

# Dictatorship and Democracy, 1920-1945 |

## Sample answer

### **How effective were the internal and external policies of Joseph Stalin? (2010)**

After an initial power struggle between himself, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, Stalin eliminated these opponents through clever manipulation and established himself as leader of Russia by 1927. His main aims were to make Russia self-sufficient, to de-westernise it and to make himself dictator. His domestic policies included an ambitious set of 5-year plans to industrialise Russia, a scheme of collectivisation designed to make farms more efficient and to get rid of any private ownership businesses. His last policy was to purge society of any enemies of the communist state.

Stalin's economic revolution was mainly achieved by his ambitious 5-year plans. His aim was 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 really 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.

The strategy adopted to achieve the aims of agriculture was widespread collectivisation. His aim was to join all small unproductive peasant farms together to form large state-owned farms. Each

“Kolkhoz” was to be run by a committee that would be monitored by the local communist party. The committees had to meet specified production targets and sell their produce at a fixed price to the state. Economically, this policy was designed to increase production but in reality, small farmers destroyed their produce and their livestock when asked to hand them over to the state, and as a result, production crashed. By 1929 less than 10% of farmers had volunteered to join the collectives. Stalin responded by using force to get the peasants to cooperate. The red army was sent to forcibly confiscate the land. Any resistance was dealt with arrests and executions. By 1930 58% of peasants farmers had joined collective farms. But the collective farms were inefficient, between 1932-1933 a famine broke out causing the deaths of 10 million people.

One of the best examples of how he 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, Serge Kirov 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 and as a result, the Soviet Union were ill-prepared for WW2.

In his external policies, Stalin played a similar game to Hitler changing action and making alliances to suit his own ends. When Hitler came to power in 1933 it caused a turning point in Stalin’s foreign policy. Up to this Stalin had pursued a policy of isolation. He knew that he was a master of the only communist state with no allies. Hitler's “lebensraum” policy of living space for Germans in Eastern Europe made Stalin uneasy. While he had earlier condemned the League of Nations as a “capitalist club”, he decided to join in 1934 to persuade Britain and France to stand up to Hitler and Mussolini (collective security). He signed non-aggression pacts with Poland,

Lithuania, Estonia and made a pact with France 1935. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 he sent aid to the republicans who opposed the Dictator General Franco. His main aim was to keep Germany distracted and far away from Russian borders. He didn't want communist to win either as he feared European powers would unite against him, therefore he played a delicate balancing act.

The events of 1938 regarding the Sudetenland and the appeasement of Hitler at the Munich Conference, September 1938, made Stalin suspicious of Britain and France's motives. He was also disillusioned by Britain's policy of appeasement so he abandoned the idea of collective security. He realised he would need to ally with his enemy Hitler in order to buy time. The result was the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Act August 1939. It gave Stalin time to prepare for the inevitable attack on Russia. This demonstrates Stalin's realism and quick thinking and both dictators playing a game where one was trying to outwit the other in a tactical battle.

War broke out in September 1939. Stalin moved cautiously into Eastern Poland, signing security treaties with Latvia and Estonia, insisting they accepted Soviet occupation. Operation Barbarossa began in June 1941 which Stalin was shocked at. The Red Army began a slow retreat but the Battle of Stalingrad proved a turning point. Stalin used the call of nationalism to motivate the Russian people to resist. He also relocated factories beyond the Ural mountains, out of range of German planes. Stalin's external policies paid dividends in the post-war conferences. Roosevelt had died and Churchill had been replaced so as the single surviving war leader Stalin dominated Soviet control of Eastern Europe. By 1948 Soviet satellite states were in power in East Europe.

In conclusion, I hope I have proved the efficiency of Stalin's policies. Domestically, Stalin proved that state control of industry and agriculture was possible. By 1939 USSR was the 2nd largest economy in the world. Production output had increased by 250%. He had replaced 25 million

family farms with 300,00 collectives. However, it came at a huge cost to ordinary Russians. In his external policies, Stalin kept peace with Hitler and adopted his policy to suit the situation. He realised isolation wasn't working so he switched to collective security. He also realised the overall aims and potential of Hitler long before Daladier and Chamberlain had.