

**Q. By what methods, and with what success, did either Hitler or Stalin attempt to establish a totalitarian state after coming to power?**

Extract from Hannah Arendt on *Totalitarianism* (Meridian Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1958), p. 438.

Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other. The problem is to fabricate something that does not exist, namely, a kind of human species resembling other animal species whose only "freedom" would consist in "preserving the species."<sup>125</sup> Totalitarian domination attempts to achieve this goal both through ideological indoctrination of the elite formations and through absolute terror in the camps; and the atrocities for which the elite formations are ruthlessly used become, as it were, the practical application of the ideological indoctrination—the testing ground in which the latter must prove itself—while the appalling spectacle of the camps themselves is supposed to furnish the "theoretical" verification of the ideology.

Summary of her points:

- Totalitarianism seeks to reduce all individuals to one type through total domination, so that each person reacts identically to the leader's wishes.
  - This is achieved through the ideological indoctrination of those in the "elite formations" e.g. the Party and Secret Police, and the terror of the prison camps.
  - That terror was the proving ground in which the Party and Secret Police showed its loyalty to the model
- (p.373)

In the center of the movement, as the motor that swings it into motion, sits the Leader. He is separated from the elite formation by an inner circle of the initiated who spread around him an aura of impenetrable mystery which corresponds to his "intangible preponderance."<sup>83</sup> His position within this intimate circle depends upon his ability to spin intrigues among its members and upon his skill in constantly changing its personnel. He owes his rise to leadership to an extreme ability to handle inner-party struggles for power rather than to demagogic or bureaucratic-organizational qualities.

Summary of her points:

- That the leader is separated from the rest of the ruling movement by an inner elite.
- That the totalitarian leader's skill is in the manipulation of different groups, organisations and structures, rather than presentational skills or competence in organisation.

Comment

Therefore this essay needs to answer the question of Stalin's methods and success in relation to the model outlined above by Hannah Arendt. Before answering the question it is worth considering the extent to which the "totalitarian" model fully applies to Stalin's Russia. For many decades historians undertook comparative studies of single party rulers using Arendt's template, but just how fully does this explain the intentions and outcomes of

Stalin's policies, given that (1) that Arendt de-emphasises the circumstances and aims specific to the country that is being ruled and (2) there is now significant evidence to show that populations in Single Party states were able to exert some power from below by using the Party's language and gaining some control over its systems

While much of Stalin's intentions may have matched this description by Hannah Arendt, it does not entirely explain all of them, and furthermore recent writing by historians such as Orlando Figes and Sheila Fitzpatrick have uncovered a significant variety of response among the Soviet peoples. Therefore the Arendt model may be limited because it implies that the common objectives of power across all dictatorships automatically transcend and outweigh the transformative political programme devised by the ruler for that particular state.

Put more simply, does that mean therefore that Collectivisation, the Five Year Plans etc were predominantly methods to enhance Stalin's power and control rather than serving their stated objectives ?

Therefore this essay will need to consider the manner in which Stalin utilised policies in various areas, but also whether "totalitarianism" was both the intention and the outcome. While Stalin was undoubtedly a brutally cruel killer of hundreds of thousands of his own people by execution and imprisonment, and millions through famine, "totalitarianism" as defined by Arendt may not necessarily have been the single goal in mind, or the main outcome.

Areas for assessing methods and success using the totalitarian model:

- Agricultural Policy: Corin & Fiehn p.207-9, 215, 217-218. Remember to consider both the economic motivations as well as the political one.

- Industrial Policy: C & F, economic aspects, pp. 225-227; p.228 Behaviours in response to the Plans; p. 233-4 political measures to enforce compliance; p. 237 Stakhanovism; p. 239 Managers' behaviours (e.g. manipulating the system)

-The Terror and the Purges: Stalin's motivations, C&F pages 267-273.

-Propaganda and the cult of personality: Origins and development, pp. 278-9; variety of reactions to the Cult pp. 282-3.

Remember at all times to link back to the question of Totalitarianism. Arendt said that totalitarian systems aimed for uniformity of popular reaction, but there is much evidence to reveal a variety of behaviours.

Quotations from S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism* (Oxford, 1999).

The cult of personality

p. 30.

'Stalin was not the only leader with a cult. As a young British scholar has recently pointed out, he was not even the only leader to whom the exalted word "vozhd", a term often seen as comparable to the Nazi "Führer", was applied. It was not just that Stalin was acquiring the aura of a charismatic ruler, but that leadership itself was acquiring that aura. Newspaper wrote of "our leaders" in the plural, referring to the Politburo. Some Politburo members like Ordzhonikidze, the popular industrial leader, Molotov, head of the Soviet Government, and, for a few years, Nikolai Ezhov, head of the NKVD, were celebrated in terms almost as extravagant as Stalin.'

p. 129. On people's reactions to being deported or declared a Kulak.

...Those seeking restoration of rights deployed a range of arguments. Some presented a Soviet persona, stressing their loyalty and contributions as productive Soviet citizens. Thus a deported "labour settler" wrote that "I have worked as an Udarnik and now I work as a Stkahanovite, fulfilling many norms in construction three times over." ... Petitions were a lottery. We know that quite large numbers were successful though we have no way of knowing what proportion of the total this was. Some categories of victims, like priests, seem to have produced comparatively few petitions for reinstatement of rights, probably because they knew their chances of satisfaction were small.'

p. 132. On concealing one's opinions and past life.

'Concealment was a normal condition of Soviet life. The authorities regarded everyone who concealed their past as a hidden enemy, but this was not necessarily so. Anyone who had a damaging past more or less had to conceal it, regardless of political sympathies, in order not to be taken for an enemy. Those who concealed their pasts were 'masked' in Soviet Parlance. And once they were masked it was necessary to "unmask" them.'

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