

Optimised Study Guide — NEP, Collectivisation & Industrialisation

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for the NEP, collectivisation and industrialisation that transformed the USSR to 1945 (Unit 3, Elective 2, Component C06-U3E2). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, especially the 2024 Q5 on collectivisation and modernisation and the 2023 Q5 on the Five-Year Plans transforming society. Covers the NEP, the Great Turn, collectivisation (kolkhozes, dekulakisation, Holodomor), the Five-Year Plans and rapid industrialisation, and their economic and social impacts. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

Between 1928 and 1941 Stalin dragged the USSR through one of history's most brutal economic transformations — from a peasant society into an industrial superpower, at a staggering human cost. This topic is examined heavily, and the questions reward students who can both define the policies precisely and weigh their effects.

Two marking-key steers that decide marks here. (1) The 2024 essay — *"Analyse the extent to which collectivisation was the key policy that led to the modernisation of the Soviet Union"* — requires you to **define collectivisation and modernisation** and to weigh collectivisation *against* the Five-Year Plans/industrialisation, showing the link between them. (2) The 2023 essay — *"Examine the impact of Stalin's Five-Year Plans in transforming Soviet society in the 1930s"* — explicitly wants the **societal** impact across **more than one group**, NOT the economics or the reasons behind the plans. Read the question's focus and obey it.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** Expect either an "extent / key policy" question on what drove modernisation, or an "impact on society" question. Each demands a different focus, so identify which you've been given.
- **Source analysis.** Propaganda posters and statistics on industrial triumph or collectivisation require you to apply scepticism toward official Soviet figures and to explain the gap between rhetoric and reality.

Answer the verb. Analyse the extent = judge how far a claim holds, weighing alternatives. **Examine** = inquire into / investigate the impact in detail. **Statistics warning:** the marking key explicitly tells candidates to treat official Soviet data with scepticism.

1. The NEP and why Stalin abandoned it

- **The New Economic Policy (1921–28)** was a mixed economy: state control of "commanding heights" (heavy industry, banking) but private trade and peasant markets restored. "Nepmen" traders and better-off peasants prospered.
- **Why abandon it?** Stalin and the Left saw NEP as ideologically impure and too slow; the 1927–28 "grain procurement crisis" (peasants withholding grain) gave the pretext for the "Great Turn" to forced collectivisation and planned industrialisation — also conveniently destroying the Right (Bukharin) who defended NEP.

2. Collectivisation — theory vs practice

- **In theory:** merging small private farms into large communal farms ([kolkhozes](#)) and state farms ([sovkhozes](#)) to achieve economies of scale, mechanisation (Machine Tractor Stations, MTS) and higher output.
- **In practice:** a compulsory, ruthlessly enforced confiscation of land and grain to feed the cities, export for hard currency, and fund industry.
- **Dekulakisation:** the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class" — better-off peasants deported, imprisoned or killed; the village way of life destroyed.
- **The famine / Holodomor (1932–33):** a state-created famine, devastating especially in Ukraine, killing millions and driving survivors into the cities.

3. Industrialisation and the Five-Year Plans

- **The "revolution from above."** Stalin: convert the USSR "from an agrarian and weak country... into an industrial and powerful country." The funds came from collectivised grain.
- **The First, Second and Third Five-Year Plans** drove heavy industry: steel, coal, machine and tractor manufacturing, chemicals, transport (canals, railways) and power (coal and hydro-electric).
- **Mobilising labour:** "shock workers" and the **Stakhanovite** movement (rewarding record output) created the cult of the ideal worker — while much construction relied on **gulag** forced labour.

4. The social impact (focus of the 2023 question)

Be ready to discuss *more than one group*:

- **Peasants:** the old village world destroyed; forced onto collectives; famine and dekulakisation.
- **Workers:** mass urban migration expanded the proletariat; some gained skills, higher literacy and advancement, but most faced low wages, poor housing, restricted movement and the

threat of punishment.

- **Women:** entered the workforce in large numbers — but generally on lower pay with fewer opportunities for advancement.
- **Youth:** the **Komsomol** grew in influence as a driver of change.
- **Overall:** Stalin built a new, mobile, compliant Soviet society organised around industrial production — but for most citizens the lived impact was negative.

5. Historical perspectives

- **"Economic disaster but political success":** some argue collectivisation failed agriculturally yet succeeded in establishing state control of the peasantry.
- **Worth the cost?** Did rapid industrialisation (which arguably enabled survival in WWII) justify the human catastrophe — or was the suffering avoidable and the achievement exaggerated by propaganda?
- **What drove modernisation?** Collectivisation as enabler vs the Five-Year Plans as the real engine — the precise axis of the 2024 essay.

6. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Analyse the extent to which collectivisation drove modernisation."** High answers: define both terms, argue the collectivisation–industrialisation link, and weigh whether the Five-Year Plans were the truer engine.
- **"Examine the impact of the Five-Year Plans on Soviet society."** High answers: stay on *society*, cover several groups, and balance gains against costs.
- **Source questions:** expose the gap between triumphalist propaganda/statistics and lived reality.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Define the NEP and give the reasons Stalin abandoned it?
- Distinguish collectivisation "in theory" from "in practice," and define kolkhoz, sovkhoz, MTS and dekulakisation?
- Explain the Holodomor and its scale and significance?
- State the goals of the Five-Year Plans and name the sectors prioritised?
- Explain shock workers, Stakhanovites and the role of gulag labour?
- Describe the social impact on peasants, workers, women and youth?
- Argue both "collectivisation drove modernisation" and "the Five-Year Plans were the real engine" — and apply scepticism to Soviet statistics?