

# Dictatorship and Democracy, 1920-1945

## Sample answer

### **What did Lenin and Stalin contribute to communism in Russia? (2008)**

Lenin came to power as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. He had got the support of the public by promising to get them out of WW1 with the slogan “peace, bread, land” (April Theses). The treaty he signed was not hugely beneficial to Russia yet he managed to hold on to power and create the first communist state. To understand what they contributed to communism we must look at the definition of communism. It is a system of government in which private property would be abolished and the government would run the land and factories for the benefit of all. This would be done by a one-party dictatorship. I aim to show that the three aspects they contributed to communism were the creation of a totalitarian dictatorship established through absolute fear, the creation of a cult of personality established through propaganda and state control of the economy.

Lenin established a communist gov by creating a secret police force known as the Cheka December 1917. Their role was to remove anyone who posed a threat to Bolshevik control. Led by Felix Dzerzhinsky, they arrested and executed thousands. The Cheka also launched a campaign of mass execution known as the Red Terror. They punished anyone accused to be cooperating with the White Army during the Civil War. The Red Terror began after a failed assassination attempt on Lenin in August 1918 by Fanya Kaplan. It is estimated that over 50,000 people died at the hands of the Cheka during the Red Terror. Another example of how absolute loyalty through fear was achieved was when the opposing political party, the Social Revolutionaries, won the free elections in Nov 1917 and the Red Guards simply dissolved the assembly. Furthermore, in July 1918 Tsar Nicholas II was shot alongside his family, an example of Lenin's ruthless determination that a monarchy would never be allowed to rule again.

An example of how Lenin accomplished state control of the economy was the introduction of War Communism during the Civil War. This meant that all industrial and agricultural output was to be geared towards the war effort. Surplus crops were taken by the government to feed the workers and soldiers. Food was rationed in the cities and given to people depending on their contribution to the economy. Factories with more than 10 workers were taken over by the state, strikes were banned. Industrial production declined and 5-7 million people died of hunger. In March 1921 sailors rebelled against war communism, an event that is known as the Kronstadt Revolt. The Cheka quashed the rebellion within 12 days.

Referring to the Kronstadt rebellion, Lenin stated that it had “lit up reality like a lightning flash” so he introduced the “New Economic Policy” so that the people would accept the transition to communism. Under the policy large industries and banks would remain under state control, peasant farmers would no longer face seizure of crops by the state, they instead were required to pay taxes and give a percentage of their crops to the state and the leftover crops would then be sold on for a profit. Small private industries with fewer than 20 workers were permitted. These smaller private companies in 1922 accounted for 90% of business in Russia. Lenin's “new economic policy” was a clear example of how he achieved state control of the economy.

Stalin was a much more ruthless dictator than Lenin. Stalin won the power struggle after Lenin's death. He dispatched his main rival Trotsky into exile. He also made sure that Lenin's testament was never published. Stalin's party controlled the press, radio, industry and the Red army. He used his secret police NKVD to put down opposition, control his 5-year plans and his labour camps (gulags). One of the best examples of how achieved absolute loyalty through fear was in his notorious Show Trials. The show trials were used to eliminate any person seen to be a threat to the government. Stalin was a paranoid person and saw threats to his power all around him. In December 1934 leading figure in the Politburo was shot and he used this incident to begin his purges. The first show trial began in August 1936 targeting Kamenev and Zinoviev and 14 others. They were being accused of plotting the murder of Kirov and Stalin. The second show trial took place in January 1937. Among those being accused were Radek and Putakov for being Anti-Trotskyist conspirators. The last show trial began in March 1938,

Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda (former head of the NKVD) were accused of plotting the murder of Lenin and Stalin as well as co-operating with enemies of the Soviet Union, Britain and Germany. All accused during the Show trials were executed on flimsy evidence. These horrific purges guaranteed Stalin's position and advanced his totalitarian state.

Stalin's economic revolution was mainly achieved by his 5-year plans. He aimed to make Russia self-sufficient, modernise the Soviet Union and ultimately make it a World power. In 1931 he said that the Western powers were "50 to 100 years" ahead of the USSR and warned that if they did not close this gap in 10 years the West would "crush" them. His first policy began in 1928-1933 and focused on heavy industry such as coal, iron, machinery, and railways. In 1933-1938 he focused on consumer goods which were taken over by military weapons. A huge canal was dug connecting the White sea with the Volga. The Moscow underground was built. The industrial workforce rose from 11 million to 22 million By 1939 the USSR was the 2nd largest economy in the world. His agriculture policy of enforced collectivisation was not as successful. He managed to wipe the kulaks out as a class and while over 97% of farms were collectivised they were still inefficient and did not produce enough grain to support the economy.

Stalin made effective use of propaganda to create a cult of personality for himself. To achieve this, statues of him were placed in every town and village, posters and photographs of him were hung up extensively. Streets and cities were renamed after him ( the city of Volgograd was renamed Stalingrad). Music, poetry, and art were used to glorify him. Stalin became present in everyday life that people were easily indoctrinated. Teachers were forced to teach children to worship Stalin as the "fount of all wisdom". History books were rewritten to exaggerate his role in the 1917 October Revolution while any enemies to the state such as Leon Trotsky were removed from history. The media was cleverly manipulated to promote Stalin as a great leader. The use of propaganda was successful in creating a cult of personality for the ruthless Stalin.

In conclusion, both leaders contributed similar attributes to communism. They did not introduce and maintain communism in Russia in a peacefully or natural but rather used large scale force to implement their policies. Their communist approach to economics was not successful. Concerning Stalin's industrial program, he only achieved a somewhat successful outcome by using slave labour and setting ridiculously high targets. In any way, Lenin and Stalin demonstrated the fundamental problems with communism. They changed the perception of an ideology which aspired to achieve complete human harmony into an ideology which is now associated with oppression, totalitarian and misery.