

To what extent did Joseph Stalin prepare the Soviet Union for the German invasion?

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Word Count: 2289

Part A: Identification and evaluation of the Source

The question that will be analyzed throughout this investigation is: To what extent did Joseph Stalin prepare the Soviet Union for the German invasion? The scope of this investigation will take place between the years 1928 to 1938. Primary and secondary sources will be utilized throughout this investigation. During his many years of power, Stalin was able to substantially modernize and industrialize the Soviet Union. But many of the people of the Soviet Union often faced famine and their personal freedoms were very limited. In order to answer this question, this investigation will analyze various aspects of the Soviet Union, including economically, socially, industrially, and militarily. Between the years 1928 and 1938, Stalin did not successfully prepare the Soviet Union for an invasion by Germany.

Source 1: The first source that I will be analyzing is a secondary source. It is a book called "Thank You, Comrade Stalin!" by Jeffrey Brooks. This book was published in 2000 and was written by an American historian. Brooks teaches courses on the American-Soviet Cold War at a school named John Hopkins. The purpose of this book was to show how Stalin and the Soviet government utilized the media in order to illustrate how the idealization of communism effected the people of the Soviet Union. This gives accounts of newspapers and other propaganda used to shed a positive light on not only communism but also on Stalin.

A value of this book is that it was written almost ten years after the Cold War, which provides a better idea of the history of the time that is being investigated. As well, this book was written by someone you predominantly studies the Soviet Union and the culture and society there. A limitation of this book is that it is written from an American perspective and provides only the orthodox view of this time period in the Soviet Union.

Source 2: The next source that will be examined is a primary source. It was a piece of propaganda from around the 1920's to the 1930's. The title of the work is, in English, is

“Beloved Stalin—People’s Happiness”. The approximate year and its author was acquired information. This work was made during the time when Stalin had control of the media and was able to present himself in a positive way through the media. The purpose of this propaganda was to make it appear to the people of the Soviet Union that Stalin was a positive impact on their lives. This work is valuable because it is a primary source from the time period and provides evidence into ways Stalin manipulated the media for his own agenda. The work also displayed communist support, therefore, making the connection in people’s minds that Stalin and communism will make their lives better. The work is limited because it was translated, which could have created error. As well, this is a heavily biased work, in regards to the goodness of Stalin.

Part B: Investigation

Between the years 1928 to 1938, the Soviet Union was under the reign of Joseph Stalin. Stalin had grown up in a lower class family and, throughout many of his early years as a young man, protested the unequal distribution of wealth throughout the area, which would later become the Soviet Union. As he came to power he kept the ideals of his successor, Vladimir Lenin, the ideals of communism¹. Stalin was inspired to bring communism to the Soviet Union by both Lenin and the ideas of Marxism. During this time period America was facing its own form of hardships, in the shape of the Great Depression, economically this was a low point in America and many suffered. Additionally, during the early 1930’s Hitler began his reign in Germany and the beginning to the Holocaust.

During his life, Stalin strove for the Soviet Union to become a communistic state. This economic standpoint would ideally have had every citizen equally cared for. This meant a total overthrow of the bourgeoisie’s wealth and power, as well as the abolishment of privatized land

¹ Cunningham, Kevin. Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union. Greensboro, NC: M. Reynolds Pub., 2006.

and furthermore all land would be owned by the state. The government would have total control over the state, including, but not limited to food production and health care. While this meant that all land and food would be controlled by the state, this meant free education, along with other public services, such as health care and assistance for the aged and disabled. During his reign, Stalin had created a stable government and was able to provide the best healthcare that the citizens of the Soviet Union had experienced in the past ten years². Through this new health care system prenatal care was now a viable option, which had not been the case until up to this point³. While healthcare improved, many citizens often faced famine. Within the scope of the investigation, Russia's population increased 40 million people, yet the agricultural production remained the same in the years 1929 to 1938. This meant that there was an increasing number of people, yet the production of food had leveled out and could not meet the needs of the people#.

Stalin's society had many major social drawbacks. Stalin allowed little to no free speech of the people and all of the media within the Soviet Union was controlled by the government. All books, paintings, poems, plays, or any sort of art or intellectual work had to be in support of Lenin, Stalin, and communism. During this time many artists were killed or took their own life because they refused to follow these binding rules⁴. This caused most of the intellectual work of the time period to be biased. Stalin also had new textbooks created for schools which emphasized his role in the Russian Revolution, as well as his relationship with Stalin. Furthermore all media was controlled by the government, to ensure that all news was regulated to benefit the appearance of Stalin. Many posters and other propaganda was created by the government in support of Stalin. These pieces of propaganda often colored Stalin as a helper of the people and sometimes as a god like figure within the Soviet Union. One piece of propaganda read, "Beloved

² "Life in USSR under Stalin - History Learning Site." History Learning Site. Accessed April 20, 2016.

³ "Silvapages." Stalin's Impact on Society. Accessed April 20, 2016.

⁴ Brooks, Jeffrey. Thank you, comrade Stalin!: Soviet public culture from revolution to Cold War. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Stalin – People’s Happiness”⁵, which associated the happiness within the Soviet Union to Stalin, making him appear responsible. More still, Stalin had a secret police that encourage people to tell on one another, this was meant to help dispense of anyone who was not in support of Stalin or communism. In regards to the terror caused by Stalin, historian McAuley said that the people of the Soviet Union had to fully dedicate themselves to the ideals of communism or be punished⁶. This orthodox view of Stalin fear based system lends to the idea of how little freedom of speech the people of the Soviet Union actually had. The fear and biased propaganda put a false image of Stalin and the Soviet Union into people’s minds, this may have caused people to believe that they lived in a safe and well protected area, making them blind to the dangers of an invasion by Germany.

Although many associate Stalin with the negative outcomes of the Soviet Union, he was very successful in modernizing and industrializing the Soviet Union. Before Stalin came to power, Russia was an extremely rural place with little technology, and out of date tools. But Stalin aided in the industrialization of many of the towns and cities within the Soviet Union⁷. Stalin believed that he must industrialize the Soviet Union so that is could rely on itself and not the other western countries of Europe. Stalin had a deep distrust in capitalism⁸ and wanted his communistic society to be enough to support his people. This intense surge of industrialization brought about a more modern Russia. This aided in the preparation for an attack by Germany because the Soviet Union was better able to supply itself as well as increase technology and defense weapons. The orthodox view of Stalin’s ability to industrialize is that he was able to

⁵ "Beloved Stalin – People's Happiness." Propaganda.

⁶ "Quizlet QWait('dom',function(){document.getElementById('PrintLogo').setAttribute Stalin Historiography Flashcards. Accessed April 20, 2016

⁷ Ibid3

⁸ Keefe, Joshua R. "Stalin and the Drive to Industrialize the Soviet Union." RSS. 2009. Accessed April 20, 2016.

quickly and successfully do so. The historian Kukshkin said that with an “incredibly short amount of time” the Soviet Union was able to “successfully” industrialize⁹.

The weakest area of the Soviet Union was the military. Over the years Stalin became increasingly paranoid when it came to people getting in the way of communism in the Soviet Union¹⁰. He often authorized mass killings, this was to get rid of anyone who might stand in his way, at this time if you defied Stalin or communism you would most likely be killed. It was estimated that during his reign Stalin killed between 43,000,000 and 39,000,000 people¹¹ that makes the amount of deaths Hitler caused during the Holocaust only a fraction of Stalin’s killings. The people Stalin usually had killed were high ranking officers and other high ranking officials, the mass killing of these important figures created a military that did not have strong leadership or a skilled and tactful brain¹². The weakened the military was no match for the German invasion, in this way Stalin drastically hurt the Soviet Union’s ability to defend itself against the Germans.

Stalin may have been unsuccessful in his overall feat to defeat the German when they invaded but it should not go unsaid that he was able to dramatically help some of the lacking aspects of the Soviet Union, such as industry and healthcare. But in the face of the Germans the Soviet Union could not protect itself with its dwindling military and the false pretense of how strong the Soviet Union was. Not only this, but many of the citizens of the Soviet Union suffered from famine, causing them to become weak and be no match for a German soldier. It is because of these reasons that Stalin was overall unsuccessful in preparing the Soviet Union for the German invasion of 1941.

⁹ Ibid6

¹⁰ Ibid1

¹¹ Ibid3

¹² Ibid1

Part C: Reflection

Throughout the entirety of this investigation, I came to face many obstacles. The most prominent of which dealt with biased sources. When researching and investigating, it is of the utmost importance that the sources chosen show a variety of views on the subject matter. While it was easy to get views that were against Stalin and his communistic rule, it proved to be more difficult to find sources that were pro Stalin, that were not from the point of view from someone of the Soviet Union. Which posed another problem, during this time in Russia all media was monitored and very few people had the opportunity to write about the oppressive nature of Stalin and the Soviet Union. For this reason I was unable to find an unbiased source that was from the Soviet Union. But, just because a source is biased does not mean that it cannot be valuable. One of the heavily biased sources that I used, that was from the Soviet Union, proved to be very helpful in providing evidence of the total government control of the media and how that effected the propaganda.

I also found the language barrier to be difficult at times, sometimes when I was able to find what appeared to be a strong source, I was only able to get it in Russian and not in English. I also had to take into account throughout this process that the language barrier may have made some of the sources less valuable. Even though language created a barrier I was able to get around it and find many informational sources written in English, or I was able to translate some small sections of Russian speech.

Furthermore, it was difficult to decide whether a source was reliable or not. Since the Cold War and the Holocaust were so widely covered by many historians, it could be hard to pick out what is reliable and what is not. It is easy for a reliable source to become unreliable if the

ideas it portrays are misunderstood, as well it is important for a historian to keep their personal bias out of the subject matter.

Versions of this topic have been covered by many historians before me, it was interesting to compare and contrast their ideas and their historiographies. Although, being a historian can be difficult, due to the bias, language barriers and other obstacles, it is a very enriching experience to become better informed on the world's great history.

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Criterion A: Investigation (6 marks)

Marks	Level Descriptor—PART A
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors.
1-2	The question for investigation has been stated. The student has identified and selected appropriate sources, but there is little or no explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. The response describes, but does not analyze or evaluate, 2 of the sources.
3-4	An appropriate question for investigation has been stated. The student has identified and selected appropriate sources, and there is some explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. There is some analysis and evaluation of 2 sources, but reference to their value and limitations is limited.
5-6	An appropriate question for investigation has been clearly stated. The student has identified and selected appropriate and relevant sources, and there is a clear explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. There is a detailed analysis and evaluation of 2 sources with explicit discussion of the value and limitations of two of the sources for the investigation, with reference to the origins, purpose and content of the 2 sources.

Criterion B: Investigation (15 marks)

Marks	Level Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors.
1-3	The investigation lacks clarity and coherence, and is poorly organized. Where there is a recognizable structure there is minimal focus on the task. The response contains little or no critical analysis. It may consist mostly of generalizations and poorly substantiated assertions. Reference is made to evidence from sources, but there is no analysis of that evidence.
4-6	There is an attempt to organize the investigation but this is only partially successful, and the investigation lacks clarity and coherence. The investigation contains some limited critical analysis but the response is primarily narrative/descriptive in nature, rather than analytical. Evidence from sources is included, but is not integrated into the analysis/argument.
7-9	The investigation is generally clear and well organized, but there is some repetition or lack of clarity in places. The response moves beyond description to include some analysis or critical commentary, but this is not sustained. There is an attempt to integrate evidence from sources with the analysis/argument. There may be awareness of different perspectives, but these perspectives are not evaluated.
10-12	The investigation is generally clear and well organized, although there may be some repetition or lack of clarity in places. The investigation contains critical analysis, although this analysis may lack development or clarity. Evidence from a range of sources is used to support the argument. There is awareness and some evaluation of different perspectives. The investigation argues to a reasoned conclusion.
13-15	The investigation is clear, coherent and effectively organized. The investigation contains well-developed critical analysis that is focused clearly on the stated question. Evidence from a range of sources is used effectively to support the argument. There is evaluation of different perspectives. The investigation argues to a reasoned conclusion that is consistent with the evidence and arguments provided.