Lenin’s implementation of Leninism in Russia

Bolshevik Reforms

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin and his new communist government initiated many reforms. They took land from the Tsar, the church, nobles and other landlords, and redistributed it among the peasants in order to reform the agricultural sector and reward the peasants for their loyalty during the Revolution.

Labor conditions were improved with working hours limited to a maximum of eight hours a day, and forty hours a week. Children born to parents from the working class had not been allowed to attend schools. They began working at an early age, and before 1921, child exploitation and abuse in Russian factories and industrial areas was common. Under the new rule factories were placed under the control of elected committees of workers. Lenin embarked on providing free education, especially for adults. In the past, education had been reserved for the nobility and a few members of the middle class. He realized that adults had been denied being able to read and write, so Lenin introduced evening classes for workers. This education included a strong component on communism.

During this reform period the Bolshevik Party changed its name to the Communist Party, and established measures to restrict political opposition. All newspapers that were not state controlled were banned to minimize criticism of government policies. Leaders of the main opposition Liberal Party, a party that had launched most of the communist leaders, were banned. Lenin had also started his political career in the Liberal Party before his resignation as a result of the teachings of Karl Marx. The Constitutional Democrats were also banned, and its leadership arrested.

A commission to fight counter-revolution and espionage, called Cheka, was also established. Cheka was a secret police force that reported directly to Lenin on all illegal activities against communism. This body ensured that people who did not support communism were recommended for expulsion from Russia or imprisoned for life. Its workforce grew to 30,000 members in a bid to crush all opposition.

Moscow became the new capital city in a move based in the belief that it was more central than Petrograd. The Communist Party adopted the calendar, which was followed by many countries in Western Europe.

White Army

The name given to the counter-revolutionary army that fought against the Bolshevik Red Army in the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1921. The officer core of the army, the White Guard, was made up of monarchists. It was supported by representatives of many other political movements.

Civil war broke out immediately after Lenin took over government. The White Army and the Red Guards, which was renamed the Red Army under the commandship or leadership of Leon Trotsky, clashed.

By 1921, the Communist Party had secured its power and crushed resistance. However, the Russian economy was in tatters. Lenin survived the civil war because his party placed political representatives of the communist party in each army unit to avoid mutiny. This led to the introduction of ‘War Communism’, as a measure to achieve economic stability.

The civil war caused shortages of food, fuel, raw materials for manufacturing and labor. Workers also left the cities to grow their food on farms in the countryside, shrinking the labor force. Faced with an economic crisis, the communist government in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) introduced War Communism in an effort to take charge of the economy, and to establish a structured socialist economy.
Nationalization

The transfer of land and equipment from private ownership to government ownership. The Red Army and industrial workers were fed with food confiscated from capitalists. Major industries, businesses employing more than 10 people, and all banks and communication companies were nationalized to provide employment for the Red Army. All private trade was banned, strikes were declared illegal and workers were strictly controlled.

War communism did not help to solve the Russian economic crisis. Instead trade came to a halt. Industrial production fell by 40% and food shortages led to the migration of people away from the cities. The government was blamed for the worsening situation and opposition to its economic policies grew.

The New Economic Policy (NEP)

War communism was especially unpopular among peasant farmers and overwhelming opposition to Lenin's economic policy forced him to change it. Lenin wanted to regain the trust of the peasants and established the New Economic Policy. Farmers were now allowed to sell their additional products on the open market, but land still remained the property of the state. All the products were taxed and the state determined all prices.

Agricultural production increased, and to mirror this growth in industry workplace incentives and bonuses were introduced. Heavy industries were still under the government's control, but foreign trade and investment were encouraged. A state bank, which was established in 1921, lent money to emerging developers and merchants and, in the same year Lenin established the state planning commission, the Gosplan in order to direct the financial activities of the country.

The main task of the Gosplan was to devise a single economic plan for the USSR, and to develop the methods and order for implementing it. It also had to coordinate the production programmes and planning proposals for various economic institutions, devise state measures for developing the knowledge, and organizing research necessary for implementing a state economy. Another task was to deploy and train the necessary personnel to achieve its goals.

Russia prospered economically until it reached the same economic level as Britain, France, Japan and the United States of America (USA). Gosplan's initiatives also ensured that Russia could successfully compete in the Second World War and emerge as one of the strongest superpowers in the whole world, along with the USA. The introduction of this economic policy saved the Russian economy. Peasants were encouraged to increase food production for the reward of becoming Kulaks.

Kulaks

Richer peasants in the Soviet Union who employed other peasants. The New Economic Policy had many faults, despite its success in bringing economic relief in Russia. It aimed to address the social imbalances within the economic framework of Russia, but failed to do so.

A new class of business people called Nepmen owed their success to the NEP. They emerged due to the flaws within NEP, which was meant to be an economic policy derived from socialistic ideology. The Nepmen controlled the forms of production and owned farms, factories and industries. They proved that, even with strict economic policies and true socialism implemented as advocated by Karl Marx, Russia had a potential of being wealthy.

These capitalists enjoyed their moments of glory in Russia between 1921 and 1929. Joseph Stalin put an end to their dominance in Russia by taxing them heavily and expelling those who resisted paying taxes to Siberia.

Lenin's death in 1924 brought the NEP to an end. Stalin criticised it for creating many capitalist groups in Russia and reviving class divisions. The NEP remained official policy until 1928.