PRESCRIBED SUBJECT 1 The Russian Revolutions and the New Soviet State 1917 to 1929

These documents relate to War Communism and Lenin’s New Economic Policy.

DOCUMENT A A decree issued 20 August 1918 giving instructions for requisitioning grain.

Every food requisition [seizure] detachment is to consist of not less than 75 men and two or three machine guns.

A commander is to head each detachment. He is to be appointed by the Chief Commissar responsible for the organisation of food armies. A political commissar is to be appointed by the Commissariat of Food.

The commander is to control purely military and economic activities. The political commissar’s duties are a) to organise local committees of the rural poor and b) to ensure that the detachment carries out its duties and is full of revolutionary enthusiasm and discipline.
So we can identify the following characteristics of War Communism:

1. An attempt to ban private manufacture, the nationalisation of nearly all industry, the allocation of nearly all material stocks, and of what little output there was, by the State, especially for war purposes.

2. A ban on private trade...


4. The partial elimination [abolition] of money ... Free rations, when there was anything to ration.

5. All these factors combined with terror ... A partly organised chaos. Sleepless leather-jacket commissars working round the clock in a vain effort to replace the free market.

By the beginning of 1920 the time had come to consider the basis on which reconstruction could be achieved...

Trotsky was the first prominent Bolshevik to accept publicly the need to abandon requisition, to substitute [replace it with] a tax in kind and to allow greater freedom for trade, or at least to barter. He said as much in February 1920.

In order to assure an efficient and untroubled economic life by a freer use by the farmer of the products of his labour and of his economic resources, in order to strengthen the peasant economy and raise its productivity ... requisitioning as a means of State collection of food supplies, raw material and fodder, is to be replaced by a tax in kind...

The holdings of the poorest peasants may be exempted [freed] from the tax.

All the reserves of food, raw material and fodder, which remain with the peasants after the tax has been paid are at their full disposition [their own] and may be used by them for improving and strengthening their holdings, for increasing personal consumption and for exchange.
The Civil War of 1918-20 greatly increased the devastation [destruction] of the country, retarded [prevented] the restoration of its productive forces and bled [hurt] the proletariat more than any other class. To this was added the failure of the 1920 harvest, the fodder shortage, the dying of cattle which still further hindered the restoration of transport and industry, because, among other things, it interfered with the employment of peasants’ horses for carting wood, our main fuel...

We were forced to resort to ‘War Communism by war and ruin ... it was a temporary measure ... we are still in a state of ruin [therefore] we are introducing the tax in kind; we will take the minimum of grain we require for the army and the workers in the form of a tax and will obtain the rest in exchange for manufactured goods. ... Our poverty and ruin are so great we cannot hope to restore large-scale factory state social production ... We must not be afraid of learning from bourgeois specialists, merchants and capitalists.

Questions

1. Explain briefly the following references:

   a. ‘...revolutionary enthusiasm and discipline.’ (Document A) [2 mark]

   b. ‘...in order to strengthen the peasant economy.’ (Document D) [3 mark]

2. Using only material contained in these documents compare and contrast War Communism and Lenin’s New Economic Policy. [6 marks]

3. With reference to their origin and purpose, discuss the value and limitations of Documents B and D as sources of historical information. [6 marks]

4. Using these documents and your own knowledge, explain why Lenin abandoned War Communism and replaced it with his New Economic Policy. [8 marks]