

Candidate 1 evidence (Field 8)

To what did Stalin owe his grip on power?

Abstract Introduction

This dissertation examines the extent to which the apparent '*grey blur*'¹ Joseph Stalin owed his grip on power to the Great Terror. It has been contended that the societal and political effects of the Terror State and Purges allowed Stalin to assume the role of supreme leader of the Soviet Union between 1928-1953. In order to evaluate its impact this study includes primary evidence which examines the extent to which the Terror invaded Soviet life. This evidence is analysed critically, and conclusions drawn consider both personal experiences and later studies.

As context, the creation of the Terror State transferred the leadership of the Soviet Union from the party to Stalin himself. It is debated whether the creation of the Terror was due to Stalin's own paranoia as he felt threatened by the opposition, or that it was developed because of Lenin's legacy and the 'Red Terror'. Stalin's Terror State was composed of religious persecution, the

¹ Nikolai Sukhanov, memoirs of the Russian Revolution of 1917

elimination of Party members who were not 'faithful', the deportation of dissidents, and was instigated by the assassination of Kirov.

The Great Terror was the weapon of control in Soviet society. Stalin emerged from the post-revolution political turmoil and used it to hold a firm grip on political power, and over the lives of the people whom he ruled. This power is highlighted by historical evaluations and primary evidence as the principle reason for Stalin's preservation of power. As Vyacheslav Molotov wrote in his memoirs:

*'The terror was necessary, and it couldn't have been completed without mistakes... I don't consider it the bloody period.'*²

Nonetheless, many people began to refer to Stalin as the 'father' of Russia, using his immense power to influence every aspect of Soviet life and culture, from the family home to literature and the arts. In this way, the implementation of the cult of personality was also important to Stalin's preservation of power. In addition, Stalin launched radical economic policies that changed the face of Russia, creating

² Vyacheslav Molotov, memoirs, quoted in Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 1993, pages 183, 213, 254, 279

a new industrial and agricultural landscape while also having a considerable impact on Stalin's retention of power.

Healthy historical debates exist about the Great Terror in relation to Stalin's grip on power. For instance, historians Sheila Fitzpatrick³ and Robert Service⁴ agree with the view that the Great Purges were accelerated by '*popular participation*'⁵ which allowed Stalin to carry out his regime of terror unopposed. It is also essential to note the Marxist view in relation to the Great Terror, with Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm indicating that the estimated 15-20 million deaths as a result of Stalin's Purges could have been '*justified*'⁶ if the Soviet Union had succeeded in showing itself to the world as a '*socialist model*'⁷. Historians have also noted the questionable death statistics with reference to the Purges.

The overall consensus among historians is that the Stalinist state was defined by the Great Terror. Other methods of control implemented by Stalin such as his cult

³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 2017, page 170

⁴ Robert Service, *A History of 20th Century Russia*, 1999, pages 222-3

⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 2017, page 170

⁶ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Eric the Red*, *The Spectator*, 2019

⁷ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Eric the Red*, *The Spectator*, 2019

of personality and economic policies were underpinned by the brutal effectiveness of the Purges.

This dissertation examines the success of the Great Terror in preserving Stalin's power, as well as detailing the societal and economic impacts of both the cult of personality and Stalin's economic policies. While all contribute this dissertation concludes that the use of Terror dominated as a method to keep Stalin in power.

617 words