

Social Security benefits

Apart from guaranteed employment, one of the other main principles of a worker's state was the distribution of the fruits of labour of the country's working population. One of the methods that this wealth distribution took place was the handing out of various welfare payments. Despite being slow to start with as the new socialist government had limited funds, social security rapidly advanced under Stalin and Khrushchev to become one of the developed welfare states in the world at its time thus initially making it seem like ordinary people did progress under communism when studying the amount of welfare and state support that was available for them.

1. War Communism era

- Healthcare was made a priority as soon as Lenin came to power.
- The government funded a compulsory vaccination programme against cholera in 1921, despite most doctors fleeing due to the revolution in 1917
- Lenin himself declared in 1921 'Either Socialism will defeat lice, or lice will defeat socialism' which highlights how the recognition of a preventative healthcare system was indeed on the agenda of the vanguard party.
- However, the lack of foreign currency and funds meant that many social security benefits were slow to develop during the civil war.
- This was made worse by the fact that many areas of the RSFSR were either not under control or was too far away to receive orders from Moscow therefore coordination and communication problems were responsible for the lack of an extensive social security system.
- The 1918 Labour Code banned pregnant women from working overtime and nightshifts
- Lenin signed more than 30 decrees on new social security measures from 1918 to 1921

2. NEP period

- Aid from Western Countries especially the USA helped to alleviate some problems with healthcare. 4.8 million orphaned children were fed by the American Relief Association. This shows the desperation of the communist government as it struggled to look after all of its population.
- The exportation of wheat for hard foreign currency finally allowed the Soviet Union to develop a welfare system.
- Unemployment leave was given until its abolishment under Stalin
- To deal with the 7 million orphaned children (*bezprizorniki*), the Bolshevik government constructed countless of night shelters to deal with the rising juvenile crime rate. Foster care was also made a priority
- From 1922, any Russian woman could receive a free abortion from a state hospital

3. Stalinist Era

- The number of doctors increased from 70 000 in 1928 to 155 000 in 1940, along with the number of hospital beds increasing from 247 000 in 1928 to 751 000 in 1939
- Medicine was heavily subsidised by the state
- The constitution of 1936 guaranteed state funded sanatoria for workers. Also, it reinforced the right to a pension and medical provision by the employer which was equal for both men and women
- The state also paid couples to marry but taxed single adults
- Women received awards for having 5 children
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4. Khrushchev's era

- Between 1950 to 1980, social security spending increased fivefold
- In May 1955, the State Committee for Labour and Wages reformed pensions
- A minimum wage was introduced in 1956. While this may have seemed generous and a sign that social security was a priority. However, from an economics point of view its usefulness for

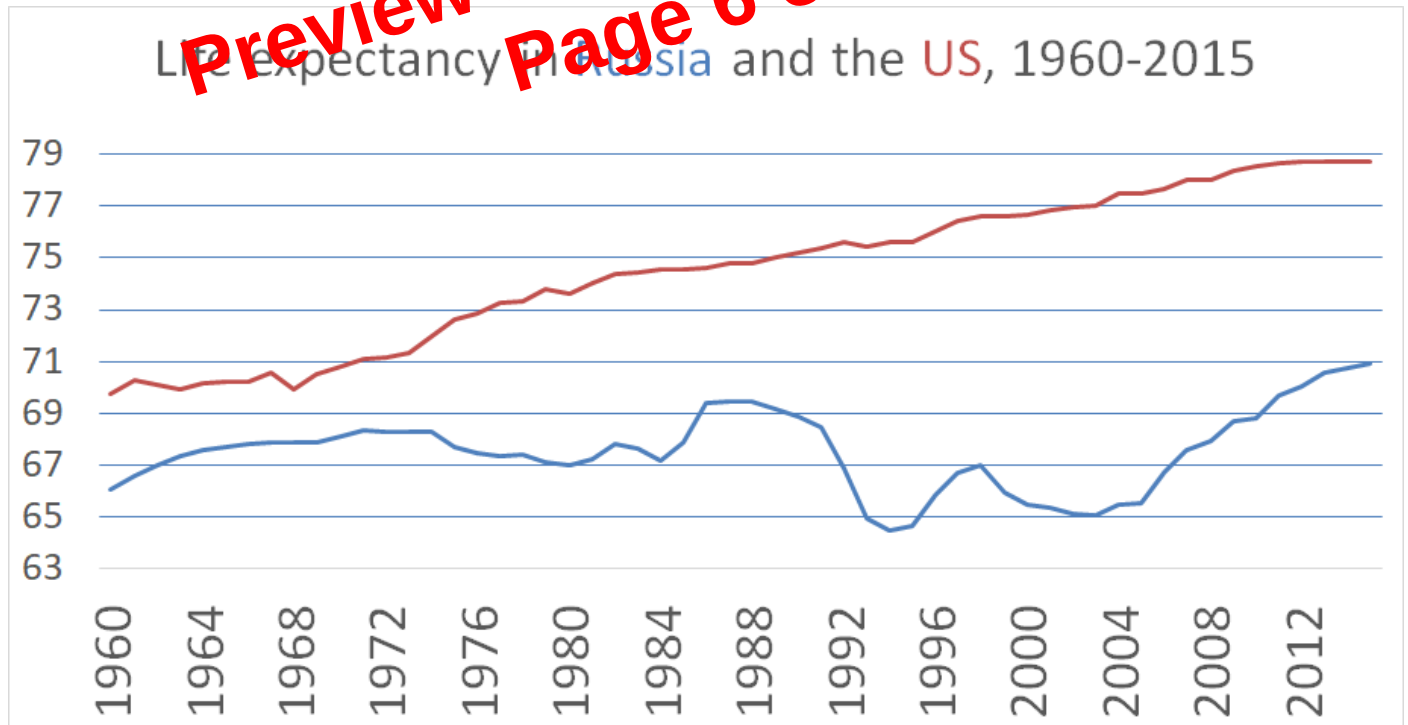
benefitting ordinary people is debated. A minimum wage further overvalued certain jobs which paid less thus leading to an inefficient distribution of labour. Also, a notable problem recorded as a result of the rise in the minimum wage was the increased demand of goods as people could afford more. This ultimately expanded upon the shortage economy and led to even more queuing as theoretically people could afford goods, but there were no goods to buy. Ultimately, this further increased the repressed inflation within the economy and the price controls gave no real value of a good.

- Pensions continued to rise at a rate faster than wages

5. Era of Stagnation

- The use of state provided sanatoria expanded with 2000 sanatoria in 1978
- However, sanatoria facilities worsened in rural areas
- Healthcare was modelled around the Semashko system which was centralised. Primary care was provided through polyclinics which could then send the patient for referral in surgery
- Between 1960 and 1980, the social security budget expanded from 71.65 billion roubles to 352.96 billion
- Most of the social security developments remained unchanged from 1964 to 1985. However, the quality of some services such as polyclinics worsened as the state budget took a hit from falling oil prices in the 1980s.

To conclude, ordinary people overall did benefit from communist rule in terms of social security benefits. The USSR was one of the first countries to fully develop a welfare state which was available to everyone. Throughout the 70 years there was a massive rise in the state budget dedicated to social security, including more spending on the provision of healthcare. On the other hand, the provision of a massive range of state support could have hampered ordinary people in the long run. The incentive to work reduced which resulted in a rise in absenteeism and essentially giving away money led to a massive increase in consumer demand which the inefficient planned economy could not supply which led to the shortage economy and the infamous bread lines. Therefore, ordinary people did on the surface benefit from social security in the short term, but the resulting stagnation in the economy most likely contributed to a decrease in living standards which could have been reflected in the overall life expectancy in the USSR as seen below.



Adult Literacy programmes

In order to radicalise the working class and make them complacent to socialism, they had to be taught the principles of Marxist theory. Therefore, along with the benefits of having a highly-educated society, the Bolshevik government prioritised the eradication of illiteracy. Once this was achieved in the 1950s, it was effectively consolidated through the rigorous Soviet education system where the benefits can be seen today as the current Russian literacy rate is on par, and even overtakes, some western countries.

1. War Communism

- Since the Bolsheviks realised that they were controlling a population who mostly haven't been educated, they realised to sow the seeds of socialism in the proletariat, they had to educate the masses in political theory. Lenin realised that knowledge breaks the chains of slavery
- Therefore, even before the October revolution, the Bolsheviks through the Petrograd Soviet organised evening classes for factory workers teaching them Marxist literature along with reading and basic numeracy skills which continued on after October
- Lenin himself stated that without literacy there can be no politics, only rumours gossip and prejudice
- The Libkez campaign was started on December 26th 1919 which aimed to completely eradicate illiteracy
- Narkompros set up the Cheka Libkez which hired teachers and released propaganda to promote literacy
- The Bolsheviks also built reading rooms across the country, which served as public libraries but with an emphasis on propaganda



Figure 16: This poster states that if you don't read books, you will forget the grammar. This symbolises the extensive propaganda campaign against illiteracy

2. NEP Period

- The Libkez campaign failed to eradicate illiteracy by 1923, which was the original goal
- Narkompros was struggling to receive funding from the Politburo thus was limited in its expansion to the countryside
- Narkompros funding dropped to 2.8% of the state budget in 1924 to 1.6% in 1928
- Many teachers were also unwilling to live in the countryside
- The state funded the writing of short stories and pamphlets which usually talked about the plights of domestic women
- However, despite the extensive efforts, the literacy rate was only 51% in 1926

3. Stalinist era

- As the state prioritised rapid industrialisation, funding for adult literacy programmes was reduced
- Propaganda was mostly focused on the achievement of the Five year plans
- However, the literacy rate has risen to 90% for men and 72% for women in 1939
- A theory states that the peasants were quite competent in self education when they had a need to. Therefore, without state support they taught themselves how to read and write thus questioning whether government intervention was really needed.

4. Khrushchev era

- By the 1950s, literacy rates were approaching 100%
- Khrushchev, himself being taught in a Rabfak, recognised the importance of adult education
- He set up additional courses for adults in full time employment, which was undertaken by 2 million people by 1964

5. Era of Stagnation

- Adult courses continued, but their priority was mostly in the education of technical skills, rather than literacy education