

OCR – AS GCE European and World History Period Studies F 962	Unit 1 Russia: From Autocracy to Communism, 1894–1941	ESSAY
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Examiner’s Specific Advice

The best answers will focus on the question set, have arguments arranged into structured paragraphs, and use knowledge to support explanations. Above all, they will offer comparative assessments of different factors, from Stalin’s own personality and attributes to the national and international circumstances in which he found himself. They will discuss in some detail the relative importance of factors such as the shape of the Communist Party and the other players within it, or the economic conditions prevailing in the USSR at the time – poor harvests and resultant famine. Less effective essays are likely to supply more general comments without relevant supporting details. They will probably consider one or two issues rather than several, and will fail to use their historical knowledge effectively. They may also drift away from the period in question.

Exemplar Question

How is Stalin’s consolidation of power best explained?
 [50 marks]

[Click Here for a
 Chronology
 Relating to this
 Topic](#)

Examiner’s Exemplar Plan and Essay 1

Plan

- Introduction
- Legacy of Lenin
- Policies pursued
- Collectivisation
- Five Year Plans
- Importance of Purges
- Conclusions

Lenin’s death in 1924 provided Stalin with the opportunity to consolidate the hold he already had on the Bolshevik Party and turn that into domination of the USSR. This essay will examine why it was Stalin and no other leading member of the Bolshevik Party who emerged triumphant.

Lenin’s death in 1924 left a power vacuum in the new USSR which potentially any member of the Politburo could have filled. Bukharin, Kamenev, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Rykov (1) and

(1) Each of these men had a specific role within the Communist Party. It would be useful to outline their strengths.

(2) Explain that this

Stalin were the main contenders. A 'literary war' (2) broke out which explored economic policy, how the Party should govern and Russia's relations with the rest of the world. 'Permanent revolution' or 'socialism within one country' saw Stalin and Trotsky at odds with each other (3).

Three main stages can be discerned; initially defeat of Trotsky, who had a good power base only within the Red Army. However, he was removed as Commissar for War in January 1925 (4). Secondly, there was defeat for the left. This was seen in the attack on Zinoviev and Kamenev, starting in December 1925. Stalin increased the size of the Politburo by adding his closest political allies so that Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined together in the 'limited opposition'. In 1926 Zinoviev and Kamenev were removed from the Politburo, with Trotsky being ejected from the Party in 1927 and then exiled in Russia and then finally expelled in 1929 from the USSR (5). Thirdly, Stalin moved to defeat the right wing of Bukharin, Trotsky and Rykov. They had argued that NEP should be continued (6). In 1929 Bukharin was removed as president of the Comintern and editor of Pravda (7). This was followed in 1930 by Tomsky and Rykov's removal from the Politburo. This resulted in Stalin being the dominant figure in the USSR by the end of 1930.

Characteristically, Stalin continued to move rapidly to consolidate his position further. Collectivisation was one important vehicle for this. This had been begun in 1928 and saw a class struggle develop rapidly against the kulaks (8). Collective farms made up 60% of the total by 1930, with over one million kulaks transported and stripped of their land. Ironically, Stalin acknowledged the significant opposition to this policy in 1930 with his 'Dizzy with success' article (9). By August of that year, the figures of collective farms had fallen to only 20% as the Party was forced to row back on its earlier policy. However, this proved only a temporary setback for Stalin. By 1937, 95% of Russian farms were collectivised. A heavy price was exacted for these changes; millions of kulaks were transported to Siberia and many perished in the harsh conditions there. Famines were very serious in 1932–34 as harvests were very poor and hundreds of thousands starved (10).

The Five Year Plans were also an integral part of what became Stalin's consolidation of power. Gosplan introduced the first in 1928. This copied the West and developed industrialisation to protect against the threat of invasion. Ambitious targets were set for coal, iron and electricity production. Significant progress was achieved: the Dneiper dam and the construction of Magnitogorsk as a centre for iron and steel production were good examples, as was the shift of industry beyond the Urals. The success of Russia in the Great Patriotic War was significantly due to the impact of these reforms by the 1940s (11).

Lastly, it is necessary to consider Stalin's use of terror to consolidate his position. A number of reasons can be discussed

was a series of articles and pamphlets, designed to win over the rest of the Party to their different views.

(3) This was the heart of the dispute between the two men and could have been usefully discussed.

(4) Trotsky was Stalin's main rival so you need to stress that he failed to build upon his existing support in the Red Army.

(5) Good use of factual knowledge

(6) Explain what the NEP was. Did Stalin disagree with them?

(7) You are asserting facts rather than explaining their importance.

(8) To clarify this point you need to explain that the kulaks were peasants made wealthy by the NEP.

(9) Stalin became so worried about the amount of opposition from farmers that he was prepared to put the programme into temporary reverse. Collectivisation resumed again later the same year.

(10) Much of this

for this use of terror. Firstly, that Stalin personally plotted throughout to establish a personal dictatorship in the USSR (12). He cowed the Russian people and Communist Party into submission. It has also been suggested that Lenin had already laid the foundations of such excesses during the initial Bolshevik takeover and consolidation.

All these factors thus help to explain how Stalin was able to consolidate his power in the Soviet Union. There is no single reason for this, rather a combination of events and actions (13).

Examiner's Assessment

This essay has a mixture of good and weak features. It stays broadly relevant to the title, is well organised and provides several good points backed up with accurate details. It is worth 15 marks at Level III (AO1a).

Although largely devoid of narrative, some sections are too assertive and miss the opportunity to fully develop the argument; for example, the links between collectivisation and the Five Year Plans and how these contributed to Stalin's consolidation of power. Some perspectives from the later period of study would have been useful in the conclusions. This element of the answer would thus merit a Level III mark of 17 out of 26 (AO1b).

Overall the essay scores 32 marks and would probably get a Grade C.

Examiner's Exemplar Plan and Essay 2

Plan

Introduction

Main reasons:

- Stalin's party support of Trotsky
- His policies – collectivisation, Five Year Plans
- The Purges
- Conclusion

When Lenin died in 1924, it was by no means certain that Stalin would succeed him. Indeed, Lenin's last testament expressly condemned Stalin. Not surprisingly, this was swiftly suppressed by Stalin. It was indeed Stalin who had the best opportunity to consolidate the hold he already had on the Bolshevik Party and turn that into domination of the USSR. This essay will examine why it was Stalin and no other leading member of the Bolshevik Party who emerged triumphant, and how he was able to consolidate his position (14).

paragraph, exemplified by this sentence, is descriptive. It needs linking more closely to 'Stalin's consolidation of power'.

(11) This provides good perspectives.

(12) More useful on this point, to show how terror was effectively used to consolidate Stalin's power.

(13) Sound if limited conclusion.

(14) A good start. It is relevant, clear and to the point, with the title referred to directly.

Lenin's death certainly left a power vacuum in the new USSR. Potentially any member of the Politburo – Bukharin, Kamenev, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Rykov and Stalin – could have filled this gap. Most attempted to demonstrate why they should succeed Lenin although Stalin skilfully declared that he was not interested, which ironically won him much support. Arguments raged about economic policy, how the Party should govern and Russia's relations with the rest of the world. Trotsky and Stalin in particular differed over whether there should be a 'permanent revolution' or 'socialism within one country'. What proved crucial for Stalin, however, were his close links with the rank and file organisation of the Party (he was secretary general) and his reputation for being a hard working and dependable, if dull, politician (15).

Between 1924 and 1929 Stalin emerged as the leader of the USSR. Trotsky, his main rival, made several blunders – not least in failing to attend Lenin's funeral – but he was also seen as being too arrogant, a criticism Lenin had once made of him. More serious, perhaps, was Trotsky's small power base: he controlled the Red Army but had little support among the Party's rank and file or the nationalities, most of whom had heard of Stalin and voted for his nominees in the soviet elections. Thus the left wing of the Politburo came under attack from pro-Stalinist supporters from December 1925. When Stalin increased the size of the Politburo by adding his closest political allies, in 1926 Zinoviev and Kamenev were removed, followed by Trotsky who was ejected from the Party in 1927 and expelled from the USSR in 1929.

The leader of the right wing, Bukharin, was removed from the Politburo in 1929 and even lost his posts as president of the Comintern and editor of Pravda. Both were prestigious offices – one internationally and the other as the main Communist newspaper. When Tomsky and Rykov were voted off the Politburo in 1930, Stalin emerged as the sole surviving figure from Lenin's government. His position was achieved by a combination of good circumstances, clever plotting and ruthless determination (16). Once power had been achieved, Stalin continued to attempt to consolidate his place at the top of the Communist Party.

To consolidate his position further, Stalin put into operation two crucial policies: collectivisation and the Five Year Plans. From 1928 he ended Lenin's NEP policy that had seen the development of kulaks, the better-off peasants who sold their surplus crops and livestock at a profit. Over one million kulaks were sent to Siberia and their land seized by the state. By 1930 collective farms made up 60% of the total and by 1937, 95% of Russian farms were collectivised. Stalin was willing to let Russia pay a heavy price for these changes, which made him an ideologically popular and unchallenged leader (17): serious famines in 1932–34 resulted in millions starving, livestock and grain were destroyed and agriculture never fulfilled its potential. Yet most peasants remained grateful to Stalin for giving them a better standard of living.

(15) A fair point. You could also add that, in contrast, Russians who voted for Trotsky were taking a risk.

(16) A good succinct appraisal.

(17) The link between collectivisation and Stalin's consolidation of power is clearly made here.

The Five Year Plans were also an integral part of Stalin's consolidation of power. Gosplan introduced the first in 1928. Ambitious targets were set for coal, iron and electricity production and progress was achieved through propaganda, fear, education, forced labour and socialist competition. Stalin had declared that Russia was at least 100 years behind the industrialised world and, in setting out to modernise Russia, he was symbolically breaking with the past. In truth Stalin was following in the footsteps of Lenin and de Witte before him (18). After the initial plans were completed, it became more difficult to reach the demanding targets but this mattered little when criticism was judged to be treasonous and progress was equated with Stalin's leadership.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Stalin used terror to create a climate of fear and to consolidate his position. Once he had removed his former colleagues from the Politburo, he used the secret police – the NKVD – to root out critics and suspected opponents. The murder of Kirov (19) in 1934, possibly ordered by Stalin himself, signalled the start of mass arrests and state trials known as the Purges. Between 1935 and 1939, writers, scientists, judges, civil servants, officers and troops, indeed anyone whom Stalin feared or disliked, were sent to labour camps or executed. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Bukharin and Yagoda were all pronounced 'enemies of the state' and shot. By 1939 when Stalin ended the Purges, he was politically supreme.

Thus, a range of factors help to explain how Stalin was able to consolidate his power in the Soviet Union. The most significant reason was Stalin's ability to exploit his initial strong position within the Party's structure from 1917 onwards. Unlike his rivals, he was persistent in continuing to pursue his ambitions and was able to build on his achievements throughout the 1920s. After 1930, he was able to consolidate his position by the extensive use of terror. However, to the majority of Russians, his reforms in agriculture and industry brought significant benefits of modernisation, changes that made possible Russia's survival in the Great Patriotic War by 1945 (20).

Examiner's Assessment

This is a well constructed, focused and, for the most part, clearly argued case. The language and style are easy to read and suggest that you are in control of your material. The use of factual knowledge is also very sound: dates and events are accurately cited and, most importantly, used relevantly to illustrate the answer. These features would merit a Level IA mark of 21 out of 24 (AO1a).

The essay is consistently analytical with developed and substantiated explanations. There is also a very good evaluation of the relative importance of different factors, all of which merit a mark of 22 out of 26 at Level IB (AO1b). Overall, this essay would receive a high Grade A mark of 43.

(18) You might explain why Stalin was keen to play down any links with recent industrial developments.

(19) While you could say more about this intriguing event, you are wise to confine your comments to how Stalin used it to consolidate his position.

(20) Clear conclusions provided; summing up directly around the question

[Click here for a Mark Scheme that accompanies the exemplar answers provided above](#)

[Click here for further sample Questions to test your skills](#)

Mark Scheme

Examiners use Mark Schemes to determine how best to categorise a candidate's essay and to ensure that the performances of thousands of candidates are marked to a high degree of consistency. Few essays fall neatly into the mark levels indicated below: some answers will be particularly well argued but offer little supporting detail; others may be factually full but poorly organised or contain few judgements. Examiners therefore try to find the 'best fit' when applying the scheme. Each essay has a final mark based on two Assessment Objectives (AO1a and AO1b) worth $24 + 26 = 50$ marks. As the standard of the two essays lies between Level 1 and Level IV, only the descriptors and marks for these levels are tabulated below.

	AO1a Mark Scheme for Levels I, II, III and IV
Assessment Objectives	Recall, select and use historical knowledge appropriately, and communicate knowledge and understanding clearly and effectively
Level IA 21–24 marks	Uses a wide range of accurate, detailed and relevant evidence. Accurate and confident use of appropriate historical terminology. Answer is clearly structured and coherent; communicates accurately and legibly.
Level IB 18–20 marks	Uses accurate, detailed and relevant evidence. Accurate use of a range of appropriate historical terminology. Answer is clearly structured and mostly coherent; writes accurately and legibly.
Level II 16–17 marks	Uses mostly accurate, detailed and relevant evidence, which demonstrates a competent command of the topic. Generally accurate use of historical terminology. Answer is structured and mostly coherent; writing is legible and communication is generally clear.
Level III 14–15 marks	Uses accurate and relevant evidence, which demonstrates some command of the topic but there may be some inaccuracy. Answer includes relevant historical terminology but this may not be extensive or always accurately used. Most of the answer is organised and structured; the answer is mostly legible and clearly communicated.
Level IV 12–13 marks	There is deployment of relevant knowledge but level/accuracy of detail will vary; there may be some evidence that is tangential or irrelevant. Some unclear and/or under-developed and/or disorganised sections; mostly satisfactory level of communication.

AO1b Mark Scheme for Levels I, II, III and IV	
Assessment Objectives	Demonstrate an understanding of the past through explanation and analysis, arriving at substantiated judgements of key concepts and of the relationships between key features of the period studied
Level IA 24–26 marks	<p>Clear and accurate understanding of key concepts relevant to analysis and to the topic.</p> <p>Clear and accurate understanding of issues in their historical context. Answer is consistently and relevantly analytical with developed and substantiated explanations, some of which may be unexpected. The argument evaluates a range of relevant factors and reaches clearly substantiated judgements about relative importance and/or links.</p>
Level IB 22–23 marks	<p>Clear and accurate understanding of most key concepts relevant to analysis and to the topic.</p> <p>Answer is mostly consistently and relevantly analytical with mostly developed and substantiated explanations. Clear understanding of the significance of issues in their historical context. Substantiated judgements about relative importance of and/or links between factors will be made but quality of explanation in support may not be consistently high.</p>
Level II 19–21 marks	<p>Mostly clear and accurate understanding of many key concepts relevant to analysis and to the topic.</p> <p>Clear understanding of the significance of most relevant issues in their historical context. Much of the answer is relevantly analytical and substantiated with detailed evidence but there may be some description. The analysis of factors and/or issues provides some judgements about relative importance and/or linkages.</p>
Level III 16–18 marks	<p>Some uneven understanding of key concepts relevant to analysis and of concepts relevant to their historical context.</p> <p>Answers may be a mixture of analysis and explanation but also simple description of relevant material and narrative of relevant events OR answers may provide more consistent analysis but the quality will be uneven and its support often general or thin. Answer considers a number of factors but with very little evaluation of importance or linkages between factors/issues. Points made about importance or about developments in the context of the period will often be little more than assertions and descriptions.</p>
Level IV 13–15 marks	<p>Understanding of key concepts relevant to analysis and the topic is variable but in general is satisfactory.</p> <p>Limited and patchy understanding of a few relevant issues in their historical context. Answer may be largely descriptive/narratives of events and links between this and analytical comments will typically be weak or unexplained OR answers will mix passages of descriptive material with occasional explained analysis. Limited points made about importance/links or about developments in the context of the period will be little more than assertions and descriptions.</p>

Further sample questions

- (1) To what extent was Stalin nothing more than a brutal dictator?
- (2) How successful was collectivisation in meeting the needs of the Russian economy?
- (3) To what extent did the purges of the 1930s help Stalin consolidate his power?
- (4) How successfully did Stalin exploit the post-war settlement to strengthen the USSR's position up to 1953?
- (5) 'The Five Year Plans failed to achieve their aims during the 1930s.' How far do you agree with this view?

**Chronology: Key Events in *Russia: From Autocracy to Communism*
1924–41**

- 1922 Stalin becomes General Secretary of Communist Party of USSR.
- 1924 Death of Lenin.
- 1925 Rivalry develops between Trotsky and Stalin (1).
- 1926 Trotsky expelled from Politburo (2).
- 1928 The Shakhty Trial of foreign engineers. Gosplan initiated; first Five Year Plan (3).
- 1929 Start of collectivisation and dekulakisation. Removal of Bukharin (4) and 'Right Opposition' supporters.
- 1930 Pravda carries Stalin's 'dizzy with success' critique of collectivisation (5).
- 1932 Ryutin Platform circulated among Central Committee members (6).
- 1932–34 Severe famine in Ukraine (7).
- 1934 17th Party Congress. Assassination of Kirov. Purges intensify.
- 1936 Trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev. New constitution adopted.
- 1937 Trial of Radek. Dismissal and execution of Marshall Tukachevsky.
- 1938 Trial of Bukharin and Yagoda. Beria replaces Yezhov as head of NKVD.
- 1939 18th Party Congress. Stalin declares end to mass purges.
- 1940 Yezhov shot.
- 1941 Invasion by Germany: start of Great Patriotic War.

- (1) Trotsky spoke of continuous revolution, spreading beyond the existing borders of the USSR; Stalin's view was to consolidate and develop socialism in the USSR first.
- (2) The Politburo was the central decision-making body in Communist Russia. Once it had affirmed a policy, there was no further discussion in the Party.
- (3) Gosplan, established in 1921, organised central economic planning. From 1928 it determined targets of the Five Year Plans.

**Access to History – Online OCR European and World History Period Studies –
Russia: From Autocracy to Communism, 1894–1941 – Standard AS Question**

- (4) Bukharin was replaced as the President of Comintern and Editor of Pravda, two highly prestigious positions in Soviet Russia. The Communist International was dedicated to help spread the Bolshevik message outside the USSR and became an important international voice by the late 1920s.
- (5) Stalin wrote this article claiming that there were traitors in the Party who would have to be purged. By 1934 more than a million members of the Party had been expelled.
- (6) The Ryutin Platform was a 194-page document that stated the Right's anti-Stalin views. Most historians see this publication as the critical event that started Stalin's reign of terror.
- (7) An estimated 5–7 million died as a result of collectivisation. Though most of the victims lived in the Ukraine, millions also died in the North Caucasus and along the Volga.

Teaching Activities

Use the following link to access the documents indicated below:

www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/coll.html

In groups, study the following:

1) Letter of April 1932, from Feigin to Ordzhonikidze (a close friend of Stalin's), about conditions on the Kolkhozes (collective farms)

www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/aa2feign.html

- (a) What problems and issues does this letter raise?
- (b) What was the response of Stalin to these issues?

2) Bukharin's letter and the Purges

www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/b2bukhar.html

What evidence of Terror and repression does this document provide to widen your understanding of the reasons for and potential effects of the Purges and Great Terror of the 1930s?

3) Study of Kirov's murder

www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/b2centcm.html

What evidence is presented here of the reaction to the murder amongst the Communist Party?

After completing the above:

- 1) Present findings as a group to the rest of the class.
- 2) Examine how these can be put together to demonstrate a better understanding of the nature of Stalin's regime.

Resources

- R. Conquest, *Stalin, Breaker of Nations* (Weidenfeld, 1991)
M. Macauley, *Stalin and Stalinism* (Longman, 1995)
P. Oxley, *Russia 1855 to 1991* (OUP, 2001)
R. A. Service, *History of Twentieth Century Russia* (Penguin, 1997)
R Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above 1928–41* (Norton, 1991)

Weblinks

- www.historylearningsite.co.uk/russia_1917_to_1939.htm
www.learningcurve.gov.uk/heroesvillains/g4/
<http://library.thinkquest.org/27629/themes/society/rsstalin2.html?tqskip1=1>
www.marxist.com/History/stalin_death1.html
www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/coll.html