

## MODERN HISTORY

### HSC 2012: To what extent did practice triumph over Communist theory in the Bolshevik consolidation of power?

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The implementation of both communist and anti-communist ideology within Russia ensured a successful Bolshevik consolidation of power. After the 1917 revolution, the Bolshevik party was left ruling a country without a government bureaucracy, a constituted army and widespread support from the Russian people. Consequently, Lenin's government implemented a series of popular and coercive measures to maintain control. The ban on opposition parties implemented the communist belief in a one party dictatorship and the Peace decree saw the Marxism-Leninism promotion of class warfare. However the implementation of popular Land decree and a series of anti-communist measures in favour of the Russian proletariat negated Bolshevik ideological goals to gain support for the regime. The harsh policies of War Communism applied during the Civil War created a socialist system within Russia where the government controlled distribution of resources. To win back the support of the Russian population lost during the implementation of War Communism, post-Civil War Russia saw the rejection of communism ideology for the decisively capitalist New Economic Policy; thereby cementing the Bolshevik consolidation of power.

The early Bolshevik measures to ensure a successful consolidation of power combined both practice and communist theory. Measures to break the power of the upper classes and the church, through expropriation and confiscation of wealth set into motion the Communist desire for a classless state. The democratization of armed forces and the decree of Rights of Peoples of Russia abolishing all privileges based on ethnicity drew upon Communist ideals of equality to create a strong, supportive Russian army and proletariat which could be used to defend the revolution. However the initial weakness of the Bolshevik party, exemplified through their failure to gain a majority in Constituent assembly elections, forced Lenin to pass measures of a populist rather than Communist nature. The decree of the Land provided peasants with the right to seize land from the gentry, and church without compensation; to ensure the continued support of the Russian proletariat. The introduction of the CHEKA, a brutal government secret force, and the ban on opposition parties and newspapers hostile to the new revolutionary administration combined the Communist belief in a one party state and the practical purpose of suppressing opposition to the new regime. The Peace decree, enacted through the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, similarly united the Russian population's desire for peace and Lenin's wish to promote class warfare to begin an international Communist revolution. Thereby, in the early months of the revolutionary government, it was a combination of practice and Communist theory that ensured the Bolshevik Consolidation of power.

Policies of War Communism triumphed over practice during the Russian Civil War as the Bolshevik government attempted to simultaneously create a state of total war and build a socialist state. To restore the disastrous economic and military situation within Russia and thereby ensure the survival of his government, Lenin established a series of rigid economic policies controlled exclusively by the Communist government. The policies exemplified the Bolshevik attempt to implement Marxist ideology and centred on creating a state in which the government held complete control over the creation and distribution of resources. The nationalisation of all major industries and factories within Russia and strict discipline of the labour force transformed the capitalist economy into a socialist dictatorship. The government attempted to reduce the role of money in favour of a Marxist system of bartering based on rationing to centralise government control over the state. Within rural Russia, wishes of the Russian population were ignored and government policy was no longer based on gaining or maintaining popularity. Peasant land was socialised and grain products requisitioned by the CHEKA to bypass private traders. As the government gained power over all sectors of the Russian economy, private ownership was extinguished. Consequently, during the Civil War period Communist theory triumphed over practice in the Bolshevik consolidation of power.

The post-Civil War period of the Bolshevik Consolidation of power saw the complete triumph of practice over Communist theory as the government reluctantly introduced policies to reverse the damage caused by War Communism. The ideological measures implemented during the Civil War had left large areas of the country in ruins and created a fierce and ongoing opposition to Communist rule that threatened the power of the Bolsheviks. Seen as a 'tactical retreat', the New Economic Policy allowed for the partial revival of capitalism in attempt to strengthen the failing Russian economy and regain the support of the Russian people. Under the NEP, Russia returned to a capitalist cash economy and the ban on private trade was lifted allowing small businesses to be owned and run by private traders. Grain requisitioning was replaced with a system of taxation where peasants were taxed a percentage of the profits and allowed to sell surpluses on the open market. These measures caused a class of people allowed for the emergence of the NEP men, who flourished under the capitalised market and exemplified the inequality within Russia. The introduction of these policies challenged Lenin's previous written works and public statements, in which he identified capitalism as in direct opposition to Marxist beliefs. However, the consequent stabilization of the country allowed for a complete Bolshevik consolidation of power.

Bolshevik policy was driven by the desire to implement communist ideology as can be seen by their initial policies of peace and War Communism. However, during times where a Marxist approach would compromise their control of the state, practice would triumph over theory to ensure a complete consolidation of Bolshevik power.