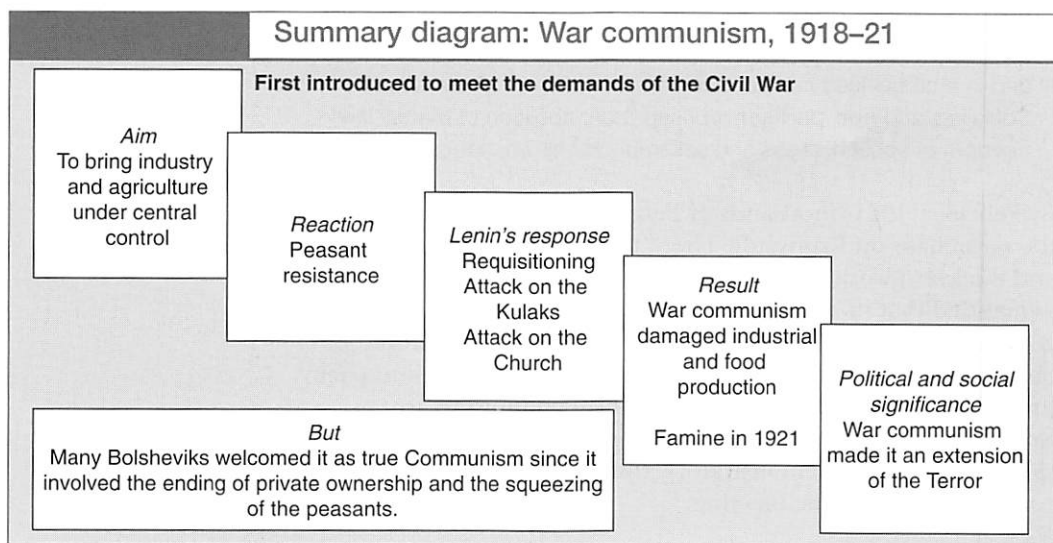


Yet, this did not mean the policy necessarily became unpopular among the Bolsheviks themselves. Indeed, there were many in the party who, far from regarding it as a temporary measure to meet an extreme situation, believed that it represented true revolutionary Communism. The party's leading economists, Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeny Preobrazhensky, urged that war communism should be retained as the permanent economic strategy of the Bolshevik government. They saw it as true socialism in action since it involved:

- the centralising of industry
- the ending of private ownership
- the squeezing of the peasants.

The policy of war communism was maintained even after the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War. The systematic use of terror by the *Cheka*, the spying on factory workers by political commissars, and the enforced requisitioning of peasant grain stocks all continued. As a short-term measure the policy had produced the results Lenin wanted, but its severity had increased Bolshevik unpopularity. Throughout 1920 there were outbreaks of resistance, the most serious occurring in the central Russian province of Tambov.



**Key question**  
What led to the Rising?

## 8 | The Kronstadt Rising 1921

Lenin himself clung to war communism as long as he could. However, the failure of the economy to recover and the scale of the famine led him to consider possible alternative policies. He was finally convinced of the need for change by widespread anti-Bolshevik risings in 1920–1. These were a direct reaction against the brutality of requisitioning. One in particular was so disturbing that Lenin described it as a lightning flash that illuminated the true reality of things. He was referring to The Kronstadt Rising of 1921, the most serious challenge to Bolshevik control since the October Revolution.

Key date

The Kronstadt Rising:  
March 1921

### The 'Workers' Opposition'

As long as unrest was confined to the peasants and to the Bolsheviks' political enemies it was a containable problem. What

became deeply worrying to Lenin in 1921 was the development of opposition to war communism within the party itself. Two prominent Bolsheviks, Alexander Shlyapnikov, the **Labour Commissar**, and Alexandra Kollontai, the outstanding woman in the party, led a 'Workers' Opposition' movement against the excesses of war communism. Kollontai produced a pamphlet in which she accused the party leaders of losing touch with the proletariat:

The workers ask – who are we? Are we really the prop of the class dictatorship, or just an obedient flock that serves as a support for those, who, having severed all ties with the masses, carry out their own policy and build up industry without any regard to our opinions.

**Labour Commissar**  
Equivalent to a Minister of Labour, responsible for industry and its workers.

**Non-partisan**  
Politically neutral, belonging to no party.

Key terms

Picking up the cue given by the 'Workers' Opposition', groups of workers in Petrograd went on strike early in 1921, justifying their actions in an angrily worded proclamation:

A complete change is necessary in the policies of the government. First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks; they want to control their own destinies. Comrades, preserve revolutionary order! Determinedly and in an organised manner demand: liberation of all the arrested Socialists and **non-partisan** working-men; abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who labour.

By February 1921, thousands of Petrograd workers had crossed to the naval base on Kronstadt. There they linked up with the sailors and dockyard workers to demonstrate for greater freedom. They demanded that in a workers' state, which the Bolshevik government claimed Soviet Russia to be, the workers should be better, not worse, off than in tsarist times. In an attempt to pacify the strikers, Lenin sent a team of political commissars to Kronstadt. They were greeted with derision. Petrechenko, a spokesman for the demonstrators, rounded bitterly on the commissars at a public meeting:

You are comfortable; you are warm; you commissars live in the palaces ... Comrades, look around you and you will see that we have fallen into a terrible mire. We were pulled into this mire by a group of Communist bureaucrats, who, under the mask of Communism, have feathered their nests in our republic. I myself was a Communist, and I call on you, Comrades, drive out these false Communists who set worker against peasant and peasant against worker. Enough shooting of our brothers!

### The Kronstadt manifesto

Early in March, the sailors and workers of Kronstadt elected Petrechenko as Chairman of a 15-man Revolutionary Committee, responsible for representing their grievances to the government. This committee produced a manifesto that included the following demands:

**Key question**  
Why was the rising so disturbing for Lenin and the Bolsheviks?

1. New elections to the soviets, to be held by secret ballot.
2. Freedom of speech and of the press.
3. Freedom of assembly.
4. Rights for trade unions and release of imprisoned trade unionists.
5. Ending of the right of Communists to be the only permitted socialist political party.
6. The release of left-wing political prisoners.
7. Ending of special food rations for Communist Party members.
8. Freedom for individuals to bring food from the country into the towns without confiscation.
9. Withdrawal of political commissars from the factories.
10. Ending of the Communist Party's monopoly of the press.

It was not the demands themselves that frightened the Bolsheviks; it was the people who had drafted them – the workers and sailors of Kronstadt. They had been the great supporters of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Trotsky had referred to them as ‘the heroes of the Revolution’. It was these same heroes who were now insisting that the Bolshevik government return to the promises that had inspired the Revolution. For all the efforts of the Bolshevik press to brand the Kronstadt protesters as White agents, the truth was that they were genuine socialists who had previously been wholly loyal to Lenin’s government, but who had become appalled by the regime’s betrayal of the workers’ cause.

**Key question**  
Why did Lenin and Trotsky consider it necessary to crush the Kronstadt protest by force?

### The rising crushed

Angered by the growing number of strikers and their increasing demands, Trotsky ordered the Red Army under General Tukhachevsky to cross the late-winter ice linking Kronstadt to Petrograd and crush ‘the tools of former tsarist generals and agents of the interventionists’. An ultimatum was issued to the demonstrators. When this was rejected, Tukhachevsky gave the signal for his force, made up of Red Army units and *Cheka* detachments, to attack. After an artillery bombardment, 60,000 Red troops stormed the Kronstadt base. The sailors and workers resisted fiercely. Savage fighting occurred before they were finally overcome. Tukhachevsky reported back to Trotsky:

The sailors fought like wild beasts. I cannot understand where they found the might for such rage. Each house where they were located had to be taken by storm. An entire company fought for an hour to capture one house and when the house was captured it was found to contain two or three soldiers at a machine-gun. They seemed half-dead, but they snatched their revolvers and gasped, ‘We didn’t shoot enough at you bastards’.

### Aftermath of the rising

Immediately after the rising had been suppressed, the ringleaders who had survived were condemned as White reactionaries and shot. In the succeeding months the *Cheka* hunted down and



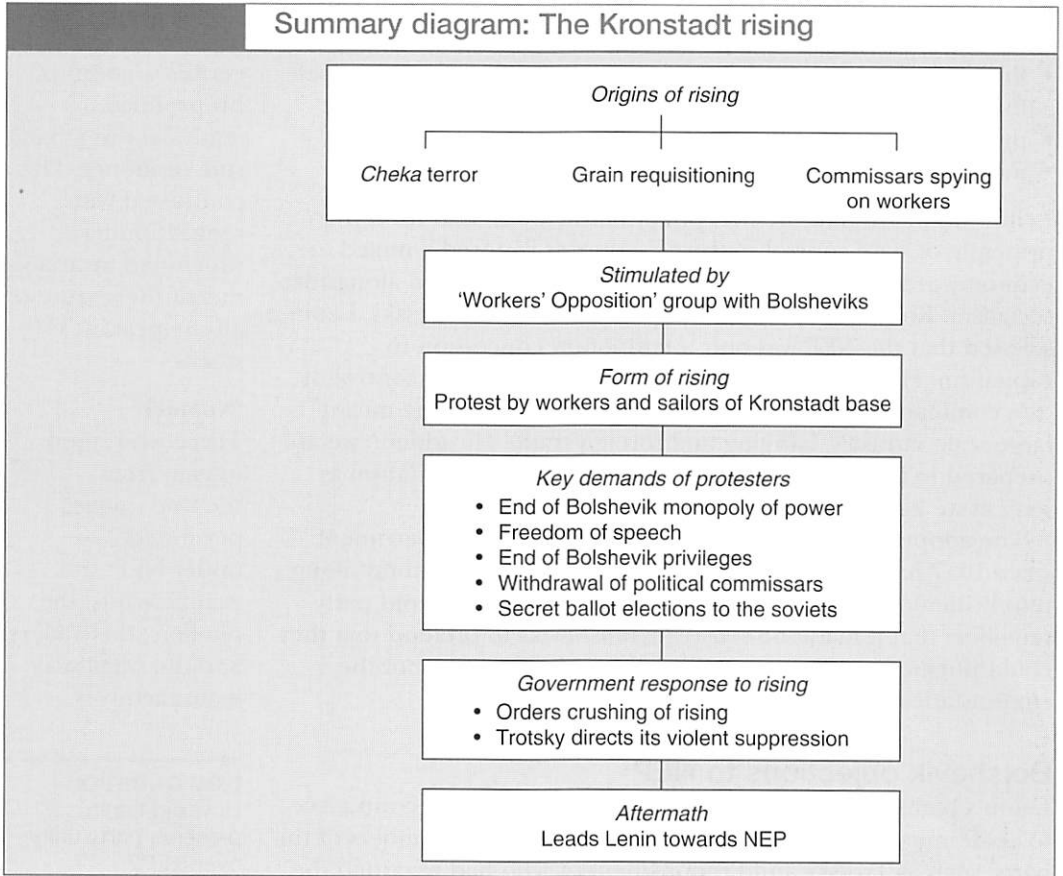
Alexandra Kollontai – the leading female in the ranks of the Bolsheviks and a consistent supporter of Lenin from the time of his return to Petrograd in April 1917 until the Kronstadt rising. Why did Alexandra Kollontai oppose Lenin over the Kronstadt affair?

executed those rebels who had escaped from Kronstadt. Lenin justified the severity on the grounds that the rising had been the work of the bourgeois enemies of the October Revolution: 'Both the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries declared the Kronstadt movement to be their own.'

However, as well as being a propagandist, Lenin was also a realist. He took the lesson of Kronstadt to heart. To avoid the scandal and embarrassment of another open challenge to his party and government, he decided it was time to soften the severity of war communism.

At the Tenth Conference of the Communist Party, which opened in March 1921, Lenin declared that the Kronstadt rising had 'lit

up reality like a lightning flash'. This was the prelude to his introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a move intended to tackle the famine and in doing so to lessen the opposition to Bolshevism. However, this was to be a purely economic adjustment. Lenin was not prepared to make political concessions: Communist control was to be made even tighter.



**Key question**  
 What were Lenin's motives in introducing the NEP?

## 9 | The New Economic Policy (NEP)

As with the policy it replaced, NEP was intended by Lenin primarily to meet Russia's urgent need for food. Whatever the purity of the revolutionary theory behind war communism, it had clearly failed to deliver the goods. State terror had not forced the peasants into producing larger grain stocks. Pragmatic as ever, Lenin judged, that, if the peasants could not be forced, they must be persuaded. The stick had not worked so now was the time to offer the carrot. He told the delegates at the 1921 Party Congress:

We must try to satisfy the demands of the peasants who are dissatisfied, discontented, and cannot be otherwise. In essence the small farmer can be satisfied with two things. First of all, there must be a certain amount of freedom for the small private proprietor; and, secondly, commodities and products must be provided.

**Key date**  
 The introduction of the NEP: March 1921

Despite the deep disagreements that were soon to emerge within the Bolshevik Party over NEP, the famine and the grim economic situation in Russia led the delegates to give unanimous support to Lenin’s proposals when they were first introduced. The decree making NEP official government policy was published in the spring of 1921. Its essential features were:

- central economic control to be relaxed
- the requisitioning of grain to be abandoned and replaced by a **tax in kind**
- the peasants to be allowed to keep their food surpluses and sell them for a profit
- public markets to be restored
- money to be reintroduced as a means of trading.

Lenin was aware that the new policy marked a retreat from the principle of state control of the economy. It restored a mixed economy in which certain features of capitalism existed alongside socialism. Knowing how uneasy this made many Bolsheviks, Lenin stressed that the NEP was only a temporary concession to capitalism. He emphasised that the party still retained control of ‘the commanding heights of the economy’, by which he meant large-scale industry, banking and foreign trade. He added: ‘we are prepared to let the peasants have their little bit of capitalism as long as we keep the power’.

The adoption of NEP showed that the Bolshevik government since 1917 had been unable to create a successful economy along purely ideological lines. Lenin admitted as much. He told party members that it made no sense for Bolsheviks to pretend that they could pursue an economic policy that took no account of the circumstances.

### Bolshevik objections to NEP

Lenin’s realism demanded that political theory take second place to economic necessity. It was this that troubled the members of the party, such as Trotsky and Preobrazhensky, who had regarded the repressive measures of war communism as the proper revolutionary strategy for the Bolsheviks to follow. To their mind, bashing the peasants was exactly what the Bolsheviks should be doing since it advanced the revolution. It disturbed them, therefore, that the peasants were being given in to and that capitalist ways were being tolerated. Trotsky described NEP as ‘the first sign of the degeneration of Bolshevism’.

A main complaint of the objectors was that the reintroduction of money and private trading was creating a new class of profiteers whom they derisively dubbed ‘**Nepmen**’. It was the profiteering that Victor Serge, a representative of the Left Bolsheviks, had in mind when he described the immediate social effects of NEP: ‘the cities we ruled over assumed a foreign aspect; we felt ourselves sinking into the mire. Money lubricated and befouled the entire machine just as under capitalism’.

Key terms

#### Tax in kind

The peasant surrendering a certain amount of his produce, equivalent to a fixed sum of money. This contrasted with requisitioning, which had invariably meant the seizure of all the peasant’s stocks.

#### ‘Nepmen’

Those who stood to gain from the free trading permitted under NEP: the rich peasants, the retailers, the traders and the small-scale manufacturers.

#### Key question

How did Lenin preserve party unity over NEP?

NEP became such a contentious issue among the Bolsheviks that Lenin took firm steps to prevent the party being torn apart over it. At the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, at which the NEP had been formally announced, he introduced a resolution 'On Party Unity'. The key passage read:

The Congress orders the immediate dissolution, without exception, of all groups that have been formed on the basis of some platform or other, and instructs all organisations to be very strict in ensuring that no manifestations of **factionalism** of any sort be tolerated. Failure to comply with this resolution of the Congress is to entail unconditional and immediate expulsion from the party.

Key term

**Factionalism**

The forming within the party of groups with a particular complaint or grievance. Lenin used the term to brand as disloyal those Bolsheviks who opposed central party policy.

The object of this proposal was to prevent 'factions' within the party from criticising government or Central Committee decisions. An accompanying resolution condemned the 'Workers' Opposition', the group that had opposed the brutalities of war communism and that had been involved in the Kronstadt Rising. The two resolutions on party loyalty provided a highly effective means of stifling criticism of the NEP.

At the same time as Lenin condemned factionalism, he also declared that all political parties other than the Bolsheviks were now outlawed in Soviet Russia. 'Marxism teaches that only the Communist Party is capable of training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and the whole mass of the working people'. This was the logical climax of the policy, begun in 1918, of suppressing all opposition to Bolshevik rule. Lenin's announcements at this critical juncture made it extremely difficult for doubting members to come out and openly challenge NEP, since this would appear tantamount to challenging the party itself.

**Bukharin's role**

What also helped preserve Bolshevik unity was the decision by Bukharin, the outstanding Bolshevik economist, to abandon his opposition to NEP and become its most enthusiastic supporter. His new approach was expressed in his appeal to the peasants: 'Enrich yourselves under the NEP'. Bukharin believed that the greater amount of money the peasants would have, as a result of selling their surplus grain, would stimulate industry since their extra income would be spent on buying manufactured goods. It is significant that during the final two years of Lenin's life, when he became increasingly exhausted by a series of crippling strokes, it was Bukharin who was his closest colleague. The last two articles published under Lenin's name, *On Co-operation* and *Better Fewer, But Better*, were justifications of the NEP. Both were the work of Bukharin.

### Economic results of NEP

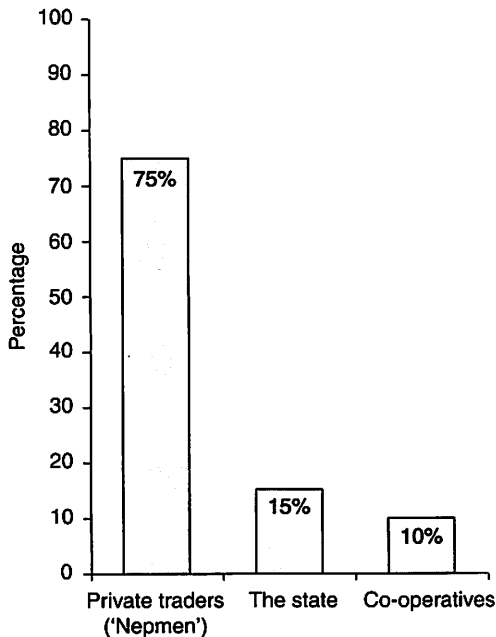
In the end, the most powerful reason for the party to accept the NEP proved to be a statistical one. The production figures suggested that the policy worked. By the time of Lenin’s death in 1924, the Soviet economy had begun to make a marked recovery. Table 5.3 indicates the scale of this.

**Key question**  
How far did NEP meet Russia’s needs?

**Table 5.3:** Growth under the NEP

	1921	1922	1923	1924
Grain harvest (million tons)	37.6	50.3	56.6	51.4
Value of factory output (in millions of roubles)	2004	2619	4005	4660
Electricity (million kilowatt hours)	520	775	1146	1562
Average monthly wage of urban worker (in roubles)	10.2	12.2	15.9	20.8

Lenin’s claim that under the NEP the Bolsheviks would still control ‘the commanding heights of the economy’ was shown to be substantially correct by the census of 1923. Figure 5.5 and Table 5.4 indicate that, in broad terms, the NEP had produced an economic balance: while agriculture and trade were largely in private hands, the state dominated Russian industry.



**Figure 5.5:** Share of trade

**Table 5.4:** Balance between main types of enterprise

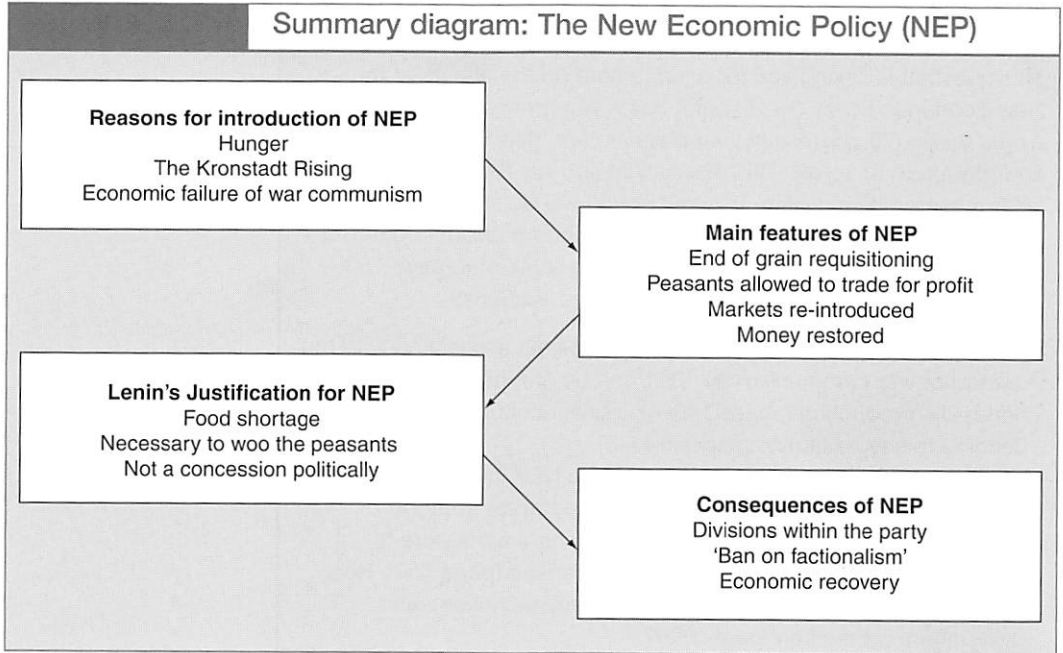
	<i>Proportion of industrial workforce</i>	<i>Average number of workers in each factory</i>
Private enterprises	12%	2
State enterprises	85%	155
<b>Co-operatives</b>	3%	15

**Co-operatives**  
Groups of workers or farmers working together on their own enterprise.

**Key term**



The NEP was not a total success. Its opponents criticised it on the grounds that the balance it appeared to have achieved was notional rather than real. The fact was that industry failed to expand as fast as agriculture. The ‘Nepmen’ may have done well, but there was high unemployment in the urban areas. NEP would continue to be a matter of dispute and division among the Bolsheviks long after Lenin’s death.



## Study Guide: AS Questions

### In the style of Edexcel

How successfully did the New Economic Policy deal with the problems it was designed to solve in the period 1921–4?

(30 marks)

#### **Exam tips**

*The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.*

This question is asking you for a judgement on the effects of the New Economic Policy (NEP), but it has a very precise focus. The key words for you to address in your planning are 'deal with problems' and 'designed to solve'. This means that you will first need to identify what those problems were. Essentially you will be showing that the NEP modified the economic policies of war communism in order to reduce the problems that had developed because of it (page 152). Your plan could usefully be divided into three sections:

- The economic problems in 1921: the problems associated with the period of war communism by 1921 can be grouped into: low industrial production (pages 143–4); low agricultural production leading to severe famine (pages 144–5).
- The aims and approaches of the NEP: the NEP involved a restoration of a mixed economy and some retreat from the principle of state control (page 152). Its central aims were to promote economic recovery and reduce famine (page 152). How did it inject wealth into the economy, stimulate industry and agricultural production (page 153)?
- The extent to which the NEP improved Russia's economy by 1924: in assessing the success of the NEP be careful not to be drawn into criticisms of it that are not related directly to the economic problems of 1921. How far did it promote economic recovery? There was a notable increase in production (page 154). In dealing with the statistics you have on page 154, it would be helpful to comment on them rather than simply reproduce them. For example, if grain output went up from 37.6 to 51.4 million tons, by what proportion or percentage did it increase?

Finally, you will need to come to an overall conclusion. In order to reach a judgement about the extent of success you will also need to acknowledge the limitations of the NEP (page 155). What is your decision? In terms of the economic aims Lenin had in 1921 was the NEP a success?