

OCR A-level History

# RUSSIA AND ITS RULERS

1855–1964



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# My Revision Planner



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REVISED

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# 1 The nature of government

## Autocracy

REVISED

Russia was governed by an **autocracy** from 1855 to March 1917. Some historians have argued that there were three aspects to Russian autocracy:

- Tsars believed they were accountable only to God and not to the people. Hence, there was no need for democratic elections.
- Tsars also believed that God had placed them on Earth to set moral standards. They had a paternalistic duty to ensure that ‘the people’ were protected from the more evil elements in society.
- As the Russian Empire was so large and diversified, autocracy was seen as a practical, straightforward way to rule. Advisers to the government such as **Konstantin Pobedonostsev** argued that **liberal democracy** would have led to too many people demanding too many things. Also, as most of the Russian population was made up of illiterate peasants, it was believed that democracy would be in the hands of those who did not have ‘the ability to reason’.

## Autocracy, repression and reform

The tsars used their autocratic power differently according to circumstance. However, they all reinforced autocracy through a mixture of **repression** and **reform**.

- **Nicholas I (Tsar 1825–55)** had promoted autocratic rule through the use of slogans such as ‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality’. ‘Orthodoxy’ indicated an intention not to make radical changes, ‘autocracy’ suggested that there would be complete obedience to the Tsar and ‘nationality’ emphasised the need to create a united Russia based on the traditions and values of the original **Rus peoples**. It was reinforced with the passing of the **Fundamental Laws of 1832** which stated that ‘The emperor of all the Russians is an autocratic and unlimited monarch’.
- **Alexander II (Tsar 1855–81)** stuck closely to autocratic principles, especially after the first attempt to assassinate him in 1866. Although Alexander II was a willing reformer, his policies were still carried out with the need to preserve autocracy in mind. For example, he maintained respect for his authority by compensating **serf** owners after the 1861 Emancipation Edict (see page 20) was put into operation.
- **Alexander III (Tsar 1881–94)** reigned with what is often viewed as more intense authoritarian rule. It is often referred to as ‘the Reaction’ – a response against the more reforming period of his father’s rule. Alexander strongly believed that the **Slav peoples** lacked the intelligence to participate responsibly in a democratic political system. Besides, they were viewed as displaying ‘inertness and laziness’ and were therefore undeserving of greater freedoms. Nevertheless, like his father, he was willing to reform if it benefited Russia as a whole.
- **Nicholas II (Tsar 1894–1917)** continued the rather severe form of autocratic rule adopted by his father. The **October Manifesto** of 1905 and the setting up of the **Duma** (see page 14) appeared to be a move towards democracy. The impact of these reforms, though, was cushioned by the passing of the autocratic **Fundamental Laws of 1906**.

## ! Spot the mistake

a

Below is a sample exam question and a paragraph written in answer to it. Why does this paragraph not get into at least Level 5? Once you have identified the mistake, rewrite the paragraph so that it displays the qualities of at least Level 5. The mark scheme on page 7 will help you.

To what extent was autocracy the main feature of Russian government from 1855 to 1964?

*All of the tsars ruled Russia autocratically. They believed they were ordained by God to rule. Advisers to the tsars, such as Pobedonostsev, argued that there should never be a move towards democracy as the people were not clever enough to know how to vote properly. However, not all of the tsars were totally autocratic. Both Alexander II and Nicholas II were interested in changing the government to make it more liberal.*

## ! Support or challenge?

Below is a sample exam question which asks how far you agree with a specific statement. Below this is a series of general statements that are relevant to the question. Using your own knowledge and the information on the opposite page, decide whether these statements challenge or support the statement in the question and tick the appropriate box. Note that as students are required to cover a 100-year period in answers to examination questions the statements relate to Russian government across the whole of the period from 1855 to 1964. But the text on page 8 only relates to the tsars; you will need to refer to later sections in the book on Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev to successfully complete this task.

'Russian rulers were consistently autocratic in the way they ruled from 1855 to 1964.' How far do you agree with this statement?

	SUPPORT	CHALLENGE
As the Russian Empire was so large and diversified, autocracy was seen as a practical, straightforward way to rule.		
The October Manifesto of 1905 and the setting up of the <i>Duma</i> appeared to be a move towards democracy.		
Alexander II maintained respect for his authority by compensating serf owners after the 1861 Emancipation Edict was put into operation.		
Alexander III's reign is often referred to as 'the Reaction'.		
The impact of reforms made by Nicholas II was cushioned by the passing of the Fundamental Laws of 1906.		
As most of the Russian population was made up of illiterate peasants, it was believed that democracy would be in the hands of those who did not have 'the ability to reason'.		
Tsars believed they were accountable only to God and not to the people.		
Lenin used War Communism to win the Civil War.		
Stalin used purges, show trials and terror to implement his policies.		
Khrushchev de-Stalinised Russia.		

## Dictatorship

Russia was governed by a form of **dictatorship** after the **October Revolution** of 1917. The leader of the dictatorship, **Lenin**, based his ideology of government on the work of **Karl Marx** (1818–83) and **Friedrich Engels** (1820–95). The ideology, **Marxism–Leninism**, centred on two key principles:

- The **'superstructure'** of institutions that formed the base for the old tsarist society had to be destroyed and replaced with bodies that would create an **egalitarian society**.
- Marx's 'Labour Theory of Value' became a justification for Lenin to overthrow tsarist rule, especially as the tsars had started to move towards **capitalism**.

### The 'Labour Theory of Value'

This theory claimed that under a capitalist economy the **proletariat** would never gain the full value of their efforts. A disproportionate amount of wages would be taken away to provide capitalists with profits far in excess of what was needed to maintain industrialisation. In other words, the proletariat would be exploited by capitalists.

Marx outlined how a struggle between the capitalists and workers would result from exploitation – the prediction was that a government consisting only of workers would be formed. More specifically:

- Workers would eventually be successful in overthrowing the capitalists.
- In the short term, intellectuals such as Lenin would be needed to help the workers govern.
- Once the proletariat became more politically educated then a **dictatorship of the proletariat** would occur (that is, rule over the **bourgeoisie** by the workers).

### Implementation of Marxism–Leninism

Lenin implemented his ideology by:

- passing on his views through his writings. Most important was the publication of *What is to be Done?* (1902), in which Lenin argued the need for revolutionaries to bypass the implementation of a democratically elected assembly and go straight to a government led by a **Party Central Committee**. Lenin believed this was necessary as in a system where workers might be given the vote they would not have the political knowledge and experience to use it in a way that would result in revolutionary change to their position in society. Therefore a Bolshevik cadre (or Committee), versed in Marxism, needed to be appointed to make decisions on behalf of workers. The Committee would govern until the workers were ready to take over.
- leading a Bolshevik revolution against the **Provisional Government** in October 1917.
- engaging in a civil war, from 1917 to 1921, against the opponents of the revolution (the **Whites**).
- using **War Communism** to ensure that there was no drift from his close followers or those he perceived should have supported Marxism–Leninism – proletarians and peasants. War Communism was implemented with a degree of ruthlessness similar to that used by Alexander III when he attempted **Russification** (see page 64). Both Alexander III and Lenin used the secret police (the **Okhrana** and the **Cheka** respectively) to enforce their policies brutally.
- making concessions in the form of the **New Economic Policy (NEP)** after the Civil War seemed to be won. This was done to ensure the backing of moderate **Bolsheviks** but it caused something of a split in the party. **Trotsky** believed the Bolsheviks should have quickly moved away from appeasing bourgeois elements through the NEP. He wanted a more **'permanent revolution'**, which meant the spreading of communism throughout the world. Others, such as **Bukharin**, disagreed and believed that the NEP was probably a necessary temporary measure to enable the consolidation of **'socialism in one country'**.

## ! Delete as applicable

a

Below is a sample exam question and a paragraph of an answer to it. Read the paragraph and decide which of the possible options (in bold) is most appropriate. Delete the least appropriate options and complete the paragraph by justifying your selection.

To what extent did the communist dictators govern in the same way as the tsars from 1855 to 1964?

Lenin's rule was similar to that of all the tsars to a **limited/fair/great** extent in that he was solely in charge. He also used repressive measures, like the tsars, such as War Communism. War Communism was implemented with a **reasonable/considerable** degree of ruthlessness very similar to that used by Alexander III when he attempted Russification. Also, Lenin was similar to **all/some** of the tsars in the way in which he used reforms to appease the people. Thus Alexander II emancipated the serfs to give them greater economic freedoms and Lenin introduced the NEP, which provided opportunities for peasants to trade freely and set up their own businesses. Thus, Lenin, in comparison to the tsars, **partly continued/continued** the way Russia was ruled as he. . .

## ! Identify an argument

a

Below are a series of definitions, a sample exam question and two sample conclusions. One of the conclusions achieves a high-level mark because it contains an argument. The other achieves a lower level because it contains only description and assertion. Identify which is which. The mark scheme on page 7 will help you.

- **Description:** a detailed account
- **Assertion:** a statement of fact or an opinion, which is not supported by a reason
- **Reason:** a statement that explains or justifies something
- **Argument:** an assertion justified with a reason

'Lenin's seizure of power in 1917 was the most important turning point in the development of Russian government from 1855 to 1964.' How far do you agree with this statement?

Lenin's seizure of power in October 1917 was undoubtedly a major turning point as it marked the end of an attempt to introduce the Constituent Assembly. It also represented the beginning of a move, in theory, towards rule by the proletariat ('the dictatorship of the proletariat') and a more egalitarian society in general. However, without the problems caused by the First World War and subsequent February Revolution of 1917 there would have been no Provisional Government and no attempt to install a Constituent Assembly in the first place. Lenin was able to exploit the problems of the Provisional Government to gain power. Therefore it was Russia's involvement in the First World War that was the most important turning point in Russian government from 1855 to 1964.

After Lenin seized power in October 1917 he went on to introduce communism to Russia and created a dictatorship. This was very different from the tsars. He consolidated his power by winning the Civil War of 1917-21 and through the introduction of War Communism. He was also important for developing his New Economic Policy, which improved the lives of Russians. Some historians disagree, though, that Lenin's seizure of power was the most important turning point because he carried on using repressive policies like the tsars. In other words, he was just a 'Red Tsar'.

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## Totalitarianism

After Lenin's death in 1924 a power struggle ensued. **Stalin** skilfully manipulated various individuals and factions to gain support for his takeover of the leadership of the Soviet Union. From 1928 onwards Stalin redefined Marxism–Leninism and moved Russia towards a totalitarian state. There were two main strands to Stalin's ideology:

- The implementation of a **command economy**, based on centralised planning and **collectivisation** so that the superstructure of society could be changed.
- The personalisation of the superstructure so that total control of the economy, society and politics was in the hands of one person – Stalin. This was to be achieved through the artful use of propaganda (including the development of the **cult of personality**), increased censorship and repression of opposition on a scale never witnessed before.

### Stalin and totalitarianism

There are a number of possible explanations as to why Stalin moved Russia away from a Lenin-style dictatorship to **totalitarianism**.

- He exploited circumstances to implement a practical solution to Russia's problems. For his **Five-Year Plans** and collectivisation to be successful, no one could be allowed to question whether the policies were appropriate.
- Another view is that Stalin was a megalomaniac. He did whatever was needed to gain and maintain power to fuel his desire to appear important.
- A more recent idea is that Stalin intentionally built upon a base laid by Lenin – totalitarianism was what Stalin believed Lenin would have moved to if he had not died. The establishment of the Party Central Committee and the use of the Cheka indicated that Lenin had every intention of centralising control of all aspects of Russian life.

### De-Stalinisation

Another power struggle occurred after Stalin's death in 1953. What emerged was a government of collective leadership but one influenced mainly by **Khrushchev**, the Secretary of the Party Central Committee. By 1956 Khrushchev had formulated a plan to move the Soviet Union away from Stalinism. In a speech made in 1956 to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev denounced Stalin on the grounds that:

- It was not Lenin's wish that Stalin should become leader.
- Stalin had not prepared the Soviet Union adequately for the Second World War.
- Stalin had committed crimes against the Russian people.
- Possible 'outsider' allies, for example Hungary, had been alienated by Stalin.

Khrushchev and his supporters then proceeded with the **de-Stalinisation** of Russia by:

- releasing political prisoners from **Gulags**
- relaxing censorship
- attempting to remove the cult of personality.

However, this did not signal a move away from authoritarian rule. Khrushchev, like previous Russian leaders, continued to use physical force to repress opposition, as was shown by his order to send tanks to Hungary in 1956 to deal with the Nagy regime.

## i Develop the detail

Below is a sample exam question and a paragraph of an answer to it. The paragraph contains a limited amount of detail. Annotate the paragraph to add additional detail to the answer.

‘The introduction of totalitarian rule by Stalin was the only backward step in the development of Russian government from 1855 to 1964.’ How far do you agree?

*In some ways totalitarian rule was the only backward step. Total control of people's lives was in the hands of one person without any hint of a move towards the representation of the people as had been started by the tsars. Stalin achieved this through repressive measures on a scale not witnessed before. Compared with the tsars, he made much more effective use of propaganda, censorship and the secret police to impose his will. In particular he used these tools of government to implement a range of industrial and agricultural policies designed to enable Russia to compete with the West. The fact that Khrushchev attempted to reverse much of what Stalin had done is evidence that Stalin's period of totalitarian rule was a major backward step. However, in some ways it was not totally backward as Stalin was building on what had already been started by Lenin.*

## i Turning assertion into argument

Below are a sample exam question and a series of assertions. Read the question and then add a justification to each of the assertions to turn it into an argument.

‘The introduction of totalitarian rule by Stalin was the most damaging ideology introduced by any Russian ruler from 1855 to 1964.’ How far do you agree?

*The introduction of totalitarian rule by Stalin was mainly damaging for Russia in the sense that*

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*De-Stalinisation was evidence that Stalin's totalitarianism was considered to have hampered progress in Russia. It showed that Stalin had*

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*However, Stalin's totalitarian approach was not totally damaging as it*

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