resting near tables and beds. Also, unlike the irrational peasant households the “Potemkin” houses were divided into rooms of a modern type. Within the “Potemkin” village also existed new administrative buildings, educational, and medical facilities.\(^54\) In a speech to the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party Stalin laid down the differences between the old peasant village and the new kolkhozy. Stalin stated, “the old village with its church as the highest point and its best houses belonging to the policeman, priest and kulak to the fore and the


\(^{54}\) Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 262-264.
half broken-down huts of the peasants behind is beginning to disappear. In its place a new type of village is developing which has communal buildings, clubs, the radio, cinemas, schools, libraries and kindergartens, and tractors, combines, threshing machines and cars.55 The realities of the collective farm were much bleaker than Stalin wished the public to know. Similar to the way in which the Stolypin reformers attempted to show the new private farms in a positive light Stalin wanted to show that the collective farm had transformed the Soviet countryside in a positive way.

The collectivization drives caused untold horrors amongst the Russian peasantry. The violence that was used to wrench the grain surpluses from the peasantry were like nothing the Russians had ever seen before. Victor Kravchenko, one of Stalin’s industrial managers, spoke of collectivization this way: “The class struggle in the village has taken the sharpest forms. This is no time for squeamishness and sentimentality. Do not be afraid of taking extreme measures. Comrade Stalin expects it of you. It’s a life and death struggle, better to do too much than not enough.”56 The Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union, Vyacheslav Molotov, wrote that “pressure must therefore be brought to bear on the middle peasant from all sides, otherwise it would be impossible to guide him towards what Stalin considered to be the regime’s most important task, that of assisting the peasantry to reorganize farms on a new technical basis.”57

One of the most devastating results of collectivization was the famine of 1932-1933. The famine was the combined result of poor weather as well as the policies of procurement. Sections of Central Russia, the Volga, northern Caucasus, and especially the Ukraine suffered immensely.

57 Molotov, As quoted in Russian Peasants and Soviet Power, 252.
Historian Norman Naimark estimates that 3-5 million Ukrainians died during the famine. When famine struck the Ukraine, instead of setting up famine relief as the Bolsheviks had done in 1921, the Soviet regime took grain and seeds, blocked roads so peasants could not escape, and delivered grain shipments to other parts of the Soviet Union. Given the fact that over half of the rebellions against the collectivization movement occurred in the Ukraine many believe today that the famine was designed as genocide of Ukrainian peasants.58

Thus, just as the Stolypin Land Reforms of 1906 had attempted to reorganize the peasantry along rational farming policies, the collectivization drives of Stalin attempted to reorganize the peasantry into rational socialists and servants to the Soviet state. The Stolypin Land Reforms were in no way as bloody or destructive to the peasantry as the collectivization drives, but each reform clearly diagnosed the peasantry as “backward” and “broken.” While Stolypin attempted to develop the peasantry into a property-minded class of capitalists in order to ensure order and more productive farming, Stalin sought to exploit and extract capital from the peasantry by placing them on large collective farms. However, both reforms saw the traditional world of the peasantry as the antithesis to progress and modernity.

In a 1945 interview Stalin proclaimed that the forced collectivization was necessary because of the peasants’ stubbornness as well as their “backwardness.”59 To Stalin, the peasantry had failed to live up to its grand socialist expectations and had retarded the pace of industrial development in the Soviet Union. Collectivization effectively changed the entire way of life for Russia’s peasantry. More than a million peasants were displaced and the process was enforced by a campaign of terror, deportation, exile, and execution that was ultimately intended to transform the peasantry into what the ruling elite thought a modern collective farmer should

59 Richard Lauterbach, “Stalin at 65,” Life (January 1, 1945)
According to Winston Churchill’s memoirs Stalin claimed that the collectivization drives of the late 1920s and 1930s were more stressful than the Second World War. By eliminating the free peasantry Stalin “captured” the countryside for the benefit of the state. The modernizing revolution, for Stalin, was represented as a way to bridge the gap between the pre-modern forms of social, economic, and political organization in Russia and replace them with a progressive form of state control. In Stalin’s view the Party had saved Russia from its own backward dark forces in the countryside.

The *Columbia Encyclopedia* defines the goals of collectivization as “to modernize agriculture, to secure a reliable food supply, to free capital for industrial production, and to release labor for heavy industry.” However, this list definition is not complete. The goals of collectivization of agriculture, the process of dekulakization, famines, and terror of Stalin’s regime were also undertaken in order to radically transform the Soviet peasantry. For over 50 years the rulers of Russia and the Soviet Union had debated how to transform Russia’s peasantry from an ignorant mass to rational farmers. While most of the attempts by pre-revolutionary state actors as well as early Bolshevik attempts to transform the peasantry had achieved only partial success, the collectivization drives succeeded in their mission to transform the Soviet peasantry. Maxim Gorky wrote, “like the Jews that Moses led out of Egyptian slavery, the half-savage, stupid, ponderous people of the Russian villages . . . will die out, and a new tribe will take their place—literate, sensible, hearty people.” The collective farm dissolved the commune as well as the debate about this hotly contested institution. Collectivization replaced the traditional

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60 Medvedev, *Soviet Agriculture*, 63.
institutions of the commune with local soviets, security organs, propaganda bases, and MTS stations. Stalin’s war against the peasantry contributed to the sluggishness of agricultural production for several decades after the collectivization of agriculture was pronounced complete in 1936. However, collectivization succeeded where tax collectors, land captains, private landowners, rural reform, and food requisitioners failed. The collectivized countryside finally fell under the complete control of the Soviet state. In doing so Stalin ended the debate on what to do about the peasant question. Like his predecessors Stalin believed that the peasantry represented a dark and alien mass that needed to be changed. Under the banner of modernization Stalin transformed the Soviet peasantry and destroyed the “backward” elements of the Soviet countryside. By the mid-1930s rural Russia was no longer the province of peasants. It now belonged to the kolkhozniki, and their urban masters.
CONCLUSION

By the mid-1930s the “peasant question” was essentially “solved.” The large scale collectivization of agriculture by Stalin and the Communist regime forever ended the debate on the role of the peasantry within the policies of modernization. To Stalin, the peasantry was to play the part of a natural resource that could be controlled and exploited in order to gain grain surpluses that would be used to finance industrialization. For over fifty years the image of the peasantry as backward and irrational provided both the pre-and-post-revolutionary governments with the desire to establish control over and dream of transforming the peasantry. Both the tsarist and Bolshevik administrations grappled over the problems of achieving industrialization and modernity in a country as economically “backward” as Russia. In order to build Russia into an industrial power that could rival the West both pre-and-post-revolutionary governments embarked upon state sponsored policies of economic modernization. Despite the different desired outcomes for the peasantry, similarities existed between the policies before and after 1917. The diagnosis of what was wrong with Russia was, for both governments, the inherent “backwardness” of the peasantry. Therefore, the representation of the Russian peasantry as something that needed to be corrected allowed for decades of social engineering through state sponsored economic policies in hopes of controlling and modernizing rural Russia.

Throughout the early 1880s the tsarist government undertook plans to modernize Russia along Western lines primarily through grain exports and taxation in return for Western industrial machinery and capital. Nikolai Bunge, Russia’s Minister of Finance from 1881 to 1886 developed a plan to attack the lack of industrial growth as well as the problem of rural poverty. To Bunge, peasant poverty was the main cause of Russia’s poor industrial output. Bunge attempted to relieve the heavy tax burden of Russia’s peasantry in hopes of increasing the
peasantry’s ability to produce, thus increasing the export of agricultural products to finance industrialization. Bunge believed that the problem was insufficient production of grain and therefore sought to increase agricultural productivity. However, it was not until 1887 that industrialization and control of the Russian peasantry became inextricably linked. Bunge’s successor Ivan Vyshnegrads[ky believed that the peasantry would have to pay for the cost of industrialization. Vyshnegrads[ky repealed the tax cuts granted by Bunge in hopes of forcing the peasants to market greater grain surpluses for export in order to pay for industrialization. Vyshnegrads[ky’s policy of “squeezing” peasant grain surpluses in order to pay for industrialization led him to pronounce, “we must export though we die.” Vyshnegrads[ky’s policies in fact did increase the capital available for the purchase of Western industrial machinery yet culminated in famine in 1891 by depleting peasant grain reserves.

In addition to the increased government intrusion into the lives of the peasantry, the 1880s also saw host of new specialists begin to make their way into the Russian countryside. Specialists in ethnography, statistics, and economics replaced the amateurs who had concentrated on the study of the peasant soul and instead provided intimate “knowledge” of how the rural village was structured and, therefore, how it could be controlled. As the perception of the Russian peasantry changed so, too, did the government’s attempt at controlling peasants. The famine of 1891 caused the firing of Vyshnegrads[ky, and he was replaced by Sergei Witte in 1892. Witte’s policy of bringing modernity to Russia was linked with allowing Russia’s peasantry to develop along Western lines by using the railroad. Witte believed that massive railroad building was the key to Russia’s success as an industrial power and, therefore, Witte continued to neglect the problems of agrarian Russia while focusing on industrialization. The policies of Witte were similar to those of Vyshnegrads[ky although the desired export surpluses
were meant to support a turn to the gold standard. Both rested on the assumption of peasant backwardness and irrationality. The increased taxes in support of railroad construction were seen as a way for Russia’s peasantry to “aid” in the creation of a modern and rational Russia.

From 1906 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Finance Minister Peter Stolypin embarked upon a program of modernization through restructuring Russia’s agricultural system. Stolypin’s reforms, which bear his name, attempted to transform Russia’s peasantry into rational, progressive, and productive capitalist farmers. The Stolypin Land Reforms called for the abolition of the Russian commune, which he saw as the barrier to agricultural productivity. The Stolypin’s Land Reforms were designed to bring rationality to the irrational Russian countryside and therefore increase prosperity through heightened productivity and order. The abolition of the commune as well as transforming Russia’s communal peasantry into property minded capitalists was seen as a way of providing stability in the countryside, which would allow for increased capital to aid the cities in industrialization. The Stolypin Land Reform was different from the policies of Vyshnegradsky and Witte in its attempt to transform the peasantry rather than simply to expropriate surplus grain and tax revenue. However, the overall theme of peasant backwardness and irrationality was at the forefront of Stolypin’s grand project of rural transformation. Despite some success the Stolypin Land Reforms came to a halt as Russia entered the First World War in 1914.

Following the Bolshevik ascension to power in October 1917 a new wave of modernizers and industrialists began to reconsider the “peasant question.” With the arrival of the Bolsheviks upon the political scene the Bolsheviks’ particular assumptions and preconceived notions concerning the peasantry arrived as well. While the Bolsheviks believed that the peasantry could be used as a potential ally in the struggle against bourgeois capitalism, they also represented a
force that lacked both a revolutionary potential and loyalty to the Bolshevik cause. The Bolsheviks, like many of their urban predecessors, believed that the Russian countryside was a place of stagnation and irrationality. Once again the peasantry represented the antithesis to modernity, and, therefore, the Bolsheviks took steps to “enlighten” the peasantry on the road to socialism. During the Russian Civil War 1918-1921 the Bolsheviks embarked upon an economic policy known as War Communism. War Communism was not only a program to ensure adequate grain supplies to the cities and the Red Army during the Civil War, but also represented an attempt by the Bolsheviks to transform the Russian peasantry into proper socialists very rapidly.

The oppressive and transformative program of War Communism forced Lenin and the Bolsheviks to reconsider their previous economic policies at the end of War Communism. The policies of War Communism severed the link between the workers and peasantry, and once again threatened the supply of food from the village to the city. In order to reconstruct the link between the peasantry and the Bolsheviks and to increase agricultural productivity which was at historic lows, Lenin enacted the New Economic Policy in 1921. The New Economic Policy provided more freedom for Russia’s peasantry to sell their grain surpluses for private profit instead of forcing the peasantry to turn over all surpluses to the state. The NEP was similar to the project envisioned by Stolypin in its attempt to create stability in the countryside while simultaneously allowing the government to focus on other tasks. While Lenin’s NEP allowed more freedom to the peasantry and increased the amount of food available to the cities, the NEP failed to transform the Russian peasantry into rational socialists. The NEP also left control over marketing in peasant hands. As the 1920s moved toward a close the new Bolshevik leader Joseph Stalin began to implement a new program that would forever end the debate on what role
the peasantry would play in modernizing Russia. The collectivization drives of the late 1920s did what War Communism, Stolypin’s Land Reforms, and the early modernization drives of the 1880s and 1890s were never able to do. Collectivization linked the peasantry to modernization by forcing them onto giant collective farms and removing any agency that peasants had previously possessed. The peasants were controlled and ultimately transformed into state workers within the newly industrialized agricultural realm of Soviet Russia. The state now controlled access to agricultural surpluses, yet productivity was slow to expand.

In the end the peasantry was transformed. The Bolsheviks’ “control” of the peasantry forever ended the debate on the role of the peasantry in the modernization of Russia. From the early 1880s to the early 1930s ministers, agricultural specialists, revolutionaries, and above all the state, embarked upon state-sponsored programs of economic modernization. The perceived “backwardness” and “irrationality” of the Russian peasantry prompted both tsarist and Bolshevik governments to intervene in the lives of peasants in hopes of achieving modernity. The aim of both governments was to industrialize Russia on a manner comparable to the great Western powers. Each of the governments saw Russia as a fundamentally backward and ignorant economic power and presumed that the main source of backwardness was Russia’s rural population. In order to solve the problem of how to industrialize Russia state actors from Vyshnegradsksy to Stalin believed that the answer lay in the transformation of the peasantry. Prevailing discourse concerning the backwardness of the peasantry provided the state actors with the belief that in order to transform Russia into an industrial power a radical transformation of Russia’s peasantry had to occur. In the process the peasantry was exploited, misunderstood, mistrusted, and ultimately sacrificed on the altar of Russia’s modernization. Harkening back to Dostoevsky’s prophetic quote, “We all, lovers of the narod (peasantry), regard them as a theory,
and it seems that none of us really likes them as they actually are, but only as each of us has imagined them. Moreover, should the Russian *narod*, at some future time, turn out to be not what we imagined, we all, despite our love of them, would immediately renounce them without regret." The modernization of Russia culminating with the Five Year Plans and the collectivization of agriculture brought untold horrors upon Russia’s peasantry. The “theory” of peasants as backward and benighted allowed Stalin to push forward with collectivization on a grand scale. In the end the peasantry’s failure to live up to its grand expectations prompted the Bolshevik regime to “renounce them without regret.”

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