

b) How far do you agree that the economic position of the peasantry in Russia was stronger in the period between the Emancipation and the Revolution than it was under Lenin and Stalin?

Agricultural policy in Russia throughout Russia between 1856 and 1964 has always been characterised by a hidden agenda. The Tsars used agricultural policy to obstruct a revolution, while Stalin used agricultural policy to facilitate industrialisation. The peasantry were limited in reaping the benefits from agricultural policies introduced by either regime. However, while both governments used agricultural policies to sustain their power, the Communist regime under Lenin and Stalin was significantly more ruthless than the former. The Tsarist regime needed the peasants on side in order to block latent revolutionary threat. Therefore, it can be said the peasants were in a better economic position under the Tsars than the Communist regime. Additionally after the emancipation, the peasantry no longer existed because of egalitarianism.

In 1861 Tsar Alexander II introduced the first economic policy 'intended' to benefit the peasantry. The Emancipation Edict was a mechanism implemented to free all serfs, who made up more than one third of the total population. The Emancipation edict abolished all personal serfdom, and the peasants were to receive land from the landlords and pay them for it. This gave the peasantry the opportunity to achieve limited economic success. However in reality, the peasants were effectively transferred from one owner to another. The state advanced the money to the landlords and recovered it from the peasants in 49 annual sums known as redemption payments. That initial stage dragged on for nearly 20 years in some regions. In many areas the peasants had to pay more than the land was worth. While in other areas they were given small plots, and many chose to accept "beggarly allotments". The peasants' landholdings were controlled by the *mir*, or village commune. The *mir* was responsible for redemption payments and periodically redistributed the land to meet the changing needs of the various households. This system meant that peasants could not leave their villages, and actually lost rights to the use of some land. (WHICH?) This policy aimed to circumvent revolution and hence actually worsened the economic plight of the peasantry. The emancipation was a failure in terms of the economic success. What is more, the provisions concerning land redistribution produced the peasant discontent that eventually helped the Russian Revolution to succeed, despite the later land reforms of Stolypin after the 1905 revolution. These plans involved allowing peasants to own their own land, removing the system in which peasants only farmed strips of land and allowing peasants to trade land freely. These proposals would have warranted more economic security for the peasantry if there wasn't a lack of enthusiasm to adopt them. Having enjoyed a sense of collective security at the time, the Bedniaks were unwilling to run the risk of setting up farms individually. For this reason, Stolypin's reforms were fruitless. By and large, the same problems created after emancipation was still present in 1914. However, many historians have argued that if given more time Stolypin may have been able to implement them successfully.

Overall, the main agricultural policies implemented to improve the economic success of the peasants at the time were aimed at trying to keep the Tsarist regime in power. This is why both the emancipation edict and Stolypin's reforms failed. M. Lynch states that 'in a country as relatively backward as Russia, reforms would take even longer to be effective' this refers to Stolypin's 'gamble on the strong'. This suggests that Stolypin's reforms may have worked if given time, but the peasants were still in a backward agricultural economy and were averse to risk. This is the reason for the failure of both the emancipation and Stolypin's reforms. Both policies failed to provide an incentive to the peasantry, to leave what they had and create a richer peasantry would reject any socialist ideals. Instead these policies were aimed at stabilising Tsardom.

When the Communist regime seized power in 1917, the peasants encountered the same problems faced in the Tsarist regime. Peasants had not benefited during the Tsarist regime due to the fact that all policies were aimed at maintaining its hold on power. In doing so, some consideration had to be given to the peasants when these policies were implemented. In addition, the Communist regime was different to that of the Tsars; in that it did not depend on the support of the peasants and therefore any policies introduced for agriculture simply relied on the repression of peasants. All policies were

aimed at industrialising Russia, and it did not matter if peasants suffered because of this. Any agricultural policy was simply to help feed the towns or to provide grain to export to pay for industrialization.

The Communist regime implemented a policy of war communism during the civil war. The sole aim of this policy was to keep the Bolsheviks in power and to win the civil war. As a result, peasants were viewed as disposable. Even during the vast **famine of 1922**, the Government took all surplus agricultural produce given to the towns to help supply the army with food. The peasants stopped producing more than they needed for themselves. The result was famine aggravated by drought; no measures were taken to help them. In addition, Russia continued to export large amounts of grain to fund the war in spite of the substantial famine in Russia itself. This left many peasants in extremely poor economic positions, definitely in a worse position than during the Tsarist regime. In 1921, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. It was intended to rectify this position and stabilise the economy. As a result of the NEP, production revived quickly, industrial production reaching the pre-war level by 1926, and although more slowly, agricultural production grew. Moreover, peasants were even allowed to sell some surplus and pay tax; some peasants became rich such as the Kulaks as a result of the removal of state requisitioning. As a result, this policy restored some prosperity and improved the economic position of the peasants by encouraging new small businesses. Experts were brought in to increase production in nationalised industries (coal, iron, steel & railways). However, although this policy was aimed at providing more grain to feed the towns, it did improve the economic position of the peasants by giving the people the chance to make money. However it is debateable as to whether it was only intended as a temporary measure to repair a severely damaged economy. There were problems that prevented the peasantry to benefit economically from the policy. The first problem was that the surplus grain produced by peasants couldn't be traded for industrial goods easily as industry did not grow as rapidly as agriculture had. This meant the peasants did not benefit as much as they could have with their increased supply of grain. Furthermore, the high turnover meant the value of grain plummeted between 1922 and 1923. To make matters worse, the lack of industrial goods available at the time meant industrial prices kept rising. The peasantry were forced to grow more grain than before in order to buy the goods they needed. **The newly denationalized industry** was producing again, but its costs were much higher than pre-war levels and thus the prices of manufactured goods were high. As the marketing of agricultural produce was resumed, the greater supply drove grain prices down. The terms of trade this moved against the countryside. Whereas the average peasant had formerly been able to get a shirt for thirty-odd pounds of rye or the equivalent, by 1923 he needed two hundred and fifty pounds. The result was the 'scissors crisis' so called from a diagram Trotsky used in a speech, which showed the intersection of a falling rural price curve and a rising urban price curve. The curves intersected, said Trotsky in September 1922. The 'Lag factor' undermined the new economic position of the peasants. Moreover, the introduction of higher taxation also further reduced the economic position of the peasants, meaning more of their grain was used to pay taxes rather than for trading. Overall, the economic potential of the NEP was cancelled out by several factors: high taxes, lack of trading opportunities. The economic position of the peasantry had seen some improvement with the abandonment of state requisitioning, but even this development was minor. The peasants were almost in the same economic position as they had been during war communism. The NEP was at least a feasible attempt to improve the state of agriculture, and did give peasants some economic freedom. But, this economic freedom was taken away from the peasantry under Stalin with his policy of collectivisation. This policy forced peasants to live on collective farms, with most the grain being produced being given to towns, over the peasants. This had a severely effect on the peasantry, who started hoarding grain as a reaction against the preferential treatment towards the towns. They refused to produce grain that would not be theirs and successful held 'the state for ransom'. This only dragged the country into a deeper famine.

NEP could have helped the peasants economically if it was run properly. This was not the case. Problems such as the machines not being available to cultivate the crops when needed meant more peasants had less grain for themselves. **The grain that was produced was not split fairly and left many peasants with insufficient grain to feed their families. NEP also meant the recreation of class distinction, however the policy continued despite its shortcomings until . All the economic freedom**

achieved since the emancipation were stripped from the peasants, leaving them in a worse position than they were eighty years before.

The final problem with collectivisation was Dekulakisation; the class of wealthier independent peasants. In smashing the Kulak class, the peasants were losing the most efficient farmers, thus reducing the amount of grain being produced by the peasants still further. The liquidation of the Kulak class left collectivised farms with the task of improving the peasants' economic position. Something it was unable to achieve. Collectivisation undermined any economic freedoms that the peasants had gained. They now had no land, no freedom to trade, and in many cases, not even enough grain to feed their families. Entirely, due to the badly run collectivised farms and the destruction of the class 'enemy': the kulaks.

Overall, agriculture was completely neglected throughout the Tsarist and Communist regimes. Agricultural policies were simply used to either keep the current government in power or to help achieve ideals the regime had, such as industrialisation. In many ways, both regimes were equally incompetent and negligent. Both were authoritarian and dictatorial and all policies passed on agriculture had a vested interest. However, during the Tsarist regime, at least some (albeit not all) peasants had their own land that they could live on. During the communist regime, many peasants were forced into poverty by the policies of war communism and collectivisation. At the end of 1950 peasants did not have their own land, and were working for little reward, as the productivity was worse than in 1917. If the evidence is weighed up on the scales: the peasants' economic position stayed much on the same level as before emancipation. However paradoxically, they received more benefits economically by the Tsarist regime than the Communist regime. The Tsarist regime needed the peasants subside revolutionary sentiment and sustain power. Collectivisation under the communist regime destroyed all economic gains the peasants had achieved throughout both regimes.

Why was NEP abandoned?

<http://www.marx2mao.org//Stalin/Index.html>

For similarities you could consider some of the following points:

1. the central control by the Tsars and by Stalin
2. the secret police under both regimes
3. terror
4. total control of the government over the economy
5. total control of the government over education
6. the adoration of the leaders by the people, giving them a godlike status
7. Both regimes relied on a large number of supporters in order to carry out the work of the leader.

For differences, you might consider some of the following points:

1. different political doctrines
2. the way in which they achieved power
3. attempts by the two last Tsars to give the people some democracy was not matched by Stalin

4. the Tsarist regimes knew that they would have to move on if they were to keep people happy. Stalin was not interested in the people's happiness. He just wanted the power.

5. Industrialisation

6. Class structure

7. Different types of people in power. Not just the Tsars and Stalin but all the other people that helped maintain the regimes.

For each of the points you wish to write about you need to make your comparison and then support it with some factual evidence.

. Some historians argue that Stolypin and his "wager on the strong" was the last chance the Tsar had to help Russia develop into a democratic society, and to keep his throne.