Control by Force

State power and repression in early Soviet Russia

TOT.C.3.2.D "brutal repression (e.g., expropriating private industry, banning private enterprise, requisitioning and rationing food, mass famine, suppression of strikes, expropriation of the Church, mass murder of priests)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two actions that took control of work or trade, circle two actions that controlled food, and write 1 and 2 beside two ways the state punished resistance.

War Communism and Its Costs

1 In 1918, Russia's new Bolshevik government faced civil war and wanted control of the economy. Under a policy later called War Communism, it took over large factories, mines, and railroads. Officials, not owners, decided how these businesses would operate. The government also banned most private trade, so selling goods outside state channels became illegal. Leaders argued that these steps would supply the Red Army and keep cities running. For workers and shopkeepers, however, control changed through orders backed by force, not through a choice at the workplace or in the market.

2 Food policy brought that power into villages and city kitchens. Armed detachments requisitioned grain from peasants, sometimes taking more than families believed they could spare. In cities, officials rationed scarce food through cards; a card did not guarantee that supplies would be available. Some peasants hid grain or planted less when they expected seizures, making shortages worse. In 1921 and 1922, a devastating famine struck parts of Russia. Drought and the destruction of civil war contributed, while requisitioning and disrupted farming deepened the crisis. Millions suffered, and many people died; the famine had several causes, not a single one.

3 The state also punished resistance. When workers struck over conditions or shortages, officials sometimes sent armed forces to break strikes and arrest organizers. The secret police, known as the Cheka, pursued people labeled enemies of the revolution. In 1922, authorities seized valuables from Orthodox churches, saying the proceeds would help famine victims. The seizures provoked protests; some clergy were arrested, and some priests were executed. These actions reached beyond factories and farms into organized religion. Taken together, the bans, seizures, arrests, and killings show how the government used coercion to enforce its policies and silence opposition.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did taking over businesses differ from banning most private trade? How did both limit private decisions?

2. How did grain requisitioning and food rationing each give officials power over food?

3. Why would it be inaccurate to blame the famine only on requisitioning? Name two other contributing conditions from the passage.

4. Compare the force used against striking workers with the force used against clergy during church seizures. What could each group face?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence letter from a factory worker in 1920 to a cousin. Describe at least two different state actions from the passage, explain one effect on daily life, and show why one action counts as repression. Do not mention events after 1920.

ANSWER KEY

Control by Force

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.3.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two actions that took control of work or trade, circle two actions that controlled food, and write 1 and 2 beside two ways the state punished resistance. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did taking over businesses differ from banning most private trade? How did both limit private decisions?	**The takeover put factories, mines, and railroads under official control. The trade ban made most selling outside state channels illegal. Both took decisions away from private owners or sellers.**
2	How did grain requisitioning and food rationing each give officials power over food?	**Armed detachments took grain from peasants, while officials controlled access to scarce city food through ration cards.**
3	Why would it be inaccurate to blame the famine only on requisitioning? Name two other contributing conditions from the passage.	**The passage also identifies drought and destruction from the civil war as causes.**
4	Compare the force used against striking workers with the force used against clergy during church seizures. What could each group face?	**Officials sometimes broke strikes with armed forces and arrested organizers. During church seizures, some clergy were arrested and some priests were executed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Cousin, the government now runs the factory where I work, and officials decide how it operates. Most private trade is banned, so my neighbor cannot legally sell cloth outside state channels. Our food comes through ration cards, but a card does not always mean food is available. When workers strike over shortages, officials may send armed forces to break the strike and arrest organizers. Arresting people for protesting their conditions is repression because it uses force to silence them.

Accept other accurate examples of economic control, food control, and punishment of resistance from the passage. In Part 3, check that the letter stays within 1920 and explains repression rather than merely naming a policy.