Communism in Russia – From Lenin to Show Trials -
NOTES

Lenin’s Russia

Tsarist Russia

• AUTOCRACY up to 1917 – Tsar Nicholas II
• REVOLUTION 1905 – Duma
• 80% PEASANTS – 20% NOBLES – Division
• Some INDUSTRIALISATION (1880-1914) but not enough
• People UNHAPPY – REVOLUTION - LENIN

Lenin adapts Marx’s ideas

• Aim = CLASSLESS SOCIETY
• How – DIVISION – BOLSHEVIKS (Lenin) + MENCHEVIKS

Fall of Tsarist Russia

• WWI – Tsar Nicholas declares war on Germany 1914
• Initial support from people BUT…..
• By 1916
  1. Germany had INVADED RUSSIA
  2. Russian army hadn't enough ARMS AND AMUNITION

3. COST OF LIVING had risen by 400%
• March 1917 Tsar Nicholas ABDICATES
• Duma elects PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT and declares republic

Provisional Government fails - SOVIETS gain success

• Kept Russia in the WAR
• STOPPED PEASANTS taking nobles land
• Therefore UNPOPULAR
• As a result:
  • SOVIETS (committees) formed to keep order run factories, distribute food etc.
  • Example: TROTSKY – PETROGRAD SOVIET – RED GUARDS
  • Soviets seen by the people as ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT
LENIN takes power

- EXILE – Switzerland/Finland
- Aim: INfiltrate and take control of Soviets – Overthrow PG
- APRIL THESIS (1917)

Aim: INFILTRATE and take control of Soviets – Overthrow PG

APRIL THESIS (1917)

PEACE  BREAD  LAND

Soldiers  Workers  Peasants

- Lenin wins backing of TROTSKY and RED GUARDS
- 24th October – RED GUARDS storm WINTER PALACE
- Lenin becomes NEW RULER of Russia

Lenin (Bolsheviks/Communists) in Power

- 1st MARXIST Government
- POLITBURO (Cabinet) + COMMISSARS (Ministers)
- PEACE – Treaty of Brest Litovsk 1918
- CHANGE:
  1. NATIONALISED banks, mines and factories
  2. ABOLISHED private property
  3. Ended PRIVILAGE of the Church + took its property
  4. Gave WOMEN the VOTE
  5. Abolished Tsarist SECRET POLICE
  6. Allowed PEASANTS seize NOBLES land
  7. Allowed ELECTIONS but only won 25% of Seats
  8. Closed Assembly – NO DEMOCRACY

GROWING OPPOSITION to Lenin

- Opposition to Lenin + Communists grew
- August 1918 – LENIN SHOT
- Communists launch RED TERROR on critics
- New Secret Police – THE CHEKA
Civil War 1918-20

- WAR COMMUNISM – Food for workers + soldiers followed by FAMINE
- Why RED VICTORY?
  1. UNITY
  2. MILITARY SKILL – TROTSKY – RED ARMY
  3. WAR COMMUNISM
  4. PASSIVE PEASANT SUPPORT
- Why WHITE LOSS?
  1. NO CLEAR AIM – Return TSAR? Socialism?
  2. IN FIGHTING
  3. Peasants didn’t TRUST them
  4. Foreign Allies = ANTI RUSSIAN?

War Communism V’s NEP (See table on PP)

Change

- 1923 – Russia Becomes USSR (Union of Soviets Socialist Republics)
- 1924 Lenin dies age 53

- Before his death he wrote in his TESTAMENT of his fears for the Communist revolution and was especially critical of Stalin. He even suggested that he be removed from his job as secretary of the party

Stalin’s Regime - Power Struggle

1. Trotsky
2. Stalin
3. Kamenev
4. Zinoviev
5. Bakunin

Future of Communism – DEBATE (see table on PP)

Economic – DEBATE (see table on PP)
Stalin becomes sole ruler of USSR – 1928

- 1927 – Kamenev, Zinoviev join Trotsky and plan workers revolt
Stalin finds out and has them expelled from part and Trotsky sent to Siberia
  - Stalin expels Bakunin from party also
  - By 1928 only “Old Bolshevik” still in power
  - Changes policy from NEP to full Communism

Why did Stalin win race to replace Lenin?

- Commissar of Nationalities and party General Secretary -
  Gave him great influence and was able to appoint supporters to key positions
  - Spread the “Cult of Lenin” and promoted his own image –
    He stage managed Lenin’s funeral and described himself as “the best, the staunchest, the truest comrade in arms of Lenin”
  - Remained moderate never isolating himself
  - Mistakes of Others –

Trotsky – Arrogant, control of army gave the perception of potentially too much power, didn’t attend Lenin’s funeral, attacked the popular NEP

Zinoviev and Kamenev – Failed to publish Lenin’s “TESTAMENT” with its damaging assessment of Stalin

- Debates on the Future of the Party
  Socialism in One Country (Stalin) V’s Permanent Revolution (Trotsky)

1925 – 14th Party Congress adopt Stalin’s idea
  - Ruthless

1927 – Expelled Trotsky from party
Allied with Bukarin to remove Kamenev + Zinoviev
Bukarin demoted
Show Trials???

Stalin’s Economic Policies

- Aim: Great Military Power through RAPID INDUSTRIALISATION

1928 – “We are 50 years behind the Capitalists, we have 10 years to catch them up”

- NEP improvements were too slow
- However to industrialise Stalin needed:
  1. Capital
  2. Factory workers
  3. Food
- The Answer = COLLECTIVISATION
Collectivisation (KOLKHOZ)

Economic Reasons
1. Money earned from Collectives would provide much needed CAPITAL
2. Peasants who lost their land could become much needed FACTORY WORKERS
3. As the collectives would be more efficient they would provide much needed FOOD

Political Reason
1. Many communists disagreed with the NEP as it created a rich farming class – the KULAKS. To change this they supported Stalin’s idea of state control of Agriculture

Collectivisation – Unpopular?
1. Voluntary BUT...Resisted
   • Revolts
   • Crops not sown
   • 53% horses destroyed
   • 45% cattle destroyed
   • 67% sheep destroyed

2. Enforced – Responded with Terror
   • Especially KULAKS (wiped out by mid-1930’s)
   • 5 million sent to Gulags
   • Millions transported to unsettled territories eg Siberia
   • 1932 – Ukraines grain quota raised to 44% meant there was not enough food to feed peasants. Led to man-made famine (HOLODOMOR) where 5-10 million die

Collectivisation – Results
1. 1940 – 97% of farms collectivised
2. Death Toll – 10 million – Famine or Labour camps
3. Collectives remained inefficient

On each collective farm (Avg. 75 families) peasants worked using modern machinery (eg tractors) for 100-150 days per year, for which they were paid a wage.

For the remaining days of the year they worked on their own private plots.

1. By 1940 there is far more food being produced on private plots than collectives
2. Collectivisation did help the growth of Industry
**Industrialisation – Introduction**

- 5 year plans to replace NEP
- Central state planning of ALL industry - GOSPLAN
- Greater control of the economy would mean greater control of the country for Stalin.
- Stalin wanted to modernise Russia in line with other Countries

"We are 50 to 100 years behind the advanced countries. Either we make good the difference in 10 years or they will crush us"

Stalin

What Stalin needed to industrialise?

- Capital – Couldn’t lend from foreign banks – Lenin
- Factory workers – needed to move peasant farmers to industry. Rural to urban shift.
- Food for Workers – Collectivisation????

**Industrialisation – 5 Year plans x 3**

**FIRST – 1928-32**

- Heavy Industry, Coal, Iron, Gas, Electricity
- Targets NOT met as they were set too high

BUT results still impressive

Machinery +400%, Oil + 100%, Electricity +200%, Iron +100%, Coal +80%

- Due to focus on QUANTITY some POOR QUALITY or FAULTY PRODUCTION
- New towns like MAGNITOGORSK constructed
- Consumer Goods neglected

**SECOND – 1933-37**

- Heavy Industry, Metalworking, Transport (Railways)
- Public works Schemes Moscow Underground built
- Propaganda used to celebrate these achievements
- More emphasis on consumer goods
- Because of troubled state of Europe - shift toward armament production eg. Tank production beyond Ural Mts. out of German reach

**THIRD – 1938-41**

- Cut short due to Purges and German Invasion 1941
- Production of Armaments, Military Expansion
Industrialisation – Results

• Success

• Russian Economy transformed, Fastest growing “Western” economy, 2nd largest economy in world after US

• Shift from Agriculture to Industry

• Urbanisation – 1926 =15%, 1940 = 30%

• 1939 Industrially Self Sufficient

• Production of Industrial goods trebled

• Iron, Electricity, and oil production grew even faster

• Did not experience “GREAT DEPRESSION” – instead full employment

• Helped Russia defeat Germany in WWII

Industrialisation - How was success achieved?

• Authority and Power of the state were used

• Control of workers through tackling absenteeism and introducing internal passport system

• Increase in Skilled workers and women workers

• Incentives for workers – bonus payments, paid holidays

• Workers encouraged by propaganda – Stakhanovite movement

• Opponents (“enemies of the people”) ended up in Labour camps solving the problem of getting workers to areas like Siberia where most didn’t want to go

• Low Rents, cheap entertainment, Free healthcare and Education

• HOWEVER, it is important to remember that this success was achieved at a terrible cost to the Russian people.

• As the historian Niall Ferguson has stated:

“For every 19 tons of steel produced in the Stalinist period, approximately 1 Soviet citizen was killed”

Stalin’s Totalitarian State

• Appeared DEMOCRATIC – All adults could vote, 1936 soviet constitution gave freedom of speech, press and right to work, health and education.

• However real power lay with the Communist Party, Secret Police and Army, all controlled by Stalin.

• CULT OF PERSONALITY – Stalin = “the vozhd” (Leader)

History books rewritten to over emphasise Stalin’s role in 1917 Revolution, while Trotsky’s part erased. Stalin’s name and image (statues) was everywhere (eg.Stalingrad).

• PROPAGANDA – encouraged people to see him as their protector and treat him like a God.
Great Terror 1934-39
• All sections of soviet society
• Communist Party – “The Purges”
• Stalin wants to remove threats to his power
• Used to lay blame for failed policies at hands of “spies,” “wreckers,” or “traitors.”
• Triggered by murder of Sergei Kirov – Dec. 1934

Great Terror 1934-39 – Living Conditions
• NKVD (Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
• Millions of innocents arrested – Gulags – Slave Labour
• Climate of Fear
• System=
Accused – Arrested – Interrogated – Torture – More Names
• Potential victims =
Trotskyites, minorities, Class enemies, Old Bolsheviks, Workers or Managers who did not meet targets ++++
• 1936 Yagoda replaced by Nikolai Yezhov
Terror increased – The Yezhovschina

Yezhov removed 1938 (replaced by Beria), Executed 1940 for killing too many

Great Terror 1934-39 – The Gulags
• System of Camps (476 complexes) around Russia
• Designed to provide slave labour to help Industrialisation
• Conditions were horrendous:
Prisoners (zeks) worked 14 hour days, little food, unsuitable clothing and freezing temperatures for 6 months of the year. They were also beaten, tortured and murdered.
• Examples: Kolyma, Solovetsk, Vorkuta
• Schemes constructed: Moscow-Volga canal, Moscow underground, White Sea – Baltic canal ++++
• “The total number of prisoners in the camps generally hovered around 2 million, but the total number of Soviet citizens who had some experience of the camps, as political or criminal prisoners, is far higher. From 1929, when the Gulag began its major expansion, until 1953 when Stalin died, the best estimates indicate that some 18 million passed through this massive system.”

Anne Applebaum, Gulag – A History, Anchor, 2004, pg2
Purges – “Cleaning Out”

- Early Purges – 1933
- Assassination of Kirov 1934
- The Great Purge – 1936-38

Purpose/Reasons

- The Show Trials (Moscow Trials)
  1st Show Trial – 1936 – Trial of 16,
  2nd Show Trial – 1937 – Trial of 17
  Purge of the Red Army
  3rd Show Trial – 1938 – Trial of 21

Early Purges

- Transformation of the of the Political System – “Rationalisation”
- 1933 Purges – eliminate “undesirables” from the party

These “undesirables included: foreign and Soviet industrial experts, Scapegoats for the failures of Industrialisation and Collectivisation etc.

- 1934-35 Purges – Assassination of Serge Kirov Dec.1934
  Stalin suggested it was evidence of a “Trotskyite Plot,” and used it as an opportunity to rid the part of all Old Bolsheviks

Purpose/Reasons

- Propagandist –to portray accused as “enemies of the people,” or “Trotskyites.”
- For Stalin:
  1. Establish complete control of communist party
  2. Eliminate any threats to his power
  “He wanted to destroy the men who might form an alternative government.” (I.Deutscher, Stalin, 1949)
- Find scapegoats for failures of 5 year plans
- To justify wider terror happening throughout Russia at the time
Format of Trials

Each Trial followed the same format:

• Main prosecutor = Andrei Vyshinsky
• Defendants accused of a range of incredible crimes
• Defendants confessed
• Verdicts decided before the trial
• Most were shot
• PROPAGANDA used to inform soviet people and those of the wider world. (Widely publicised)

1st Trial – August 1936 - United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre

• On trial: Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev + 14 others
• Accused of being members of the United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre. Also said that they had murdered Kirov and were plotting to kill Stalin.
• For months before the accused were subjected to physical and psychological torture, and families threatened.
• All pleaded guilty even though one defendant who pleaded guilty to Kirov’s murder was in prison at the time!!
• Kamenev said, “No matter what my sentence will be, I in advance consider it just.”
• All 16 were shot dead
• Carefully stage managed – PROPAGANDA
• Venue: October Hall in the House of Unions, Moscow
• 350 spectators – mainly NKVD in plain clothes, foreign journalists and diplomats
• 3 judges
• Defendants dressed in old clothes that didn’t fit properly, guarded by NKVD troops with fixed bayonets
• State prosecutor, Vyshinsky demanded:
  “...that these rabid dogs be shot – every one of them – until the last of them is wiped out.”
• Propaganda machine applauded the executions and asked for more purges of counter-revolutionaries.

2nd Trial – January 1937 - Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre

• On trial: Yuri Pyatakov, Karl Radek + 15 others
• Accused of being members of the Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre. Many were also leading figures in the Industrialisation drive.
• Accused confessed to conspiring with anti-soviet Trotskyites and to spying for Nazi Germany and Japan
• Again weak and factually inaccurate evidence (e.g. Assassinations ordered from Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen even though it was demolished in 1917)

• 13 defendants shot

• Radek avoided death by implicating other leaders (e.g. Bukharin) but was later killed in prison camp by NKVD

**Purge of the Red Army**

• Many officers had been appointed by Trotsky during Civil War

• Stalin believed that to prevent a military takeover, officers whose loyalty was in question needed to be removed.

• Trials conducted in secret

• Chief of General staff, Marshal Tukhachevsky and other senior officers tried for plotting with Germany. All were executed

• Overall 50% of all officers or 35,000 men were shot

• This seriously impacted the leadership of the Red Army and directly contributed to an inability to resist German invasion in 1941

**3rd Trial – March 1938**

**Case of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites**

• On trial: Nikolai Bukharin, Nikolai Krestinsky, Alexei Rykov, Genrikh Yagoda, + 17 others

Accused of:

1. Being members of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites.

2. Murdering Kirov, and Maxim Gorky (writer) and trying to assassinate Lenin 2 decades earlier

3. Wrecking and sabotage to weaken the economy and military,

4. Attempting to assassinate Stalin, along with assisting in the murders of other party members.

5. Spying for Germany, France, Japan, Britain.


The accused admitted a plot involving Fascist circles (Germany)

Some defendants moved away from the lines they had been told to deliver. However they were quickly encouraged to change their minds

Krestinsky at first refused to admit his guilt, but after a night with the NKVD he changed his mind.

Bukharin denied he was guilty of individual charges, but to save the lives of his wife and child he admitted to the charges in general terms.
Reaction in Russia

- Sense of panic
The trials indicated that there was widespread conspiracy with links to foreign countries including, Germany Japan and Britain
- Sense of Fear
The trials reinforced the atmosphere of terror throughout the USSR
- Communism must prevail at all costs!!

International Reaction

- International observers such as British diplomats, US Ambassador, and reporters from newspapers like the New York Times were invited to the trials. Many believed that they were legal and fair.

The International Association of Lawyers’ statement on the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial:

“We consider the claim that the proceedings were unlawful to be totally unfounded....We hereby categorically declare that the accused were sentenced quite lawfully.”

- Communists and socialists around the globe believed the trials to be both necessary and successful.
- However other international observers did not believe in the trials and felt that they were set up by the Soviet government.
- For example the British magazine, “The Economist” believed that the trials were set up to hide the failings of Stalin’s government from the people.
- Others in Western Europe believed that the trials showed up the weaknesses in Stalin’s rule.

Results of the Show Trials

- 10 of the 15 man Bolshevik Government of 1917 died in the Show Trials. Only 2 – Stalin + Trotsky (murdered 1940) – were still alive.
- Spread fear to Ordinary citizens. Stalin used them to discipline Soviet people. He strengthened the TOTALITARIAN system.
- PROPAGANDA tool to blame wreckers etc. for policy failure.
- Acted as justification for Great Terror (Traitors and conspiracies)
- Internal and External enemies used to create a greater unity in USSR
Documents Question Layout – 100 marks or 20% of total

Handout

NB. Consult slide from PP that deals with LITERACY for this Question.

Q1. Comprehension: 20 marks

This question may be sub-divided into 3 or 4 parts. It is designed to test your understanding of a source.

To do: Take RELEVANT info from Documents to answer Q’s

Advice: Don’t write too much, QUOTE from text

Underline key words in the Questions

Examples of questions:
1. According to document A/B ....what/how/why/when/where...etc.
2. What is the message....
3. What evidence does document A/B offer about......

Q2. Comparison: 20 marks

The question may be divided into two parts. This is designed to test with your ability to compare and contrast two different sources which deal with the same event. You might be asked to detect bias, selectivity etc. You MUST refer to both documents when answering each part of the question.

To do: Compare 2 or more sources on the same period of history

Advice: REFER to BOTH sources if asked. Back up statements made with reference to sources.

Examples of questions:
1. Are documents A/B objective/subjective sources?
2. Which document is more effective in making its point?
3. How does document A differ from B in relation to.....?
4. Are documents A/B primary/secondary sources?
Q3. Criticism: 20 marks

This question may be divided into two parts. You may be required to study the document as a source and to recognise propaganda, different viewpoints, contradiction, objectivity etc. You might be asked to assess reliability, usefulness etc.

To do: Need to be able to recognise Propaganda and Bias. It is also important to be able to identify contradictions and make judgements about the reliability of the sources.

Advice: Have examples of STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES for the different types of sources. Use evidence from sources to back up points made.

Examples of questions:

1. How reliable is document A/B?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of document A/B as a historical source?
3. Why would the historian need to use both documents to achieve a balance view of....?

Q4. Contextualisation: 40 marks

This is worth the most marks and here you are expected to use your knowledge of the topic to show an understanding of the issues and events associated with it. Here the advice seems to be to make whatever information you give relevant to the question.

The examiner in this section will mark according to paragraph or paragraph equivalents. He will give a cumulative mark (Max = 24) for two paragraphs or paragraph equivalents. The emphasis is not on quantity but quality – relevance, focus and knowledge. There is also the Overall evaluation mark. The maximum OE mark is 16.

The overall evaluation mark is given according to how concisely and correctly the candidate deals with the set question and how well he/she shows a command of the case study and its context in the wider scheme of the Topic.

To do: Put the subject matter of the documents in their HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Show an understanding of issues and events (Before and After) associated with the period.

Advice: This is a “mini-essay” (2 A4 pages approx.) Therefore UNPACK the Question. Plan your answer CAREFULLY. ANSWER the Question ASKED.

Examples of questions:

1. Why did Stalin set up show trials?
2. How did Stalin use the Purges and show trials to consolidate his rule in the Soviet Union?
3. How did Stalin’s show trials affect life in the Soviet Union?
4. To what extent were the purges and show trials part of Stalin’s scheme to establish a totalitarian state?
Study the documents opposite and answer the questions below:

1. (a) According to document A what union took place in autumn 1932
(b) According to document B what did the defendants give no evidence of?
(c) In document A, what has the court established that the “united centre” carried out in December 1934?
(d) From document B what reason do those give who doubt the guilt of the executed men?

2. (a) Document A and B are clear about the guilt of the defendants. Do you agree? Refer to both documents in your answer
(b) Are documents A and B objective sources? Refer to both documents in your answer

3. (a) How would you describe the tone of document A? Support your answer with evidence from the source.
(b) How does document B illustrate the strength and weaknesses of magazines as sources of information for historians?

4. What was the impact of the show trials on the USSR in the 1930’s?
Document A

Extract from the verdict in the case of The Trotskyite – Zinovievite Terrorist Centre (First Show Trial ) 23rd August 1936

In the autumn of 1932, on the instruction of L. Trotsky a union took place between the Trotskyite and Zinovievite underground counter-revolutionary groups which formed a “united centre”....

The union of these counter revolutionary groups was achieved on the basis of the use of individual terror against the leaders of the communist party of the Soviet Union.

The Court has established that the “united centre”, on the direct instructions of L. Trotsky and Zinoviev, organized and carried out on December 1st, 1934, the foul murder of .......... Comrade Sergei Mironovich Kirov.

Not confining them to the assassination of Comrade Kirov, the Trotskyite – Zinovievite centre prepared a number of terroristic acts against Comrades Stalin, Voroshilov, Zhdanov, L. M. Kaganovic,.....

Source: http://art-bin.com/art/omoscowtoc.html

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Document B

Extract from the New Republic an American magazine about the verdict of the First Show Trial 2nd September 1936

Some commentators writing at a long distance from the scene profess doubt that the executed men (Zinoviev and Kamenev) were guilty. It is suggested that they may have participated in a piece of stage play for the sake of friends or members of their families, held as the Soviet government as hostages and to be set free for the sake of this sacrifice.

We see no reason to accept any reason of these laboured hypotheses or to take the trial in other than its face value. Foreign correspondence present at the trial pointed out that histories of these sixteen defendants, covering a series of complicated happenings over nearly five years, corroborated each other to an extent that would be quite impossible if they were not substantially true. The defendants gave no evidence of having been coached, parroting confessions painfully memorised in advance, or of being under any sort of duress.

Source: Spartacus Educational
Answers to Sample Document Question on Stalin’s Show Trials

Q1. (a) According to document A what union took place in autumn 1932? – 5m

In the autumn of 1932, on the instruction of L. Trotsky a union took place between the Trotskyite and Zinovievite underground counter-revolutionary groups which formed a “united centre”....

Q1. (b) According to document B what did the defendants give no evidence of? – 5m

The defendants gave no evidence of having been coached, parroting confessions painfully memorised in advance, or of being under any sort of duress.

Q1. (c) In document A, what has the court established that the“ united centre” carried out in December 1934? – 5m

The Court has established that the “united centre”, on the direct instructions of L. Trotsky and Zinoviev, organized and carried out on December 1st, 1934, the foul murder of.......... Comrade Sergei Mironovich Kirov.

Q1 (d) From document B what reason do those give who doubt the guilt of the executed men? – 5m

It is suggested that they may have participated in a piece of stage play for the sake of friends or members of their families, held as the Soviet government as hostages and to be set free for the sake of this sacrifice.

Q2. (a) Document A and B are clear about the guilt of the defendants. Do you agree? Refer to both documents in your answer. – 10m

• Document A

Document A is very clear about the guilt of the defendants. In fact the document outlines the crimes that the defendants are guilty of. The document is the verdict of the trial and is therefore the facts as seen by the judges. The document uses clear and firm language to outline the guilt of the defendants. For example, “The Court has established that the “united centre”, on the direct instructions of L. Trotsky and Zinoviev, organized and carried out on December 1st, 1934, the foul murder of.......... Comrade Sergei Mironovich Kirov.” The reader is left in no doubt of their guilt as the language used is unambiguous. For example, “a union took place between the Trotskyite and Zinovievite underground counter-revolutionary groups.”

• Document B

In paragraph one document B introduces a doubt that exists among some commentators regarding the guilt of the defendants. “Some commentators writing at a long distance from
the scene profess doubt that the executed men (Zinoviev and Kamenev) were guilty.” However it uses paragraph two to dispel this as a myth suggesting two reasons why the men are in fact guilty. “The defendants gave no evidence of having been coached, parroting confessions painfully memorised in advance, or of being under any sort of duress.” The second paragraph begins by saying, “We see no reason to accept any reason of these laboured hypotheses or to take the trial in other than its face value.” This does suggest that the magazine is clear in its view of the defendant’s guilt, however it does suggest to the reader that an undiscovered reason to doubt the defendant’s guilt may exist.

Q2. (b) Are documents A and B objective sources? Refer to both documents in your answer. – 10m

An objective source is one that is based on the facts and is not one sided or bias.

• Document A

Would like itself to be seen as an objective source but is in fact bias or subjective. The verdicts given in the show trials were in fact the views of Stalin and therefore were in no way objective. Although presented in such a way as to make it look factual, time would uncover the many factual errors in the verdicts of the trials.

• Document B

At the time the New Republic magazine would have seen itself as an objective source. In paragraph one it puts forward the views of those who doubted the legitimacy of the trials. However in paragraph two it explains why it believes that view to be incorrect. “We see no reason to accept any reason of these laboured hypotheses or to take the trial in other than its face value.” It continues in paragraph two to detail why it believes the trials are in fact legitimate, citing two main reasons. “Foreign correspondence present at the trial pointed out that histories of these sixteen defendants,..... corroborated each other to an extent that would be quite impossible if they were not substantially true. The defendants gave no evidence of having been coached, ...... or of being under any sort of duress.” Therefore despite the magazine’s best efforts to be objective, historians can now see the factual inaccuracies in this document.

Q3. (a) How would you describe the tone of document A? Support your answer with evidence from the source. – 10m

The document starts with a solemn or serious tone when the facts are described, “In the autumn of 1932, on the instruction of L. Trotsky a union took place between the Trotskyite and Zinovievite underground counter-revolutionary groups which formed a “united centre.” The tone then becomes acrimonious or bitter when the verdict outlines the accusations, “The union of these counter revolutionary groups was achieved on the basis of the use of individual terror against the leaders of the communist party of the Soviet Union.” When
listing its findings that, “the “united centre”, on the direct instructions of L. Trotsky and Zinoviev, organized and carried out on December 1st, 1934, the foul murder of……….. Comrade Sergei Mironovich Kirov”, the tone reads as harmonious. In the final sentence the tone becomes vengeful and even malicious when listing other crimes against the state, possibly suggesting the need to inflict harm and/or seek revenge against the accused.

Q3. (b) How does document B illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of magazines as sources of information for historians? – 10m

- **Strengths:**

  One of Document A’s strengths is that as a primary source it conveys one particular attitude to the show trials from the time. For example it states “We see no reason to accept any reason of these laboured hypotheses or to take the trial in other than its face value.” Another strength is that it is giving an alternative point of view to the correspondents who, “profess doubt that the executed men were guilty.”

- **Weaknesses:**

  Magazines are open to many weaknesses such as, bias propaganda. It is unclear from Document B as to whether either of these are the motivation behind the factual inaccuracies in the source. It is clear with the benefit of hindsight that the magazine got its information wrong in this case. It can be suggested that the main reason for this was the quality of information it was able to obtain when you consider the control Stalin had over the release of such information. It should also be pointed out that the New Republic was not alone in its belief that the trials were legitimate. In fact the International Association of Lawyers along with the US ambassador (J.E.Davies) were in agreement with this commonly held viewpoint.

Q4. What was the impact of the show trials on the USSR in the 1930’s? – 40m

Stalin won the struggle to replace Lenin as leader of the USSR in 1928. He used a mixture of political skill (Socialism in One Country) and force to eliminate rivals such as Kamenev and Trotsky. He quickly set about turning the USSR into a major world power through focussing on the economic policies of collectivisation and Industrialisation. Any success gained came with a huge human cost. However by the middle of the 1930’s the USSR began to see major improvements in Industry.

The middle of the 1930’s was also important for another reason. It was the period in which Stalin began a policy became known as the Great Terror. Central to this policy would be the show trials or Moscow trials of 1936-1938. The Great terror and show trials in particular would have a wide ranging and profound effect on the USSR.
One of the main impacts of the show trials was that it increased the level of political control and power that Stalin had. One of the main reasons Stalin had for using the trials was to eliminate his political opponents. He achieved this with great success. 10 of the 15 man Bolshevik Government of 1917 died in the Show Trials. Only two, Stalin and Trotsky (murdered 1940) were still alive in 1938. Key men like Kamenev and Zinoviev who Stalin had defeated in the struggle had been ruthlessly eliminated.

The Red Army were also purged during the show trials. Many officers had been appointed by Trotsky during the Civil War. Stalin believed that to prevent a military takeover, officers whose loyalty was in question needed to be removed. Chief of the General staff, Marshal Tukhachevsky and other senior officers were tried for plotting with Germany. In all 50% of all officers or 35,000 men were shot. The purges of political opponents and the army combined to ensure that Stalin was now well on the way to setting up a totalitarian system of government which would impact greatly on the USSR.

The propaganda machine benefited from the show trials and in turn impacted profoundly on Soviet society. The trials were cleverly used to try those who Stalin declared were to blame for any failures in the collectivisation and industrialisation policies. This was particularly true in the Third show trial of 1938 where one on the accusations against the defendants was wrecking and sabotage to weaken the economy. Newspapers also spread the word that many high ranking Communists were plotting with foreign powers to overthrow the Communist system, while others were conspiring to murder Stalin. As a result, weeding out traitors and conspiracies acted as justification for Great Terror. Interestingly this had the impact of creating unity among Russians against a common enemy. Consequently throughout the trials the Cult of Personality or Cult of the Leader that Stalin hoped to create, continued to grow.

The show trials heavily impacted the Soviet population as a whole. During the Great Purge over eight million were arrested. One million were executed while a further two million died in camps. The gulags housed over seven million people during this period. Those who were sent to the Gulags would indirectly impact on industrial improvements as they were to become the slave labour that the new factories craved.

The show trials had many impacts on the USSR. Most notable among these was their contribution to Totalitarianism and Propaganda. They too introduced a sense of fear and tension. A belief emerged that Communism must prevail at all costs. Stalin however was the big winner as the cult of personality around him grew bigger. Indeed a speech made by the main prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky at the end of the Third trial sums it up well, “Guided by our beloved leader and master, the great Stalin, we will go forward to Communism along a path that has been cleansed of the remnants of the last scum and filth of our past.”